

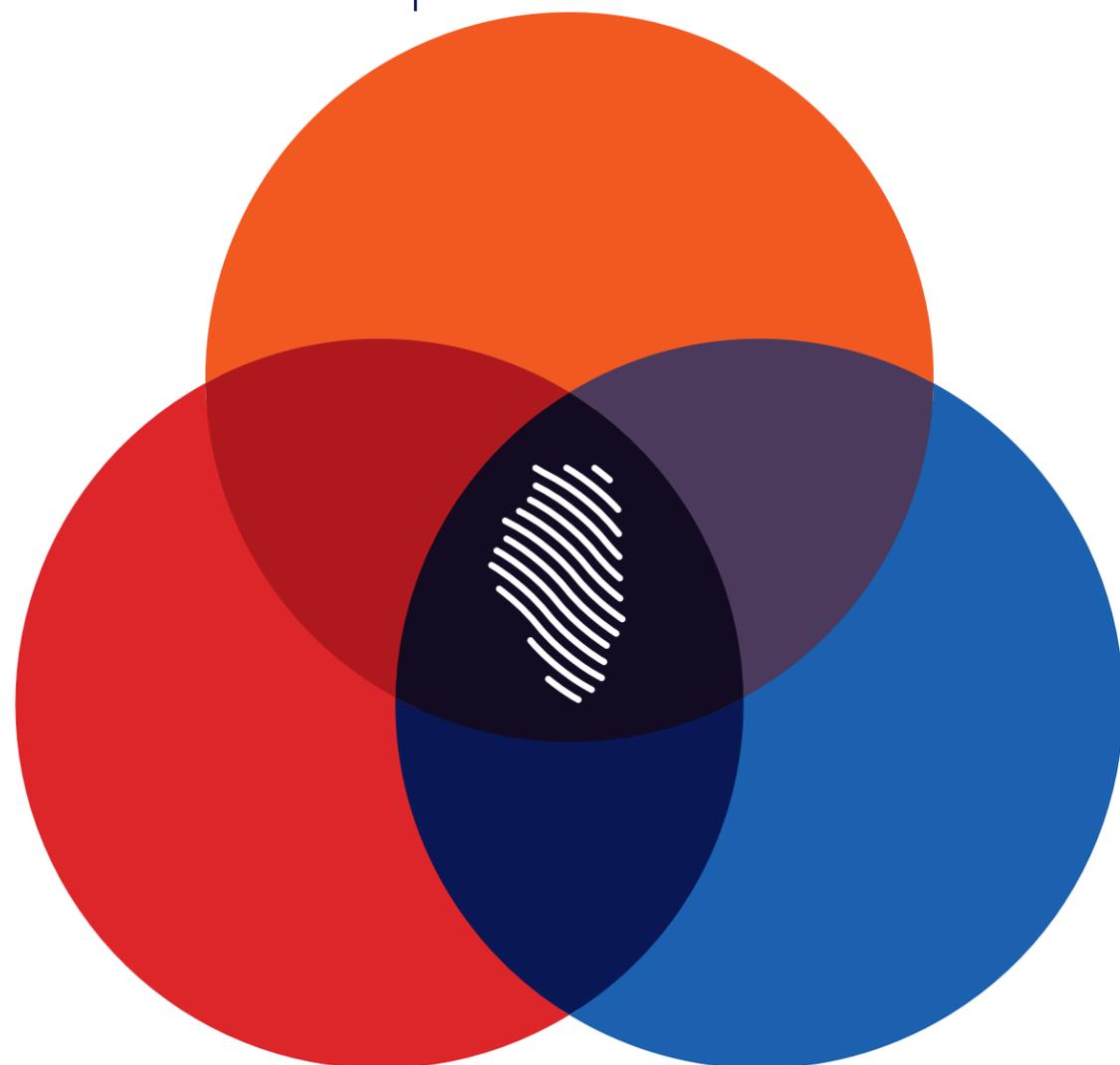
Illinois Public Media

2024 ANNUAL REPORT





College of Media



Just as Champaign-Urbana lies at the intersection of three major interstates, so too does Illinois Public Media find itself uniquely positioned at the intersection of the University of Illinois, NPR, and PBS.



We unite the missions of these three entities in the execution of our mission: to enrich the lives of individuals in our community through the power of public media. In our various efforts to meet this mission in 2024, we can point to no fewer than 283 instances in which we relied on subject experts and leaders in disciplines from across the University of Illinois to give us helpful context and perspectives on current events and local issues, as well as provide respite in the arts, culture, and community. Having this vast wealth of knowledge on our doorstep improves what we offer to you, our listeners and viewers, and we are happy to lend our resources to the university in kind through the Illinois Student Newsroom at IPM and other partnerships, which we will showcase within this publication.

In 2024, we worked to make our programming, events, and news an inclusive space for all to enjoy. The largest development last year was the launch of Illinois Soul. We identified a clear lack of Black voices in the local media landscape and were uniquely situated to fill that gap. Already recognized with several local and regional awards, Illinois Soul has provided a much-needed resource to central Illinois and deepened our connection with the diverse communities we serve.

As the national debate over federal funding for public media intensifies, it's important to remember that local public media stations like IPM are a vital resource. Our services extend far beyond traditional entertainment programming. We also provide trustworthy, unbiased news as well as agricultural reporting, emergency alerts, and educational resources — all tailored to meet the unique needs of people in our region. We can only continue to do this thanks to your gifts, combined with critical federal, state, and University of Illinois financial support.

