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on Page 5

The whistleblowers vs. the shadow prosecutors

David Jackson Justice Watch

A new trove of documents independently confirmed by Injustice Watch allege previously unreported misconduct and conflicts of interest by Illinois' Special Prosecution Unit.

In LaSalle County's stately courthouse in central Illinois, a powerful law enforcement official fought a bitter legal feud with an unflappable young lawyer, charging her with felony perjury for statements she made in a court affidavit.

Some two years later and 250 miles south in St. Clair County, a similar legal grudge match washed through the glass and concrete courthouse when a local news researcher was charged with harassing a public official for alleged statements he made outside a local diner.

In both cases, the accusations were leveled by members of Illinois' Special Prosecution Unit — the elite squad of state lawyers who typically handle cases when local prosecutors have conflicts.

In their separate corners of the state, attorney Julie Ajster, 50, and newswire court researcher Bradley VanHoose, 59, were acquitted of the felony charges.

They then used their legal research skills to gather boxes of records on the special prosecutors who attacked them in court.

"I didn't know what the Special Prosecution Unit was until I was charged," VanHoose told Injustice Watch. "That's when I made it my life's mission to find out everything I could about this agency."

Injustice Watch independently verified these records and Ajster's and VanHoose's accounts, which reveal previously unreported misconduct and conflicts of interest by the Special Prosecution Unit.

An Aug. 14 Injustice Watch investigation showed the unit has faced allegations of ethical breaches, including withholding evidence and favoring political insiders, while operating with little public oversight.

The two veteran special prosecutors who indicted Ajster and VanHoose — Brian Towne in LaSalle County and David Rands in St. Clair County — to this day shoulder some of the unit's heaviest caseloads. Both also played leading roles in the unit's problematic history.

VanHoose and Ajster, meanwhile, had never met nor even heard about one another until Injustice Watch shared their stories in recent interviews. They had independently reached out to Injustice Watch after it published its investigation last month.

"I'm glad I have another kindred spirit out there," VanHoose said. "I know what the Special Prosecution Unit did to me was wrong. The charges against me were a politically based vendetta. Now here's another person who recognized this is wrong, and stood up like I did."

Towne and Rands did not respond to detailed written questions about Injustice Watch's findings. Patrick Delfino, who heads the agency that houses the unit — the Illinois State's Attorneys Appellate Prosecutor, or ILSAAP — also did not respond to written questions.

The small-town attorney

Perhaps this all started because Julie Ajster fell in love with a warehouse worker and stuck with him when he was badly injured working on the loading dock.

A lawyer from Peru, Illinois, she handled compensation cases for injured workers, crusaded against the area's illegal puppy mills, and was named one of Illinois Valley's "40 Under 40" young business leaders.

In 2014, Towne charged Ajster's fiancé, Danny French, with felony harassment by telephone for allegedly threatening an attorney who was a contributor to Towne's political funds.

Those political connections bothered Ajster. "I didn't know anything about Towne, but the case kind of pissed me off," she said.

Towne, it turns out, wore many hats.

While serving as LaSalle County state's attorney in 2011, he created an unorthodox team of highway patrol officers who pulled over interstate motorists suspected of drug trafficking and confiscated whatever cash they were carrying. He called it the SAFE Team, short for State's Attorney's Felony Enforcement, and it grew as it confiscated more than a million dollars from drivers during the five or so years it operated.

Ajster was recruited to represent drivers whose cash was seized by Towne's team. Starting as early as 2012, lawyers alleged in court that Towne's overlapping law enforcement roles created an obvious, disqualifying conflict: He was acting as both police and prosecutor, which is not permitted under Illinois law.

To resolve the issue, Towne began asking the court to bring in the Illinois Special Prosecution Unit to try SAFE Team cases in his stead. LaSalle County judges granted his requests.

But that only deepened Towne's conflicts, Ajster later alleged in court. Towne in 2012 had become chairman of the Board of Governors that oversaw ILSAAP, the state agency that housed the Special Prosecution Unit. He was effectively in charge of the special prosecutors who were called in to replace him in the name of independence.

Ajster also discovered new details about financial ties between Towne's SAFE Team and ILSAAP.

Starting in 2013, she found, ILSAAP paid the SAFE Team up to $40,000 per year to hire additional police officers. She also documented SAFE Team expenditures on a softball team sponsorship and a school trip that boosted Towne's visibility as an elected state's attorney; generous per diems for

continued on page 4

OBITUARIES

Carol Robbins, 85, Poplar Grove, October 23
Christina Virzi, 80, Belvidere, October 25
Patricia Daniel, 92, Formerly of Belvidere, Oct 25
Lawewnce Nelson 78, From Caledonia, Oct 29

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Richelle Kingsbury Aug. 1955 - June 2013

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Each week, the Journal seeks to present a variety of voices.

Letters. Every attempt will be made to print all letters received with the exception of those that are libelous or obscene. Letters should be signed and include an ID or phone number, so that we can contact the author prior to publication to verify authenticity.

Guest columns. Community leaders are encouraged to submit guest columns consistent with our editorial guidelines for possible inclusion in the Journal.

Opinions. The opinions expressed in the Journal are those of their authors and do not necessarily reflect the opinions of The Boone County Journal management or ownership.

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It's projected to cost ComEd $3.1B to connect data centers to the grid

Consumer groups say data center developers should pay infrastructure costs up front

Maggie Dougherty Capitol News Illinois

Data centers have been the focus of growing debate across the U.S., facing a push for regulation that would require operators to pay for the energy and water resources they use, among other proposals.

But beyond paying to generate new energy, consumer advocates warn that the costs of infrastructure to connect data centers to ComEd's grid will be paid in part by households and small businesses in northern Illinois — something the utility disputes.

Records filed by ComEd in an ongoing regulatory matter show that new infrastructure and system upgrades needed to connect 30 data centers to the grid will cost $3.1 billion. Some of those projects are already connected, with the rest expected to come online by 2031.

Developers of those data centers have paid $721 million in advance deposits, just under 25% of the total cost, an amount that consumer groups including the Citizens Utility Board and Environmental Law & Policy Center say could leave a potential shortfall of $2 billion to be spread across regular customers' bills.

"Ordinary households should not foot the bill to provide power to data centers," said Nick Wallace, a senior associate attorney with the environmental law center. "ComEd and the (Illinois Commerce) Commission can protect ratepayers and the grid by requiring data centers to pay for 100% of their power supply and infrastructure investments."

ComEd contends that the consumer groups' analysis overlooks $1.1 billion secured by lines of credit that guarantee rate payments from the data centers for 10 years.

Electricity delivery

The $3.1 billion in costs comes from two components of the electricity delivery system: transmission and distribution. Both include using poles and wires to move electricity from one place to another, but at different stages in the process.

Transmission lines carry high-voltage electricity long distances along highways and across state lines from power plants to local substations where it can be reduced into lower-voltage electricity. Distribution lines then carry that electricity to the homes and businesses that use it.

The data center connection costs are split roughly equally, with $1.6 billion expected in transmission costs and $1.5 billion in distribution costs.

The transmission costs for several individual projects each exceed $100 million, with one project alone expected to cost $289 million and another expected to cost $269 million.

Max Leichtman, ComEd's director of economic and workforce development, said only the distribution costs are an appropriate apples-to-apples comparison for the $721 million in deposits.

Some of those projects won't come online until 2030 or 2031 and are in early stages of development, so the full cost of equipment needed has not been calculated, he added.

"The deposits that today stand at $721 million may continue to increase as these projects move forward and become more mature and more well-defined," Leichtman said. "That doesn't mean that's all we'll ever collect."

Leichtman said any remaining distribution costs would not be spread among all customers, but rather between similar types of customers in the large-user rate class.

