



Illinois
Association
of
Agricultural
Fairs

December 2025

TentTalk

You Make THE Difference: A New Era

Every so often, a generation is called to pick up the torch — to carry forward the institutions that shaped our lives and pass them on stronger than we found them.

For Illinois, that moment is now.

At the 2026 Illinois Association of Agricultural Fairs Convention, a new movement will take the stage — the official launch of the You Make THE Difference National Initiative, a first-of-its-kind effort to reignite volunteerism, strengthen leadership, and restore pride in the county fairs that define the spirit of this state.

It's more than a program, says founder Ian Hill. He considers it a revival of purpose. Created and led by award-winning humanitarian and fair advocate Ian Hill, You Make THE Difference exists for one simple reason: the future of our fairs and the communities they hold together. He says the future of fairs depends on people who still believe -- not institutions or policies but people.

Those people include the board members who refuse to let the fair fade, the retired farmer who still teaches kids to show animals, the high-school senior who believes her hometown is worth staying for.

These are the Difference Makers — ordinary people doing extraordinary things because their community matters.

What does this mean for Illinois fairs?

Through the support of Fairs.com, Illinois has been awarded a national grant that brings the full strength of the You Make THE Difference pro-



Founder of You Make THE Difference National Initiative Ian Hill will bring for the official launch of the program during the 2026 115th Annual IAAF Convention at the Crowne Plaza in Springfield.

gram to every corner of the state — at no cost to IAAF or member fairs.

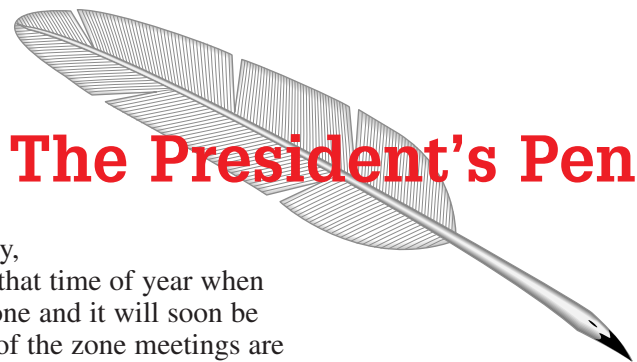
This initiative includes:

A statewide training tour, bringing high-energy, in-person workshops directly to county fair boards. It is scheduled for the March 21-25, 2026.

Access to a digital learning hub and mobile app packed with videos, templates, and ongoing support tools.

A featured keynote and training session at the 2026 IAAF Convention, delivered by Ian Hill.

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The President's Pen

Hi everybody,

Well, it's that time of year when harvest is done and it will soon be winter. All of the zone meetings are over and I have attended all three. All of the zone meetings were well attended.

The 2026 IAAF convention will be on January 16-18 at the Crowne Plaza in Springfield. This year's theme is "Celebrating Agriculture 2026". We are sure everyone will have a great time, especially if Mother Nature cooperates. We have several new things this year, one of those is You Make the Difference. We all need to get involved and look outside the box.

On Friday afternoon and Saturday is the Trade Show. I always enjoy talking to the vendors. Be sure to stop by and visit with them.

On Saturday we have the breakfast and the speaker will be Dustin Gaylon from the state of Kansas. I heard him speak at the Zone 5 meeting this year and he was great. I hope everyone goes away with an encouraging thought of something when he's finished.

Also, on Saturday afternoon and evening there is the Talent Show and the Queen Pageant preliminaries. Sunday evening is the Banquet and Queen Pageant Finals. There

are 75 young ladies competing for the title of Miss Illinois County Fair and will be crowned by the reigning queen Johnna Fulcher.

As I write this letter, I realize this is the last one I will write. It has been great being your IAAF President. I have met so many great fair people. I would like to say Thank You for letting me serve you. I also would like to say Thank You to the board for all they have done to help me during my term.

In closing, let's have a great convention. I hope everyone has a wonderful Holiday Season and hope to see you in January!

I have ended every Tent Talk with "Until We Meet Again!"

President



David Hake

2026 Roundtables

We've got some education and fun Roundtables planned for Sunday morning that you won't want to miss.

