



Illinois
Association
of
Agricultural
Fairs

May 2026

TentTalk

Crown Krista Phillips 2026 IAAF Queen

“Celebrating Agriculture” was just one of many things that was celebrated during the 115th annual IAAF Convention in January.

With an attendance of over 3,300 Illinois County Fair members, Associate members, Showcase Entertainment performers, Trade Show Exhibitors, along with the Talent Show and Pageant participants and guests the Crowne Plaza was the place to be for Celebrating what makes Illinois County Fairs be the success they are.

Our 2025 Queen Johnna Fulcher joined a crowd of approximately 1500 in watching to see who was going to be taking over her crown as the Sunday evening portion of the pageant named the top 16 out of the 75 contestants.

All the contestants had practiced and competed during the weekend leading up to the Sunday Finals. With the judges’ votes counted, 21-year-old Miss Krista Phillips, representing Effingham County, was named the 2026 Miss Illinois County Fair Queen.

She is the daughter of Glen & Jeni Phillips of Effingham. As an employee of the Illinois Department of Agriculture Krista will travel around the state this summer visiting County Fairs and promoting Illinois Agriculture. She will also serve as the Official Hostess of the Illinois State Fair and the Du Quoin State Fair.

The top 5 winners were Queen Krista, 1st Runner Up: Riley McDermott of Monroe County, 2nd Runner Up: Bella Evans of Morgan County, 3rd Runner Up: Ruby Mul-

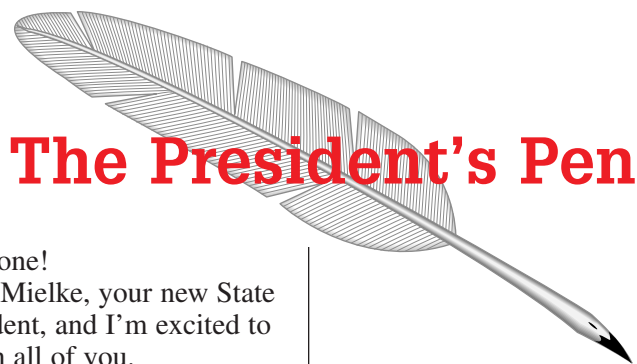


Newly crowned 2026 IAAF Queen Krista Phillips of Effingham County waves to the crowd following her coronation during the Annual IAAF Convention held January 16 to 18 at the Crowne Plaza in Springfield.

vany of Ogle County, and 4th Runner Up: Laney York of White County.

There were also more Celebrations happening on Saturday at the Jr. and Sr. Talent Shows which included performances by all the

very talented contestants. Keynote Speaker Dustin Galyon got the Saturday morning Breakfast attendees’ attention with ideas they could take back home in making their fairs become Celebrations too.



The President's Pen

Hello Everyone!

I'm Gary Mielke, your new State IAAF President, and I'm excited to connect with all of you.

I grew up on my family's farm in Stephenson County, where I had the opportunity to work with a wide range of livestock—from dairy and beef to swine—while also helping farm acres of various crops. My wife, Cindi, and I still call Stephenson County home, living near Ridott, and we remain very active in our local county fair.

The 2026 Convention was a tremendous success and very well attended. The trade show drew great participation, and as always, county fairs brought their very best talent to Saturday's Talent Contest—making it no easy task for the judges!

Sunday's roundtable sessions were also a highlight, featuring several new topics that were well received.

I want to personally thank everyone who contributed their time and effort to make this convention such a success. Your dedication truly makes a difference.

Congratulations to Krista Phillips of Effingham County on being crowned the 2026 Miss Illinois County Fair Queen—what a wonderful achievement!

We were also fortunate to have Dustin Galyon as our Saturday morning speaker. Dustin is a motivational speaker and storyteller who challenges audiences to take ownership and build stronger relationships. Known for his energy, intensity, and



Gary Mielke

inspiring others to lead and serve in meaningful ways.

This past year, we also saw two IAAF board members complete their terms. I'd like to extend a heartfelt thank you to past president Jill Hardesty of the Fisher Fair and Jack Ratcliffe of the Boone County Fair for their dedication and service to the IAAF and county fairs across the state.

