

# The Sunday **ntagra**

## Young refs ease shortage

Rigsby, Marcopulos receive high marks sports, BI



## **Spirited showing**

Thousands turn out to back 100 teams in state cheerleading finals in B-N LOCAL, A3

NOT AS COLD 33 • 12 FORECAST, A8

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#### **OUR ENVIRONMENT**



Workers sort paper from other items as part of Midwest Fiber's recycling business. The conveyor belt system allows several workers to screen

# KIAL MAT'

# Local recycling efforts evolve to reduce waste 'glut'

KADE HEATHER

BLOOMINGTON – As long move and even-as you place everything that has tually there is a recycle symbol into your recycling bin, you shouldn't have to of that material," worry about where it goes, right?

shape. Some items, even though they Michael Brown. are labeled as recyclable, could

somewhere and it's never going to said Ecology Ac-That depends - mostly on its tion Center Ex-

ecutive Director Brown

Todd Shumaker, director of properly go through the entire new business development at sorting and recycling process Midwest Fiber in Normal – a and yet, "it's just going to sit main recycling processing cen-

ter for McLean County — said the hardest thing to educate people with is what's acceptable for while a clothes hanger might be plastic. what's acceptable for a ladder might be alu-

reality, we're looking for plastic containers," Shumaker said. "We try to explain to folks that it's typically purchased at a grocery store and the neck is narrower than the base," for example, water and soda bottles, containers for laun-dry detergent, ketchup, as well as yogurt and butter containers.

"There's a lot of plastic, but in minum, they're only looking for cans or smaller household items

Midwest Fiber also processes

steel and aluminum. However,

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Midwest Fiber's recycling operation.
Watch the video by camera at this code and tapping the link. **NEWS**VU

■ INSIDE: Where does your recycling go? LOCAL, A6

# NewsVu brings new experience to print

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Then snow was in the forecast last week, we mobilized our team of journalists to cover the story and the impact all day long. Our camera about what was coming Thursday newspaper chronicled what happened through strong visuals and storytelling.



CHRIS

eos, footage of residents talking about the conditions and our meteorologist explaining on

version didn't

on-scene vid-

include were the

next. Our digital and mobile readers had access to all of that plus photo galleries, updated

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related to the story or a podcast with our staff. Or it could open documents, other materials about the story you're reading

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of editor Chris Coates talking about new News Vi technology Point your smartphone camera

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**BUDGET ANALYSIS** 

# Speech, reaction set up election

Pritzker, GOP trade barbs over budget

BRENDEN MOORE brenden.moore@lee.net

SPRINGFIELD — When Gov. J.B. Pritzker delivered his combined budget and state of the state address Wednesday, one phrase in particular stood out:

'spelunking for misery.' "Contrary to those folks who spend their time orbiting Illi-nois politics just spelunking for misery, our state has a lot to be proud of," Pritzker said, calling out Republicans critical of his – and, by extension, Democratic legislative supermajorities' stewardship of the state.

The phrase later took on a life

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### COVID | STATE

# **B-N schools** look at ruling blocking III. mask orders

KAREN ANN CULLOTTA

SPRINGFIELD - Students at scores of districts across the

state may be freed from wearing a mask in the classroom, with an Illinois judge ruling Friday that Gov. J.B. Pritzker's COVID-19 mandate was authorized ille-

Sangamon County Circuit Judge Raylene Grischow on Friday granted a request from attor-ney Tom DeVore to temporarily halt the governor's executive orders on masking and quarantining for schools, finding that

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#### Where does your recycling go?

## Step 1

Tip floor and metering bin Garbage trucks - private haulers, municipal trucks and Midwest Fiber trucks - that drive throughout town to pick up recycling makes stops at Midwest Fiber to dump loads of waste onto the tip floor. A small loader truck picks up materials and carries them to the metering bin - the first machine in the sorting process - where the materials are evenly laid out on a conveyer belt in a depth of about 6 to 8 inches.



**>>> Step 2** 

Pre-sort

#### through it properly. Items that workers look for at this

Midwest Fiber staff members Materials fall into the OCC stand along the conveyer screen next, which is a belt and pull any items off turning wheel designed to that could damage the system or would not travel stage to pull off the conveyer belt include large pieces of metal, plastic bags, wire,



>>> Step 3

Old corrugated containers

#### News screen

conveyer belt.

