

Spring/Summer 2025

# The Monitor

RAISING THE BAR BY MONITORING THE CONSTRUCTION INDUSTRY

**III FFC Leads Push  
for Responsible  
Decarbonization and  
Infrastructure Protection**

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## FROM THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR: ILLINOIS' ENERGY SECTOR POWERS GROWTH ACROSS THE CONSTRUCTION INDUSTRY

Illinois has emerged as a national leader in clean energy and digital infrastructure, with a strong commitment to carbon-free electricity and data center development. This forward momentum is not only transforming the region's energy landscape but also driving economic growth and creating long-term opportunities for the construction industry.

As of 2024, more than 53% of Illinois' electricity is generated from nuclear power<sup>1</sup>, making it the top producer of nuclear energy in the nation and ranking third in total carbon-free electricity output. This dependable, low-emission energy source positions Illinois as a prime destination for major infrastructure investment.

From preparing sites and laying foundations to constructing substations and installing underground utilities, contractors and skilled tradespeople play a pivotal role in executing large-scale energy and infrastructure projects. Infrastructure upgrades tied to energy reliability—such as grid modernization, transmission line installations, and substation expansion are all critical components of this growth and rely heavily on a skilled workforce.

At the same time, Illinois is experiencing a surge in digital infrastructure development, particularly in the data center market. As the demand for artificial intelligence (AI) and cloud computing accelerates, so does the need for massive, high-efficiency data centers. Chicago has become a national hub, now tied with Dallas as the third-largest data center market in the country, with nearly 5 million square feet of space already completed and over 2.2 million square feet currently under construction<sup>2</sup>.



**Marc Poulos**  
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

Illinois' 2019 data center tax incentive program, which offers benefits to companies that invest at least \$250 million and create 20 or more jobs<sup>3</sup>, has driven major growth. More than 80 data centers now operate in ComEd's territory<sup>4</sup>, and future projects are expected across northern Illinois. While some lawmakers have raised concerns about the significant energy demands of data centers, others believe there's still time to implement solutions. It's critical that we strike a balance—protecting our environment while fostering the sustainable growth of emerging technologies.

Utilities like ComEd are responding with major investments in grid reliability and capacity upgrades. ComEd's upgrades are designed to reduce outages and improve power restoration times, especially for data centers that demand round-the-clock reliability. These upgrades often translate into multi-year construction projects that provide steady employment for construction workers.

The expansion of clean energy and digital infrastructure is more than just an economic boost—it's a testament to the value of a strong, skilled construction workforce. Contractors and tradespeople are on the front lines of this transformation, ensuring these projects are completed safely, efficiently, and with the highest standards of quality. As Illinois continues to lead in clean energy production and high-tech development, the construction industry will remain an essential partner in building a sustainable and prosperous future.

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# MODERNIZING THE SALES TAX TO FIX ILLINOIS' BUDGET AND FUND MASS TRANSIT

As the State of Illinois' second-largest revenue source, the sales tax is critically important to adequately fund vital services, investing in public infrastructure, and maintaining fiscal responsibility. However, Illinois' sales tax structure still primarily taxes goods rather than services—despite modern economic activity shifting away from manufacturing and other goods-producing industries towards services and information-based industries.

Household consumption has shifted significantly towards services, with expenditures on consumer services growing 2.5 times faster than expenditures on goods over the last six decades. Since the 2010s, more than 50% of all household consumption has been spent on services, up from about 30% in 1960. Research also shows that high-income households spend 5 times more on services, which are not taxed in Illinois, than low-income households. This ends up favoring wealthier consumers over those of more modest means, as well as advantaging service-oriented businesses over retail outlets.

While Illinois lags behind, many states have chosen to modernize their revenue streams and tax the services which have become prevalent in today's economy. This includes everything from digital streaming and gym memberships to personal care services to legal or investment advice. Illinois currently only taxes 29 of these services. In comparison, Indiana taxes 36, Kentucky taxes 40, Wisconsin taxes 82, and Iowa taxes 89. Among other large states, Pennsylvania taxes 67, Florida taxes 69, and Texas taxes 90.

