



Sauk Valley Area
chamber of commerce

UNITED STATES CHAMBER OF COMMERCE

ACCREDITED



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Partnering for Success

October 2026

Together with Sauk Valley Area Chamber of Commerce,
STERLING WOODWORKS invites you to our

AFTER HOURS EVENT

cheers
COME ~~BUILD~~ WITH US

APPETIZERS AND DRINKS
catered by Bartinis & House in the Country

Join Us on Thursday, 15 October | 5pm-6:30pm

Lets have some fun and create beautiful memories.



Sauk Valley Area
chamber of commerce

www.sterlingwoodworks.com



1307 W 4th St. Sterling, IL.



OPEN HOUSE

TUES., OCT. 13, 2026 • 4:30 – 6:00 P.M.
LEARN MORE AT SVCC.EDU/OPENHOUSE26

October Meetings

October 1 HBLC Meeting
October 8 Ambassador Meeting
October 13 Executive Committee Meeting
October 14 Board Retreat
October 20 Agribusiness Meeting
October 21 PWN Meeting

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 CareerCenter
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, CastorHome Health Solutions

Staff

Dallas Knack – Executive Director
Chrissy Palacz – Office & Member Relations
Tori Beirdman – Finance Specialist
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

October has a way of reminding us how much we love where we live. Friday night football, fall festivals, crisp mornings at your favorite coffee shop, local restaurants filling up after the game, and those first cool evenings spent downtown with friends.

It's also a good time to think about what makes a community strong, not just the businesses and organizations that call it home, but the people who show up and take part to make a difference.

With Election Day coming up on November 3, I encourage you to take some time to learn about the candidates and issues that will appear on your ballot. Local elections have a meaningful impact on the communities where we live, work, and raise our families. Being informed and participating in the process is one of the ways we each contribute to the future of the Sauk Valley. Mark your calendars, and vote on November 3.

While you're out and about this fall, keep supporting the businesses that help make our community what it is. Grab dinner after the football game, shop local, attend a community event, or simply invite someone to join you.

Thank you for being a Chamber member and for continuing to invest your time, energy, and resources into our region. We're grateful to have you as part of the Sauk Valley Area Chamber of Commerce!



Investor Update October 2026

NEW INVESTORS

Dealer Activation

dealeractivation.com
319-533-0635

Good News Coffee Co.

815-441-7614

Eric's Moving Services

1215 W. Rock Falls Rd., Rock Falls
309-838-3648

Rahn Family Wellness

1304 Riverview Rd., Sterling
815-441-2335

INVESTOR RENEWALS

7:24 Fitness on the Rock
Altofer Inc.
Bushel Basket Candle Co.
Days Inn of Rock Falls
Deer Valley Golf Club
Educators of Beauty
Edwards Jones- AJ Sharp

Hill Fastener
Lance's Plumbing
Moeller, Myers & Associates
OnCall Imaging
Republic Services
Savant Wealth Management
SERVPRO of Sterling

Shelly Dambman, CPA
Sterling Chevrolet
Subway
Teresa Clark
Total Construction Services
University of Illinois Extension

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
U.S. Bank
Wahl Clipper Corporation
Wal-Mart D.C. #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

Altran Magnetics	Loescher Heating & Air Conditioning
Bargain Exterminators	Mattox Insurance Agency
Helm Civil	RE/MAX of the Sauk Valley
Hill's Electric Motor Service, Inc.	Reagan Mass Transit District
Lance's Plumbing	Sauk Valley Community College
LK Design Source	Stratus Networks

110% Investors

Astec Industries	N & C Cleaning Service	Smeltzer Insurance Agency
Bollman Auto Center	Northern Illinois Veterinary Services	St. Vincent DePaul Society
Bushel Basket Candle Co., Inc.	PC Tech 2U	Subway
Compeer Financial	Rock River Lumber & Grain	The Mertes Law Firm, P.C.
Dennis Electric of Tampico, Inc.	Sauk Valley CPR	The Wellspring Medical Spa
Kiwanis Club of Sterling	Scholl Insurance Agency, Inc.	University of Illinois Extension
McCormick's Nursery & Landscaping	Showplace Antiques & Treasures	