Consumer advocates, though, say the data center developers cannot be taken at their word to pay the bills.

"These data centers are some of the wealthiest corporations in the world," CUB spokesperson Jim Chilsen told reporters. "They always say, 'Trust us, we're going to pay our energy bills,' but Illinois customers can't afford to take big tech's word for it."

Reducing speculation

Hyperscale data centers' requests for energy usage are often understood to be largely speculative. The massive projects — often operated by multibillion-dollar tech companies looking to compete in the race for artificial intelligence — sometimes place duplicate requests with different utilities, meaning some do not come to fruition.

The projects have also faced growing opposition from local communities in recent years, causing many to withdraw.

ComEd, in cooperation with Illinois and federal regulators, has sought to weed out speculative requests that drive up energy demand prices by requiring deposits for large customers and requiring them to sign long-term contracts known as transmission security agreements, or TSAs, that require customers to provide a line of credit guaranteeing payment of transmission rates for 10 years, even if the project does not materialize.

Regulators approved ComEd's TSA requirement in 2025, meaning that projects after that point have them in place.

Of the total $1.6 billion in planned transmission costs, ComEd has $1.1 billion protected through transmission security agreements. Nineteen of the 30 projects pre-date the TSA requirement.

Implementing the TSAs has also resulted in "substantial attrition" of data center requests in ComEd's queue, Leichtman said.

Payments now or later

Like many of the utility watchdogs, ComEd also endorses the idea that large-load customers like data centers should be directly allocated the cost of their projects.

The electric utility has proposed a new approach in which it would directly assign rates to individual data centers based on their costs rather than assigning costs within groups. ComEd says that proposal, in combination with the TSAs and deposit requirements, shows it has been proactive in protecting customers.

"We really believe that in totality, the suite of proposals that we put together are industry-leading," Leichtman said.

But unlike its watchdogs, ComEd does not think the data centers should be asked to pay for the infrastructure costs up front, which it said would make it difficult for those customers to do business in Illinois.

Eric DeBellis, general counsel for CUB, agreed the TSAs are an improvement but said they would still leave a "substantial gap" that households and small businesses should not be left to pay.

"We don't want to pay for grid bridges to nowhere," DeBellis said. "If they don't have these up-front payments, then we're left footing the bill for all of it."

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Prosecutors

from page 2

Towne's junkets to Las Vegas law enforcement seminars; and his SUV, cellphone, team workout equipment, and television monitors, according to receipts she filed in St. Clair County Circuit Court.

Meanwhile, as part of his prosecution of Ajster's fiancé, French, Towne took the unusual step of eavesdropping on Ajster.

One of French's own friends was a key witness against him. The friend alleged French had bragged during a card game about threatening the lawyer. French's friend then moved to Florida — in court papers, Ajster said this was an attempt to avoid testifying.

In 2015, Towne brought two Peru police officers to Tampa to eavesdrop on calls the friend placed with French and Ajster. Towne received LaSalle County court authorization for the surveillance.

According to Towne's police report on one of the recorded calls, Ajster told her fiancé's friend she was not going to tamper with the case, and that it was his choice whether to retract his previous statements.

"Several minutes into the conversation Danny French could be heard telling [the friend] to throw the statement away in the trash," the police report said.

Towne secured a LaSalle County court order giving him 90 days to listen in on more phone calls if needed. Ajster only learned she had been secretly recorded months later, when French and his lawyers received notice of the surveillance as part of discovery in his case.

Ajster rushed to the courthouse to find the orders authorizing the surveillance, but the clerk's office said it had no such records.

"They didn't even have a file on it, because the orders were secret," she recalled. "I thought I was living in the twilight zone. Like, this is America! This isn't how the court system should operate. It's what happens when people have unchecked control."

Towne separately used a recorded call to disqualify Ajster from being French's attorney — because she had now become a potential witness in his case.

To top it all off, Towne charged Ajster with two felony counts of perjury, alleging a statement she made in a recorded call contradicted an affidavit she filed to reduce French's bond.

The perjury charges against Ajster were ultimately dropped, but Towne filed a complaint with the Illinois Attorney Registration and Disciplinary Commission, which later found Ajster misrepresented French's income to the court and suspended her license for 30 days — a conclusion Ajster calls unfair.

As the 2016 St. Clair County state's attorney election approached, Ajster — and the revelations in her court records — fueled a "Dump Towne" campaign. Challenger Karen Donnelly unseated Towne with 54% of the vote.

Weeks later, Towne was hired as a member of the Special Prosecution Unit.

Ajster said she was disappointed, but not at all surprised, to learn of Towne's new law enforcement title.

"I no longer refer to it as the justice system. I refer to it as the legal system, because there's little to no justice in it."

Julie Ajster

But in early 2017, LaSalle County news outlets reported that Towne was himself the subject of a grand jury investigation, spurred by Ajster's court filings about SAFE Team spending.

Then, in a separate case, the Illinois Supreme Court issued a biting decision: Towne had acted outside his legal authority in creating and leading the SAFE Team.

Donnelly indicted Towne for official misconduct and misapplication of funds pertaining to SAFE Team expenses, most of which were first exposed by Ajster.

But Towne successfully petitioned the court to have a special prosecutor brought in to replace Donnelly, since she had been his political opponent.

That courtroom tactic derailed the charges against Towne: When Donnelly appealed her disqualification, Towne's lawyers filed a demand for speedy trial — which meant the LaSalle County court had only 160 days to try him.

The newly appointed special prosecutor — retired Warren County judge Gregory McClintock — told Injustice Watch he was forced to abandon the prosecution as the clock ran out.

Asked whether Towne should have been charged, McClintock said: "I would not proceed with a case where I didn't think I had the evidence to prove somebody guilty."

Ajster made one final attempt to hold Towne accountable. In 2018, she filed a federal malicious prosecution lawsuit against local police, and won a $75,000 settlement. State's attorneys such as Towne are generally immune from civil liability, but the judge ordered Towne to pay Ajster a symbolic $1.

"I settled with Ajster for one American dollar," Towne said in a statement to a local news outlet at the time. "In my mind, it was worth a buck to have Ajster out of my life."

Ajster said she had the $1 bill framed and hung on the wall of her law office. But the episode rattled her faith in the law.

"I no longer refer to it as the justice system," she said. "I refer to it as the legal system, because there's little to no justice in it."

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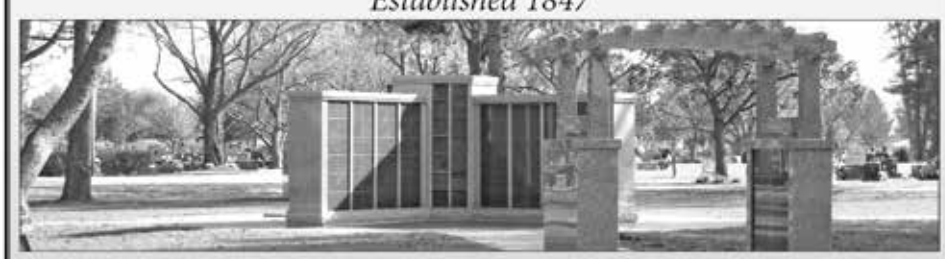
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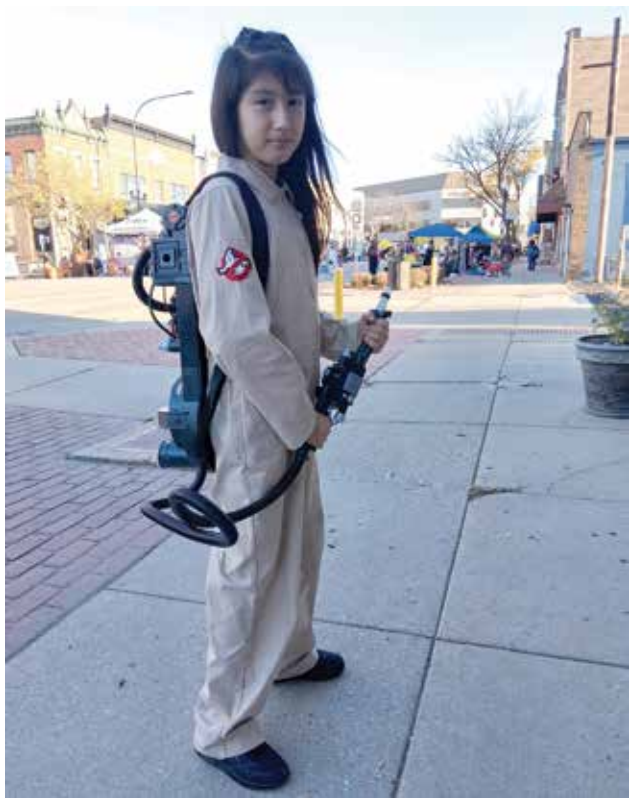


