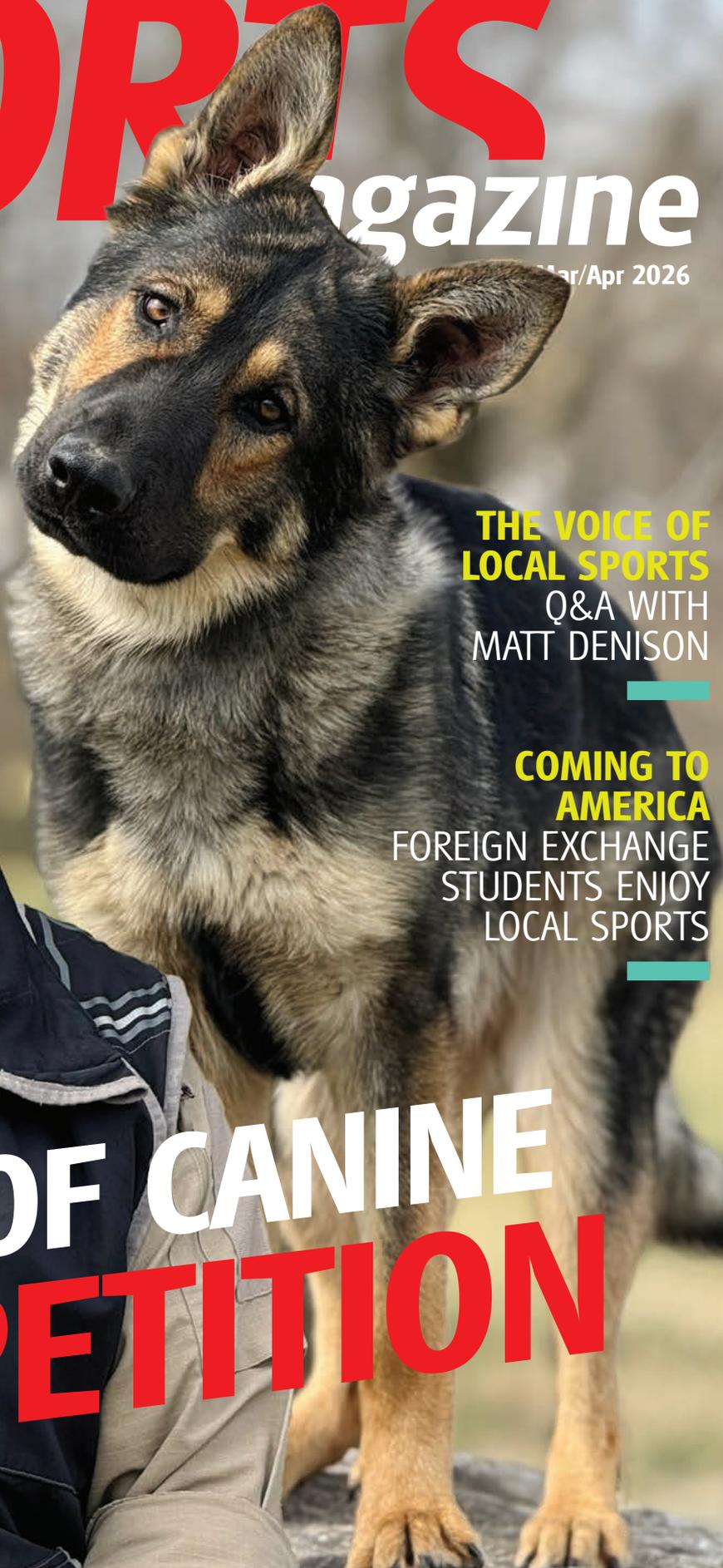


News and Tribune

SPORTS

Magazine

Mar/Apr 2026



**THE VOICE OF
LOCAL SPORTS**
Q&A WITH
MATT DENISON

**COMING TO
AMERICA**
FOREIGN EXCHANGE
STUDENTS ENJOY
LOCAL SPORTS

**HEART OF CANINE
COMPETITION**

BRINGING SILICON VALLEY TO THE OHIO VALLEY

4TH LARGEST

BOARD LEVEL CONNECTOR
COMPANY GLOBALLY

40+ LOCATIONS

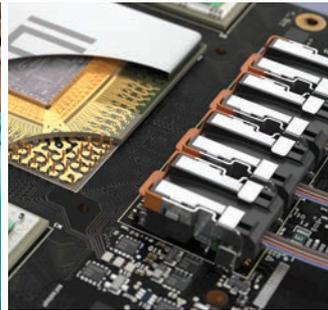
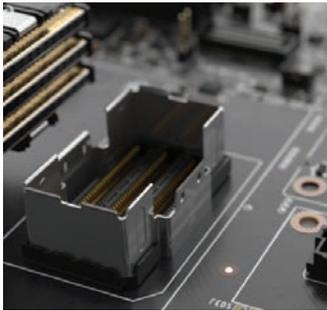
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CONTENTS

Mar/Apr 2026



06

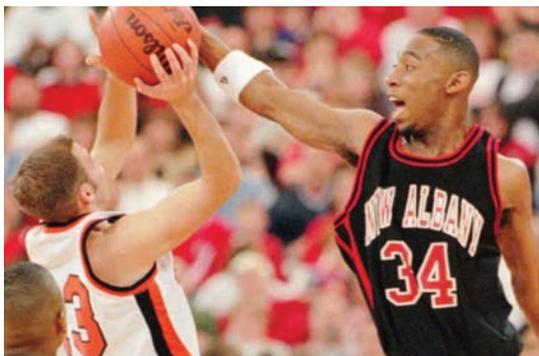
FOREIGN EXCHANGE

4 foreign exchange student-athletes enjoy playing their sports

13

HOO, HOO, HOO, HOOSIERS!