Thanks to Dave Hake and Todd Cotter for rounding these up. Roundtables start at 9:15 a.m. and are repeated at 10 a.m. Here's the lineup:

* Off Season Income

* Nuts & Bolts of Running a Fair

* Securing Sponsorships

* Livestock meeting

* You Can Make A Difference

* Weather Insurance

* What Computer Program Works for You

* Successful Marketing of Your Fair

Dates to Remember

- **Queen Banquet Ticket Orders** to Tom Schahrer, Nov. 20, 2025
- **Talent Show Applications** due to Terri Quinn: Nov. 20, 2025
- **December 31:** Declaration of Intent
- **Premium Fund Grand Summary Report & Accounting Reports/Receipts**
- **December 31:** 4-H Report & Justification; Due in State 4-H Office prior to County Fair Office Due Date
- **IAFE Convention**, Denver, CO, Nov. 30 - Dec. 4, 2026

Illinois Association of Agricultural Fairs

OFFICERS

PresidentDavid Hake, Hoyleton
 Vice PresidentGary Mielke, Ridott
 Secretary/TreasurerCharlyn Fargo Ware, Springfield
 Assistant SecretaryTerri Quinn, Chrisman
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 Ken Tyrell (Northern Zone)Sandwich

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 Craig McCoy (Central Zone)Lewistown
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www.IllinoisCountyFairs.org

iaafsecretary@gmail.com
 IAAF Office
 71 West Fairview Lane
 Springfield, IL 62711
 217-553-1120

Celebrate Agriculture Is 2026 Theme

Great things are planned for the 2026 IAAF Convention. Dates are January 16-18, 2026.

Your attendance at the 2026 IAAF Convention is the first step toward helping your fair get inspired and excited about future county fairs.

Our keynote speaker, Dustin Galyon, is set to help and inspire you to, “Serve, Celebrate and Work Together,” to make your fairs better than ever.

“My heartbeat is not to come in and change your rich history,” he says. “I want to help elevate the good work, fun and entertainment that you provide day in and day out at your fairs.”

Galyon is from Hesston, Kan., where he has coached successful college basketball and golf teams. He is currently golf coach at Friends University in Wichita where he has led the team to 4 straight national titles. He also is a co-author of a leadership book, “The Impactful Coaching Project.”

He has spoken to over 2 million in the U.S., including those attending the IAFE Zone 5 conference last year. You won’t want to miss his presentation.

In addition to the Saturday morning breakfast, Galyon will speak at the Friday afternoon session. That session will also feature Ian Hill with The Changing Point. His “You Can Make a Difference” movement is now work-



Dustin Galyon

ing with county fairs in 18 states. He will also lead visits to each of the zones to talk with Illinois county fair members March 21-25, 2026.

Later Friday afternoon, the Trade Show opens followed by the Showcase, where you can look for another big name to close out the Friday night entertainment. This year’s headliner, sponsored by Variety Attractions, is Country Music Star, Alex Miller. There will be two stages again and a full schedule of other bands playing prior to Miller. As always, we will have plenty of beer, wine and ice cream, thanks to our own Tom and Pam Schahrer – to go along

with the extra music.

On Saturday afternoon, you won’t want to miss the Junior and Senior Talent Shows.

New Roundtable topics are planned for Sunday morning. And Sunday evening, we will crown a new Miss Illinois County Fair Queen. There are 75 queens vying for the coveted crown.

Both fairs and associate members should have received your IAAF Membership and Convention packets by email. Deadline to get your hotel room at the Crowne or Holiday Inn Express is Nov. 20, 2025. This year we are working with area hotels as well to secure similar rates. There will be a shuttle from those nearby hotels on Friday evening and all day Saturday.

If you haven’t returned your registration materials yet, please do so and make sure all contact information relating to names, addresses, email and website information is included. This year, they will be mailed or emailed to Terri Quinn, 15824 N. 1650 th St., Chrisman, IL 61924. You can also pay online at www.illinois-countyfairs.org.

Thank you for your continued support of Illinois fairs. If you have questions, email at

iaafsecretary@gmail.com or call 217-553-1120.

—New Era: You Make THE Difference

(Continued From Page 1)

Together, these elements blend inspiration with implementation — giving every fair practical systems to recruit volunteers, build sustainable leadership, and keep the fair’s legacy alive for generations to come.

