



Sauk Valley Area
chamber of commerce

UNITED STATES CHAMBER OF COMMERCE

ACCREDITED



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Partnering for Success

JUNE 2026



Business After Hours



THURSDAY, JUNE 18
5:00 - 6:30 p.m.

THE NEXT PICTURE SHOW

113 W 1ST ST. DIXON

JOIN US FOR NETWORKING, REFRESHMENTS, AND DOOR PRIZES!



Sauk Valley Area
chamber of commerce



THE NEXT PICTURE SHOW
Community Fine Arts Center



NON-CREDIT INSTRUCTORS WANTED!

NO TEACHING CERTIFICATION NEEDED.



Apply online at schooljobs.com/careers/svcc and filter jobs for *Non-Credit Instructors* or contact brenda.helms@svcc.edu for more information.



June Meetings

- June 9 Exec
- June 11 Ambassadors
- June 16 Board
- June 16 Agri-business Committee
- June 18 Hispanic Business Leaders
- June 18 Business After Hours

Sauk Valley Area Chamber of Commerce Directors & Staff

Executive Committee

President: Alejandro Rivera
First Vice President: Geoff Wright
Second Vice President: Josh Johnson
Treasurer: Dr. Jon Mandrell
Past President: Pam Fluck

Term Ends January 31, 2027

Emily Buikema, Ward Murray Pace & Johnson
Mike Ceruzzi, Moore Tire
Josh Knie, Knie Appliance & TV

Term Ends January 31, 2028

Alejandro Rivera, RE/MAX Sauk Valley
Geoff Wright, CGH Medical Center
Josh Johnson, Whiteside Area Career Center
Dr. Jon Mandrell, SVCC
Rebecca Munoz-Ripley, YWCA

Term Ends January 31, 2029

Pam Fluck, Sauk Valley Bank
Sandi Cavazos, US Bank
Cael Sanders, Sterling Federal Bank
Sami Wiggins, Castor Home Health Solutions

Staff

Dallas Knack—Executive Director
Gabriel Lewis—Financial Specialist
Chrissy Palacz—Office & Member Relations
Sarah-Beth Haenitsch—Marketing

The views expressed by any member of the Chamber do not represent the Sauk Valley Area Chamber of Commerce in any official endorsement or support of any specific elected official or political party. Any products, events, statements, views or opinions offered or expressed by members are not the products, events, statements, views or opinions of the SVACC, nor endorsed by the Chamber or its membership at large.

A Message from the Director

As we wrap up another busy month at the Chamber, I find myself reflecting on the incredible impact that can be achieved when a community comes together around a shared goal: investing in people.

This month the community celebrated the completion of another successful year of the CEO program, recognizing a group of students who have spent the school year building entrepreneurial skills, gaining real-world business experience, and developing the confidence to pursue their future goals. We also watched the latest cohort of the Sauk Valley Community Leadership Program graduate; a group of emerging and established leaders who dedicated their time to learning more about our region and exploring ways to make a positive impact in the communities they serve.

These milestones are a powerful reminder that workforce development begins long before someone enters the workforce. By creating opportunities for students, young professionals, and community leaders to learn, grow, and connect, we are helping build a stronger future for the Sauk Valley.

We are especially grateful for the members, sponsors, volunteers, and partners who make this work possible. Because of your support, we are able to continue investing in the next generation through scholarships and educational opportunities. This year, we were proud to award more than \$17,000 in scholarships to local students as they pursue higher education, skilled trades, and career pathways that will strengthen our local workforce for years to come.

The Chamber's mission extends far beyond networking events and ribbon cuttings. At its core, our work is about supporting the people who make our communities thrive. Whether through leadership development, entrepreneurship education, scholarships, or professional growth opportunities, we remain committed to creating pathways for success and improving the quality of life throughout the Sauk Valley.

Thank you for being part of this work. We look forward to continuing to grow, learn, and invest in our community together.