IU boasts a large alumni base at home and abroad



28

LOOKING BACK

The shot heard 'round Southern Indiana

23

Inside the partnership at the heart of canine competition

COVER PHOTO BY Jana Davis
PHOTO ABOVE BY Bill Hanson

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This distinctive 1922 Arts and Crafts Bungalow in historic Port Fulton is just a block from the Ohio River. It's been restored and renewed with love and care. The home and 3 car garage sit beautifully on a 1/2 acre corner lot with mature trees, flower beds, and a brick patio. The front porch defines the style with tapered columns, graceful steps, a handcrafted railing and the gorgeous front door that leads to a generous foyer. Original floors with mahogany and maple inlays, incredible crown molding, 8" baseboards and 9' ceilings grace the main level. The living room features a coffered ceiling, gas fireplace and is adjacent to a sunroom with stunning windows. The formal dining room shines with a bay window. A kitchen and half bath remodel in 2021 feature a butler's pantry, custom cabinetry, quartz counters, a full set of Kitchen Aid appliances and walk out to back porch. Primary Suite features more gorgeous windows, laundry and a luxurious California closet. Upstairs is a large landing plus a family room, full bath, office and cozy bedroom. The lower-level features form and function with a 1,200 sf, 2-bedroom apartment with full bath, kitchen, laundry, and private entrance. The huge 3 car garage and workshop were designed with historic features to complement the property and include hot and cold water, HVAC and commode. The riverfront from Jeff to Port Fulton is slated for an exciting redevelopment as a vibrant entertainment and residential neighborhood.

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COMING TO AMERICA

FOREIGN EXCHANGE STUDENTS ENJOY THEIR TIME IN THE U.S.

Story by Patrick Murphy

For the past two decades, Gary and Janet Purlee have hosted 15 foreign-exchange students in their home.

The Purlees, who are both retired, have entertained five from Spain, four from Germany and one each from Switzerland, Belgium, France, Austria, Denmark and Columbia. The couple began hosting foreign-exchange students, all of whom have attended and played sports at Jeffersonville High School, in 2006.

"We had a good initial experience, but had our kids home at the time," Purlee said. "We had a great time and we have continued to do it as we have become empty-nesters. If our health remains good, then we're definitely going to continue to host. It's a wonderful experience. I mean how often do get to make a kid's dream come true?"

Mikail Cetiner is the benefactor of a dream. The Purlees chose Cetiner through the International Student Exchange program. The new Red Devil got a chance to play organized boys' soccer and tennis for the first time this school year.

"I never played tennis in Europe, as I have mainly played soccer," Cetiner said. "It was my first time playing for a school than playing for a small team. It was fun and it was competitive. At first playing tennis was really boring and I needed to get used to it. I had a lot of fun, mostly because it was for the school."

Cetiner was ecstatic to come to the United States after the urging of his mother.

"I was excited to try different things, learn the language and learn about the interesting things I have seen from the Internet, like the food," he said.

His first impression of the U.S. was that everything was big.

"Denmark is such a small country and Indiana is twice the size, population-wise," Purlee said. "Jeff High is five times the size of his Danish school and his school would be the size of Borden. I have been amazed that all of the students have adjusted very quickly to Jeff High and they just fit in real well."

Cetiner played junior varsity and some varsity matches for the tennis team. On the court, he won around 65 to 70 percent of his matches for the Red Devils. He continues to work with legendary JHS coach Mark Reilly.

"He was a complete novice, but he listens well to the coaches and that's what has helped," Purlee said. "He had the second- to third-most wins of any of the players, which I thought it was remarkable considering he was starting to learn tennis. That's not typical."

Along with playing sports, Cetiner also got two opportunities to fly an airplane at the Clark County Regional Airport. His adventure with flying was under the guidance of a co-pilot.

"It was kind of scary flying the plane the first time," Cetiner said. "There's a co-pilot next to me, so I was kind of nervous."

The nerves faded away from Cetiner, like the Atlantic Ocean waves under the airplane that carried him to the U.S.

However, Cetiner is not the lone Dane in Southern Indiana this school year, as Silver Creek's Magnus Melcher and New Albany's Bertrand Eske-Lund are here too.

Melcher played soccer this past fall, donning the blue-and-gold of the Dragons. The 6-foot-1 forward led the team in goals (38) and points (89) while ranking second in assists (13).

"It's different playing soccer compared to Denmark, as it's for a school team, so it's more of a family vibe with it cause you're with the same people all day," Melcher said.

Melcher has enjoyed his time in America and at Silver Creek.



Mikail Cetiner
Denmark

Jeffersonville's Mikail Cetiner serves to an opponent during the boys' tennis season. Cetiner played organized tennis for the first time during the fall season for the Red Devils. Photo provided I Gary Purlee



Magnus Melcher
Denmark



Silver Creek forward Magnus Melcher dribbles past a Clarksville defender during a Sept. 2 match. Melcher scored two goals against the Generals. Photo by Josh Cook.



Betram Eske-Lund
Denmark

Betram Eske-Lund, middle, is a foreign exchange student from Denmark is with Chase Corbett, left, and Scott Cooksey, right, who are hosting Eske-Lund. They posed before New Albany's Senior Night during the swimming and diving season. Photo provided | Scott Cooksey

"Thankfully they had a soccer team," he said. "The hardest part of me adjusting here was that I didn't know anybody."

From not knowing anyone, the other big hurdle has been the language.

To come to the U.S., most of the foreign-exchange students are required to take English language proficiency tests.

"I think the language was the biggest thing," said Chloe Bekol, who is an exchange student at New Albany. "That was a change, because it was based off everything. If you don't know the language, then you can't have friends."

Through learning English, Bekol was able to make friends among the girls on the NAHS basketball team. Bekol, who has played the sport since she was 10 years old, said basketball is different in France than it is in the U.S.

"In the U.S., we have practice every single day at the school," Bekol, a 6-foot-2 center who played in 23 games for the Bulldogs, said. "In France, it's a club sport that doesn't include school."

