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WINTER 2020

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WINTER 2020

MAGAZINE

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SDS brightens community with display

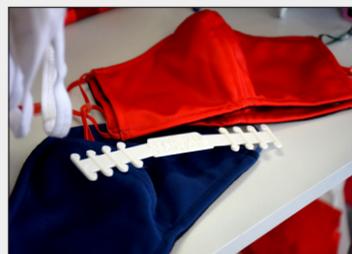
By CATHY GRIFFITH

Effingham Magazine
on the web

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On the cover: Members of the vocal group On High perform "O Christmas Tree" as part of the 2017 Hometown Christmas, sponsored by the Downtown Effingham Business Group and Effingham County Chamber of Commerce. Effingham Daily News photo.



FROM THE EDITOR

With Thanksgiving, Christmas and New Year's Day around the corner – along with Hanukkah and Kwanzaa – it's more important than ever in this year of upheaval to remain grateful for the blessings we enjoy. Family. Friends. Members of this community who never fail to go above and beyond for a neighbor.

The novel coronavirus has affected the Thanksgiving community meal that Effingham County FISH has hosted since 2005. Last year, more than 250 meals were enjoyed at the St. Anthony Church Parish Center and another 420 were delivered to people's homes.

Like many things in 2020, this year's meal will be different. But as we knew it would, FISH is finding a way to continue the tradition. Volunteers will still deliver the meals to anyone who asks, taking the extra precautions demanded by the pandemic.

"It's gonna be hard," Susan Elke, the chief organizer of the meal, told writer Andrew Adams for this edition of Effingham Magazine. "The whole lockdown situation has been hard on everybody."

Yes. But Elke and all of those dedicated volunteers make us feel more certain that our community can over-

come anything 2020 throws at us.

Find that and other stories of giving and good neighbors throughout this 2020 holiday edition of Effingham Magazine.

Here's hoping for a bountiful 2021.

Jeff Long
Editor



Jeff Long is the editor of the Effingham Daily News. A 1987 graduate of the University of Wisconsin, he has worked for newspapers in England, Pennsylvania and Virginia. For 13 years, he was a reporter and later an editor at the Chicago Tribune. He lives in Altamont with his wife, Karen.



Cathy Griffith is news editor of the Effingham Daily News. She is a 1998 graduate of Eastern Illinois University with a Bachelor of Arts in Journalism. She has worked at the Daily News for 18 years in news and magazine publications. She is a lifelong resident of Effingham, where she resides with her husband, Tim, and daughter, Leah.



Charles Mills is reporter and videographer for the Effingham Daily News. A 1983 graduate of Southern Illinois University, Carbondale, he is the son of a south-central Illinois newspaper publisher, worked as master control director for a St. Louis television station, assistant video editor at a video editing facility on Music Row specializing in music-videos, served as senior video editor for a Nashville television station and learned the art of computerized video editing while living in Hollywood, California in the middle 80s. Mills is a native of Vandalia, where he lives with his wife, Zoryana.



Andrew Adams is a reporter for the Effingham Daily News, covering Effingham City Hall, Effingham Community Schools Unit 40. He earned a bachelor's degree in science journalism from the Illinois Institute of Technology in 2020. He wrote for publications in Chicago and Champaign covering local politics and community organizations before finding his way down to Effingham.

PUBLISHER

Amy Winter
amy.winter@effinghamdailynews.com

EDITOR

Jeff Long
jeff.long@effinghamdailynews.com

CONTRIBUTING EDITOR

Cathy Griffith
cathy.griffith@effinghamdailynews.com

ART DIRECTOR

Amanda Hartke

CONTRIBUTORS

Charles Mills
Andrew Adams

ADVERTISING SALES CONSULTANTS

advertising@effinghamdailynews.com
DeeAnn Bauguss
Jody Hardiek
Julie Harkins

DISTRIBUTION

Todd Buenker
todd.buenker@effinghamdailynews.com

CONTACT US

(217) 347-7151

E-MAIL

news@effinghamdailynews.com

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SDS brightens community with display

CATHY GRIFFITH
EFFINGHAM MAGAZINE

Ask Steven Schallert about the holiday light display he and employees at SDS Technology have been working on for the past several months and his face lights up.

A visit in late October to the Effingham business revealed a room that has served as the nerve center of an elaborate 80-foot-long display that sequences lights to music and features a 24-foot-tall simulated Christmas tree. The 8,000 lights and 4,000 feet of wiring have taken over nearly every inch of the conference room that is not in use because of COVID-19.

Schallert works at a computer that projects onto a large screen the sequences he and staff have been diligently developing to entertain the community for the holidays. As he plays one of the sequences, he awakens the

"You're always tinkering. You're always tweaking."

- Steven Schallert

strands of lights that begin to pulsate and change color in rhythm to "Mary, Did You Know?" by Pentatonix. Just days away from setting up the display they have been working on since July, Schallert admits he can't help but make some last-minute adjustments.

"You're always tinkering. You're always tweaking," he said.

Schallert came up with the idea of a community light display set to music after attending a Disney Institute training for customer service in June 2019. The CEO decided one of the things his company needed was a good team-building exercise.

