



Sauk Valley Area
chamber of commerce

UNITED STATES CHAMBER OF COMMERCE

ACCREDITED



IN THIS
ISSUE:



PAGE 4



PAGE 7



PAGE 9

Partnering for Success

MARCH 2026



Sauk Valley Area
chamber of commerce

BUSINESS AFTER HOURS

Featuring catering by
Lil' Smoked!

THURSDAY, MARCH 19TH
5 PM - 6:30 PM

Stop by for:

- Hors d'oeuvres
- 21+ beverages
- Behind the scenes tour

*Every visitor receives a
free t-shirt!*



1301 E 4th St, Sterling, IL 61081



MARIAN KAVANAUGH, DPM, AACFAS
PODIATRIC SURGERY

Now accepting new patients! CGH Medical Center is pleased to introduce Dr. Marian Kavanaugh, AACFAS (Podiatry). Dr. Kavanaugh is fellowship trained in complex foot and ankle surgery. She completed a residency in podiatric surgery at MedStar Georgetown University Hospital in Washington D.C. and a fellowship at West Virginia University in Wheeling with a focus on total ankle replacements and lower extremity trauma. She recently performed CGH's first total ankle replacement surgery, bringing a highly specialized option to patients in the Sauk Valley area who suffer from severe ankle arthritis.



(815) 625-4790 • 101 E. Miller Road, Sterling • www.cghmc.com

March Meetings

March 10 Exec
March 12 Ambassadors
March 17 Board
March 17 Agri-business Committee
March 19 Hispanic Business Leaders
March 19 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
Ronda Borgmann—Financial Specialist
Chrissy Palacz—Office & Member Relations

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 move through another busy and exciting season in the Sauk Valley, I'm continually reminded that the strength of our Chamber comes from you. Our impact is fueled by members who choose to show up, share ideas, and invest their time in building something bigger than their own business.

One of the most valuable benefits of your Chamber membership doesn't come with an additional price tag. It's a perk of your membership. It's the opportunity to get involved. Our committees are where ideas turn into action, relationships are built, and real impact happens across the Sauk Valley.

Whether you've been a member for years or just recently joined, serving on a committee is one of the best ways to maximize your investment. Groups like Ambassadors, Golf Outing, Agribusiness, Hispanic Business Leaders, Professional Women's Network, and Workforce Development bring together professionals from different industries who share a common goal: strengthening our regional business community.

What's especially important to note is that committee involvement isn't just for CEOs or presidents. In fact, many of our most engaged and energized committee members are team members who were encouraged by their employer to get involved. Serving on a committee provides leadership development, networking experience, and professional growth opportunities for your staff, all while increasing visibility for your business.

When your employees sit at the table, they represent your organization. They build relationships, gain insights, and develop skills that directly benefit your workplace. It's a win-win: they grow personally and professionally, and your business strengthens its presence and connections in the community.

If you're looking for ways to deepen your engagement or provide meaningful development opportunities for your team, I encourage you to consider committee involvement. There's a place for every interest and schedule, and we're always excited to welcome new voices to the table.

Reach out; let's connect on opportunities to continue to strengthen our region.



Investor Update March 2026

NEW INVESTORS

Miss Molly's School of Music

2000 N. Locust St. Ste. D, Sterling
319-464-2861

Sterling Motors Service Repair

1608 E. 3rd St., Sterling
815-625-5749

INVESTOR RENEWALS

1st Gateway Credit Union
April House Children's Advocacy Center
CGH Medical Center
Crescent Electric Supply
First Congregational Church
Fraternal Order of Eagles #2783
Gold Star Cleaning LLC
Harvest Time Bible Church
Knie Appliance & TV, Inc.
Morningside of Sterling
Morrison Institute of Technology
Renewal By Andersen
Roger A. Colmark, CPA PC