Chamber Ambassadors

Allie Johnston – University of Illinois Extension

Breanne Hunter – CGH Medical Center

Brenda VanHorn – CLA (CliftonLarsonAllen LLP)

Brian Hawkins – Brian Hawkins Insurance,
The Cornerstone Agency

Cael Sanders – Sterling Federal Bank

Danny Hartz – Central Bank

Erik Eaglin – Sauk Valley Bank

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

Mindy Wallin – WSI Wallin Group

Sami Wiggins – Castor Home Health Solutions

Tygen Bausman – Sauk Valley Bank

Ambassador Spotlight: Mindy Wallin, WSI - Wallin Group

I was born and raised in Dixon, Illinois. After high school, I spent two years at Sauk Valley Community College, where I played tennis, before moving to Wisconsin to complete my undergraduate degree. After college, I spent 16 years in the Kentucky area before returning home about five years ago. I'm grateful to be back in the community that shaped me and honored to serve as an Ambassador for the Sauk Valley Chamber of Commerce. Personally, I enjoy golf, fitness, and outdoor activities.



Professionally, I have worked across marketing, digital products, technology, and customer-focused growth, helping teams turn complex goals into clear strategies and measurable action for over 15 years. I have led cross-functional teams in launching and scaling award-winning digital experiences. My approach is simple: listen and learn, align around the strongest opportunities, and turn insight into an actionable plan.

My passion is helping business owners transform their ideas, products, and potential into sustainable growth through creative, strategic thinking.



Ambassador Spotlight: Cael Sanders, Sterling Federal Bank

My name is Cael Sanders. I have been a Chamber Ambassador for three years. Over the past year, I have had the opportunity to deepen my commitment to the SVACC through my involvement as a board member.

I currently work at Sterling Federal Bank as the Senior Commercial Loan Officer. I'm truly blessed to have an opportunity to make an impact on the new and existing businesses in the community that I was born and raised in.

I strive to be very active outside of the bank through community involvement. Outside of my involvement with SVACC, I am the active president of the Sterling-Rock Falls Jaycees, Treasurer with Hope Cancer Wellness Center, and involved with Sauk Valley Under 40. When I am not working or volunteering in the community, you can find me either golfing, playing pickleball, or enjoying time with family/friends.

If you are interested in learning more about how Sterling Federal Bank can help you with your business, please contact me at 815-622-3355 or csanders@sterlingfederal.com.

Ambassador's September Meeting

The SVACC Ambassadors gathered for lunch at Azul Cantina to connect, discuss current projects, and prepare for upcoming Chamber events. The group continues to play an important role in welcoming members and supporting Chamber activities throughout the year.

Thanks to Azul Cantina for their hospitality!



Ribbon Cuttings



Haymarket Apartments
123 E. 3rd St., Sterling
815-535-7947



CGH Hometown Pharmacy
4 W. 3rd St., Sterling
815-632-5371



Mexicali Rose Banquet Hall
1409 8th Ave., Rock Falls
815-590-3110



Heroes of Hope
815-499-6169
heroesofhope-saukvalley.org

Guest Editorial

Written by Lt. Jessica Tosh, Corps Officer at Sterling Rock Falls Salvation Army

For as long as I can remember, seeing Salvation Army bell ringers during the Christmas season has been a cherished tradition. As I grew older, I came to understand the deeper meaning behind the familiar Red Kettle. More than a holiday symbol, the Red Kettle represents hope, compassion, and the generosity that brings communities together.

Each year, the funds raised through the Red Kettle Campaign help The Salvation Army provide critical assistance to local individuals and families facing difficult circumstances. As the need for support continues to grow throughout our community, so does our fundraising goal. This year, we are aiming to raise \$70,000 to help meet those needs and ensure vital services remain available to our neighbors.