Hill believes this program matters more now than ever.

Illinois county fairs are more than summer events; they are the heartbeat of rural life. They celebrate agriculture, unite families, and pass on values of hard work and community pride.

But many are stretched thin.

Volunteers are harder to find, and leadership transitions are uncertain. You Make THE Difference meets those challenges head-on — not with theory, but with tools, mentorship, and belief.

“We’re not building something new,” Hill says. “We’re awakening what’s already there.”

The January convention marks only the beginning. After the kick-off, the You Make THE Difference team will hit the road for a statewide tour — equipping, encouraging, and connecting Difference Makers in every county.

Illinois has a proud tradition of fairs that bring people together. This initiative ensures that tradition doesn’t just survive — it thrives.

Because the future of our fairs has always depended on people like you. You already have the grit.

You already have the wisdom.

You already have the heart.

We’re just here to remind you: You Make THE Difference.

To learn more, visit

www.youmakethedifference.com

This grant is made possible through the generous support of Fairs.com.

Headliner Is Music Star Alex Miller

Get ready for a great time at Showcase 2026. The Headliner is County Music Star Alex Miller, sponsored by Variety Attractions.

Young Country traditionalist Alex Miller's world expanded wildly following his American Idol experience in 2021. Shortly after his exit from the show, Miller secured a manager, a booking agent, and a record label. Alex's well-received debut album, *MILLER TIME* (April 2022), generated three high-impact singles: "I'm Over You, So Get Over Me," "Don't Let The Barn Door Hit Ya," and "Through With You." Miller's second project for Billy Jam Records, the EP *COUNTRY* (October 2023), featured additional hits: "When God Made The South," "Girl, I Know A Guy," and the smash single, "Puttin' Up Hay."

The 22-year-old 6' 6" singer/songwriter from rural Lancaster, Kentucky is a natural fan favorite whose career has moved at warp speed. In addition to touring heavily throughout 2021, this talented newcomer was honored as the Texas Roadhouse Artist of the Month (October) and performed a duet with Grand Ole Opry star Rhonda Vincent at the Lee Greenwood All-Star Salute concert (November). By the beginning of 2022, Alex had entertained at multiple State Fairs (Kentucky, Missouri, New York, Washington, Wisconsin), and opened for Hank, Jr, Josh Turner, Lee Brice, and Shenandoah. His star continued to rise, and even more bookings rolled in with Miller opening for Brooks & Dunn, Jamey Johnson, King Calaway, and Aaron Watson in 2022. Additionally, he shared the stage with Diamond Rio and Sawyer Brown and debuted at the popular Wild Rose Casinos in Iowa.

By the end of 2023, Alex had appeared on bills with: Chris Janson, Chapel Hart, Drake Milligan, Noah Thompson, Dillon Carmichael, HunterGirl, Emily Ann Roberts and Tracy Byrd. Miller performed at State Fairs in Kentucky, Missouri, New York, Oklahoma, and West Virginia, plus County Fairs in Illinois, Indiana, Kentucky, Minnesota, Pennsylvania, Virginia, and West Virginia. Alex also partnered with CMR Nashville, Europe's #1 Country Music Radio Station, to host a curated monthly radio show called *MILLER TIME* - a



Country Music Star Alex Miller headlines Showcase 2026

fun, inside look at Miller's inventive mind. Closing out a spectacular year, he received the American FFA Degree for excellence, the organization's highest accolade.

His heavy touring schedule exposed Alex to alternate genres and new artists, and in 2024 he opened for headliners Justin Moore, Ian Munsick, Neal McCoy, Alabama, and more. "I'm always working to better myself and my music," Alex says. "But I'm country ... ain't nothin' gonna change that."

Miller is serious about carving out time for his songwriting. "It really helps me stay centered on who I am as an artist while at the same time giving me a chance to experiment a bit," Alex notes. In the last 12 months alone, Alex has collaborated with hit-makers Kent Blazy, Larry Cordle, Kirsti Manna, Byron Hill, Carl Jackson, Wood Newton, Jerry Salley, Josh Shilling, and Bill Whyte. Miller has also written with select talented newcomers, including Emily Ann Roberts, Allie Colleen, and Sara Jean Kelley. "Writing with these folks has been huge for me," Alex says.

