



Sauk Valley Area
chamber of commerce

UNITED STATES CHAMBER OF COMMERCE

ACCREDITED



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Partnering for Success

MAY 2026



BUSINESS *After Hours*

Wednesday,

MAY 13

5:00 - 6:30 p.m.

Franklin Grove Grist Mill
1893 Twist Rd,
Franklin Grove

Join us for a joint Business After Hours!

- Build connections, grow business
- Network with local professionals
- Relax, connect, exchange ideas



franklincreekconservation.org

INTRODUCING MEGAN RENKES, DNP OBSTETRICS AND GYNECOLOGY

Now accepting new patients! CGH Medical Center is pleased to introduce Megan Renkes, DNP. Megan joins the Obstetrics and Gynecology department at CGH Medical Center Main Clinic. She received her DNP as a Family Nurse Practitioner from Clarke University in Dubuque, Iowa, and her BSN from St. Ambrose University in Davenport, Iowa. Megan is board-certified by the American Nurses Credentialing Center.

To make an appointment, please call 815-625-4790.



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

May Meetings

May 12 Exec
May 13 Business After Hours
May 14 Ambassadors
May 19 Board
May 19 Agri-business Committee
May 21 Hispanic Business Leaders

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
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

This month has been a great reminder of what makes our Chamber so strong—engaged members who turn ideas into action.

Our committees have truly been moving and shaking. The Hispanic Business Leaders Committee created meaningful opportunities for local youth to learn, connect, and grow, continuing to build a strong foundation for our future workforce. Sauk Valley Under 40 brought energy to the community through a successful clean-up effort paired with a networking event, showing how service and connection go hand in hand. Meanwhile, the Professional Women's Network hosted an outstanding Lunch & Learn, drawing over 100 attendees for an afternoon of professional development and meaningful conversation.

These efforts don't happen by accident, they are driven by dedicated volunteers and members who care deeply about this community. Their work is creating real impact, from supporting the next generation to strengthening professional networks across the Sauk Valley.

Thank you to everyone who continues to show up, get involved, and invest in the growth of our region! We're building something special together, and it's exciting to see the momentum continue.



Investor Update May 2026

NEW INVESTORS

INVESTOR RENEWALS

Amazing Grace
Angelo's
Blackhawk Hills Regional Council
Brown Construction Company
Christ Church Sterling
Cornerstone Special Care
D & E Furniture
Downie & Associates, CPA's, PC
Edward Jones - Mike Loos
Exclusive Style and Protection
Folsom's Bakery, Inc.
Gaffey Health Service, Inc.
Greater Sterling Development

HB Wilkinson Title Company
Helm Civil
Jakobs Bros. Farms Inc.
Majeski Motors
Moore Monument & Granite Co.
Northern IL Home Medical Supply
Primo's Bar and Grill
River Ridge Animal Hospital
RRCA Accounts Management
Selmi's Wedding & Events
ServiceMaster
Slim-N-Hank's Auto Body Shop
Sterling Federal Bank
Sterling Park District

Sterling Rock Falls Jaycees
Sterling Schools Foundation
Sterling Woodworks LLC
The Factory
The Midwest Mercantile
T-Mobile
Wilco Rental, Inc.
Willy's Restaurant

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
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% Investors

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

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: Tygen Bausman, Sauk Valley Bank

Hello, my name is Tygen (Teagan) Bausman. I grew up in Sterling and now live in Rock Falls with my husband and 3 children. I am proud to have served the Sauk Valley Area Chamber of Commerce as an Ambassador for three years and currently hold the role of Ambassador Co-Chair. In addition, I serve as Co-Chair of the Hispanic Business Leaders Committee and am a member of the Agribusiness and Sights and Sounds Committees.



As a Sterling native and current Rock Falls resident, I am deeply invested in our community and committed to giving back by supporting local businesses and youth-focused initiatives.

Currently, I am the AVP Treasury Management Officer for the Sterling and Rock Falls markets at Sauk Valley Bank, where I bring 19 years of banking experience, ten of those dedicated to the Commercial Banking field. In my role, I’m passionate about helping local businesses achieve their goals by providing tailored banking solutions that meet their unique needs.

Connecting with local business leaders, welcoming new enterprises to our area, and fostering growth within our community is not just my job; it’s my passion. I am honored to contribute to the success and growth of our businesses and community, helping them thrive and achieve their aspirations.

In April, the Ambassadors met at The Factory for great conversation over a tasty lunch! They provided committee updates and chatted about new initiatives like the Ambassador Volunteer Day—more information to come in next month’s newsletter!



