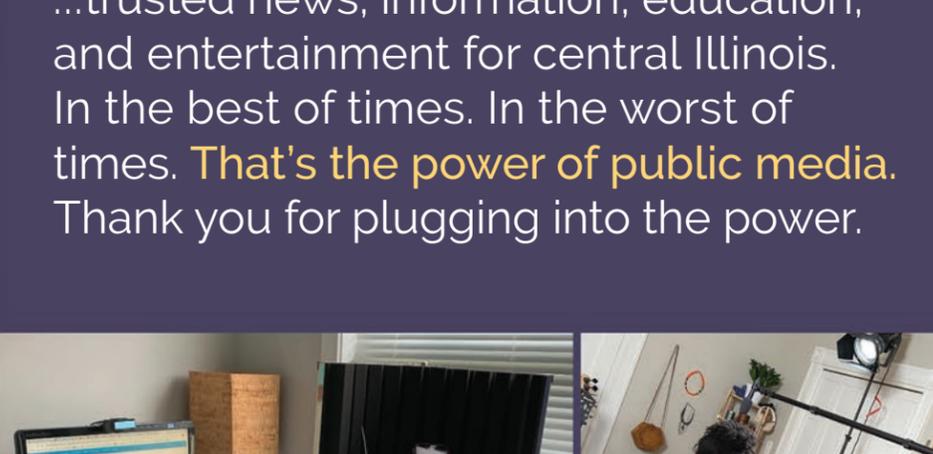
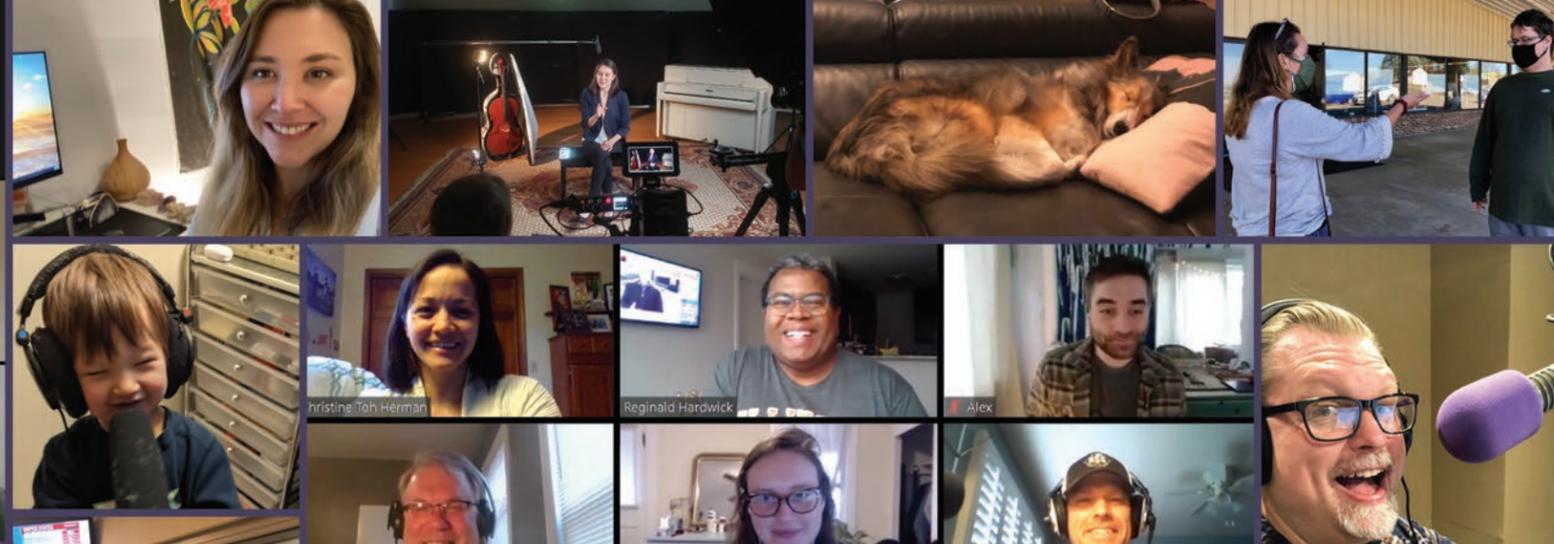


# The Power of Public Media



2020 proved what  
**Illinois Public Media**  
is made of...

...trusted news, information, education,  
and entertainment for central Illinois.  
In the best of times. In the worst of  
times. **That's the power of public media.**  
Thank you for plugging into the power.



Our team of news professionals met the challenges of 2020 with a renewed commitment to keeping our communities informed about a myriad aspects of the year's most pressing issues. We reimagined a more statewide approach to news gathering and reporting under the newly named Illinois Newsroom — expanding our coverage of health, education, agriculture, politics, and the environment — and launched new collaborations with other media partners. And our statewide talk show, *The 21st*, entered its next chapter with Brian Mackey as the new host.



## Election 2020

**RELIABLE. ACCURATE. INFORMATIVE.**

As always, Illinois Public Media, NPR, and PBS came together to provide Election 2020 coverage with information that exemplified reliability, accuracy, and credibility.

With few ways to receive information in person — and with record-setting interest from voters — Illinois Newsroom created the definitive online voter's guide for central Illinois. This resource

encompassed every aspect of election-related news and information, including inviting questions from central Illinoisans for our news team through Ask the Newsroom, an online form. The robust Frequently Asked Questions section addressed topics ranging from voter registration to ballot deadline details.

We also worked with area county clerks — the subject matter experts — to create informative five-minute videos with comprehensive voter information, then shared them widely on WILL-TV, the web, and social media.