New research from the Illinois Economic Policy Institute, The Civic Federation, Chicago Metropolitan Agency for Planning (CMAP), and Center for Tax & Budget Accountability reveals that Illinois could modernize its sales tax system to reflect today's economic realities. The report concludes that expanding the base to include more services would generate as much as \$2 billion annually—all while being structured to exempt essential services like healthcare and housing as well as business-to-business transactions<sup>1</sup>. With this revenue, Illinois could address its mass transit fiscal cliff of at least \$770 million, make supplemental pension contributions to pay down \$144 billion in unfunded liabilities, and make additional investments in K-12 education or deliver more relief to working families through Earned Income Tax Credits and homeowners through property tax circuit breakers. Indeed, broadening the base could also allow for cuts in the overall sales tax rate.

Too often, balancing the budget can be presented as a false choice about tax hikes or spending cuts. There is a middle ground, however, that most states have embraced—to expand the tax base rather than raise tax rates or eliminate vital services. The data shows that modernizing Illinois' tax system to better reflect the way today's economy works can improve the state's long-term fiscal situation, ensure access to mass transit for commuters and businesses, and deliver more relief for families who need it most.

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## SCHOOL DISTRICT PASSES RBO TO SUPPORT WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT

# PUBLIC BODY SPOTLIGHT

### Minooka Community High School District #111

**T**he Minooka Community High School District #111 is one of many schools across the United States that have developed a Career and Technical Education (CTE) curriculum. CTE programs focus on teaching specific career skills to students in middle school, high school, and post-secondary institutions. Unlike traditional, university-based education, CTE emphasizes hands-on experience over textbook learning, allowing students to develop practical skills in their chosen fields before entering the workforce. This program paves the way for a highly specialized, and incredibly versatile learning environment, and provides students alternatives to the traditional college pathway.

Construction is one of the 16 different high-demand career pathways offered by the Minooka Community High School District #111 CTE program. This hands-on program provides students with practical experience in the construction field, giving them a valuable head start toward careers with construction companies or entry into registered apprenticeship programs. With the ongoing demand for skilled labor in the construction industry, this program plays a vital role in developing the next generation of tradespeople—equipping students with the tools they need to succeed in rewarding, high-paying construction careers.

The school district has recognized the importance of the CTE program in setting students up for success so

much so that the school board recently decided to adopt a Responsible Bidding Ordinance (RBO) into their public procurement code that focuses on the importance of apprenticeship training. An RBO is a tool that public bodies use to help ensure that contractors meet objective criteria to be awarded public contracts. The school district's new RBO will now require contractors to participate in U.S. Department of Labor (USDOL)-approved apprenticeship programs. Their RBO mandates that contractors must show proof that they have graduated at least five apprentices in each of the past five years for each of the construction crafts the bidder will perform on the project.

This new ordinance not only reinforces the district's support for students advancing from CTE programs into formal USDOL-approved apprenticeship training but also ensures a pipeline of highly skilled workers to meet the growing demands of the construction industry. By committing to workforce development, the school district is investing in both the future of its students and the long-term sustainability of the local construction workforce.



Lydia Simrayh  
CONSTRUCTION ANALYST





## DATA CENTERS, NEW CONSTRUCTION, AND ECONOMIC INCENTIVES

New data centers are popping up across northern Indiana—and they’re massive. Amazon is currently building a \$11 billion campus in New Carlisle, while Microsoft is investing \$1 billion in LaPorte. These aren’t just big projects—they’re among the largest investments our region has ever seen.

With projects like these, developers often ask for tax breaks or incentives from local and state governments. In return, they tout “job creation”—claiming their developments will bring hundreds of construction jobs and long-term employment. But here’s the catch: some developers have no intention of hiring local workers. Instead, they bring in their own traveling crews, meaning our tax dollars support outside labor—while our local workers are left out. So instead of creating hundreds of new construction jobs in your community, developers are really just keeping their own workforce temporarily employed while using your locally funded tax incentives to do it.

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*If Hoosier tax dollars are funding these projects, shouldn't a Hoosier workforce be required?*

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Construction costs are already baked into a developer’s budget. Each year, local communities are asked to provide incentives in the form of property tax abatements or TIF districts. The state of Indiana, through the Indiana Economic Development Corporation (IEDC), offers a variety of economic incentives to many developers and businesses ranging from tens of thousands to tens of millions of dollars. Despite this public financing, most agreements include no requirement to hire local workers. If Hoosier tax dollars are funding these projects, shouldn’t a Hoosier workforce be required? Right now, millions in public incentives are handed out with no guarantee of even a single local job.

