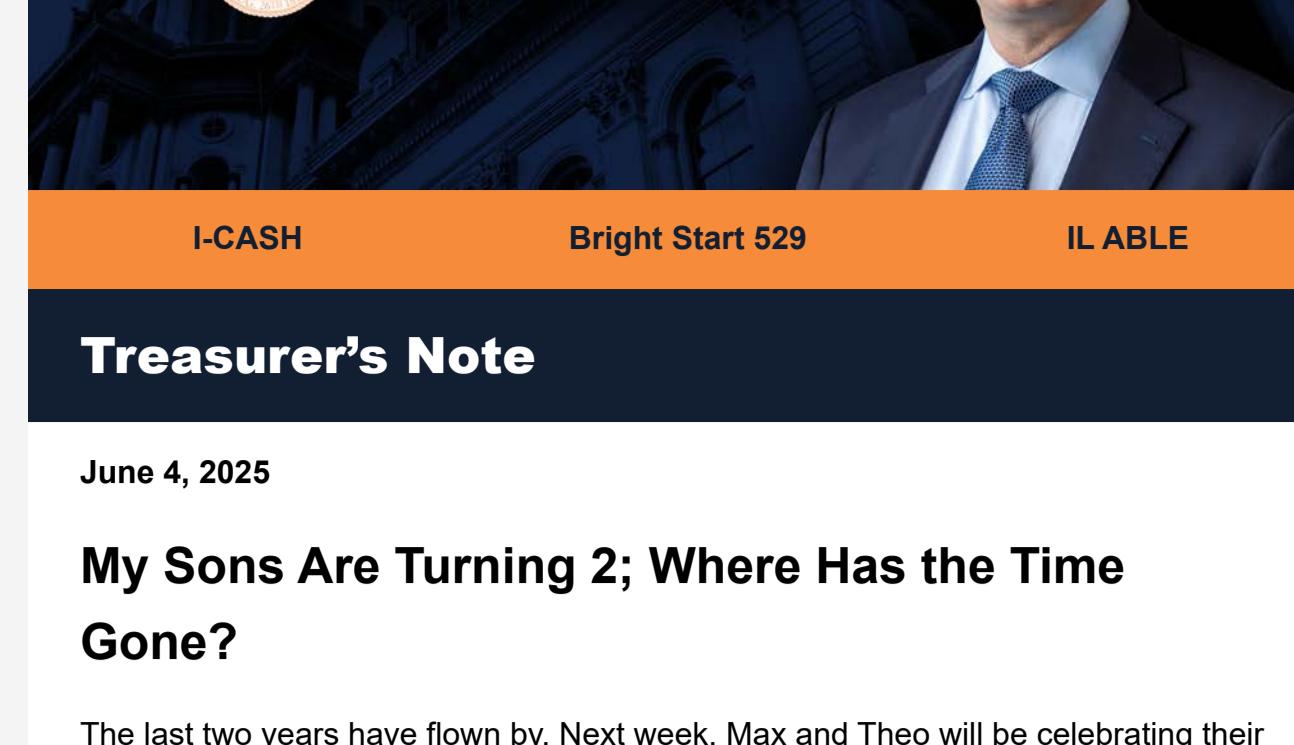


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Michael W. Frerichs
ILLINOIS STATE TREASURER