To launch this year's campaign, The Salvation Army is excited to host a special Kettle Kickoff event on November 14. This free **"Give with Joy Christmas Concert"** will be held at First Presbyterian Church and promises to be an evening filled with music, fellowship, and holiday spirit.

We are honored to welcome an outstanding lineup of performers, including Mardi Huffstutler, the Sterling High School Madrigal Singers and Strings, and the Rock River Valley Barbershop Chorus. Special guests will include The Salvation Army Next Gen Band and our own Joyful Noise ensemble.

In addition to the music, the Kiwanis Club will host a bake sale and raffle during the event. While admission is free, a freewill offering will be collected to support The Salvation Army's mission and help us reach our Red Kettle Campaign goal.

We invite everyone in the community to join us for this special evening as we celebrate the joy of the season and begin working together to make a difference for our neighbors in need. With your support, we can continue bringing hope, help, and encouragement to those who need it most.



Certificate of Employability Program - Rock Falls High School

The Certificate of Employability Program at Rock Falls High School gave students opportunities to build workplace skills through activities and conversations focused on communication, teamwork, problem-solving, resume development, and employability. Students also participated in mock interviews with local employers to practice presenting themselves professionally.

Thank you to Joanna of Wal-Mart DC 7024; Amber of The IFH Group, Inc.; Stephanie of Hughes Recruiting & Consulting; Dana of Sauk Valley Community College; Jamie and Jack of Sterling-Rock Falls Family YMCA; Jessica of the City of Sterling, and Dawn, Tricia, and Sara from Sauk Valley Bank for joining us in the classroom to engage our local students in soft skills.



Sauk Valley Community Leadership Program (SVCLP)

The Sauk Valley Community Leadership Program cohort had a fantastic experience at this month's session at Camp Benson. They deepened their connections through engaging, hands-on team-building activities, developing a better understanding of one another.

Marissa Larson, manager at Camp Benson, welcomed the session and provided an overview of the camp, its programs, and activities. Even though the weather did not cooperate, we were able to get a snapshot of the vast and beautiful 113- acre campus while experiencing the mission of creating opportunities in the outdoors for personal growth and character development.



We were joined by Marissa Razo (Rock Falls Chamber of Commerce), Bob Sondgeroth (Rock Falls Rotary), Ashleigh Sorenson (Sauk Valley Community College Impact Program), and Paige Toms (Sauk Valley Bank) for a panel discussion on volunteerism and leadership. Their perspectives on leadership and volunteerism were not only inspiring but also packed with practical advice for making a difference in our community.

While enjoying a delicious lunch from Molly's, every member of the cohort had the chance to share their story. The day was filled with meaningful conversations, new friendships, and renewed motivation to lead and serve. It was truly an uplifting and impactful experience!



Sauk Valley Grown - Farm Tours & Dinner

Sauk Valley Grown was a special day featuring local farm tours and a meal prepared by Whiteside Area Career Center culinary arts students. The Sauk Valley Area Chamber of Commerce was honored to partner with the U of I Extension Carroll-Lee-Whiteside Unit and WACC for this event.



We are grateful to Chef Joe and the WACC students for preparing the meal, as well as the farmers who provided ingredients. We also thank the participating locations—JL Acres, ROOTS Market, The Hohlen Homestead, S & J Hobby Farm, All Good Things Lavender, and Whiteside Area Career Center—for welcoming guests and sharing their operations. Lauren's Flowers also provided a wonderful build-your-own bouquet bar.

Grennan Farms, Sauk Valley Bank, and Sterling Federal Bank made the event possible through their generous support. We also thank the members of the SVACC Agriculture Advancement Committee for organizing the event and bringing the final details together.



Congratulations to Showplace Antiques & Treasures for receiving September's Customer Service Award!

