



GROUNDWORK



In 2022, we spent time celebrating the origins of WILL while looking forward to what we want our legacy to be in the next century. In 2023, we rolled up our sleeves and got to work laying the foundations for what we envision as the future of public media in central Illinois.



One of this past year's priorities has been broadening our audience: identifying who we may not have served extensively in the past and how we can reach them now. We spent a great deal of time out in the community having conversations and surveying residents to find out what kinds of programming appeals to them.

This groundwork led to the exciting launch of Illinois Soul in 2024, as well as an expansion in the variety of topics at our 2023 News, Brews & Beatz events. We launched the 24/7 Classical Stream online to help make classical music accessible to new listeners who are more tuned in to the digital space. WILL-TV programming became accessible to millions of new viewers via Hulu + Live TV, one of the nation's largest streaming services, and we initiated a soft launch of NPR+ for new Friends of WILL as early adopters of this new podcast streaming service. We have also been working on reaching a younger audience through new video formats that highlight our programming in different social media spaces.

We hope you'll enjoy learning more about how we continued to work in 2023 to make our programming, events, and news an inclusive space for all to enjoy.

Maurice "Moss" Bresnahan
Executive Director



Explore issues of importance to the communities we serve.



Take pride in high production values and editorial quality, embracing new ways to meet audiences.



Provide programming based on quality content, respecting the intelligence of our audience.



Provide a public forum for the diversity of voices and opinions essential to a healthy democracy.



OUR MISSION

Enriching lives through the power of public media.



OUR VISION

Dynamic, thriving communities informed and inspired by public media.

Stimulate minds and inspire lifelong learning.

Highlight injustice, hold power accountable, and seek solutions to societal problems through accurate and fair reporting.

Present a continuous stage for performing arts programs, assuring the arts a place in our daily lives.

Be a trusted media organization, accountable and responsive to our constituents.



Ag Programming

Thanks to the efforts of host Todd Gleason, WILL Ag held **29** remote broadcasts, emceed **12** conferences around the state, and hosted **3** Illinois Farm Economic Summits and **16** webinars for the farmdoc Team.

The **217 Today** offers weekday headline roundups in podcast form.

Book Mentor Program

With the help of **24** community volunteers, this program served **350** children across **12** Head Start classrooms and **8** off-site locations, giving **2,450** books to children and families.

Clef Notes

Curated **12** newsletters, wrote **36** blog posts — featuring **16** interviews with local and national musicians, **5** reviews, and **2** guest blogs — and corresponded with **342** subscribers by the end of 2023.

The 21st Show carried on 7 Illinois NPR stations

Broadcast partners helped bring the voices of **787** guests to listeners across Illinois, along with countless everyday people through calls, texts, emails, voicemails, and person-on-the-street interviews.

Traveled to **13** towns for video production shoots.

The **Middle** aired on more than **400** NPR stations, broadcasting in **42** states and **6** of the top **10** markets.

State of Change, our annual environmental special, aired on **6** PBS stations.

Illinois Radio Reader

Our free service for the reading impaired depends on **52** volunteer readers — hailing from Illinois, California, Alabama, and Australia — to produce **80+** hours of weekly programming, including an average of **2** audio books a month. **3** volunteers have been reading with IRR for more than **25** years.

50 newscasts per week

Atomic Age Cocktail Party was heard on **half a dozen** stations across the U.S., including in Illinois, Alaska, Washington State, California, and Virginia.

Mid American Gardener aired on **7** PBS stations, answering **107** viewer questions across the show's **41** episodes.

Kimberly Schofield became our new permanent host of *Morning Edition*, and **Jim Meadows** took over as host of *All Things Considered*.