I-CASH Bright Start 529 IL ABLE

Treasurer's Note

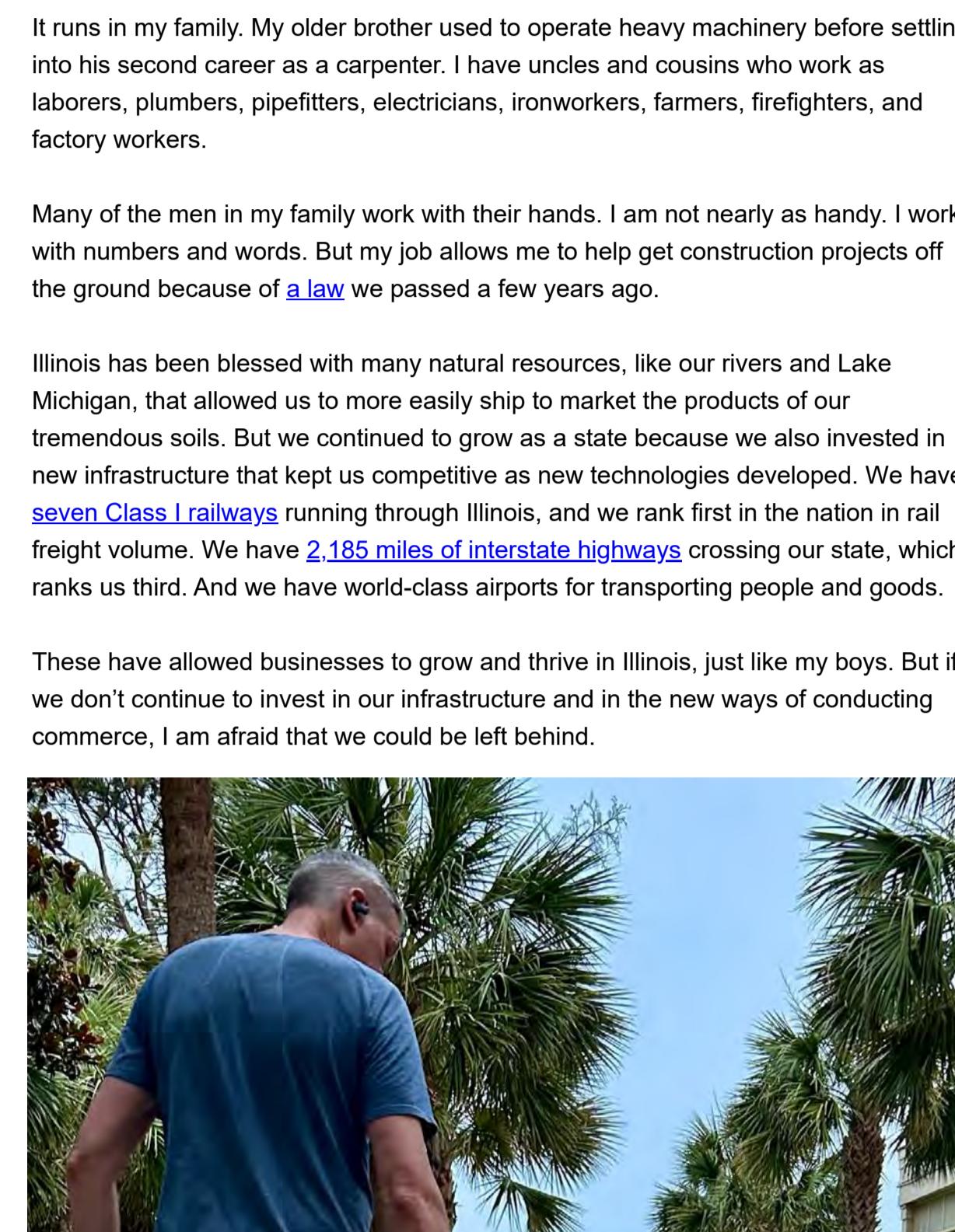
June 4, 2025

My Sons Are Turning 2; Where Has the Time Gone?

The last two years have flown by. Next week, Max and Theo will be celebrating their second birthday. They have been growing and thriving, and it is a joy to watch them develop, explore, and learn new things.

I recently learned that children's birthday parties need a "theme." I don't remember having themed birthday parties as a kid, but times change. It didn't take long for us to decide on a train theme: Choo choo, we're two! (Two boys, two years old.)

They love playing with toy trains and they love watching real trains pass by on two different tracks close to our house. But really, I think they just like big, noisy vehicles. They are boys, after all. They also love garbage trucks, buses, bulldozers, and diggers.



They boys were excited to put on their birthday shirts, and they are ready to party.

