



2025

ANNUAL REPORT

creating entrepreneurial opportunities

richlandcountyceo.com

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Discover ways to support, mentor, and connect with our program to help shape the next generation of young entrepreneurs.

LETTER FROM THE BOARD CHAIR



LAUREN MCCLAIN
Board Chair

Dear Friends, Supporters, and Community Members, As President of the Richland County CEO Board, it is my honor to reflect on another transformative year for our CEO program. What originally began as a vision to foster entrepreneurial thinking in our youth has continued to flourish into a cornerstone of innovation, leadership, and real-world learning in our community. This year, our students have once again demonstrated resilience, creativity, and ambition. From launching

individual business ventures to engaging with local leaders and business owners, each participant in the CEO class has grown in both confidence and capability. They not only gained business acumen, but they also discovered their voices and have shaped the future of our local economy.

Thanks to the unwavering support of our investors, mentors, guest speakers, and community partners, our students are experiencing what few high schoolers ever do: the opportunity to connect classroom learning to the real world in meaningful, lasting ways. Every year, I tell our group of entrepreneurs how fortunate they are to have this experience. It is something many of our board members wish was around when we were their age.

We are especially proud of our 2025 class who thought outside of the box with their class business. It truly is a reflection of the power of collaboration and the potential within each of our students.

As we look ahead, we remain committed to growing the program, expanding our reach, and continuing to provide students with the tools, relationships, and experiences they need to thrive—not just in business, but in life.

Thank you for believing in the mission of CEO and for investing in the future leaders of Richland County. Together, we are shaping something truly extraordinary.

With gratitude,
Lauren McClain

President, Richland County CEO Board



100% of students said that through Richland County CEO, they gained a new perspective of the contributions businesses make to our community. They also all said they shared information from business visits with others.



LETTER FROM THE **FACILITATOR**



SHERI GRAY
Facilitator

The 2024–2025 Richland County CEO journey was one of growth, discovery, and incredible transformation—for all of us. It was my true honor to walk alongside eight outstanding young entrepreneurs who inspired me every single day with their courage, creativity, and commitment. To the eight incredible entrepreneurs in the Class of 2025—thank you for showing up with curiosity, courage, and dedication. You embraced every challenge and turned each opportunity into growth. Watching your businesses

and confidence flourish was one of the greatest joys of my year. I was so proud of each of you.

To our CEO Board of Directors—your support and leadership were the foundation of this program. Thank you for your time, your wisdom, and for always championing our students and their potential. To our investors and mentors—you were the heartbeat of CEO. Your belief in these young people, your generosity, and your guidance made an incredible impact that will continue far beyond this year. And to our community—thank you for being our classroom, our audience, and our biggest supporters. Whether you hosted a visit, gave advice, or showed up at our events, you helped make this year unforgettable.

This program worked because of the people behind it. I was grateful to be part of something so meaningful and proud of what we built together.

With sincere gratitude,
Sheri Gray
Richland County CEO Facilitator



87.5% of students stated they could see themselves returning to Richland County to start a family and/or becoming part of the local economy as a business owner, employee, or resident.

PROGRAM OVERVIEW

The CEO program allows the students to learn the various industries, careers, and opportunities that exist in our community. They build life-long relationships with professionals that foster future growth and improvement in Richland County.



PARTICIPATING SCHOOLS

Richland County High School



VISION

CEO nurtures entrepreneurial thinkers who possess an awareness of themselves and their communities.



MISSION

Being and developing life-long learners, owners, creators, communicators and connectors



CULTURE

Expecting the best of ourselves and others that reflects the spirit and accountability found in CEO.



PARTICIPATING
SCHOOLS

1



CURRENT
STUDENTS

8



TOTAL
ALUMNI

50



ACTIVE
INVESTORS

45



BOARD
MEMBERS

12



YEARS
ACTIVE

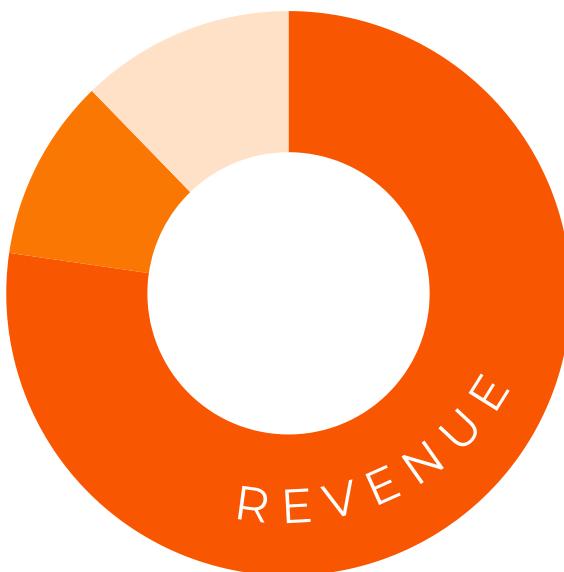
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ceo[®] RICHLAND
COUNTY