"It's broadened my horizon musically and made me more confident with my songwriting. And hey, when it works and you've got a good song at the end of the day, there's no better feeling." Alex's songwriting is a highlight of his current EP, *MY DADDY'S DAD*, released April 2024.

The energetic entertainer co-wrote

three of the project's five songs. Produced by Jerry Salley for Billy Jam Records, the collection's title track and first single quickly became a Country radio hit. "She Makes Dirt Look Good," the EP's hit second single release, enjoyed a long and successful radio run. The songs from *MY DADDY'S DAD* range from rowdy to romantic and prove Miller is here for the long haul.

For a "kid from Kentucky" who began his career at the age of seven, Alex's commitment to his craft is hardly in doubt. As a youngster, he quickly progressed from shows in and around his hometown of Lancaster to larger markets. Alex performed at the Dolby Theatre, Lucas Oil Stadium, WoodSongs, Renfro Valley, Lincoln Jamboree and more. His expressive tenor voice and skills as a musician have brought him legions of fans over the years, and he continues to display his Country credentials on stage and in the studio.

Career highlights include Alex's debut on the Grand Ole Opry (June 2024) and his appointment as ambassador for the Kentucky Department of Agriculture's Kentucky Proud program in July 2025.

Miller has delivered a few surprises to fans this year including "More Country Than You," a streaming duet track with Emily Ann Roberts.

New Officers Elected at Zone Meetings

Thanks to everyone who attended and planned the recent Central, Northern and Southern Zone Meetings.

They were well attended and gave a great chance for those attending to talk and share ideas. Thanks also to the fair queens (and many parents) who attended.

Magic Mike (Mike Winters) entertained attendees of the Northern Zone, even bringing a live dove, balloons and strings. The meeting was held at a new venue, Senica's Oak Ridge Golf Club in LaSalle.

Southern Zone attendees helped the Advocacy Fund with a fun game. For

\$10, participants had a chance to win \$50 cash by choosing a small bucket. The meeting was held at the Marion County fairgrounds in Salem.

At Central Zone, those attending had a chance to listen and dance to the Feudin' Hillbillies, presented by Variety Entertainment. The meeting was held at the Morgan County fairgrounds in Jacksonville.

All three zones have elected new officers for the coming two years.

Congratulations to:

Northern Zone president Keith Schubbe of Will County; vice president

Susie Dvork of Stephenson County and secretary, Cindi Mielke of Stephenson County. Tom Simpson of Ogle County was elected to the IAAF board and will serve as Northern Zone Director with Charlie Kennel of Peoria County. Ken Terrell of Dekalb County is the current Northern Director at Large.

Central Zone president Brandon Oxley of Macoupin County; vice president Alan Buchner of Martinsville County Fair; and secretary Tiffany Phillips of Jersey County. Central Zone Directors are Craig McCoy of Fulton County and Jay Harris of Morgan County. Tom Moore of Jersey County is the current Director at Large.

Southern Zone president Steve Eastin of Wayne County; vice president Kirk Wilkins of Marion Count; and secretary Ilene Ruroede of Perry County. Directors are Wendell Alwardt of Effingham County and Doug Telford of Marion County. Current Director Kris Lowe of Clinton County was recommended to fill the position of Director at Large, a position that has been vacant from the passing of Bill Jennings. The Director at Large position will be voted on at the annual meeting in Springfield.



Central Zone Queens Attnded the Zone Meeting.



Northern Zone elected new officers at their zone meeting. Pictured above, left to right, are: president Keith Schubbe of Will County; vice president Susie Dvork of Stephenson County; and secretary, Cindi Mielke of Stephenson County.



Central Zone elected new officers at their zone meeting. Pictured above, left to right, are: secretary Tiffany Phillips of Jersey County; president Brandon Oxley of Macoupin County; and ice president Alan Buchner of Martinsville County Fair.



Southern Zone elected new officers at their zone meeting. Pictured above, left to right, are: President Steve Eastin of Wayne County Fair; Secretary Ilene Ruroede of Perry County Fair; and Vice President Kirk Wilkins of Marion County Fair.

Schedule of Events for 2026 IAAF Convention

“Celebrate Agriculture 2026”

115th Annual Convention
Illinois Association of Agricultural Fairs
 Crowne Plaza and Holiday Inn Express
 Springfield Illinois

—Schedule of Events for 2026 Convention—

All events open only to registered guests with a convention badge.