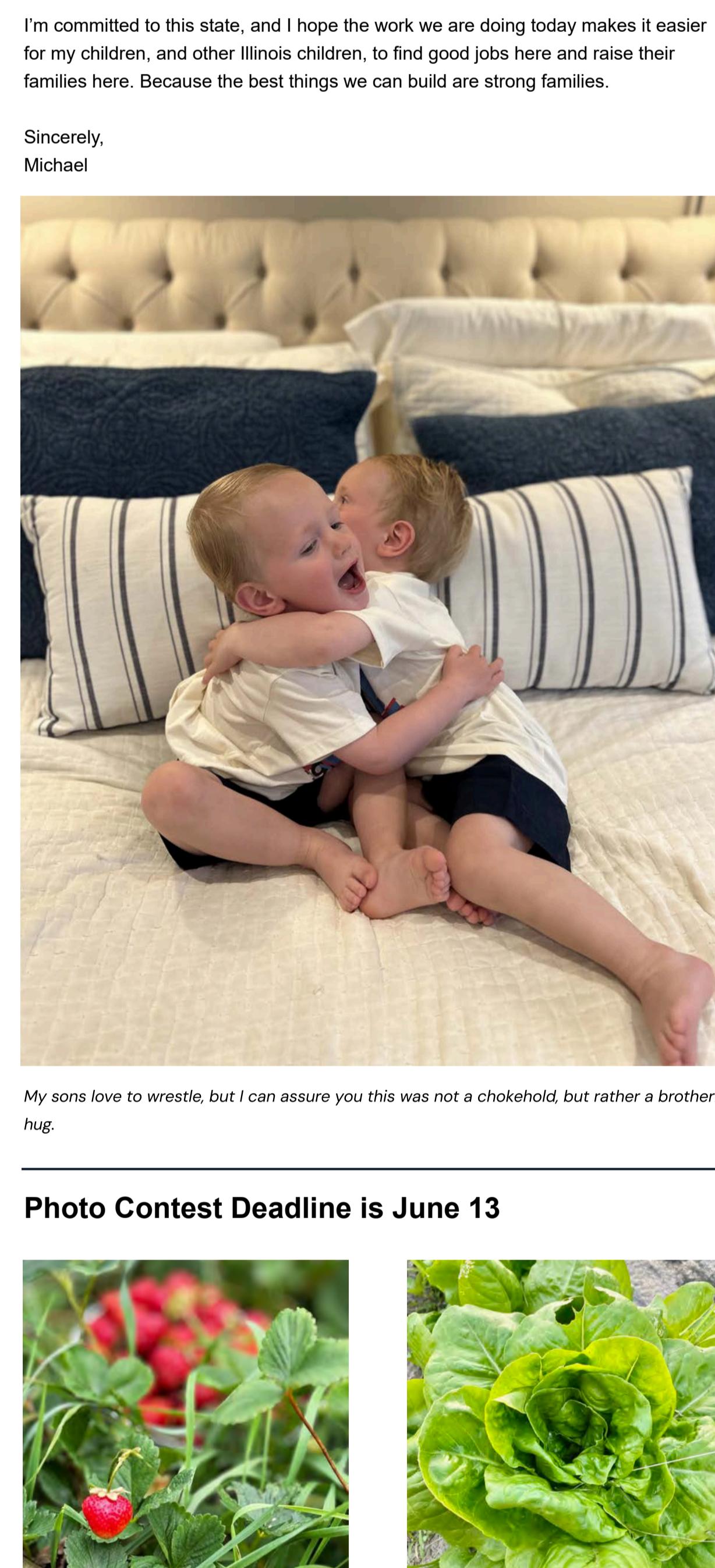
My father was a [truck driver](#), and we can't pass a semi-truck without them calling out "Opa!" (Opa and Oma are the German words for Grandpa and Grandma. They are easier to say, and they help us differentiate between my parents and Erica's.)

It runs in my family. My older brother used to operate heavy machinery before settling into his second career as a carpenter. I have uncles and cousins who work as laborers, plumbers, pipefitters, electricians, ironworkers, farmers, firefighters, and factory workers.

Many of the men in my family work with their hands. I am not nearly as handy. I work with numbers and words. But my job allows me to help get construction projects off the ground because of [a law](#) we passed a few years ago.

Illinois has been blessed with many natural resources, like our rivers and Lake Michigan, that allowed us to more easily ship to market the products of our tremendous soils. But we continued to grow as a state because we also invested in new infrastructure that kept us competitive as new technologies developed. We have [seven Class I railroads](#) running through Illinois, and we rank first in the nation in rail freight volume. We have [2,185 miles of interstate highways](#) crossing our state, which ranks us third. And we have world-class airports for transporting people and goods.

These have allowed businesses to grow and thrive in Illinois, just like my boys. But if we don't continue to invest in our infrastructure and in the new ways of conducting commerce, I am afraid that we could be left behind.



I love walking with my boys by my side. I don't want to leave them, or any Illinois children, behind.

[That's why we created the FIRST Fund](#), which allows me to invest up to \$1.5 billion in Illinois infrastructure — such as roads and bridges, but also things like communications, housing, and energy. When we make these investments, we will make money for the state, we will put people to work at the construction sites, and we will help our businesses be more competitive.