Investor Update June 2026

NEW INVESTORS

Ashton North LLC
Oregon, IL
262-212-7507

Azul Cantina
3920 E. Lincolnway, Sterling
779-297-7014

INVESTOR RENEWALS

4-D Farms
Ashton North LLC
Astec Industries
Azul Cantina
Bollman Auto Center
City of Sterling
Clinton LumberKings
Davis & Gisi
Dennis Electric of Tampico, Inc.
Happy Tails Animal Shelter
Hill's Electric Motor Service, Inc.
Hope Cancer Wellness Center
PC Tech 2U

Reagan Mass Transit District
Representative Ryan Spain
Rock River HR Professional Assoc.
Showplace Antiques & Treasures
Solstice Salon and Scalp Spa
Sterling Public Library
Sterling Systems & Controls, Inc.
Surf Internet

Over \$1000 Invested

Central Bank Illinois
CGH Medical Center
Community State Bank
Farmer's National Bank
Midland States Bank
Sauk Valley Bank
Select Employees Credit Union
Sterling Federal Bank
The IFH Group
US Bank
Wahl Clipper Corp.
Wal-Mart DC #7024
Ward, Murray, Pace & Johnson

We would like to give special recognition to the following groups who provide extra support to the Sauk Valley Area Chamber of Commerce. This extra effort and support is truly appreciated. If you have the opportunity to express your sincere appreciation to these members, please do so!

150% Leadership Investors

Helm Civil	RE/MAX Sauk Valley
Hill's Electric Motor Service, Inc.	Reagan Mass Transit District
Lance's Plumbing	Rock River Hospice & Home
LK Design Source	Select Employees Credit Union
Loescher HVAC	Stratus Networks
Mattox Insurance Agency	Surf Internet

110% Investors

Allure of Sterling	Compeer Financial	Rock River Lumber & Grain
Altran Magnetics	Dennis Electric of Tampico, Inc.	Sauk Valley CPR
Astec Industries	Gold Star Cleaning LLC	Scholl Insurance Agency, Inc.
Bargain Exterminators	Helm Civil	SERVPRO of Sterling
Bollman Auto Center	Hill's Electric Motor Service, Inc.	Showplace Antiques & Treasures
Brown Construction Company	Hollyhock Hill Farms	Smeltzer Insurance Agency
Bushel Basket Candle Co., Inc.	Kiwanis Club of Sterling	St. Vincent DePaul Society
	N & C Cleaning Service	The Mertes Law Firm, P.C.

Chamber Ambassadors

Allie Johnston – University of Illinois Extension

Brian Hawkins—Brian Hawkins Insurance,
The Cornerstone Agency

Cael Sanders—Sterling Federal Bank

Erik Eaglin—Sauk Valley Bank

Esther Douglas —CGH Medical Center

Ethan Harrington—Castor Home Health Solutions

John Kelly—Culver’s of Rock Falls

Karen Voss – Morningside of Sterling

Keenan Dickman—TBK Bank

Lyndsey Kelly—Sauk Valley Community College

Mary White – Community State Bank

Sami Wiggins — Castor Home Health Solutions

Tygen Bausman—Sauk Valley Bank

Ambassador Spotlight: Brian Hawkins, Brian Hawkins Insurance, The Cornerstone Agency

I have been involved with the Chamber since 2011, serving on the board of directors, executive board, and board president. My current roll is as a chamber ambassador, and I work on the golf committee and enjoy helping with that annual event. Being a part of the SVACC has been one of the best investments of my time in terms of getting to know the people and businesses of the Sauk Valley. The SVACC is a great organization, and I enjoy doing my part to help with all the good that it does for our community.



At The Cornerstone Agency, our family-owned and operated business is proud to serve clients locally and across Illinois from our multiple office locations. We offer insurance solutions for your farm, business, and personal insurance needs.

Our Chamber Ambassadors spent time giving back to the community by volunteering at the food bank on Saturday, May 16, helping distribute food to local families in need. We’re proud to have ambassadors who not only represent the Chamber and their respective businesses, but also show up to make a difference in the Sauk Valley community.



Ribbon Cutting



CGH renovations
100 E. LeFevre Rd., Sterling
815-625-0400



You in Photos by Nanc
1741 Industrial Dr., Unit 3, Sterling
815-718-5136



Select Employees Credit Union
Lobby reopening
2412 Freeport Rd., Sterling
815-626-8181



Boss Roofing & Siding
1910 4th St., Sterling
815-590-2677

Business After Hours

For May's Business After Hours, members had an exciting evening at the Franklin Creek Grist Mill for a joint business after hours with Discover Dixon! We had the opportunity to see the mill in action, explore the museum, and hear about upcoming events that Franklin Creek Conservation has in the works including a summer solstice event on June 20. Check out their social media or franklincreekconservation.org/upcoming-events/ for more information.

Join us on Thursday, June 18 at The Next Picture Show for our next members-only Business After Hours!



Congratulations to Selmi's Formal Wear for receiving May's Customer Service Award!

Their nominator said: Selmi's Formal Wear is always excellent, but they truly went above and beyond this prom season!

The staff is so knowledgeable, kind, and patient. They make each person feel special and most importantly confident.