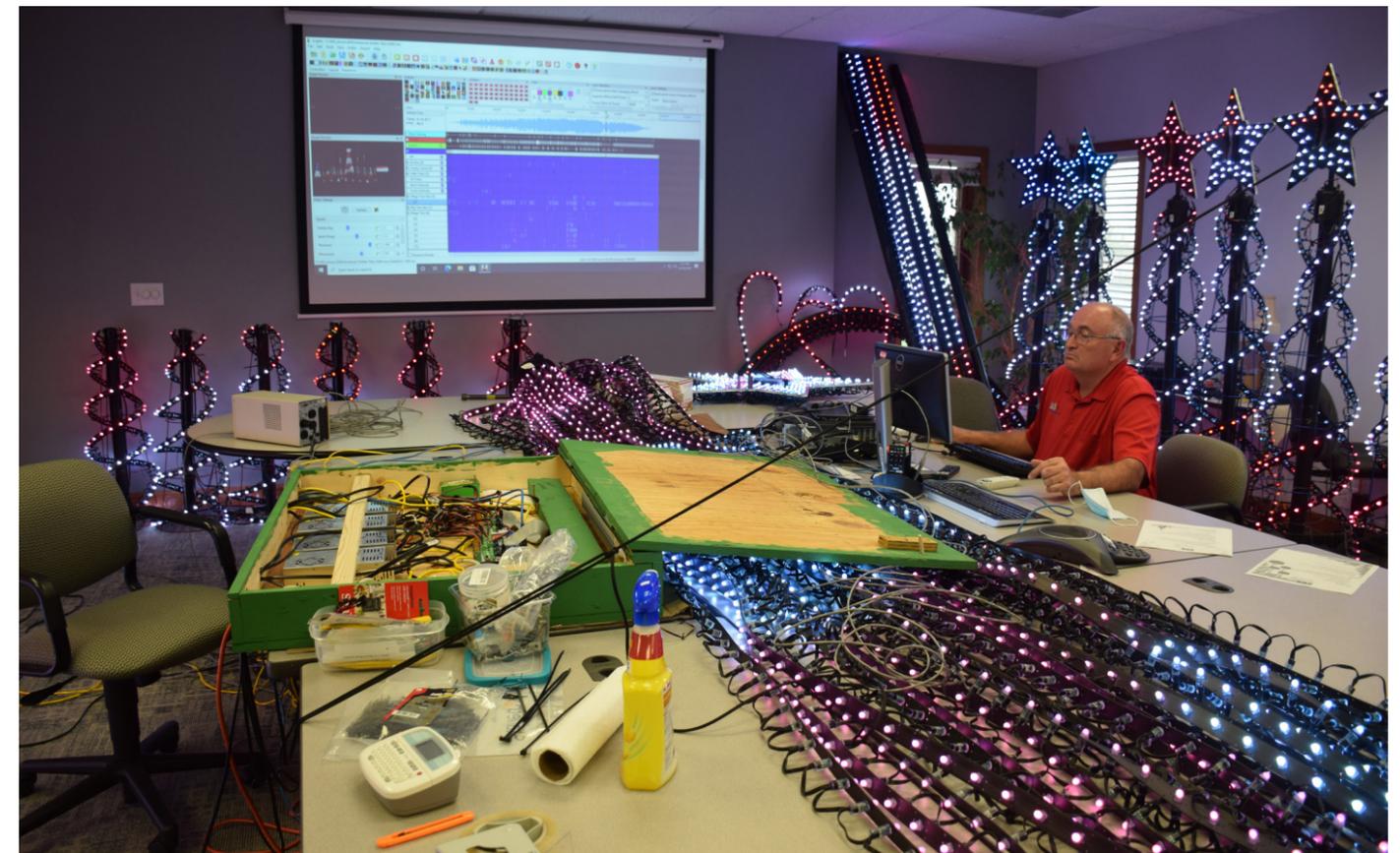
"So, we got together as a group and brainstormed on what would be good and we wanted to do something for the community. We talked about things like picking up trash along the roads and the other things people do for community effort. One member of the group thought the idea of doing Christmas lights would be good. One thing led to another. We liked it," he said.

They thought, "How hard can it be for a tech company?"

It was a lot of effort, the group discovered, as they started working on the project in August that year.

"It was a lot of people working together as a team, a lot of volunteer hours," he said.

Schallert said the team members brought skills and talents to the project. "One was pretty good with electronics and electrical and another has a



Cathy Griffith photos

Above: Steve Schallert operates a program he and other employees at SDS used to design sequences for the light show. The lights in the room are part of the show and illuminate in rhythm to the music.
Left: The smaller tree for the display is shown.



Steve Schallert looks at a sequence on the computer for one of the light shows that is being projected onto a larger screen at SDS Technology.

strong background in music," he said. The display quietly went live on Dec. 10.

"We didn't advertise at all last year. We didn't promote it," he said.

Schallert knew they created something special the first night the lights went live.

"I was in here working and started tinkering with it. Our show computer sits on the front counter that actually drives the whole thing. I took the show down for a little bit to tinker on it and some cars honked at me. We didn't even know we had cars in the parking lot. After that, we had cars every night," he said.

Even though the display wasn't up very long, Schallert said it received a lot of good feedback from the community.

They decided to take what they learned and do a bigger light show in 2020, doubling the size of the display. Another change was made in the process.

"This year we prebuilt everything and

See a video of the making of the display at effinghamdailynews.com

have it ready to go, so that deployment goes faster," said the company's sales and marketing manager, Sherry Waldo.

They also decided to take some advice from parents whose children enjoyed the show.

"Some of the feedback we're taking seriously – not to have too many sequences because their kids won't leave," said Waldo. "If we played them all, you would have a 45-minute show."

The songs are hand-picked by the group and span different genres of holiday music.

"We do some for the kids, some that are upbeat, have some that are traditional Christmas music. So, we've kind of got a wide variety," said Waldo.

"To shorten the shows this year, they

will feature different genres of music each night, giving people the opportunity to pick and choose which night they want to come. The show schedule will be posted on SDS' Facebook page," Waldo said.

Schallert, Waldo and other members of the staff create the sequences for the shows.

"When you do a sequence, you match to the effects in the music. Basically, what we're trying to do is match the emotion of the music to the lights. We're using lights to express emotion," explained Schallert. "We think we're pretty decent at that on quite a few of our songs."

Motorists tune into FM 90.5 to listen to the music while they watch the lights.

Creating the sequences is time consuming. Each 4-minute song is estimated to take up to 60 hours to create.

"Someone actually goes in and actually creates the layout for the song," said Waldo, adding that is done through xLights software.

The group has 10 song sequences

this year. Last year they had four.

The songs are purchased through Amazon, but aren't expensive, according to Schallert. Each is only a couple of dollars because the company doesn't profit from the show since it is free.

To learn how to put together such a show, Schallert said he did a lot of Googling and watched a lot of YouTube.

"There's a lot of passion about doing this," he said.

Waldo said a lot of the online community will share sequences and "there's people out there that just have channels where you can just ask questions."

