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FEATURE STORY



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Stretching toward 'typical'

By Dawn Schabbing

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On the cover: Niemerg's Steakhouse pie maker, Cindy Morrison, holds two of several pies she and her co-workers make fresh daily for the restaurant. Charles Mills photo

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Cindy Austin takes pies out of the oven in the kitchen at Niemerg's Steakhouse.

Crystal Reed photos

Niemerg's Steakhouse is an Effingham tradition

Pies baked round-the-clock during the holidays

CRYSTAL REED
EFFINGHAM MAGAZINE

Niemerg's Steakhouse in Effingham employs eight people to make its 17 varieties of pie. They're always busy. But during the holidays, they're really busy – baking round-the-clock in three shifts. "Our ovens never turn off during the holiday season," said Cathy Walk, who has been baking pies at Niemerg's for 36 years.

The popular restaurant averages 1,000 pies per week during the rest of the year, according to co-owner Jason

Sandschafer. During the holidays, that number soars to 2,500 per week.

Niemerg's doesn't have any special pies for the holidays. The best sellers around the holidays are coconut cream, and pumpkin is big through Thanksgiving and Christmas.

Walk said she and the other pie makers bake 150 pies per day during the holidays. And yet, she still makes pies at home. She's even hosted baking classes for her daughters-in-law and their moms.

Her favorite pie flavor is cherry. "I like the tart and the sweet," she said.

Cis Ozenkoski of Teutopolis is a fan.

"I buy them fairly often and have taken them all the way to Springfield and St. Louis," she said. Friends and relatives always love seeing her with a pie from Niemerg's.

Ozenkoski doesn't reserve her pie purchases to just the holidays; she buys them throughout the year. Her favorite is the strawberry pie. Her husband prefers pecan and her daughter likes the coconut cream.

Jean Czernski of Effingham gets a whole pie a couple of times per year, but treats herself to a slice every few weeks. When she does get a whole



Randy Niemerg cuts filets in the kitchen at Niemerg's Steakhouse.

pie, she shares it with family. At Thanksgiving, she gets a pumpkin pie.

"It's a nice way to spend time with family because you don't have to make something from scratch," Czernski said. Her favorite pie is french silk.

An Effingham tradition

For locals and guests from out of town, Niemerg's Steakhouse is a destination eating establishment.

The restaurant has been around for 41 years, started by Dennis Sandschafer and Gene Niemerg on Sept. 1, 1978.

It's still in its original location on Fayette Avenue in Effingham, but has undergone eight major additions over the years. According to owners Jason and Lucas Sandschafer, the restaurant has grown as much as it can on its current lot.

Besides the restaurant, Niemerg's also has a catering business that allows the business to take its food beyond the city limits.

The brothers attribute the reason for the restaurant's longevity to the local population. But they also serve a lot of visitors from out of town due to their

"Our ovens never turn off during the holiday season."

- Cathy Walk

location close to the interstate.

"We get a lot of snowbirds," Jason Sandschafer said. "I also have a lot of people tell me that they plan their trip around lunch or dinner at our restaurant."

The brothers also attribute the success of the restaurant to being independently owned and the quality and quantity of food offered for the dollar. That food is still made the way that it was when the restaurant was established – from scratch.

They roll their own pie crusts, cut their own steaks, hand-cut lettuce for the salad bar and make soups.

"Most of the products are the same

and we're not trying to change that," Lucas Sandschafer said.

The No. 1 item on their menu is the fried chicken. They go through 1,450 chickens per week.

When it comes to spreading the word about the restaurant, the Sandschafer family says they have some billboards and they use social media and advertising. But their main draw is word of mouth.

"The biggest thing is taking care of our customers," Jason Sandschafer said. "Then they go out and bring others back to dine with us."

They also attribute success to their hardworking staff of 180 employees. The average years of service for staff members is 10 years. Lucas Sandschafer said they often will hire generation after generation and siblings from the same family to work at the restaurant.

The restaurant gives back to the community through events for local charities and by supporting high school athletics.

Sarah Cutwright of Broomfield, Colorado, dines at Niemerg's every three or four months when she is in town. Her father eats there on a daily basis.



Owners Jason and Lucas Sandschafer in front of one of their catering vans.

"This place has been here forever," she said during a recent stop at the restaurant. "I've been coming here since I was a little kid."

Tom and Linda Richmond of Flat Rock, Indiana, stopped at the restaurant recently on their way to Branson, Missouri.

Their favorite part of the restaurant is the salad bar. They say that they've come to Niemerg's several times and they always tell people to stop there.

Henry and Pat Stuckey of Springfield were in town for a wedding when they stopped at Niemerg's for lunch.

"We've been here a few times and it's a great place to come back to," Pat said.

Their favorite things to enjoy at Niemerg's are the chicken and pie.



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HOLIDAY GIFT CARDS for the Holidays





Dawn Schabbing photos
Ryker's bright eyes look at the camera
during a routine day of play at home.



Above: From left, Carter, Ryker and McKenzie at their home in Altamont.

“We want to share his progress and about this diagnosis. If you look it up, you see all ‘the bad stuff. It doesn’t necessarily have to be that way.”