“We are proud to work with Illinois Public Media and the League of Women Voters of Champaign County as a resource for Central Illinois with this partnership.”

— Richard Flesch  
WCIA-TV news director

As part of NPR *Morning Edition* with Brian Moline, reporter Jim



Meadows featured weekly election spotlights that included interviews with candidates in the 13th and 15th Congressional Districts, the Illinois graduated income tax proposal, vote-by-mail issues, and more.



## Covering the results

Starting with analysis from NPR on Election Day morning, our in-depth on-air and digital coverage of the historic event continued with local updates throughout the day and was carried by other NPR stations across Illinois.

Illinois Newsroom reporters stayed with area referendums and races for local offices, as well as state House and Senate contests and U.S. Congressional District races. And election night live coverage on local county voter turnouts and processing of mail-in ballots got an assist from journalism students from the College of Media at Illinois.



## Candidates' debate for 13th Congressional District

A panel of local journalists — moderated by *The 21st* host Brian Mackey — posed their questions, along with those submitted by constituents of the 13th Congressional District, in a debate between Republican incumbent Rodney Davis and Democrat challenger Betsy Dirksen Londrigan, made possible by the strong partnership between Illinois Public Media, WCIA-TV, and the League of Women Voters of Champaign County.

## From WILL News to Illinois Newsroom

Not only did we reimagine the environment where reporters collaborate, we significantly expanded our resources under a newly named Illinois Newsroom.



Dana Cronin joined Illinois Newsroom to cover agriculture-related stories. Her previous work experiences were at San Francisco public media station KQED and at NPR headquarters in Washington, D.C., where she produced content for news shows including *Weekend Edition* and *All Things Considered*. Among the many stories Cronin has produced here, the one titled "Farm tools were designed for men. That's a problem for the increasing number of female farmers." kickstarted a national conversation.



Thanks to a grant from the Backlund Family Trust, we're able to report on issues of the environment and sustainability from the perspective of our state and its residents.

And we've added collaborations with public media station WFYI's Side Effects, featuring Illinois Newsroom reporter Christine Herman's stories on public health, and with Harvest Public Media picking up reporter Dana Cronin's agricultural stories — to share their work with a much larger audience.

## Trusted COVID information



When the shared experience is a global pandemic, fear of the unknown and isolation from familiar comforts and camaraderie envelop all of us. Stepping in to inform and unite was the Coronavirus Information Center website, spearheaded by Illinois Newsroom. This trusted online source provided not only multiple updates of local and state news each day, but also specialized reports from Illinois Newsroom reporters about the impacts of the coronavirus on education, agriculture, health care, and more. Adding another dimension were the personal experience stories and conversations with experts offered daily on *The 21st*.

In addition to making Gov. Pritzker's daily briefings available on WILL-AM 580, the COVID Information Center, and will.illinois.edu, we created one-minute local coronavirus updates that aired weekdays following the *PBS NewsHour* on WILL-TV.

## Host Brian Mackey's favorite moments from *The 21st*



One of the few constants in a tumultuous year was *The 21st* team pulling together a daily radio program, bringing a wide range of perspectives to bear on what matters most to Illinoisans, and finding Illinois angles on national and international stories.

### On U.S. Supreme Court Justice Ruth Bader Ginsburg:

Illinois Solicitor General David Franklin, who was a law clerk for Ginsburg in the late 1990s, joined *The 21st* in honoring RGB's legal legacy after her passing in September. "When Justice John Paul Stevens retired, which made her the senior liberal justice on the court, she was placed in the role of speaking for that wing of the court more forcefully, and she embraced it. And then it just so happened that some young women were inspired by her, and decided to 'meme her,' and I think she was tickled by it."

### On racial injustice:

As Illinois-based Quaker Oats announced that it would end the Aunt Jemima brand, *The 21st* connected with Marcus Hayes, a descendant of Nancy Green, the Chicago woman who in 1893 was hired to portray Aunt Jemima.

Hayes wanted people to know his great-(to the sixth power)-aunt "was born into something that she didn't ask for, but made the best out of it. She used what she knew to make sure that her family at the time was taken care of. She was looked at as property, and she still rose to the occasion and made something great out of her life. She was way more than what we could ever perceive her to be from a box."

“As people’s listening habits continue to evolve, I hope *217 Today* gives them another way to catch up on news in our area.”

— Brian Moline

### 217 Today

NPR *Morning Edition* host Brian Moline was looking for new and fresh ways of providing central Illinoisans with their local news, which led to the creation of *217 Today* in September. This new daily podcast features the day's headlines, along with one deeper dive, all in an easily consumable 10 minutes. It is hosted by Moline and produced by University of Illinois student Olivia Butts, which is just one element of our ongoing efforts with the College of Media to offer students the opportunity to gain real-world experience.