We hope you enjoy learning about all the ways we have advanced our mission in 2024 and worked to ensure IPM continues to thrive.

Maurice "Moss" Bresnahan
Executive Director

“ The services provided by Illinois Public Media are as essential today as they were a century ago to connect our campus and our local and regional communities with a variety of enriching news, programming, and events. For students in the College of Media, IPM also provides innovative experiential learning opportunities such as the Illinois Student Newsroom.”

—Tracy Sulkin, Dean of the College of Media





Illinois Soul hit the airwaves on February 1 as IPM’s newest radio station. From day one, Illinois Soul has unapologetically highlighted Black experiences, celebrated Black culture, elevated Black voices, and showcased Black music.

“Public media is uniquely positioned to meet the needs of its community in ways that commercial media might not, and this new service connects listeners to the issues that matter most to those across our region,” said Moss Bresnahan, executive director for IPM.

Broadcasting on WILL-FM 101.1 and streaming live at illinoisoul.org, Illinois Soul is a 24/7 public media audio service featuring exceptional, Black-hosted NPR news programs — such as *Code Switch* and *It’s Been a Minute* — alongside other popular programs such as *Cafe Mocha*, mixed with smooth jazz, neo soul, R&B, and throwback jams.

“On a national level, Illinois Soul is a groundbreaking format for attracting Black adult audiences to public media,” said Jill Clements, who was named Illinois Soul Manager in August. “We’re also proud to be a part of the local community engagement efforts to better connect the University of Illinois and Black communities.”

IPM’s work in creating Illinois Soul was rooted in the idea of intentionally changing the media landscape with the support and guidance from respected Black community leaders and Black University of Illinois professionals who advocate for the mission of the station and for its listeners.

“Black voices and perspectives are more important today than ever,” said Tracy Parsons, community advisory member for Illinois Soul and community coalition facilitator. “The station and social media platform are critical life supports to tell the Black communities’ story and build, empower, and inform communities of Black values and contributions.”



“ I deeply appreciate the mere existence of Illinois Soul in our community. For those of us who often feel displaced, it serves as a connection: a lifeline to the rest of the Black world. Keep going. Soothe us. Push us. Always help us grow. Thank you.”
— Imani, Champaign



STAND-OUT MOMENTS FROM THE FIRST YEAR



1. UNCORKED SERIES

During Illinois Soul’s first month on the air, which also was Black History Month, the station sponsored special editions of the Krannert Center Uncorked concert series every Thursday evening with performances from local, regional, and national acts. It was a great way to introduce Illinois Soul to the community and celebrate its launch. This collaboration broke attendance records each week.



2. JUNETEENTH CONCERT

In June, Illinois Soul and Krannert Center presented the first-ever special Juneteenth edition of Uncorked with a performance by national recording artist and Chicago native Syleena Johnson. According to Krannert, the performance was their best attended Uncorked concert since the series began.



3. CELEBRATING BROWN V. BOARD OF EDUCATION

In December, Illinois Soul hosted a celebration of the 1954 landmark Supreme Court case on racial segregation in public schools. The Brown v. Board of Education 70th Anniversary Musicology Experience featured music, spoken word performances, and digital art. It was co-hosted by IPM News’ Reginald Hardwick and Rod Wyatt with the University of Illinois Office of the Chancellor.



4. AWARDS SEASON

In its first year, the station was recognized with several local and regional awards, including Outstanding Program with a Social Justice Award presented by the campus Office of Diversity & Social Justice Education; recognition from the NAACP’s Champaign County branch honoring Jill Clements with its Media Trailblazer Award and Reginald Hardwick with its Media Expansion Award; and a Crystal Mic award from the Illinois News Broadcasters Association honoring an episode of *Dialogue*, our new community affairs program hosted by Kennedy Vincent.



EXPLORING GOSPEL'S ROOTS

In February, Henry Louis Gates Jr. returned to the PBS airwaves with another four-part documentary, this time digging deep into the origin story of Black gospel music, coming out of slavery, blending with the blues tradition, and soaring to new heights during the Great Migration. From Chicago to Detroit and from California to the South, the story of *GOSPEL* unfolded over two nights on WILL-TV. In addition to the film, Illinois Soul created a pop-up gospel exhibit on the second floor of the Illinois Terminal in downtown Champaign thanks to a community engagement grant from WETA. This proved to be a dynamic location for the pop-up as Illinois Terminal hosts a variety of people each day.

This exhibit drew from the film's story, highlighting the cultural, historical, and musical impacts of gospel music across the nation, alongside the history, music, and people here in central



“I especially appreciate your local reporting. Recently, the work with student Farrah Anderson has been amazing, and I thank WILL for providing a platform and guidance for up-and-coming journalists.”

— Jane, Urbana

Illinois who contribute to gospel music's impacts. The installation celebrated southern migrants Thomas A. Dorsey, Mahalia Jackson, and Sister Rosetta Tharpe, all of whom built lives in Chicago after the Great Migration, and blended the melodic sounds and instrumentation of blues and jazz with lyrics about God's goodness. Like the blues, gospel music would become a commodity, but one built by Black-owned publishing companies like Martin and Morris and sustained by Black audiences. The exhibit shared their stories and their impacts on the genre, along with local musical forces such as Willie T. Summerville.

Illinois Soul also hosted two *GOSPEL* screening events across the viewing and listening area, one in Champaign-Urbana at the Virginia Theatre and another in Springfield at the Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library and Museum.