SBM
Select Employees Credit Union
Shay Brown State Farm Insurance
Showplace Antiques & Treasures
Sjostrom & Sons, Inc.
Sterling NAPA Auto Parts
Sterling Rock Falls Child Care
Sterling Steel Company
The Fitting Room
Whiteside Co. Healthier
Communities Partnership
Wipfli LLP

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% Club

Helm Civil
Hill's Electric Motor Service, Inc.
Lance's Plumbing
LK Design Source
Loescher HVAC
M5 Industries, LLC
Mattox Insurance Agency

RE/MAX Sauk Valley
Reagan Mass Transit District
Rock River Hospice & Home
Select Employees Credit Union
Stratus Networks
Surf Internet
United Craftsmen

110% Club

Allure of Sterling
Altran Magnetics
Astec Industries
Bargain Exterminators
Best Cob
Bollman Auto Center
Brown Construction Company

Bushel Basket Candle Co., Inc.
Compeer Financial
Dennis Electric of Tampico, Inc.
Gold Star Cleaning LLC
Hollyhock Hill Farms
Kiwanis Club of Sterling
N&C Cleaning
Rock River Lumber & Grain

Sauk Valley CPR
Scholl Insurance Agency, Inc.
SERVPRO of Sterling
Showplace Antiques & Treasures
Smeltzer Insurance Agency
St. Vincent DePaul Society
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

Ethan Harrington—Ken Nelson Auto Group

Esther Douglas —CGH Medical Center

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 Nursing

Tygen Bausman—Sauk Valley Bank

Ambassador Spotlight: Allie Johnston, University of Illinois Extension

Allie Johnston works for the University of Illinois Extension as the 4-H Program Coordinator for Whiteside County. She holds a BA in Business Administration and Marketing, and a minor in Art, from Augustana College in Rock Island, IL. She likes to be involved in her community and is a member of a few different groups. She serves on the Sauk Valley Area Chamber Ambassadors, and on the Chamber’s Agri-Business, Sights & Sounds committees as well as on the Sauk Valley Under 40 steering committee. She is also member of the Sterling Kiwanis Club, and volunteers as a mentor through the Sterling Public Schools mentor program.



In her role as 4-H Program Coordinator, she is responsible for implementing 4-H youth development programs designed to foster the acquisition of knowledge and the development of individuals and communities in Whiteside County. With the help of her co-workers, they identify critical priority needs and issues to be addressed throughout the Carroll, Lee, and Whiteside counties, primarily the 4-H Community Club. She works to develop plans to involve volunteers in specific educational activities, which include identifying roles, recruitment, training, and recognition.

When she's not working or volunteering she spends time with her husband Mitchel and their two daughters Nell and Ruth. She enjoys spending time with family and friends, the outdoors, crafting and thrifting.

In February, a couple of our committees met out in the community.

Our ambassadors enjoyed a great lunch at Leo's Marvelous Bites while they discussed upcoming events and initiatives. Thanks, Leo's!

Hispanic Business Leaders Committee (HBLC) met at Primo's to discuss details for the Fiesta Parade on September 19, 2026 and their mentor program at Elevate Youth Center. Thanks, Primo's!



Ribbon Cutting



Sterling Box Company
1980 Eastwood Dr., Sterling
815-626-9657



SM Service Repair
1608 E. 3rd St., Sterling
815-625-5749

Government Affairs

Written by US Chamber of Commerce



Tariff Refunds FAQ: What Small Businesses Need to Know After Supreme Court's Ruling

The U.S. Supreme Court's recent decision striking down certain tariffs imposed under the International Emergency Economic Powers Act (IEEPA) has opened the door for many U.S. small businesses to seek refunds. However, determining whether your business qualifies—and understanding what steps to take next—can be challenging.

While we will learn more about the refund process in the days ahead, this guide provides information to help small businesses identify whether they paid IEEPA-based tariffs, understand what types of duties may be eligible for refunds, and prepare for the emerging refund process.

Do I qualify for a refund?