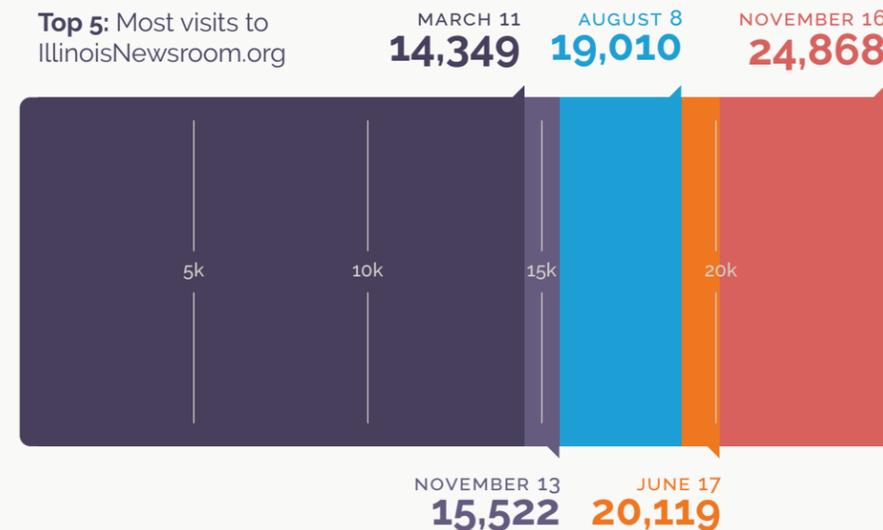


### News from Around Illinois

Award-winning original reporting from Illinois Newsroom and *The 21st* is delivered to your inbox each week with the News from Around Illinois eNewsletter. This digital digest is curated by Illinois Newsroom Digital Producer Alex Coleman and *The 21st*'s Digital Intern, Zainab Qureshi.



Top 5: Most visits to IllinoisNewsroom.org



166,848  
TOTAL PAGE VIEWS  
Coronavirus Information Center

23

LOCAL ILLINOIS NEWSROOM STORIES WENT NATIONAL

## ▶ PRODUCTIONS

Upholding our role as your PBS member station and a national partner in producing regionally-focused programs and documentaries became more difficult — but all the more necessary — with 2020 pandemic restrictions in place. Illinois Public Media delivered an impressive range of locally produced content — from contributing to national conversations to exploring the personal and poignant experiences of fellow community members.



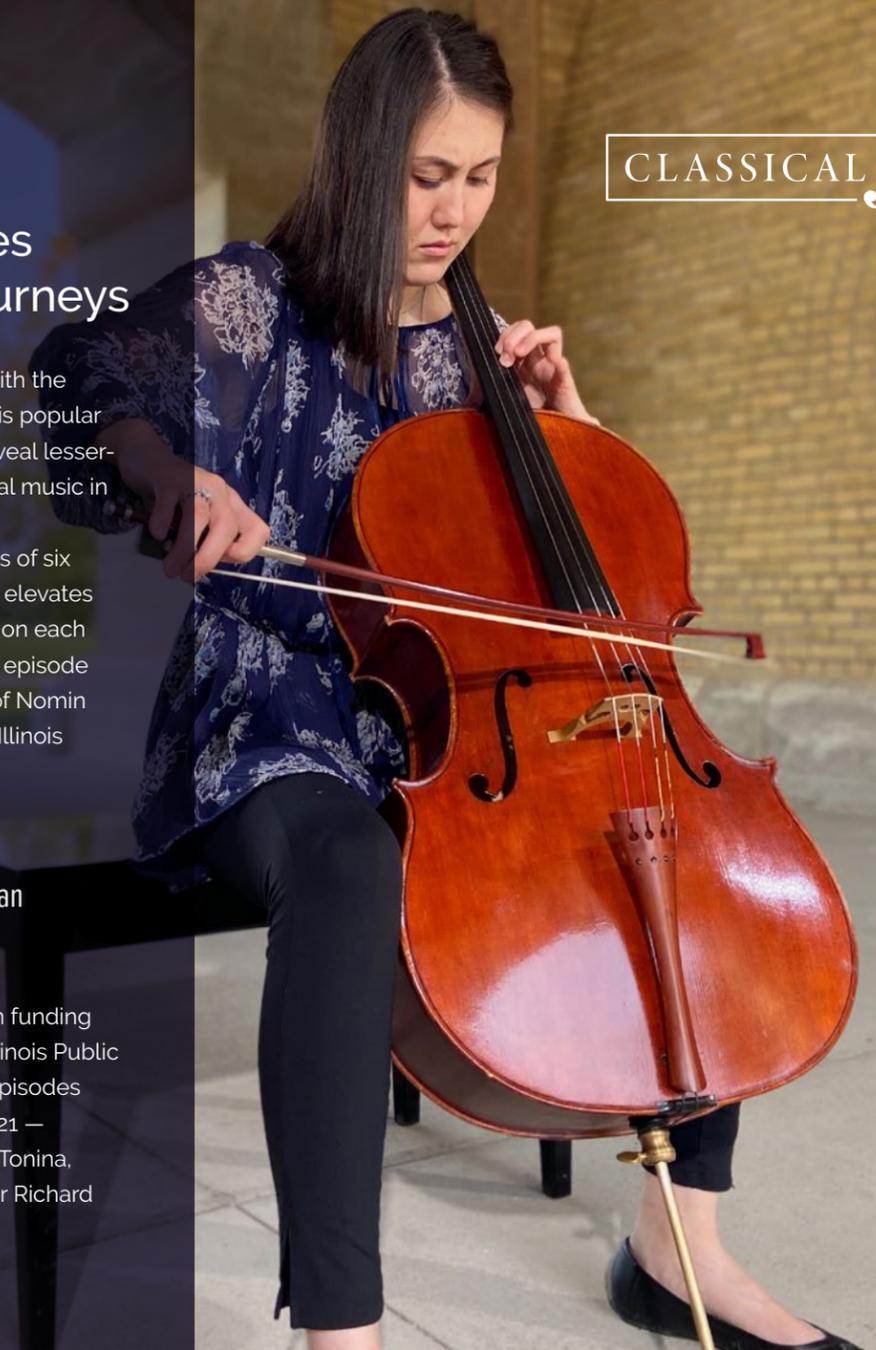
## Second season of *Classical:BTS* shares artists' personal journeys

*Classical:BTS* returned in November with the first episode of the second season. This popular docuseries continues its mission to reveal lesser-seen and heard stories around classical music in central Illinois.