Bekol is from the west part of France, near Nantes, a port city along the Loire and Sèvre Nantaise rivers.

Bekol is being hosted by Augelique Walls, who also fosters four kids and has adopted two, through the Pan Atlantic Foundation. She worked with Ann Offutt, who also has a student at New Albany.

"Not all of the schools accept foreign-exchange students, I think it's awesome that New Albany does," Walls said. "They're all

listed as seniors, then they could participate in all of the senior activities that they hear about it and they get to experience it while they're here."

Walls has participated in the foreign-exchange program for the past four years. Through sports, Bekol was able to meet players and first-year New Albany coach Kelsy Taylor.

"Coach Taylor is an African-American and she was playing basketball at New Albany and she's over 6-feet tall," Walls said. "To have that kind of example as a coach, I think it has made a difference for Chloe because in France she doesn't have that. There's not a lot of biracial kids who go to her school. So, for her to have a coach she can look eye-to-eye, who looks similar to her, it has made her more confident in herself because she doesn't stand out."

During the girls' basketball season, Bekol posted a career-high 14 points and eight rebounds against North Harrison on Dec. 4.

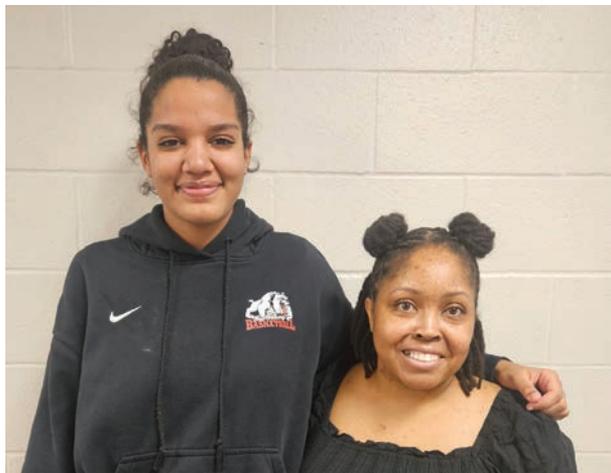
"We had lost a lot of games, but I think this team has so much potential," Bekol said. "I think they have a lot of potential for seasons to come."

Eske-Lund is the last Dane. He is at New Albany, where he has involved himself in boys' soccer, swimming and track & field.

For the Bulldogs' swim team, he finished 16th in the 100-yard freestyle at the Hoosier Hills Conference meet.



TOP: New Albany senior Chloe Bekol goes up for two against Evansville F.J. Reitz this past season. Bekol, a foreign exchange student from France, finished with six points in the paint for the Bulldogs. Patrick Murphy | News and Tribune BOTTOM: Chloe Bekol with Aungelique Walls, her host mom, before after Friday's Class 4A New Albany Sectional final against Bedford North Lawrence to advance to the Sectional final. Walls has hosted foreign exchange students for four years.



 **Chloe Bekol**
France

“He did swim as a child as there was a little club near him,” said Scott Cooksey, who is Bertram’s host father, along with his partner, Chase Corbett. “Denmark is a peninsula, so they’re surrounded by water. Knowing how to swim is important to them so he has been exposed to swimming. He had an understanding of most of the core strokes, but before this season he and I spent some time together going to the YMCA and I was teaching some of the fundamentals he had forgot.”

Cooskey is the swim coach at South Oldham (Ky.) High School, where he swam for the Dragons. Meanwhile, Corbett is a former tennis player at Floyd Central High School. Last year, they hosted a German student-athlete.

“We understand the high school sports world, where we have sports ingrained in our schools and programs available to them,” Cooksey said. “You learn with these kids that it’s not the case in Europe. They have clubs and organizations that exist outside of their schools, so when you think about soccer people say ‘name of soccer FC’ because those are actual clubs for people who want to play soccer. They go to those places and train as a child to an adult and they keep them and trade them to keep them playing for teams. When they came here to America, they’re exposed to our gravitas of sports where it’s a piece of culture with American high school. Everyone is playing sports and it’s a big piece of our culture, where back home it’s not part of their day.”

From playing sports to enjoying the American culture, exchange students get to experience and enjoy the American life, including high school sports.

“Exchange students are always looking for host families and you can do it as short as six weeks, or as long as a full school year,” Gary Purlee said. “It’s a wonderful experience and enjoyable for everyone involved.”



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BATS SWINGING FOR THE FENCES

IN 2026

Story By: Tom May

The Louisville Bats, Triple-A affiliate of the Cincinnati Reds, are gearing up for an exciting 2026 season as spring training ramps up in Arizona. Manager Pat Kelly returns for his seventh year at the helm. With 332 wins in Louisville and more than 2,000 career victories, Kelly ranks second all-time in franchise history and was recently honored with Minor League Baseball's prestigious Mike Coolbaugh Award for excellence in leadership and player development.

Fans can expect a full slate of promotions, entertainment, and theme nights throughout the season. The Bats open at home on Friday, March 27, against the Omaha Storm Chasers at Louisville Slugger Field. The popular ZOOperstars! will perform between innings, and both dollar beers and Margarita Madness will make their return for Opening Night.

Thunder at Louisville Slugger Field returns April 18 as the Bats face the Toledo Mud Hens. Fans can enjoy the Thunder Over Louisville air show, a postgame performance by The Crashers, and one of the nation's premier fireworks displays. Throughout the season, the team will take the field in several specialty uniforms, including the Derby City Mint Juleps, Louisville Redbirds, Louisville Blackcaps, and Murciélagos de Louisville. New this year are the Louisville Melonheads and the weather-themed Louisville Humidity.

Other returning favorites include Star Wars Night, the Drone Show, Hops and Hounds, Paw Patrol Night, and multiple fireworks shows. Two bobbleheads will be released: Reds manager Terry Francona on Aug. 15 and Louisville basketball coach Pat Kelsey on Aug. 28.