- Brad Miller

Stretching toward ‘typical’

Altamont family gives thanks

DAWN SCHABHING
EFFINGHAM MAGAZINE

Young Ryker Miller smiles as he maneuvers his walker like a NASCAR driver, buzzing around the living room of his family’s Altamont home. He deftly dodges toys and siblings, including twin brother Carter and older sister McK-

Kenzy calls out with indignation that they have made their way into her room uninvited. So it goes for 7-year-old girls burdened with a pair of brothers who are not yet 3. Truth be told, their parents are thrilled by this typical family scene, because their family has not always been so typical. Ryker was born with spina bifida, which caused weakness in his

lower legs. He has undergone 10 surgeries due to complications caused by the condition, which occurs when the spinal cord or bones in the spine don’t form correctly in utero. Today, Ryker’s care is pretty much like Carter’s, their parents say. The fraternal twins are considered more alike than different. Despite the challenges they’ve overcome and those they still face, the Millers say they have much to be thankful for this holiday season. “This has made us stronger as a family, stronger as individuals and stronger

as parents,” said father Brad Miller. Mother Amy Miller agrees.

The parents

Becoming a parent can be one of the most exciting things in life. Or it can be one of the most frightening things, especially when you learn your child has been diagnosed with one of the most severe forms of spina bifida. Brad, who is a wedding DJ and stay-at-home dad, and Amy, who is teacher’s aide at Altamont Grade School, have turned those obstacles into something positive – and they want to share their story with others who face similar situations. They say the challenges they’ve overcome have made them stronger. The joy of being a parent for the second time – with the added surprise of twins – turned into what they say seemed bleak when they learned their twin boys would be born with defects of different calibers. “We were not prepared,” said Amy. “We were 20 weeks along when we knew something was wrong. Something wasn’t right. We knew Carter may have club feet, and there was a sign that something was wrong in Ryker’s brain, but that could have been anything. The amniocentesis didn’t show any chromosomal defects. It was at 26 weeks when we were told it was spina bifida.” “When we first came home, it was

pretty tough,” said Amy. “When we first heard the diagnosis, we thought only the worst.” Now that more than two years have passed, as a family of five, the parents reflected on the hurdles they’ve overcome dealing with a newborn with a tracheotomy, a feeding tube and multiple surgeries that were needed to correct Ryker’s neural tube defect. They can see progress and want to give others hope. “Our message is to educate, because when we got the diagnosis, we knew nothing about spina bifida,” said Brad. “The doctors gave it a real grim diagnosis, but it doesn’t have to be that way. It isn’t always that way.” In fact, Ryker and Carter are quite active. “Even with the medical concerns, there still are a lot of similarities in a normal day for any 2-year-old boy,” said Amy. She noted that Ryker sleeps more than Carter, and he can out-eat the bigger twin. And while Carter may be bigger, the two play well together.

The first months

On April 17, 2017, Carter was born with club feet and Ryker was born with spina bifida. Ryker was born with his spinal cord and nerves on the outside of his small body. At birth, he had a large bubble or sac, where everything was and had

“We want people to know that yes it is scary, but his life is worth living. He has a good life and it is worth living.”

- Amy Miller

to be surgically tucked back into its proper place. Today, he has a long incision across his lower back where that repair was made. Other scars are on his belly, where he used a feeding tube and on the front of his neck, where he needed a tracheotomy. In addition, he has needed shunts – small hollow tubes – placed in his head to relieve extra fluid and pressure on the brain.

The first several months of the twins' lives were bumpy, marked by lengthy hospital stays for Ryker and the inability to take newborn Carter home under those circumstances. It was a full 22 days before the twins spent any time together outside of the womb.

“We uprooted our lives basically, and for 56 days we stayed at a Ronald McDonald House,” said Brad. “During this, we had to care for the second newborn and it would have been nice



Above: Ryker enjoys having his photo taken and shows his excitement at their home in October.

to bring Carter, our other newborn home.”

Carter's condition has since been rectified with exercises to correct the position of his feet.

Weakness in Ryker's feet and ankles means sometimes he doesn't have the strength he needs to keep them in place. Braces – ankle and foot orthotics – help him, along with the use of a pediatric-sized walker that offers him stability.

Ryker 's surgeries

Ryker's surgeries include Myelomeningocele repair, which is to correct

the spinal cord and nerves that were outside his body at birth but enclosed in a sac of fluid; ventriculoperitoneal shunt surgeries or revisions that help control pressure in the brain by draining extra fluid from the brain to the belly; a laminectomy, to correct spinal stenosis that had caused breathing issues and vocal cord paralysis; tracheostomy tube, to help with breathing issues; and duraplasty, which involved the membrane covering the brain and spinal cord to ease up pressure that was causing apnea.

The family of five has a busy calendar of appointments and therapy: developmental, physical, occupational, and speech for Ryker. There are the typical pediatric appointments coupled with several specialists appointments, mostly at St. Louis Children's Hospital.

“Some people might think, ‘Why me? Why us?’ But, we say look at it and think about how much we have learned and matured from all that we have experienced,” said Amy.

Brad said the diagnosis for Ryker brought some serious challenges, many setbacks and long hospital stays, but by keeping a positive outlook, tomorrow looks bright.

“Even a simple trip to Walmart was challenging – but now compared to what it was, it is really a breeze. He still obviously requires extra care, but overall, now, he's just a normal boy,” said Brad.

The outlook

Brad said the couple wants to help other families with their positive outlook by sharing their story and their experiences.

“We are always reading other stories of families sharing their struggles and successes when they are dealing with similar situations,” he said. “We have made friends with others in the spina bifida world, both near and far, and sometimes they are relying on us for advice and courage to get through a situation – and sometimes it is the other way around, too.”