As we look ahead, I'm excited for the opportunity to visit many of your county fairs this year. Wishing each of you a successful and rewarding fair season!

Best regards,
Gary Mielke
IAAF State President

passion, he has delivered high-impact presentations to over two million people worldwide. As an author, entrepreneur, and coach, Dustin brings a wealth of experience and insight,

Dates to Remember

- Invoices for Fair Dues will be emailed May 1, 2026
- Deadline to order tickets for County Fair Day - July 24, 2026
 - County Fair Day at Illinois State Fair - August 13, 2026
 - Registration packets for convention will be emailed - September 1, 2026
- Hotel Registration form will be emailed - September 1, 2026
- Queen Contestant Entry packet deadline - October 1, 2026
 - Fair Dues Deadline - October 1, 2026
 - 2027 Convention - January 15-17, 2027

Illinois Association of Agricultural Fairs

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www.IllinoisCountyFairs.org

IAAF Office
15824 N 1650th St.
Chrisman, IL 61924
217-822-1896

Address Updates Are Needed

The IAAF office continues to update the TentTalk mailing list.

If you are responsible for your fair directors' listings, please forward any new address changes, and new board members or current

directors who do not currently receive the issues of TentTalk.

Please send all updates to:
IAAF Office, 15824 1650th St.,
Chrisman, IL 61924.



The New 2026 Queen and Her Court are pictured above. In the front center is Miss Illinois County Fair Queen Krista Phillips of Effingham County. She is pictured with the other four finalists in the back, left to

right: 3rd Runner Up, Ruby Mulvaney, Ogle County, 1st Runner Up, Riley McDermott, Monroe County, 2nd Runner Up, Bella Evans, Morgan County, and 4th Runner Up, Laney York, White County.

Charlyn Steps Down after Nine Years

There aren't many who have been involved with county fairs in the state of Illinois that don't recognize the name Charlyn Fargo Ware.

After all, she grew up showing shorthorn cattle at various county fairs and the IL State Fair. She went on to be an ag reporter at the State Journal Register for 27 years before taking a leap at the IL Department of Agriculture as the Bureau Chief of County Fairs and Horse Racing for 8 years.

From there she spent the next 9 years as the Secretary/Treasurer of the Illinois Association of Agricultural Fairs.

She enjoyed working with the

IAAF & writing Tent Talk. She is credited with the evolution of Tent Talk and getting it printed in color. Charlyn was an essential piece in putting on the annual convention each year & could be often found flying from one thing to the next. Her favorite thing, however, was working with all the wonderful county fair people.

Charlyn resigned her position with the IAAF at the end of March 2026. We are so thankful for her years of dedication and wisdom and are honored to be a part of such a wonderful legacy. We wish her much luck on her next chapter!



Charlyn Fargo-Ware

Queen Krista and Governor at Ag Day

Queen Krista Phillips found herself busy on March 24th during Ag Legislative Day.

The event was represented by nearly 50 various Agricultural Organizations along with over 1000 Illinois FFA Members, their Vocational-Agricultural Teachers, and the State FFA Officers that tackled the task of filling baskets with Illinois Ag Products, along with delivering them to the offices of all the Illinois Representatives and Senators that day.

Queen Krista's day started by attending the FFA breakfast and social event where she got to connect with Illinois Director of Agriculture, Jerry Costello and IAAF President Gary Mielke. Krista had the honor of speaking on the importance of Agriculture and how it has shaped her life.

As the day progressed some of Krista highlights included being interviewed by Jim Taylor of the RFD Network. She also was introduced to the House of Representatives by Representative Brad Halbrook, where she received a certificate of recognition for serving as an honorary page for the day. She also was introduced by Senator Steve McClure in the Senate Chamber.

Queen Krista especially enjoyed

participating in the Capital Steps Photo standing with and meeting Illinois Governor, J.B. Pritzker, Illinois Director of Agriculture, Jerry Costello, along with all the State

FFA Officers and the 1000 plus FFA Members. Krista noted that Ag Day did keep her busy, as she truly enjoyed having the pleasure of being a part of it.