Sometimes that can be hard when high schoolers are looking for dresses, but not when they're being taken care of by the

empowering team at Selmi's Formal Wear! Additionally, Katy is such a wonderful supporter of our community, always sharing her time, talents, and resources to many of our local businesses and organizations. She's truly lifts our community and we are grateful to have her in our business community.



Visit Selmi's Formal Wear inside Northland Mall at 2900 E. Lincolnway, Sterling and give them a call at 815-200-1051

CSA Sponsored by:



Guest Editorial

Written by: Sarah Schlegel, PFLAG Sauk Valley President

PFLAG is love in action. Parents and family are at the heart of PFLAG*. They are striving to create a caring, just, and affirming world for the LGBTQ+ people they love.

Set in motion in the 1970s when a woman named Jeanne Manford publicly supported her gay son, first by writing an article published by the New York Post and then by marching in the 1972 Christopher Street Liberation Day March, PFLAG grew from a singular support group to a nation-wide movement with hundreds of community-based chapters. The Sauk Valley area's PFLAG chapter became official in 2006, and was formed by Barb and George Schwamberger and Jane Biddle to provide vital support, education, and advocacy for their own families and to build a safer, more inclusive community for LGBTQ+ individuals in the Sauk Valley area.

This month, the founding of PFLAG will be the focus of a reader's theater production at Stage Left in Dixon on June 26 and 27. Everybody's Favorite Mothers is a celebration of unconditional love and unlikely activism. The theater event is being sponsored by PFLAG Sauk Valley and represents just one of the many ways PFLAG engages with the community. PFLAG also awards college scholarships to area LGBTQ+ seniors and allies, provides scholarships for students to attend LGBTQ+-inclusive summer camp, hosts an annual karaoke night, a "Read With Love" event, a picnic, and so much more. Most events are free. LGBTQ+ individuals, their families, and all affirming allies are welcome to attend.

PFLAG offers free programming (either informative or educational) to local organizations and businesses. Inquiries about programs may be submitted to pflagsaukvalley@gmail.com. Programs can be designed to fit any timeframe.

Like any minority group, people who identify as LGBTQ+ rely on strong ally support to maintain a healthy and positive balance within their communities. PFLAG is here to help increase that ally base and put love into action.

Submitted by Sarah Schlegel, PFLAG Sauk Valley President

*PFLAG originally stood for Parents and Friends of Lesbians and Gays, but PFLAG outgrew its acronym as scientific research shed new light on gender, including new awareness of what it means to be transgender and intersex. PFLAG is no longer an acronym, just the name of the organization.

Members in the News

A Community that Cares: Sterling Launches Dementia-Friendly Initiative and becomes the 52nd "Dementia Friendly Community" in Illinois

"The goal is to create a more informed and inclusive community for individuals living with dementia," said Beth Sterk, CGH Dementia Navigator. "We want them to feel safe, understood, and supported as they navigate daily life within the community."



The Dementia Friendly Sterling Action Team (DFSAT) was initiated by Sterk of the CGH Health Foundation, along with Dementia Champions Teri Shaw of the Whiteside County Senior Center and Sami Wiggins of Castor Home Health Solutions.

The action team includes representatives from local government, law enforcement, the senior center, the National Institute of Aging - Alzheimer's Association (NIA-AA), University of Illinois Extension, the local Chamber of Commerce, the Alzheimer's Association, as well as healthcare representatives and individuals living with dementia and their care partners.

DFSAT is also working closely with Susan Frick of RUSH University and the Illinois Cognitive Resource Network to help build Sterling into a community where individuals living with dementia can thrive.

Additional updates will be shared in the coming months, along with opportunities for community members to get involved! Follow along on the [Dementia Friendly Sterling, Illinois](#) Facebook page to learn more.

Pictured in the photo are members of the Dementia Friendly Sterling Action Team (DFSAT), including: (L-R) Mary Toth with Millie, Sterling Police Department; Beth Sterk, CGH Health Foundation; Dallas Knack, Sauk Valley Chamber; Scott Schumard, City of Sterling; Jennifer Snow, NIA-AA; Bob and Jan W.; Teri Shaw, Whiteside County Senior Center; and Sami Wiggins, Castor Home Health Solutions.

You're Invited!
GRAND OPENING!
COME CELEBRATE
NORTHWESTERN STEEL & WIRE PARK

A NEW DESTINATION.
Year-Round Fun for Everyone!

PLAYGROUND
CLIMB, SLIDE & PLAY!

SPLASH PAD
COOL OFF, MAKE MEMORIES!

ICE RIBBON
SKATE, LAUGH & ENJOY!

