



# 2024

# ANNUAL REPORT

[www.richlandcountyceo.com](http://www.richlandcountyceo.com)

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# LETTER FROM THE BOARD CHAIR



**Sara  
Buehnerkemper**  
2024 Board Chair

**"Do not follow where the path may lead. Go instead where there is no path and leave a trail." Ralph Waldo Emerson**

**CEO Investors, Friends of CEO, and the CEO community,**

**It is with great pleasure that I present the 2023-2024 Richland County CEO Annual Report.**

**The annual report stands as a testament to the collective efforts of our dedicated facilitator, passionate mentors, generous investors, and above all, our brilliant entrepreneurs. Each year, I am continually amazed by the creativity, resilience, and entrepreneurial spirit demonstrated by the young minds that are accepted into the program. From innovative business ideas to successful ventures, our students have not only showcased their entrepreneurial acumen but also exemplified the values of leadership, teamwork, and perseverance.**

**The sense of community that permeates our program is truly unparalleled. Through collaborative projects, networking events, and mentorship opportunities, our students have forged meaningful connections and learned the importance of supporting one another on the journey to success. As a board, we have strived to foster an inclusive environment where every voice is heard and every idea is valued—a community where dreams are nurtured and aspirations are realized.**

**I am particularly proud of the tremendous growth I have witnessed in our students throughout my tenure on the CEO Board. From the timid students embarking on their entrepreneurial journey to the confident entrepreneurs ready to take on the world, the transformation is both remarkable and inspiring. The program has not only equipped them with essential business skills but also instilled in them the confidence to pursue their passions and make a positive impact on society.**

**As my Presidency and term on the CEO Board comes to an end, I am filled with deep gratitude for the privilege of serving alongside such dedicated individuals who share a common commitment to empowering our youth. To our program facilitator, investors, mentors, and fellow board members, thank you for your unwavering support, wisdom, and tireless efforts in shaping the future leaders of tomorrow.**

**As we look ahead to the future of the CEO program, I am confident that the seeds we have planted will continue to flourish and bear fruit for years to come. Our students are the embodiment of innovation, resilience, and boundless potential, and I have no doubt that they will continue to inspire and redefine the landscape of entrepreneurship.**

**With sincere appreciation and warm regards,**  
**Sara Buehnerkemper**  
**Richland County CEO President**

# LETTER FROM THE FACILITATOR

The Richland County CEO, Class of 2024, marked my sixth year facilitating the program, and I can honestly say that our time together was nothing short of extraordinary.

From day one, it was evident that we had a group of exceptionally talented entrepreneurs in our midst. Their passion, creativity, and drive set the stage for what would become the most successful Micro Business in CEO history, and their unique product-based Class Business, SugarLab, stood as a testament to their innovation and collaborative spirit.

Throughout the program, they embarked on fifty-seven behind the scenes visits to area businesses and had the privilege of learning from fifty inspiring guest speakers. Each encounter broadened their perspectives and deepened their understanding of what it takes to succeed in the world of entrepreneurship, along with strengthening their appreciation for their community.

The ending of their journey was nothing short of spectacular. Their tremendous Trade Show was a testament of pride and accomplishment. But perhaps most notably, the Class of 2024 earned the most scholarship money to date - an impressive \$19,500. This achievement was evidence of their commitment to excellence and their unwavering determination to seize every opportunity that came their way. As we parted ways and embarked on the next chapter of our lives, I was filled with excitement for all that the future held for them. I had no doubt that they would go on to accomplish great things, leaving their mark on the world with their talent, passion, and drive. In closing, I want to express my deepest gratitude for allowing me to be a part of this journey. I also want to extend my heartfelt thanks to the CEO Board of Directors for their unwavering support, the CEO Mentors for their invaluable guidance, and the CEO Investors for their belief in the power of this program. Without your collective efforts, none of this would be possible. It is an honor and a privilege to serve as the Richland County CEO Facilitator, and I cherish the memories we create.

