

## Local man funds repairs

LOCAL, A5



## EHS edges O'Fallon

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# Edwardsville the Intelligencer

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# Edwardsville faces snow and cold

Snow expected to start Saturday night in region

By Billy Woods  
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After a historically warm 2024 for the Edwardsville region, 2025 will begin with snow and freezing temperatures.

The National Weather Service predicts the Edwardsville area will be blanketed with 1 to

2 inches of snow on the evening of Saturday, Jan. 4 and an additional 3 to 5 inches of snow the following day.

To go with the snow accumulation are predicted freezing temperatures. Saturday, Jan. 4 has a high of 30 degrees and a low of 24 degrees, while Sunday, Jan. 5 has a high of 26 degrees and a low of 18 de-

grees.

After the weekend, temperatures will remain freezing. Jan. 6 has a high of 23 degrees and a low of seven degrees, while the high for Jan. 7 is predicted to be 19 degrees with a low of two degrees.

The evening of Jan. 8 has temperatures predicted to drop below zero degrees.

Precautionary steps may be taken. The Centers for Disease

Control and Prevention (CDC) advises to stay indoors during weather events like the one predicted for the Edwardsville area.

General advice by the CDC includes properly and safely heating your home with space heaters and sleeping with extra blankets. If you need to go outdoors, dress appropriately with multiple layers. Stay dry, stay off ice, and don't drive in

low visibility conditions.

Listen for radio or television reports of travel advisories issued by the National Weather Service.

The incoming weather isn't limited to just Edwardsville. It's part of a weather event impacting the entire region. Snow and freezing temperatures are predicted for parts of Illinois, Missouri, Kansas, Indiana, Ohio, and Kentucky.

## 2024 WEATHER

# St. Louis ties heat record, rainfall surges

By Scott Marion  
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In meteorological terms, 2024 was a historic year in the St. Louis area.

Local weather expert Dr. Alan Black noted that the region had a mean average temperature of 61.2 degrees in 2024, tying it with 2012 for the warmest year on record.

"Of the 10 warmest years on record, six of them have been since 2010 and that includes

2023, 2021, 2017 and 2016," said Black, an associate professor and graduate director in the Department of Geography and Geographic Information Sciences at Southern Illinois University Edwardsville.

"Overall, global temperatures are increasing and the planet is warming, so it makes sense that our average temperatures have been increasing over time. If you look further back, there were some other warm years, including 1921, 1990 and 1991. But most of the warmer years are in a more recent period of record."

While 2024 was a warm year overall, it was up and down in terms of average monthly temperatures.

"We had an average January, but we were almost 10 degrees above normal last February and in March we were over seven degrees above normal. Last winter, we barely had any snow, and it hardly ever got cold," said Black, who discusses weather topics in a weekly story for the Intelligencer.

"April, May and June were about three to four degrees above normal. In the summer, we had a few 100-degree days, but we were about average for July and August in terms of temperature. In the fall, we were two to four degrees above normal in September, October and November. December was also abnormally warm, and we ended up running nearly five degrees above normal."

In terms of precipitation, meanwhile, 2024 was decidedly above normal, with 50.54 inches of rain in the St. Louis

*Weather continues on A8*



Scott Marion/The Intelligencer

Chris Azar, left, is president of Rebuilding Together Southwest Illinois while Sara Berkbigler is the new executive director.

# Rebuilding Together Southwest Illinois expands home repair efforts

## Sara Berkbigler is organization's new executive director

By Scott Marion  
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EDWARDSVILLE — The numbers show that Rebuilding Together Southwest Illinois is fulfilling its mission, but Chris Azar knows that there is a lot more work to do.

Rebuilding Together is the nation's leading nonprofit or-

ganization working to preserve affordable homeownership and revitalize neighborhoods by providing home repair and renovation services free of charge to those in need.

As president of Rebuilding Together Southwest Illinois, Azar has overseen a dramatic increase in the number of people the organization has been

able to assist.

The number of phone calls requesting assistance, which was 92 in 2019, has increased every year and there were 320 calls in 2023 and 439 calls in 2024. The number of homeowners assisted, likewise, has gone up every year, from eight in 2019 to 92 in 2023 and 130 in 2024.