FINANCIAL HIGHLIGHTS

- Investors
- Friends of CEO
- Class Business
- Salary
- MIE Chapter Fee
- Operating Expenses



INCOME STATEMENT

REPORT

CLASS OF 2025 | AUGUST 1, 2025 - JULY 31, 2026

ITEM	AMOUNT
REVENUE	
Investors	\$45,800.00
Friends of CEO	\$1,500.00
Grants	\$2,500.00
Other	
TOTAL REVENUE	\$49,800.00
EXPENSES	
Contract Services	39,650.04
MIE Chapter Fee	\$5,000.00
Marketing	\$1,704.93
Operations	\$12,787.31
Insurance	\$400.00
Miscellaneous	\$190.93
Other	\$156.18
TOTAL EXPENSES	\$59,889.39
NET INCOME	-\$10,089.39

INVESTORS

POWERING THE NEXT GENERATION

Our Program Investors provide support to our community-driven program. An annual investment of \$1,000 provides the necessary resources for current-year facilitator salary and operating expenses and ensures the sustainability of the Richland County CEO class for future students. Investors also contribute their time to the program, hosting business visits, providing guest speakers and serving as mentors. All are crucial to the success of Richland County CEO.



A.M. Transport Services	First National Bank in Olney	Runyon Insurance Agency, Inc.
Avery & Mary Jo McKinney	Gene & Sherry Brauer	Runyon Oil Tools, Inc.
Baker Hughes	Hometown Appliance	Shuler Truck & Tractor Service, Inc.
Bartley C. Zuber, Attorney at Law	Illini Builders Company of Olney	Southern IL Scale
Big R Farm Store	Illini Wire Works, Inc.	Thrifty Home Medical
Blake and Melissa Runyon, White Oak Events	Illinois Gas Company	TrustBank
Blank's Insurance Agency	Infiniti Strength & Performance	US Weight
Carle Richland Memorial Hospital	Joe's Pizza	Wabash Valley Service Company
Carrie Winter Trust (Grant)	Kemper CPA Group	WalMart DC 6059 (Grant)
CEO Class of 2023	MAC Plastics Manufacturing	WalMart Supercenter #254 (Grant)
CEO Class of 2024	Mark & Kelsey Phillips / Microsoft	Wabash General Hospital
Charleston Engineering	Master Halco	Ward Family Trust
Citizens National Bank of Albion	Mike and Janet David	
City of Olney	Olney Rotary Club	
Country Financial Insurance	Pacific Cycle	
Doll's Inc.	Prairie Farms	

MENTORS

GUIDING THE NEXT GENERATION

A mentor is a business owner, entrepreneur, or intrapreneur from the Richland County business community who plays a vital role in shaping the next generation of leaders. By sharing their time, expertise, and real-world experiences, mentors provide invaluable guidance, encouragement, and insights that help CEO students develop confidence, critical thinking skills, and an entrepreneurial mindset.



AUTUMN CARMODY

A.M. TRANSPORT SERVICES
CUSTOMER SERVICE REPRESENTATIVE

GUNNAR MICHELS

MAC PLASTICS MANUFACTURING
VICE PRESIDENT OF FINANCE

CONNOR DIXON

THE HERSHEY COMPANY
PACKAGING PROCUREMENT

SARA PEAVLER

OLNEY TOWNSHIP
ASSESSOR

CHELSEA KERMICLE

CARLE RICHLAND MEMORIAL HOSPITAL
MANAGER OF DEVELOPMENT AT CARLE
HEALTH

COLBY SHAWVER

USDI / IL. GAS
MATERIALS AND LOGISTICS MANAGER

TARA LEMKE

CARLE
MANAGER, ORGANIZATIONAL AND
COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT

KELSIE STERCHI

CITY OF OLNEY
CITY CLERK



MENTOR **TESTIMONIAL**

"I strongly believe in the skills CEO helps develop for our entrepreneurs, and love being a small part of how this program sets up these students to be future leaders in our community."

-Connor Dixon

BOARD MEMBERS

STEERING THE FUTURE OF ENTREPRENEURSHIP



LAUREN MCCLAIN
Board Chair
Runyon Insurance



GINA KOCHER
Vice Chair
TrustBank



MADDY JONES
Treasurer
Big R Farm and Home



BRANDAN MICHELS
Secretary
MAC Plastics



TARYN BUNTING
Board Member
IECC



JASON FOX
Board Member
RCCU #!



DON HINCKLEY
Board Member
WMDC #6059



DARRELL HOUGHIN
Board Member
RCCU #!