Sincerely,  
Sheri Gray  
CEO Facilitator



**Sheri Gray**  
Facilitator



## ABOUT US

We strive to nurture entrepreneurial talent, empower the upcoming workforce, and connect young people to the community.

## CONTACT US

[facilitator@richlandcountyceo.com](mailto:facilitator@richlandcountyceo.com)

## OUR MISSION

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

## OUR VISION

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

# BUSINESS VISITS and SPEAKERS



An important piece of the CEO experience is visiting local businesses in Richland County.

People drive by these locations daily without recognizing their contribution to economic development of the area. The group walks away with a changed mindset, never viewing the business the same way again.

## BUSINESS VISITS

A.M. Transport	Illinois Gas Company/USDA	Racklin Realty
Best Western Plus & Parkside Inn & Suites	Illini Wire Works, Inc	Racklin's Market Street Offices
Big R Farm & Home	IOGA Conference	Rehabilitation & Performance Institute
Blank's Insurance	Joe's Pizza	RCMS
Carle RMH	Kemper CPA	Rude Wealth
Charleston Engineering	King's Furniture	Runyon Insurance
Citizens National Bank of Albion	MAC Plastics	Runyon Oil Tools
City Hall	Master Halco	Sara Buckels, LMT
Consolidated Grain & Barge	Molding Services of Illinois	SKS USA
Doll's Inc	Office of RCHS Athletic Trainer	Southern Illinois Scale
Eagleson's Automotive	Olney Eye Care	St. Joe School
Edward Jones	Olney Township	State Farm
First National Bank in Olney	Ophelia's Cup	TrustBank
Hometown Appliance	Pacific Cycle	US Weight
Hurn's Lumber	Parkside Events Center	WalMart DC 6059
IECC District Office	Pools & Hidden Treasures	Zuber Law
	Prairie Farms	
	Printforce	

CEO participants have a unique experience with guest speakers serving as instructors for the program. Community leaders present their life stories, entrepreneurial journeys and share lessons on a variety of business topics

## SPEAKERS

Alex Nealis	Darrell Houchin	Lauren Boley	Ryan Jones
Allyson Padilla	David Abell	Lauren McClain	Sara Buehnerkemper
Andria Shan	Drew Bunting	Leon Stallard	Sara Peavler
Angel Padilla	Emily Clark	Lori Uhl	Shelly Herman
Autumn Carmody	Gary Houchin	Luke Colwell	Sherry Slankard
Bartley Zuber	Gina Kocher	Maddox Dorn	Sheryll Mitchell
Bob & Nancy McClenathan	Gina Thomas	Maddy Jones	Sonja Holtz
Brandan Michels	Heath Houchin	Mandy Houchin	Sophia Ranes
Carol Redman	Hudson Lathrop	Mark Richardson	Tara Lemke
Chad LeCrone	Jaclyn Shan	Matthew Paddick	Taryn Bunting
Chelsea Rude	Jeremy Wyatt	Micah Jo Peavler	Taylor Runyon
Chris Foust	Jim Baker	Mike & Janet David	Todd Bettis
Colby Shawver	Kelsie Sterchi	Mitch Mammosser	Tony Gibson
Connor Dixon	Larry Brinson	Reece Copeland	Tynan O'Neil

# INVESTORS

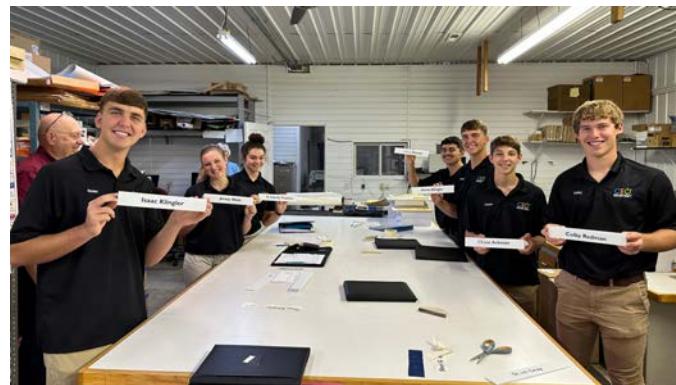


Our Program Investors provide support to our community driven program. An annual investment of \$1,000 provides the necessary resources for current-year facilitator salary and operating expenses, and ensures the sustainability of the Richland County class for future students. Investors also contribute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

All these roles are crucial to the success of Richland County.