New construction is a one-time chance for both local workers and communities to benefit economically. Once the project

is complete, those construction jobs—and the income they generate—are gone for good. When local workers are hired, their wages stay in the community, supporting families, small businesses, and the local economy. But developers often downplay this, focusing instead on future tax revenue while ignoring the question of who actually builds the project.

It’s time for local and state leaders – including those at the IEDC – to demand more. Until they do, communities will continue giving away millions without seeing the full benefit of “job creation.”

Thankfully, some towns are stepping up. The City of Crown Point, the Town of Chesterton, and the City of Valparaiso have passed Responsible Bidding Economic Incentives policies that ensure local workforce participation. They should be commended for their leadership.

We encourage you to speak with your local officials about the importance of hiring a local workforce whenever economic incentives are being discussed for a project in your area. If you or a public official would like more information about a Responsible Bidding Economic Incentives document for your area, please contact me at [msutton@iiffc.org](mailto:msutton@iiffc.org).



Myron Sutton  
REGIONAL MANAGER





## ADVANCING CLEAN ENERGY WITHOUT COMPROMISING SAFETY OR JOBS

At the federal level, the push for rapid decarbonization has accelerated through executive action, agency rulemaking, and proposed legislation—often with limited input from labor or infrastructure experts. While the III FFC supports a cleaner, more sustainable energy future, we are concerned that many of these efforts lack the necessary planning, investment, and regulatory frameworks to be implemented safely and effectively. In response, the III FFC has been highly active at the state and local levels to ensure that the transition to clean energy is carried out in a way that protects workers, maintains public safety, and strengthens critical infrastructure. The following highlights key areas where we have engaged to advance responsible policy and safeguard long-term economic and environmental stability.

In response to the uncertainty created by the Trump Administration and an overly aggressive push toward decarbonization, the III FFC has taken a proactive stance at the state and local levels. While we fully recognize the urgency of addressing climate change, we strongly advocate for a thoughtful and strategic approach—one that ensures the necessary legal frameworks, infrastructure, and systems are in place before sweeping mandates are enacted. The accelerated pace at which some interest groups aim to implement decarbonization goals raises serious concerns about feasibility and safety.

A notable example of this tension arose last year when the Illinois Commerce Commission (ICC) issued a decision to halt the People's Gas Safety Modernization Program (SMP), a critical initiative aimed at replacing aging gas mains throughout Chicago. The SMP not only enhances public safety but also supports jobs for operating engineers. The III FFC and Local 150 firmly opposed the ICC's decision, and we are pleased that the program has since been reinstated to continue vital infrastructure improvements.

Similarly, after unsuccessful legislative attempts to ban the sale of internal combustion engine vehicles, a coalition is now attempting to enact such a ban through the rulemaking process at the Illinois Pollution Control Board (IPCB). The proposed rule would prohibit the sale of new gas-powered vehicles beginning in 2035. The III FFC has actively participated in public hearings to oppose this rule and is currently awaiting the Board's decision.

We also continue to pursue solutions that support sustainable development without compromising worker protections or system integrity. One such effort is our geothermal pilot program, introduced in the previous legislative session and carried into the current one. The initiative would require utilities and qualifying organizations to submit up to five pilot geothermal projects,

each including Project Labor Agreements (PLAs) and responsible bidder standards.

Protecting infrastructure funding remains another top priority. The III FFC and Local 150 were instrumental in passing Illinois' "transportation lockbox" constitutional amendment, which safeguards transportation revenues from being diverted for non-transportation purposes. This year, we are focused on ensuring those funds are used responsibly by supporting reforms to how road fund dollars are spent on mass transit operations such as CTA, Metra, and PACE.

To support the responsible transition to electric vehicles (EVs), we introduced legislation to implement a 6-cent-per-kilowatt-hour tax on EV charging stations. The bill also creates a framework for public-private partnerships to develop dynamic charging lanes on I-55, which would allow vehicles to charge while in motion—an innovative step toward future-ready infrastructure.