HEATH HOUGHIN
Board Member
First National Bank in
Olney



JACLYN SHAN
Board Member
Kemper CPA



**SHERRY
SLANKARD**
Board Member
RCCU #1



**TIFFANY
TRUPIANO**
Board Member
Joe's Pizza

CLASS OF 2025

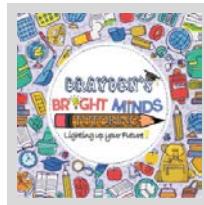
THE ENTREPRENEURS OF TOMORROW

Brayden Beard



Brayden Beard, son of Brad and Brenda Beard, was active in football, track, and tennis, and held leadership roles in FBLA, FCA, and student council. He earned high honors all four years, was an Illinois State Scholar, DAR recipient, Phi Theta Kappa member, and Top Teen at RCHS. He planned to study Business Analytics at the University of Evansville. Through CEO, Brayden launched "Brayden's Bright Minds Tutoring," gained confidence, and strengthened his public speaking and networking skills, leaving with a deeper appreciation for the local business community and a clear drive to pursue his goals.

BRAYDEN'S BRIGHT MINDS TUTORING



Jillian Bettis



Jillian Bettis, daughter of Julie and Todd Bettis, earned high honors all four years and was active in sports, playing volleyball throughout high school and serving as varsity captain her senior year. She also ran track and played softball and tennis as a freshman. An Athletic Ambassador, she was recognized for her leadership. After graduation, she planned to attend Olney Central College to study nursing. CEO was a highlight of her senior year, where she launched Sweet Eats & Canine Treats and gained confidence, creativity, and professional skills that prepared her for a bright future.

SWEET EATS & CANINE TREATS



Payden Buchanan



Payden Buchanan, son of Jordan and Ashley Buchanan, was active in his community, volunteering at the Food Pantry and local church events. A varsity soccer player, he consistently pursued leadership roles to grow and make a positive impact. Joining CEO his senior year, he saw it as a chance to build soft skills and connect with business leaders. He especially valued touring local businesses and learning from professionals. Payden launched Custom Key Creations, designing unique mechanical keyboards. CEO played a key role in shaping his personal growth and entrepreneurial journey.

CUSTOM KEY CREATIONS



Ainsley Doris



Ainsley Doris, daughter of Jason and Shawna Doris, earned high honors and was named a 2025 Illinois State Scholar and National Rural & Small Town Recognition recipient. She planned to attend the University of Evansville to study Economics and Legal Studies, with goals of law school. CEO was a transformative experience, building her skills in leadership, communication, and time management. Her business, Flicker & Flame Candle Creations, featured handcrafted candles and wax melts in unique scents, including a custom Olney Tiger candle. CEO helped spark her passion for creativity and entrepreneurship, shaping her future path.

FLICKER & FLAME CANDLE CREATIONS



CLASS OF 2025

THE ENTREPRENEURS OF TOMORROW

Mariah Livingston



Mariah Livingston, daughter of Brian and Lacie Livingston, found her passion for creativity and entrepreneurship through the CEO program. She launched The Tastebud, a seasoning business, gaining real-world experience and earning first place at Pitch Day. CEO taught her the value of hard work, communication, and resilience. A high honors student and cheerleading captain, Mariah planned to attend Greenville University to study secondary education, aiming to inspire future students. With drive, positivity, and a heart for others, she looked forward to continued growth and making a lasting impact.

Brendan McCartney



Brendan McCartney, son of Kelly and Rob Powers, played football his first two years before taking junior year off to recover from injury and spending senior year working. He joined the CEO program uncertain of its value but found it helped him grow in confidence and direction. Unsure of his future, a call from a Navy recruiter sparked his interest in the military. After a medical delay, he reapplied and now awaits clearance. In the meantime, Brendan continues building life skills, also exploring structured careers like law enforcement while crediting CEO for shaping his mindset and discipline.

THE TASTEBUD



Audry Runyon



Audry Runyon, daughter of Jennifer and Jonathan Runyon, was a consistent honor student and active in student council, athletic ambassadors, Co-Op, and prom committee. A two-time Stripes Award winner and IPA nominee, she played multiple sports and captained the soccer team her junior and senior years. After graduation, she planned to attend Wabash Valley Central College to study surgical technology and play soccer. Through the CEO program, she grew in confidence and professionalism, launching "Authentic Radiance," her all-natural skincare line, and gaining skills in public speaking, marketing, and time management.

HEROS PROTEIN



Raeleigh Rusk



Raeleigh Rusk, daughter of Emily and Kyle Rusk, earned High Honors all four years and was a STRIPES Award recipient for integrity. She played softball and basketball and received the Student Ambassador Scholarship to Olney Central College, where she planned to study finance before transferring to the University of Illinois. The CEO program had a lasting impact on her, teaching responsibility, communication, and business operations. Her business, Rusk's Marketing Business, supported small businesses with social media. CEO strengthened her work ethic and appreciation for entrepreneurship, and she expressed gratitude for the support that shaped her future.

