



The 13th debate was broadcast live on WILL-FM, and streamed on social media



Much of the media landscape in 2018 was dominated by the midterm elections. Illinois Public Media remained steadfast throughout, delivering on our mission to provide unbiased and well-sourced reporting.

Leading up to November 6, we hosted a debate for Illinois' 13th Congressional District, broadcast live from the WILL-TV studio. Republican incumbent Rodney Davis and Democratic challenger Betsy Dirksen Londrigan answered questions from reporters, students, and constituents of the district.

*The 21st* also interviewed dozens of candidates running for statewide office, including those running for Governor, Attorney General, Treasurer, and Comptroller.

All of this, along with extensive news coverage from WILL and other public media stations across the state was made available on a special elections section of the Illinois Public Media website.

Beyond the headlines, interviews, and debates, several educational resources were offered to help voters make an informed decision come Election Day.

We teamed up with BallotReady.org to offer a mobile-friendly voter's

guide, giving individuals the ability to find their polling place, research candidates in their district, learn more about ballot initiatives, and find answers to commonly-asked questions.



And with the help of **Illinois Newsroom**, WILL Education visited eight high school classrooms across central and southern Illinois to ask: What do elections have to do with your biggest concerns? For example, if students are concerned about funding for their school, it's important they know the candidates running for their local school board.

## NEWS & BREWS

In June, **Illinois Newsroom** launched News & Brews to spark important discussions inspired by public media reporting that could lead to action and impact in our area. And October's News & Brews discussed the midterm elections in an educational, non-partisan way. Members of the audience learned what local and state elected officials do and how each office can affect our everyday lives.

The series has also tackled topics such as dealing with trauma and mental health issues in schools, funding for books in



prisons, and legalizing recreational marijuana. Each event has averaged 100 people in attendance.

With a successful model in place, other partner stations within the journalism collaborative have started to host their own News & Brews conversations in the communities they serve.



News & Brews offers a space for deeper discussion around issues that matter. And by bringing journalists and community members together to focus on these important topics and share information, it's our hope that these events can spark positive change."

— Kristin Walters, engagement strategist for Illinois Newsroom



midAmerican gardener

**CLASSICAL:BTS**  
BEHIND THE SCENES

It was a big year for *Mid-American Gardener*—now in its 26th season on WILL-TV. In July, the how-to show welcomed Tinisha Shade-Spain as the new host. One of her passions is making gardening more fun and accessible for everyone, no matter the skill level.

The show also brought its wealth of gardening expertise out to Urbana's Market at the Square for two roadshow appearances, with panelists answering to a variety of questions from those visiting the market.

Also added to the show's offerings was the *Mid-American Gardener*

podcast. The first season spanned 24 episodes and gave listeners the opportunity to hear from local growers on a variety of topics, including seeds,

Transforming data sets—such as DNA—into music. A mobile app that helps students learn the violin. The practice of yoga integrated into conducting music. Breaking stereotypes around who plays classical music. *Classical:BTS* demonstrated there was more to classical music than meets the ear.

In this webseries—made possible by the Barbara E. Barnes Fund for Illinois Public Media—hard work, performance, and creativity were



"Music is like a first language to me. It's how I say what I'm thinking or how I feel, and it's abstract, which I think is really important."

— Julia Kay Jamieson, harpist

brought to life. We are looking forward to another season of these mini-documentaries devoted to the lesser-seen or heard stories around classical music in central Illinois.



"I think a lot of people are intimidated or don't feel like they have time, and neither of those things are true. If you've got a dollar for a pack of seeds and a few minutes, you can do it."

— Tinisha Shade-Spain, host

With a new permanent host in place, the show hit the road to see how gardeners around central Illinois are making use of their growing space for a new segment called, "Other People's Gardens." In the first installment, Roxanne Sawhill of Urbana proved you don't need a lot of space to grow a lot of things.



vegetables, herbs, pests, canning, flower arranging, and more.

## WOMEN IN JOURNALISM



Panelist field attendee questions

In November, we hosted a conference to celebrate women in journalism. The event focused on what has changed for women in the industry, what still needs to change, and what the future may hold with more women pursuing the career than ever before.

Women in Journalism featured University of Illinois alumnae Monica Eng, WBEZ, *Curious City* and *Chewing Embedded* podcast; Kelly McEvers, NPR's *Embedded* podcast; and Christine Herman. Also joining them on the panel



was Niala Boodhoo, Lee V. Gaines, and Stephanie Craft, Journalism Department Head at the College of Media at Illinois.

## 21ST ON THE ROAD



"We think it's important to be in the communities we serve. And while we can't be face-to-face with all of our listeners every day, we think it's important to show up and talk about things concerning them."

— Niala Boodhoo,  
host and executive producer of *The 21st*

In celebration of the show's second year, *The 21st* set out to visit many of the communities they serve across Illinois. The statewide daily talk show could be found broadcasting live from the Statehouse, The Pygmalion Festival, the Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library and Museum, and Research Park at the University of Illinois, as well as local bicycle shops, grocery stores, coffee houses, and farmer's markets.