U.S. importers of record who directly paid the tariffs or the person who takes ownership of the goods once they have cleared customs (the "consignee") may be eligible for a refund. Businesses that did not directly pay the tariffs are not eligible for a refund. Refunds are only available for tariffs applied under the International Economic Emergency Powers Act (IEEPA).

Next Steps

The U.S. Chamber of Commerce is closely tracking the treatment of tariffs issued under the International Emergency Economic Powers Act (IEEPA) and struck down by the U.S. Supreme Court. More information can be found here as it becomes available. Visit the U.S. Chamber's Tariffs [page](#) and track case updates [here](#).

Congratulations to B&D Supply for receiving January's Customer Service Award!

They were nominated for providing quality service in a prompt and timely manner. Their nominator said: "During the really cold temps, I was having issues with my furnace and they came out right away to look at it. They had to find some parts but I was up and running the same day. Thank you B&D!" They are located at 201 W 14th St, Rock Falls, and can be reached at 815-626-0897.



Congratulations to Sauk Valley CPR for receiving February's Customer Service Award!

Their nominator said: "Sauk Valley CPR provides much needed training for our community. Whether you need a refresh or have never taken a class before, it is a very valuable class. The owner, Stephanie, is incredibly kind and patient during training, even staying late after class to answer questions or work one-on-one with individuals to ensure they can properly execute CPR." Learn more at saukvalleycpr.com or call 815-564-8766.



CSA Sponsored by:



Guest Editorial

Written by: Stephanie McLean, owner of Sauk Valley CPR



Sauk Valley CPR was founded in June 2023 by Stephanie McLean, a registered nurse and long-time local resident, who provides certification training through the American Heart Association to the surrounding Sauk Valley communities and the Northern Illinois area beyond. She is an experienced instructor who first pursued her interest in teaching through KSB Hospital's Corporate Health department in 2020 where she provided certification training to local companies and businesses. Since then, she has certified hundreds of students from diverse backgrounds and environments including business and factory workers, service clubs, church members, non-profit groups, school personnel, licensed childcare providers, and healthcare professionals. Sauk Valley CPR has also been an active sponsor and participant in local community events and health and wellness programs throughout the area. "Our mission at Sauk Valley CPR is to help build and promote safer communities through emergency education, preparing and empowering anyone with the ability to act as a first responder and help make a difference in a victim's survival until more advanced help arrives", says McLean. "Transforming fear and reservation into knowledge and confidence through relatable experiences and hands-on practice is an important part of how we help students learn and retain life-saving skills for a lifetime". To learn more about Sauk Valley CPR or enroll in courses offered both monthly and by appointment, please visit saukvalleycpr.com or call 815-564-8766. SVACC members are offered a 10% discount.

Business After Hours

On February 19 we held the first Business After Hours of 2026 at OnCall Imaging! It was a great opportunity for members to get together to meet new people, make connections, and see the facility at OnCall Imaging. Thank you to our hosts for a great event!

See you next month at JJM Printing on March 19.



CEO Program



Written by: Lillian Swatos, Prophetstown High School

At the beginning of this year, I didn't realize how much CEO would end up shaping me as a person. Honestly, this class has pushed me in ways I didn't even know I needed. Now, we're over a semester into this class and I've gone from overthinking every conversation to actually walking up to business owners and introducing myself without rehearsing it 47 times in my head. My social skills have grown so much; I'm more confident, more comfortable speaking up, and way less afraid of sounding "awkward". CEO didn't just teach me how to talk about business plans and profit margins; it taught me how to talk to people, how to shake hands like I mean it, and how to believe I actually belong in the room. I've learned that growth is uncomfortable, networking is not as scary as it sounds, and sometimes the biggest return on investment isn't money, it's confidence.



Written by: Jonathan Podolski, Sterling High School

Recently in CEO, we have been working on our individual business plans. After a rough draft is sent to bankers, they will give us feedback so the plan will be successful. Another thing we have been working on is our pitches, which includes the problem we're solving and our products' secret sauce. Mark your calendars for the CEO Trade Show on April 29th and 30th!