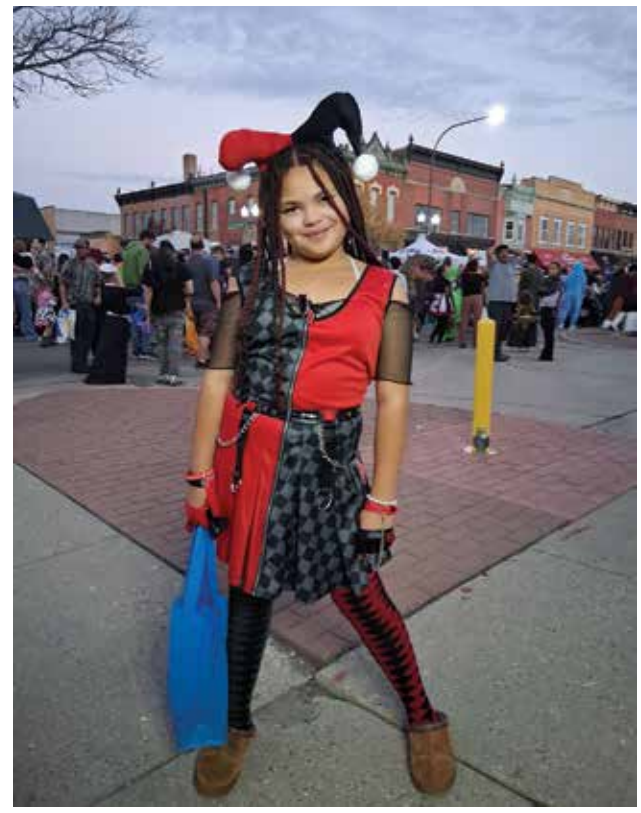






Belvidere Chamber of Commerce Trick or Treat Night













LEGAL NOTICES

IN THE CIRCUIT COURT OF THE 17th JUDICIAL CIRCUIT,
BOONE COUNTY, ILLINOIS
THE DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORTATION OF THE STATE OF ILLINOIS, for and on Behalf of the People of the State of Illinois,Plaintiff,
Parcel # 20513013A, 20513013B, 20513013TE-A, 20513013TE-B
v. Case # 2026ED6
Deer Hills,LLC; Deer Hills Homeowner's Association; BMO Harris Bank, N.A. successor to Amcore Bank, National Association; City of Belvidere, a Municipal Corporation; Deer Hills Estates, Llc; Deer Hills Residential, Inc.: Landmark Development , Inc.; Unknown Owners and Non-Records Claimants, Defendants.
Job # R-92-005-13
PLAINTIFF DEMANDS TRIAL BY JURY
NOTICE OF PUBLICATION

The requisite affidavit for publication having been filed, notice is hereby given to you, Non-Record Claimants and Unknown Owners, defendants in the above entitled suit, that the above named plaintiff has filed its Complaint in said Court in the Law Division thereof, for condemnation pursuant to the eminent domain laws of the State of Illinois, of the lands and premises in the Complaint situated in Boone County, State of Illinois, to wit:

Owner Deer Hills, LLC
Route F.A.P. 517 (US Bus Rte 20)
County Boone County
Job No. R-92-005-13
Parcel No. 20513013
P.I.N. No. 05-20-200-013
Section L-R-1
Station 83+87.72
Station 110+97.78

LAND
20513013A

That part of the Northeast Quarter of Section 20, Township 44 North, Range 3 East of the Third Principal Meridian, Boone County, State of Illinois, with bearings and grid distances referenced to the Illinois Stat PlaneCoordinate System, East Zone NAD 83 (2011 ADJ), with a combined factor of 0.9999985, described as follows:

Beginning at the Southwest corner of said Northeast Quarter; thence North 00 degrees 48 minuets 04 seconds East, on the west line of said Northeast Quarter, 66.89 feet, to the existing northerly right of way line of US Business Route 20 as described in the Dedication to the People of the State of Illinois recorded October 23, 1957 in Book 2, Page 170, as Document Number 115587 in the Recorder's Office of Boone County; thence North 89degrees 43 minuets 48 seconds East, on said northerly right of way line, 11.03 feet; thenceNorth 67 degrees 43 minuets 57 seconds East, 107.85 feet; thence North 87 degrees 26 minuets 20 seconds East, 125.10 feet; thence North 89 degrees 43 minuets 46 seconds East, 125.00 feet; thence South 86 degrees 11 minuets 06 seconds East, 350.98 feet; thence North 89 degrees 43 minuets 46 seconds East, 150.00 feet; thence North 51 North 89 degrees 43 minuets 46 seconds East, 150.00 feet; thence North 51 degrees 04 minuets 11 seconds East, 32.02 feet; thence North 89 degrees 43 minuets 46 seconds East, 50.00 feet; thence South 59 degrees 18 minuets 24 seconds East, 29.15 feet; thence South 87 degrees 23 minuets 29 seconds East, 200.25 feet; thence North 89 degrees 43 minuets 46 seconds East, 300.00 feet; thence North 85 degrees 34 minuets 11 seconds Eats, 275.73 feet; thence North 89 degrees 43 minuets 46 seconds East, 176.79 feet to the existing northerly right of way line of US Business Route 20 as described the Warranty Deed recorded May 9, 1994, as Document Number 94-3815 in said Recorder's Office; thence South 00 degrees 16 minuets 12 seconds East, on said existing right of way line and its southerly extension, 99.31 feet to the south line of said NortheastQuarter; thence South 89 degrees 38 minuets 27 seconds West on said south line, 1,914.07 feet to the Point of Beginning, containing 4.0933 acres, more or less, of which 2.8722 acres, more or less, has been previously used or dedicated for highway purposes (area based on ground distances).

20513013B

That part of the Northeast Quarter of section 20, Township 44 North, Range 3 East of the Third Principal Meridian, Boone County, State of Illinois, with bearings and grid distances referenced to the Illinois State Plane Coordinate System, East Zone NAD 83 (2011 ADJ), with the combined factor of 0.9999985, described as follows:

Commencing at a found mag spike at the southeast corner of said Northeast Quarter of Section 20 per Monument Record recorded May 18, 2010, as Document Number 2010R03363 in the Recorder's Office of Boone County; thence North 00 degrees 53 minuets 15 seconds East, on the east line of said Northeast Quarter, 302.87 feet to the northeast corner of a tract of land described in the Warranty Deed recorded May 9, 1994 as Document Number 94-3815, and the Point of Beginning.