Weekly promotions—Taco Tuesday, Senior Day, Thrifty Thursday, Happy Hour Fridays, Kids Days, and Dog Days—round out a packed 2026 schedule as the Bats look to build on last season's 71–79 record.





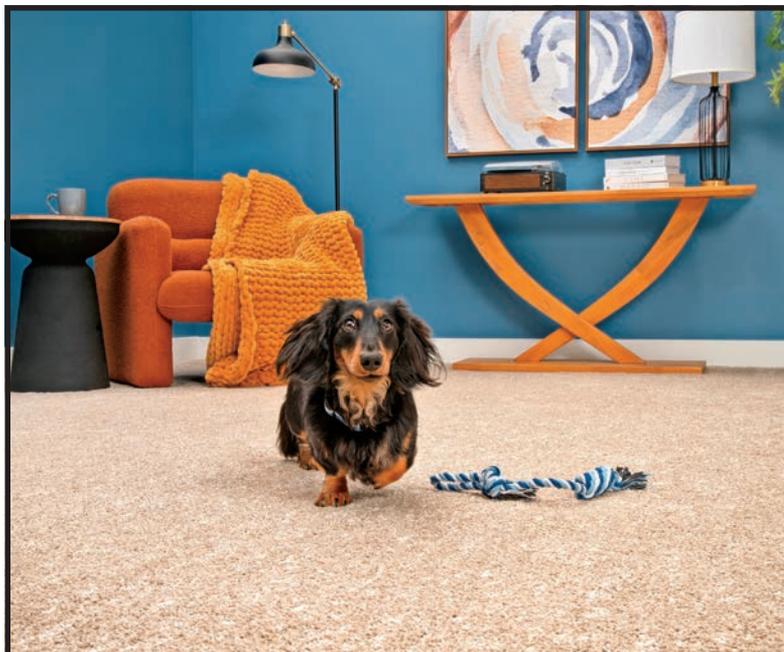
THE HOOSIER IMPACT

IU STRENGTHENS ITS IMPACT AT HOME AND ABROAD

Story By: Tom May

As of the fall 2025, Indiana University boasted the nation's largest living alumni community among colleges and universities in the United States. With over 805,000 living alumni, IU shows the impact that it has in Indiana and beyond. Almost 417,000 of the network live in the state, providing opportunities for connections, career advancements and lifelong educational growth.

Indiana University's community of alumni includes graduates of nine campuses across the state. IU has a campus here in New Albany, as well as Bloomington, Indianapolis, Gary, South Bend, Kokomo, Richmond, Columbus and Fort Wayne. Like other schools, IU also offers online classes and programs. IU alumni live in more than 165 countries and contribute to the fields of business, healthcare, public service and the arts.



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Since the mid-1800s, Indiana University has challenged students to pursue an education that will help them reach career goals and make a difference in their world. IU has several top-ranked schools, including the country's largest medical school and the nation's first school of informatics. IU is also one of the few universities in the country to boast of more than one Research 1 campuses.

One of the stats that goes hand-in-hand with the large alumni base is a large on-campus student body. The student body number has now become of the largest in the country. The total number of students enrolled on all campuses is 89,247. The Bloomington campus alone had over 48,000 students enrolled at the start of the fall semester in 2025. This number included 16,636 beginner students made up of freshmen and non-traditional students enrolling for the first time.

Former IU alumni span a variety of industries. Some of its more famous alumni include entrepreneur Mark Cuban, Hunger Games author Suzanne Collins, former Ireland president Michael Higgins, sportscaster Joe Buck, Wikipedia founder Jimmy Wales, composer and trumpeter Chris Botti, television producer Ryan Murphy, actor Kevin Kline, Kansas governor

Laura Kelly and tennis legend Venus Williams. Other notable graduates include Jane Pauley, Mike Pence, Mark Spitz, Isiah Thomas and Hoagy Carmichael.

A name you might not know is Laura Sisk. The Jacobs School of Music graduate is not a household name, but if you have listened to pop music in the last decade, you have heard her work. Sisk has become one of the industry's most trusted sound engineers, working with Taylor Swift, Rihanna, Shakira and Pink among others.

According to the groups that track alumni activities, the IU alumni ranks first in the nation with 805,000. The Hoosiers are followed by Penn State (802,500) and then the University of Michigan (700,000). UCLA (670,000) and Ohio State (600,000).

The impact of the large alumni base was recently seen during the Indiana football team's appearance in the College Football Playoff. Many estimated the crowd at the Peach Bowl in Atlanta was about 80% Hoosier fans. Even the long trip to California for the Rose Bowl did not deter Indiana fans. Estimates guessed that 75% of the legendary stadium was comprised of IU fans.

Indiana University's alumni stay connected with each other and support their university through lifelong learning, scholarship programs and fun traditions.

BY THE NUMBERS

Alumni & Reach

805,000+ living alumni — largest in the U.S.

417,000 alumni in Indiana Alumni in 165+ countries

9 IU campuses statewide

Enrollment

89,247 total students (all campuses)

48,000+ at Bloomington alone

16,636 first-year students in 2025



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Why are sports and recreation important to communities?

They bring people together and help create a strong sense of connection within the community, especially in a place like Southern Indiana, where our love for sports and teams runs deep.

What stands out about the sports scene in Southern Indiana?

Two things really stand out to me. First is the support for high school sports, especially basketball. In Southern Indiana, high school sports are still old-school – packed bleachers on Friday night, loyal season ticket holders and passionate fan bases. Second is the uniqueness of our college team loyalties, split somewhat evenly I believe between Cardinal, Hoosier and Wildcat fans. There's truly no better place to be a high school and college sports fan.

What drew you to sports broadcasting and radio?