The Millers are thankful that medical technology to help patients and information on spina bifida is more prevalent today than it was even 10 years ago. They've gained information



Above: Ryker moves past a recliner occupied by twin brother Carter at their home. Right: Ryker is shown here at approximately 6 months old, smiling and happy. At this time, he had a tracheotomy for breathing assistance and a G-button for feeding, both in place. Submitted photo

from a variety of websites and made connections with others using social media.

“We decided to share (Facebook page) Ryker Miller's Journey with others on social media to spread a little more knowledge with the world and to show a success story,” said Amy. “We know Ryker has his limitations, but he also shines in so many other ways.”

“He's been through a lot, but he's still just a normal boy,” Amy said.

Ryker's parents hope that he won't have any recall of surgeries and hospital stays at such a young age. But they know that the average patient with this diagnosis will have about 20 surgeries.

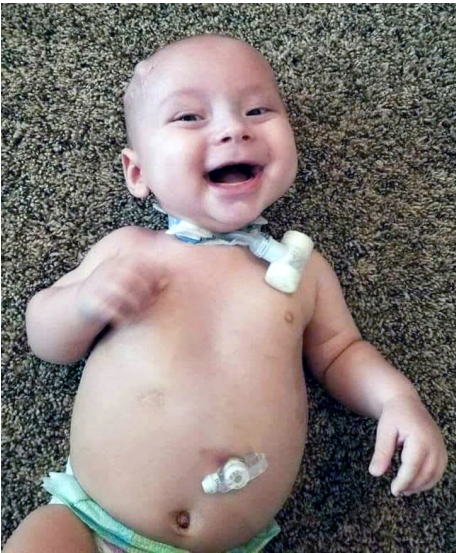
“We want to share his progress and about this diagnosis,” said Brad. “If you look it up, you see all the bad stuff. It doesn't necessarily have to be that way.”

Amy added that abortions are high in parents if they learn early enough their child will be born with spina bifida.

“We want people to know that yes it is scary, but his life is worth living,” said Amy. “He has a good life and it is worth

living.”

Brad sums it up this way: “I would say that no matter what happens with this medical journey we are on, the five of us will have each other, even if it is from a hospital room or a room at the Ronald McDonald House. We will make the most of what we have. We have become so good at dealing with the punches as they come we try to stay ahead of the curve and always plan for the unexpected, but hope for the best.”



Left: Amy Miller holds Carter and McKenzie in the center, and Brad Miller holds Ryker.

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With its rich history in Illinois politics, being the terminus of the Cumberland Road and the place where Abraham Lincoln began his political career, the City of Vandalia is noted for its tourist attractions and its historic downtown

district. The historic sites in Vandalia include the Vandalia Statehouse - the third capitol building in Vandalia and oldest existing capitol building in the State of Illinois. For 20 years - 1819 to 1839 - Vandalia served as the capitol of the State of Illinois. It was during this time that Abraham Lincoln, perhaps one of the best loved and most recognized political figures our nation has ever produced, started his political career as a state representative. He delivered his first speeches against slavery in Vandalia and debated Stephen A. Douglas.

Other attractions include The Fayette County Museum and Garden and the Little Brick House. Vandalia also features the Madonna of the Trail statue, situated on the grounds of the Statehouse. The statue was dedicated in 1928 and is a tribute to the pioneer women who traveled the Cumberland Road.

In June 2001, Vandalia became the home for another historic statue. The Vandalia Main Street Program's "Sitting With Lincoln" project is a life sized, seated bronze Lincoln statue across the street from the Statehouse in Lincoln Park.

Area outdoor activities are plentiful which includes the Vandalia Lake for swimming, camping, boating and fishing and a very fine park district which includes seven parks, ball fields and a public pool for kids of all ages. Other area recreation includes challenging golf courses, skydiving, bowling and hunting.



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Volunteering on the big stage

Effingham native assists during Dove Christian music awards

KAITLIN CORDES
EFFINGHAM MAGAZINE

For Cedarville University junior Antonio Muñoz, volunteering at Christian music's most important night is something the Effingham native does not take for granted.

The Effingham High School graduate helped celebrate the Gospel Music Association's 50th Annual Dove Awards in October as a volunteer. Muñoz was one of 19 students from the Cedarville University's Worship Department to help out with the behind-the-scenes moments leading up to the awards show.

"This year, a group of 19 students from the Cedarville University Worship Department was accompanied by Professor Susan Plemons, Dr. Roger O'Neel and his wife, Nancy O'Neel," Muñoz said. "Through this experience, we had the opportunity to witness all the planning and preparation that goes into the inner workings of a production as big and complex as the Dove Awards."

The Dove Awards honors outstanding achievements and excellence in Christian music. Some of this year's winners include big names such as Josh Turner, TobyMac, Casting Crowns and more.

Submitted photos
Antonio Muñoz served as a volunteer at the 50th annual Gospel Music Association DOVE Awards ceremony in October.





Above: Antonio Muñoz, standing in the center, speaks at the 2019 Gospel Music Association DOVE Awards ceremony in Nashville, Tennessee.

Muñoz said preparing for the awards night took a big team to make sure all artists and their bands, presenters and award winners had what they needed and to make sure the show “went off without a hitch.”

Even though Muñoz was surrounded by some of the greats of Christian music, he said the best part of the night

had little to do with the artists.

“The most meaningful part to me, however, is being able to see the students in our department grow closer and build their friendships and our department unity overall,” Muñoz said. “This kind of shared experience helps people lower their walls and get to know each other.”