STUDENT NEWSROOM REPORTING SPARKS CHANGE

We continued to support the award-winning Illinois Student Newsroom at IPM, which helps expand our coverage and offers journalism students from the College of Media at Illinois real-world experience working side-by-side with media professionals in all facets of a public media newsroom. In 2024, the Student Newsroom's 12 student reporters produced nearly 100 stories, which were heard on WILL-AM 580 and FM 90.9, shared on social media, and published online.

News editor Christine Herman also worked with journalism students from outside of the student newsroom. The students were asked to report stories for class and pitch them to IPM. One of these stories, from Layli Nazarova, went on to win fourth place in the 2024-2025 Hearst Journalism Awards Program's Audio News/Features Competition, qualifying her for the National Championships in June. Nazarova, will join the Illinois Student Newsroom in Spring 2025. In November, she produced a feature about a University of Illinois student who uses a wheelchair and had to drop a class due to bathroom accessibility issues. Nazarova's reporting — and inquiries about these accessibility challenges — led the university to acknowledge that bathrooms in the Henry Administration Building were not ADA-compliant, as labeled, and shared a plan to fix them.



CONNECTING ILLINOIS

Our longstanding statewide program, *The 21st Show*, underwent a refresh. The team engaged in multiple strategic planning retreats to outline the future of the hourlong program and the show's purpose and place in local Illinois communities as it relates to the day's top issues and the national discourse. Through these discussions, the team reinforced its commitment to serving as the connective tissue for Illinoisans of various backgrounds, interests, geographical locations, political affiliations, and more. From that a new look and show mission statement was born: *The 21st Show*, Connecting Illinois.



CREATING LEARNING SPACES

We are always excited to partner with the university, and in particular the College of Media, to utilize our studio spaces as learning incubators. Over the last few years, we have only seen that activity grow, from giving incoming students a unique welcoming experience to providing crucial studio space to explore independent filmmaking. Efforts from Victor Font, senior lecturer in the Department of Media & Cinema Studies, provide a wonderful example of engaging students in our TV studio. In 2024, students from both MACS 480: Advanced Filmmaking and MACS 370: Cinematography and Sound Design took advantage of our media resources for their projects.

Additionally, in April Collins TV Studio was transformed into a Harry Potter experience for incoming first-year students touring campus.

STUDENT OPPORTUNITIES

We are proud to offer a range of opportunities to students from the University of Illinois to challenge themselves and grow professionally. Year after year, students play a vital role at IPM, from reporting the news and producing segments for our ongoing programs to helping on-air elements flow smoothly on our WILL stations.

“I was particularly grateful for the Donald P. Mullally Internship Scholarship, as I am eager to gain more hands-on experience in sound design. As a theatre major, I was excited to explore all aspects of sound. My passion for sound design began in high school, and I knew then that I wanted to build a career in this field. Whether in theatre, radio, concerts, or film, I am committed to deepening my understanding of sound and broadcasting.”



— Grace Merki, recipient of the Donald P. Mullally Internship Scholarship for 2024-2025

“These roles have provided invaluable insights into live show production and the diverse opportunities within journalism. They have helped me immerse myself in the community and connect with the people around me. These experiences have sharpened my skills in sourcing and storytelling and am looking forward to serving in that capacity again this year.”



— Stephanie Mosqueda, recipient of the Robert O. Endres Endowed Internship for 2024-2025

CREATING SPACE FOR BLACK STORIES

At the same time Illinois Soul was launched, we also introduced a new weekly local community affairs magazine program, *Dialogue*, highlighting issues important to Black communities in central Illinois. IPM welcomed Kennedy Vincent as the host of the program and as a specialty reporter for Black and immigrant communities for IPM News.

“Even before Illinois Soul hit the airwaves, IPM leadership knew we wanted to create and produce local content to serve Black communities in central Illinois and to engage with local community members,” said Reginald Hardwick, director of news and public affairs at IPM. “So, I was excited to create *Dialogue*, a weekly space to bring Black communities together to discuss issues and, more importantly, discuss solutions and ways to empower the community.”

Each week, the program features interviews with people across the region along with in-depth stories from the IPM News team about education, health, politics, arts, and more as they relate to local Black communities.



“Kennedy is an emerging early-career audio journalist who helps tell the stories of our neighbors, question leaders, and empower communities with information through *Dialogue*,” said Hardwick. “She continuously pushes boundaries and believes sharing meaningful stories globally is what will unite us intentionally.”

Vincent is focused on surrounding her work with collective BIPOC stories, universal rights, and community healing. “Our goal for Illinois Soul and for *Dialogue* is to create a hub for Black media, where communities of color can listen to everyone’s stories,” she said.

The program aims to provide a space to discuss topics like distrust in the health care system, the impact of hair discrimination on Black women, and the growth of the Congolese population in Champaign-Urbana and the resources needed for integration.

“We want to create a space where we can all connect, integrate, and build together. Listening and relating to other people’s stories is important, especially when we can relate to someone who looks like us. It lets you know that you are not alone in this world,” Vincent said. “And, of course, having great music on Illinois Soul tying it all together is the cherry on top!”

Listeners can also expect to learn more about Champaign-Urbana’s growing immigrant population through Vincent’s reporting work. It’s her hope that *Dialogue* becomes a hub for local updates on immigrant news and resources, hearing from community leaders and members from all diverse backgrounds.

IPM ELECTION CENTER EMPOWERS AND INFORMS

As our local communities prepared for Election 2024, IPM News was there as your trusted source for the latest information on candidates and issues.