Additionally, the Ambassadors hosted a table at Business After Hours on April 16 to share more about what they do and open the door to individuals who may want to get involved as an Ambassador. If you are interested in joining the team, contact Dallas at director@saukvalleyareachamber.com

Ribbon Cutting



Coqui Comfort
Food truck
815-677-5619



Action Roofing & Siding
601 W 3rd St., Sterling
563-212-0004



Upcycle Junkie
121 E. Main Street, Morrison
815-716-1870



Walmart DC #7024
20th Anniversary!
23769 Mathew Rd, Sterling



WSI Wallin Group
wsiworld.com/mindy-wallin
815-550-5544



Dunk's Restaurant
312 Locust St., Sterling
815-632-3040

Business After Hours

On April 16 RiverWorks Coworking hosted a great opportunity for our members to get together and make new connections.

See you next month at Franklin Creek Conservation on Wednesday, May 13.



Congratulations to Savy Chic's Bridal Boutique for receiving April's Customer Service Award!

They were nominated for their kindness and knowledge, helping brides find their perfect wedding dress. Their nominator said "Kelly and Diana assisted our daughter find her wedding dress in their beautiful Sterling store. They were exceptional in sharing the bride's vision of her happily ever after. They were so fun and trusting and made the experience wonderful."



CSA Sponsored by:



Guest Editorial

Written by: Ellie Hanlon, Marketing & Development Director Sterling-Rock Falls Family YMCA

We're ready for a summer of adventure! With changes to our Summer Day Camp Program and new opportunities at YMCA Camp Benson, we are sure that there's no place like the Y this summer!

This year the Sterling-Rock Falls Family YMCA Summer Day Camp program is moving to Dillon Elementary school. Our summer day camp provides safe and educational activities for over 150 kids in the Sterling-Rock Falls area. The move to Dillon Elementary is a huge one for this program, providing kids with more activities and space to simply be kids. This year our day camp program is offering day trips to YMCA Camp Benson. Day campers can experience all the fun and adventures to be had out at camp without the worry of spending the night away from home.

YMCA Camp Benson is in its final preparations for the kickoff of our 2026 Summer Camp Season. Campers in first grade all the way through high school can spend the summer out at camp. Camp provides a safe place for kids to just be kids; while they explore the outdoors and create amazing memories. From mini weeks to mega week and every session in between Camp Benson provides kids with a summer they will never forget!

And this year, camp isn't just for kids! Join us out at camp for our family weekend, May 29th & 30th! The entire family can explore hiking trails, race down the zipline and relax by the campfire at the end of the night. They might even catch a glimpse of the famous Camp Benson Kangaroo!

At the Y, we are excited for the return of NFL Flag football. Our second season kicks off in May with our meet and greet combine. Players can meet their coaches and teammates and practice their football skills before the start of the season. The extra benefit of our meet and greet combine is that players do not need to be registered to attend! We understand kids might be nervous when faced with trying something new, so we invite you to stop by and have some fun before registering!

For the rest of this year the YMCA will focus on showing why there's "No Place like This Place!" In 2026, the YMCA as an organization turns 175 years old! That's 175 years of providing safe and active places for everyone in our community. You can help the Y continue being the place to be by donating to our annual support campaign. This program helps provide scholarships for all in our community. Ensuring that no one is turned away due to the inability to pay!

To learn more about what the YMCA has to offer, donate to our annual support campaign, or register for one of our great programs, visit our website today!
www.srfymca.org.



Professional Women's Network

PWN is proud to announce Upcycle Junkie as the first recipient of the Women-Owned Business Grant, created to support and elevate women entrepreneurs across the Sauk Valley. This month, we're excited to celebrate this milestone as the program officially launches; providing membership support, visibility, and valuable connections to help women-owned businesses grow and thrive. Stay tuned as we continue to highlight and invest in the incredible women making an impact in our community.

PWN also hosted Real Colors workshop presented by Karla Belzer on April 29. Participants took a personality assessment prior to attending the event and received their "color" during the event where Karla walked us through the meanings, how we interact with others, and how it comes into play in our personal and professional lives. We met new people and had a wonderful group of 100 individuals learning together.



Hispanic Business Leaders Committee

As part of the Hispanic Business Leaders Committee's new initiatives, the group held a financial literacy event for high school students at Elevate Youth Center. Lead by co-chairs, Tygen Bausman and Jose Barrientos of Sauk Valley Bank, they walked students through basics of money including budgeting and understanding terminology.

The committee also hosted a bilingual Free Application for Financial Student Aid (FAFSA) completion night in coordination with Sauk Valley Community College to help Spanish speaking students complete the FAFSA for college readiness.