EXPERIENTIAL PLATFORMS

STREAMING from will.illinois.edu

RADIO

90.9 FM — Classical & more
101.1 FM — Classical
580 AM — News & talk

TV

12.1 WILL-HD
12.2 WILL Kids 24/7
12.3 WILL Create/WILL World

PODCASTS

217 Today
The 21st Show
Closing Market Report
Commodity Week

SOCIAL MEDIA

Facebook
Instagram
TikTok
Threads

NEWSLETTERS

Clef Notes
Aircheck
News Around Illinois
Passport Picks

APPS

PBS App
NPR App
WILL App

PATTERNS

ILLINOIS RADIO READER



IPM NEWS

In 2023, Illinois Newsroom rebranded as IPM News

ipmnewsroom.org recorded more than **1.1 million** clicks

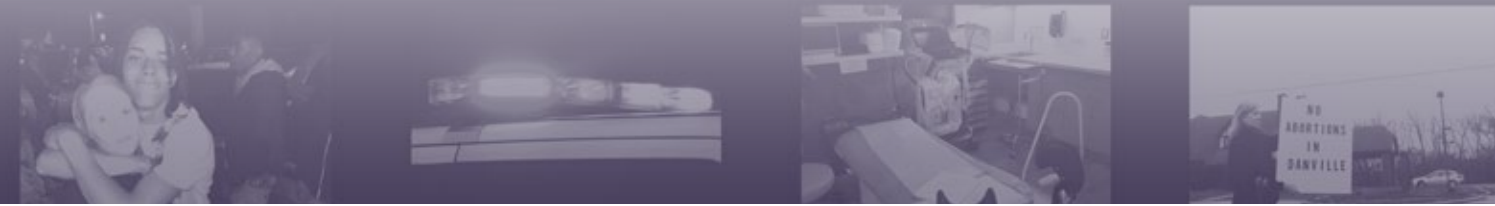
Over **14,000** email subscribers received News Around Illinois newsletter

State's Attorney Rantoul officer's deadly force against 18-year-old deemed justified

New U of I database gives more complete picture of police shootings in Illinois

Planned Parenthood is expanding abortion services in Champaign & statewide to meet a surge of out-of-state patients

Danville may pass an ordinance restricting abortion, but the ACLU of Illinois is prepared to fight back



The 21st Show expanded to 5 days a week

The new Friday edition allows for more time to cover national issues out of the US Capitol, with a special focus on how those issues connect to central Illinois. To help bring those stories home, IPM News contracted with Washington, D.C.-based reporter Linda Kenyon to cover stories that concern downstate members of Congress direct from the Capitol.

The 21st Show hit the road, producing live remote broadcasts across the state. The show traveled to the Illinois State Capitol for the annual governor's budget address, the Illinois State Fair, and the Quad Cities to highlight local Dia de los Muertos celebrations.

Illinois Public Media expanded local coverage to include a new arts and entertainment feature: **WILL Call**. Hosts Kimberly Schofield and Owen Henderson joined forces to create a space to discuss local arts, performance, culture, and entertainment in central Illinois, with regular segments during *Morning Edition* and *All Things Considered*, plus regular weekly roundups of area events, concerts, festivals, and more.



STUDENT OPPORTUNITIES

We are proud to offer a range of opportunities to students from the University of Illinois and the wider community. Students play a vital role at IPM, from reporting the news to creating original content for social media and broadcast to helping traffic flow smoothly on WILL.



Illinois Student Newsroom at Illinois Public Media published and/or broadcast **95** stories, giving student journalists more than **1,800** hours of real-world experience.



John Frayne Classical Music Fellow Julia Escobar guest hosted new episodes of *Prairie Performances*.



Student interns provided marketing support by creating original video content and graphics to help highlight Illinois Public Media across social media platforms.



Student interns provided translation services and project support to the Book Mentor Program.

“When I first came to IPM I was nervous to share ideas or be a contributing member of a team. I did not believe that an intern could make that big of an impact or be heard. Working with IPM has shown me that my voice matters and more importantly that I matter within this setting.”