The new season's in-depth portraits of six performers and classical craftspeople elevates the beauty of their music and focuses on each performer's personal journey. The first episode follows the inspiring story and music of Nomin Zolzaya, Acting Principal Cello for the Illinois Symphony Orchestra.

“I always had this dream that I would play somewhere else than Mongolia,” Zolzaya said.

*Classical:BTS* is made possible with funding from the Barbara E. Barnes Fund for Illinois Public Media, and continues with five more episodes rounding out the second season in 2021 — featuring bass performer and vocalist Tonina, conductor William McClain, and luthier Richard Brune, to name a few.



CLASSICAL *BTS*

## Summer Solstice concert refreshes without gathering



What better way to celebrate the longest day of the year than by enjoying a virtual concert by acclaimed musician and Champaign native Viktor Krauss? While his global performance tours have taken him to venues that include Carnegie Hall, Lincoln Center, and the Kennedy Center, Krauss has continued an ongoing music relationship with Allerton Park & Retreat Center.

We appreciated the opportunity to join Allerton in bringing this summer celebration safely to our central Illinois audience on WILL-FM 90.9 — also streamed live on the WILL website and on WILL's mobile app. Audience members were encouraged to drive around Allerton Park and take in the beautiful scenery while listening to the performance.



# ILLINOIS COUNTRY

## The Illinois influence on country music

As director Ken Burns continued telling America's stories with his national eight-part history of country music for PBS, Illinois Public Media saw an opportunity to showcase the significant role Illinois and its people have played in shaping this music genre.

Serving as a companion documentary, *Illinois Country* shared the personal stories of the musicians who have taken their talent from hometowns across the state to stages around the world. It also uncovered the venues and events — including the WLS Barn Dance in Chicago and Farm Aid in Champaign — that contributed to the growth of this uniquely American art form.

From the outset, our *Illinois Country* team wanted to create a multi-platform experience for our audience. This included creating a six-part web series called *Voices of Illinois Country* that offered further vignettes and performances from the artists

When plans for live studio events with artists featured in the program had to be scrapped due to the pandemic, we pivoted to produce and distribute *Illinois Country Live at Home*. These intimate concerts with the singers and songwriters were made available on our various content platforms, from social media to WILL-TV.



## Sharing insight at Pygmalion Festival



Illinois Public Media partnered with the annual Pygmalion Festival for a virtual event, sharing a rebroadcast of our *Illinois Country* film and gathering luminaries from all facets of the music industry to discuss the realities artists are facing today.

Particularly poignant were the stories of how COVID shattered some opportunities and crystalized others, as collaboration and resilience became more important than ever. The Facebook Live panel discussion offered vital insights for all, from the artists who dream of a career in music to those who are curious about what it takes.

## Mid-American Gardener grows its audience



Another creative pivot found Illinois Public Media's longtime signature gardening program changing from an in-person production in the WILL-TV studio to a virtual production using video conferencing. We also added a special Facebook Live component.

The addition of new gardeners seeking a trusted source of advice during the pandemic helped propel *Mid-American Gardener* to the most streamed local program in 2020 — with 1,066 streams!

## Prairie Performances showcases new concerts



WILL-FM 90.9 became the concert hall for local orchestras as four recent performances — one each from Champaign-Urbana Symphony Orchestra, Illinois Symphony Orchestra, Millikin-Decatur Symphony Orchestra, and Sinfonia da Camera — debuted in Fall 2020 on *Prairie Performances* with host Roger Cooper.



## Local storytelling captures pandemic experiences

Illinois Public Media also made the most of partnering with *PBS American Portrait*, a national storytelling project — aligned with PBS's 50th anniversary — that opened a coast-to-coast conversation about what it truly means to be an American today.

We produced two 30-minute episodes of *American Portrait: Central Illinois* that aired on WILL-TV and were also available for streaming on the PBS Video app. In the June debut program — "Living Through the Pandemic" — we heard from a pastor, a high school senior, a grocery store operator, a nurse and father, a small business owner, and an oil producer on how they were adjusting to the economic, social, and psychological impact of the COVID-19 pandemic.

The December episode, "Lift Every Voice," followed the Windy City Performing Arts choirs of Chicago, the Danville High School Madrigals, and the University of Illinois Black Chorus on the Champaign-Urbana campus as they navigated new challenges to singing together and keeping people safe.

We then brought these COVID conversations out to the community with virtual panel discussions hosted on Facebook Live and including many of the individuals featured following each episode.



## Two Emmys for *Illinois Country*



Illinois Public Media's documentary film, *Illinois Country*, was honored with two Mid-America EMMY® Awards for outstanding work in the "Documentary - Cultural" category for the film as a whole and "Musical Composition/Arrangement" for its original song, "Backroads" — which united the storyline of the film.

Written by five-time Grammy nominee Graham Edwards and renowned songwriter/producer John Pennell, the song was brought to life through the vocals of Mo Pitney and supported by some of the best musicians in Nashville: Sam Bush, Jerry Douglas, Andrea Zonn, Blake Pitney, Chris Brown, and Alison Krauss.

We are proud to be part of the nationwide consortium of independent filmmakers whose locally produced programs help power PBS.

“... an experience beyond just about any, in terms of joy and artistic satisfaction.”

— John Pennell, co-writer & producer of "Backroads"



## Series earns Edward R. Murrow Award

"Educating the Imprisoned," an Illinois Newsroom series that uncovered many of the barriers that incarcerated individuals in Illinois face when it comes to education, won a 2020 Regional Edward R. Murrow Award for "Best News Series."