At the municipal level, we have pushed back against local efforts to eliminate natural gas in new construction. In Chicago, we successfully opposed an ordinance that would have banned gas hookups in new buildings. Meanwhile, municipalities like Evanston and Oak Park have passed ordinances requiring both new and existing buildings to be fully electric by 2050, with interim benchmarks beginning in 2035.

Beyond Illinois, the III FFC is actively engaged in Indiana, where we are advocating for local hire preferences and responsible bidder standards on projects receiving state economic incentives. Our efforts have already resulted in successful policy adoptions in Chesterton, Valparaiso, and LaPorte County, and we are currently pursuing similar measures in Hobart and Lowell.

The III FFC remains committed to ensuring that the transition to decarbonization is both responsible and equitable. Our work across Illinois and Indiana reflects a broader philosophy: that progress should not come at the expense of safety, infrastructure integrity, or working families. We will continue to advocate for smart policies that balance environmental goals with practical implementation, protect critical funding streams, support skilled union labor, and promote long-term economic resilience. As this landscape evolves, the III FFC will remain a steadfast voice for common-sense solutions that serve both our communities and the industries that sustain them.



Kara Principe  
COUNSEL



# CONTRACTOR SPOTLIGHT



## TOPPERT JETTING SERVICE

ONE OF THE LONGEST-STANDING WOMEN-OWNED  
BUSINESSES IN THE COUNTRY

**W**hen Deb Toppert founded Toppert Jetting Service in 1983, she wasn't just starting a business—she was blazing a trail. As a young woman with a passion for machines and an eye for engineering, Deb grew up alongside her father, a John Deere engineer who held more than 50 patents. “My dad had a knack for building things that worked better, lasted longer, and solved real problems,” Deb recalls. “That kind of thinking shaped everything I wanted Toppert Jetting to be.”

More than 40 years later, Toppert Jetting Service stands as one of the nation's oldest surviving woman-owned businesses and a true pioneer in the water jetting and hydro-excavating industry. Built on the values of hard work, innovation, and trust, Toppert Jetting has earned a reputation for quality and reliability that has withstood the test of time.

Headquartered in Illinois and proudly union-owned and operated, the company is a certified woman-owned small business (WBENC) and an IDOT-certified Disadvantaged Business Enterprise (DBE). The company is also a vetted member of IS Network, PICS, and Veriforce, maintaining a top-tier safety record and a deeply rooted culture of professionalism. “We’ve never cut corners,” Deb says. “We

believe our customers deserve to know that when Toppert Jetting shows up, the job gets done right—and safely.”

Toppert Jetting's extensive list of services includes hydro-excavation, dewatering and bypass pumping, pipeline and industrial services, crossbore prevention, vacuum truck work, high-pressure water blasting, camera services, industrial cleaning, and safety training. With each project, the company brings decades of experience and a hands-on approach that ensures consistent, high-quality results across industries—whether it's gas, electric, water, petroleum, or sewer.

Deb especially values Toppert Jetting's partnership with the operating engineers, allowing the company to not only grow into the Chicagoland energy market with qualified personnel who worked well in high-consequence work on tight schedules, but also allowed Toppert

Jetting to move into new markets and add new roles to their portfolio. “IUOE Local 150 was instrumental in our development of a dewatering division to serve northern Illinois and Indiana, and our team is the best family we could have ever hoped for.”

“We’ve had some of the same customers coming back to us for decades,” says Deb. “That’s not just because we do good work—it’s because we treat people right. We’re

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*I've always believed that if you're not innovating, you're falling behind. We want to be the company that's solving tomorrow's problems, not just today's.*

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a family-run company that values relationships, and that shows in how we do business.”

At the heart of the company's continued success is a commitment to staying ahead of the curve. From investing in advanced technology to adopting innovative techniques that increase efficiency and safety, Toppert Jetting is always pushing forward. “I’ve always believed that if you’re not innovating, you’re falling behind,” Deb says. “We want to be the company that’s solving tomorrow’s problems, not just today’s.”