— Elon Jones

Communications student and Pre-Law at UIUC and recipient of the Donald P. Mullally Internship



“Illinois Public Media served as an essential foundation to my career as a journalist and has prepared me to enter a competitive industry. As I prepare to graduate, I feel immense gratitude for the opportunities and professional experience IPM and the Student Newsroom has provided me and countless other talented student journalists at the University of Illinois.”

— Farrah Anderson

UIUC Journalism student and recipient of Robert O. Endres Endowed Internship



University Laboratory High School (Uni High) students produced *800 Miles from Ground Zero: 9/11's Impact on Central Illinois*, a four-part podcast delving into how 9/11 impacted people who live in the Champaign-Urbana area.





OUT IN THE COMMUNITY

Illinois Public Media was excited to once again participate in **CU Days** at Douglass Park, and this time, we brought along Costume Character Elmo. Our favorite *Sesame Street* monster danced, played, and posed for photos with kids and families, and our Education Department gave out 250 Pre-K learning bags to families.

For **MASTERPIECE** fans, we hosted a special sneak preview of the fan-favorite *All Creatures Great and Small* at the Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library and Museum in Springfield.

In May, **PBS NewsHour** hosted a live special from the University of Illinois Quad. "Tipping Point: Agriculture on the Brink" was hosted by Emmy-award-winning science journalist Miles O'Brien and featured conversations with leading agricultural researchers from UIUC, sharing their insights into critical issues for central Illinois: agriculture and the impact of climate change. Three of those interviews were pre-recorded in the **Collins Studio** and many of those connections were forged by WILL Ag host Todd Gleason.

Our **Reel Midwest** screenings were presented as a part of the Arthouse Experience series at the Virginia Theatre and placed a particular focus on issues that impact our communities — such as education, supporting LGBTQIA+, and mental health among Midwestern farmers. Each event featured a panel of local experts discussing the issues following the film.



Our Education Department's various **WILL Kids summer reading programs** headed to Hoopston, Georgetown, and Oakwood with focus on music and loving ourselves and the world around us.



Illinois Public Media was proud to participate in the **Champaign-Urbana PrideFest** activities in downtown Urbana. We had a tent at the fair and shared the various public media programs that speak to the LGBTQIA+ experience. Several IPM staff members even walked in the parade.

We also welcomed the community into Campbell Hall with events like **Friendsgiving** and **WILL 101**.



Our third annual Friendsgiving open house was a huge success, with more than 125 donors, viewers, and listeners coming through Campbell Hall to meet our staff, take a tour, and pick up swag along the way! It was our most successful Friendsgiving to date.

WILL 101 is an online series where we answer questions from our listeners and viewers about WILL radio and television operations. In August, we held our first in-person event at Campbell Hall where visitors could learn more about the distinction between the PBS App and WILL Passport, plus how to set up each streaming option on their own device.



ILLINOIS PUBLIC MEDIA'S PLEDGE

Amplify

the stories and experiences of our local communities accurately and fairly.

Embrace

diverse points of view as our civic responsibility.

Overcome

longstanding inequities and divisive biases in our organization, industry, and society.

In advance of the latest documentary from Ken Burns, we hosted a special VIP preview event and live taping of *The 21st Show* with *American Buffalo* consultant and UIUC History Professor Roslyn LaPier. LaPier not only provided commentary in the film; she also helped guide the filmmakers in shaping how the story would be told in a way that incorporates and honors Native American perspectives.



In the fall, *The 21st Show* traveled to the Quad Cities for a remote broadcast from the area's Dia de los Muertos celebrations.



The 2023 edition of our award-winning annual environmental reporting special, *State of Change*, focused on how climate change impacts communities of color across Illinois.

We wrapped up the year with a special edition of the **Arthouse Experience** film series, presented by Illinois Soul, at the Virginia Theatre. This free event featured a screening of the second hour of Henry Louis Gates Jr's *The Black Church: This Is Our Story, This Is Our Song* followed by a panel discussion with local Black ministers and religious scholars and a live gospel performance.