We just wrapped up our class business. I felt as though everything worked out better than we expected. Going into the event, I lacked confidence, but during the performances all the confidence just flowed to me. Although some acts could've gone better than we hoped, everyone just had fun energy, which is all that really mattered. In the end, we reached our financial goal and want to thank our guests and our sponsors. We also had really talented performers that entertained the crowd. Ultimately what stood out was the learning experiences for the West CEO Class.

Sauk Valley Community Leadership Program (SVCLP)

Written by Laura Carbaugh, SVCLP Facilitator

Kreider Services and its staff generously hosted the Sauk Valley Community Leadership Program cohort on February 4, 2026. We began our morning with Jeff Stauter, Executive Director of Kreider Services, who shared a few short videos and discussed the amazing work Kreider and its clients are doing in the community. Brandy Muntean, a former SVCLP participant and Assistant Manager of Community Services at Kreider, gave us a tour of the building and explained the variety of programs available in the community. If you haven't heard of the Thrive Program, contact Brandy at 815-288-6691.



We started our activities with making a "rainbow" bracelet. Unfortunately, we just didn't have enough color to make that rainbow, and we've been challenged to get there! Through an engaging activity that got us up and moving, Karla Belzer, County Director with U of I Extension Carroll-Lee-Whiteside Unit, prompted us to examine how our individual cultures affect our lives and how we interact with others. The next interactive session, led by Rebecca Muñoz-Ripley, Executive Director of the YWCA of the Sauk Valley, included activities designed to open our eyes to the idea that all people carry a "load of bricks" (oppression), and we also harbor implicit biases and labels.

We were also privileged to have Dawn Olds, retired HALO Senior Vice President of Industry Relations and DEI, guide discussions throughout the morning using thoughtful questions that emphasized the importance of DEI for us as leaders in the workplace and in other areas of our lives.

Rashaad Lane, Retail Area Sales Manager with T-Mobile and Vice President of the Sauk Valley Diversity Alliance; Aaqil Khan, Revenue Cycle Management at Collectly; and Ermir Ramadani, owner of E&K Cleaning Services, shared their personal experiences and discussed how to understand the importance of meaningful change as we work to shape culturally responsive, diverse communities.

Leo's Marvelous Bites of Dixon provided a buffet that delighted and satisfied everyone.

WACC CEO students collaborated with the SVCLP cohort on 2/18/26. First, Le Hartman, facilitator of WACC CEO West and Laura Carbaugh, facilitator of the SVCLP class, led discussion on generational differences and how to understand motivations in the workplace and in life. Le also facilitated a discussion on the intricacies of Gen Z and Gen Alpha.



A panel of local professional leaders then discussed the need to recognize generational differences in the workplace: Emily Hammer and Denise Garcia from the Whiteside County Senior Center; Josh Knie, Knie Appliances; Dr. Jon Mandrell, Sauk Valley Community College; and Joe Strabala Bright, Sauk Valley Community College.



The finale of the morning was a mini-dive into the Difficult Conversations class at SVCC, taught by Amanda Eichman and Dr. Amy Jakobson. We'd love to hear more!

Willy's Restaurant provided a delicious buffet for us all.

Interested in joining the '26-'27 cohort? Learn more at svleadership.org

Members in the News

Rock Falls, Ill. – Out of over 1050 Culver's restaurants, Culver's of Rock Falls received Silver in the nationwide 2025 Culver's Crew Challenge.

The Silver finalists in the annual competition represent the top 45 restaurants within the franchise. Each restaurant's performance is evaluated on core company values, strategic priorities, and operational initiatives. The challenge encourages Culver's restaurants to continually improve and live out the franchise's mission, "We genuinely care, so every guest who chooses Culver's leaves happy."

Culver's of Rock Falls, IL was selected for the Ruth Hospitality Award for the sixth consecutive year along with the Commitment to Excellence recognition for the tenth consecutive year. The Ruth Hospitality award is only given to one restaurant per region and the restaurant who receives this award embodies "True Blue Hospitality".