Through four decades of change and growth, one thing has remained constant: Toppert Jetting Service is a company you can count on. With a legacy rooted in engineering ingenuity and a future driven by innovation, Toppert Jetting Service continues to deliver results that speak for themselves—every job, every time.

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*My dad had a knack for building things that worked better, lasted longer, and solved real problems. That kind of thinking shaped everything I wanted Toppert to be.*

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**Deb Toppert,**  
President of Toppert Jetting Service





# ILLINOIS MUNICIPAL ELECTIONS USHER IN NEW LEADERSHIP—AND A NEW OPPORTUNITY TO PROTECT WORKERS AND TAXPAYERS

In the wake of Illinois' April 2025 consolidated municipal elections, a new chapter is beginning for cities, counties, and school districts across the state. Voters reshaped the makeup of dozens of city councils, school boards, and county boards from Rockford to Joliet, electing a new generation of leaders with mandates centered on accountability, transparency, and responsiveness. In suburbs like Orland Park and Tinley Park, where contentious local debates over a wide range of issues dominated the public discourse, the results showed a strong public appetite for leadership that puts working class people first.

While national elections often dominate headlines, these local elections are where many of the most impactful decisions on public investment, workforce policy, and infrastructure are made. That's why the Indiana, Illinois, Iowa Foundation for Fair Contracting (III FFC) is stepping up efforts to ensure newly elected officials understand how they can deliver tangible results for working families and taxpayers starting with stronger local protections in public contracting.

We advocate for the adoption of common-sense policies such as Responsible Bidder Ordinances (RBOs) and RISE (Raising Infrastructure Standards of Excellence) Certification. These tools help municipalities ensure public construction projects—whether building roads, schools, or water systems—are completed by qualified contractors who follow labor laws, invest in workforce training, and deliver safe, high-quality work. Our goal is to ensure that these new leaders hit the ground running when it comes to protecting public investments and supporting local workers.

Why is this important? Because when local governments award public construction contracts

without clear standards, it opens the door for low-road contractors to cut corners. That might mean skipping safety protocols, underpaying workers, or sidestepping apprenticeship programs—all practices that not only harm workers but ultimately cost taxpayers more in delays, litigation, and substandard work that requires costly repairs.

Policies like RBOs level the playing field by setting baseline criteria for all bidders, including participation in U.S. Department of Labor-approved apprenticeship programs, compliance with prevailing wage laws, and proof of proper insurance and licensure. As Illinois communities look to rebuild aging infrastructure and expand public services, the policies they adopt today will determine the quality and sustainability of those investments. RBOs and RISE Certification ensure that public money supports safe worksites, skilled labor, and equitable economic outcomes.

This approach doesn't just protect budgets; it builds local economies. When cities and counties prioritize contractors who train and hire local workers, they create sustainable pathways into the middle class. Apprenticeship programs, for example, help build a pipeline of skilled tradespeople—often right from the communities

where the work is happening.

As newly elected leaders take office, III FFC is engaging with them directly offering guidance, policy language, and data to support the implementation of responsible contracting ordinances. Now is the time to build infrastructure that not only serves public needs, but also supports local workers, strengthens neighborhoods, and ensures tax dollars are invested wisely.

Good government starts at the local level. With the right policies in place, Illinois communities can ensure their infrastructure investments do more than pour concrete—they can build futures.

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*Good government starts at the local level. With the right policies in place, Illinois communities can ensure their infrastructure investments do more than pour concrete—they can build futures.*

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Jodi Frailey

REGIONAL MANAGER



Dean Alonistiotis

GOVERNMENT AFFAIRS  
COORDINATOR

# STAFF SPOTLIGHT

## TAMARA McCOLLOUGH

*DEIA Outreach Associate*

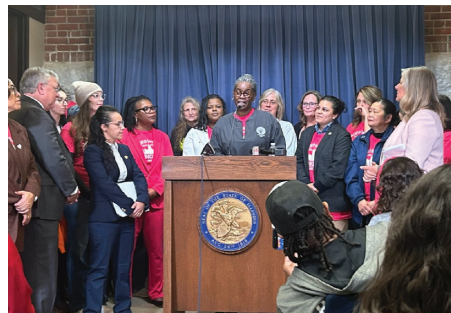
**T**amara McCollough, DEIA Outreach Associate at the III FFC, brings more than two decades of hands-on experience, leadership, and advocacy to her work—and it all started with a calling to serve.