For Schallert, the most challenging part of taking on such a project was underestimating the amount of time it takes to do it. He estimated it takes about 30 hours to physically put up the mega tree, which is 24 feet tall and weighs 600 pounds. That includes punching each light bulb into a strip by hand. There's also no power plugs, requiring the strands to be soldered together.

Schallert said another challenge was supplying power to the low-voltage lights.

"Basically, you have to connect power in constantly throughout the place," he said.

Also challenging was understanding the power technology.

"You don't plug them in and nail them to the side of the house type of thing," he added.

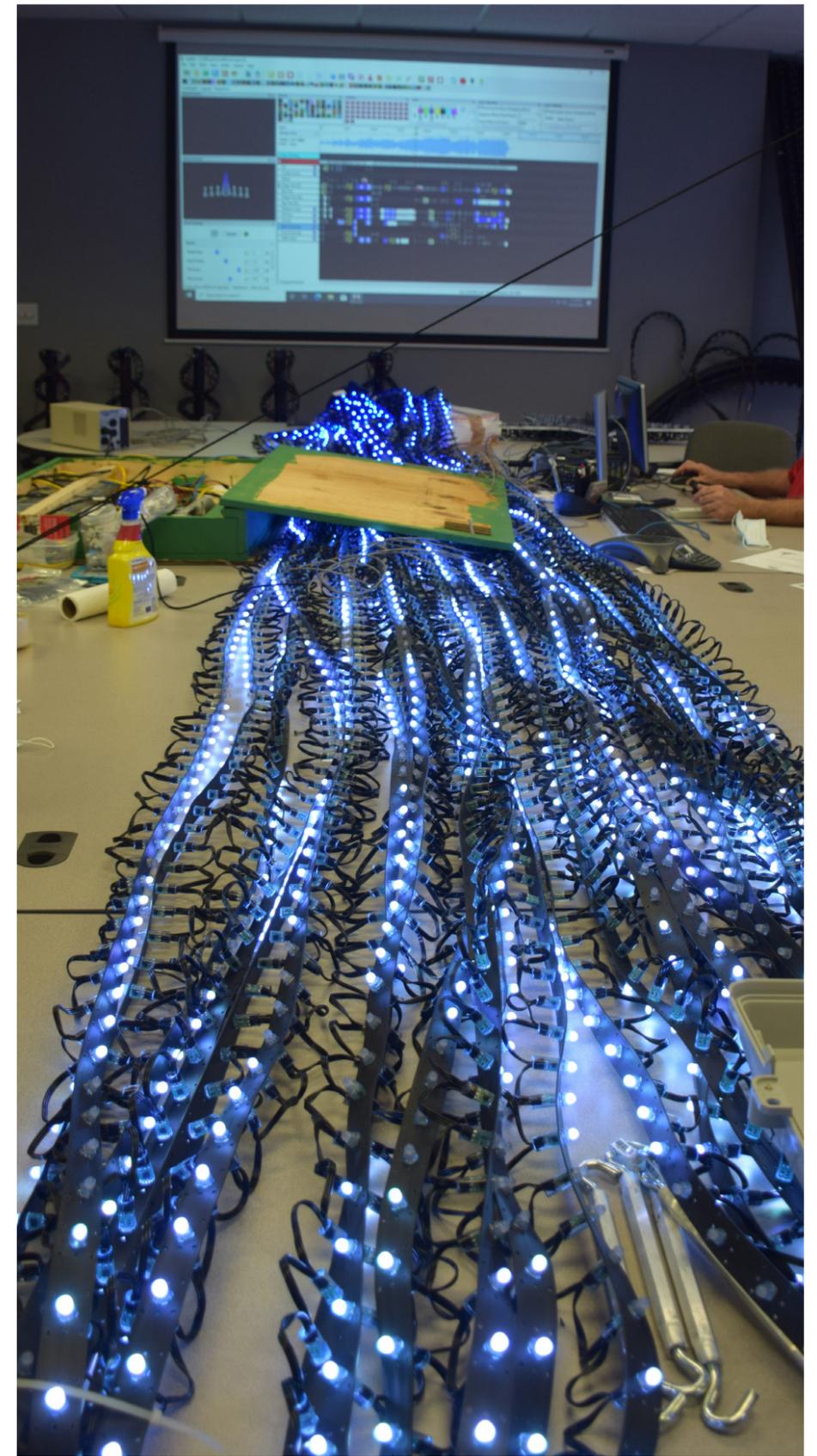
Waldo said the group has done a lot of research on the electrical aspects of the display and how everything communicates with each other.

"It's definitely been something that having some technical expertise in house has been a big help. That's one of the things when we decided to do this, we wanted to showcase our technical ability and skills, and so it's been a lot of fun doing it, but at the same time I think it shows what we can do," she said.

Waldo said the group also has fun creating the sequences and sharing them with each other.

"Every Tuesday morning we have a meeting, and we'll fire it up and see the progress," she said, noting they will help each other with the sequences.

The fun shines through as one



The strands of the mega tree light up as Steve Schallert plays one of the song sequences for the display at SDS Technology, located along South Banker Street.



Steve Schallert and Sherry Waldo set up the mega tree for the display this year at SDS. Helping them is SDS Office Manager Vanessa McKee's husband, John, and son Andrew.

sequence has a comical element to it. This year spectators can see the mega tree get in a conversation with the smaller tree as they both turn into faces.

"Talking trees," Schallert said with a laugh.

The cost of the display went well beyond the company's budget the first year as the group's enthusiasm grew. So, this year Schallert knew more would be needed to fund the project.

"We had big plans for this year. I personally stepped up and donated money. I'm glad I did. We doubled the size of the display this year. We got some new technology, new effects. We're a little better prepared," he said.

Waldo noted Schallert has also put in a lot of physical work, pounding posts and climbing ladders.

"Nobody can say that they're as passionate about the program as Steve," she said.

Schallert has enjoyed the camaraderie with staff.

"There's not a member of this staff that hasn't been involved, I would argue, that doesn't enjoy doing it," he said.

Schallert and Waldo admit the week leading up to deployment is an anxious time for them.