I fell in love with high school basketball at a young age, listening to legendary voices like Charlie Jenkins, Lee Kelly and Ted Throckmorton—voices that would later become mentors as I learned from them and worked alongside them. If New Albany was playing too far away for my dad or family and I to attend, I would recreate the game using a small basketball goal in our basement while listening to Charlie's play-by-play on the radio call. I'm so fortunate to have had the opportunity to develop close relationships with those outstanding men and broadcasters.

How often do you get asked about something that was said on the show when you're out and about?

All the time, and I love it. Some of the best topics, questions and ideas for my daily show come directly from the folks I run into at local games, in the grocery store or via WXVW's listener text line.

What's your role as the superintendent for Floyd County Parks.

My commitment as parks superintendent is to ensure we offer a wide range of recreational opportunities for our entire community, including youth, adults and senior citizens. Alongside my staff, we're focused on going above-and-beyond to make our department a leader in first-class programming, from sports camps and leagues to concerts and special events. Along with increased programming, we also maintain a large acreage of parkland, and we're constantly exploring all funding and grant opportunities to support ongoing improvements to our aging parks and facilities. We also operate the Southern Indiana Sports Center and are actively transforming it into a true community facility designed to host events, rentals and gatherings that serve everyone in our county and beyond.

What's a typical day like as the superintendent?

Every day brings its own opportunities and challenges. This work often means long hours, nights and weekends to make activities and programming available to the folks we serve. I feel this position has been the perfect fit for me, and it's truly an honor to serve a community that has given so much to me.

What changes/additions have you made or will you be implementing in the near future?

Thanks to the incredible team we've built, it's amazing to see all the new programs and initiatives we have in motion, and we're just getting started. We've just opened registration for the Southern Indiana NFL FLAG Football Spring League and are gearing up for a variety of Easter events, highlighted by the third-annual Floyd County EasterFest at Kevin Hammersmith Memorial Park. Plus, we're looking forward to concerts, new summer camps and more as the weather warms up.

Who are some of your role models professionally?

I've been fortunate to have a long list of mentors guiding me in community service, parks and recreation and radio. Our county has a proud history of great parks superintendents, including the late Bob Lane and my predecessor, Roger Jeffers. Former New Albany coach and athletic director Don Unruh has been extremely influential throughout both my youth and adult years. I'm also grateful for the friendship and guidance of Ron Toran, former New Albany Fire Chief, who in retirement has worked for us part-time at the Parks Department. And on the radio side, I owe a lot to Charlie Jenkins, Lee Kelly and Ted Throckmorton.

Before joining the parks department, you launched the Floyd County Elementary Basketball League. Why is it important get youngsters playing organized sports early in life?

The FCEBL was created to bring back elementary school-based basketball, giving students the chance to represent the school they attend. Beyond the game, organized sports teach teamwork, perseverance and how to handle challenges.

10. What do you love about living in Southern Indiana?

We live in a wonderful place full of opportunities and a bright future. The best part of our area, though, is the people who make our communities so strong and welcoming.

A Letter from Our CEO

As we begin 2026, I am excited to share that this is a defining year for River Heritage Conservancy, the year we move from vision into activation.

For the past several years, we have been laying the groundwork for Origin Park: building partnerships, securing resources, completing environmental remediation, and planning thoughtfully for what this place could become. In 2026, that foundation becomes visible, tangible, and shared. This is the year the park truly begins to come alive.

Across Origin Park, plans are turning into places. Wildwater at Origin Park is advancing into site preparation and infrastructure planning, marking a critical step toward construction and opening this signature adventure destination to the community. The Vista is nearing completion and is already booking its first events, signaling its future as a vibrant gathering space for learning, celebration, and connection. We have also completed the cleanup of former brownfields and junkyards throughout the park, transforming previously neglected land into a clean, safe canvas for restoration, recreation, and public use.

This year is about activating both the landscape and the experience. The removal of low head dams at Blackiston Mill and Providence Dam on Silver Creek is creating safe, navigable waters and setting the stage for the future Blackiston Mill Launch and the Silver Creek Blueway. Views are opening, habitats are being restored, and long-standing physical and environmental barriers are being removed, supporting a healthier blueway environment.

Activation also means ensuring these places are cared for properly. In 2026, we will launch a strategic capital campaign, expand our donor and membership community, and deepen partnerships with local leaders to support stewardship efforts from shoreline stabilization and vegetation management to wayfinding, safety, and visitor experience improvements.

Most importantly, this is a year of activating our community. New programs, events, and partnerships will invite people into the park in meaningful ways to learn, volunteer, celebrate, and connect. Each experience strengthens the relationship between people and the Ohio River, building a shared sense of responsibility and pride in this extraordinary place.

Thanks to your support, River Heritage Conservancy enters 2026 with momentum, clarity, and optimism. Together, we are shifting from imagining what Origin Park can be to experiencing what it is becoming: a living landscape, a community gathering place, and a lasting investment in the health and vitality of our region.

Thank you for being part of this journey.

Dennis Schnurbusch II
Chief Executive Officer
River Heritage Conservancy



Welcome to the team, Molly Blake!

Join us in giving Molly, our new Office Manager, a warm welcome!

"Born and raised in the Highlands of Louisville, Kentucky. I love the outdoors (particularly my garden), seeking the best waterfalls, books and coffee. My favorite hobbies include singing, dancing, and making memories with my young daughter."



Ecological Restoration Underway

Ecological restoration is underway on roughly one acre within Buttonbush Woods to reestablish a native sedge meadow that is being overtaken by sycamore trees.

Restoring this open meadow habitat is vital for native flora and fauna, as sedge meadows provide specialized plants with the light and hydrology they require, while offering food, shelter, and breeding grounds for insects, birds, amphibians, and other small mammals. This work helps to establish and preserve biodiversity, support pollinators, and strengthen the overall health and resilience of Buttonbush Woods.



