



OFFICE OF ILLINOIS STATE TREASURER

MICHAEL W. FRERICHS

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:

September 13, 2022

CONTACT:

Eric Krol 312.814.1252

Adriana Colindres 217.558.1920

Illinois State Treasurer's Office IT Team Among the Best in the World in Recent Competition

Cybersecurity Efforts Deny 7.5 Million Attacks in a Typical Hour

SPRINGFIELD – The tech team at Illinois State Treasurer Michael Frerichs' office is one of the world's best, a recent cybersecurity competition showed.

A three-person Information Technology team from the state treasurer's office reached the semi-final round in the International Cyber League 2022 competition. The team finished 15th out of 500 that entered. Just 200 teams escaped the qualifying round, and the Illinois treasurer contingent was the only government team to do so. The treasurer team performed better than counterparts from some Fortune 100 companies and a branch of the U.S. Armed Forces.

"We take cybersecurity very seriously, as the results of this competition illustrate," Illinois State Treasurer Michael Frerichs said. "We are very proud of our Information Technology group for its problem-solving skills and top-notch teamwork."

The treasurer's team was led by Joe Daniels, the office's chief information officer and a sergeant in the Illinois National Guard who has deployed for cybersecurity missions.

Members of the team each had to qualify and were given individual challenges simulating an online attack on a computer network. Working from the office's security operations center in the Marine Bank building in downtown Springfield, each member had three hours to fend off the would-be computer network intruders.

One of the simulated scenarios involved a data leak from a computer network. The challenge was to locate the leak, identify the bad actor and quickly fix the problem. Those who finished sooner rather than later scored more points.

-MORE-

Daniels, who is more experienced, got a tougher task --- a “golden ticket” scenario. An infiltrator snuck inside a network and granted themselves top-level administrative powers. Critical-thinking and puzzle-solving skills come into play, Daniels said. Solving the training exercise during a simulated crisis helps the technology specialists do a better job of safeguarding information.

“Part of my role is to evaluate how our employees operate during a crisis,” Daniels said. “We have state-of-the-art tools in the treasurer’s office, but what if they didn’t work? That’s what this exercise was designed to test.”

The number of threats to computer networks is mind-boggling. During a recent afternoon, the treasurer’s cybersecurity defenses neutralized 7.5 million attempts to enter the network in one hour, Daniels said.

Daniels, who has years of private- and public-sector cybersecurity experience, deployed to Afghanistan in 2014-15 and several other times for cybersecurity missions. He serves out of the Guard’s Defensive Cyber Operations Element in Joint Force Headquarters, Springfield. He also has served on a state mission to provide cybersecurity support for the Illinois State Board of Elections.

“It has been a great role. What I love about the state treasurer’s office is that Treasurer Michael Frerichs puts security first,” Daniels said. “When I have told him I need to deploy, he says ‘Do what you need to do to make us safe.’”

The winning team from a Middle Eastern bank got a perfect score in the competition put on by Israeli-based Cyberbit, which provides cybersecurity training. Daniels and his team already are looking forward to next year after finishing 19th the first time and 15th this year.

“We are hoping for a top-5 finish,” Daniels said.

About the Illinois Treasurer

As Illinois State Treasurer, Michael Frerichs (FRAIR'-iks) is the state’s Chief Investment and Banking Officer and actively manages approximately \$52 billion. The portfolio includes \$27 billion in state funds, \$16 billion in retirement and college savings plans and \$9 billion on behalf of local and state governments. Frerichs’ office protects consumers by safeguarding more than \$3.5 billion in unclaimed property, encouraging savings plans for college or trade school, increasing financial education among all ages, assisting people with disabilities save without losing government benefits, and removing barriers to a secure retirement. The Treasurer’s Office predates Illinois incorporation in 1818. Voters in 1848 chose to make it an elected office.

-END-