If you are interested in getting involved in HBLC, please email Dallas at director@saukvalleyareachamber.com



Written by: Tynlee Williams, Sterling High School

As the school year comes to a nearing close, The CEO program stands out as more than just a course, it has been a hands-on experience that challenged students to think like entrepreneurs and grow as leaders. As you will be reading this after the CEO Tradeshow has concluded, it is important to reflect on everything that led up to that moment. Throughout the year, both classes stepped outside of the traditional classroom setting and into the real world of business. From pitching ideas to local bankers and many speakers, to creating and running our individual business, every experience pushed students to develop confidence, communication skills and resilience. The Tradeshow served as a final opportunity for students to showcase not only their businesses, but also the growth they have achieved over this year. There were a variety of emotions that were reflected leading up to the days of the show; some were nervous, ready, or even a little sad how fast the year went by. Looking back, the CEO class was not always easy. There were challenges, setbacks, and moments of uncertainty, but those moments became some of the most valuable lessons. Students learned to problem solve, adapt, and support one another in a professional environment. As the year comes to a close, the impact of the CEO program goes far beyond the classroom. The skills, connections and experiences gained will continue to influence students as they move forward in their journeys. What an amazing opportunity it was for all of us to be a part of this class and the endless opportunities it gave to us.

Please join us in celebrating
13 years of CEO and Le Hartman
on May 22!



Members in the News

Avril Winkle, Destinations Travel Services Inc., is proud to announce that they have been awarded the Two Million Dollar Travel Advisor Sales Award by the MAST Travel Network, recognizing outstanding achievement in travel sales and industry partnership. The award honors elite travel advisors who have generated more than \$2,000,000 in leisure travel sales, with 70% or more booked through MAST Preferred Suppliers, a distinction that reflects strong industry relationships, trusted expertise, and a commitment to delivering exceptional travel experiences.



“We are incredibly honored to receive the Two Million Dollar Travel Advisor Sales Award,” said agency owner Avril Winkle. “This milestone is a direct reflection of the trust our clients place in us to plan their most meaningful travel experiences. We are deeply grateful for their continued support and loyalty.”

Sauk Valley Community Leadership Program (SVCLP)

Written by Laura Carbaugh, SVCLP Facilitator

There were no April Fools in the Rock Falls Chamber Community Building on April 1, 2026, as the '25-'26 Sauk Valley Community Leadership Program cohort spent the morning with Dr. Tad Everett, Superintendent of Sterling Public Schools, learning about how to lead the most difficult person of all: ourselves! We learned about goals and strategies, self-check, the power of mistakes, ABC calendars, The Failure Framework, and much more.

Suzanne Ravlin, owner of White Coat Negotiations and CEO of Serenity Hospice and Home, also presented a powerful look at how to lead during times of upheaval, recognizing that we all react to change differently, especially as we become "sandwiched" between differing personalities and generational differences. Remember: resistance is data!

El Tapatio Restaurant of Rock Falls provided a delicious taco bar with all the fixings. Yum!



On Wednesday, April 15, 2026, Mad Water Saloon, Dixon, hosted the Sauk Valley Community Leadership Program and guests. Thank you to all who took time to visit this session!



We began with a Q & A with Economic Development leaders Kim Ewoldsen, Director of Regional Economic Development and Illinois Small Business Development Center at Sauk Valley Community College, and Robbin Blackert, City of Rock Falls IL Administrator. Amanda Wike, Executive Director of Discover Dixon, led this panel discussion on the future of the Sauk Valley area and what it takes to bring the region's remarkable projects to completion. These powerful women work diligently to "set the table" and create the kind of community in which they (and we) want to live.



Reagan Mass Transit District - RMTD Executive Director Greg Gates wowed us with his discussion of grants and the present and future of RMTD. Rural public transportation is critical for helping people get to jobs, medical appointments, and other essential destinations—and for some, it is the only way they have to stay connected. Somkit, also known as Touch of Thai, provided a buffet of deliciousness!



MAKE A DIFFERENCE IN YOUR COMMUNITY

SAUK VALLEY COMMUNITY LEADERSHIP PROGRAM

SVCLP participants will be guided through a 10-month skill-building curriculum focused on leadership and community topics. Participants will learn from local leaders sharing their love for their organizations and community.

The SVCLP is designed to engage and develop leaders within the Sauk Valley.

Program sessions run July through May.

Join the next cohort at svleadership.org or email svleadership@svcc.edu.



Applications for the 2026-2027 cohort are now open!

Learn more at svleadership.org.

Sauk Valley Under 40

Sauk Valley Under 40 hosted an Earth Day inspired Give Back and Get Connected event on April 25. The steering committee hosted individuals from our community for a networking and casual get together. They explored the Sterling Riverfront area hearing from Alderman Josh Johnson, on the progress of the site and what is to come for the space. While exploring the riverfront area, the group picked up garbage they came across to help beautify our community, while also learning about mindfulness and nature. Thank you to Molly Johnson for providing the mental health and environmental pieces to the event and enlightening our individuals under 40!

The next event is a summer networking event on August 5 at Palmyra Pub.