Tamara began her career in the U.S. Air Force, where she honed the discipline, resilience, and teamwork that continues to guide her today. After completing her military service, she was drawn to the trades, seeking a career that was both impactful and grounded in tangible skills. She started as a sheet metal apprentice while raising her son and eventually becoming a journeyperson.

“That experience gave me a deep understanding of the challenges tradespeople face and the importance of access, support, and opportunity, especially for women and underrepresented communities,” she says.

After working in the field for over a decade, Tamara realized she wanted to make a broader impact, not just in her own career, but by helping others get started in the trades. That desire led her to IUOE Local 150, where she first served as a seasonal instructor. Eventually, Tamara joined the III FFC as a DEIA Outreach Associate, a role that allows her to connect with schools, community organizations, and individuals who might not know that a future in the trades is possible for them. “My favorite part of the work I do now is opening doors for others,” she says. “There’s nothing like watching someone light up when they realize, ‘This path is for me too.’”

But the work doesn’t come without challenges. Tamara is quick to acknowledge the need to shift perceptions—both in communities unfamiliar with the trades and within the industry itself. “Building trust takes time,” she says. “But



*Tamara speaking at the Tradeswomen Take Over Springfield 2nd Annual Illinois Tradeswomen Advocacy Day.*

showing up authentically, sharing my story, and listening to theirs—that’s how change starts.”

That commitment to change is what makes Tamara most proud. She’s helped more women gain access to apprenticeship opportunities, supported fellow veterans, and mentored young people navigating their first steps in the trades. One standout moment in her career was attending the Tradeswomen Build Nations Conference in September 2024 in New Orleans, where she was surrounded by skilled, passionate women from across the country. “It reminded me how far we’ve come and how important it is to continue advocating for equity,” she reflects.

Outside of work, Tamara enjoys crafting, gardening, and spending cherished time with her family—especially her son and granddaughter. And while many are surprised to learn she’s a veteran with over 21 years in the trades, she also surprises people with her past as a high school swimmer who was once offered a swimming scholarship. “It speaks to the discipline and drive I’ve always carried with me,” she says.

For those just getting started in the trades, Tamara offers this advice: “Be open to learning, work hard, and don’t be afraid to ask questions. Find mentors, build relationships, and remember—you belong here. Your presence matters, and your future is worth investing in.”

Tamara McCollough is more than an advocate—she’s a builder of pathways, a mentor, and a powerful force for equity in the trades. Through her work, she’s helping reshape the face of the industry and proving every day that the future of the trades is inclusive, diverse, and bright.





## IN MEMORIAM

George Petecki, Jr.  
(1969-2025)

**W**e at the III FFC were saddened to learn of the passing of George William Petecki, Jr., a valued friend and partner through his company George's Landscaping Inc., a proud signatory contractor with IUOE Local 150. George was not only a trusted colleague, but a devoted father, son, brother, and community leader.

George's deep commitment to his family, his community, and his work left a lasting impression on all who knew him. As a Trustee of the Joliet East Fire Department, an Eagle Scout, and a mentor to young scouts in Pack 94, George embodied service and leadership. His passion for excellence was evident in every project, and his larger-than-life personality and adventuresome spirit brought warmth and energy wherever he went.

We are grateful to have worked alongside George and will remember him with deep respect and appreciation. Our thoughts are with the entire Petecki family during this difficult time. He will be truly missed.

# THE POWER OF PARTNERSHIP

**T**he power of constructive partnership took center stage at the Indiana, Illinois, Iowa Foundation for Fair Contracting's (III FFC) 2025 Construction Industry and Public Officials Awards Dinner. The event served as a vibrant celebration of the essential collaboration between responsible contractors, skilled labor unions, and proactive public entities – a relationship the III FFC actively fosters to ensure quality construction, fair competition, and community prosperity across the Quad City region. The annual dinner remains a cornerstone event, reinforcing these critical bonds and honoring those who exemplify the power of working together toward shared goals.

