

Perry County 2024 VOLUNTEERS



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Citizens ELECTRIC:

////// A COMMITMENT TO VOLUNTEERISM

Since 1947, the Citizens Electric Corporation in Perryville has been serving the community — both on and off the clock. According to Communications Specialist Kelli Behrle, in addition to Citizens Electric's company-wide commitment to volunteerism, nearly all 80 employees volunteer their time in various ways across the county and beyond.

"Citizens Electric Corporation's commitment to volunteerism runs deep within a set of seven cooperative principles of which 'Concern for Community' is a fundamental principle," Behrle wrote in an email to the Republic-Monitor. "Offering flexible scheduling for employees to fulfill volunteer commitments is something we see benefits our employee well-being, strengthens overall leadership and allows our organization to further broaden our reach, which ultimately strengthens the services we offer."

The company's service territory includes Perry County and St. Genevieve County, as well as northern Cape Girardeau County. According to Behrle, involvement in events that take place within the service area not only allows Citizens Electric to give back to the community, but it helps them keep a pulse on member satisfaction as well.

Throughout the year, the company hosts a Thanksgiving food drive, Easter egg hunt, and participates in local parades and weekend Touch-a-Truck events.

"Several of our employees have been involved in a two-year project with several partners planting trees in an open area, creating green space and a walking trail," Behrle wrote.

As a company, Citizens Electric also has a commitment to safety education at local fire departments and schools.

On their own time, many employees volunteer at local churches, schools, civic organizations, sporting events, community events, and more.

"It is literally our job to put our energy to work for the communities we serve!" Behrle wrote. "The magnitude of our organization's regional impact started its roots over 76 years ago and is something that we are proud to continually build upon today."



By Heather C. Wentz
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Paul BARBER:

ALL ABOUT THE GAME



For 45-year-old Paul Barber of Altenburg, baseball has been a common thread in every chapter of his life. At Perryville High School, he was a pitcher, catcher and third baseman. Through the military and his 9-year career with Citizens Electric, he has always been a part of a local league. This summer, with two sons of his own, he will enter his fourth year as a coach for the Midwest Thunder youth baseball organization.

"I'm the head coach of the 9-year-olds and assistant coach of the 11-year-olds," said Barber. "These 9-year-olds are fun because this is the first year they are pitching. It's a lot of fun to teach them how to go from a machine pitch to a real person."

According to Barber, 9-year-old Brett and 11-year-old William have kept him busy with the national pastime since they started playing T-ball six years ago.

The Midwest Thunder youth baseball organization is a collection of tryout-only travel teams composed of players aged 7-16. Age ranges are grouped according to the number of participating players. The organization was founded by Barber's older brother, Mark Barber.

"He just started the program, and it's an easy way for someone to start a team," Barber said. "Every age group has a team and a coach for that age group. It kind of depends on the demand."

According to Barber, the Midwest Thunder program fills a gap between T-ball, Little League, and high school baseball opportunities.

"There's nothing else offered at this time until a certain age, so we try to provide some sort of opportunity," Barber said.

The traveling teams begin practices in February one day a week, with games on weekends from March to June.

"We practice once a week on Thursdays, and it's usually 1.5 to 2 hours," Barber said. "Then it's typically three to four games in a weekend, and you're finished by Sunday."

Barber stated that a season includes approximately 7 weekend tournaments, or 25 games overall. The teams travel to locations in southeast Missouri and southwest Illinois, including Cape Girardeau, Ste. Genevieve, Sikeston, St. Louis, and Marion, Ill.

According to the organization's website, Midwest Thunder's mission is "to develop young men in our surrounding area, both fundamentally and personally, through the game of baseball, and to teach and educate our players on the life lessons that come with learning to play the game."

Outside of Midwest Thunder, Barber volunteers in various organizations and positions at Immanuel Lutheran Church in Altenburg, coaches 11- and 12-year-olds in the City of Perryville Recreation Baseball League, and has coached a men's fast-pitch league in Frohna for 10 years.

"I just have a lot of respect for the game," Barber said. "I think it can teach all of us something."