The number of projects completed, meanwhile, continues to grow, going from 35 in 2020 to 203 in 2024. The number of wheelchair ramps has increased as well, starting with one in 2020 and climbing to eight in 2021, 22 in 2022, 38 in 2023 and 44 in 2024.

"I credit our volunteers for

*Rebuild continues on A8*

# When 2025 arrives, so will the end of the amateur athlete in college sports

By Eddie Pells  
ASSOCIATED PRESS

When the page turns on 2024, it will be time to say goodbye, once and for all, to the amateur athlete in college sports.

In theory, the concept held on stubbornly via the quaint and

now all-but-dead notion that student-athletes played only for pride, a scholarship and some meal money.

In practice, the amateurs have been disappearing for years, washed away by the steady millions, now billions,

*Amateur continues on A2*



Ed Hille/AP

NCAA student athletes are no longer amateur athletes.

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Courtesy of Chris Azar

**Rebuilding Together Southwest Illinois recently made a wheelchair ramp for a homeowner in Alton.**



Courtesy of Chris Azar

**This wheelchair ramp is one of 44 built by Rebuilding Together Southwest Illinois in 2024.**

## REBUILD

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helping those numbers to go up, and we had over 300 volunteers this year. The response from the community to what we are doing has been incredible," Azar said.

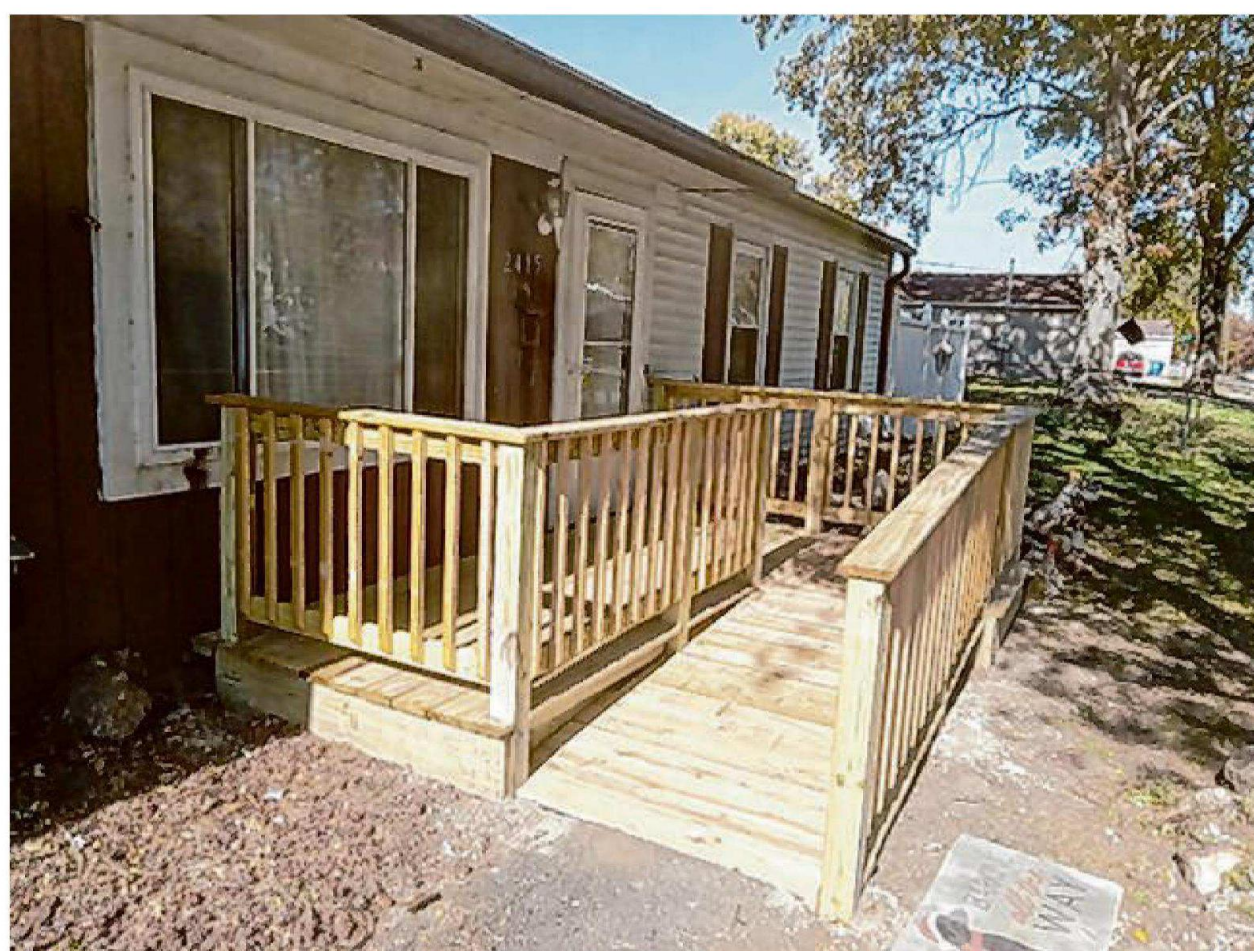
Azar attended his First Rebuilding Together meeting in 2019, and he was soon voted in as vice president. He was named as president in 2020 and that was when it made the transition to being an all-volunteer organization.