Snowy Owl Foundation Assists in Buttonbush Clean-Up

River Heritage Conservancy is excited to announce a \$2,672 grant from the Snowy Owl Foundation to support restoration in Buttonbush Woods, a 103-acre forest and one of Origin Park's most ecologically important natural areas.

This funding helps our team remove invasive species, including bush honeysuckle and wintercreeper, which increasingly threaten the health and biodiversity of the forest. By protecting native plants and enhancing wildlife habitat, these efforts ensure the forest remains a healthy, accessible, and welcoming natural space for all visitors to enjoy.



Community Foundation of Southern Indiana Grant

Thanks to a \$21,900 capacity-building grant from the Community Foundation of Southern Indiana, River Heritage Conservancy strengthened our ability to advance the development of Origin Park.

The grant supported a major website upgrade and the launch of our new membership program, transforming our digital presence into a more effective tool for communication, donor engagement, and community outreach. Since the upgrade, website engagement has more than doubled, increasing visibility and interest in Origin Park while improving efficiency across our organization.



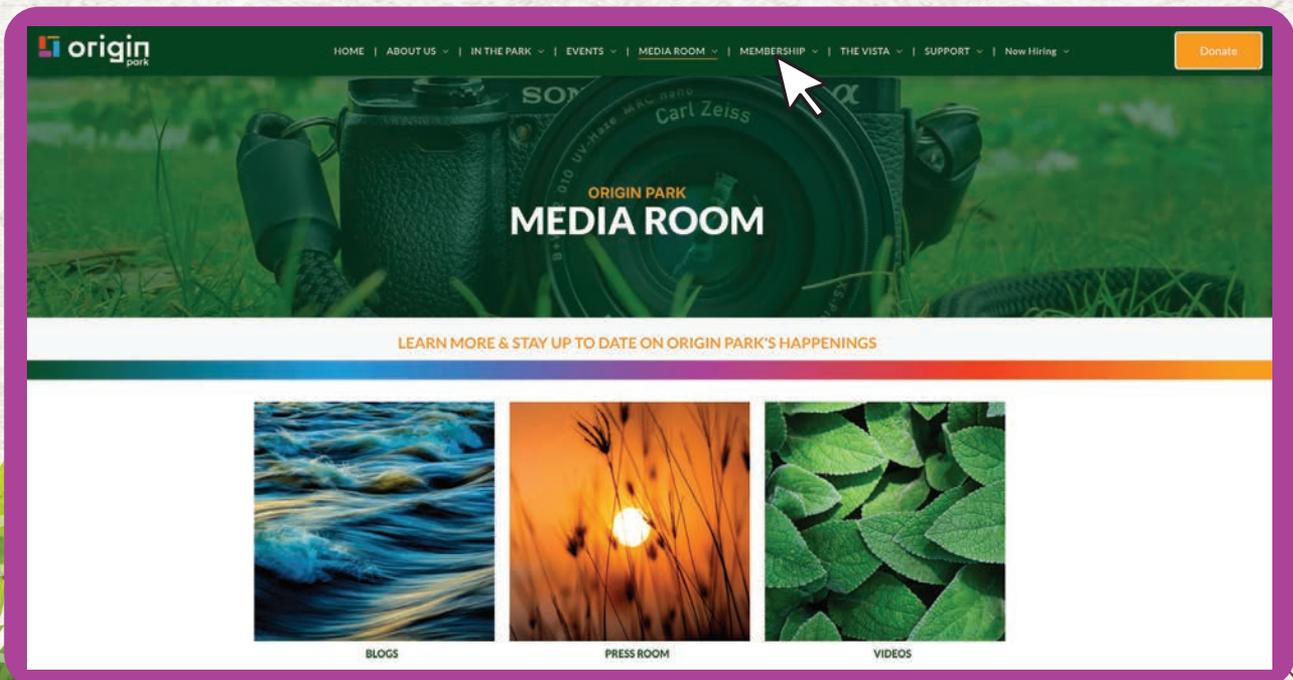
This investment ensures our community stays connected, informed, and inspired as Origin Park continues to grow!

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Thank You for Your Support – A Successful 2025

In 2025, River Heritage Conservancy made significant progress advancing the vision for Origin Park. The organization expanded its land stewardship efforts through major site cleanups, restoration work, and the continued reclamation of formerly industrial and landfill properties along the Ohio River.



Environmental leadership remained strong with ongoing invasive species removal, tree mitigation monitoring, and the initiation of a comprehensive deer management plan.

Community engagement grew through 35 guided tours, expanded park programming, and a sharp increase in volunteer participation. RHC's digital reach surged, reflecting growing public interest and support. Fundraising efforts reached new heights, with record-breaking Give for Good Day and Golf Scramble results, strengthened donor relationships, and the launch of a successful membership program.



We are proud of what was accomplished in 2025 and invite our community to support our work as we make 2026 an even bigger success.





A TEAM SPORT BUILT ON MANNERS

INSIDE THE PARTNERSHIP AT THE HEART OF CANINE COMPETITION

Story By: Rebecca Carlton | Photos by: Jana Davis and Bill Hanson

At first glance, canine sport competitions look almost effortless. A dog trots attentively beside its handler, weaves through poles, or darts through tunnels as spectators watch. Every turn, pause and burst of speed reflects a sport defined by teamwork and relationship, requiring the same elements that define more familiar athletic pursuits: communication, discipline, repetition, strategy and trust. Success depends not on a single athlete, but on a coordinated partnership between two.

That partnership defines competitive success for Matthew Duffy, master trainer and owner of Duffy's Dog Training Center in Jeffersonville. Across obedience, competition and service work, his philosophy remains consistent. Success is built on fundamentals and a relationship between owner and dog.

"No matter what the goals are," Duffy says, "we begin with canine manners."

After more than four decades of training dogs and their handlers, Duffy insists the starting point is not commands or obstacles, but foundational life-skills that allow dogs to function calmly and confidently in the world. A dog with manners can regulate its energy, manage impulses and defer to its handler before acting, even in stimulating environments.