More information and the link to RSVP can be found at saukvalleyareachamber.com/svu40



Governmental Affairs

Written by: Illinois Department of Employment Security



The Illinois Department of Employment Security (IDES) provided notice due to a change in the Illinois Administrative Code. Beginning on July 1, 2026, employer contribution payments to a worker's 401(k) plan made on and after that date are no longer considered to be "wages" for purposes of the Illinois Unemployment Insurance Act. Therefore, these payments should not be included when reporting the wages paid to workers to IDES after July 1, 2026. Employee contributions to their 401(k) plan will continue to be considered "wages."

Any employer contribution payments to a worker's 401(k) plan made prior to July 1, 2026, should continue to be included as wages when reporting to IDES.

For reference, the section of the Illinois Administrative Code that changed is located here. This change was made to be consistent with the way that the Internal Revenue Service now treats employer contribution payments to a worker's 401(k) plan.

Please note that this change only applies to employer contribution payments to workers' 401(k) plans and not other plans.

Please contact IDES at (800) 247-4984 with any questions or review the Illinois Administrative Code.

Member Spotlight

Written by: Matthew Hicks

So, it has been just over a year since we started up our new business in Sterling, more specifically inside Northland Mall. We kept reading and hearing a need for "something to do" in our communities and decided to try our idea out. We are locally owned, and everything is built in-house. When we started, it was with 13 holes of mini golf and a soccer pool "table". We expanded to 14 holes, 9 of which were made into a blacklight course. When we moved across the hall back in November, we added 4 more holes for a total 18 for our regular mini golf course, plus we added 18 table tops which are a combination of pool and mini golf built on tables and played with pool cue sticks. A month later we added 18 holes of blacklight mini golf. We are now officially the area's largest mini golf establishment with 54 holes of mini golf and soccer pool, in quite a wide radius. We have attracted people as far as Freeport, and Fulton, that we are aware of, and continue to grow. We are currently working on a new concept in mobile mini golf, 18 holes on a folding trailer, which are also removable to be able to be set up indoors at off site locations. More to come on this expansion project. For up to date info, check out our Facebook page, The 9th Hole Mini Golf & More.



Workforce Development

The SVACC's Certificate of Employability continues this spring at **Rock Falls High School**. Local employers visited two classrooms at RFHS to work through soft skills, career exploration, and essentials for the workplace. Chamber members spoke on the importance of communication, teamwork, adaptability, flexibility, reliability, among other important skills for students entering the workplace. The program concluded with mock interviews in which the students put their skills to work and received feedback and tips from our employers.

Thank you to our guests:

- Shaunte Padilla, Sami Wiggins, and Teresa Tucker, Castor Home Health Solutions
- Adrian Sandoval, Toast and Plate Catering
- Alejandro Rivera, RE/MAX Sauk Valley
- Jamie Alexander, YMCA
- Dawn Castillo, Arnulfo Valdivia, and Jose Barrientos, Sauk Valley Bank
- Dana Chacon, Sauk Valley Community College
- Joanna Thiede, Walmart DC #7024
- Stephanie Richardson and Sarah Wypasek, Hughes Recruiting
- John Kelly, Culver's of Rock Falls
- Dana Conkrite, CGH Medical Center
- Nathan and Janel Stahr, Stahr Media
- Kathy Book, University of Illinois Extension



We also brought mock interviews to **Milledgeville High School** this month. Thank you to Brent Reuter, Dixon Township Supervisor; Sarah Cleary, Sauk Valley Bank; Riley Gober, Sauk Valley Community College; and Dr. Chelsey, Northern Illinois Veterinary Services for joining us and preparing students for the workforce!





JOIN THE SVACC FOR A DAY OF GOLF

FRIDAY, JUNE 12, 2026
Deer Valley Golf Course

Presented by



PUTTING CONTEST SPONSORED BY



NEW **60TH ANNIVERSARY RAFFLE!**

Help us celebrate the 60th anniversary of the Golf Outing with new raffles and fun games!

Mulligans & 50/50 tickets will be available

Schedule

- • 11:30 Registration & Lunch
- • 12:30 Shotgun Start
- • 5:00 Awards
- •
- •
- •

Proceeds benefit the Charles Farnham Business Scholarship and Chamber operations

Ways to Support

Double Eagle Package - \$1,000
Full hole sponsor + 4 Golfers
(logo on registration materials and table for promoting business during the event)

Eagle Package - \$550
Full hole sponsor + 4 Golfers

Birdie Package - \$450
Half hole sponsor + 4 Golfers

Golf Only (foursome) - \$320

Full Hole Sponsor Only - \$300
**golf not included*

Half Hole Sponsor Only - \$200
**golf not included*

Register by May 15



Use the QR code, call 815-625-2400, or email director@saukvalleyareachamber.com

saukvalleyareachamber.com/golf-outing



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

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