The IPM News team brought hourly local updates on Election Day across all platforms, with results from the Associated Press and an interactive space on IPMnewsroom.org providing up-to-the-minute results, broken down by county. IPM reporters and student reporters were out in the field monitoring turnout and getting reaction to race results from around central Illinois.

Prior to Election Night, IPM News established an Election 2024 Headquarters to stay up to date on national, state, and local races. The website included a voting guide for important dates, candidates, and ballot measures as well as a “Find Out What’s on Your Ballot” feature. The website was updated frequently with stories from IPM News, such as candidate interviews and election reports to empower voters to cast a vote based on facts. The IPM News Election Headquarters also gave our local communities instant access to *The 21st Show’s* interviews with statewide office seekers.

SARAH MCCAMMON VISITS ‘THE 21ST SHOW’

IPM was pleased to welcome NPR’s Sarah McCammon to Campbell Hall in March to discuss her new book, “The Exvangelicals: Loving, Living, and Leaving the White Evangelical Church.”

Friends of WILL joined us in the Collins TV Studio for a special live taping of *The 21st Show*. Host Brian Mackey sat down with McCammon to discuss her life growing up in an evangelical family in the Midwest in the ’80s and ’90s and witnessing first hand the power and influence of evangelical beliefs on politics while serving as a National Political Correspondent for NPR. Additionally, she shared insights on covering the 2024 election. It was a fascinating discussion, and you can still hear portions of it wherever you get your podcasts or at 21stshow.org.



Illinois Soul’s David Pierce produced multiple “Voice of the Voter” stories, which could be heard and watched across radio, TV, and YouTube. He talked with voters about the Election 2024 issues and candidates and what was important to them individually.

In addition, we shared national news coverage and political programs from NPR and PBS in the lead-up to Election Day, compared 2024 to 2020, examined the vice president’s role throughout history, explored efforts to reach Latino voters across the political spectrum, revealed the complexities of the Electoral College, and aimed to contribute to the discourse with civil dialogue. In addition, *Frontline* provided another unflinching examination of each presidential ticket with “The Choice.”





This year, IPM produced eight new episodes of the beloved magazine show *Prairie Fire*. Begun in the mid-1990s and relaunched in May 2023, *Prairie Fire* brings you cinematic documentaries, profiles, and performances highlighting the businesses, history, and people of downstate Illinois.

From visiting one-of-a-kind museums showcasing hats and typewriters to learning more about the craft of making paper, hand-dyeing yarn, and the legacy of the Black barbershop, *Prairie Fire* showcases the rich diversity of our region and the intensely passionate and talented people who make it so. One standout segment this year involved sampling the hyper-local microbrews and pizza at Scratch Brewing Company in Ava, Illinois. “Scratch Brewery brings together a lot of the elements we want *Prairie Fire* to represent,” producer and host Sarah Edwards said. “It’s an innovative, little-known business quietly making a big impression on its customers and its community. We feel like we captured the beauty and flavor of what they have to offer. And we couldn’t wait to tell viewers about this discovery hiding in southern Illinois.”

In another episode, we learned about the Illinois Underground Railroad from historian Eric Robinson. While the Underground Railroad has a long and storied history in this country, many do not realize how much of that history exists within Illinois or wrongly assume what the “North” and “South” meant for those who were enslaved. Robinson details how escaped enslaved people would use the natural routes of the two rivers that border Illinois to reach freedom and what life looked like for them on the other side. By showing us how many towns in southern Illinois still bear traces of this rich history, Robinson gives voice to people and stories that might otherwise be forgotten.

The *Prairie Fire* team also highlighted their visit to Taylor Studios, a museum exhibit design and fabrication firm in Rantoul. What began in a renovated chicken coop quickly exploded into a successful enterprise, employing artisans of all kinds to create exhibits featuring anything from life-like human figures to realistic nature scenes and cutting-edge interactive displays. Taylor Studios brings stories to life, educating the public and encouraging wonder and discovery at every age. “As someone who has always been fascinated by the curation of museum exhibits, it was such a treat to go behind the scenes and see projects develop from start to finish,” producer/director Taylor Plantan said. “There’s a sense of awe when an exhibit can transport you to another time and place.”

“What makes *Prairie Fire* essential viewing goes beyond its technical excellence or its Emmy-winning production values. Whether it’s hand-dyed yarn in Clinton or artisanal paper on campus, these makers are weaving a future that values craft over convenience and community over isolation. In their hands, central Illinois is, itself, creating something new and worth preserving.”

— Amy Penne, *Smile Politely* Arts Editor

STUDENTS GET REAL-WORLD EXPERIENCE WITH ‘CETACEAN’

In April, *Prairie Fire* presented a one-hour special filmed by College of Media students from Victor Font’s MACS 370: Cinematography and Sound Design class. The episode follows the creation and performance of “CETACEAN (The Whale),” a multimedia performance that dives deep into the environmental plight facing whales. The episode includes interviews with artists Deke Weaver, professor of new media in the School of Art and Design, and Jennifer Allen, choreographer and director, who talk about why they created the show, why it’s important, and how it came together. The special also features excerpts from the show, which took place at the Stock Pavilion on the University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign campus in the fall of 2023. In collaborating with the team at WILL-TV to plan and execute this large-scale shoot, students gained valuable real-world experience, made possible by IPM’s position within the College of Media.