"Everything works in here but there's always that chance that you take it out, set it up, and a wire breaks or gets loose and then you're troubleshooting thousands of connections trying to find the right one. That's kind of scary," said Waldo.

But when the display is set up, tested and ready to go, the excitement can be compared to Christmas morning.

"It's fun to see the sequences you're working on come to life," said Waldo.

The two say what they enjoy most about doing the shows is the excitement from the people who come to see them. It's contagious.

"We've had people asking us when it will be available. The ones that didn't even get to see it last year and didn't even know about it until after the fact said they want to see it," said Schallert.

They have heard people are even planning family nights around the shows.

"I have friends from Breese that are planning a night to come over and look at it," said Waldo.

Schallert's only concern is traffic.

"That's one of the main reasons we're thinking about staggering the nights and shortening the length of shows," said Waldo.

Schallert and Waldo are already looking ahead to next year.

"We make a list of things we would do slightly different. Next year we will definitely look at how we stage it," said Schallert.

They have also started their wish list for songs that may include another holiday.

"I think one of the things when we're said and done is next year we may try to fire it up by Halloween. There are people that are really into Halloween," said Schallert.

You can view the current display until Jan. 6.

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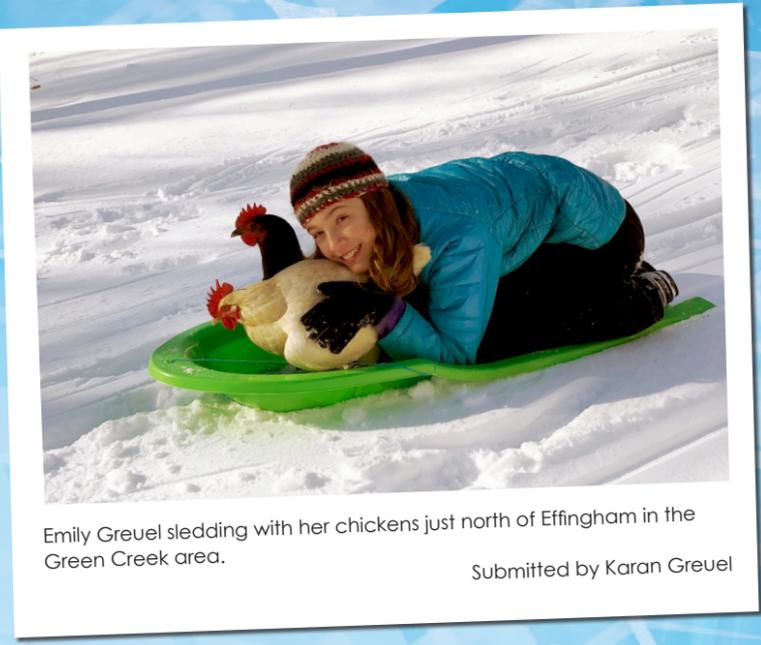
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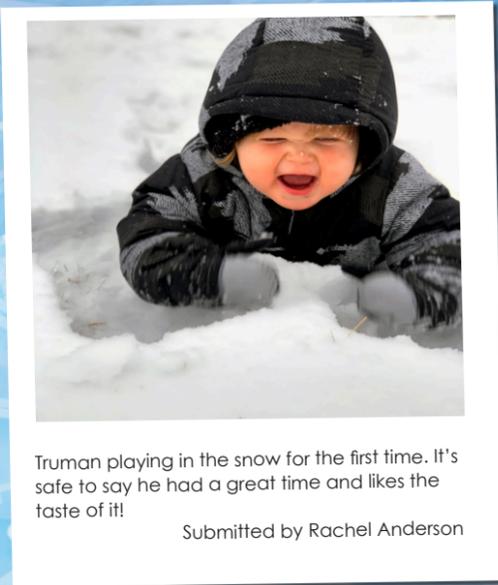
Emma and Jace Smith are in the igloos they made.
Submitted by Sarah Wendt



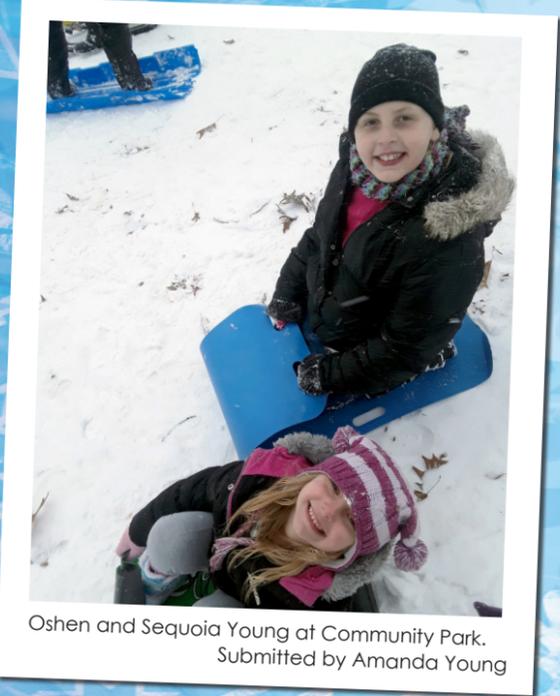
Drake Brown on Jansen Hill on North Third Street in Effingham.
Submitted by Marty Jansen



Emily Greuel sledding with her chickens just north of Effingham in the Green Creek area.
Submitted by Karan Greuel



Truman playing in the snow for the first time. It's safe to say he had a great time and likes the taste of it!
Submitted by Rachel Anderson



Oshen and Sequoia Young at Community Park.
Submitted by Amanda Young



Brady and Ian McDaniel had a blast sledding at Community Park in Effingham.
Submitted by Heather McDaniel



Deer in Rollin Hills subdivision while plowing snow.
Submitted by Jeremy Giles



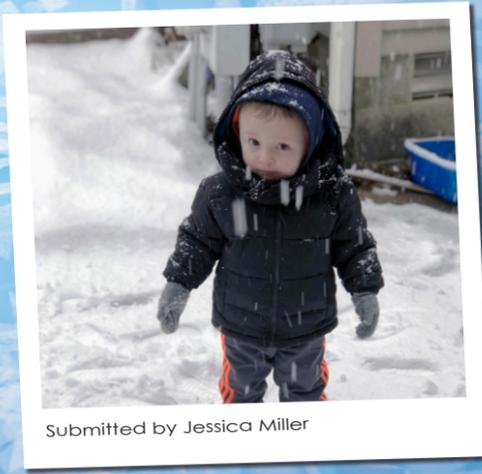
Addison and Harper Mast in front of Nana and Papa's house.
Submitted by Teri Hoelscher



Jackie Tabbert took this photo of her niece and nephews in Stoneridge Subdivision in Effingham. From left, Miley Wilson 7, Brady Wilson 10, Cooper Wilson 4.