"It was beneficial to us because we were able to put all that money into helping people, but because of our growth, we're swinging back in the other direction and adding a couple of paid positions," Azar said. "It's difficult to manage all these phone calls and the paperwork that goes into helping folks. There are permits and the whole process of dealing with different cities.

"We voted this year to hire someone to help us as executive director to go out and meet people and take care of the administrative duties. They can also work on grants to bring in more money because all of this is a balancing act between the number of volunteers we have, the number of projects and the money we have coming in. We want this organization to be sustainable no matter who is president or on the board of directors."

Sara Berkbigger, who spent 11 years as executive director of Main Street Community in Edwardsville, officially assumed her new role as executive director of Rebuilding Together Southwest Illinois on Jan. 1. More recently, Berkbigger worked for Duane Jones at Country Financial in Edwardsville, and she will continue working part-time in that position while working part-time for Rebuilding Together.

"I've been helping for the last year as a consultant, and I've been in non-



Courtesy of Chris Azar

**Rebuilding Together Southwest Illinois rebuilt this porch/ramp for a veteran homeowner.**

profit management for 30 years, mostly for smaller organizations," Berkbigger said. "You see a lot of nonprofits start and sputter because they can't build a good base.

"For Rebuilding Together, we've very lucky obtaining grants and Chris has been working very hard on that. We've been building on that in the past year, but we're focusing on letting the community know who we are and what we do. If you're going to give to a local organization, you're going to get a lot of bang for your buck with Rebuilding Together. It's amazing how many people we can help with the budget we have."

Azar has always said that volunteers are the lifeblood of Rebuilding Together, and they come from all walks of life.

Financial support, whether through grants or sponsors, is equally vital for Rebuilding Together.

"Valvoline Oil not only sponsors us financially but also provides volun-

teers once or twice a year for projects, especially for veterans," Azar said. "Olin Winchester is another company that helps us, and they allow their employees a certain amount of time each year to volunteer. We've gotten to know a lot of their people.

"Scott Air Force has provided us with a lot of volunteers for numerous projects. There's a group from Chicago that wants to come down and help us for two or three days, so we're even getting volunteers from outside of our area."

Junior Service Club of Edwardsville/Glen Carbon, the Edwardsville Community Foundation, and various church groups are among the many organizations that have volunteered to help Rebuilding Together.

"We also received a grant from Edwardsville Rotary Club, which is celebrating the 100th anniversary of Rotary by awarding 10 grants for \$10,000," Azar said.

For Azar, the success of Rebuilding Together is measured by hearing stories of how the organization's projects have helped to improve people's lives. He noted a recent call from a Vietnam veteran whose house was broken into.