Muñoz said this type of experience helped the underclassmen feel more comfortable approaching the upperclassmen and those who they normally wouldn’t have interacted with. Muñoz describes himself as an extrovert, so seeing his classmates come together was what he called the “best aspect of the Dove Awards.”

Muñoz himself was once one of the underclassmen who was trying his hand at something new. He said the Ohio university’s worship department began taking student volunteers to the Dove Awards three years ago when Muñoz was a freshman.

The worship department only took upperclassmen the first year students volunteered at the Nashville awards ceremony. That did not deter Muñoz from signing up his sophomore year, and he was selected as a volunteer for the first time that year.

“It blew my mind that my department was providing the opportunity for its students to have this kind of experience and interact with the artists on a personal level and work the behind the scenes of such an iconic event in Christian music,” Muñoz said.

Left: Antonio Muñoz, center, is shown with the group of students who attended the 2019 Dove Awards ceremony. This was Muñoz’s first year volunteering at the awards show.



“I decided to sign up for it through my department because I figured if I have the chance to interact with the artists that had made such an impact on my upbringing and play a part in running this prestigious award show, how could I not?”

Music and worship has always played a role in Muñoz’s life. Starting in fifth grade, he participated in choir through his senior year of high school, and in that timeframe, he participated in the District Festival choir for six years, District Jazz Choir for three years and the Honors All-State Choir for two years.

Muñoz’s musical talents have also garnered him awards and recognition. He has been recognized as the Best of the Day and Judge’s Choice and first place in many solo and ensemble contests, and he also participated in the Effingham High School band his senior year as a percussionist.

As a student at Cedarville University, Muñoz is double majoring in music education and worship arts and is on the vocal track to become a choir teacher. Muñoz said his family has been his biggest inspiration in his chosen career path.

“There are many factors that led to my decision to include worship as one of my majors, but I’d have to say that my dad was the biggest influence,” Muñoz said. “My family and I have



Top: Pictured is the group of Cedarville University students who volunteered at the 2019 Gospel Music Association DOVE Awards ceremony in October. Effingham native Antonio Muñoz, in the second row second from the left, attended as a volunteer. Above: Antonio Muñoz, left in the black shirt, sings with fellow Cedarville University students at the 2019 Gospel Music Association DOVE Awards Ceremony in October.

been at our Hispanic church for the last 13 years. My dad started my sisters and I on the worship team as early as 11 years old, and that opened doors to other opportunities.”

Muñoz’s father, Tony Muñoz, is the pastor at the Iglesia Bautista Latina – The Latina Baptist Church – in Effing-

ham. Following in his father’s footsteps, Antonio Muñoz started volunteering on his youth group’s worship team throughout his junior high and high school years.

Antonio Muñoz said that experiences like volunteering at the Dove Awards have opened his eyes to how much he

“There are many factors that led to my decision to include worship as one of my majors, but I’d have to say that my dad was the biggest influence.”

-Antonio Muñoz

enjoys the musical aspect of worship. He said he’s also discovered where his passion lies.

“Through this experience as well as my classes at Cedarville University, I have come to discover that the performance aspect of worship music is thrilling and exciting, and I enjoy it,” Antonio Muñoz said. “More importantly, I’ve discovered that my passion lies in the ministry side of worship ministry. Our professors always say that music and performing is 25 percent of a worship leader’s job, and through the years, I have come to realize that they are so right.”

Antonio Muñoz said he’s come to realize that ministry is the most important part of his majors and described music as a tool he uses to reach others and “posture their hearts and minds to give God the glory due to His name.”

Antonio Muñoz does not plan to see his name in lights like some of the artists he assisted at the Dove Awards.

“Would I love the chance to share the same stage as all the artists at the awards one day? Absolutely, but I love people more, and I thank God for showing me that the reason He called me to study worship is so that He can use me to shine His love and light on others,” he said.

“I am beyond grateful that God led me to Cedarville University, where I have been given so many opportunities to branch out beyond anything I had ever experienced in Effingham and grow as a professional, as a person and as a Christ follower.”

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Tim Mueller takes pride in being a Neoga Indians coach. Mueller has continued to coach cross country and track through his battle with bone cancer. Kaitlin Cordes photos

The Coach and the Cancer

Tim Mueller leads in his most crucial race

KAITLIN CORDES
EFFINGHAM MAGAZINE

Tim and Lisa Mueller welcomed their first grandchild into the world on a November morning in 2017. That afternoon they learned Tim had colon cancer. For the Neoga High School track and cross country coach, the diagnosis was just another hurdle. Tim, 53, says the story of his life will always be about his family, his coaching and his student athletes. Still, the day Tim learned his diagnosis looms large. The avid runner had been experiencing pain during his runs and even in everyday situations. He decided it was time to find out what was wrong. "I thought it was a sciatic nerve," Tim said. "My racing had gone down hill, and I didn't run as much as I usually did. I missed some races that I normally run, and I finally told (Lisa) ... I'm going to the doctor."

It was a few days before Thanksgiving. The doctor thought Tim's pain might have been caused by an enlarged hernia pushing against muscles, and ordered a scan. On Nov. 27, 2017, the results were in, and Tim headed back to the doctor's office. "After the holiday, he got the results back, and Roscoe was born that morning. We were on Cloud Nine for our first grandchild," Tim said. "I thought I was just going to have to go in, they'd give me a shot, pill, just give me something." "You've got cancer," Tim's doctor told him. Though the scan showed the cancer in Tim's body, his doctor at the time did not know what type. That's when Tim was sent to Dr. Philip Dy at the Crossroads Cancer Center in Effingham. Tim described that December two years ago as a whirlwind. After a colonoscopy, Dy concluded the cancer had also spread to his bones. The first step in Tim's treatment was radiation.

