



The Power of Public Media

2020 showed what
we're made of...

super cool photo collage

...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 your support.



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 traditional and digital platforms.

It's a role we have served 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



NEWS

Our team of news professionals met the challenges of 2020 with a redoubled commitment to keeping everyone informed about the myriad aspects of the year's most pressing issues. We reimagined a more statewide approach to news gathering and reporting, expanded our regional coverage of health, education, agriculture, politics and the environment, while launching new collaborations with other public media partners. And we entered the next robust chapter of our statewide talk show, *The 21st*, by welcoming Brian Mackey as the new host.



Election 2020

RELIABLE. ACCURATE. INFORMATIVE.

As always, Illinois Public Media, NPR, and PBS joined together to provide Election 2020 coverage that exemplified these attributes.

With few ways to receive information in person — and with record-setting interest from voters — Illinois Newsroom created the definitive voter's guide for central Illinois at IllinoisNewsroom.org/election2020. This resource encompassed every aspect of election-related news and information, including inviting questions for our news team from Central Illinoisans through an Ask The Newsroom online form. The robust Frequently Asked Questions section addressed topics ranging from voter registration to ballot deadline details.

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. voting basics Illinois Newsroom



“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

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 among Illinois Public Media, WCIA-TV Channel 3, and the League of Women Voters of Champaign County.

Trusted COVID information

When the shared experience is a global pandemic, fear of the unknown and isolation from familiar comforts and camaraderie enveloped all of us. Stepping in to inform and unite was the Coronavirus Information Center, spearheaded by the 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 available live video from Gov. Pritzker's daily briefings on both the COVID Information Center website and will.illinois.edu, we created one-minute local coronavirus updates that aired weekdays following the PBS NewsHour on WILL-TV.



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 Murrow honor was earned for a series of reports by WILL Education Reporter Lee V. Gaines that began in 2019. After initially looking at the numerous barriers to education for people in Illinois state prisons, Gaines discovered that 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 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



Dana Cronin joined Illinois Newsroom to cover agriculture-related stories. She brought experience with San Francisco public media station KQED and with NPR headquarters in Washington, D.C., where she produced content for news shows including *Weekend Edition* and *All Things Considered*. Since arriving in early 2020, Cronin has produced...

Thanks to a grant from the Backlund Family Trust, we're hiring a reporter to concentrate 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 ag stories.

[graphic: top 5 favorite topics/aha moments from Brian Mackey + inset photo of him]
-- more about Brian

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

number of local TV updates created

New multimedia local coverage

News from Around Illinois

Each week's award-winning original reporting from Illinois Newsroom in digital digest form is delivered in the News from Around Illinois eNewsletter, curated by the Newsroom's Alex Coleman.

217 Today

Fresh ways of providing Central Illinoisans with news prompted Morning Edition host Brian Moline to spearhead the creation of 217 Today — a daily podcast featuring each weekday's headlines, along with one deeper dive, in just 10 minutes. Launched in September, the podcast is hosted by Moline, and produced by University of Illinois student Olivia Butts as part of our relationship with the College of Media that offers students opportunities to gain real-world experience..

▶ PRODUCTIONS

Upholding our role as a PBS partner in producing compelling documentaries and programs became more difficult—and even 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.



CLASSICAL ∫ BTS

After a successful six-part debut season, Classical:BTS returned in November with the first installment in the second season of the popular docuseries that reveals the lesser-seen and heard stories around classical music in Central Illinois.

Made possible with funding from the Barbara E. Barnes Fund for Illinois Public Media, the six episodes of season 2 each focus on a performer's personal journey; five more are coming in 2021, starting in January.

“We focus on their inner struggles to be the best they can be, and what it means to come to terms with the ups and downs of a career in music, especially in COVID times.

— Sarah Edwards



Viktor Krauss Summer Solstice Cruise on FM

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 to nurture his local roots through an ongoing music performance relationship with Allerton.

We appreciate joining Allerton for this summer celebration of Krauss' exceptional talent via the broadcast on WILL-FM 90.9 — also streamed on the WILL website and on WILL's mobile app — made possible with funding from the U of I Community Credit Union, Kirby Medical Center, The Ayers Family, and The Herbold Family Trust.





ILLINOIS COUNTRY

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 spotlight the significant role that 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 FarmAid in Champaign – that contributed to the growth of this uniquely American art form.

Behind-the-scenes footage allowed our Illinois Country production team to create a six-part web series, *Voices of Illinois Country*, that offered additional vignette stories 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 at-home concerts with the singers and songwriters, available online and on WILL-TV.



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."