STERLING ILLINOIS
STERLING RECREATION FOUNDATION

SATURDAY
JUNE 13, 2026
11:00AM

11:00AM
RIBBON CUTTING
MUSIC • GIVEAWAYS
FOOD TRUCKS & MORE!

NORTHWESTERN STEEL & WIRE PARK
201 WALLACE ST.
STERLING, IL

BIG BOY 4014
is returning to Sterling
Tuesday, June 2, 2026
1:30 - 2:00 PM

Celebrating
AMERICA
250

CEO Program

On May 22 the community had the opportunity to celebrate Le Hartman and 13 incredible years of the CEO Program. Since the program's inaugural year in the Sauk Valley region, Le has been a passionate leader, mentor, and advocate for countless students and future entrepreneurs. We are grateful for her dedication, vision, and the lasting impact she has made on our community through the CEO Program.



SVACC Scholarships

We are incredibly grateful for the support of our members, sponsors, and community partners who make our workforce development efforts possible. Their investment allows us to continue creating opportunities for the next generation of leaders and professionals in the Sauk Valley. This year alone, we were proud to award more than \$17,000 in scholarships to local students, helping them pursue their educational and career goals. Together, we are strengthening our workforce, supporting local talent, and investing in the future of our community.

Congratulations to our 2026-2027 scholarship award recipients:

Agribusiness Scholarships

Daniel Kelly, Iowa State University
Natalie Pratt, Oklahoma State University
Loren Meiners, University of Wisconsin—Platteville
Jaden Brower, University of Iowa
Laynie Mandrell, Loyola University
Grace Wetzell, Sauk Valley Community College
MaKayla Cisketti, Sauk Valley Community College
Allison Duggan, Sauk Valley Community College

Farnham Business Scholarship

Ryan Gebhardt, University of Iowa
Haleigh Dale, Sauk Valley Community College

Hispanic Heritage Scholarships

Daniel Gonzalez, Indian Hills Community College
Ben Munoz-Ripley, Augustana College
Morelia Vargas, University of Iowa
Isabella Sylvester, University of Iowa

Manufacturing Scholarships

Rachelle Yore, Morrison Institute of Technology
Kairyn Lottman, Sauk Valley Community College

Sauk Valley Community Leadership Program (SVCLP)

Written by Laura Carbaugh, SVCLP Facilitator

Resilient Leadership was the topic for Wednesday, May 6, 2026, Diana Merdian, Mayor of the City of Sterling welcomed us to the Sterling City Hall for this penultimate session of the Sauk Valley Community Leadership Program.



Our first speaker of the morning was Kris Noble, Board Growth & Support Specialist at Midland Institute for Entrepreneurship. Among many insightful topics, she presented her journey from a PPP (Professional People Pleaser) to the woman we see today: one who plays to her strengths; finds people who make her want to be better; and a person who tries, always, to do work that fills her cup.

Scott Hibbard, owner of Hibbard Builders and managing partner of Sterling Woodworks, helped us examine our need to embrace adversity, be mission-focused, and learn through the process. He challenged us to go out and “do hard and impossible things” and to “set fear aside.” Scott, along with John Gibler, Sterling Woodworks Operations Director, led us on a tour of their impressive custom cabinetry workshop and showroom, where the perfect cabinets for any need can be designed, built, delivered, and installed for a competitive price.

The Factory Pub n Grub provided a delicious lunch, and we ate in the beautiful showroom.

The finale for the '25-'26 SVLCP cohort took place Wednesday, May 13, 2026. We began the morning in the newly dedicated Hellmich Community Conference Room at Sauk Valley Community College.

The culminating task for SVCLP students is a "Call to Action." The students reflected on the lessons and insights they gained from the program and discussed how they plan to apply these experiences to set and achieve new goals moving forward. This amazing group of people shared inspiring, humbling, and creative reflections on our ten months together. What an impressive group of passionate, talented Sauk Valley community members!

The session concluded with a luncheon attended by mentors, family members, and friends of the cohort.

We honored our friend and former SVCLP cohort member, George Howe, with a scholarship named after him, and his wife, Mary, spoke of his love for life and for the Sauk Valley Community Leadership Program. We miss his kindness and trustworthy, authentic self.

The class and the board said goodbye to Laura Carbaugh, facilitator (who is writing this). I will miss the program, the board, and all the new learning of people, organizations, and surprising (even to me who has lived here all my life) elements of the Sauk Valley area. It's been an honor to serve as facilitator of this program, and I'm proud to have been a tiny part of the past 5 years.



We then honored Dr. David Hellmich, outgoing president of Sauk Valley Community College.