“ My day does not truly start until I hear Kimberly Schofield’s voice in the morning. Real estate agents should include her *Morning Edition* broadcast in their list of perks for buying a home in the area.”
— Andrew, Urbana



“ Illinois Radio Reader service is an exemplary service for the central Illinois community under the expert guidance of Kathie Spegal, our coordinator who works tirelessly to make Illinois Radio Reader service function so smoothly.”
— Carl & Dorothy, Champaign



“ I like WILL AG with Todd Gleason. I listen to his program every day, and I’m not even a farmer or a trader, but I like to know what is going on with our state’s largest commodities—corn and beans... Thank you.”
— John, Urbana



“ Keep up the great work — and congratulations to Jason Croft for the continued success with the *Atomic Age Cocktail Party!* ”
— Ruth, Bloomington





HITTING THE ROAD

In 2024, IPM disseminated dozens of hours of helpful gardening advice to Illinoisans via *Mid American Gardener*. Last summer, host Tinisha Spain and the rest of the crew took the show on the road. We enjoyed meeting new people, learning new things, and, of course, spending time in the gardens we visited. In early June, we met regular contributor Rusty Maulding, site superintendent of the 900-acre nature preserve at Lake of the Woods in Mahomet. Rusty showed us two pollinator flower gardens his team started in the fall of 2023. He highlighted the importance of selecting a diverse mix of plants with different blooming times to enjoy fresh flowers and feed vital pollinators all season long.

Other notable field segments include a trip to the Idea Garden in Urbana — part of the University of Illinois Arboretum — where we learned from Jennifer Nelson about maintaining berry vines, and the gardens at Allerton Park in Monticello. Here park supervisor Lucas Rund explained an old German gardening technique they use called “Hügelkultur,” which involves making raised garden bed mounds loaded with organic material, nutrients, and air pockets to keep roots happy and healthy.

We also had the chance to record an episode of *Mid American Gardener* from the bustling Market at the Square in Urbana. Panelists Martie Alagna, Ella Maxwell, and Doug Williams spent the morning greeting those who stopped by our table and answering garden questions you had sent in. Getting out into the field and into the community is an important part of our program’s mission. Meeting with experts where they work and learning about their processes not only helps all of us cultivate beautiful gardens, but it also promotes our local ecosystems.



“ I have been watching WILL for many years. Have always loved the station. I am now retired so not able to contribute as much as formerly, but still want to help. I especially love *Mid American Gardener* and *All Creatures Great and Small*, but there are so many good programs. Thank you!”

— Connie, Danville



TACKLING INVASIVE SPECIES

Climate change, along with other factors, has driven the spread of invasive species across Illinois, affecting everything from aquatic creatures and birds to insects and plants. This year, IPM’s annual environmental special, *State of Change*, focused on the various invasive species that have made their way into our state — explaining why it matters and what we can do about it. Now in its fourth year, this award-winning series continues to highlight the impact of climate change right here in Illinois and the people working to combat it.

In this year’s special, we met researchers who catch and categorize migrating birds that are killing native Illinois birds and eating crops. We then waded into Illinois rivers to study zebra mussels. After their accidental introduction into the United States 40 years ago, this invasive species has infiltrated Illinois waterways, where it competes with native species for resources. We also learned how invasive plant species got here, how to spot them, and why you’re encouraged to destroy them. Plus, the show covered the nine-banded armadillo. Although usually associated with the southern United States and Central and South America, the armadillo has expanded its territory into half of Illinois. We showed the extensive process researchers have undertaken to observe these mysterious animals.





WILL CLASSICAL 90.9 FM

In 2024, IPM renewed its commitment to classical music by hiring Classical Manager Max Ramirez. He has brought some exciting changes to the Classical 90.9 FM lineup, including the addition of shows like *BirdNote* and *Anytime Classical*, guided by feedback from his extensive Classical Survey. We continue to partner with regional orchestras, Illinois School of Music, and local musicians to promote performances throughout the region, but Ramirez also helped forge new partnerships with local organizations.

We continued our coverage of local classical music through *Clef Notes*, which has grown to over 600 subscribers. The articles within the monthly newsletter span a range of topics, spotlighting local artists and events and connecting readers to larger conversations within the arts. Highlights from 2024 included interviewing National Humanities Medal winner Robin Wall Kimmerer, who wrote

“Vic does an exceptional job at consistently positive music education. WILL is the reason classical music is strong in central IL.”

— Karma, Decatur



20 YEARS OF 'CLASSICS OF THE PHONOGRAPH'

This past June marked the 20th anniversary of *Classics of the Phonograph*, which airs Saturdays at 11 a.m. on FM 90.9. We honored the occasion by interviewing host John Frayne, whose voice has been a consistent presence on our airwaves since 1985. In our interview, which ran in *Clef Notes* and *Patterns*, we discussed how *Classics of the Phonograph* came to be, how Frayne approaches programming, and the importance of historical recordings in the digital age.

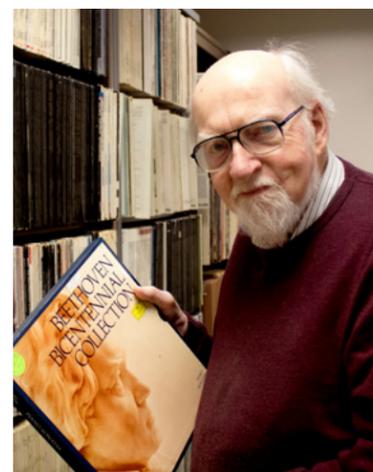
We learned that Frayne usually focuses on one composer or performer when planning his weekly programs for *Classics of the Phonograph*, but he tries to vary the subjects from week to week. “In approaching a decision, I try to let my

mind roam over new ideas, subjects that should be revisited, new developments, things never done before, new issues of large collections summarizing a career’s achievements,” Frayne said he mostly draws from his own vast record collection for the show, but recent bequests to the station have made the Friends Library a rich resource in older recordings too.