From said Point of Beginning; thence South 89 degrees 41 minuets 48 seconds West, on the north line of said tract of land, 60.01 feet feet to the northwest corner thereof, being also the existing westerly right of way line of Beaver Valley Road as described in said Warranty Deed; thence South 00 degrees 53 minuets 15 seconds West, on said westerly right of way line of Beaver Valley Road, 140.03 feet to the existing northerly right of way line of US Business Route 20 as described in said Warranty Deed; thence on said existing northerly right of way line, the following (2) courses and distances: 1) South 49 degrees 00 minuets 25 seconds West, 69.14 feet; 2) thence South 89 degrees 43 minuets 48 seconds West, 381.72 feet; thence North 00 degrees 16 minuets 14 seconds West,225.42 feet; thence North 89 degrees 39 minuets 00 seconds East, 464.79 feet to the existing westerly right of way line of Beaver Valley Road as occupied, being 33.00 feet west of a parallel with said east line of the Northeast Quarter of Section 20; thence South 89 degrees 06 minuets 45 seconds east, 33.00 feet to said east line of the NortheastQuarter of Section 20; thence South 00 degrees 53 minuets 15 seconds West, on said east line, 40.27 feet, to the Point of Beginning, containing 2.2862 acres, more or less, of which 0.0308 acre, more or less, has been previously used or dedicated for highway purposes (area based on ground distances).

Said parcels 20513013A & B contain a total of 6.3795 acres, more or less, of which 2.9030 acres, more or less, has been previously used or dedicated for highway purposes (area based on ground distances).

Owner Deer Hills, LLC
Route F.A.P. 517 (US Bus Rte 20)
County Boone County
Job No. R-92-005-13
Parcel No. 20513013TE
P.I.N. No. 05-20-200-013
Section L-R-1
Station 83+88.97
Station 93+25.00

EASEMENT
20513013TE-A

That part of the Northeast Quarter of Section 20, Township 44 North, Range 3 East of the Third Principal Meridian, Boone County, State of Illinois, with bearings and grid distances referenced to the Illinois State Plane Coordinate System, East Zone NAD 83 (2011 ADJ), with a combined factor of 0.9999985, described as follows:

Commencing at the southwest corner of said Northeast Quarter of Section 20; thence North 00 degrees 48 minuets 04 seconds East, on the west line of said Northeast Quarter, 66.89 feet to the existing northerly right of way line of US Business Route 20 as described in the Dedication to the People of the State of Illinois recorded October 23, 1957, in Book 2, page 170, as Document Number 115587 in the Recorder's Office of Boone County, and the Point of Beginning.

From said Point of Beginning; thence continuing North 00 degrees 48 minuets 04 seconds East, on said west line, 41.10 feet; thence North 14 degrees 59 minuets 04 seconds East, 20.01 feet; thence North 89 degrees 43 minuets 46 seconds East, 30.00 feet; thence South 19 degrees 00 minuets 04 seconds East, 46.71 feet; thence South 67 degrees 43 minuets 57 seconds West, 43.14 feet to said northerly right of way line; thence South 89 degrees 43 minuets 48 seconds West, on said northerly right of way line, 11.03 feet, to the Point of Beginning, containing 0.0539 acre, more or less (area based on ground distances).

20513013TE-B

That part of the Northeast Quarter of Section 20, Township 44 North, Range 3 East of the Third Principal Meridian, Boone County, State of Illinois, with bearings and grid distances referenced to the Illinois State Plane Coordinate System, East Zone NAD 83 (2011 ADJ), with a combined factor of 0.9999985, described as follows:

Commencing at the southwest corner of said Northeast Quarter of Section 20; thence North 89 degrees 38 minuets 27 seconds East, on the south line of said Northeast Quarter, 887.45 feet to a perpendicular line; thence North 00 degrees 21 minuets 33 seconds West, on said perpendicular line, 105.90 feet to the Point of Beginning.

From said Point of Beginning; thence North 00 degrees 16 minuets 14 seconds West, 60.00 feet; thence North 89 degrees 43 minuets 46 seconds East, 50.00 feet; thence South 00 degrees 16 minuets 14 seconds East 60.00 feet; thence South 89 degrees 43 minuets 46 seconds West, 50.00 feet to the Point of Beginning, containing 0.0689 acre, more of less (area based on ground distances).

Said Parcels 20513013TE-A & B contain a total of 0.1228 acre, more or less (area based on ground distances).

PIN:05-20-200-013; that summons was duly noticed out of the said Court against you as provided by law and that said suit is now pending. The aid Complaint is for the ascertaining of the just compensation to be paid to the owner: Deer Hills, LLC; Deer Hills Homeowner's Association; BMO Harris Bank, N.A., successor to Amcore Bank, National Association; City of Belvidere, a Municipal Corporation; Deer Hills Estates, LLC; Deer Hills Residential, Inc.; Landmark Development, Inc.; Unknown Owners and Non-Record Claimants, Generally, for the fee taking and temporary easement acquisitions to the above described real property sought to be acquired for the purposes of widening a public highway.

Now, therefore, unless you the said above named defendants, unknown owners and non-record claimants file your appearance in the said suit, in the office of the Clerk of the Circuit Court Boone County, Law Division, Boone County Courthouse, Boone, Illinois, on or beforeNovember 27, 2026, an order or default may be entered against you at any time after that day and judgement entered in accordance with the prayer of said Complaint.

Dated: Boone, Illinois
Clerk of the Circuit Court
Kwame Raoul, Attorney General, Vincent D. Minelli,
Special Assistant Attorney General Attorney for Plaintiff.
70 West Madison, Suite 4300, Chicago, IL 60602;
Attorney No.3122437
Published in the Boone County Journal 10/27, 11/03, 11/10

IN THE CIRCUIT COURT OF
THE SEVENTEENTH JUDICIAL CIRCUIT
BELVIDERE, BOONE COUNTY, ILLINOIS
FIRST MID BANK & TRUST, NATIONAL ASSOCIATION, Plaintiff,
vs. CASE NO. 26-FC-57
UNKNOWN HEIRS AND DEVISEES OF BETTY J WALLEY, DECEASED, UNKNOWN CLAIMANTS AND LIENHOLDERS AGAINST THE ESTATE OF BETTY J WALLEY, DECEASED, UNKNOWN CLAIMANTS AND LIENHOLDERS AGAINST THE UNKNOWN HEIRS AND DEVISEES OF BETTY J WALLEY, DECEASED AND SHERRY ZACK, AS SPECIAL REPRESENTATIVE OF BETTY J WALLEY, DECEASED, Defendants.
PROPERTY ADDRESS:
702 FREMONT ST
BELVIDERE, IL 61008
NOTICE BY PUBLICATION

NOTICE IS GIVEN YOU, Unknown Heirs and Devisees of Betty J Walley, deceased, Unknown Claimants and Lienholders Against the Estate of Betty J Walley, deceased and Unknown Claimants and Lienholders Against the Unknown Heirs and Devisees of Betty J Walley, deceased, Defendants, this case has been commenced in this Court against you and others, asking for foreclosure of the Mortgage held by the Plaintiff on the property located at 702 Fremont St, Belvidere, IL 61008, more particularly described as:

i. The names of all plaintiffs and the case number are identified above.

ii. The court in which said action was brought is identified above.

iii. The names of the title holders of record are: Heirs and Devisees of Betty J. Walley, deceased

iv.A legal description of the real estate sufficient to identify it with reasonable certainty is as follows:

A part of Lot Two (2) in Block Six (6) in Otis Caswell's Addition to Belvidere, as platted and recorded in the Recorder's Office of Boone County, Illinois, in Book S of Deeds, page 356, bounded and described as follows: Commencing at the Northwesterly corner of said Lot Two (2) and running thence South Five (5) rods; thence East Forty-five and Thirty-seven Hundredths (45.37) feet; thence North Five (5) rods; thence West Forty-five and Thirty-seven Hundredths (45.37) feet to the place of beginning; situated in the County of Boone and State of Illinois.