Their nominator said: "Showplace Antiques and Treasures is such a unique and wonderful space in our community. The staff is incredibly kind and welcoming. They are incredibly helpful to their customers and sellers. With a wealth of knowledge, they have created a great community for anyone who loves old and unique items. Thank you for your warm hospitality, Showplace Antiques!"

Visit their store at 307 First Avenue in Sterling or call 815-564-9376 to find your next antique treasure!



CSA Sponsored by:



Sauk Valley Under 40 - Lunch and Learn

Sauk Valley Under 40 hosted an afternoon focused on personal branding and professional development, made possible through the generous support of Culver's, CGH Medical Center, and Sauk Valley Bank. Thank you to Dr. Mandrell, Karla Belzer, Aidan Schmall, and Gracie Young for sharing their insights and presenting to attendees.

As the final Sauk Valley Under 40 event of 2026, the group looks forward to building on its momentum and creating more opportunities for professional connection and development in 2027!



Cheers to SVACC Members!

SVACC gathered with members for a Chamber Week celebration hosted at The Foundry. The evening provided an opportunity to connect with fellow members, learn more about Chamber initiatives, and enjoy offerings from local businesses.

Guests had the opportunity to sample food and beverages from several SVACC members, including Toast and Plate Catering, Good News Coffee Co., Dunk's Restaurant & Pizzeria, and Woody's Original Handmade Popcorn.



Several SVACC committees also shared updates on current projects and initiatives, including the Ambassadors, Hispanic Business Leaders, Professional Women's Network, and Sauk Valley Under 40. The event highlighted the many ways members can get involved with the Chamber and connect with others throughout the business community.

Thank you to everyone who joined us and to the participating businesses for helping make the evening a special opportunity to celebrate SVACC members.



73rd Annual Fiesta Parade

While we were disappointed not to celebrate the 73rd Annual Fiesta Parade, we are incredibly grateful to the businesses, organizations, sponsors, volunteers, and community members who helped prepare for this year's parade. Your support, preparation, and commitment to the Fiesta Parade are what make this annual tradition such a special part of our community.

A special thank-you to all of our 2026 Fiesta Day Parade sponsors for their generous support and continued investment in this community celebration. We truly appreciate your partnership and understanding.

We look forward to bringing the Fiesta Day Parade back next year!

Save the Date: Saturday, September 18, 2027



Professional Women's Network

Professional Women's Network had the honor of hosting Natalie Moeller of Moeller, Myers & Associates, PC for "How to Tame Your Stress". Guests took away loads of great information, helpful tips, and lots of goodies from Moeller, Myers & Associates!

Attendees also wrote letters to their future selves, which the committee will mail out at a future date for a surprise check-in. Attendees set goals, shared words of encouragement, and took away reminders from Natalie to keep in mind. Leo's Marvelous Bites provided a delicious lunch. Thank you, Leo's!

A big thank you to our PWN 2026 event series sponsors: H.B. Wilkinson Title Company, Invenergy Services, Sauk Valley Bank, ThriveWorks Consulting, and The Wellspring Med Spa.



The Professional Women's Network planning committee is excited for what is to come in 2027! The committee has shared lots of great topics and fantastic speakers. They are narrowing down the lineup and can't wait to share. Stay tuned for the PWN events in 2027.



Written by
Delaney Mullen *Junior, Eastland High School*

CEO has been nothing but an amazing experience so far for the East Class! We went from complete strangers on the first day to a very close-knit group, and we still have so much more time to grow! The East Class has traveled to many different locations, had many different presentations, and multiple days of team bonding that helped us grow closer as a class! We have all learned so much, and we couldn't have done it without our amazing presenters and tours! We have all grown so much as individuals and have more confidence in our greetings and handshakes!