Step 4

Materials that have made it through the pre-sort and OCC screen are sent to the news screen, which aims to separate paper from the rest. Working similarly to the OCC, materials are sent up a conveyer belt and a series of spinning discs to separate containers from paper. Containers fall between the discs and move on to the next step, while the paper moves up to a different

#### >>> Step 5 **Polishing screen**

Containers and other materials that were sorted from paper in the previous step are now sorted by dimension at the polishing screen. Another series of spinning discs help to push materials along and a steep incline at this stage allows heavier, three-dimensional items to fall to a different conveyer belt, while two-dimensional items like paper move along to its own line.

#### >>> Step 6

#### Fiber line Two-dimensional items that moved through the

polishing screen next land at the fiber lines. Midwest Fiber employees stand along a conveyer belt to sort out items that shouldn't be there, such as plastic bags, small cardboard pieces and flattened containers. The rest of the materials, mostly paper, falls into the



#### **)))** Step 7

#### Cross belt magnet Three-dimensional

materials that fell through the news and polishing screens land at the container line. The cross belt magnet, which is a powerful magnet that rotates over the container line conveyer belt, pulls steel and tin materials off the line and separates them into its own holding

colorings, such as detergent containers. Another employee

#### **Container line** After the cross belt magnet has pulled all steel and tin materials off the three-dimensional material line, the rest of the containers move along the container line where employees sort the plastics by type. Each worker is looking for a specific plastic type to sort from the line, such as one worker will watch for No. 2 plastics without dyes or colorings, such as milk jugs Another employee will sort No. 2 plastics with dyes and

is sorting any materials that have slipped through the

cracks in previous steps like

#### Step 9

Materials left over after all the previous stages, such as (single-use plastic water bottles) heads to the eddy current which is designed to sort the aluminum from the rest. The machine gives a positive charge to aluminum, making it jump off the belt holding bunker.



**Eddy current** aluminum or polyethylene terephthalate, or PET, bottles and over a separator bar to a

## Step 10

Optical sorter The rest of materials that have made it through next go through he optical sorter. This stage separates PET bottles, such as single-use plastic water bottles, from the rest by generating a puff of air on any items it recognizes as PET plastic. The shot of air pushes those bottles off the conveyer helt to be manually sorted and then

brought to a holding

## Step 11

All materials that have been sorted throughout the process eventually fell into its own holding bunkers at different stages. Once a bunker is full, an employee hauls it to the baler, which condenses the given material into cubes. Each cube could weigh anywhere betwe 1,200 to 1,800 pounds. The cube of that specific material is tied with wire, moved to storage and is ready to be shipped away. Semi-trucks or train cars pick up the cubed materials to haul them to recycling mills where the items are turned into new products. Midwest Fiber ships its materials anywhere from Pekin to Indiana, Wisconsin, Georgia, Mexico, China, Taiwan or India

#### Recycling

In years past, there was a larger push and focus on recycling more items. Recently, the focus has shifted from quantity to quality the types of plastic and the shapes

'Too many people got in the habit of just throwing everything and anything in the recycling cart with the thought in their mind being, 'Oh, they'll take care of this at the other end," Brown said. "They thought it was better to leave it in if they were in doubt rather than leaving it out. Truly, now that is our motto: If in doubt, leave it out."

Larger items can cause problems at recycling centers like Midwest Fiber. Some materials could damage sorting machines. They also create more labor and hauling costs for recycling centers, which then reduces the net value of that commodity.

Shumaker said for bigger objects that the recycling center doesn't want — for example, a trailer hitch or ladder - workers will pull it off the line and recycle it separately. He added "99.99% of the time" that the facility receives recyclable com-

modities, those items are recycled. Brown said recycling, especially plastics, is a market-driven system

"Plastics recycling is focused heavily on the materials that have long-term viability to be recycled, and it tries not so much to focus on these items that have kind of in-termittent market value that's very temporary, those things just aren't truly sustainably recyclable in terms of there being some demand for it somewhere," Brown said.

He said consumers have a responsibility if they want to have a strong recycling market. That includes buying and demanding more materials made from recycled

#### COVID-19 pandemic's effect on waste

What has been recycled or not recycled, however, has changed pared to about 88,000 tons in 2019 to those centers, forcing many rethroughout the pandemic, especially in 2020, when there were EAC data shows. stricter stay-at-home orders in place.