Each year, a cohort member will be chosen to receive the Hellmich Community Leadership Award. Sami Wiggins is this year's recipient.



Congratulations to the 2026-27 SVCLP cohort!

Farm. Family. Fun.

Support 4-H by Dining-in, Driving-Thru, or Carrying Out at Culver's of Rock Falls, IL during the event! Learn about farming and agriculture through interactive activities sponsored by Culver's of Rock Falls, IL and 4-H!

Date: Saturday, June 13

Time: 11:00am-2:00 pm

Where: Culver's of Rock Falls, IL

Activities: Touch a Tractor, Farm Animals, Giveaways, Coloring Contest and more!

Culver's
Welcome to delicious.™



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**Lend a hand.
Save a life.**

www.SaukValleyCPR.com

Upcoming June/July Community Classes

Classes include books and card cost – no hidden fees

Saturday 6/13

1140 Inlet Rd Lee Center, IL

AHA Family & Friends CPR (non-certified) – FREE

Friday 6/26

603 1st Ave Suite 106 Sterling, IL

8:00a – 12:00p AHA BLS for Healthcare Workers (Recertification) - \$75/person

1:00p – 5:30p AHA BLS for Healthcare Workers (New Learner) - \$80/person

Saturday 6/27

603 1st Ave Suite 106 Sterling, IL

8:00a - 10:30p AHA Adult and Child Heartsaver CPR/AED - \$50/person

12:00p - 4:00p AHA BLS for Healthcare Workers (Recertification) - \$75/person

Friday 7/10 & Sat 7/11

603 1st Ave Suite 106 Sterling, IL

8:30a - 12:30p Safe Sitter Babysitter Bootcamp- \$75/child

Friday 7/17

603 1st Ave Suite 106 Sterling, IL

8:00a - 12:30p AHA BLS for Healthcare Workers (New Learner) - \$80/person

1:00p - 5:00p AHA BLS for Healthcare Workers (Recertification) - \$75/person

Saturday 7/18 1:00p – 3:30p

603 1st Ave Suite 106 Sterling, IL

AHA Heartsaver Child and Infant CPR/AED - \$50/person

Saturday 7/25

603 1st Ave Suite 106 Sterling, IL

8:00a – 12:00p AHA BLS for Healthcare Workers (Recertification) - \$75/person

1:00p – 5:30p AHA BLS for Healthcare Workers (New Learner) - \$80/person



CGHMC Sterling, IL

Trying to find training that fits your schedule? We also offer training by appointment and blended online training options!

For more information, please text 815-564-8766
or email info@saukvalleycpr.com



NON-PROFIT ROUNDTABLE

MONDAY,

June 22

10:00–11:00 a.m.

YWCA Sterling

412 1st Ave, Sterling



**This event is FREE to attend;
however, an RSVP is requested.**

Join us for a non-profit roundtable focused on grants and funding opportunities. **This open-forum discussion is designed to encourage collaboration, idea-sharing, and peer support — bring your questions, experiences, and insights as we learn from one another.**

Whether you're looking to gain fresh ideas, offer your own experiences, or simply connect with others who "get it," this roundtable is for you. Come as you are. Leave feeling heard, supported, and inspired.

For questions or to RSVP, email
director@saukvalleyareachamber.com

» WHAT TO EXPECT

- * Candid conversation about shared challenges and opportunities
- * A supportive environment to ask questions and share insights
- * Collaborative problem-solving and idea exchange
- * Relationship-building with peers across the non-profit community



PWN Professional Women's Network

SUMMER NETWORKING

Drinks, networking, prizes
& make your own vision board!

WEDNESDAY,
JUNE 24

5:00 p.m. - 6:30 p.m.

THE RUSTY FOX
1 E 3RD ST, STERLING

FREE FOR SVACC MEMBERS
\$10 NON-MEMBERS

SCAN THE QR CODE OR VISIT
SAUKVALLEYAREACHAMBER.COM/PWN
TO RSVP BY **JUNE 17**



QUESTIONS? EMAIL DIRECTOR@SAUKVALLEYAREACHAMBER.COM

PWN series sponsors



Invenergy
Services





SATURDAY,
JULY 18
8AM-12PM

SVACC AGRIBUSINESS

YOUTH IN AGRICULTURE MARKET DAY

TWIN CITY FARMERS MARKET
106 AVENUE A, STERLING

Join the Sauk Valley Chamber Agribusiness Committee for a special pop up at Twin City Farmers Market celebrating the next generation of agriculture leaders, makers, growers, and entrepreneurs!