What happens in the competition ring, Duffy explains, is only the visible layer of a much longer process. Long before dogs earn titles, they learn how to exist within structure.

“The foundation has nothing to do with ‘Come. Sit. Stay. Down,’” he says. “We need canine manners and self-control.”

Two common canine sports, agility and rally, look different on the surface. Agility sends dogs racing through obstacle courses of jumps, tunnels and weave poles against the clock, demanding speed and accuracy. Rally requires dogs and handlers to move together through a series of numbered obedience tasks, following posted signs that test precision and communication. Despite those differences, both sports depend entirely on the relationship between dog and handler.

Duffy describes that relationship as a partnership rather than a performance.

“I’m going to refer to it as the handler-dog relationship,” he says, “because that’s the way we view it.”

He often explains the connection using a paired dance analogy.

“It is an intricate and integrated operation between a pair,” Duffy says. “We are going to teach you how to lead a tango dance with your dog.”

That same pattern shows up in the ring. Dogs and handlers move through a course together, adjusting to each other’s position and pace. As teams gain experience, communication becomes quieter and more efficient, relying less on verbal direction and more on movement and timing.

“The more experienced the dog, the less I need to use both,” Duffy said.

Dr. John Parker has seen that philosophy unfold over time. A long-time competitor in rally and obedience, Parker has trained with Duffy for more than 20 years. He competes with

“

We are going to teach you how to lead a tango dance with your dog.





English Mastiffs, a breed rarely associated with obedience or rally, and did not begin training with competition as his goal. He wanted a well-mannered dog.

"I began to have a house pet with good manners," Parker says.

That foundation eventually led to higher level work. His current dog, Dickens, is pursuing a Rally Advanced Excellent title, which requires qualifying scores in both "advanced" and "excellent" classes at the same trial on 10 separate occasions. Still, Parker says the most meaningful outcomes show up away from the ring.

"I get more compliments on my dogs' manners than anything else," he says.

Competition, Parker believes, simply reveals what already exists. To strength-

en that foundation, Parker integrates training into daily life. Instead of feeding his dogs from a bowl, he delivered most of their daily calories during structured work.

"Most of his calories came from me, out of my hand, while he was in the heel position," Parker says.

For Clara Markham, that same emphasis on structure supports a different competitive path. She competes in rally and obedience with her Basset Hounds and avoids agility due to the breed's long backs. Her older dog, Juniper, now nearly 12, holds multiple rally and obedience titles and continues to compete enthusiastically. Her younger dog, Lily, earned her Novice Rally title in a single weekend

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A master at whatever you do is endless curiosity, endless enthusiasm for that specific topic."



For Markham, structured training improves a dog's quality of life, regardless of titles.

"Dogs are bred for jobs," she says, "and they like to think."

She also emphasizes how closely dogs observe their handlers.

"The dogs want to please us," Markham says. "They want to do the right thing."

Duffy, Parker and Markham all agree on one central truth — canine sport is often misunderstood as dog-training, when it is primarily about human learning. Handlers must develop patience, timing, body awareness and emotional regulation. Moving too quickly is one of the most common mistakes Duffy sees.

"Slow down," he says. "Take your time."

Winning, in this context, is not measured by ribbons or rankings, but by reliability. Skills are

built carefully and reinforced until they hold under pressure. Over time, communication becomes efficient and unobtrusive.

At its best, competition is not performance for an audience. It is a reflection of the working relationship behind it.

"The bottom line, this should be fun," Duffy says. "Structured fun."

For Duffy, mastery is not a finish line. It is an ongoing commitment to attention and learning.

"A master at whatever you do is endless curiosity," Duffy adds, "'Endless enthusiasm for that specific topic."

What appears in the ring reflects that mindset. Calm handling. Clear signals. A dog that responds without hesitation. The result is not spectacle, but consistency.



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LOOKING BACK

WRITTEN BY
CHRISTOPHER MORRIS



The shot heard 'round Southern Indiana

Don Unruh will never forget the name Jeff Poisel.

With time running out and the score tied at 54–54 in the second overtime of the 1996 state championship game, Poisel dribbled across the midcourt line and launched a desperation shot as the buzzer sounded.

The ball hit nothing but net.

For Poisel and the Indianapolis Ben Davis Giants, it was the stuff dreams are made of — highlight-reel worthy, even SportsCenter-top-10 material. For New Albany Head Coach Don Unruh and his 12th-ranked team, it was a nightmare.

“That shot haunted me for a long time,” said Chad Hunter, who was a junior forward on the 1995-96 New Albany team.

Looking back on that game and season 30 years ago, Unruh is still bothered by the outcome, but has nothing but praise for his players and the successful season.

“As difficult as it was to lose that final game ... I sometimes look back even though it was 30 years ago and wonder if I could have done something differently,” Unruh said. “We had such a great run and great season. It is only going to end good for one team out of 364 (before class basketball) at the time. It was not us but we made a great run and had great memories all the way up.”

The New Albany boys' basketball 1996 team finished IHSAA State runner-ups after a 57-54 loss to Ben Davis in double overtime. This year was the penultimate year of un-classed basketball. During the final, Lamont Roland led the Bulldogs with a double-double in points (27) and rebounds (10).

It was Ben Davis' second-straight title. But for the Bulldogs, it was another gut-wrenching defeat that had become all too familiar in tournament play. New Albany has nine semistate titles in its illustrious basketball history, but only two state crowns — 1973 and 2016. It always seems like something, or someone ruins the tourney run. In March of 1996, it was Poisel.

New Albany won four semistate titles in the 1950s, only to come up empty in the state finals. In 1980, the Bulldogs took an undefeated record into the final game but came up short against Indianapolis Broad Ripple. In 1994 New Albany had a solid chance in the state semifinal but a controversial walking call late in the game ended the dream. And two years later, it was Poisel's 35-footer that sealed the Bulldogs' fate in front of 21,748 fans at the RCA Dome.