Illinois Public Media staff worked hard to gather community input that would lay the groundwork for our new broadcast service, Illinois Soul, through in-person conversation at nearly **30** community events as well as **350+** surveys distributed and completed.



We added a new lesson to our **Social Justice Learning** space that focuses on voting in America, with a particular emphasis on the enfranchisement of certain groups and disenfranchisement of others.



Among these community events was the Champaign Park District's Juneteenth celebration in Douglass Park, where we had a booth with book giveaways for children and the Soul Food Family Festival, where we co-hosted the Children's Village with educational activities, games, and free book giveaways.



Illinois Public Media was chosen for the Public Media Digital Transformation Program, a CPB-funded virtual program developed by the Poynter Institute to educate, assist, and coach public media senior leaders and their staff on the best strategies and tactics to transform their organization's digital operations and culture. Staff explored new ways to make our broadcast and digital space more welcoming and informative to communities of color, ultimately leading to the expansion of News, Brews & Beatz and later the development of Illinois Soul.

Poynter.

PRAIRIE FIRE

One of the year's biggest highlights was the relaunch of *Prairie Fire*, a newly reimagined take on WILL-TV's beloved magazine show from the mid-'90s. Rooted in storytelling, this monthly program brings together cinematic documentaries, profiles, and performances from downstate Illinois.

“We have had a lot of fun taking this show — which was such a high-caliber part of WILL programming for many years — and making it uniquely our own. We're proud of the beautiful cinematography, the variety of stories we are telling, and the freedom we've had to experiment with different kinds of storytelling formats. And I keep hearing all around the community how much people love it!”

— Sarah Edwards
Senior producer-director



Prairie Fire airs the third Thursday of each month at 7:30 pm on WILL-TV and is available for streaming on YouTube and via the PBS App.



May Premiere

Prairie Fire made its return to central Illinois airwaves with stories about Paralympian and Boston Marathon winner Susannah Scaroni, restaurateur Mubanga Chanda of Stango Cuisine, and Normal native and “American Idol” star Leah Marlene.



June

For the second episode, we met two Illinois artists of different stripes (renowned painter and sculptor Preston Jackson in Peoria and recording engineer and music producer Anthony Gravino in Urbana), learned the history of the University of Illinois' famous cherry blossom trees, and heard some not-so-kind words about the prairie from author Charles Dickens (yes, that Charles Dickens).



July

On the July edition we met Tony Becker, a central Illinois man who had to overcome some incredible odds to hold on to his love of gardening. We also heard from former *Prairie Fire* producer and host Alison Davis about some of her favorite segments throughout her tenure on the show. And, finally, Illinois roots musician Chris Vallillo stopped by the studio to play us a few cuts from his album “Forgottonia.”



August

We wrapped up the summer with a trip to the Brown Bag, a unique deli in Monticello that has been a favorite spot for nearly 50 years. Of course, our team had to sample some of the deli's most popular dishes. Finally, in her first installment of this conversation series, Tinisha Spain sat down with a poet and author from central Illinois who has had quite a journey that took her across the world and back again.



September

September included a trip to a Frank Lloyd Wright home in Riverside that used to be a schoolhouse, followed by a tour of an old-school gaming paradise called Arcadia in Mclean. Charles Dickens got a chance to redeem himself after disparaging the beauty of the Illinois Prairie when we joined him for a trip down the Mississippi River, and we wrapped with a performance by Los Texano'z to celebrate Hispanic Heritage Month.



October

Fall was in full swing with a trip to the Great Pumpkin Patch in Arthur to enjoy the colors and cucurbits of the season, and a visit to a spooky hotel in Alton with historian and author Troy Taylor. We also got a personal tour of the newly redecorated Illinois Governor's Mansion from First Lady MK Pritzker, who documented the history of the house — and its changes — in a new book called “A House that Made History.”