When asked about the place and value of programs like *Classics of the Phonograph* and the preservation of historical recordings more broadly, Frayne replied that he doesn’t think the record as a physical object will ever disappear. “People still like, even love, physical objects, whether cars, violins, or old wine bottles,” he said. “It seems to me that we are in a golden age in the recovery of

the libretto for a new commission by the Jupiter String Quartet; reviewing Renée Fleming’s book “Music and Mind” in advance of her recital at Krannert; and learning more about unsung musical powerhouse Clara Schumann.

In locally produced content, Vic Di Geronimo meticulously curated 1,000 hours of music via *Classic Mornings*, and Vincent Trauth brought us 260 episodes of *The Evening Concert. Atomic Age Cocktail Party* continued its celebration of the golden age of hi-fi and beyond with 33 new episodes. This locally produced program also doubled the number of stations around the country that carry it in 2024.



the knowledge of the history of classical music. The sheer amount of old music being recorded is amazing.” Thanks to *Classics of the Phonograph* and John Frayne, listeners get to engage with that wealth of recording history each week.



REEL MIDWEST GAINS NATIONAL AUDIENCE

Launched by IPM in 2019, Reel Midwest is an independent film series that helps to find and broadcast the best feature, documentary, and short films from Illinois and across the region. In April 2024, we presented *Carbondale: The Little Blue Dot*, which follows the southern Illinois city as it wrestles with its identity and its past, present, and future. Through socioeconomic differences and interpersonal challenges, the film explores the city’s diverse pathway to new leadership, including its first transgender woman running for city council and its first woman of color running for mayor. “I’m grateful for IPM’s support that provides me the creative space and flexibility to tell stories within the great state of Illinois that ripple and touch lives of the entire Midwest,” said filmmaker Sam Mirpoorian. “I’m confident this film can reach a vast and diverse audience in so many ways. The story that is rapidly unfolding in Carbondale is just a small microcosmic footprint on the direction in which America is moving in.”

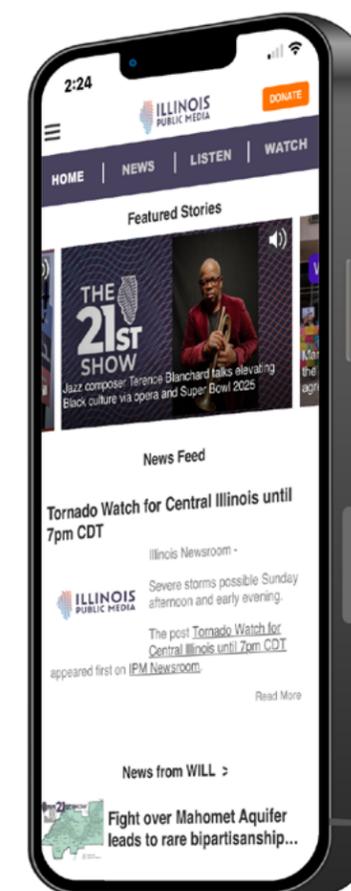
Earlier in the year, IPM expanded the reach of Reel Midwest. We partnered with the Center for Asian American Media, Firelight Media, and PBS to present *Reel Midwest: Homegrown*, a limited series of eight documentary short films by diverse filmmakers whose narratives illuminate the living histories, cultures, and future visions of the region. The filmmakers received mentoring from independent filmmakers and were paired with a local public media station within their respective communities. What began as an online series (*Homegrown: Future Visions*) has since aired nationally on PBS and World and is available on PBS Plus, thanks to the efforts of IPM video production manager DJ Roach.

NEW APP DEBUTS

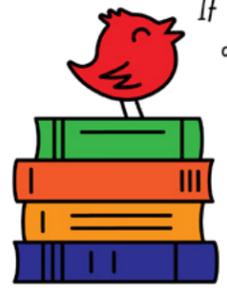
IPM’s new and improved mobile app makes it even easier to access programs, news, and content from PBS, NPR, and WILL. Created with our audience in mind, the new IPM App is your one-stop for the best of public media. With just a few taps, anyone can quickly catch up on the events of the day, enjoy captivating music, or tune in to WILL’s live television stream.

With an intuitive design, the app is easy to navigate for both beginners and the tech savvy. Shows and news stories are neatly divided into categories — News, Listen, and Watch. Under the News tab you will find articles, talk radio segments, and video clips covering local, state, and national news. Tap the Listen tab for instant access to IPM’s audio streams. With a built-in alarm and sleep timer you can even wake up or drift off to your favorite sounds. The Watch tab is your portal to the WILL-TV livestream, on-air schedule, and the most popular programs from PBS and PBS KIDS. And the app’s bookmark feature makes finding your favorites a snap.

Download now from the Apple App Store or Google Play to bring the best of public media to your smartphone or tablet.



It was a dark and stormy night...



WILL-TV's Book Mentor Project

CELEBRATING 20 YEARS

Thanks to a very generous ongoing grant from PNC Grow Up Great™, we have been strengthening relationships between pre-kindergarten children and reading since 2004. Book Mentor Project provides carefully selected books and activities designed to deepen learning in the classroom as well as at home, and members of our local community become invested in the outcomes of children throughout east central Illinois.

“As a book mentor volunteer myself, I see firsthand the importance and impacts of a program like this each month,” said Moss Bresnahan, executive director of IPM. “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. Since 2004, our Book Mentor Project has been no exception, and we couldn’t do it without our longtime funding partner PNC Grow Up Great™.”