Nick Clark on Jansen Hill on North Third Street in Effingham.
Submitted by Marty Jansen



Submitted by Jessica Miller

Snow Day Snapshots 2019

Readers submitted photos showing how they spent their snow day in December 2019. For more photos, visit our online galleries at photos.effinghamdailynews.com.



Susan Elke, the president of Effingham County FISH.

Andrew Adams photo

Effingham County FISH reworks its holiday programs to stay safe during the pandemic

ANDREW ADAMS
EFFINGHAM MAGAZINE

Every Thanksgiving since 2005, people have gathered for a free meal made by volunteers with Effingham County FISH. Last year, more than 250 meals were enjoyed at the St. Anthony Church Parish Center and another 420 were delivered to people's homes.

Like many things in 2020, this year's Thanksgiving meal will be different.

"It's gonna be hard," said Susan Elke, the chief organizer of the meal and president of Effingham County FISH. "The whole lockdown situation has

been hard on everybody."

Elke has spent the past several weeks prepping and planning FISH's Thanksgiving Day Meal. She says there isn't a safe way to pack as many people as she expects into one place.

That won't stop her from serving the people of Effingham. She knows that people depend on the holiday meals that FISH provides. She's going to have the meal, but without the gathering.

"There will be no congregated meal," she said.

While she understands that it's necessary, Elke isn't thrilled about the break from tradition.

"You don't have the camaraderie of

sitting down together," she said.

Facing this dilemma, FISH has a number of hurdles to overcome. Where to prep the meals? How can volunteers help package the meals safely? How to deliver hundreds of meals in a day?

Not everyone would be up to the task of tackling these hurdles, but Elke is. She has decades of experience volunteering with FISH that are driving her ability to handle the challenges of 2020.

FISH, a non-denominational Christian organization, regularly partners with churches for their larger events. Cornerstone Christian Church has agreed to let FISH use its facilities to prepare

"If it wasn't for the work of these organizations, a lot of families wouldn't be able to have Christmas."

- Molly Bushue

the meals.

Luckily, the space is one of the places in town big enough to hold the volunteers that Elke expects.

"On a normal Thanksgiving, I would have 100 to 150 volunteers," Elke said.

She expects that to be lower this year, around 100.

"All the people volunteering will have to wear gloves and masks," she noted.

Elke is also breaking up the meal prep into three volunteer shifts, overseen by a core group of volunteers.

The first part of the day will be dedicated to packaging and delivering meals to the outlying communities in Effingham County – places like Altamont, Dieterich and Shumway. The second part will be for packaging and delivering to people in the city of Effingham. The last part of the day will be for curbside pickup. This way, she can reduce volunteers' possible exposure to COVID-19.

To further reduce exposure, Elke is cutting out one of her longtime volunteer requirements: Fellowship. Normally, she asks volunteers to spend 10 or 15 minutes with the people they deliver meals to.

"They should have a little time to spend with people," Elke said. Because she's worried about COVID-19, she won't be telling people to do that this year.

"It's not gonna be as fun this year," Elke said, referring to the cutbacks she's had to make. Still, she's determined to make sure that Thanksgiving is a day where everyone can have a good meal.

"To me, it's a special day," Elke said.

Russ Howard is on the Board of Directors for FISH and plans on driving some of the Thanksgiving meals to their destination.



File photo
Addison Holste, Effingham, adds some whipped cream to a slice of pumpkin pie for a home-delivered Thanksgiving Day meal in 2015.

"I'm gonna miss the camaraderie," Howard said.

"Everybody's kinda walking on eggshells," he said, referring to how careful event planners have to be due to the pandemic. "There's a fine, fine line, especially with older people."

FISH will also hold a Christmas Day Meal, offering free food to Effingham County residents for the holiday. Elke says this meal will function similarly to this year's Thanksgiving meal – volunteers working in shifts with no congregate meal.

Meals aren't the only thing that FISH has had to rework this holiday season.

FISH hosts a "Christmas Store" in collaboration with Effingham Catholic Charities. The store is a way to support families during the holiday season, according to Molly Bushue, a volunteer for FISH and Catholic Charities who acts as the primary organizer for the Christmas Store.

"Especially in today's world, there are a lot of families that need a little extra help," Bushue said.

The Christmas Store is an application-based program in which people who meet certain financial criteria are invited to the Christmas store on Dec. 11 or 12. There they can take home coats, hats, gloves, shoe vouchers, toys, stocking stuffers, socks, underwear, pajamas, a voucher for a Catholic Charities food box, a bag of consumer product goods, and board game or puzzle, all free of cost because of community and business donations.

"We park a semi and the community literally fills the semi," Bushue said.

FISH stores some of these donations throughout the year in a loft at its service center, which is currently filled. At points, there are only inches of room between the roof and the stacks of donated goods.

"If it wasn't for the work of these organizations, a lot of families wouldn't be able to have Christmas," Bushue said.

In the age of COVID-19, Bushue has had to modify the program to minimize exposure to the virus. This year, patrons will fill out a form based on their family's interests and be given a package assembled by volunteers. In a typical year, people "shop" and browse items that they select themselves.

"Honestly, it is so much work ahead

of time," Bushue said.

The work is worth it for her. The reason she keeps doing it is "to see the smiles and the appreciation from the families that need those items."

While the pandemic has changed so many things, Howard said the driving force of the organization remains intact: "People are so generous."

"We're reasonably optimistic. I think we're all on target," Howard said.