The evening's speakers offered perspectives from critical points within this partnership. Marshall Douglas, Treasurer for IUOE Local 150, underscored labor's vital role within this partnership, emphasizing that a well-trained, fairly compensated, and safe workforce is fundamental to delivering the high-quality infrastructure public bodies require and responsible contractors strive to build. His remarks highlighted the labor's commitment to providing the skilled professionals who form the bedrock of successful project execution through collaboration.

Josh Weger, Executive Director of the Illinois Economic Policy Institute (ILEPI), illuminated the shared economic advantages born from this collaborative approach. By presenting data on the positive impacts of fair contracting standards – often championed by labor and



III FFC Staff at the event.



management and implemented by public bodies – Weger demonstrated how cooperation leads to tangible benefits like improved infrastructure longevity, stronger local economies, and improved community well-being, providing a compelling rationale for all three parties to engage constructively.



The awards presented further solidified the theme of successful cooperation. The City of Moline, Illinois, received the Public Official Award, accepted by Mayor Sangeetha Rayapati alongside city council members and staff. This honor recognized Moline's success in effectively partnering with labor and industry stakeholders. By implementing policies that align public infrastructure needs with fair labor standards and responsible contracting practices, Moline exemplifies how government entities can facilitate a synergistic relationship that yields high-quality public projects built safely and ethically, benefiting the entire community. Mayor Rayapati spoke to this spirit of teamwork in her acceptance.

The Contractor of the Year was awarded to Central Excavating, represented by Brent Martin and his team, showcasing how contractors thrive through strong cooperative relationships. The III FFC commended the company's

commitment to valuing its workforce – often in partnership with labor unions – upholding rigorous industry standards, and collaborating effectively on complex projects. Their notable growth stands as proof that ethical operations and strong labor-management relations are pillars of long-term business success in the construction sector. Martin's remarks echoed the central message of the night: that mutual respect and partnership are key to thriving in today's industry.



The construction industry operates most successfully on a "three-legged stool" model: projects reach their highest potential when contractors, labor, and public entities work together. When these groups align their goals and collaborate, the result is not only superior infrastructure but also a stronger regional economy and a well-supported, highly skilled workforce.

The 2025 III FFC Awards Dinner reaffirmed a timeless truth: the best outcomes in the construction industry — and the communities it serves — are built on partnership, transparency, and a shared commitment to excellence across Indiana, Illinois, and Iowa.



Andrew Waeyaert  
REGIONAL MANAGER



# REVIVING THE ILLIANA EXPRESSWAY: THE MIDWEST'S CRITICAL FREIGHT CORRIDOR

More than a decade ago, the Illiana Expressway was proposed as a visionary infrastructure project to connect I-55 in Illinois with I-65 in Indiana through a 47-mile tollway. Designed to alleviate congestion, enhance freight mobility, and stimulate economic development, the project gained early momentum—only to be shelved in 2015 due to shifting political winds, funding uncertainties, and environmental concerns.

Since the project's suspension, freight and logistics demands south of Chicago have skyrocketed. Anchored by Will County—the largest inland port in North America—more than 88 million square feet of new warehouse space now lines the proposed corridor, transforming Will County and Northwest Indiana into critical logistics hubs. All that growth funnels onto I-80/94, which has become the nation's second-worst truck bottleneck and a key contributor to the \$108 billion in annual congestion costs. Congestion costs and pavement wear will only increase without new east-west capacity.

The Illiana Expressway presents a strategic solution to this gridlock. Modeling from initial project assessments indicates that a dedicated freight corridor would divert roughly 24,000 vehicles daily from overloaded routes like Route 30 and I-80/94. Commuters would gain back 25 minutes per trip, while truck-related crashes could be dramatically reduced.

A revitalized Illiana would generate thousands of jobs in both construction and long-term maintenance. According to estimates by the Illinois Economic Policy Institute (ILEPI), the project could support over 13,000 jobs

during construction alone, delivering \$1.3 billion in labor income and contributing nearly \$2.8 billion to regional gross domestic product (GDP)<sup>1</sup>. With a highly skilled and local workforce at the helm, the Illiana would be built by the very workers who have long kept the Midwest moving.

However, the window to act is closing. Although the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act (IIJA) currently earmarks over \$303 billion for highway improvements through 2026, shifting political priorities in Washington D.C. have cast uncertainty on how long this funding stream will remain available—or at what scale.