AM Transport Services  
ASL Solutions  
Avery and Mary Joe McKinney  
Barley C Zuber  
Blake and Melissa Runyon  
Blank's Insurance Agency  
Carle Richland Memorial Hospital  
Class of 2020  
Class of 2021  
Class of 2022  
Charleston Engineering  
Citizens National Bank of Albion  
City of Olney  
Doll's, Inc  
Eagleson Automotive Center  
Escalade Sports  
First National Bank in Olney  
Illini Wire Works, Inc  
Illinois Gas Company  
Joe's Pizza  
Kemper CPA  
MAC Plastics Manufacturing  
Master Halco  
Micah Gray Construction

Olney Rotary Club  
Pacific Cycle  
Prairie Farms  
PrintForce  
Runyon Insurance Agency  
Rural King  
Shuler Truck & Tractor Service, Inc  
Southern IL Scale, Inc  
Spieth Photography  
TrustBank  
Wabash Valley Service Company  
Walmart Supercenter 254



# MENTORS



Autumn Carmody, AM Transport  
Connor Dixon, Hershey  
Tara Lemke, Carle RMH  
Allyson Padilla, Blank's Insurance  
Angel Padilla, Regions Bank  
Sara Peavler, Olney Township Assessor's Office  
Mark Richardson, TrustBank  
Colby Shawver, USDI/IL Gas  
Kelsi Sterchi, City of Olney

# MEET THE CLASS OF 2024

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## Chase Ackman - Ack's Snacks



Chase Ackman is the son of Aaron and Heather Ackman. Chase was involved in FFA throughout high school, serving as the chapter Historian and Treasurer. He also served as the Pep Club president, cheering on the RCHS sports teams. After high school, Chase planned to attend University of Southern Indiana to pursue a degree in Business Administration and return to Olney to work at MAC Plastics Manufacturing. Throughout his year involved in CEO, he learned many lifelong skills that will help him in the future. Chase's business, Ack's Snacks, was revived from his brother's 2020 CEO business. CEO taught him how to run a business and work better in a team setting. Chase implemented many lessons from CEO that no other class has shown before. He learned not to avoid challenges, but to "ATTACK" them head-on!



## Aaron Klingler - Klingler's Kandies



Aaron Klingler is the son of Michael and Amanda Klingler of Olney. Aaron had high honors throughout high school and was named one of the 2024 Illinois State Scholars. Aaron also participated in many sports and clubs including golf, tennis, basketball, baseball, Interact Club, and FCA Club. Aaron planned to attend the University of Southern Indiana to study pre-med and continue to medical school for a career in pediatric medicine. Throughout his year in CEO, he learned many different, valuable skills that will last him a lifetime. Aaron was also able to network with many individuals in the community and learn about business from them. Aaron later started his business, Klingler's Kandies, out of his love for sweets. His business taught him persistence, responsibility, and time management. Aaron is grateful for the amazing opportunities and experiences offered through the CEO program and feels it prepared him well for the future.



## Isaac Klingler - ISAACustom Woodworking



Isaac Klingler is the son of Michael and Amanda Klingler. Isaac had high honors all throughout his high school career, and he was a 2024 Illinois State Scholar. Isaac was also involved in several sports including tennis, golf, basketball, and baseball. During high school, Isaac was also a part of the Interact club and FCA. Isaac planned on attending the University of Southern Indiana to study business. While in CEO, Isaac learned the importance of being organized and working as a team. He also learned many soft skills and communication skills that will help him move forward in life. Isaac started ISAACustom Woodworking, where he made handmade, laser-engraved charcuterie boards. Through his business, Isaac learned time management, communication skills, and responsibility. Isaac was grateful for all the lessons, opportunities, and experiences that CEO gave him which will help him in his future career.