AUTHENTIC RADIANCE



RUSK'S MARKETING BUSINESS



CLASS BUSINESS

“BAKE IT UNTIL YOU MAKE IT”



IMPACT TO STUDENTS

The class business is the most valuable part of the experience to me because it taught us how to work together as a team. We connected to the community and created memories, all while learning productive lessons. Working that closely with a team is something that I have never experienced before, and I am so glad that I had the opportunity to do it with my CEO family.



FINANCIALS

During the class business, “Bake it Until You Make It”, students worked diligently to assemble teams and create an exciting event for the community. Through their ticket sales, raffle, and auction income, they grossed \$12,018.42 with a net profit of \$5,872.61.



BUSINESS VISITS & SPEAKERS

BEYOND THE CLASSROOM: LEARNING FROM REAL BUSINESS LEADERS

A key part of the CEO experience is visiting local businesses in Richland County. Every day, people pass these businesses without realizing their impact on the local economy. Through these visits, students gain a new perspective—walking away with a deeper appreciation and never seeing these businesses the same way again.

A.M. Transport
Best Western Plus & Parkside Inn & Suites

Big R Farm & Home

Blank's Insurance

Carle RMH

Charleston Engineering

Citizens National Bank of Albion

City Hall

Consolidated Grain & Barge

Doll's Inc.

Eagleson's Automotive

Edward Jones

First National Bank of Olney

Hometown Appliance

Hurn's Lumber

IECC District Office

IL. Gas Company / USDI

Illini Wire Works, Inc.

IOGA Conference

Joe's Pizza

Kemper CPA Group

Kings Furniture

MAC Plastics

Master Halco

Molding Services of Illinois

Office of RCHS Athletic Trainer

Olney Eye Care

Olney Township

Ophelia's Cup

Pacific Cycle

Parkside Event Center

Pools & Hidden Treasures

Prairie Farms

PrintForce

Racklin Realty

Racklin's Market Street Offices

Rehabilitation & Performance Institute

Richland County Middle School

Rude Wealth

Runyon Insurance

Runyon Oil Tools

Sara Buckels, LMT - Spa

SKS USA

Southern Illinois Scale

St. Joe School

State Farm

TrustBank

US Weight

WalMart DC 6059

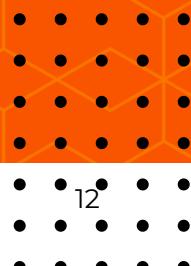
Zuber Law



BUSINESS TESTIMONIAL

Having the CEO entrepreneurs visit my office is a morning I look forward to every year. I am always surprised to hear a thoughtful question that I have never been asked. These young people do not merely want to hear "your story;" they intend to learn from it.

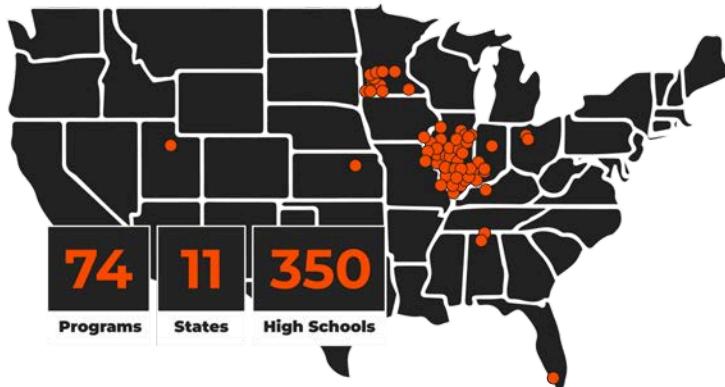
-Bartley Zuber



WE NEED COMMUNITY-MINDED INDIVIDUALS LIKE YOU.

CEO is free for students and schools. The program relies on local investors to support this transformative learning experience.

INVEST IN TOMORROW, TODAY.



By helping us connect our young people with local businesses and area leaders, you are making a direct impact on the workforce and leaders of tomorrow.

AS AN INVESTOR, YOU RECEIVE:

- Name/Logo Recognition on CEO Website
- Social Media Acknowledgement
- First Rights to host/visit the class



"The CEO experience has been life changing for me. I learned a lot of skills I wouldn't have been able to gather otherwise and I feel more prepared for my future. CEO opened up more doors for me than any other opportunity ever has."



"CEO is so much more than how to run a business. It is teaching students the life skills and all of the things that go into being successful in any career path you choose. It exposes all of our students to what endless opportunities are right here in our backyard."



"In 20+ years in economic development, the chamber of commerce and the economic development corporation, CEO has been the most beneficial most gratifying program I have been involved with."