December

For the holiday edition, we traveled to Bull Valley to learn about a special program geared toward helping veterans. Then the U of I Black Chorus graced the Collins Studio for a special performance. And we once again heard from author Charles Dickens as he gave us (and his wife) a preview of the new Christmas story he was working on.

News Brews & Beatz

News, Brews & Beatz in 2023 took a deeper dive and widened its scope by focusing on additional topics that heavily resonate with Black communities.



“We are delighted to see the positive impact that News, Brews & Beatz has made in the community over the past three years. Local gun violence numbers are trending down, and safe-space after school programs for teens are growing. We want to continue these needed conversations that engage, and connect community leaders together under one roof, to discuss realistic solutions that help our community thrive.”

— Jill Clements
News, Brews & Beatz, Producer and Assistant Corporate Support Director

Panelists discussed topics ranging from enrollment, tuition, and University of Illinois campus relationships with the Champaign-Urbana community to the unique challenges of raising Black children in 2023 to the health, wealth, and hurdles of Black-owned businesses in central Illinois. In addition to the community conversations, events featured musical and spoken-word poetry performances by local artists.

Two of the special edition tapings took place in the Collins Studio with a live audience of over 65 attendees who enjoyed a pre-reception in the IPM lobby featuring smooth jazz pianists. In addition to streaming over YouTube, as we have done with previous News, Brews & Beatz recordings, these critical conversations were also aired as broadcast specials on WILL-TV.

News, Brews & Beatz has always strived to provide a space for diverse voices to engage in breakthrough conversations regarding pressing community issues and allow for realistic solutions to be identified. The inaugural year of events focused on the gun violence crisis here in Champaign-Urbana but since has expanded into quarterly community conversations on a variety of topics impacting the Black community in central Illinois.

Closing the education gap in Black communities



PANELISTS

Robert J. Jones
University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign Chancellor

Christopher Span
Chief of Staff and Associate Chancellor for Administration and PreK-12 Initiatives

Wanda E. Ward
Executive Associate Chancellor for Public Engagement

Parenting today's Black youth



PANELISTS

Dr. Carolyn Randolph-Kato
Visiting Assoc. Director of Arts Impact Assessment at UIUC

Todd Kato
Assistant Director in the Office of Undergraduate Admissions

Cynthia Smith
Child Care Resource Service

Erik L. Felix
Danville coach, referee, and entrepreneur

Robert A. Wise II
The Douglass Annex

Dr. Dynesha D. Grissom
YMG Psychological Services, PLLC

The challenges & triumphs of Black owned & operated businesses



PANELISTS

Matthew J. Simpson
Illinois Department of Commerce & Economic Opportunity

Tricia D. Teague
The Trep School business incubator in Danville



THE MIDDLE

Illinois Public Media has also taken on a key role in the expansion of Jeremy Hobson's now weekly national call-in show, *The Middle with Jeremy Hobson*. Following a successful four-episode initial run in 2022, *The Middle* returned to the airwaves on a weekly basis in the fall, with Illinois Public Media providing distribution support, delivering the program to hundreds of public radio stations from coast to coast.

As a weekly live call-in program, Hobson brings people from across the country into the national conversation and works to find some middle ground in a time when

divisiveness is the name of the game. The program is now airing on more than 400 NPR stations, broadcasting in 42 states and six of the top 10 markets.

Discussion topics have ranged from abortion to artificial intelligence to inflation to the opioid crisis. Callers are able to join in the conversation with nationally renowned guests and share their personal experiences, helping provide an detailed picture of how all kinds of issues that are talked about in the media play out in real life across the United States.

“Our small but mighty team has booked some incredible panel guests including political leaders, top journalists, experts, and Illinois Public Media’s Jason Croft has been flawlessly engineering our show — and getting it out to hundreds of stations around the country.”
— Jeremy Hobson

WILL proudly served as host for the September 28 premiere. The 2023 launch marked WILL's first national distribution effort in modern history, and we are proud to continue providing the technical support that brings these vital conversations to audiences across the country.