ISAACustom  
Woodworking

## Tristan Mitchell - Sweet Pepper



Tristan Mitchell is the son of Steven and Amy Mitchell. Tristan maintained high honors throughout every term of his high school career. He was on the high school varsity golf team for all four years and was named first team all conference his senior year. After high school, Tristan planned on attending Eastern Illinois University to pursue a degree in Business Analytics and Information Systems. The CEO program taught Tristan numerous soft skills that will ultimately benefit him for the rest of his life. Tristan started CEO as an observer, but he quickly gained the confidence to become a leader in the program. Tristan's favorite aspect of CEO was the real hands-on experience he was able to gain from starting his own business: a hot sauce company named SweetPepper. Tristan harnessed his love for hot sauce and used it to create sauces that everyone could enjoy. Overall, Tristan was extremely grateful for the CEO program, as it had given him a priceless set of skills and helped point him in the direction of success in his future endeavors.





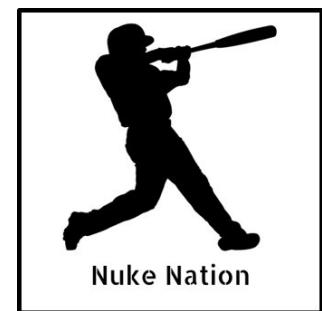
## Ilyanna Ray - Ray-Ray Sweets

Ilyanna Ray is the daughter of Becky and Matthew Ray. Ilyanna was a high honor roll student throughout high school and did ballet and pointe for three years. She also helped teach younger kids dance such as tap and ballet. Ilyanna was accepted to Olney Central College for an Associate's in Science and Art. CEO taught Ilyanna to step out of her comfort zone and gain confidence in her public speaking skills. The program also gave Ilyanna great insight into the Richland County community since she moved from St. Louis during her Junior year. She started a baked goods and confectioners business, Ray-Ray Sweets. Ilyanna's business taught her responsibility, that hard work pays off, and people love to support people. CEO was the highlight of her senior year, it taught her many life skills, lessons, and helped her become a more confident person.



## Colby Redman - Nuke Nation

Colby Redman is the son of Keith and Amanda Redman. During high school, Colby was involved in baseball and basketball, serving as the captain for both teams in his junior and senior years. Colby also participated in the Fellowship of Christian Athletes and the Athletic Ambassadors programs. Colby planned to attend McKendree University, pursuing a career in physical therapy and continuing his baseball career. Throughout his time in CEO, Colby learned the importance of effective communication. His business, Nuke Nation, offered baseball and softball lessons to young athletes. Working with his business has shown him all the different aspects of running a business and the importance of producing a good product every time you go to work. CEO opened Colby's eyes to all his community has to offer and has helped him grow into a better version of himself.



## Bella Trupiano - Simply Social

Bella Trupiano is the daughter of Tony and Tiffany Trupiano. During high school, she was a part of the softball team, Fellowship of Christian Athletes club, a student leadership ambassador, and was also involved in the Best Buddies club. In addition to these activities, she was a high honors student, an Illinois State Scholar, the DAR Good Citizen recipient, and a Richland County High School Top Teen. Bella plans to attend the University of Evansville to study business. Bella started a social media marketing business, Simply Social: Media & Marketing, which offered services to small businesses and organizations in Richland County. This business aligned with her passion for marketing, and allowed her to get a glimpse into the industry. Aside from that, the CEO program shaped her into a better individual by pushing her out of her comfort zone and made her more grateful for the community in which she lives. Bella is thankful for the lessons, accomplishments, and memories she has gained from this program, and is excited for future students to be able to take part in it.



## Jersey Wells - The Pecan Pantry

Jersey Wells is the daughter of Brent and Kaci Wells of Noble. Jersey received high honors through high school and was involved in many activities during her time. She was a member of FFA, an involved volunteer at her church: The First Christian Church of Noble, and was part of the high school cheer team. Through these activities, Jersey's accomplishments consisted of being 1st place winner of district proficiency in the area of Human and Public Services, receiving the Pep and Spirit Award, and being named all-American Cheerleader. Jersey planned to attend Olney Central College and enrolled in the radiology program. She planned to transfer to a four-year university to obtain her bachelor's degree in diagnostic ultrasound. CEO has helped Jersey make many useful connections in her community as well as helping her improve her to gain the skills needed in a professional setting. However, the main takeaway that Jersey found from the CEO program is that working in business takes lots of hard work and perseverance, but pays off immensely.