Queen Krista Phillips along with over a 1000 Illinois FFA members and State Officers are pictured with Illinois Governor J.B. Pritzker, and Director of Agriculture, Jerry Costello during the 2026 Agriculture Legislative Day at the Capitol.

State Lists Dates Fair Reports Are Due

Happy Spring Everyone!

Good news! If you haven't received it, your premium reimbursements are on its way, just in time for the 2026 Fair Season.

I'm looking forward to getting out to visit as many fairs as I possibly can this year. Prayers that mother nature is kind to us this year and each of your fairs are a great success!

If your fair has a change on its board, I'm asking the president of your fair to please send me an email with the new contacts and who should be eliminated from any

future emails.

Here is a list of the remaining 2026 important report dates:

May 1st: Track improvement receipts are due

June 1st: All annual contracts are due ***THIS IS BEING REVIEWED BY OUR LEGAL DEPARTMENT AND POSSIBLY REVISED. I WILL SEND AN EMAIL OUT WITH AN UPDATE WHEN IT IS AVAILABLE. PLEASE DO NOT SEND IN YOUR CONTRACT UNTIL YOU RECEIVE MY EMAIL UPDATE.**

June 30th: Rehabilitation Reports

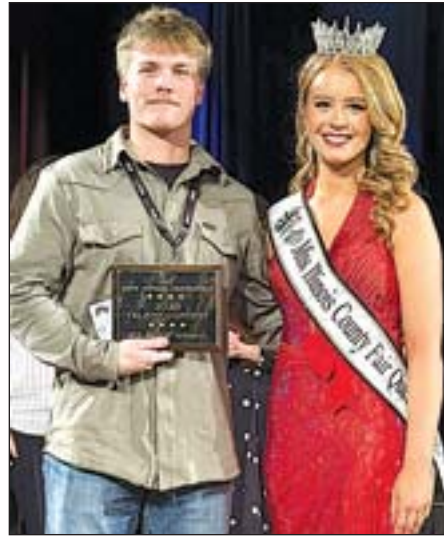
and receipts are due. Please make sure all supporting receipts are included and have a calculator tape attached.

Please feel free to contact me at 217-524-0666 or Jeannette.M.Watkins@illinois.gov with any questions.

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



The 1st Place Sr. Talent Show winner was Jaycee Bates of Sangamon Co.



The 2nd Place Sr. Talent Show winner was Jaxon Dion of Morgan Co.



The 3rd Place Sr. Talent Show winner was Isa Pina of Iroquois Co.



The 1st Place Jr. Talent Show winner was Ariel Moreno of McHenry Co.



The 2nd Place winners in the Jr. Talent Contest were Ahna York, Braelyn Labby, Adalyn Tarrez and Clancy Dunker all of Calhoun Co.



The 3rd Place winner in the Jr. Talent Contest was Daphne Slusser of Jersey Co.

Amazing Talent Winners

The contestants that performed at the 2026 IAAF Convention Junior and Senior Talent Shows were amazing.

The judges had their work cut out for them, with a total of just under 40 acts of tough competition being performed by a very talented group of young women and men. To say the least, the audience was provided with a variation of wonderful talent to enjoy.

Winners in the Junior Division were: 1st Place — Ariel Moreno of McHenry County with a vocal solo

2nd Place — Ahna York, Braelyn Labby, Adalyn Tarrez, and Clancy Dunker of Calhoun County doing a jazz dance

3rd Place — Daphne Slusser of Jersey County with a vocal solo
Winners in the Senior Division were:

1st Place — Jaycee Bates of Sangamon County doing a tap solo

2nd Place — Jaxon Dion of Morgan County with a vocal solo

3rd Place — Isa Pina of Iroquois County with a vocal solo

IN MEMORIAM

Patricia Wagahoff 1948-2026

Patricia "Pat" Wagahoff, 78, of Ipava, Illinois passed on April 14, 2026. Pat is survived by her son Mike, brother Dennis, a niece and great nephew. She was very involved in various community organizations, many for over 50 years. The Fulton County Fair was one of those organizations which she served as the fair secretary for 20 years. Pat was that "Behind the Scenes" person making sure things were ready.