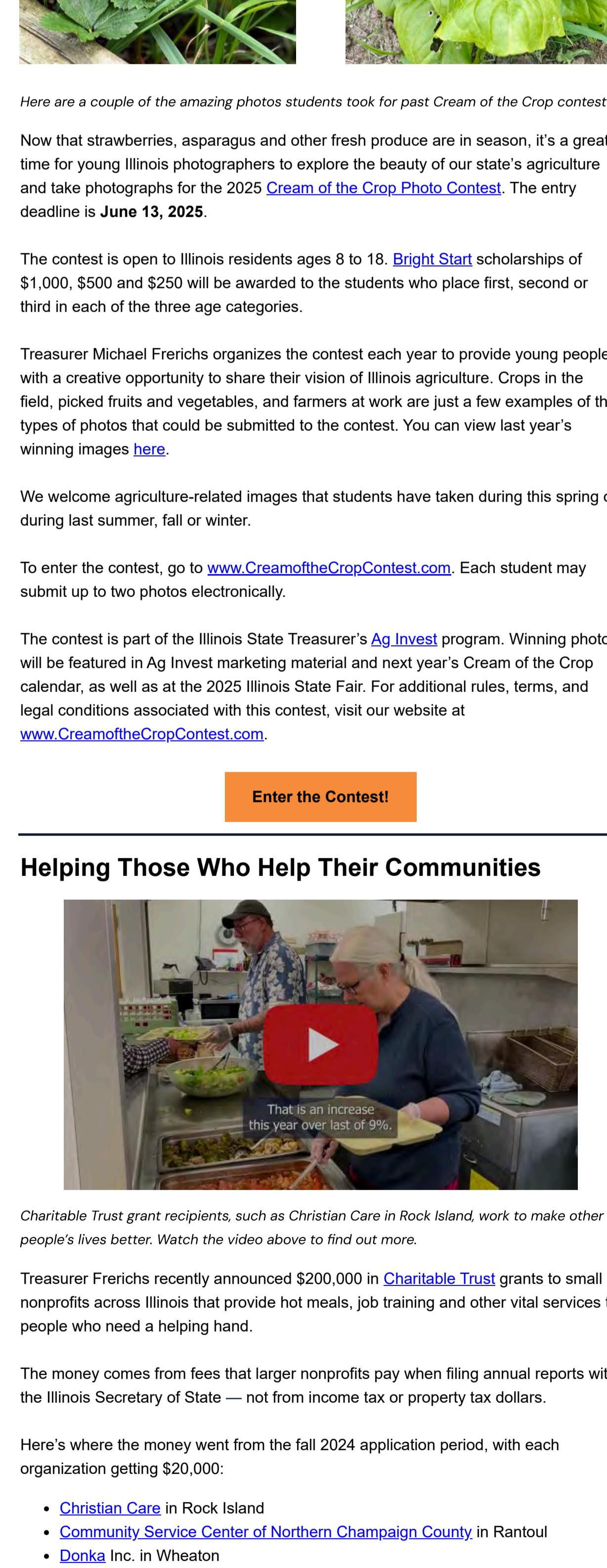
Though we only recently started, we are already [seeing results](#) in a project that is providing efficient, cost-effective, environmentally friendly cooling in downtown Chicago buildings. In addition, we have invested in the IIT campus utility system, which is reducing costs and carbon emissions while supporting Illinois Tech's energy research initiatives.

We also have invested in a cell tower company that is improving coverage throughout Downstate Illinois. Additionally, FIRST Fund is investing in a Will County industrial park along Interstate 55 that is projected to create 7,000 jobs when completed.

As the boys continue to grow, I hope they see lots of construction sites around the state. They may grow out of their fascination with large, loud vehicles, but if they don't and want to pursue careers in the construction trades, I hope that our investments keep Illinois building for years to come.