Ahead of each school year, IPM recruits and trains local volunteers to become book mentors. Each month mentors visit the same Head Start classroom — from Urbana to Champaign to Rantoul — to read that month’s book selection and join the children in a book-related, hands-on activity to reinforce a math, science, language, or arts skill. The project provides teachers with lesson plans and the classroom materials to support this curriculum.

“The Book Mentor Project encourages parents and family members to sit down and read to their child, especially when the child comes home so excited about the book and activity that was provided for them that day,” said Jacki Buckingham, a family child care mentor for the Early Childhood Education Program at Head Start.



Additionally, the project provides families with copies of the books, resources to facilitate at-home learning, and events to bring that excitement out of the classroom and into everyday life through four family nights per school year.

For the '24-'25 school year, Daiane Geremias Goulart served as the Book Mentor Project coordinator through a graduate assistantship, creating the monthly curriculum guides for volunteers, teachers, and families to use as well as leading each of the family night events. Goulart is getting her Master of Arts in Latin American and Caribbean studies at the University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign, with an interest in applying her studies to educational initiatives. Amelia Bellizzi, a junior in the Gies College of Business at Illinois, was this year’s Book Mentor Project assistant, handling the day-to-day clerical and administrative support tasks on top of managing the inventory and deliverables for the project.

“Working on the Book Mentor Project has been an amazing experience to be part of, and I have enjoyed interacting with the community and giving back. I have had a great time getting to know others working on the project and enjoy the work that I do organizing and distributing the books and activities for the program,” Bellizzi said. Michelle Garduno, a sophomore studying human development and family studies at Illinois, served as the program’s Spanish translator.



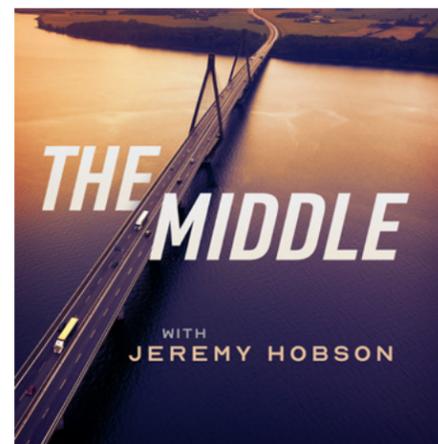
CHAMPIONING EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATORS

In May, IPM’s Education Department honored three early childhood educators and volunteers from central Illinois at its Early Childhood Champions reception. Miniature horses Shifa and Chiron, along with their handler, Sarah Nixon, of Miniature Horse Power, were recognized in the category of “Very Important Person/Organization.” Jessica Ochoa and Angela Kleber, both of the International Prep Academy in Champaign’s Unit 4 School District, were named “Emerging Professional” and “Professional of the Year,” respectively. In addition to an awards plaque, Lone Star Lodge #18, Prince Hall Affiliated Grand Lodges of Freemasonry provided a monetary gift to each of the award recipients. (Nixon was given mini carrots to take back to the equine VIPs.)

The program is our local effort in support of the national PBS KIDS Early Learning Champions, which seeks to recognize and support talented early education professionals who work or volunteer with young children (infants to third graders) and their families. “It is our goal to help others understand the importance of early childhood education and early development. These pivotal years lay the foundation for all future learning, behavior, and wellness. A strong foundation helps children develop the skills they need as adults. Our early childhood champions are not recognized enough for their hard work and passion to serve our littlest learners. This is our effort to show them how much we appreciate them,” said Kellie Blanden, IPM assistant director of educational outreach and professional development.



EARLY CHILDHOOD CHAMPIONS



‘THE MIDDLE’ ADDS MORE STATIONS

The Middle with Jeremy Hobson continued to expand its reach this year. Distributed to NPR stations by IPM, *The Middle* is the only live national call-in current events program on public radio. As of 2024, it airs on 426 NPR stations across the country each week. Those who live outside the listening areas of these stations can now tune into *The Middle* through NPR’s Sirius/XM channel or stream the video version of the show on YouTube, Instagram, Facebook, TikTok, and Twitch. This means *The Middle* is now available in every single U.S. market at a time when such programming is needed most.

The Middle brings you high-quality, nonpartisan discussions, elevating the voices of those in the geographical and political middle who wish to come together to find solutions to the country’s most pressing issues. In 2024, the show produced multiple live specials, including two with the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation, which aired live across the United States and Canada on radio and television. Other live shows were taped in New Orleans, Salt Lake City, Park City, Denver, Detroit, Las Vegas, St. Louis, Birmingham, Evansville, Waterbury, and Vancouver. Hobson also welcomed several high-profile guests to the show, including Katie Couric, Mark Cuban, and former Iraqi President Barham Salih.

DEVELOPMENT SUCCESS

Everyone knows a friend is someone you can count on in good times and bad times. Perhaps that's why in 1974 the small group of community members that helped create a member organization for supporters of WILL aptly named our donors for what they are — our "friends." This year, we celebrated 50 years of the Friends of WILL. During the last half of 2024, we revisited how the Friends came to be and how those first volunteers helped expand WILL's outreach, creating a platform for the central Illinois community to invest in our future. We featured some of our nearest and dearest, both new and old, learning more about what motivates each of them to invest in IPM.