Bestowed by the Radio Television Digital News Association, the award honored a series of reports by Illinois Newsroom Education Reporter Lee V. Gaines that began back in 2019. After initially looking at the numerous barriers to education for people in Illinois state prisons, Gaines discovered more than 200 books, mostly about race, had been removed from an Illinois college-in-prison program's library. She broke the story, which subsequently drew national attention, and later moved the Illinois Department of Corrections to revise its publication review policy.

The series was supported in part by a fellowship Gaines received from the Education Writers Association.

“Journalists like Lee are making a difference for Illinoisans.”

— Reginald Hardwick, news & public affairs director

## More honors for Illinois Public Media

- *American Portrait: Central Illinois* "Living Through the Pandemic" received a 2020 Public Media Award from the National Educational Telecommunications Association (NETA).
- Illinois Newsroom Health Reporter Christine Herman was honored with a first-place award from the Public Media Journalists Association for her story, "When Teens Abuse Parents, Shame and Secrecy Make It Hard to Seek Help." The story aired on NPR in November 2019.
- *Morning Edition* on WILL was awarded Best Newscast by the Illinois Associated Press.

## *Reel Midwest* steps onto the international stage

Our curated independent film series — which helps to find and broadcast the best feature, documentary, and short films from Illinois and across the Midwest — was nominated for "Best Documentary Series" by the International Documentary Association in a finalist group that included PBS *American Masters* and PBS *American Experience*, which won the category.

Additionally, two of the 25 short-form independent films included in the 2020 PBS Short Film Festival were presented by Illinois Public Media through our *Reel Midwest* series. Both "Paddle Together" and "You Know the Drill" were featured in the culture category and found themselves in great company.

## Honors for PBS and NPR

- In a nationwide poll, Americans ranked PBS and its member stations the most-trusted institution for the 18th consecutive year.
- PBS received a total of nine 2021 NAACP Image Award nominations, with five of those for programs that aired in 2020.
- NPR's *Code Switch* — which has addressed topics around race, identity, and culture since 2013 — was selected as "Show of the Year" by Apple Podcasts. It was the first time the world's leading podcast platform recognized a single podcast of the year.

## Most-streamed local programs

*Mid-American Gardener*  
 WILL Documentaries  
*State & Water* (WTVP)  
*Illinois Country*  
*Illinois Pioneers*  
*Classical: BTS*  
*Backyard Industry*  
*American Portrait: Central Illinois*  
*Illinois Adventure* (WTVP)  
*Reel Midwest*

## Most-streamed national programs

*PBS NewsHour*  
*Frontline*  
 NOVA  
*Sanditon*  
*Antiques Roadshow*  
*American Experience*  
*Grantchester*  
*Call the Midwife*  
*Nature*  
*World on Fire*



## EDUCATION

Helping students of all ages learn is a core mission of every PBS member station and has been since the earliest days of *Sesame Street* more than 50 years ago. WILL-TV is no exception. In fact, WILL Education led early efforts to share the resources of PBS Learning Media with teachers throughout Illinois. So, naturally, teachers and families turned to us for critical educational support when the pandemic forced schools to close. We went beyond those efforts to convene healing conversations around the year's divisive issues and relied on loyal volunteers to continue our Book Mentor Project and Illinois Radio Reader service on a virtual basis.

### Powering at-home learning

Illinois Public Media elevated its commitment to helping students learn at home by providing additional educational offerings for students of all ages. One of the first actions was an updated WILL-TV daytime lineup of learning programs for students from pre-kindergarten through 5th grade, plus other TV resources for students in 6th through 12th grade.

“... The partnership between WILL and local school districts highlights our state’s ability to work together to meet the needs of our children, no matter the circumstances.”

— Kimberlie Kranich  
director of community  
content and engagement

Students eagerly accessed new digital resources — including apps, games, and printables supporting a range of academic subjects and endorsed by local school districts — through a dedicated at-home learning website. Parents and caregivers could also find learning materials contained in popular PBS KIDS programs, arranged by topic, on the site.

As always, materials related to those programs were available for download on Illinois Edition of PBS Learning Media, an online library of thousands of curated free, standards-aligned videos, interactives, and lesson plans specifically designed for teachers and students.



### Guiding critical social justice conversations

WILL Education launched an online Social Justice Learning space to help guide children, families, and educators in exploring critical conversations about race, ethnicity, and national origin; varying degrees of mental, emotional, and physical abilities; sexual orientation; and gender and gender identity/expression. The first two lessons included curated materials on race, racism, and privilege in America, as well as the LGBTQ+ and allyship experience across the country.



With age-specific resources broken out by early childhood, adolescent, and adult learning levels, each section of the learning space features something to watch with videos from PBS and other national learning partners, something to listen to with audio from experts like NPR *Code Switch*, and something to read with articles and book selections from various sources.

“We know when we are exposed to the stories and experiences of others, we can then begin to understand things from their perspective, which is an essential part in creating a more inclusive community.”

— Kellie Blanden  
assistant director of  
educational outreach &  
professional development



### Book Mentor Project goes virtual

Cue the video! A group of dedicated volunteers maintained the Book Mentor Project by creating Zoom-based readings of books that support social emotional learning, diversity, math, and social studies.

Supported by annual grants from PNC Bank's Grow Up Great Foundation since 2004, the Book Mentor Project is a vital resource for Head Start families in Champaign County who otherwise might not have access to books or at-home learning resources. Recorded readings from familiar faces kept kids excited about reading and connected them to the community volunteers they are accustomed to seeing in their classrooms.



3,500

average number of books distributed



“These recordings give the children something to tune into for a brief while that is different than their teachers reading a book. It’s good for the kids to see others reading to them as well.”