Permanent Index Number: 05-36-133-001

v. A common address or description of the location for the real estate is as follows:

702 Fremont St, Belvidere, IL 61008

vi. An identification of the mortgage sought to be foreclosed is as follows:

Names of the Mortgagors: Gary E Walley, husband and Betty J Walley, wife
Names of the Mortgagee: Blackhawk Bank
Date of the Mortgage: July 20, 2022
Date of the recording: July 25, 2022
County where recorded: Boone County
Recording document identification: Document No. 2022R04277

YOU MAY STILL BE ABLE TO SAVE YOUR HOME. DO NOT IGNORE THIS DOCUMENT. By order of the Chief Judge of the Seventeenth Judicial Circuit, this case is subject to the Residential Mortgage Foreclosure Mediation Program. You must follow the instructions issued by the Program to participate.

UNLESS YOU FILE your answer or otherwise file your appearance in this cause in the Office of the Clerk of this Court at the Boone County Courthouse, 601 North Main Street, #303, Belvidere, IL 61008-2644 on or before November 26, 2026, A JUDGMENT OR DECREE BY DEFAULT MAY BE TAKEN AGAINST YOU FOR RELIEF ASKED IN THE COMPLAINT FOR FORECLOSURE.

CLERK OF THE COURT

THIS IS AN ATTEMPT TO COLLECT A DEBT, AND ANY INFORMATION OBTAINED WILL BE USED FOR THAT PURPOSE.

Karen C. Mitch (#6291822)
HEAVNER, BEYERS & MIHLAR, LLC
Attorneys at Law
601 East William Street
Decatur, IL 62523
Email: Non-CookPleadings@hsbattys.com
Telephone: (217) 422-1719
Facsimile: (217) 422-1754
6088-970491

Published in the Boone County Journal 10/27, 11/03, 11/10

IN THE CIRCUIT COURT OF
THE SEVENTEENTH JUDICIAL CIRCUIT
BOONE COUNTY, ILLINOIS
MIDFIRST BANK Plaintiff,
-v.- 25 FC 34
DARRELL M REIDINGER; UNITED STATES OF AMERICA; Defendants.
1625 Wildrose, Belvidere, IL 61008

NOTICE OF SALE PUBLIC NOTICE IS HEREBY GIVEN that pursuant to a Judgment of Foreclosure and Sale entered in the above cause on 6/30/2026, an agent of Auction.com, LLC will conduct the Online Only auction at www.auction.com, with the bidding window opening on 12/14/2026 at 10:00 AM CDT and closing on December 16, 2026 at 10:00 AM subject to extension, and will sell at public sale to the highest bidder, as set forth below, the following described real estate.

LOT 102 IN DAWNGATE SUBDIVISION PLAT NO. 3, BEING PART OF THE SOUTHEAST 1/4 OF SECTION 36, TOWNSHIP 44 NORTH, RANGE 3 EAST OF THE THIRD PRINCIPAL MERIDIAN, ACCORDING TO THE PLAT THEREOF RECORDED APRIL 19, 1994 AS DOCUMENT NO. 94-3319 IN THE RECORDER'S OFFICE OF BOONE COUNTY; SITUATED IN THE COUNTY OF BOONE AND THE STATE OF ILLINOIS.

Commonly known as 1625 Wildrose, Belvidere, IL 61008
Property Index No. 05-36-478-021

The real estate is improved with a Single Family Residence. The judgment amount was $175,510.25 Sale Terms: Full Sale Terms are available on the property page at www.auction.com by entering 1625 Wildrose into the search bar. If sold to anyone other than the Plaintiff, the winning bidder must pay the full bid amount within twenty-four (24) hours of the auction's end. All payments must be certified funds. No third-party checks will be accepted. All bidders will need to register at www.auction.com prior to placing a bid. The subject property is subject to general real estate taxes, special assessments, or special taxes levied against said real estate and is offered for sale without any representation as to quality or quantity of title and without recourse to plaintiff and in "AS IS" condition. The sale is further subject to confirmation by the court. Upon payment in full of the amount bid, the purchaser will receive a certificate of sale that will entitle the purchaser to a deed to the real estate after confirmation of the sale. The property will NOT be open for inspection and plaintiff makes no representation as to the condition of the property, prospective bidders are admonished to check the court file to verify all information. If this property is a condominium unit, the purchaser of the unit at the foreclosure sale, other than a mortgagee, shall pay the assessments and the legal fees required by the Condominium property Act, 765 ILCS 605/9 (g)(l) and (g)(4). If this property is a condominium unit which is part of a common interest community, the purchaser of the unit at the foreclosure sale other than a mortgagee shall pay the assess-

ments required by the Condominium Property Act, 765 ILCS 605/18.5(g-1). IF YOU ARE THE MORTGAGOR (HOMEOWNER), YOU HAVE THE RIGHT TO REMAIN IN POSSESSION FOR 30 DAYS AFTER ENTRY OF AN ORDER OF POSSESSION, IN ACCORDANCE WITH SECTION 15-1701 (C) OF THE ILLINOIS MORTGAGE FORECLOSURE LAW. For information, contact Plaintiffs attorney: LOGS Legal Group LLP (847) 291 1717 please refer to file number 25-103263-FC01. Auction.com, LLC 100 N LaSalle St., Suite 1400, Chicago, IL 60602 - 872-225-4985 You can also visit www.auction.com. Attorney File No. 25-103263-FC01 Case Number: 25 FC 34 NOTE: PURSUANT TO THE FAIR DEBT COLLECTION PRACTICES ACT, YOU ARE ADVISED THAT PLAINTIFF'S ATTORNEY IS DEEMED TO BE A DEBT COLLECTOR ATTEMPTING TO COLLECT A DEBT AND ANY INFORMATION OBTAINED WILL BE USED FOR THAT PURPOSE. I3296956

Published in The Boone County Journal Nov 3, 10, 17, 2026 PNN

LEGAL NOTICENOTICE TO BIDDERS

NORTH BOONE COMMUNITY UNIT SCHOOL DISTRICT NO. 200

MECHANICAL/HVAC PREVENTATIVE MAINTENANCE - #27-02

North Boone Community Unit School District No. 200 seeks qualified firms to deliver consistent, documented preventive maintenance for mechanical and HVAC assets across seven district facilities. The objective is to maintain safe, reliable, efficient buildings; detect failures early; establish an accurate asset inventory; and support proactive capital planning. Proposals must use the common scope and pricing format below to permit direct comparison.

Sealed proposals must be clearly marked "MECHANICAL & HVAC PREVENTATIVE MAINTENANCE #27-02" and delivered to:
North Boone Community Unit School District No. 200District Office
6248 North Boone School Road
Poplar Grove, Illinois 61065

Proposals will be publicly opened and read aloud in the District Office Large Conference Room at the address listed above at 10:30 A.M. (prevailing time) on December 8th, 2026. Late proposals, facsimile submissions, and electronic submissions will not be accepted. The District reserves the right to reject any or all proposals and to waive informalities or irregularities in any proposal.

Complete specifications and proposal documents are available on the District's website at www.nbcusd.org under the Business Services section.

All questions regarding this RFP must be submitted in writing via email to Mr. Jimmy Helmick at jhelmick@nbcusd.org no later than five (5) business days prior to the proposal opening date.