Applications to shop at the Christmas

Store are available until Nov. 25. To sign up to receive a meal for the Thanksgiving Day Dinner, call Effingham Senior Services at 217-347-5569.



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Top: Donations for the Christmas Store cover the entire floor and are stacked almost up to the ceiling in the loft of FISH headquarters.

Andrew Adams photo

Above: Anna Mae Gibson puts toppings on slices of pumpkin pie during the 2018 FISH Thanksgiving dinner.

Right: At left, Nancy Koester and Ruth Gier, followed by Norma Larson and Ursula Polzin, all of Effingham, prepare to serve slices of pie at the FISH Organization Thanksgiving Dinner.

File photos





Andrew Adams photo

Brittany Jill is pictured at Joe Sippers in Effingham. In addition to enjoying the coffee, Jill uses the cafe to work when she needs a change of scenery from work-

Woman uses social media to give huge tips to servers around Effingham

ANDREW ADAMS
EFFINGHAM MAGAZINE

The comments on Brittany Jill's TikTok videos are filled with emotion. "Girl you make me cry." "This makes me so happy." "Why am I crying?" "Thanks for sharing this with the world, such an inspiration for others." "That made her day." They are responses to one of Jill's "Venmo Challenges," a series she produces for her social media platforms, where she asks her followers to give her 25 or 50 cents through Venmo, a money transfer service. Then, with the pooled donations of thousands of her followers, Jill goes to a restaurant and tips her server hundreds of dollars. "I do it because it makes me feel good," Jill said.

In an age of polarized and negative media, Jill wants to create positive content. "People want to see that happening," she said. So far, Jill has raised and given over \$10,500 to servers at restaurants around Effingham, including Niemerg's Steakhouse, Gopher's Grill, Gabby Goat, Puerto Vallarta, Fujiyama, Chili's, Joe Sippers. She's also visited restaurants in Wisconsin, Pennsylvania and Tennessee. Her videos have reached thousands of people. A video of her tipping a server at Gabby Goat has more than 539,000 views. In an effort to ensure that she is doing the most good possible, Jill has called restaurants ahead of time to ask if anyone has been struggling recently. She

then goes to the restaurant when that person is working and sits where she knows she'll get them as a server. At Gabby Goat in Effingham, Jill gave a \$1,000 tip to her server, Kae Lynn Hoyt, in early August. Hoyt is a single mom and second-year student in Parkland College's occupational therapy program. She was preparing to cut back hours to accommodate a heavier school schedule and was stressed about income when Jill came to the Gabby Goat, ready for a Venmo Challenge. "It came at the perfect time for me," Hoyt said. "I was trying to hustle as much as I could." "I was in shock," Hoyt said, adding it took until she arrived home for her to realize that it really happened. "I'm extremely grateful for what she did."

Even when Jill can't do research ahead of time, she finds that it's easy to be surprised. "Everybody is struggling right now," she said. At one out-of-town restaurant, she wasn't sure if a big tip would be a good idea. The servers looked like they were all doing well. After tipping \$300, her server said, "You don't realize how much this helps us." "Even when you think somebody doesn't need it, they might surprise you," Jill said. Tipping servers isn't all Jill has done with her crowdfunding skills. She took a few weeks in August to gather donations to help fight child trafficking. "I really fell down a rabbit hole," Jill said, explaining how she couldn't stop reading things about trafficking. "It really just made me sick," she said. "I was sobbing." Turning to her social media fans, she asked them to give money to support nonprofits Fight to End Exploitation, Operation Underground Railroad, and Rapha International. She raised \$6,200. Jill didn't just stumble into viral internet success by having a good cause and a camera. Viral internet success is her job.

Jill works full time in social media marketing for GSM Outdoors, a company that sells hunting accessories and outdoor gear under almost 30 different brands, including Stealth Came, Walker's, and Muddy. Jill manages these brands' social media accounts. She also uses her personal social media pages for business. She has relationships with several companies, like the gun company Browning. She makes posts featuring products the company gives her. "People consider me an influencer," she said, though she added she doesn't like that description. Still, it's a fitting one. Her rise to internet notoriety has even extended to her pet. "My dog gets free stuff now," she said. To be fair, the dog has its own Instagram following at @kiptheduckdog. The trend for brands to partner with social media accounts who have high followers and good "engagement" has become more and more popular over the past few years. In December 2019, Business Insider used data from consulting firm Media-kix to project that influencer marketings

will be a \$15 billion industry by 2022, up from under \$1 billion in 2015. Jill knew this trend could help her. When her Instagram account reached 10,000 followers about four years ago, she made a choice. "That's when I started treating it like a business," she said. At the time, Jill hadn't broken into the social media management industry, so she needed to demonstrate that she could grow an audience and build engagement with followers. She did that on her own pages. Since she is an avid hunter, Jill decided to trim her pages content to focus on that niche. After several afternoons doing nothing but fishing and posting on social media, she was worried what her in-laws thought of her. "They probably thought I was the biggest piece of work," Jill said. Still, it worked out in her favor. She has 31,000 followers on Twitter, 59,000 followers on Instagram, and 76,000 followers on TikTok and manages 29 brands' social media accounts. Jill got the inspiration for her tipping after seeing another content creator,

Lexy Burke (@lexilatly on TikTok), do a Venmo Challenge. "I watched her do it," Jill said. She started by asking her followers on Twitter to give her money for the project. "My Twitter followers are very interactive," she said. Some might view Jill's Venmo Challenges as a way to further grow her follower base or to get likes, but Jill doesn't see it that way. She sees them as a way to bring the thousands of donors with her to give the money away. "I'm just the lucky one who gets to be there with them," she said. "The reason why I'm filming is because I'm gathering money from other people." Jill doesn't plan to stop her Venmo Challenges. She spent late October trying to track down a local Effingham woman's work schedule, all while trying to keep it a secret. You can find Jill on Instagram, Twitter, and TikTok at @britt_jill_ and if you want to contribute money to her ongoing challenges, go to venmo.com/brittany-jill

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Sara Ruholl in the workshop at the back of her store. Here, she personalizes items for her customers and - in a pinch - puts together masks. Andrew Adams photos

Beanstalk Boutique finds a way during pandemic

ANDREW ADAMS
EFFINGHAM MAGAZINE

When the rest of the world was shutting down, Sara Ruholl was rolling up her sleeves.