— Champaign Head Start Teacher

## Illinois Public Media stands with the Black Lives Matter movement and all who support it.

We have always been an organization dedicated to public service and building community, but now more than ever, we need to harness the power of public media to deepen our understanding, foster conversation, and encourage meaningful change.

As a start, we are working to offer more programs across all platforms

that elevate the work, stories, and experiences of people of color. Additionally, we are committed to producing and presenting even more local and national content that exposes injustice and presents a diverse set of voices and viewpoints.

What we have seen play out in the past couple months is nothing new for

our communities of color, especially the Black community; but for so many of us, we are coming to realize our roles in upholding and benefiting from the systematic racism that these injustices represent. We acknowledge that Illinois Public Media hasn't always been perfect, but we are striving to do better.

— statement released June 8, 2020

## So many questions. Discussing answers ...

### ...about learning and instruction.

On April 23, WILL Education's Facebook Live event brought together Urbana School District 116 Superintendent Dr. Jennifer Ivory-Tatum, Champaign Unit 4 Schools Superintendent Dr. Susan Zola, and Clinical Psychologist Dr. Dynesha Grissom. This session provided information for the community and answered parents' questions about the schools' online education resources, as well as the best strategies for helping children and families cope with the changes and uncertainty.



### ...about policing.

As our nation tried to reconcile the tragic deaths of Black citizens Breonna Taylor and George Floyd at the hands of police, Illinois Newsroom hosted a Facebook Live event on July 23 exploring the role of police and policing in Champaign-Urbana. Moderated by News & Public Affairs Director Reginald Hardwick, panelists included local mayors, law enforcement, scholars, and racial justice activists.



### ...about trauma.

Uncovering ways to help children, families, and communities find resilience during difficult times was the focus of a June 8 Facebook Live event — moderated by Illinois Newsroom Health Reporter Christine Herman — with a licensed therapist, a representative from Champaign Unit 4 Schools, a retired Carle Clinic pediatrician, and the director of the Infant-Parent Institute.

Together, they discussed how early childhood trauma affects child development and how supportive relationships can help children overcome adversity. Specifically, this panel explored what is being done locally to break the cycles of trauma.



### Illinois Radio Reader volunteers keep people connected

With WILL's Campbell Hall closed to all but essential staff, Illinois Radio Reader Coordinator Kathie Spegal and her 40-plus volunteers couldn't utilize their usual recording process to bring local news and information to reading-impaired listeners.

Thanks to a creative pivot, volunteers used recording software on their smartphones and home computers to bring users the local news they rely on as part of the Illinois Radio Reader service. As an added bonus, the 42-year-old service became available to all via Amazon's Alexa smart speaker device.

### Delivering learning resources

WILL Education's Assistant Director of Educational Outreach & Professional Development Kellie Blanden kept learning resources flowing to students, teachers, and parents.

Among the good stuff were 500 Summer Learning Bags with two reading books, hands-on math and science activities, crayons, a dry-erase activity mat and marker, crayons, resources for parents, and more. They were distributed in May to students through our various community partner organizations.

Those were followed by Curious George Learning Bags with resources and activities focused on STEAM (science, technology, engineering, the arts, and math). The 200 bags were hand-delivered to students in December to encourage hands-on learning during the winter school break.



Blanden also led numerous professional development sessions for local teachers as well as facilitated sessions on various topics through PBS National Edcamp via Zoom.



From our broadcasting start in 1922 on the campus of the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, Illinois Public Media remains committed to supporting and advancing the missions of public higher education. Meaningful new projects reinvigorated that commitment in 2020, offering lasting impact for the future.

## Sharing the university's notable discoveries

The University of Illinois System's new *Rising to the Challenge* podcast shares some of the breakthrough discoveries from the Illinois campuses in Urbana-Champaign, Chicago, and Springfield to help meet our world's most pressing challenges. Naturally, President Tim Killeen chose to partner with Illinois Public Media for production support.



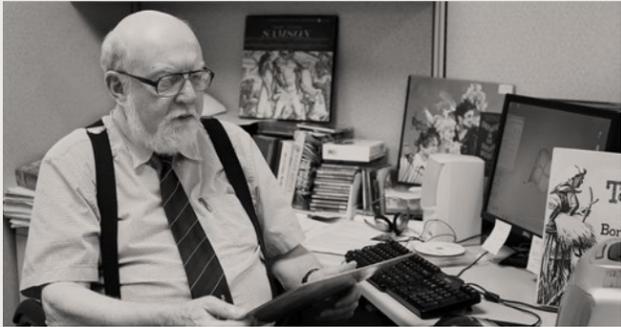
Debuting in September, a series of six episodes detailed how the university came together to battle the coronavirus — from creating a rapid, saliva-based detection test to addressing the educational, economic, and social challenges brought on by the COVID-19 pandemic.

The podcast is hosted by Gwen Macsai, an award-winning veteran of audio storytelling who is based in Chicago, working with producer Libby Foster, an award-winning journalist also based in Chicago and formerly of Illinois Public Media's talk show, *The 21st*. Both are graduates of the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign.

We are being called on now to meet myriad challenges... the stories behind just how those tests are being met can and will inspire and inform all of us.

— President Tim Killeen

## John Frayne School of Music Internship



The John Frayne Classical Music Graduate Student Work Experience underscores the many connections Illinois Public Media creates across the breadth of the University of Illinois. And it is thanks to the recent generosity of two local couples who are long-time Friends of WILL that this connection between Illinois Public Media and the University of Illinois School of Music was forged.

It is vital that young people be invited in the strongest way to gain experience in taking part of so noble a task of sharing the great music of the past with a new generation, and I am deeply honored that this internship bears my name.”