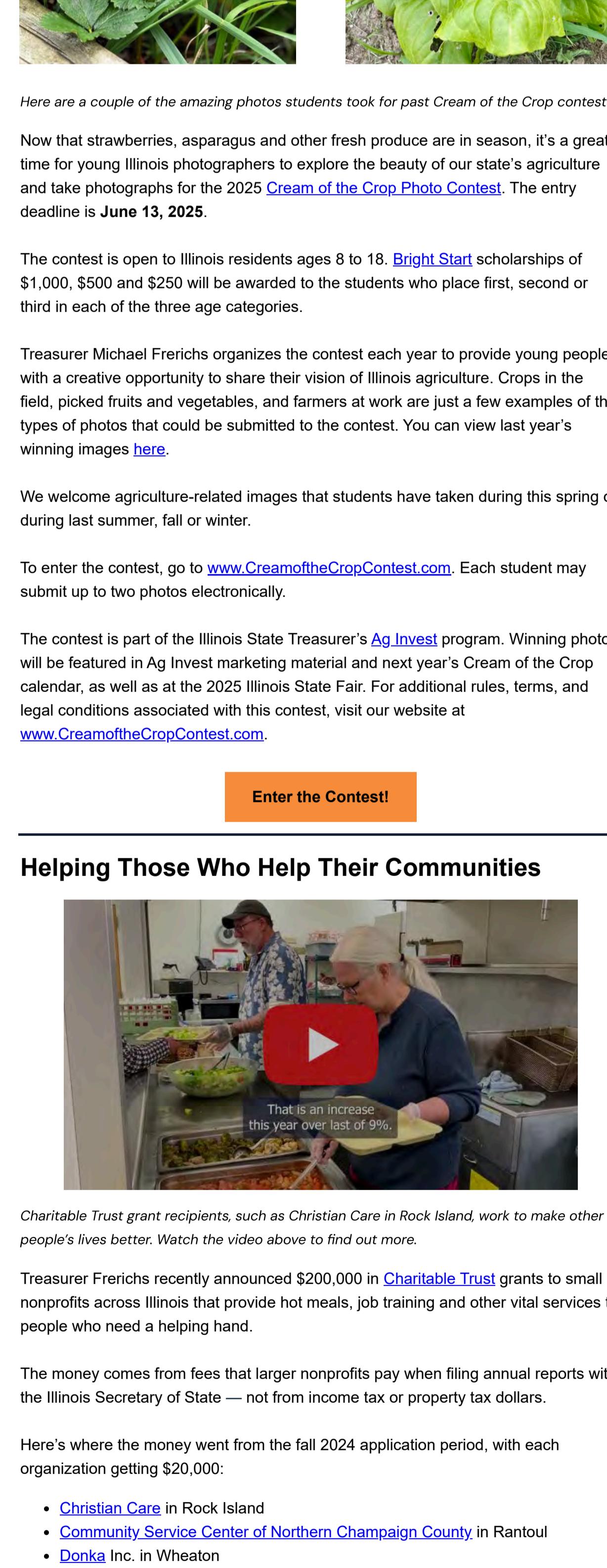
I'm committed to this state, and I hope the work we are doing today makes it easier for my children, and other Illinois children, to find good jobs here and raise their families here. Because the best things we can build are strong families.

Sincerely,
Michael



My sons love to wrestle, but I can assure you this was not a chokehold, but rather a brotherly hug.

Photo Contest Deadline is June 13



Here are a couple of the amazing photos students took for past [Cream of the Crop](#) contests.

Now that strawberries, asparagus and other fresh produce are in season, it's a great time for young Illinois photographers to explore the beauty of our state's agriculture and take photographs for the 2025 [Cream of the Crop Photo Contest](#). The entry deadline is **June 13, 2025**.

The contest is open to Illinois residents ages 8 to 18. [Bright Start](#) scholarships of \$1,000, \$500 and \$250 will be awarded to the students who place first, second or third in each of the three age categories.

Treasurer Michael Frerichs organizes the contest each year to provide young people with a creative opportunity to share their vision of Illinois agriculture. Crops in the field, picked fruits and vegetables, and farmers at work are just a few examples of the types of photos that could be submitted to the contest. You can view last year's winning images [here](#).