Here are some other highlights:



HONORING MULLALLY LEGACY CIRCLE

In June, the second annual Mullally Legacy Circle donor reception was held in the Collins TV Studio. Members of the Mullally Circle are committed to helping secure quality public radio and TV programming for future generations by leaving a gift through their will, trust, or other estate plan. After IPM Executive Director Moss Bresnahan's opening remarks, donors met with IPM staff and enjoyed a private musical performance by the Solideo Trio. It was a great way to learn more about our Mullally Circle members' strong connections to the WILL stations and to celebrate the big impact they're having on our sustainability.



CHATTING WITH NPR'S SCOTT SIMON

In October, we welcomed *NPR Weekend Edition* host Scott Simon to Urbana for a special afternoon with the Friends of WILL. *The 21st Show* host Brian Mackey talked with Simon about growing up in Illinois, his long and storied career in journalism, and his thoughts on the November election. Simon also shared some personal stories about his experiences in war zones and the people he met there. Vision Circle members were invited to a special reception to meet Simon in person prior to the main event. It truly was a special occasion!



CELEBRATING FRIENDSGIVING

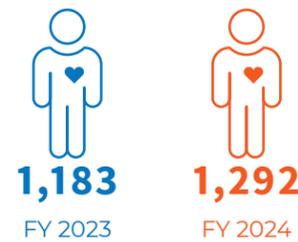
In November, we hosted our fourth annual Friendsgiving open house. More than 150 donors, viewers, listeners, and community members stopped by Campbell Hall to meet our staff and learn more about IPM's programs and services through self-guided tours of the station. The College of Media had an informational table and invited visitors to tour the Richmond Journalism Teaching Studio inside Campbell Hall, another first for our Friendsgiving celebration.



REFRESHING FRIENDS PLAZA

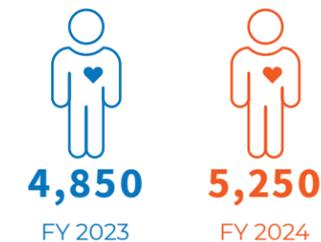
Not only was 2024 the 50th anniversary of the Friends of WILL but also the 25th anniversary of Campbell Hall. To honor this milestone, we repainted and spruced up the commemorative donor benches in Friends Plaza. Dedicated October 17, 1999, the brick-lined plaza is located at the corner of Goodwin and Main in Urbana, next to Campbell Hall.

NEW DONORS



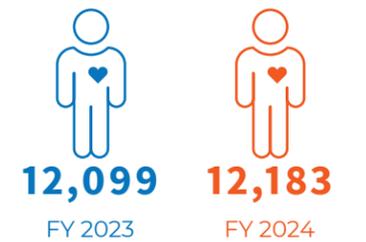
9.2 % INCREASE

SUSTAINING FRIENDS OF WILL



8.2% INCREASE

TOTAL FRIENDS



0.7 % INCREASE

To view a complete audited financial statement, please visit will.Illinois.edu/about/compliance.

AWARDS



Radio and Television Digital News Association, Regional Edward R. Murrow Awards

- Excellence in Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (small market TV): “Waukegan’s Woes,” *State of Change*
- Breaking News (small market radio): Coverage of June 2023 derecho



Society for Professional Journalists, 2023 Mark of Excellence Award, Region 5

- Radio News Reporting, first place: “Champaign Police investigate ‘agency culture’ and domestic violence reporting laws”



Public Media Journalists Association

- Visual Storytelling, first place: “Waukegan’s Woes,” *State of Change*
- Interview, second place: *The 21st Show* segment with author Luis Alberto Urrea
- Collaborative Effort, second place: “Champaign Police investigate ‘agency culture’ and domestic violence reporting laws”



Illinois News Broadcasters Association, 2024 Crystal Mic Awards

- Podcasting (small market radio), second place: *Dialogue* episode on Congolese community in Champaign-Urbana
- Investigative Reporting (small market radio): “Champaign Police investigate ‘agency culture’ and domestic violence reporting laws”



NAACP Champaign County Branch, Freedom Fund Celebration

- Media Trailblazer Award: Jill Clements
- Media Expansion Award: Reginald Hardwick



2024 National Academy of Television Arts and Sciences Mid-America Regional Chapter Emmy Awards

- Best Magazine Program: *Prairie Fire*
- Arts/Entertainment, Short Form: “Preston Jackson,” *Prairie Fire*
- Diversity, Equity, & Inclusion, Short Form: “Operation Wild Horse,” *Prairie Fire*
- Human Interest, Short Form: “Susanna Scaroni,” *Prairie Fire*



Hearst Journalism Awards

- Audio News/Features, fourth place: “U of I senior dropped disability studies minor over inaccessible bathrooms,” Layli Nazarova (Student Newsroom), *217 Today*



This year we renewed our commitment to providing essential services to our community across our news, arts, music, and educational programming, plus much more. With the addition of Illinois Soul, we upheld our mission to explore issues of importance to the communities we serve and to provide a public forum for the diversity of voices and opinions vital to a healthy democracy. The awards and recognition IPM has received in the last year are a testament to the value of what we offer, but so too are your continued support and engagement.

As the 50th anniversary of the Friends of WILL wraps up, we look to the next 50 years and beyond. You, the friends and neighbors of WILL, are what drives us. It is only through conversations with our listeners, our viewers, and our community that we can ensure we remain a robust public media organization into the future. Amid this period of uncertainty for public media and so much else, you can be sure of one thing: IPM will work to meet the needs of our community, state, and region, both on and off the air.



BROADCASTING FROM THE UNIVERSITY OF ILLINOIS URBANA-CHAMPAIGN SINCE 1922



**ILLINOIS
PUBLIC MEDIA**
will npr PBS



College of Media
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