## SUGAR LAB

Students engaged in an in-depth exploration of the science behind freeze-dried candies as part of their class business. They developed and marketed a unique product, ultimately earning a net profit of \$3,057.44. Many participants reported gaining meaningful real-world skills, including product development, financial literacy, and project management.



## INCOME

Investor Income	\$ 38,000.00
Grants	\$10,500.00
Miscellaneous Income	
Total Income	\$48,500.00

## EXPENSES

Investment Expense	\$5,000.00
Marketing	\$7,364.39
Program Expense	\$7,373.64
Office Supplies	\$1,850.91
Postage	\$307.84
Payroll/Contracted	\$29,021.03
Insurance	\$425.00
Miscellaneous Expense	\$32.02
 Total Expense	 \$51,374.83
Net Income/(Loss)	-\$2,874.83



# BOARD MEMBERS

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**SARA  
BUEHNERKEMPER**  
PRESIDENT  
CARLE RMH



**LAUREN MCCLAIN**  
VICE PRESIDENT  
RUNYON INSURANCE



**CHAD LECRONE**  
TREASURER  
RCCU #1



**BRANDAN MICHELS**  
SECRETARY  
MAC PLASTICS



**TARYN BUNTING**  
MEMBER  
IECC



**SHELLEY HERMAN**  
MEMBER  
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**SHERRY SLANKARD**  
MEMBER  
RCCU #1

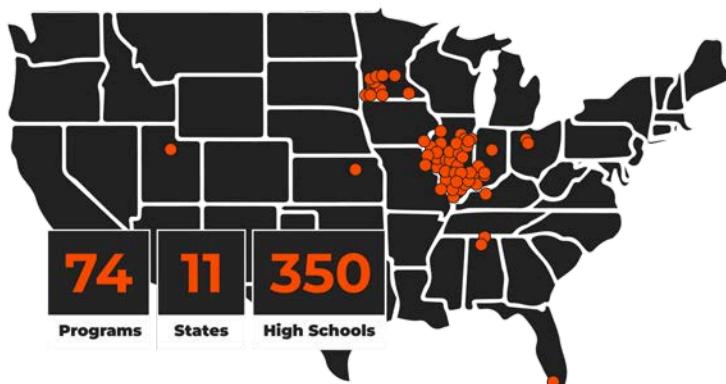


**LORI UHL**  
MEMBER  
ILLINOIS GAS

## 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."*

# DISCOVER HOW TO TRANSFORM OUR COMMUNITY THROUGH CEO.

The CEO (Creating Entrepreneurial Opportunities) Program gives young people hands on business experience and transforms them into entrepreneurial thinkers who are invested in our community.

## ABOUT THE **CEO PROGRAM**

CEO (Creating Entrepreneurial Opportunities) is unlike any other class. It is a program for high school juniors and seniors that teaches them about business. But even more, it teaches them about life.

Kids think that opportunity exists everywhere but in their hometowns. The CEO Program shows them that there are thriving businesses, opportunities for growth, and people who want to support them right here in their community - all they have to do is look.



We know that where our young people have a good network, they have opportunities.

# 90%

*Of all CEO students said they could see themselves returning to their community in the future.*



### **CEO IMMERSES STUDENTS IN THE COMMUNITY.**

CEO is never held in a classroom. Instead, students visit area businesses and hear from guest speakers from their community.



### **CEO INSTILLS AN ENTREPRENEURIAL MINDSET.**

Each student is guided through the creation of two real businesses. Every CEO participant leaves the class with an operating business.



### **CEO INSPIRES THE NEXT GENERATION**

It challenges young people to own their work, innovate creative solutions, and consider the possibilities available to them.