Tryouts for Midwest Thunder begin in July, and registration forms can be found at www.midwestthunderbaseball.com.

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Mike ENGERT:

GIVING BACK AT THE EAST END

Mike Engert's childhood memories are intertwined with the rural charm of tractor pulls, mule jumps, and 4-H exhibits. In January, the 49-year-old Altenburg native was elected board president for the East Perry Community Fair, which is held annually in September at the fairgrounds in Altenburg, Mo.

But for Engert, the election is just a formality.

"It kind of runs in the family," said Engert, who has served on the board in various positions for 12 years, including previous roles as president and publicity chairman, and has been personally involved since 1998. "My dad was a former member for the fair, so I grew up around it. When he'd go to the fairgrounds, I'd tag along."

When he reached his teen years, Engert joined the Junior Chamber of Commerce and participated in fundraising efforts for the event.

"That was my start at that age," Engert said. "It progressed from there and I just kept with the fair and have a really good time doing it. It's a non-paying deal, but you get out of it what you put into it, and there are just a bunch of people who step in and do their part."

The fair board consists of 9 members, including a smaller number that form the executive board. Many others volunteer their time and energy to organize the fair's various events and exhibitions.

As board president, Engert's responsibilities range from publicity for the event to decisions on entertainment and vendors.

"I'll oversee everything," Engert said. "We make sure all the food's ordered, all the help is in place to work the stands, and exhibitors have what they need."

According to Engert, the time involved to plan an event the size of the fair is unevenly spaced throughout the year.

"It doesn't get too strenuous until we start to hit the summer months," said Engert. "We meet on the grounds to clean up and talk for two hours one night a month. It might be 10 hours a month overall, but as you get closer it's more and more deadline-oriented."

This year, Engert is excited to organize attendance prizes with the help of his four older sisters, who have also had a hand in the fair since childhood. The tradition extends to his wife of 21 years, Kellie, and their sons, Brock and Korby. Brock is a junior at Missouri S&T, and Korby is a sophomore in high school at Saxony Lutheran.

"My wife's very involved," Engert said. "She is taking on the role of organizing drivers for the Senior Citizen Shuttle, and she does a lot of running for that."

When their sons' schedules are not overwhelmed with schoolwork and sports, they also tag along to help where they can. According to Engert, the future of the fair lies in getting the younger generation involved.

In addition to his commitment to the fair, Engert has also served as a city alderman for nearly 20 years, chairman of the board for the city of Altenburg, president of the Trinity Lutheran Church board, treasurer for the Frohna-Altenburg Fire Department, and Vice President of the Midwest Thunder youth baseball organization.

"I've been lucky and blessed that things have always found a way to work out, and I also carry a full-time job that deserves my attention," said Engert, who serves as assistant superintendent for Citizens Electric's south district. "I'm very lucky to have grown up where I did. It's a good community, a bunch of great people, and I'm just trying to do my part."



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Eric AUSTIN:

A FULFILLING LIFE OF SERVICE

When a botched surgery rendered him permanently disabled at 35 years old, Minnesota native Eric Austin had no idea that he would be delivering Meals on Wheels to senior citizens in Perryville, Missouri.

"My wife and I both grew up in the country," said Austin, now 43 years old. "But the last farm was purchased out before we left, and it just wasn't the same place anymore."

Austin's wife, Jamie, held a remote position that allowed the couple and their two boys, Trace and Cale, to move anywhere in the country. In October 2022, Perryville became their home. A 23-year-old daughter, Taylor, remained in Minnesota.

"We got a lot of 'why here' when we first moved here," Austin said. "The weather, the costs, the geography — we had no personal connections, but the community was awesome. We could not be happier."

The family had barely arrived when Austin saw an advertisement in the Republic-Monitor for meal delivery volunteers at the Perry County Senior Center.

"They needed help at Thanksgiving," Austin said. "My mother-in-law did Meals on Wheels delivery in Minnesota. It was a no-brainer."

Since March 2023, Austin has carried an in-town route every Monday.

"Sometimes you're the only person they see that week," Austin said. "I know every single person on a first-name basis, and my routes tend to get longer because we'll chat for a while."