We're 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*

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 and on the PBS Video app. In the June debut program — Living Through the Pandemic — we hear 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're adjusting to the economic, social, and psychological impact of the COVID-19 pandemic.

AMERICAN PORTRAIT:



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

Mid-American Gardener attracts growing audience

Another creative pivot found Illinois Public Media's longtime signature gardening program changing from an in-studio production to a Facebook Live video conference approach to keep the insight coming.

The show became even more popular as new gardeners were seeking

out trusted sources of advice.

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.

Joining annual Pygmalion Music Festival

-- Brief blurb and photo(s)

I'm glad to be donating to Illinois Public Media. With so much "fake news" going around these days, I want to support the University's broadcasting program, bringing thoughtful, truthful news and information to listeners and viewers throughout East Central Illinois. Onward and upward!

— Rob, Champaign

Most-streamed national programs

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

Most-streamed local programs

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

Reel Midwest films featured in PBS Short Film Fest

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 initiative. Both selections were featured in the culture category.

"Paddle Together" from filmmaker Katie Prentiss Onsager told the story of the Paradise City Dragon Boat team of breast cancer survivors and supporters who paddled a 20-person boat down the Connecticut River.

"You Know the Drill" from filmmaker McKinleigh Lair examines both the research and personal experiences of parents, students, and teachers from conducting active shooter drills in schools.

Local reporting goes national

National appointments within other news organizations



EDUCATION

Since the earliest days of Sesame Street more than 50 years ago, helping students of all ages learn remains a core mission of every PBS member station. WILL-TV is no exception, and our WILL Education department 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.



AT-HOME LEARNING RESOURCES

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, free of charge. One of the first actions was a new 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.

Students eagerly accessed new digital resources — including apps, games, and printables, endorsed by local school districts, to support a range of academic subjects — 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 website.

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

[photos & graphics suggestions]

-- banner art from dedicated At-Home Learning website <https://will.illinois.edu/athomelearning>

-- graphic: page view totals for all eight Pre-K to Grade 3 learning topics

-- quote from Moss: "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."

SOCIAL JUSTICE LEARNING INITIATIVE

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, national origin, mental/physical ability, sexual orientation, gender and gender identity/expression. So far, we've already shared materials on race and racism, as well as gender.

With age-specific resources for early childhood, adolescents, and adults, each section of the dedicated website — made possible with financial support from Common Ground Food Co-op in Urbana — features videos from PBS and other national learning partners, audio from experts like NPR Code Switch, and books.

Book Mentor Project goes virtual

Cue the video! Recording their readings of books with educational messages was how a dedicated group of volunteers maintained the Book Mentor Project as a vital resource in 2020. For families who otherwise might not have access to books, the videos and copies of each book kept kids excited about reading.

Illinois Radio Reader now on Alexa

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

Thanks to a creative pivot to use recording software on their

smartphones and home computers, IRR users continued to receive that local news as part of the Illinois Radio Reader service they rely on. Plus, the 42-year-old service became available on Amazon's Alexa.

FACEBOOK LIVE EVENTS

So many questions. Discussing answers ...

... ABOUT INSTRUCTION.

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

... ABOUT POLICING.

As our nation tried to reconcile the need for public safety with the deaths of Black citizens Breonna Taylor and George Floyd, Illinois Newsroom hosted a July 23 Facebook Live event about the role of police in Champaign-Urbana. Moderated by News & Public Affairs Director Reginald Hardwick, panelists included local mayors, law enforcement, scholars and 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 guests _____.



UNIVERSITY OF ILLINOIS CONNECTIONS

From our broadcasting start 99 years ago 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, with lasting results for the future.



Illinois Public Media



Telling the university's inspiring stories

The new U of I System's Rising to the Challenge podcast details some of the most notable ways the University of Illinois campuses in Urbana-Champaign, Chicago and Springfield are meeting our world's most pressing challenges. Naturally, U of I President Tim Killeen chose to partner with Illinois Public Media for production support.

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

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

John Frayne School of Music Internship

"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 generosity of two local couples and long-time Friends of WILL has created the John Frayne Classical Music Graduate Student Work Experience. The gift from Terry and Barbara England and Herb and Jane Lasky will fully fund special classical-first projects to be created by a University of Illinois School of Music grad student for our WILL classical music service.

At the same time, it will help fully prepare the music student selected for a well-rounded career in music that today must include training and experience in media skills, including research, editing, writing, programming, or announcing in addition to excellence with the chosen instrument or study area.



Chris Evans

After joining the College of Media 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 that 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," he 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.



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 traditional and digital platforms.

It's a role we have served 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

Development

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.