— John Frayne, host of *Classics of the Phonograph* and *Afternoon at the Opera* on WILL-FM 90.9.

The John Frayne Classical Music Graduate Student Work Experience is meant to help prepare the music student selected for a more well-rounded career in music — which today must include training and experience in media skills, including research, editing, writing, programming, and announcing in addition to excellence with the chosen instrument or study area.

The gift from Terry and Barbara England and Herb and Jane Lasky will fully fund special classical-first projects to be created by chosen grad students for our WILL Classical service for years to come.

## Powering the future of journalism

Our community members consume news and information across countless platforms, and Illinois Public Media is doing more than ever to provide learning opportunities for the next generation of multimedia journalists.



The Donald P. Mullally Internship is offering 2020-2021 winner Olivia Butts, a University of Illinois junior from Chicago,

the opportunity to work with *Morning Edition* host Brian Moline as producer for the *217 Today* podcast.

"This experience has already strengthened my audio editing skills and encouraged me to take more initiative in a professional setting," the journalism major said. She's also the special projects chair for the National Association of Black Journalists.



The Robert O. Endres Internship is giving Brielle Scullark, a University of Illinois junior, experience preparing various

segments and working with guests as an assistant producer for *The 21st*. The Chicago native also currently serves on the board of the National Association of Black Journalists.

"I have learned so much in a matter of months, and I am continuing to learn more each day. I have gained confidence in myself as a journalist-in-training while researching, pitching and creating content. I really appreciate *The 21st* team and IPM for guiding and teaching me more than I imagined possible," Scullark said.



Scullark works closely with Chantal Vaca, another assistant producer for *The 21st*, whose internship is part of her course

work toward a master's degree in journalism. Vaca is producing one segment each week for the statewide talk show.

"My experience is helping hone my journalistic skills of booking guests, prepping questions and scripts, and directing the conversation during the show," said the first generation Mexican-American from Chicago.



## Mentoring: one aspect of professional-level reporting

After joining the College of Media at Illinois in Fall 2020, Chris Evans immediately began establishing connections between the college and Illinois Public Media. His position in the Department of Journalism is a brand-new initiative to do just that — by helping students get real newsroom experience and create professional reporting that's heard on air.

Part of the goal is to create a system where Illinois Newsroom reporters will serve as mentors to the students — not only for improving the quality of students' work, but also as a constant source of support.

"My goal is to make it something where people have to attain a certain level of expertise in order to get the work and to be a beat reporter," Evans said.



"You might go and be the one who is covering the school board meetings for the education reporter, while she works on bigger projects and longer-term things."

The 2020 Election offered a great opportunity to kickstart the new program as six student journalists covered various aspects of Election Day.

## New internships create more opportunities to learn



Humanities Gateway Internship in Public Media and Civic Engagement for undergraduate majors in humanities disciplines is sponsored by the University of Illinois Humanities Research Institute (HRI) in partnership with Illinois Public Media. New in 2020, its funding through HRI is in part thanks to a generous gift from Elizabeth Nolan and will continue in 2021.

During Gabby Castellanos' time as our first Gateway for Humanities intern for Illinois Newsroom, the senior studying English and sociology worked on several community engagement projects. Among them was helping coordinate a Facebook Live event on the role of police in Champaign-Urbana, as well as designing voter information graphics that were distributed to campus and community organizations. Castellanos hopes to get younger generations more involved in news, especially after seeing the innerworkings of Illinois Newsroom. "The biggest takeaway I've had so far is how on top of things journalists have to be. They always have to come up with

new story ideas, be in the know within their communities, and listen to their audience."

Future Gateway interns will produce community listening sessions for Illinois Newsroom reporters that will assist in understanding the aspirations of the communities we serve and the roadblocks in reaching those aspirations. Information from these sessions will also help Illinois Public Media create future programming.

Support from the College of Media made it possible for WILL to help fill the gap for University of Illinois interns whose internships with other media companies were canceled because of the COVID-19 pandemic.

In May, Jose Zepeda joined Illinois Newsroom. He has written stories for on air and IllinoisNewsroom.org, and he also helped produce the newsroom's weekly newsletter, News From Around Illinois.



Zainie Qureshi joined us to focus on digital efforts for *The 21st*. She has also produced

—researching, booking guests, and writing scripts — a few segments for the talk show, including a discussion on colorism within the Asian community.



Illinois Public Media is also collaborating with



America Amplified, a journalism initiative funded by the Corporation for Public Broadcasting, to find ways to understand the needs and aspirations of central Illinoisans with the help of our America Amplified interns.

Over the summer, Eunice Alpasan returned to *The 21st* team — she had formerly served as an intern for the show in a different capacity. This time, she continued her work with the daily show as an engagement producer, using two-way texting through GroundSource as another means of connecting *The 21st*'s guests with its audience.



## Giving voice to your community

As a supporter, you value Illinois Public Media as the voice of your community, your state, your nation, and your world. 2020 underscored that role and introduced a significant new audience to a diverse range of resources that embody trust, integrity, fairness, and inclusion.

Together, you experienced the power of public media — content built around serving our local communities, amplified through sharing with our national NPR and PBS media partners to document and report on our shared experiences.

During a time when many news organizations are in decline or are cutting back resources and coverage, Illinois Public Media is fulfilling its mission in more robust ways than ever before — contributing to the arts, news, education, entertainment, and local information on every content platform.

It's a role we have served proudly for 99 years, and one that we work to honor each day. As we anticipate the privilege of celebrating our century milestone on April 6, 2022, I look forward to continuing to earn the trust and support you have placed in all of us at Illinois Public Media.