Published in The Boone County Journal Nov 3, 2026

IN THE CIRCUIT COURT OF
THE SEVENTEENTH JUDICIAL CIRCUIT
BOONE COUNTY, ILLINOIS
U.S. BANK NATIONAL ASSOCIATION Plaintiff,
-v.- 2024 FC 50
SHAWN L. HARTMAN, ILLINOIS HOUSING DEVELOPMENT AUTHORITY, Defendant

NOTICE OF SALE

PUBLIC NOTICE IS HEREBY GIVEN that pursuant to a Judgment of Foreclosure and Sale entered in the above cause on August 11, 2026, an agent for The Judicial Sales Corporation, will at 1:00 PM on December 7, 2026, at the Advocus National Title Insurance, 530 S. State, Suite 201, (Logan Avenue entrance), Belvidere, IL, 61008, sell at public in-person sale to the highest bidder, as set forth below, the following described real estate:

The North Half (1/2) of Lot Four (4) in Block One (1) as designated upon the plat of Otis Caswell`s Addition to Belvidere, as platted and recorded in the Recorder`s Office of Boone Count, Illinois; situated in Boone County, State of Illinois.

Commonly known as 624 FREMONT STREET, BELVIDERE, IL 61008
Property Index No. 05-36-129-003
The real estate is improved with a single family residence.
The judgment amount was $182,655.36.

Sale terms: If sold to anyone other than the Plaintiff, 25% down of the highest bid by certified funds at the close of the sale payable to The Judicial Sales Corporation. No third party checks will be accepted. The balance, in certified funds/or wire transfer, is due within twenty-four (24) hours. The subject property is subject to general real estate taxes, special assessments, or special taxes levied against said real estate and is offered for sale without any representation as to quality or quantity of title and without recourse to Plaintiff and in ''AS IS'' condition. The sale is further subject to confirmation by the court.

Upon payment in full of the amount bid, the purchaser will receive a Certificate of Sale that will entitle the purchaser to a deed to the real estate after confirmation of the sale.

The property will NOT be open for inspection and plaintiff makes no representation as to the condition of the property. Prospective bidders are admonished to check the court file to verify all information.

If this property is a condominium unit, the purchaser of the unit at the foreclosure sale, other than a mortgagee, shall pay the assessments and the legal fees required by The Condominium Property Act, 765 ILCS 605/9(g)(1) and (g)(4). If this property is a condominium unit which is part of a common interest community, the purchaser of the unit at the foreclosure sale other than a mortgagee shall pay the assessments required by The Condominium Property Act, 765 ILCS 605/18.5(g-1).

IF YOU ARE THE MORTGAGOR (HOMEOWNER), YOU HAVE THE RIGHT TO REMAIN IN POSSESSION FOR 30 DAYS AFTER ENTRY OF AN ORDER OF POSSESSION, IN ACCORDANCE WITH SECTION 15-1701(C) OF THE ILLINOIS MORTGAGE FORECLOSURE LAW.

You will need a photo identification issued by a government agency (driver's license, passport, etc.) in order to gain entry into our building and the foreclosure sale room in Cook County and the same identification for sales held at other county venues where The Judicial Sales Corporation conducts foreclosure sales.

For information, contact RANDALL S. MILLER & ASSOCIATES Plaintiff's Attorneys, 120 N. LASALLE STREET, SUITE 1140, Chicago, IL, 60602 (312) 239-3432. Please refer to file number 24IL00370-1.
THE JUDICIAL SALES CORPORATION
One South Wacker Drive, 24th Floor, Chicago, IL 60606-4650 (312) 236-SALE
You can also visit The Judicial Sales Corporation at www.tjsc.com for a 7 day status report of pending sales.
RANDALL S. MILLER & ASSOCIATES
120 N. LASALLE STREET, SUITE 1140
Chicago IL, 60602
312-239-3432
E-Mail: ilpleadings@rsmalaw.com
Attorney File No. 24IL00370-1
Case Number: 2024 FC 50
TJSC#: 46-2087
NOTE: Pursuant to the Fair Debt Collection Practices Act, you are advised that Plaintiff's attorney is deemed to be a debt collector attempting to collect a debt and any information obtained will be used for that purpose.
Case # 2024 FC 50 6088-970785

Published in The Boone County Journal Nov 3, 10, 17, 2026 SW

ORDER Docket No: 26-51

In re: Application of the Steve Thomas for Approval of the Extension or Alteration to Poplar Grove Airport

On 9/20/2026, Steve Thomas filed an Application for Approval of Extension/Alteration in the name of Poplar Grove Airport for the reorientation of Runway 17/35 at Poplar Grove Airport. The airport is located near Belvidere, in the South ½ of the Northwest ¼, in the Northeast ¼ of the Southwest ¼ and the Southeast ¼ of the Southwest ¼ of Section 11 also the Southeast ¼ of the Northeast ¼ of Section 2, all in township 44 North, Range 3 East of the Third Principal Meridian in Boone County, Illinois

This airport was originally approved and a Certificate of Approval issued to John A. Strom & Richard Thomas on October 10, 1972 in the name if Belvidere Airport. The airport was renamed to Poplar Grove Airport, still under the ownership of the Steve Thomas and the Village of Poplar Grove in 1996

Said extension or alteration will consist of reorientation of Runway 17/35 to 18/36, and shortening the width of the runway to 60 feet.

On or about October 29, 2026, the Division served Notice of its intention to enter an Order approving said application, pursuant to Section 60 (620 ILCS 05/60) of the Illinois Aeronautics Act. No comments have been received by the Division on this matter.

IT IS, THEREFORE, ORDERED BY THE DIVISON OF AERONAUTICS AS FOLLOWS:

1. That the above-entitled application for approval of the extension or alteration to Poplar Grove Airport be and it is hereby approved.

2. That the requirements and limitations of all Orders previously issued by the Division pertaining to this airport shall remain in effect, except as changed by this or successor Orders.

3. Said airport shall conform to all requirements (including writer notice of abandonment) to this Division

4. Unless the Division finds that a hearing is necessary or that a longer period is appropriate, this Order shall take effect twenty (20) days after the service date thereof.

5. This Order and the Certificate of Approval create no private interest in the applicant or its successors. The Division expressly reserves the authority to revoke or modify said Certificate of Approval when in the public interest to do so.

6. This Order and any Certificate of Approval issued pursuant thereto do not pre-empt, waive, suspend or modify zoning regulations, building code requirements, or local ordinance adopted by local governmental bodies.

7. The Certificate of Approval must be modified or reissued if any additional alteration or extension is made to the airport.

Please address any comments or request for a hearing regarding this Order within fifteen (15) days after the date of service to: IDOT, Division of Aeronautics, Bureau of Aviation Safety, 1 Langhorne Bond Drive, Springfield, Illinois 62707-8415

Clayton Stambaugh, Deputy Director
Office of Intermodal Project Implementation, IDOT
DATED: October 29, 2026
TO BE SERVED: November 5, 2026

Published in The Boone County Journal Nov 3, 2026

ASSUMED NAMES

CHANGE IN CERTIFICATE OF OWNERSHIP OF
BUSINESS PUBLICATION NOTICE

Public Notice is hereby given that on OCTOBER 13, A.D. 2026, a certificate was filed in the Office of the County Clerk of Boone County, Illinois, concerning the business known as THE INDIGO ROOM, located at 110 LOVSEE ROAD, ROSCOE, IL 61073, which certificate sets forth the following changes in the operation thereof: BUSINESS IS DISSOLVED PER OWNER MICHELE HANSEL.

Dated this 13 day of OCTOBER, A.D. 2026
Amy E. Ohlsen, Boone County Clerk
Published in Boone County Journal 10/20, 10/27, 11/03/26 - P

STATE OF ILLINOIS COUNTY of BOONE COUNTY
ASSUMED NAME CERTIFICATE OF INTENTION

No. DBA4304 - The undersigned person(s) do hereby certify that a CORN STAND business is or is to be conducted or transacted under the name of ELOTES MIGUELON that its location is or will be 1418 GREEN STREET in ROCKFORD , IL in the County of BOONE COUNTY, State of Illinois, and that the true or real name(s) of the person(s) owning, conducting, or transacting the same with the post office address or address of said person(s) is shown below.