Austin has run into his senior friends from time to time outside the home. On a chance meeting at a restaurant, one senior, a musician, invited Austin up to the stage to play the bass with his band.

"I consider the man a friend," Austin said. "We had a blast. I'll never forget it."

Outside of his delivery route, Austin also works part-time as a driver for the Life Enrichment Center in Perryville, and works one day a week in the center with clients with developmental disabilities.

"It's unbelievably fulfilling," Austin said. "It took moving down here to straighten out. Everything happens for a reason, and God's got a plan."



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St. Vincent THRIFT STORE :

BEHIND THE SCENES

For 20 years, the Society of St. Vincent de Paul Thrift Store has been a destination for local thrifters looking for quality items at affordable prices. But, without an army of volunteers to run things like clockwork, it would be impossible for the Society to fund emergency aid with the funds raised. Beth Shrum, Margie Miget, and Clete Welker are just a few of the names that make this mission possible.

For Beth Shrum, 66, the acquisition of her responsibilities resembles a relay race. A veteran volunteer was looking to pass on her tasks to the next generation, and Shrum was there to take the baton and run with it, thanks to longstanding volunteer Ed Schumer.

Shrum heads up the cleaning, repairing, dressing, and shelving of any doll donations, while Miget collects, sorts, repairs, and packages jewelry for display.

"Ed and Marilyn Schumer impacted my life," Shrum said. "They were in charge of it when I started helping four years ago."

Every Tuesday and Thursday, Shrum stops in to work on the donated dolls, occasionally bringing a tub of them home.

"I try to wipe them off and put clothes on them and put prices on them and put them on the rack," Shrum said. "People donate bags of doll clothes, so it all comes together."

When she first stepped into the role, Shrum stated that a unique challenge was washing the doll clothes.

"You don't think about all of these little pieces getting caught up in your washing machine," Shrum said. "I tore up my washing machine with doll clothes. You have to put them in a garment bag or something."

When she isn't volunteering at the thrift store or at the Old Bethel Free Will Baptist Church near Patton, Mo., Shrum enjoys

gardening, doing puzzles, raising chickens, and visiting family. In a way, her thrift store companions have become family as well.

"That's my therapy, to go out there," Shrum said, "just for the camaraderie and the friendship."

While Margie Miget, 82, has volunteered at the St. Vincent de Paul Society Thrift Store in some capacity since it opened 20 years ago, the responsibility of managing all jewelry donations has been more recent. Like Shrum, Miget acquired her position from a previous volunteer with the help of Ed Schumer.

"Any time you're around him, he's going to get you to volunteer," Miget said.

Like Shrum, Miget also divides her volunteer hours between the store location and her own home. For both women, the number of hours they spend depends on the volume of donated goods.

"One day I brought home a bag of jewelry and worked on it for 4 hours," Miget said. "Other times it's 2 hours, but there's always something in the basket for me."

While the majority of her time is devoted to cleaning and packaging jewelry, Miget also spends some time repairing broken hooks. If it isn't a quick fix, she'll add it to an ongoing box of "junk jewelry" for sale, which thrifters will pick through for crafting projects or personal jewelry repairs.

"We're making use of everything," Miget said. "It's very interesting. You never know what's coming in. One day, a lady handed me a whole bag of her jewelry, and it wasn't cheap stuff."

In addition to managing jewelry, Miget also spends every Thursday morning pricing other donations. A retired quilter by commission, Miget spends her free time quilting for pleasure.

When asked why she volunteers, Miget gives credit to her faith.

"I read the Bible every day, and it does say if you can, help the poor," Miget said. "That's my purpose — to price this jewelry, and people buy it, and the money helps the poor."

When Ed Schumer caught wind of Clete Welker's talent for repairing electronics — especially TVs — he asked if Welker would be interested in using his talents to help the poor. It was an easy answer.

"I already had a business doing in-house programming for saw mills and rock quarries," said Welker, 75, who spent a large portion of his career building simulators for Caterpillar drivers and technicians. "I travel around to different companies within the state, programming the conveyors and touch screens for control people."