After nearly six weeks of radiation treatments, Dy said Tim's tumor marker numbers were not quite low enough, prompting him to put Mueller on chemotherapy toward the beginning of 2018. "He said we're going to start chemo, and it's going to be pretty intense," Tim said. "My first dose, it didn't do anything. I thought, 'Shoot, I can do this. This is a piece of cake.'" By his fourth treatment, however, he lost his sense of taste. He could not drink or touch anything cold because it felt like glass shards. Tim continued his treatments through the spring and summer. When the fall cross country season started, Neoga school officials made sure to schedule events so that Tim would not have to wear his chemo pump to meets. Then November came, marking a year since Tim's diagnosis. "It was November when I had another scan done toward the first

Right: Neoga High School track and cross country coach Tim Mueller shows his runners a route during a recent practice at the school.

of the month, and numbers looked really good. I had like two treatments left, and that was when my feet went numb," Tim said. That numbness still affects Tim, nearly a year later. But he continues to run and bicycle, especially with his student athletes. Tim used to run the same distances and do the same exercises at practices as his students do, but the numbness in his feet have made those tasks more difficult. Tim can't run on trails with the students because he can't feel what he is stepping on. But when he tells his runners to take laps on a flat surface, he still joins in. A scan at the end of 2018 revealed the cancer in Tim's colon had disappeared, but the malignant cells in his bones remain. Tim is on what he calls preventative-maintenance chemotherapy, which takes place less often and requires him to take chemo pills and a variety of other medicines and vitamins.

Dy estimated if the feeling in Tim's feet hadn't returned by the end of October, it will likely never come back. Despite some of his hardships with intense chemotherapy and his slowed running ability, Tim said it's his student athletes and his grandsons who have buoyed him through his two-year battle. "Again this year, my cross country kids — and even last year when I was going through the rough stuff — they'd watch out for me. They'd say, 'Everything OK, coach?' They knew that it bothered me because I used to run with my kids all the time," Tim said. "The kids I've got this year are great, and again, they kind of watch out for me. They know what I'm up against." Another driving factor for Tim's positive attitude has been his grandsons. Lisa Mueller said the devastating news of her husband's cancer diagnosis was somewhat softened by the birth of their first grandson. Lisa said when she and her husband held Roscoe for the first time those two short years ago, it made them realize their grandchildren make fighting the cancer worthwhile.



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Left: Tim Mueller and his wife, Lisa, inside the Neoga High School gym.

"Even through all this, you realize God is good because even when you find out that he has cancer, but then when you held Roscoe that night, it was like you just realize what it's all about," Lisa said. "There's a reason the timing was like it was."

Tim agreed. "When I'm with him (Roscoe), it's like this is what it's all about. I have so much I have to show him, to teach him," he said.

Lisa has been Tim's rock, too. Tim said she has been by his side at every appointment and has been his biggest motivator through it all. Lisa is the one, Tim said, who pushes him to finish his race against cancer.

Two things Lisa said she never wanted to ask doctors is what stage the cancer is in, and how much time her husband has left. Those things did not matter, Lisa said.

Lisa likened Tim's fight against cancer to track.

"If you know anything about running, you have like your whole list of names and you have your times beside the names, and at the very end of all those lists, there's usually these 'DNFs,'" Lisa said. "That means 'Did Not Finish.' I go, 'This is a race we will finish. It's not going to be a DNF by your name.'"

Coaching remains at the center of Tim Mueller's life, right next to his family and faith. The 16-year track and cross country coach looks to continue a suc-

cessful streak of sending a handful of athletes to the state level.

Lisa estimates her husband has had at least one athlete reach the state level every year in track since he started coaching in 2003. Even coaches outside of the Neoga school district have noted Tim Mueller's success. But more importantly, it's his personality and positive attitude that makes an impression.

Cowden/Herrick-Beecher City track and cross country coach Andy Nohren described Tim Mueller and his family as some of his favorite acquaintances.

"I feel like working with Tim has always meant working with his whole family. It's never surprising to see his whole family at meets, and they have always been some of my favorite people to visit with during these times," Nohren said. "From the start of my own coaching career and up to this point, he has always been someone I could talk to and kick around ideas with even though we are in constant competition."

Nohren said coaching against Tim and his team is always a challenge because of Tim's knowledge of track and cross country. He said Tim knows just where to put kids on the track or trail to help them be successful.

That's something Nohren said he has taken with him through his coaching career.

"When I begin to think about where

to put my kids into the best spot to succeed, I have to think about what Tim would do first, and I'm a better coach for that," Nohren said.

Tim's battle with cancer hasn't taken away from his coaching, either, Nohren added.

"When I found out that Tim had cancer, it was surprising because it just seemed to come out of nowhere," Nohren said. "I know for a fact that it's not taking away from his coaching because I still have to coach against him, and he's still crafty as ever."

Fellow Neoga coach Kim Romack said Tim is all about the students he coaches. The varsity girls basketball coach described Tim as an example for the students of Neoga High School.

"He puts in so much to his sports, but more importantly, supports all our athletes and coaches," Romack said. "Even on days that are tough, he's showing up and setting a great example for his athletes of what it takes to overcome hardship."