Phone Number: 779-384-9308
SOSIMA GUADALUPE HERNANDEZ
1418 GREEN ST ROCKFORD, ILLINOIS 61102
SANCHEZ

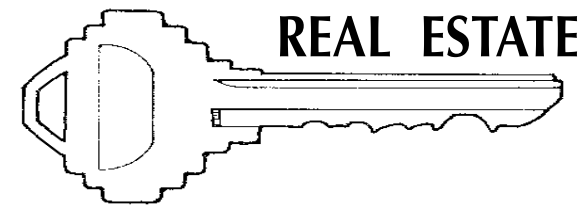
I, Amy E. Ohlsen, Clerk & Recorder of Boone County, in the State aforesaid, do hereby certify that the within is a true and correct copy of an Assumed Name Certificate on file in my office. Dated: Wednesday, October 28, 2026

Amy E. Ohlsen, Clerk & Recorder of Boone County
Published in Boone County Journal 11/3, 11/10, 11/17 - P

CHANGE IN CERTIFICATE OF OWNERSHIP OF
BUSINESS PUBLICATION NOTICE

Public Notice is hereby given that on OCTOBER 26, A.D. 2026, a certificate was filed in the Office of the County Clerk of Boone County, Illinois, concerning the business known as ROSSY'S HAIR SALON, located at 224 N. STATE STREET, BELVIDERE, IL 61008, which certificate sets forth the following changes in the operation thereof: BUSINESS HAS BEEN DISSOLVED.

Dated this 26 day of OCTOBER, A.D. 2026
Amy E. Ohlsen, Boone County Clerk
Published in Boone County Journal 11/03, 11/10, 11/17/26 - P



IN THE CIRCUIT COURT OF
THE SEVENTEENTH JUDICIAL CIRCUIT
BOONE COUNTY, ILLINOIS
U.S. BANK NATIONAL ASSOCIATION Plaintiff,
-v.- 2024 FC 50
SHAWN L. HARTMAN, ILLINOIS HOUSING DEVELOPMENT AUTHORITY, Defendant

NOTICE OF SALE

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Commonly known as 624 FREMONT STREET, BELVIDERE, IL 61008
Property Index No. 05-36-129-003
The real estate is improved with a single family residence.
The judgment amount was $182,655.36.

Sale terms: If sold to anyone other than the Plaintiff, 25% down of the highest bid by certified funds at the close of the sale payable to The Judicial Sales Corporation. No third party checks will be accepted. The balance, in certified funds/or wire transfer, is due within twenty-four (24) hours. The subject property is subject to general real estate taxes, special assessments, or special taxes levied against said real estate and is offered for sale without any representation as to quality or quantity of title and without recourse to Plaintiff and in ''AS IS'' condition. The sale is further subject to confirmation by the court.

Upon payment in full of the amount bid, the purchaser will receive a Certificate of Sale that will entitle the purchaser to a deed to the real estate after confirmation of the sale.

The property will NOT be open for inspection and plaintiff makes no representation as to the condition of the property. Prospective bidders are admonished to check the court file to verify all information.

If this property is a condominium unit, the purchaser of the unit at the foreclosure sale, other than a mortgagee, shall pay the assessments and the legal fees required by The Condominium Property Act, 765 ILCS 605/9(g)(1) and (g)(4). If this property is a condominium unit which is part of a common interest community, the purchaser of the unit at the foreclosure sale other than a mortgagee shall pay the assessments required by The Condominium Property Act, 765 ILCS 605/18.5(g-1).

IF YOU ARE THE MORTGAGOR (HOMEOWNER), YOU HAVE THE RIGHT TO REMAIN IN POSSESSION FOR 30 DAYS AFTER ENTRY OF AN ORDER OF POSSESSION, IN ACCORDANCE WITH SECTION 15-1701(C) OF THE ILLINOIS MORTGAGE FORECLOSURE LAW.

You will need a photo identification issued by a government agency (driver's license, passport, etc.) in order to gain entry into our building and the foreclosure sale room in Cook County and the same identification for sales held at other county venues where The Judicial Sales Corporation conducts foreclosure sales.

For information, contact RANDALL S. MILLER & ASSOCIATES Plaintiff's Attorneys, 120 N. LASALLE STREET, SUITE 1140, Chicago, IL, 60602 (312) 239-3432. Please refer to file number 24IL00370-1.
THE JUDICIAL SALES CORPORATION
One South Wacker Drive, 24th Floor, Chicago, IL 60606-4650 (312) 236-SALE
You can also visit The Judicial Sales Corporation at www.tjsc.com for a 7 day status report of pending sales.
RANDALL S. MILLER & ASSOCIATES
120 N. LASALLE STREET, SUITE 1140
Chicago IL, 60602
312-239-3432
E-Mail: ilpleadings@rsmalaw.com
Attorney File No. 24IL00370-1
Case Number: 2024 FC 50
TJSC#: 46-2087
NOTE: Pursuant to the Fair Debt Collection Practices Act, you are advised that Plaintiff's attorney is deemed to be a debt collector attempting to collect a debt and any information obtained will be used for that purpose.
Case # 2024 FC 50 6088-970785

Published in The Boone County Journal Nov 3, 10, 17, 2026 SW

IN THE CIRCUIT COURT OF
THE SEVENTEENTH JUDICIAL CIRCUIT
BOONE COUNTY, ILLINOIS
MIDFIRST BANK Plaintiff,
-v.- 25 FC 34
DARRELL M REIDINGER; UNITED STATES OF AMERICA; Defendants.
1625 Wildrose, Belvidere, IL 61008

NOTICE OF SALE PUBLIC NOTICE IS HEREBY GIVEN that pursuant to a Judgment of Foreclosure and Sale entered in the above cause on 6/30/2026, an agent of Auction.com, LLC will conduct the Online Only auction at www.auction.com, with the bidding window opening on 12/14/2026 at 10:00 AM CDT and closing on December 16, 2026 at 10:00 AM subject to extension, and will sell at public sale to the highest bidder, as set forth below, the following described real estate.

Commonly known as 1625 Wildrose, Belvidere, IL 61008
Property Index No. 05-36-478-021

The real estate is improved with a Single Family Residence. The judgment amount was $175,510.25 Sale Terms: Full Sale Terms are available on the property page at www.auction.com by entering 1625 Wildrose into the search bar. If sold to anyone other than the Plaintiff, the winning bidder must pay the full bid amount within twenty-four (24) hours of the auction's end. All payments must be certified funds. No third-party checks will be accepted. All bidders will need to register at www.auction.com prior to placing a bid. The subject property is subject to general real estate taxes, special assessments, or special taxes levied against said real estate and is offered for sale without any representation as to quality or quantity of title and without recourse to plaintiff and in "AS IS" condition. The sale is further subject to confirmation by the court. Upon payment in full of the amount bid, the purchaser will receive a certificate of sale that will entitle the purchaser to a deed to the real estate after confirmation of the sale. The property will NOT be open for inspection and plaintiff makes no representation as to the condition of the property, prospective bidders are admonished to check the court file to verify all information. If this property is a condominium unit, the purchaser of the unit at the foreclosure sale, other than a mortgagee, shall pay the assessments and the legal fees required by the Condominium property

continued on page 8

Act, 765 ILCS 605/9 (g)(l) and (g)(4). If this property is a condominium unit which is part of a common interest community, the purchaser of the unit at the foreclosure sale other than a mortgagee shall pay the assessments required by the Condominium Property Act, 765 ILCS 605/18.5(g-1). IF YOU ARE THE MORTGAGOR (HOMEOWNER), YOU HAVE THE RIGHT TO REMAIN IN POSSESSION FOR 30 DAYS AFTER ENTRY OF AN ORDER OF POSSESSION, IN ACCORDANCE WITH SECTION 15-1701 (C) OF THE ILLINOIS MORTGAGE FORECLOSURE LAW. For information, contact Plaintiffs attorney: LOGS Legal Group LLP (847) 291 1717 please refer to file number 25-103263-FC01. Auction.com, LLC 100 N LaSalle St., Suite 1400, Chicago, IL 60602 - 872-225-4985 You can also visit www.auction.com. Attorney File No. 25-103263-FC01 Case Number: 25 FC 34 NOTE: PURSUANT TO THE FAIR DEBT COLLECTION PRACTICES ACT, YOU ARE ADVISED THAT PLAINTIFF'S ATTORNEY IS DEEMED TO BE A DEBT COLLECTOR ATTEMPTING TO COLLECT A DEBT AND ANY INFORMATION OBTAINED WILL BE USED FOR THAT PURPOSE. I3296956