## FELLOWSHIPS



"Public media has a long history of elevating the work of female journalists. This event recognized those in our region whose work is moving the field forward. It also gave us a chance to connect them with the Friends of WILL, who've supported their efforts for 45 years, now."

— Danda Beard



**Lee Gaines**—education reporter for WILL and **Illinois Newsroom**—received an Education Writers Association Reporting Fellowship to explore barriers to higher education for currently and formerly incarcerated people in Illinois.



**Christine Herman**—health reporter for WILL and Side Effects Public Media—received a Rosalynn Center Mental Health Journalism Fellowship to report on the challenges parents face raising children with serious mental illnesses.



December Book Mentor event in our studio



WILL Education hosted 57 events across 12 different cities throughout Illinois. This outreach extends the impact of award-winning educational programming, bringing it from the screen into the classroom—and even into the home.

**The Book Mentor Project**—now in its 15th year and made possible by funding from the PNC Foundation—gets children in local Head Start programs excited about reading. We also provide families with books, resources, and events to bring that excitement home. Now in its second year, **Design Squad** has branched out to Rantoul, Danville, and Hoopston and continues to empower children to solve real-world problems through engineering.

Additionally, the education team expanded community outreach and engagement efforts to better serve secondary education. This included screening various films, such as



Independent Lens' *Tell Them We Are Rising: The Story of Black Colleges and Universities*, inside the WILL-TV studio and at local high schools to encourage college readiness among the student populations.



## AWARDS

### Illinois Associated Press Awards

- An investigation into how the two-year budget impasse affected children on Medicaid in Illinois was awarded second place in Hard News Feature.
- A series on one local woman's struggles with opioid addiction and recovery was awarded second place in Best Series or Documentary.
- *Still Here: Vietnam War Stories from Illinois*—which shared first-hand accounts from local individuals who served, opposed, or were displaced by the war—was awarded first place in Best Series or Documentary.

Journalists in the WILL newsroom continue to raise the bar on community-focused journalism that offers depth and context, often along with resources such as public outreach and lesson plans. The following awards honor the talent, commitment, and passion of our news team.

### National PRNDI (Public Radio News Directors Incorporated) Awards

- *The 21st's* segment "The stalemate has ended: Illinois reacts to end of budget crisis" was awarded second place in both News/Public Affairs Program and Call-in Program.
- *Still Here: Vietnam War Stories from Illinois* was awarded second place in Long Documentary.

### Edward R. Murrow Award

- *Still Here: Vietnam War Stories from Illinois* was also honored with one of the most prestigious and celebrated awards for broadcast and digital journalism.



## NEWMAN'S OWN

Thanks to a \$35,000 gift from the Newman's Own Foundation and our generous major donors contributing an additional \$35,000, we were able to offer a \$70,000 dollar-for-dollar match during the second annual **WILL Marathon**. Over the marathon's 26.2 hours, we raised more than \$140,000, with the last hour being the most successful fundraising hour we've had in years.



## ILLINOIS COUNTRY

Premiering on WILL-TV in the fall, *Illinois Country* will trace country music's roots in Illinois from the early part of the 20th century to the present, featuring old-time hoedowns, The National Barn Dance, Farm Aid, Illinois-bred Grammy winners, and much more. Join us as we follow the story of Illinois' singular role in the history of country music in the United States during this new one-hour documentary.



The start of 2019 brought **Reel Midwest**—our new independent film series showcasing the best in feature, documentary, and short films from or about Illinois and the Midwest.



Also in 2019, we're upgrading our television studio to allow for full high-definition productions; producing more award-winning news coverage and public affairs programming; providing unparalleled education and community outreach; and celebrating the 45th anniversary of the Friends of WILL with a variety of events.



I have to say, I love when it is time to present the annual report. It always turns out to be this amazing fusion of entertainment, news, community journalism, and educational outreach that perfectly encapsulated who we are here at Illinois Public Media. It also gives myself and our hard-working staff a quiet moment to reflect back on all we have created as we continue to meet the demands of the 24/7 news and entertainment cycles.

2019 is already shaping up to be another great year. New legislators and elected officials in local, state, and federal governments already making an impact. Area high school students are preparing to join our staff for a day of hands-on civics instruction. Trips both near and far are on the horizon. Our newsroom continues to present breaking news while also engaging in in-depth journalism that is featured across the country, while our digital teams make sure you have information and entertainment at your fingertips.

As we continue to look ahead, we know the demand for public media will only increase. And with the 2020 election now in full-swing, the need for factual, accurate journalism becomes even more glaring. But I know that Illinois Public Media can handle it, because we have you: The wonderful Friends of WILL who know there is power in public media. You, who for the past 45 years have shown us we will always have your support. You, who ensure that WILL continues to make its place in the world.

*Thank you.*