Neoga Athletic Director Mike Taylor said Tim is always one to put the kids first and also someone who treats the athletes fairly.

Tim's passion for helping take athletes to the next level in track and cross country at times has culminated in the runners continuing their athletic careers. The coach has had a handful of runners who run track and cross country in college.

"That's always really neat to see ... when you see those kids compete on the next level. It's always neat when they come up and acknowledge you or introduce you to their college coach," Tim said. "That just tickles me to death when I can go and watch a former athlete at a college level."

Tim said he always has one piece of advice for those who graduate after running in Neoga's programs.

"I tell them you're going to take a year or two off, but you'll get back into it. I said, this time, you're doing it for yourself. It's not so much winning the race."

Lisa Mueller hopes her husband continues to overcome the hurdles cancer has brought to his life so that he reaches the finish line for himself, his family and the kids he coaches.

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Kaitlin Cordes photos
Alan Deters, left, and his wife, Kris Deters of Teutopolis, talk with Gabby Goat manager Jason Gines, center, as they dine in the restaurant. Alan is enjoying the swordfish special while Kris has the pulled pork.

Gabby Goat like a second family for locals and visitors

KAITLIN CORDES
EFFINGHAM MAGAZINE

Bob and Mary Bryant are from Rapid City, South Dakota.

The Gabby Goat American Pub and Grill is not just a restaurant to them. It's like a second home, with the staff serving as a second family for the HSHS St. Anthony's Memorial Hospital contracted nursing assistants.

Though the couple is only in Effingham 18 weekends or so out of the year, they make it a point to stop into the Gabby Goat as often as they can to eat, drink and visit with the staff.

Through the years of working in Effingham, the Bryants have gotten to know the Gabby Goat crew on a personal level, even going as far as travel-

ing with them and introducing them to their biological family members.

"We're always welcome here," Mary Bryant said. "If you go to a business in a town that's been there a long time and you aren't from here, sometimes you'll get the cold shoulder. Here, we don't."

Mary Bryant said the staff often goes above and beyond for the couple and other restaurant patrons. She recalled a moment during the summer when

one of the waitresses, who is a member of the Army National Guard, spoke with her niece who was visiting Effingham before training for the Army.

Mary Bryant said the waitress showed kindness and compassion in telling her niece about her experiences in the military.

The Bryants started going to the Gabby Goat not long after it opened in 2012. Bob Bryant is a fan of craft beers, and the restaurant was once

one of the only locations in Effingham to serve those drinks.

"That's how we got to know people (at the Gabby Goat) because it was like 'you guys are the only ones buying beers,' but then of course it's blossomed into everybody trying to brew craft beer now," Bob Bryant said.

Mary and Bob Bryant agree the food is high-class quality and is well made. One recent evening, Bob Bryant was enjoying a daily special of swordfish while he and his wife sipped on a brew.

Restaurant Manager Jason Gines said the Gabby Goat makes its food 95 percent from scratch, and the recipes and dishes are often his or the cooks' own creations. Gines said homemade, hometown cooking is what often draws travelers like the Bryants to the restaurant.

"We don't buy it previously made. All of our recipes are either myself or some of the kitchen staff who like to come up with a lot of stuff," Gines said. "We're really just a big family just making hometown stuff. I think with the

comfortable food, good drinks and the staff, they make it work."

Gines, who moved back to Illinois from California to manage the establishment, agreed with the Bryants, saying the staff is at the heart of the business.

Gines said he's worked in more corporate-style restaurants where the focus was on getting guests in and out as quickly as possible. He said at the Gabby Goat, that is not the case.

"We want you to come and stay," Gines said.

It's the friendliness of the staff that keeps customers coming back, too, Gines said.

"Every past review we've had on our Facebook and Yelp and Trip Advisor, it's all about these guys," Gines said of the staff.

It's those social media and travel review sites that Gines said helps the Gabby Goat reach travelers. He believes it's important to be active on those sites to not only aid the travelers but to also stay in touch with local

customers.

Gines said events like Corvette Fun-fest and shows at the EPC, as well as events in downtown Effingham, usually draw large crowds to the bar and restaurant. Effingham's location near two interstates is also a factor in drawing travelers, he added.

Even though travelers make up a large portion of the Gabby Goat's patrons, those who live a little closer choose to dine at the locally owned restaurant. Alan and Kris Deters of Teutopolis drove to Effingham recently to enjoy the swordfish special and the homemade pulled pork.

"I would recommend this place to anyone," Kris Deters said. "It has a good atmosphere, and the food is phenomenal. It's world-class type of food."

The Gabby Goat American Pub and Grill is located at 303 E. Fayette Ave. in Effingham.



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Charles Mills photos
Each person attending the Effingham County HCE Christmas in October received a cookbook with seasonal recipes.

'Christmas in October' returns

CHARLES MILLS
EFFINGHAM MAGAZINE

The basement of the University of Illinois Extension Center in Effingham was feeling the spirit of Christmas on a recent October morning as people got a jumpstart on their holiday crafts.

Elsie Voelker and Claudia Berg of Altamont, co-chairs of the Culture Enrichment for the Effingham County Home and Community Education board, brought back "Christmas in October" after a 15-year absence.

Voelker said when they held Christmas in October 15 years ago, it came

with a prepared soup lunch. She hopes to rekindle the celebration as an annual event.

"We haven't done this for many, many years," Voelker said. "We are just doing it again and we will see what happens."