On his own time, Welker had begun applying his technical knowledge to repairing household electronics for friends and family members. It was an easy transition to use his skills to repair donated TV sets and other electronics brought into the St. Vincent de Paul Society Thrift Store, and he's been their go-to expert since 2012.

"People bring TVs in and usually tell them they're working," Welker said. "They bring them here first, and I check them out. Sometimes they need repair, and sometimes just programming, or they need a remote or a stand or something like that."

Welker enjoys the challenge of repairing broken electronics, but the thing that keeps bringing him back is the people.

"The other volunteers always seem so grateful and appreciative," Welker said. "It's like a big family, and there are so many talents. We have meetings once every month, and I look forward to that. It's a pleasure to work with this group."



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Carol ROZIER:

By Heather C. Wentz
heather.c.wentz@gmail.com

DEDICATED TO SERVICE

When she retired from education and consulting in 2009, 77-year-old Carol Rozier thought it would be an opportunity to slow down, kick back, and relax. Little did she know that she'd be busier than ever.

While Rozier serves as a member on several different boards in Perry County and beyond, the majority of her time is dedicated to service at the Association of the Miraculous Medal in Perryville.

Although Rozier has had a personal connection to the seminary grounds since two of her own brothers studied at the Seminary for the Vincentian Order, when she heard that AMM was seeking volunteers through a parish guide, she thought it might be an opportunity to fill her free time with something meaningful.

According to Rozier, Volunteer Coordinator Frank Ryan organizes responsibilities for her and other volunteers at AMM.

"He's wonderful," said Rozier. "He does the interview, sets up everybody's schedule, worries about people that don't come in.

"One of the things Frank's got me doing is answering people on our website. They'll ask questions and ask for prayers, and I go on the computer and I answer their questions and offer prayers."

In addition to website communication, Rozier also works in the office to sort mail, stuff envelopes, and organize returns for two hours each day.

Since 2017, Rozier has also served as one of 13 board members for the association.

"It's a working board," said Rozier. "I wasn't on the board at the time, but the board just finished redesigning and upgrading the church, the grotto, and the grounds. We make decisions also on what happens to the donations that people send in — money that goes to the Archdiocese of St. Louis for projects for the homeless, and we also have a part of our community in Alaska and in Kenya.

"We also set approvals on various trips to the Holy Land and overseas to different parts of Europe."

Rozier noted that because AMM is volunteer-run, there are opportunities to serve in almost any area for those who may be interested. In addition to office-type work in production fulfillment, other AMM volunteers work in the garden, sweep sidewalks, clean or decorate the church, and distribute communion and miraculous medals at hospitals and nursing homes. Some volunteers spend their time at the Apostle of Charity Residence for retired priests, playing card games or working on projects.

When she isn't volunteering with the association, Rozier commits her time to education — both in the Catholic Religion and in Americanism. In the evenings, Rozier teaches for the Parish School of Religion, a program for Catholic students that attend public school and would otherwise not have an opportunity to learn about the faith before baptism, communion, and confirmation. Rozier has also spent the last 5 years fulfilling her commitment to the American Legion Executive Board.



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Cindy CZECH:

A HEART FOR HELPING OTHERS



At 67, Cindy Czech of Perryville has a full plate — and nearly every task on her daily to-do list is another way of serving others.

On Mondays and Thursdays, she is an in-town delivery driver for Meals on Wheels through the Perry County Senior Center, an organization that serves 275 meals per day across the county.

On Tuesdays, she drives to her hometown of Millstadt, Ill. to continue her third year of delivering Meals on Wheels rurally, and then spends the day helping her elderly parents with tasks around the home.

"I'm retired, I have the time, and I just feel like those programs are very much needed," said Czech, who moved to Perryville two years ago. "We just have a lot of elderly that need help. I call them my 'peeps'."

Czech shared the story of one woman on her route who always enjoys a sit-down conversation.

"One day she told her daughter that she needed to talk to me," Czech said. "I told her I'd deliver the rest of the meals, and then I'd come back on my way into town."

"When I got back, she said, 'Oh, I just haven't seen you!' So we sat down and had a little discussion, and she was all smiles and happy as could be. She looked forward to our talks as much as I did."