“As many times as we made it up there in the 1950s we never won it. I was reminded of that many times as we headed up to the state finals that year,” Unruh said. “I just

remember how amazing our fans were that year. They really supported us ... New Albany fans always travel well and back the Bulldogs."

New Albany rolled past Warsaw 75-53 in the second morning semifinal game at state finals to advance to the championship game. However, the game took longer than most thanks to a number of free throw attempts, a tactic Warsaw employed to stop the clock. It did not work as New Albany won going away.

"We played extremely well that game," Unruh said. "It was the second game and there were like 50 free throws attempted so by the time we walked off the floor, got back to the hotel and got something to eat, it was time to get back on the bus and head to the RCA Dome."

New Albany may have been a bit fatigued, but Unruh won't make any excuses. However, the Bulldogs struggled from the field hitting only 2 of 13 three-point attempts while Ben Davis was a solid 9 of 21 from the three-point line in the championship game.

"Ben Davis had an excellent team and played very well defensively," Unruh

said. "I thought our kids played well defensively. Both teams played hard and defended very well."

All-State guard LaMont Roland led the Bulldogs with 27 points while Reggie Wheeler chipped in 12. They were the only two Bulldogs in double-figures. Poisel hit six three-pointers in the contest, including the game-winner and led Ben Davis with 20 points.

Hunter, who like Roland graduated as one of New Albany's most heralded players, was held to two points in the championship game. He would end his career the next season as the school's all-time leading scorer with 1,463 points, a mark that stood before being broken by Romeo Langford.

"That was the worst game of my career, and it was on the biggest stage, at the state finals," Hunter said. "It just didn't come together for me that night."

Many New Albany players including Roland, Hunter and Wheeler, got experience at the '94 state finals and were determined to get back to the Dome before their high school careers ended.

Despite its 23-3 record and top-20

ranking during the 1995-96 campaign, Hunter said the team didn't get the respect it deserved in the northern part of the state that season.

"A lot of those teams had no idea about us," he said. "We had a lot of talent and just gelled as a team. I think one of the players who didn't get enough credit on that team was Angelo Pipes. He was a pure shooter."

Hunter said he thinks Roland should have been named Mr. Basketball that year. Unruh would agree.

"I cannot say enough with how LaMont played. Not just in the finals but the entire year," Unruh said. "He put a lot of work in over the summer. When we needed him the most, he played extremely well in the state finals. He had taken a jump at mid-season and was playing at a high, high level."

"We had a really good team that year. They really did not care about individual stuff; they just wanted to win more than any group I had ever been around. Their goal was to win that thing. They worked all year and made a great tournament run. They played for each other and for New Albany High School."

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Hunter said Unruh played a big part in the team's success.

"Coach Unruh was one of the strong points of that team. He was the glue that held everyone together," said Hunter, who was named to the Indiana Basketball Hall of Fame Silver Anniversary Team in 2022. "LaMont and myself got a lot of press that year but he made sure we played with a team concept."

New Albany almost did not make it out of its own sectional that season having to rally in the fourth quarter to edge arch-rival Floyd Central in the championship game.

"The kids just took off from there and got momentum," Unruh said.

"One special thing about the '96 team is we always managed to make a late run when we had to. That was

something unique about us," Hunter said. "We were able to do that."

Unruh, who served six years as an assistant to Jim Miller before taking over as head coach, was in his first year during the 1995-96 season. He was head coach for three years, taking his team to the semistate final the next year, before becoming the school's athletic director, replacing Gary Austin who retired.

"That is something I really wanted to do," he said of becoming the school's athletic director. "I have no regrets doing that."

Looking back, Unruh said the loss to Ben Davis "was a gut punch like no other." However, he added that the season was filled with so many great moments including victories in the sectional, regional and semistate.

"As crushing as it was, we had so many great memories that season," he said. "It was a great experience. We had such great community and school support. I knew how important it was to the community living in New Albany all my life. I knew what it meant to fans and the whole city of New Albany, and what it meant to me being a New Albany graduate. We made a great run and had great memories all the way up to state."

"One special thing about the '96 team is we always managed to make a late run when we had to. That was something unique about us." Hunter said.



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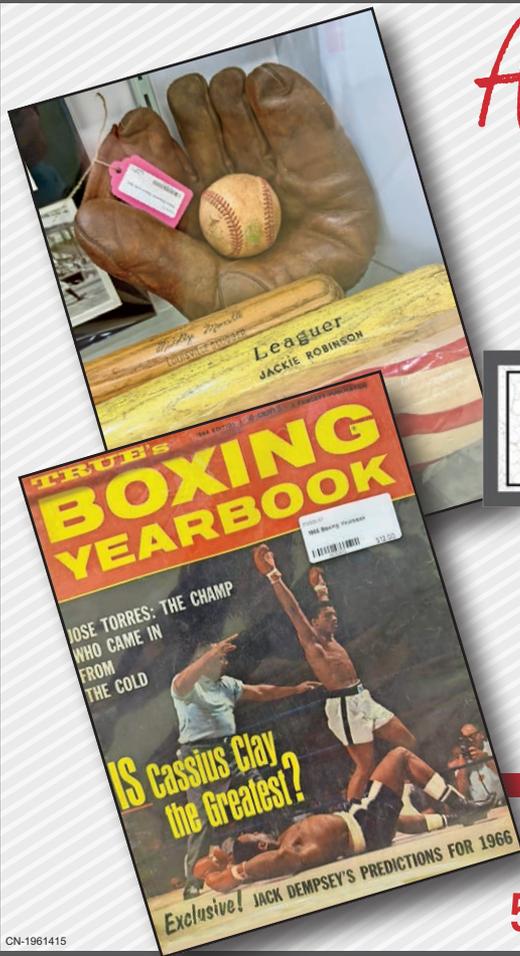
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