Thursday, January 15, 2026

- 8:30-11 AM Queen Registration— *Plaza Lobby*
 1-4:00 PM Registration Desk Open
 1:00 PM Queen Pageant Rehearsal—*Ballroom*
 7:00 PM IAAF Board Meeting—*Lincoln Board Room, 3rd*
 8-11 PM “Let’s Have Fun” Pre-convention hospitality and fun—*Capital View —12th floor*
 Sponsored by the Northern, Central and Southern Zones

Friday, January 16, 2026

- 8:00 AM Registration Desk Opens —*Plaza Lobby*
 8:30 AM Queen Pageant Rehearsal – *Ballroom*
 10:00 AM Carnival Amusement Safety Board Mtg. — *Winter Garden, 14th floor*

1:30 PM Opening Session
“Making A Difference”
Special Guest Ian Hill
 You Can Make A Difference
 Dustin Galyon, Keynote Speaker
 Remarks by Illinois FFA President
“What did your fair do differently in 2025?”
 Moderated by Mary Liz Wright, IAAF Director
 — *Plaza FG — 1st Floor*

- 3:00 PM **Trade Show opens with a reception. Skinners Amusements Host of Trade Show and Sponsors of Trade Show Snacks — Plaza A-E**
 6:00 PM Trade Show closes for the day

- 4:00 PM Fairs and Exposition Fund Meeting — *Capital VI - 3rd floor —Jeannette Watkins, IDOA*
 5:30 PM Audit Committee Meeting —*Turquoise—2nd floor*

7:00 PM **Showcasing—Plaza H-J**
Drinks and Snacks Sponsored by Burnham & Flower Insurance, Illinois Wine by Tom & Pam Schahrer, Ice Cream by Rent One, Kris Lowe

MC: Kent Casson of Central Illinois Farm Network.
Bands: Eclipse - A Pink loyd Tribue Band - Togo Talent
Big Guns - Lisa Hoag
Next Thing Somkin - No Agency
Neon Rodeo - Grandstand Entertainment
Dustin Devine - SSM Agency
Rubber Biscuit - The Ultimate Blues Brothers Tribute Band
Alex Miller, headliner

Associates who have hospitality rooms may be hosting during other hours than those listed for the trade show.

- 8:00 PM Registration Desk Closes

Saturday, January 17, 2026

- 7:00 AM Registration Desk Opens—*Plaza Lobby*

- 7:30 AM Looking to the Future” Breakfast doors open. — *Plaza F&G*
 Tickets Required
 Sponsored by Luehrs Ideal Rides
 Special door prize for breakfast participants — \$50 Cash

- 7:45 AM Opening remarks:
 IAAF President Dave Hake
 Color Gurd: Abraham Lincoln Council Scout Troop
 Pledge of Allegiance:
 Queen Johnna Fulcher
 Invocation
 8:15 AM **All non-ticket fair members and associates are welcome to join the meeting after breakfast.**
 8:30 AM Welcome
 David Hake, IAAF President
 8:45 AM Presentation of “Friend of Illinois County Fair” Awards, Ron Meyer
 Drawing for “Early Bird” door prize
 9:00 AM Remarks: Illinois Department of Agriculture
 9:30 AM **Dustin Galyon, Keynote Speaker,**
 presented by Luehrs Ideal Rides.
 10:30 AM **Drawing**—All door prize winners must be present to win at the time of each drawing.
 10:45 AM Secretaries and Treasurers Meeting —*Jeannette Watkins, IDOA—Plaza F&G*

Please Visit the Associate Member Rooms or Trade Show Booths

- 8:30 AM Queen Pageant Rehearsal—*Ballroom*
 11:00 AM Trade Show and Associate Rooms open — *Plaza A-E*
Skinners Amusements, Shelter Equipment Host of Trade Show and Sponsors of Trade Show Lunch.
 1:00 PM Afternoon Queen Pageant Preliminaries—*Ballroom*
 1:30 PM Jr. Talent Competition—*Plaza H-J*
 2:00 PM Past Presidents Meeting—*Capital View, 12 floor*
 3:00 PM All Zones Meeting - *Capital View 12th Floor*
 4:00 PM Trade Show closes
 5:00 PM Forever State Queen Reception —*Capital View - 12th Floor*
 6:00 PM Sr. Talent Competition—*Plaza H-J*
 6:00 PM Catholic Mass —*Winter Garden, 14th floor*
 7:00 PM Evening Queen Pageant Preliminaries —*Ballroom*
 7:00 PM Registration Desk Closes

Associates who have hospitality rooms may host during other hours than those listed for the trade show.