Czech also enjoys the relationships she has built with family dogs on her route. In addition to treats provided by the Senior Center, Czech brings some of her own.

"One dog, Dolly, smiles," Czech said. "She just grins, and she's so excited to see you."

When she isn't delivering meals, Czech can be found helping friends and neighbors in need or pursuing her own hobbies of crochet, crafting, and canning. In February, she spent a few days out of town with a friend who was recovering from foot surgery and needed help caring for her dog.

"I just enjoy helping people out," Czech said.

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Todd PETZOLDT:

////////////////////VOLUNTEERING IS PART OF THE CHRISTIAN LIFE

When Todd and Tammy Petzoldt of Frohna started to look into schooling opportunities for their children, they wanted to prioritize faith and quality education. When they realized that a Christian educational track was not an option from K-12 in Perry County, Todd Petzoldt decided to take matters into his own hands.

"My wife attended a Lutheran high school when she was in Michigan, where she's from," said Petzoldt, who met his wife at Concordia University Chicago. "But growing up here in Perry County, we did not have the option of a Lutheran high school, just the grade schools. My wife and I had been talking about what we were going to do, and we were very adamant that [our kids] did have a Christian education all the way through."

According to Petzoldt, while a few attempts had been made to start a Lutheran high school, none had been successful. He was determined to change that, and joined with others who wanted to see a Christian high school in Perry County.

"My oldest daughter at the time was in 2nd grade," said Petzoldt. "Area congregations got together to do a feasibility study, and they found that there was sufficient support. It was a group effort. We incorporated and actually started the school, and the first week we had classes was in August 2000."

Since that time, Petzoldt, 59, has served on the Board of Regents in various positions for approximately 25 years, including an 8-year stint as chairman of the board, a position that he concluded in the summer of 2023.

"As of today, I am working on getting the Saxony Lutheran foundation up and going," Petzoldt said. "That entails getting the bylaws set up, the initial board set up, and getting the not-for-profit tax status in line, so that is a work in progress. The eventual goal there is to have a related entity that manages the endowments for the school."

Tammy Petzoldt, who holds her degree in secondary education, serves as the drama coach at the high school as well.

Since its incorporation, their three children, Alicia, Landon, and Tabitha, have gone through Saxony Lutheran High School.

"They are productive citizens at this point," Petzoldt said. "They excelled while they were there, and we've graduated many kids that have gone on to excel in all areas of life. I think that's the biggest testimony you can give as an educational institution."

Petzoldt, who holds a position as CFO at East Perry Lumber Co., has also served on the board for Perry County Memorial Hospital for 15 years, was a founding member for the Perry County Community Foundation, and served on the board that built the Perry Park Center. Currently, he is also president of the board for the Saxon Lutheran Memorial in Frohna.

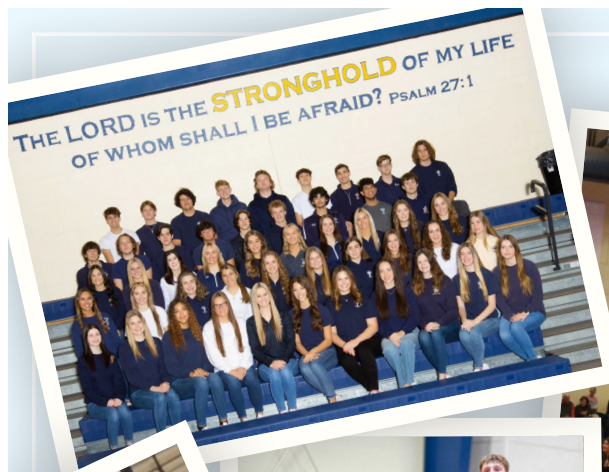
"That is taking up a lot of my time at this juncture," Petzoldt said, who noted that his weekly time commitment to the memorial is anywhere between 8-10 hours. "My responsibilities as president are to be a leader and keep things moving. Anything there is done by volunteers and our ambassadors, Brian and Jennie Williamson. We want to offer retreats or use the unique aspects of the heritage that exists there with helping out people in ministry generally."



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