The 2026 Friends of Illinois County Fairs were recognized during the 115th Annual IAAF Convention. From left to right are: Wendell DeVries of Stephenson Co.,

Jerry Frankel of Adams Co., Ed Dame, award presenter of North American Midway Entertainment, Susan Banks of Boone Co., and H.R. Gentsch of Monroe Co.



Illinois attendees at the Zone 5 meeting are pictured above: front row, left to right, Valerie Booth, IL State Fair; Tom Meyer, DuPage Co.; Tom Schahrer, IAAF; Ellen Sietmann, DuPage Co.; Dave Hake, Washington Co.; and Brandon Oxley, IL State Fair; middle row: left to right, Jill Hardesty, Fisher Fair; Rick Hardesty, Fisher Fair; Sara Barentine, DuPage Co.; Marti Meyer, DuPage Co.; Susan Dvorak, Stephenson Co.; Kim Hart, IL State

Fair; Patsie Hopkins, Du Quoin State Fair; Rebecca Clark, IL State Fair Mgr.; and Luke Davison, Du Quoin State Fair Mgr.; back row: left to right, Alan Buckner, Clark Co. Martinsville; Jim McGuire, DuPage Co.; Bob Zellers, Clark Co. Martinsville; Scott Halpin, IL County Fairs & Horse Racing Bureau Chief; and Darrell Aders, Iroquois Co.; Angela Zellers from Clark Co. Martinsville was not present when photo was taken.

Exhibitors Offered Lots of Fair Options



Talking about some Awesome Acts they could book with Agents Chris Hesse and Melissa Wolken representing Variety Attractions



Paul Laughter with ETIX offers some Great Ticketing Advice to the Queens



Getting the facts on having a Carnival from Bill Johnson & Bob Thorson of Fantasy Amusements



OK....How did Magic Mike get that card out from under our hands??



Checking with Robert and Theresa Holmes of Spectrum Weather Insurance about future Convention Snow and Ice Coverage



Helping Julie Sullivan of Trackside Racewear in Promoting some IAAF Merchandise

Legislative Affairs Update

By Bridget Dougherty
IAAF Legislative Director

Hello IAAF Fair Leaders!
This is your state legislative affairs update.

The Illinois General Assembly is in the homestretch, headed for its annual scheduled adjournment on May 31. It is a busy time in the legislature between now and then.

The Governor's proposed budget, which he presented in February, is essentially a blueprint for the final budget, reflecting his administration's priorities.

Like last year, we were pleased to see a slight increase in several of the appropriations that flow through the Department of Agriculture to county fairs, including in the rehabilitation line item. Last year's small increases were incorporated into the final

budget and approved by the Governor.

The goal now is to keep these small increases in the negotiations through the end of the spring session, and have them passed and signed by the Governor.

It is also encouraging that several of the appropriations bills filed in the House and Senate contain the Governor's increases. The House and Senate Appropriations Committees are meeting soon on the Department of Agriculture's budget, and we will monitor them.

The IAAF's annual legislative "Meet and Greet" is scheduled for May 5, 2026 in Springfield. This is an event where we invite every member of the legislature to join us to discuss county fairs. We hope to see you there!

Best wishes for a fun and safe

IN MEMORIAM

Gene "Berkie" Bergschneider
1935-2026

Godfrey Eugene "Berkie" Bergschneider, 90, of New Berlin, Illinois passed on March 27, 2026. His passion extended far beyond the farm where his family raised purebred Hereford cattle for four generations.

Gene was very devoted to supporting local organizations, youth programs, county fairs, and various agricultural associations. He was a man who led by example, giving his all to his family, his farm, and the community he cared so deeply about.

Gene is survived by his wife, Darlene, their children and grandchildren, which they will all miss having him attend their activities from sports to the cattle showing at the fair.

IAAF OFFICE
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