Sunday, January 18, 2026

- 8:15 AM Protestant Worship - —*Winter Garden-14th floor*

 8:50 AM Enjoy a Breakfast Sandwich & Coffee —sponsored by A Fantasy Amusements
 Convene for Round Tables—*Plaza F-G* — Moderated by David Hake & Todd Cotter
 9:15 AM Roundtables: First Session
 • Off Season Income
 • Nuts & Bolts of Running a Fair
 • Securing Sponsorships
 • You Can Make a Difference
 • Weather Insurance
 • What Computer Program Works for You
 • Successful Marketing of Your Fair
 10:00 AM Roundtables: Second Session (Same Agenda as First Session)

- 11:00 AM Annual Business Meeting —*Plaza F-G*

Please Register for Door Prizes

A Crowne Plaza Package for the 2027 IAAF Convention will be awarded.

Welcome — Dave Hake, IAAF President
 Minutes

Introduction of Directors

Committee Reports:

- Secretary-Treasurer report - Charlyn Fargo Ware
- Audit Committee report - Gary Mielke
- Grievance Committee - Tom Moore
- Advocacy Report - Bridget Dougherty
- Legislative Committee - Tom Moore
- Election of Officers

Drawing for prizes donated by **Crowne Plaza** and \$100 from the IAAF and other prizes. All door prize winners must be present to win.

- 4:00 PM Doors Open for Banquet—*Plaza A-J*
 5:00 PM Banquet Served
 6:30 PM Queen Pageant Finals —*Ballroom*
 9:30 PM Reception for the new Queen —*Lobby and Rosewood Dining Room*

Monday, January 19, 2026

- 8:00 AM IAAF Directors And Spouses
 Breakfast — *Ruby Room*
 9:00 AM IAAF Directors Meeting—*Ruby Room*

Nominate a Volunteer

Does your fair have a dedicated volunteer or a community person who is a true county fair booster?

The “Friends of Illinois County Fairs” awards program will honor a group of recipients at the 115th Annual IAAF convention to be held next January. Your fair may nominate an individual to be recognized at the 2026 IAAF Convention.

A nominee must be a supporter in some manner of Illinois county fairs. They need not be an officer, a board member or a superintendent of your fair. However, they must be dedicated to the support, promotion, and innovative operation of a fair or fairs. This is a way to recognize the unsung stars of county fairs.

All Illinois fairs should consider nominating a candidate. The nomination form was included in the summer IAAF packet mailed to each fair near the end of May. A fair may submit more than one worthy candidate for consideration. Only one person from any fair may receive the award in 2026. Any unselected candidates will be reconsidered in 2027 without reapplying.

The IAAF “Friend of County Fair Award” program is sponsored by Jeff Blomsness of North American Midway Entertainment.

Note: Please do not confuse this award with the “Illinois County Fair Person” Award presented by the Illinois Department of Agriculture at the State Fair’s County Fair Day.

More Info on Speaker Dustin Galyon

You won't want to miss this year's Saturday morning breakfast. Our keynote speaker is sure to inspire, encourage and challenge you. And of course, we will be honoring the Friends of Illinois Fairs at the Saturday morning breakfast as well.

Dustin Galyon, (rhymes with Italian), loves helping others and feels speaking is an incredible way to do that. His goal is to encourage, challenge and change everyone he encounters.

"I believe that I have been perfectly created, not in an arrogant way, but seriously, I believe that I have been created perfect in the image of the Big

Guy upstairs. Because of that, I want to pursue each day with an energy and passion that is unmatched. I want to love people, and I want people to love themselves and others and build relationships that are incredibly valuable."