Residential waste "skyrocketed" in 2020, while commercial and industrial waste decreased, according to the EAC. Corrugated cardboard waste also dramatically increased, recycling rate report in November as more people ordered items online to be delivered.

Shumaker said there was a noticeable difference at the beginning ing routines, carry-out meals, and of the pandemic in household recycling such as aluminum cans or plastic bottles.

"But over the entirety of the pandemic, we've continued to see an increase in cardboard in residential recycling," Shumaker said.

McLean County's recycling rate in 2020 plunged to 35%, a rate not seen since 2015 after recycling steadily grew in the latter half of last decade.

waste was recycled in 2020, com- ters or may not have transportation management company?"



DAVID PROEBER, THE PANTAGRAPH

A front end loader pushes a load of waste toward a processing station at Midwest Fiber's recycling business on Jan. 19. Trucks carrying waste paper and plastic arrive at the business around the clock



DAVID PROEBER, THE PANTAGRAPH

A series of conveyor belts wind through sorting stations at Midwest Fiber's recycling business on Jan. 19.

and nearly 95,000 tons in 2018, cyclable items to be left in the trash

"Commercial and industrial waste generation decreased (in sites in McLean County, All are op-2020), and collection and sorting practices were altered due to restricted workforce," the EAC wrote in its 2020 waste generation and 2021. "At the same time, residential waste generation skyrocketed. likely a result of intensified cleandisposable PPE (personal protective equipment.)"

Recycling rates for 2021 will not Bloomington. be known until late 2022.

#### **Recycling accessibility**

One large obstacle to higher recycling rates is accessibility.

Many residents live in apartment complexes that do not provide a recycling option or curbside services. Roughly 58,000 tons of solid knowabout recycling drop-off cen- to get it through their apartment or

week after week.

There are four recycling drop-off erated by Midwest Fiber and all are in Normal:

- 901 S. Cottage Ave., Normal
- 1101 N. Main St., Normal ■ 300 Greenbriar Ave., Normal
- 300 S. Walnut St., Normal The Normal Town Council passed an ordinance in 2018 requiring landlords to offer recycling services to tenants.

There is no such requirement in

Brown said it comes down to residents to demand that change. if they want it, but they should understand that it comes at a cost.

"It's not free for property owners to provide this," he said. "If residents really want it, are they willing to accept a slight increase in their Some of those residents may not rent if that's what it takes to be able



**CLAY JACKSON**, HERALD & REVIEW Director of Sales & Procurement Todd Shumaker shows bundles of newspapers at Midwest Fiber Recycling in Decatur. The items are vet packed into semis and hauled to the

facility in Normal for processing.

The other cost would be either to continue hauling recycling materials to a drop-off center across town or, if they lack transportation, sending the recyclables off to

Brown said there could be movement in the future to move one of fast) because it's missing at least the recycling drop-off sites to Bloomington.

#### **New community** composting service

the landfill.

The EAC also is working to combat organics ending up in the waste stream.

recently developed a residential composting system.

Residents can sign up for the program for \$20.99 and they will receive a 5-gallon bucket, educational materials and a 30-pack of @kadeheather

#### compostable liners.

He said organic waste is one of several focus points in the EAC's 20-year solid waste plan, which was developed in 2017 for McLean County government in compliance with a state law mandating counties to generate a long-term solid waste

The community composting program includes a drop-off site at Normandy Village in Normal.

"You can drop off food waste from your homes, whether it's scraps or leftovers, food gone bad, chicken bones or grease or whatever all those can be recycled through

a service we have now," Brown said. He said it would be ideal to have curbside compost recycling, but that's "probably going to be a while

Banana peels, for example, if they cannot be composted, are better off in a field than they are in the trash,

which goes to a landfill. A banana peel in a field will break down "relatively quickly" because it's exposed to oxygen, microbes,

moisture and sun, Brown said. "That same banana peel in a landfill does not (break down as one critical component, which is oxygen," Brown said. "The landfill is an anaerobic, or oxygen deprived, environment, so that banana peel could last for who knows how long,

Furthermore, when that banana peel in a landfill does eventually break down, it releases methane The nonprofit organization has in that process, which is a potent greenhouse gas that contributes to climate change.

> Contact Kade Heather at 309-820-3256. Follow him on Twitter:

15 years in a landfill."