Fortunately, Illinois does not need to wait for Washington. Through the state's Public-Private Partnerships for Transportation Act (605 ILCS 130), the Illiana Expressway can be delivered using a P3 model—limiting public exposure while leveraging private capital. This proven structure ensures value-for-money, budget certainty, and on-time delivery.

This is not just a highway—it's an economic engine, a job creator, and a safety net for a region at the epicenter of America's freight economy. The Illiana Expressway has waited long enough. With the right steps, and the political will to move forward, Illinois and Indiana can finally break ground on a project that builds more than roads—it builds the future.

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# DATA CENTERS ARE ESSENTIAL FOR POWERING FUTURE JOBS AND ECONOMIC GROWTH IN REGION

**A**s digital transformation continues to reshape nearly every sector of the economy, data centers have become essential infrastructure—powering everything from e-commerce and streaming services to artificial intelligence, telehealth, and advanced manufacturing. As discussed in the Executive Article on Page 1, these facilities are not only supporting the digital economy in Illinois—they’re also creating high-quality jobs, driving local economic growth, and offering long-term career opportunities in the skilled trades.

Between 2020 and 2023, Illinois attracted over \$11 billion in investment across 21 data center projects, resulting in thousands of construction jobs and more than 500 permanent roles in operations and maintenance<sup>1</sup>. In 2023 alone, the data center industry supported more than 115,000 jobs statewide, an 8% increase in total employment, according to a PwC report<sup>2</sup>. Many of these roles are in construction, engineering, and technical support.

Major projects continue to reshape Illinois’ economic landscape. A \$10 billion redevelopment at the former Sears Headquarters in Hoffman Estates is generating 1,000 construction jobs and significant local investment. In Grayslake, a \$2.25 billion development will bring 20 new data centers across 160 acres—creating tens of thousands of skilled labor hours and generating business for local contractors, suppliers, and fabricators. These projects generate real economic ripple effects in communities across the state—from Chicago and its suburbs to Champaign and downstate towns.

To fully realize the economic benefits of these projects, it’s essential that construction jobs go to local workers—a point emphasized in the *Focus on Indiana* article on Page 4. Keeping taxpayer-supported wages within Illinois ensures that paychecks are spent in local communities, supporting small businesses, families, and long-term regional growth. When developers rely on out-of-state labor instead of the local skilled workforce, the economic benefits of these massive projects are diminished.

Fortunately, Illinois has recognized this. A 2019 state law provides targeted tax incentives to attract data center development—but with important accountability. To qualify, developers must meet responsible bidder standards and enter into a Project Labor Agreement (PLA), ensuring that construction work is done to the highest standards with local labor. This ensures that public investments stay in-state and that Illinois residents are the ones building the state’s digital future.

Data centers are also fueling demand for workforce development and training across multiple trades. Apprenticeship programs are preparing the next generation of tradespeople to meet the complex demands of data center construction and operations. Electricians, pipefitters, operating engineers, laborers, and more are finding meaningful careers in this expanding industry. In addition to economic impact, data centers help Illinois achieve its clean energy goals. In 2024, data center companies were responsible for half of all clean energy procurement in the U.S., and these projects are accelerating the adoption of energy-efficient technologies across industries.

Illinois has positioned itself as a national leader in this space. In 2023, the Chicago metro area was ranked the #1 location for corporate expansion and relocation for the 12th straight year<sup>3</sup>—thanks in large part to our robust digital infrastructure and highly skilled local workforce. As demand for digital infrastructure surges, Illinois continues to lead by example—backed by strong policies, a talented trades workforce, and a commitment to keeping economic gains right here at home.

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1. Illinois Department of Commerce and Economic Opportunity. (2023). Data Center Investment Program: 2023 Annual Report. Available at: <https://dceo.illinois.gov/content/dam/soi/en/web/dceo/aboutdceo/reportsrequiredbystatute/2023-data-centers-annual-report.pdf>

2. Data Center Coalition. (2025). Economic contributions of U.S. data centers, 2017–2023. Available at: <https://www.centerofyourdigitalworld.org/2025-impact-study>

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# The Monitor

RAISING THE BAR BY MONITORING  
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