Maurice "Moss" Bresnahan  
CEO Illinois Public Media



As each employee in every department of Illinois Public Media continued to persevere and achieve, we were encouraged in our work by the continued partnership with our Friends of WILL and Corporate Underwriters for crucial program and project funding.

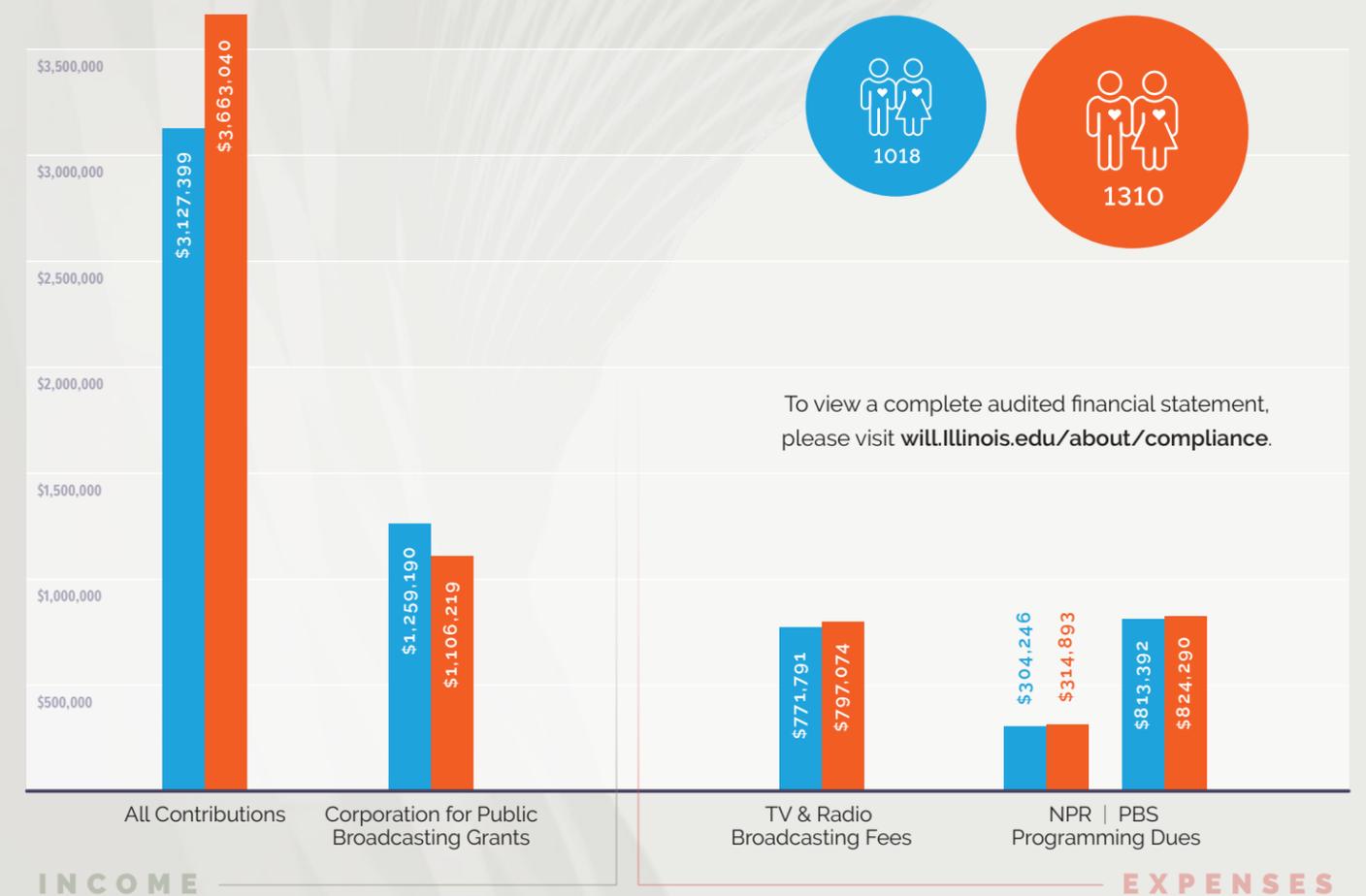
We also took heart in reaching the milestone that 30% of those Friends have become sustaining members — pledging their monthly support year to year. Their vital, reliable, and consistent financial commitment allows us to better budget and plan for the future.

Long-time Friends of WILL Nancy and Thomas Anderson provided a successful challenge fund match of \$15,000 on Giving Tuesday. Their donation helped jumpstart our giving and led to us raising more than \$50,000, achieving our most successful Giving Tuesday yet.

“The family of WILL has been an indispensable part of our lives for 40 years. We have enthusiastically maintained a tradition of annual giving over this period. We hope you will join us in this endeavor. WILL is an invaluable cultural institution. It deserves our support.”

— Nancy and Thomas Anderson

## FINANCIALS: 2019 | 2020



To view a complete audited financial statement, please visit [will.illinois.edu/about/compliance](http://will.illinois.edu/about/compliance).

My baby loves listening to Vic  
DiGeronimo's voice.  
Calms him right down.

Audra from  
Eureka

Working from home since mid-  
March, I am relying on WILL-AM  
and FM more than ever, especially  
*Classic Mornings* and the afternoon  
AM 580 shows.

William from  
Urbana

Thank you for all you're doing during this  
difficult time. You're doing your usual  
thorough, accurate job. We are so blessed  
to have you as our public  
broadcasting source.

Beverly from  
Urbana

I appreciate your coverage of  
Illinois news as well as national  
stories. Thanks for all you do!

Rebecca from  
Champaign