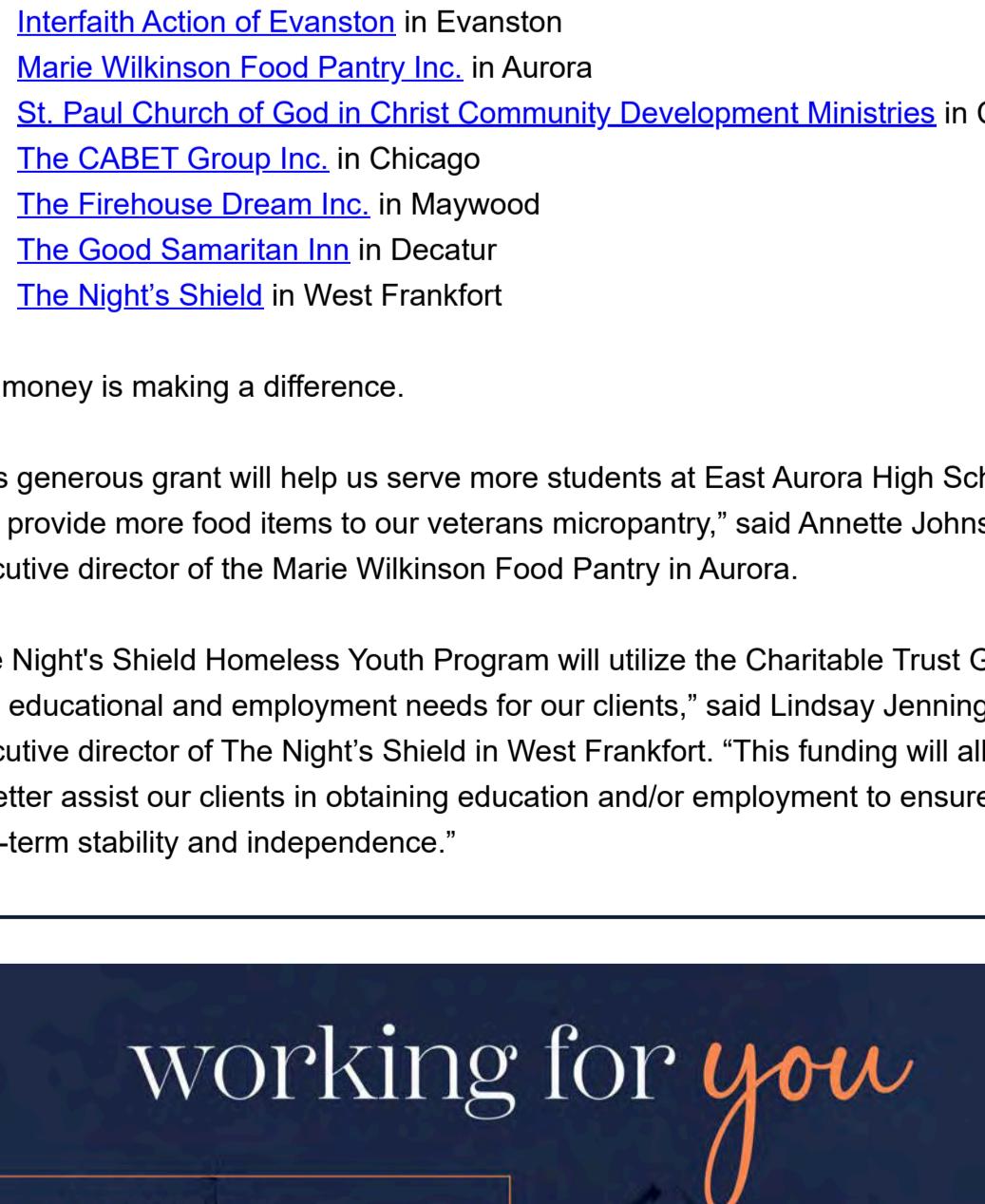
We welcome agriculture-related images that students have taken during this spring or during last summer, fall or winter.

To enter the contest, go to [www.CreamoftheCropContest.com](#). Each student may submit up to two photos electronically.

The contest is part of the Illinois State Treasurer's [Ag Invest](#) program. Winning photos will be featured in Ag Invest marketing material and next year's [Cream of the Crop](#) calendar, as well as at the 2025 Illinois State Fair. For additional rules, terms, and legal conditions associated with this contest, visit our website at [www.CreamoftheCropContest.com](#).

[Enter the Contest!](#)

Helping Those Who Help Their Communities



Many charitable trust grant recipients, such as [Christian Care in Rock Island](#), work to make other people's lives better. Watch the video above to find out more.

Nonprofits Across Illinois recently announced hot meals, job training and other vital services to people who need a helping hand.

The money comes from fees that larger nonprofits pay when filing annual reports with the Illinois Secretary of State — not from income tax or property tax dollars.

Horgan's where getting \$20,000 from the fall 2024 application period, with each

[Christian Care in Rock Island](#) in Northern Champaign County in Rantoul

[Donika Inc. in Wheaton](#)

[Interfaith Action of Evanston](#) in Evanston

[St. Paul Church Group of God in Chicago](#) Community Development Ministries in Chicago

[The Friends Dream Inn](#) in Maywood

[The Night's Shelter](#) in Frankfort

"This generous grant will help us serve more students at East Aurora High School and provide more food to our veterans pantry in Aurora," said Annette Johnson, executive director of the Marie Wilkinson Food Pantry in Aurora.

"The Night's Shelter Homeless Youth Program will utilize the charitable trust grant to fund educational and employment needs for our clients," said Lindsay Jennings, executive director of The Night's Shelter in West Frankfort. "This funding will ensure their long-term stability and independence."



The money is making a difference.

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