According to Voelker, close to 100 people came to the original Christmas in October.

"Today it is on a smaller scale," Voelker said.

Those attending the event learned how to create Christmas decorations from Mason jars, lids, fabric, string, bows and light bulbs, just to name a few.



There were 13 stations set up with plenty of creative decorating ideas in addition to an idea table with several Christmas ornament examples on display.

Helping with creating the decorations were a few members from Effingham County 4-H clubs.

"It's a good bond between the 4-H program and the HCE program," Voelker said.

Three demonstration stations were set up. One was led by Sylvia Dust, who was teaching how to make festive plastic bag covers out of fabric. Deb Schultz demonstrated how to make a bow and decorate a present, while Crystal Habing taught how to create a festive kitchen boa.

Ten areas were available for make-and-take ornaments, including various crafts such as how to make a canning lid snowman by Kate Dickens and canning ring Christmas ornament by Marilyn Schaefer.

Barb Carie and 4-H member Anthony Kreke helped visitors create a walnut wood reindeer. Ruth Abell helped visitors coming to her station create a bouncing ball made out of glitter glue, Borax and water.

Mary Beth Hoene and Teutopolis

Far left: Mary Beth Hoene, left, helps Judy Traub decorate a Mason jar.
Left: Lydia Young holds a reindeer Christmas decoration she created out of a piece of walnut.



Above: Grace Schumacher, left, and Mary Beth Hoene, center, help Maggie Shepard create a Christmas decoration.

Right: Lydia Young, left, and her mother Hayley Young, create a Christmas angel out of a plastic Ensure bottle.

Wranglers 4-H President Grace Schumacher taught how to decorate a Mason jar.

"I really enjoy working with the little kids here," Schumacher said. "I like it when we finish a project. It makes the kids so happy."

Effingham County HCE Board President Sharon Davis taught how to color a piece of embroidery material to make a Christmas decoration. County 4-H members instructed station visitors on how to make a Christmas decoration from a light bulb. Nancy Hoene made Christmas angels out of her husband's discarded plastic Ensure bottles.

Hoene said she has been collecting one Ensure bottle a day for the past six months and throwing them in a big tub.

"I've been saving them, one a day," Hoene said. "So I came up with idea of making angels out of them."

A couple of visitors to Hoene's angel-making workstation were Lydia Young and her mother, Hayley Young of Effingham.

"This is a lot more interesting than I thought," Lydia Young said as she was deciding how to create her Christmas angel.

Every visitor to Christmas in October was given a special cookbook featuring several recipes for the holidays, including caramel corn, peanut brittle, brownies, fudge and vanilla fudge



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candies, pretzel bites, and breads, pies and cakes.

The recipe book is filled with recipes shared by HCE members. Some of the recipes from the cookbook were made available for those attending Saturday's event to enjoy.

In addition to Christmas in October, Voelker said the HCE organization creates Christmas stockings, Christmas cards for veterans, walker caddies, wheelchair caddies, clothing protectors for nursing homes, and fidget mats for Alzheimer patients.



Above: A variety of seasonal recipes were made as they appear in a cookbook given to those attending the Effingham County HCE for Christmas in October.



Above: Effingham County HCE Christmas in October allowed those attending get hands-on experience creating Christmas decorations.



Scared of Santa

The day Talan overcame his fear of Santa

JANE RIES
FOR EFFINGHAM MAGAZINE

My youngest grandson, Talan, was 4.

When Santa came to town after Thanksgiving, his parents took all of the kids to see him. Talan wouldn't have anything to do with him. When told that he might get nothing if he didn't tell Santa, he said, "Nothing is good for me!"

Not long ago, he stayed with me while the rest of his family was out of town.

I took him to breakfast with Santa. He enjoyed his breakfast, but when it came time to see Santa, he froze up.

We went up to Santa, but again, he wouldn't look at him or talk to him. I said, "That's OK Buddy. Santa understands. He'll know what you want."

We left and went back to my house. We did some things together, played and watched some movies. I'd promised him he could pick where we ate lunch. He picked McDonald's. He asked to go to the one on the south side of town.

As we passed by the old courthouse in downtown Effingham, he asked if Santa was in his house nearby.

I told him Santa would be there in a few minutes. Talan said, "Mamaw, when we're done at McDonald's, can we stop and see Santa?" "Whatever you want to do, Buddy! You tell me." I replied.

We went through the drive-up at McDonald's, got our food, and headed home. Talan said, "Don't forget to see if Santa is in his house."

I pulled up by Santa's house, and lo and behold, Santa was there! Talan got out of the car, but looked like he was ready to back out.

We went in and Santa greeted us.

Talan stood behind me and wouldn't go near him. Santa said, "That's OK – don't force the child."

All of a sudden, Talan looked at Santa, walked up to him, and hopped on his lap. He talked to Santa, told him what he wanted, smiled at him, and even wished him Merry Christmas.

As we walked to the car, Talan looked up at me with his big, blue eyes and said, "I like that man!"

That was the day Talan got the gift of love for Santa.



Submitted photo
Talan and Grandma Jane Ries visit Santa at his house in downtown Effingham in 2011.

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Santa arrives by firetruck to his house downtown.

Dawn Schabbing photo



Chet Piotrowski Jr. photo/Piotrowski Studios
Alivia Blomberg, 7, of Farina skates last year during the Hometown Christmas in downtown Effingham sponsored by the Downtown Effingham Business Group.