"They managed to get the door fixed where they can lock it from the inside, but they called people to get the door replaced and couldn't get any help and his wife was very distraught," Azar said. "We went over there to replace the door, and we noted that he was disabled and had to come down the stairs to get to the landing and they didn't have handrails. While we were there, we installed some handrails for them.

"Of the 439 people that called us this year, we were able to help 130 of them, which is almost one out of three. We should celebrate our wins, but we want to focus on what more we can do, not only at people's homes to make it safer, but what we can do for the community."

Azar also related a story from a Rebuilding Together project in Bethalto, where the son of a veteran contacted the organization to request assistance to build a wheelchair because his father was too proud to ask for help.

"As we finished the ramp, the older gentleman came out to thank us, and he had tears in his eyes," Azar said. "He told us his wife of 52 years could now come because they wouldn't release her from the hospital until they had a wheelchair ramp to safely get in and out of the house."

"People are scared because they can't get out of their house safely in an emergency," Berkbigger added. "That's something we take for granted, but one day with five volunteers to build a wheelchair ramp can change somebody's life."

With the goal of expanding its community reach, Rebuilding Together, through Berkbigger, has set up meetings with various organizations to see how they can work together to help people.

"We've talked to Madison County Community Development, AgeSmart Community Resources, Senior Services Plus, Faith in Action Edwardsville/Glen Carbon, Faith Coalition and other places that are doing similar work," Berkbigger said. "We're trying to figure out how we can help each other."

"A lot of cities have stepped up and asked what they do can to help their residents," Azar

added. "Some of them have streamlined their permit process for us. I met with the mayor of Granite City (Mike Parkinson), and they have put into place a mechanism to where they have the ability to waive the permit fee for nonprofit organizations."

Another goal for Rebuilding Together for 2025 is to hire a handyman to help improve its response to help projects that need immediate attention.

"We have situations where people call us and say someone broke their window or their basement is leaking and they want to know if we can help them right away," Azar said. "We want to have somebody on staff as an employee for those situations."


"Right now, if somebody gives Chris a call, we have to go to the site and see what has to be done and how many volunteers are needed, so sometimes we're a month or two out between getting the call and having the project done," Berkbigger added. "We want to have a quicker response for those emergency situations."

While Rebuilding Together Southwest Illinois currently serves Madison, Bond, Clinton, Jersey, Macoupin, and Montgomery counties, it doesn't have the resources to serve St. Clair County, and that's something that Azar hopes to change by 2026.

"We would like to do that, but it's going to take a lot of money and probably another dedicated individual for that county, so hopefully some of the money we get will go toward filling that job," Azar said. "From the data that we're getting when we're looking at all our phone calls, a lot of them come from St. Clair County."

"This all depends on if we can establish the infrastructure for volunteers and funding. We know that the need is there, and, in time, we hope to be able to help address those needs."

For more information about Rebuilding Together Southwest Illinois, visit [rebuildswi.org](http://rebuildswi.org), call 618-960-2440, email [help@rebuildswi.org](mailto:help@rebuildswi.org), or go to Rebuilding Together Southwest Illinois on Facebook.



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## WEATHER

From page A1

area compared to a normal of 41.7 inches.

"That's almost 9 inches above normal, but we had some months that were near to just above average, some months that were way below average and some months that were way above average," Black said.

"We had almost 10 inches of rain in November, and we had over 8 inches of rain in both April and July.

"February is not a particularly wet month, but we had only 0.4 inches of rain, and it was warmer than usual. October was very dry with 0.82 inches of rain, and we had a nice extended fall where people got to enjoy their time outdoors."

Black cautioned that while heavy snow and bitter cold may not define the winter of 2024-25, it's unlikely that the region is in for a repeat of the relatively mild winter of 2023-24.

"If you were one of the people who said they missed out on cold and

snow last winter, you're probably not going to be disappointed this winter, at least in the short term," Black said. "A pattern shift started before the first of January that will allow us to get some colder weather here."

"If you can get that cold air in place, snow can follow. There are still questions about how cold we're going to get and how much snow we will get, but it looks like a significant winter storm is possible for January 4th and 5th, with some very cold air coming in after that storm."