

**FLAGFEST WEEKEND**  
**JUNE 12TH & 13TH**  
**MIDWEST ENDURO CHAMPIONSHIP 500**  
**FLAGFEST RODEO**  
**TICKETS ON SALE!**

FRIDAY, MAY 15, 2026

**SPENCER**  
**REPORTER**  
 SERVING CLAY COUNTY

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**5 THINGS TO KNOW**



**1. YMCA AND PEOPLE FOR PETS WHISKER WALK MAY 16**

Spencer Family YMCA and People for Pets will hold the 16th annual Whisker Walk Saturday, May 16, starting at 10 a.m. at East Leach Park. It's a 1K loop around East Leach Park with your furry friends to support People for Pets.

**2. SPENCER YPS CORNHOLE EVENT MAY 29**

Spencer Young Professionals are holding a corn hole tournament to raise money for the Hunting with Heroes Salute to Veterans race night. The tournament is Friday, May 29, at 5:30 p.m., at the Varied Industries Building at the Clay County Fairgrounds. There is a limit of 32 teams. The Hunting with Heroes race night is July 22 at the fairgrounds speedway.

**3. FLAGFEST 5K RUN-WALK REGISTRATION OPEN**

Registration is open for the Flagfest 5K Fun Run / Walk on Saturday, June 13. Sign-in or registration begins at 6:30 a.m. at the Spencer Hospital. The race begins at 7 a.m. The fee is \$30 before June 1 and \$40 after. Participants age 12 and under running with a guardian will be assessed an additional \$10 for each participant. The first 35 people to register will receive a Flagfest 5K shirt courtesy of Tailored Graphics. You can register at the Spencer Chamber website.

**4. RED CROSS BLOOD DRIVE IN SPENCER MAY 20**

The American Red Cross will conduct a blood drive in Spencer Wednesday, May 20, 9 a.m. to 3 p.m., at Northwest Bank's corporate office, 1607 W. 18th St. Go to redcross-blood.org and enter 51301 for information and registration. Other Red Cross blood drives in the coming months in Spencer are Thursday, June 11, 10 a.m. to 3 p.m., at Foundation Church, 1410 W. 18th St.; and Thursday, June 25, noon to 6 p.m., at Hope Reformed Church, 919 Grand Ave.

**5. NEW DEMENTIA SUPPORT GROUP HERE MAY 20**

Occasions announced it will begin a new Dementia Support Group monthly gathering on the third Wednesday of the month at 2:30 p.m. It will be at Occasions, 104 E. Fourth St., Spencer. The first meeting is Wednesday, May 20, and it will be facilitated by Cari Jack from St. Croix Hospice. For answers to questions about the group, contact Cari at 712-363-9897.

**APPRENTICESHIP HELPS FILL SURGICAL TECHNOLOGIST NEED AT SPENCER HOSPITAL**



**Britnei Wolken prepares for her work as a surgical technologist in the operating room at Spencer Hospital. (Photos submitted)**

**NICK LOWREY**  
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When Britnei Wolken looked into becoming a surgical technologist, the biggest obstacle wasn't the coursework — it was figuring out how to stop working long enough to complete it.

Wolken was already working in healthcare at the Cherokee Regional Medical Center. In fact, she'd worked as both a certified nurse assistant and a phlebotomist over the years, but had always wanted to work in operating rooms.

Then, around two years ago, Wolken met Erin Howard, executive director of Staff 605, who helps set up apprenticeship programs. Howard worked with Chanda Doring, Spencer Hospital's operating room director, to design a program that would allow Wolken to complete her training faster and move directly into a full-time role as a certified surgical technologist. The only catch was that Wolken and her husband would need to move to Spencer.

"It made more sense for us to move to a different town," Wolken said. "And so (my husband) took a chance, just like Spencer Hospital did, and we picked up and

**SURGICAL TECH**  
*continued on 3A*



**Batschelet: County EMS effort needs direction**

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Clay County Supervisor Allen Batschelet said he's frustrated that he and his fellow supervisors haven't given clear direction to the county EMS Advisory Council despite voters approving a special EMS tax levy last year.

Batschelet, speaking during the Clay County Board of Supervisors' May 12 regular meeting, said the advisory board is "treading water" when it comes to planning for a new county emergency medical services system. While the EMS council has been meeting for months and has developed useful information, key questions, such as whether the county should hire a contractor or build its own ambulance service, remain unanswered, he said. Meanwhile, tax receipts are expected to start arriving in September.

"Let's just be clear about this. It's our job to set those goals, determine what the system is going to do, how much it's going to cost, who's going to do it, and what governance and oversight look like," Batschelet said. "It's not the advisory council. I gotta admit, I'm frustrated about this."

County EMS Director Bethany TerHorst said the advisory council has nevertheless continued meeting monthly to evaluate coverage gaps and service options. She said advisory council members have also met with officials at Spencer Hospital to determine what it would take to place a fully staffed

**EMS DIRECTION**  
*continued on 3A*

**Spencer to graduate 160 seniors May 17**

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The community looks to celebrate the accomplishments of 160 graduates during the Spencer High School graduation ceremony at 2:30 p.m. on Sunday, May 17, at the Spencer High School Field House.

Four students, Abbey Crew, Jivany Lovan, Robert Gorlock and Rachel Bare — the Spencer Reporter's news intern in 2024 — are set to speak during the ceremony.

In addition to speakers, many students are to receive recognition for their accomplishments, including academic honors. Students graduating with honors have a GPA of 3.0-3.49, with excellence a GPA of 3.5-3.74, and, finally, with distinction, a GPA of 3.75 or above.

Additional awards include a certificate of perfect attendance and a celebration of students who earned the Seal of Bilingualism. The seal is presented to students who have shown proficiency in English and at least one other language.

The Spencer High School Class of 2026 has chosen class colors of brilliant purple and butter yellow, class flower of the tiger lily, and a class song of "Good Riddance (Time of Your Life)" by Green Day.

The 2027 class motto is "Life moves pretty fast. If you don't stop and look around once in a while, you could miss it."

Congratulations to the Spencer High School Class of 2026!

**Flood effects still felt throughout Spencer, LTRG director says**

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Some area homes still lack HVAC systems nearly two years after the 2024 flood, despite their owners' desire to restore them to a livable condition, according to Clay County Long-Term Recovery Group Director Megan Hanges.

The news was part of an update on flood recovery efforts that Hanges gave the county Board of Supervisors during its regular meeting on May 12. She said the LTRG has, so far, closed 350 flood assistance cases since its creation following the 2024 flood. However, the group still has around 90 open cases and continues to accept new cases.

"I think in the last three weeks we've probably had about 10 intakes," Hanges said. "People are just getting to the point

**FLOOD EFFECTS**  
*continued on 3A*