Published in The Boone County Journal Nov 3, 10, 17, 2026

Prosecutors

from page 4

The court researcher

Bradley VanHoose was a Belleville high school jock who cut grass for a lawn service before he discovered his calling in court research.

He learned his craft tracking the torrent of asbestos lawsuits sluicing through Madison County, a national clearinghouse for plaintiffs' claims. Colleagues described him as a hard-charging, meticulous researcher.

"I'm a good digger, and I'll be honest with you — it's what I should have been doing my whole life," he told Injustice Watch.

Court researcher Bradley VanHoose made it his mission to learn everything he could about Illinois Special Prosecutor David Rands.

VanHoose is also well known around town as a lightning rod who maintains a frequent — sometimes vitriolic — presence on social media, posting about local and national politics.

In 2016, special prosecutor David Rands charged VanHoose with threatening a former mayor of Caseyville, Illinois, during a profanity-laced confrontation outside a local diner. VanHoose and the former mayor were related by marriage, and they had argued publicly in the past. VanHoose was exonerated by an appellate court following a four-year legal battle.

VanHoose applied his research skills to Rands, sketching out a rough spreadsheet of Rands' cases in St. Clair County. Then he queried ILSAAP and the local state's attorney for details on Rands' assignments, digitized the data, and compiled a cache of documents.

Rands consistently downgraded charges of drunken driving and sexual abuse against the relatives of politically powerful people, Injustice Watch found in an analysis of VanHoose's court records.

In the courthouses of St. Clair and other counties, Rands had garnered a nickname.

"They called him 'Rollover Rands,'" VanHoose said. "If your mommy and daddy are somebody important down here, or you get the right attorney, get it into the appellate prosecutor's hands. Rands would just basically roll over and let the case go. Like magic, the charges will be gone."

Among those well-connected defendants were the son of a Fifth District Illinois appellate judge who had faced alcohol-related driving charges in St. Clair County, as well as in Missouri and Tennessee.

After Rands reduced their charges to minor infractions like improper lane use, many of those defendants had their cases expunged, eliminating any public record of what Rands had done.

In cases that stretch from 2001 to today, it is often impossible to tell why Rands was appointed as special prosecutor in the first place — in documents referring cases to his office, the rationale was often left blank.

In one quarterly report, Rands wrote he was assigned to handle ordinance violations involving a strip club because it was a "high profile matter for State's Attorney; causing a lot of upset on County Board." Special prosecutors are supposed to be called in only when the local prosecutor has a real or perceived conflict of interest.

A similarly baffling assignment came in 2015, when then-33-year-old Blaine Zdybel was arrested at Belleville's Skyview Drive-In movie theater for allegedly exposing himself and propositioning two boys in the restroom. Rands was appointed special prosecutor but never brought Zdybel to trial; the case is still listed as open on the official docket of the St. Clair County Circuit Court Clerk.

While the case dragged on unresolved, Zdybel was charged five times with child sex crimes in Horry County, South Carolina, with one conviction, two dismissals, and two recent cases pending. He also pleaded guilty to indecent liberties with a minor in Pender County, North Carolina. He is a registered sex offender in both states.

Rands' inactivity in the Belleville arrest meant Zdybel faced no justice or accountability in St. Clair County, no chance at court-mandated treatment, and no registration on Illinois' sex offender registry.

One of Bradley VanHoose's hand-drawn spreadsheets tracking cases pursued by Illinois special prosecutor David Rands. Defendant names have been redacted. Courtesy of Bradley VanHoose

One of Rands' duties in St. Clair County was to review police-involved fatal shootings and make an independent determination of whether charges against the officer were appropriate.

ILSAAP plays a similar function in Cook County, where it has conducted 73 such reviews from 2016 to last year, never once overruling the Cook County state's attorney's decision not to charge, Injustice Watch found.

Among the cases Rands cleared in St. Clair County was the 2016 shooting of 35-year-old Jason Stringer, an unarmed Black man, by an off-duty police officer in a suburban Wal-Mart parking lot.

According to a police report, officer Christopher Heatherly, along with two other local officers and a police dog, approached Stringer as he and his girlfriend walked out of the Wal-Mart. As Stringer ran to his car, Heatherly pinned Stringer's girlfriend to the pavement then shot into Stringer's car, later saying he thought Stringer was trying to ram into them.

Rands cleared Heatherly in a two-page letter to St. Clair County's chief judge: "It is this office's opinion that no criminal charges should be filed against the officer in this matter."

But Rands' letter omitted key information about Heatherly's credibility found in other public records, Injustice Watch found.

Heatherly "knew Mr. Stringer was considered to be armed and dangerous," Rands wrote. But Stringer was not armed, and no weapon was retrieved at the scene, according to a 157-page Illinois State Police report. In a local news interview, Stringer's girlfriend later disputed the police's account and denied that Stringer was trying to ram them with his car.

Before the Stringer shooting, Heatherly had worked at seven southern Illinois police departments in 15 years. He lost one job at the East St. Louis Police Department after a shooting the police chief there said was reckless and endangered the life of another officer.

After Rands cleared him, Heatherly would go on to be convicted of misuse of official information by a public official for disclosing personal information from police files, court records show.

Heatherly, now retired, told Injustice Watch the Stringer shooting was justified; he is appealing his 2024 conviction. He said of his career, "I got on some bad departments. When you are a good police officer who wants to work hard, sometimes when you come to a department that is not used to working hard, it ruffles feathers."

Today, VanHoose and Ajster still reckon with the fallout from the special prosecutors' failed attempts to put them in prison. Both say they tapped their savings to clear their names in court, and lost friends and even family amid the prosecutors' attacks.

VanHoose says his 74-year-old father died in 2017 believing VanHoose had committed a felony.

"I didn't even get to talk to my dad at the end of his life," VanHoose said. "That's what hardened my heart, and got me in the courthouse digging."

Rands and Towne remain mainstays of the Special Prosecution Unit.

Between them they handled 177 cases in 20 counties during 2024, the most recent year for which complete records were available.

David Jackson was a senior reporter at Injustice Watch from 2023 to 2026, where he reported on judges, elder financial exploitation, and the court system. Before joining Injustice Watch, he was an investigative reporter at the Chicago Tribune and the Washington Post, where he won a Pulitzer Prize, a senior editor at Chicago magazine, and a writer for alternative weeklies. His stories have sparked legislative hearings, exposed official corruption, and lifted the voices of neglected people. He was born and raised in Chicago.

Injustice Watch is the only newsroom in Cook County dedicated to reporting on the court system. Our goal is one of public service: to listen to and center people affected by institutional injustices and provide our community with the information and resources needed to hold power to account.