We have loved all of our tours and presenters, but a couple of them stood out to us the most! We are extremely grateful for every single one, and look forward to meeting even more people! We loved visiting Jakobs Brothers Farms, where we got to learn a lot about all of the different components that are needed to make a farm successful! East Class visited Seth Nicklaus at the Dixon Park District, and we got to do some really fun team exercises to get our feet moving! We also had breakfast with the CEO board members, and we loved getting to interact with them and get to know more about all of their professions! We got to play disc golf with Brent Reuter and learn all about Page Park. We also visited All Good Things Lavender Farm, where we got to learn all about how lavender can be made into many different products, and we even got to pick some ourselves! CEO East couldn't be more grateful for all of the opportunities that we've had, and we are looking forward to even more! Thank you to all of our sponsors and supporters; we are so grateful for you all!



Written by
Dean Geiger *Senior, Dixon High School*

This year in CEO, we have had the opportunity to meet and learn from many important and influential people throughout the Sauk Valley. One person I would especially like to highlight is Margo Jakobs. Margo has taught our class so many valuable lessons that we can carry with us as we continue to grow, both personally and professionally.

One of the things that stood out to me most was how she taught us things about ourselves that we may not have even realized before. She taught us the importance of knowing when to ask for help and understanding that asking for help is not a weakness, but a way to learn and improve. She also taught us how important first impressions are, including how to properly greet someone, introduce ourselves, and communicate with people in a respectful and professional way. Beyond those specific skills, Margo showed us the importance of being confident, respectful, and willing to learn from the people around us. These are skills that will be useful not only in our future careers, but also in everyday life. The lessons she shared with us have helped me become more comfortable when meeting new people and have given me a better understanding of how I want to present myself to others.



Saturday, November 7, 2026
10 a.m. - Noon
Sauk Valley Community College
Field by Dillon Mall

SMASH, Don't Trash

After the fun of pumpkin picking and carving ends, plan to recycle them at the 2026 Pumpkin SMASH!

Learn more:

go.illinois.edu/PumpkinSmash



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Sauk Valley Area
chamber of commerce

The Sauk Valley Area Chamber of Commerce
invites you to an evening of celebration for
the manufacturing industry.

8th Annual Manufacturing Dinner

Thursday, October 8
5:30 p.m. social hour | 6:00 p.m. dinner

Join us at:
Sauk Valley Community College
173 IL Rt 2, Dixon
**Tours of the SVCC
manufacturing area
will be available.**

\$40 per person

Buffet & Cash Bar

Register at
bit.ly/44AVYot, scan the QR code,
or call 815-625-2400
to reserve your tickets by **October 2.**



Sterling federal
Bank



Sterling Steel Company, LLC



Thank you to our sponsors



PARTNERING FOR SUCCESS

SVACC Hispanic Business Leaders Committee
invite small business owners to:

BUSINESS TOOLS & RESOURCES WORKSHOP

Celebrating Hispanic Heritage Month

Don't miss this chance to gain insights, connect with
resources, and elevate your entrepreneurial journey.
Join us and take your business to the next level!

TUESDAY,
OCTOBER 13
10:00 a.m. – 11:30 a.m.



Aurelio's Cake Factory & Bistro
2907 Locust St, Sterling

- Marketing Tips
- Legal, Financial, Accounting
- Technical & Funding Resources

RSVP BY OCTOBER 6

<https://bit.ly/4ryTvpo>
815-625-2400
director@saukvalleyareachamber.com

Free for SVACC members
\$10 for non-members

IN PARTNERSHIP WITH



Illinois
Department of Commerce
& Economic Opportunity
OFFICE OF ECONOMIC EQUITY & EMPOWERMENT

**This workshop is relevant to all
small business owners.**
Presentation will be in English
but materials will be made
available in Spanish if requested.



saukvalleyareachamber.com



Santa's Workshop

FRIDAY, DECEMBER 4

**FOLLOWING THE LIGHTED PARADE
UNTIL 8:00 P.M.**

DOWNTOWN STERLING

Sign up to provide a FREE game
or activity by November 4 at:
<https://bit.ly/3U3hOim>

*Sights &
Sounds* 



**QUESTIONS? CALL SVACC AT
815-625-2400**