He adds, "Helping others is something that I love, and speaking is an incredible way to do that, whether it is an opening keynote for a high school/state organization, helping educators understand and create avenues to connect with this generation, providing workshops to achieve goals, training businesses to implement customer service and recruiting strategies or sharing at a Christian youth retreat,

my goal is to encourage, challenge and change each person I encounter."

Dustin is known for his energy, intensity and passion. He's shared his high-energy, interactive and intentional keynotes to over 2 million people world-wide. He is a distinguished author, coach, entrepreneur and presenter who connects with audiences on a variety of topics. As an entrepreneur, Dustin has started several successful businesses all with the intent to serve and lead others. As a coach, Dustin has led his teams to multiple national rankings, championships and helped develop numerous collegiate athletes into professional athletes. He is the current golf coach at Friends University in Wichita, KS. As an author, Dustin co-authored the "Impactful Coaching Project" which helps "Lead Leaders" and elevate teams and organizations to maximize performance. Dustin is a very interactive storyteller that allows his audience to take ownership in every presentation. Most importantly, he inspires others to build better relationships. Seeking to be a catalyst in every single presentation, Dustin combines personal stories, photographs, and foundational steps to create positive change.

Back in fifth grade, Galyon would do one of two things every day at recess – play basketball or give concerts. By the age of 10, he knew he had the ability to gather all his classmates and make them laugh or be entertained with his speeches or concerts. He's still doing that 20 years later.

Watkins: Important Dates

Happy Holidays,

As we approach the holiday season and conclude the 2025 Fair year, I would like to take a moment to express my sincere gratitude to each of you who have contributed tirelessly and volunteered substantial hours to ensure the success of this year's County Fairs. Your commitment to your fair is not only apparent in its accomplishments but is also crucial for the future of agriculture.

I have received most of the Premium Reports. For those who have not yet submitted their reports, I will be sending a reminder email shortly. Please be reminded that the Declaration of Intentions, along with the Track Improvement Assistance forms for fairs that feature horse

rides, are due by December 31st. I kindly urge you to thoroughly double-check the fair dates and year on your forms before submitting them to me. Ensuring their accuracy will help us move forward smoothly.

If there are any changes to your fair board members, please send an email to Jeannette.M.Watkins@illinois.gov so I can update my contacts. Thank you!

I extend my best wishes to you and your families for a joyous holiday season.

Sincerely,

Jeannette Watkins
County Fair Administrator
Department of Agriculture
Bureau of County Fairs & Horse
Racing

Updating Mailing List

The IAAF continues to update the TentTalk mailing list. Please forward new names or names that should be removed.

Please send all updates to: iaafsecretary@gmail.com or to IAAF Office, 71 West Fairview Lane, Springfield, IL 61711.

The Eye Opening Breakfast

Tickets may still be ordered for the Saturday morning IAAF breakfast.

Tickets will be held for pickup at the registration desk.

Name: _____

County Fair or Associate: _____

Town: _____ Phone: _____

Email: _____

Number of tickets: _____ @\$20/ticket = \$ _____ Due no later than Jan. 4th, 2026

Please send this request and check to:

IAAF, c/o Charlyn Fargo Ware, Secretary, 71 West Fairview Lane, Springfield, IL 62711

Bridget Daughtery: Legislative Report

by Bridget Daughtery

Ola! I hope you all had a wonderful and successful fair season.

The Illinois General Assembly completed the Veto session after midnight on October 31, 2025.

The legislature passed significant legislation in the fall Veto Session including transit reform and energy policy reform. Both of these issues have been under consideration since the beginning of the year.

The final version of the transit bill was very different than previous ver-

sions put forward by the Senate last May and by the House this week. For example, House amendment 2 to Senate Bill 2111 contained a new percent entertainment tax which was removed in House amendment 3. House amendment 3 eventually became the bill and does NOT include the entertainment tax.

Some were concerned that such a tax would impact county fairs, but it was not included in the final amendment.

I would caution, however, that we are likely to see this proposal in the

future. It is aimed at large scale events such as professional sports and other large stadium events like concerts, operated by private ownership, that are seen as a ready source of revenue for the state. We will continue to monitor for similar language in the future.

Both chambers in the General Assembly have released their 2026 spring session calendar and we are preparing to select the dates for our annual Legislative reception in Springfield and we will let you know the date.

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of
Agricultural
Fairs

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