Ruholl owns and operates Beanstalk Boutique, a personalization shop in downtown Effingham. There, she sells bags, shirts, water bottles and other personal items that she customizes for her customers with things like names and logos.

She was having modest sales that supported her as she entered her fourth year of business this spring when she was confronted with the COVID-19 pandemic. As everything was shutting down in March, she was forced to stay home.

"The low part was having my doors locked," Ruholl said.

Then, a friend asked her to make 25 cloth masks. After all, she had a studio in the back of her store with several sewing machines and she knew how to put them to work.

After she posted about it on her store's Facebook page, she got comments asking for more masks.

"I couldn't even comment back fast enough," she said.

As the pandemic continued, Ruholl kept sewing masks.

Eventually, Ruholl teamed up with local high school students who wanted to volunteer their time to help the community. They built an assembly line of mask creation. Cut the fabric, line it up, set it down, pass. Ruholl sews it together and keeps the line moving.

"It got to the point where all I was doing was sewing," Ruholl said. "I

would get up at 5 o'clock in the morning and sew."

Ruholl kept a calendar throughout the pandemic, marking how many masks she and her team assembled each day.

May 8: 71 masks.

May 14: 142 masks.

April 27: 319 masks.

At one point, Ruholl was contracted to make 900 masks for local chain restaurants.

"I was delirious from not sleeping," she said.

"The face masks got me through it," Ruholl said.

"Operating a business in a pandemic is insane," she said.

As Ruholl settled into the routine of making masks, she began to realize that her business needed a plan.

Ruholl reached out to customers and community members through Facebook.

"I would do a lot of live videos doing the face masks," she said. "I feel like the live videos really helped."

There, people recommended that she apply for a federal Paycheck Protection Program loan, but because of how her business was incorporated, she was ineligible.

She was eligible for a small grant from the Effingham County Chamber of Commerce. Receiving it in June helped stabilize her business.

"It paid my rent," Ruholl said.

The masks and the grant also helped the business grow. In early August, Ruholl hired two staff members to help run the business.

As Beanstalk Boutique reopened after the COVID-19 lockdown, Ruholl realized she was selling a lot of masks.

"Some days I would sell close to 300," she said.

Now, Ruholl says she sells about 50 masks per day. She said the storefront is doing well.

"Sales are where they were back then," Ruholl said, comparing sales to pre-pandemic numbers.

The business has changed focus.

"A lot of my sales are still face masks," said Ruholl.

Ruholl has started buying wholesale masks, mostly from Viv&Lou, a supplier of customizable personal items with which Ruholl does a lot of business.

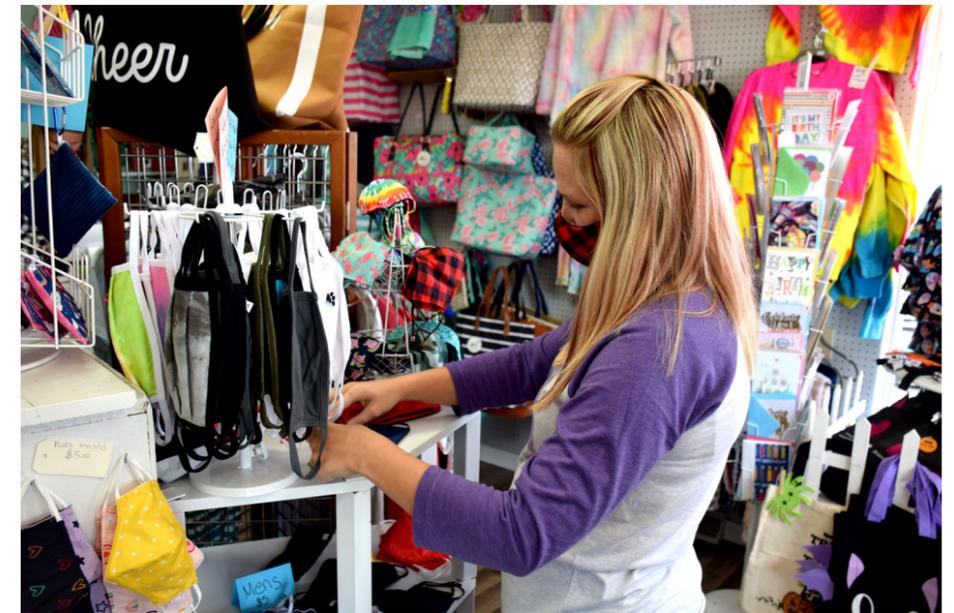
She sells these masks alongside some hand-sewn masks and "ear savers" that hold the bands of masks so they don't pull on the wearer's ears. The plastic accessory is 3-D printed by a friend of Ruholl's in town.

Why did a customization boutique get into making masks in the first place?

"For me, it was seeing my business survive. You couldn't get face masks anywhere," Ruholl said.

She added that it was a way to use her business to produce a social outcome, not just a financial one. She wanted to "give back" to the community.

"I feel like I'm a whole different person," Ruholl said, reflecting on the rapid growth of her business when so many have shrunk. "You have to adapt to the times and that's what I did."



Top: Ruholl finds the perfect arrangement for her store's arrangement of masks. Some are handmade and some are bought through wholesale sellers. Above: Beanstalk Boutique branded "ear savers" 3D printed by a friend of Ruholl's are shown.

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Charles Mills photos
Mary Beth Hoene creates several craft items for
Christmas.

Christmas crafts for your home

CHARLES MILLS
EFFINGHAM MAGAZINE

Mary Beth Hoene has crafted for most of her life. "I started crafting when I was in Girl Scouts," Hoene said.

Hoene has ideas for a few crafts you can make around the house for Christmas. Hoene is second vice president of the Effingham County Home and Community Education (HCE) organization.

HCE brought back its "Christmas in October" crafting event in October 2019 after a 15-year absence. She was looking forward to this year's "Christmas in October," but it was canceled due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

"If everything goes OK, we'll be having 'Christmas in October' next year," Hoene said.