Owner/Operator of Culver's of Rock Falls, IL, Ashlee Alber, says, "Our team is focused on serving high quality food and genuine Culver's hospitality every day! We are excited to once again compete in this nationwide competition representing the Rock Falls community! I'm so proud of this team and are excited to go for Gold in 2026!"

General Manager of Culver's of Rock Falls, IL, says "I've essentially grown up with Culver's of Rock Falls and lived in the area my whole life. I started here at 16 and, now 27, and I've learned how to connect with people, work as part of a team, and grow into a leader. Shoot, I even met my wife here! I owe a great deal of both my personal and professional success to this team, this restaurant, and this community. The best way I know to pay that forward is by doing everything I

can to get this team to the gold finish we've been striving for and continuing to provide the best possible experience for our community."



Save the Date

Tuesday, March 10: Non-profit Roundtable

Saturday, April 25: Sauk Valley Under 40 Community Clean Up

Wednesday, April 29: Professional Women's Network Lunch & Learn

Friday, June 12: 60th Annual Golf Outing

Learn more at saukvalleyareachamber.com/events



NON-PROFIT ROUNDTABLE

TUESDAY

March 10

9:00 a.m. | SVACC Office
211 Locust St, Sterling



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

Join fellow non-profit leaders and staff for an open, welcoming roundtable designed to create space for honest conversation, idea-sharing, and peer support. This is an opportunity to connect with others who truly understand the work you do, exchange perspectives, and serve as a sounding board for 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

Give Back & Get Connected



with Sauk Valley Under 40

Saturday, April 25 | 9:00 a.m. - 12:00 p.m.
Twin Cities Farmers Market in Sterling

Join Sauk Valley Under 40 for a hands-on morning of connection and community impact.

We'll kick off with time to **mix and mingle**, then head out together to pick up litter and explore the exciting **riverfront development**. It's a simple way to give back, meet new people, and see the progress happening in our community.

After the cleanup, anyone who wants to keep the conversation going is welcome to join us for lunch at The Factory (lunch on your own).

Register for this free event by scanning the QR code or visiting this link:
<https://forms.gle/RV4trWV62t1ZqTn17>



Questions? Email Dallas at director@saukvalleyareachamber.com



Real Colors

WEDNESDAY, APRIL 29

11:00 a.m. - 1:00 p.m.

Woodlawn Arts Academy
3807 Woodlawn Rd, Sterling



Presented by
Karla Belzer

Karla Belzer serves as the County Director for University of Illinois Extension, providing leadership and support for programs that strengthen communities across northwest Illinois. In her role, she works with staff, local government, and community partners to bring trusted, research-based education to residents of all ages.

With a background in health and human services, Karla has nearly 20 years of experience before joining Extension. As an Extension Educator, she focused on mindfulness, brain health, and family well-being, helping people reduce stress, build resilience, and live healthier lives.

Karla is passionate about empowering others to be their best selves. She is active in her community as a member of the Lee County United Way Board, Salvation Army Advisory Board, and President of the Board for the YWCA of the Sauk Valley. She is also involved with Oneighty Church and Dixon High School Boosters. Outside of work, she enjoys gardening, traveling, hiking with her family, and walking her dogs.

Join us for an engaging, hands-on workshop that uses the **Real Colors four-color personality assessment** to help you better understand your own temperament and improve communication with others, personally and professionally.

Learn what motivates you—and those around you—as we explore the Gold, Green, Blue, and Orange personality types in a fun, interactive setting.

\$35 members | \$65 non-members

Includes Real Colors personality assessment, tools to put to use in the office immediately after the event, networking opportunity, and a catered lunch.



Scan the QR Code or
visit <https://bit.ly/3Yu6RWd>

Register by April 22.

Participants will receive an email link to complete. Must be completed by April 28 to have their results available for the session.

PWN series sponsors



SAUKVALLEYAREACHAMBER.COM/PWN