Dawn Schabbing photo
Jasper Everett, 6, is about to sink his teeth into an edible craft make and take cup of hot chocolate, at the Effingham Public Library.



Dawn Schabbing photo
Mindy Taphorn of Moccasin adjusts the hat on her Beagle, Suzy Q, at the Reindog Pet Parade. Both owner and dog were dressed as Cindy Lou Who.



Dawn Schabbing photo
Jeremy Kopf, 2, the son of Eric and Jeanna Kopf, enjoys a train ride last year during Hometown Christmas.

Dawn Schabbing photo



Chet Piotrowski Jr. photo/Piotrowski Studios
Callen Jacobs, 4, of Savoy tells Santa a list of items he would like to receive on Christmas last year during Hometown Christmas sponsored by the Downtown Effingham Business Group.



Dawn Schabbing photo
Betty Ramirez pushes her Yorkie, named Baby, in the parade. While she wore a santa hat, the dog had a Santa suit on for the event.



Chet Piotrowski Jr. photo/Piotrowski Studios
Santa waves to the crowd as he arrives in downtown Effingham during Hometown Christmas last year, sponsored by the Downtown Effingham Business Group.



Dawn Schabbing photo
Anthony and Rebekah Robertson, and their daughter, Norah, 1, of Altamont, have a family photo taken at the newest lawn ornament on the Effingham County courthouse square.

Dawn Schabbing photo



Dawn Schabbing photo
Ali Bloemer and Brileigh Bloemer, 10, of Teutopolis, hold their dogs, Sheffield and Addison. Brileigh came dressed as Cindy Lou Who. Sheffield came wearing antlers, to portray Max from The Grinch story. Addison, donned green hair and came as The Grinch.



Hometown Christmas
2018



Dawn Schabbing photo
The Waymoth Family enjoys the day together playing in the snow at Community Park in Effingham. From left to right in the back row, Karla, Clare, Lilly, Waylon, and in the front are Josie and Sam



Ryker Miller, 1, in Altamont.

Submitted by Amy Miller



Submitted by Carrie Ruholl
Snow deer with Brad Ruholl, Chris Ruholl and Joe Galloway in Toledo.



Submitted by Sully Rivera
Laura Gomez, from Effingham.



Submitted by Dallas Orsborn



Downtown Effingham

Donna Niemann photo



Maggie

Submitted by Dawn Grubb



Dawn Schabbing photo
Mia Kinkelaar and Live Hoene sled down the hill at Community Park on Jan. 12, 2019.

Snow Day Snapshots 2019

Earlier this year, readers submitted photos showing how they spent their snow day on Jan. 12, when more than 6 inches of snow fell in Effingham County.
For more photos, visit our online galleries at photos.effinghamdailynews.com.



Devin Grubb with snowman.

Submitted by Dawn Grubb



Reid Mayhall in his snow fort.



Submitted by Leann Shackelford



Submitted by Meghan Rewers
James Rewers, age 4.



Submitted by Megan Coy
Micaiah, Maleah and Malik Coy make a Snow-woman in Neoga.



The Ruholl family from Teutopolis



Submitted by Katie O'Dell
Heath Westendorf and Reese O'Dell stand with a 7-foot snowman at their home in Windsor.



Submitted by mom Brandi Smithson
Zayda Moseley, 9 months old, enjoying her first snow experience. She didn't know what to think of it!



Submitted by Linda Wiedman of Effingham
Snow dog

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Downtown Effingham

HOMETOWN CHRISTMAS

Friday, November 29 from 5 to 9 p.m.
Saturday, November 30 from 12 p.m. to 9 p.m.
Sunday, December 1 from 12 p.m. to 5 p.m.
Find us on Facebook for a complete schedule of events!

Presented by the Downtown Effingham Business Group

New This Year: 5K Run & Holiday Open Mic Night at Gazebo on Friday; Lunch With Santa at Joe's Pizza and Snow Ball Drop on Saturday.

- * Meet Santa * Christmas Carols * Christmas Tree Lighting
- * Carriage Rides * Photos * Refreshments
- * Ice Skating Rink Returns * Childrens Train Rides
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21st Annual

Sunday, November 24th
Dieterich High School
noon - 4pm

Booths include holiday crafts, ornaments, wreaths, floral arrangements, jewelry, baby burp towels, hair bows, homemade candy, cookies, caramel corn, wooden toys, American Girl doll clothing and accessories, dog treats, wood crafts, snowmen, candles, aprons, Pampered Chef, soaps, lotions, Party Time, and much, much MORE!

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SANTA ARRIVES
Friday, Nov. 29
Mon-Sat 3pm-8pm; Sunday 1pm-4pm

Christmas Craft Show
Nov 22, 23 & 24

Holiday Sales & Specials Throughout The Mall

Cross County Mall

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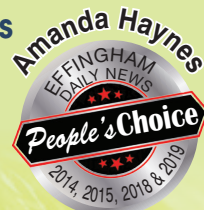
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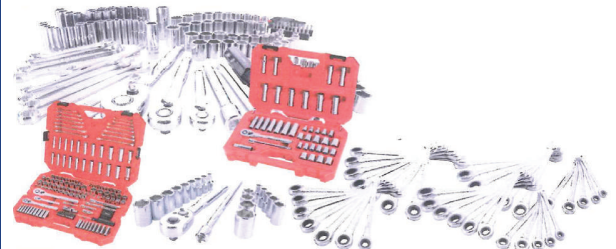
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