Hoene enjoys crafting and shared her expertise at making Christmas crafts to be displayed around the home or use for gifting. She also enjoys making embroidery, baby quilts, large quilts and crocheting.

"I'm the one who has to be kept busy. I always have to have my fingers doing something, even if I'm sitting watching TV," Hoene said.

"I'm really partial to snowmen. My basement is decorated with snowmen," Hoene said.

SNOWMAN FROM CANISTER

Needed to make this craft: Old Crystal Light or Lemonade canister with a lid, ribbon and either a child's glove or sock to make a small snowman.

Measure and cut a ribbon or material long enough to make a bow around the bottom of the canister.

Use a child's glove or sock to create a cap.

Add the cap over the canister lid. Paint a face in the middle of the canister.

The canister can also be filled for



gifting.

For a larger version, substitute the smaller Crystal Light or Lemonade canister with a Pringles can.

CHRISTMAS TREE MADE OF CUPCAKE LINERS

Needed to make this craft: Hot glue gun, Christmas cupcake liners in three different sizes, a crafting stick and some string.

Fold each cupcake liner in half. Apply some glue to the inside and lay flat.

Use a glue gun to glue the cupcake liners to a crafting stick, keeping them center and in graduating order by size.

Cut out a foam star and glue to the top.

Glue a string on the top back of the crafting stick to use as an ornament.

SNOWMAN FROM WHITE PAPER SACK

Needed to make this craft: Black construction paper, patterned crafting paper, plain white sack, black marker and orange marker/orange construction paper.

Use black construction paper to cut out a hat and glue to the top of the sack.

Cut out eyes from black construction paper and glue to the sack or use black markers to draw the eyes and mouth.

Create a carrot nose with orange marker or orange construction paper. Cut and glue to the sack.

Then accent the original hat with

scrapbooking craft paper, cutting a piece to match the outline of the hat. Then glue the piece on top of the original hat.

Trim the hat by gluing a piece of Christmas greenery.



Above: A snowman created by Mary Ann Hoene using a white paint roller adding beads, wire for a mouth and buttons with a glue gun, small twigs for arms, ribbon for a scarf and topped with a cap made of a children's glove or sock. Right: A simple Christmas craft created with a small white sack.



A Christmas tree made of different sized roll cores. Starting with a toilet paper cardboard inner core on top and graduating in size to a paper towel cardboard core. Multiple paper towel cores were cut to different sizes to create a Christmas Tree effect with the addition of beads and small Christmas trim. For the tree base, cut out a square piece from a leftover roll core and put felt over it before gluing to the bottom.

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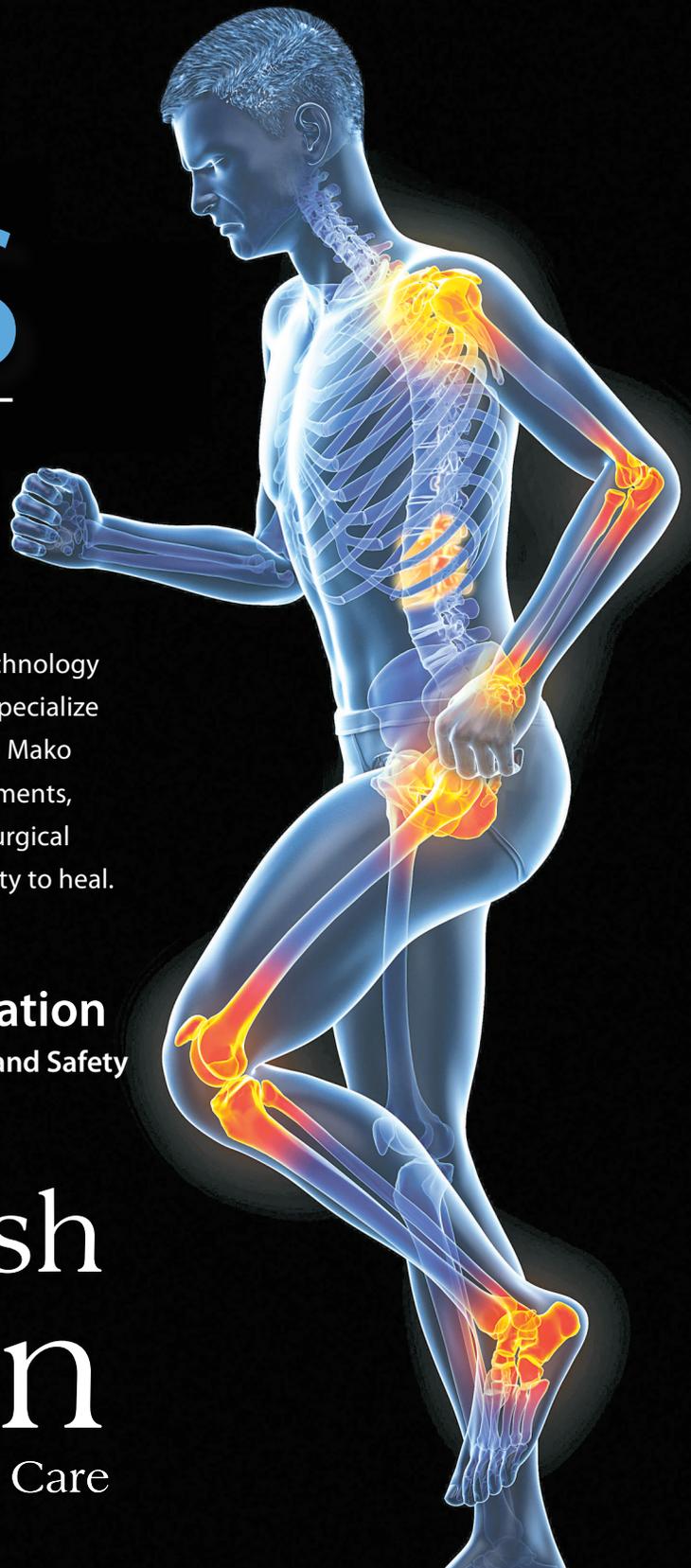
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