Hobson got his broadcasting start at the age 9 contributing to WILL's **Treehouse Radio** and later worked on WILL radio documentaries with University of Illinois Laboratory High School (Uni High) through Illinois Public Media's Illinois Youth Media project.

The Middle airs Thursdays at 8 pm on WILL-AM 580 and FM 90.9 and streams live at will.illinois.edu.

willclassical

In 2023 we worked to make classical music available to listeners around the clock on even more devices with our all-new 24/7 Classical Stream. The new service allows listeners to enjoy local favorites like *Classic Mornings* with Vic Di Geronimo, *Classics by Request* with Vincent Trauth, and *Classics of the Phonograph* with John Frayne, alongside beloved classical compositions. The 24/7 Classical Stream represents a new outlet to reach more listeners and make classical available throughout the day from anywhere.



After an extended hiatus, we were thrilled for the return of *Prairie Performances*, with **6 new episodes** in 2023 hosted by John Frayne Classical Music Fellow Julia Escobar.

Our monthly classical music newsletter, Clef Notes, enjoyed a successful sophomore year. Clef Notes readership grew steadily, adding on average **20 new subscribers** each month.

Clef Notes continued to bring readers features, book reviews, and classical music news that highlight the role of musicians and composers of color. Some highlights included:

- An interview with author Brendan Slocumb
- A profile of Black American composer Edmond Dédé
- A spotlight on classical musicians with disabilities
- A visit to Spurlock Museum's Violins of Hope exhibit, a collection of stringed instruments played by Jewish musicians before and during the Holocaust
- A look back at Roger Cooper's episode of "Classically Black" on Joseph Bologne, the Black French composer and subject of 2023 film *Chevalier*
- A feature on Coretta Scott King's musical background and legacy

“With Clef Notes, I hope to open up classical music to new audiences, offering something for everyone from the classical-curious to the aficionado. Clef Notes has allowed me to interview musicians of national and international prominence, including author Brendan Slocumb, conductor JoAnn Falletta, and composer Peter Boyle, as well as highlight some of the wonderful artists based here in central Illinois. These articles have brought in readers from across the country, demonstrating IPM's leadership in promoting classical music.”

— Katie Buzard
Clef Notes editor



AWARDS



Regional Edward R. Murrow award

- Jim Meadows' WILL 100 coverage



Public Media Journalists Association

- *State of Change* (multimedia presentation award)
- *The 21st Show* (audience engagement program)
- Illinois Student Newsroom "Students say Champaign schools fail to provide menstrual products" (Student Feature-2nd place)



Illinois News Broadcasters Association

- Andrew Pritchard's June derecho coverage (Small Market Radio Breaking News)



Public Media Award

- Jim Meadows' feature on Roger Cooper



International Association of Audio Information Services

- Illinois Radio Reader's *Call the Midwife* (Books on Air: Program of the Year)



Mid-America regional Emmy nominations

- *County Fair* (Best Documentary-Cultural)
- *County Fair* (Best Trailer)
- *State of Change* (Best Public Affairs Program)
- "WILL Centennial Fanfare" (Best Musical Composition/Arrangement)

In 2023 we laid the groundwork for future financial support by expanding our network of members and increasing planned giving.

We sought to grow our audience by engaging new supporters through new avenues. One such avenue was a soft launch of NPR+ in an effort to build on the success of Passport's streaming model and reach new audiences more attuned to the digital space. NPR+ is a new podcast subscription service that provides sponsor-free access to NPR's wide array of news and entertainment podcasts, plus bonus episodes for select offerings.

Our donors also helped lay the financial foundation for IPM's future through several large planned gifts that were realized in 2023. These gifts added almost \$1 million to our existing endowments. Building on one of our 2022 goals to increase planned giving, we officially launched the Mullally Circle for donors who have shared their plans to leave a legacy gift to Illinois Public Media.



With our over-the-air broadcast signal, we are able to reach over **500,000** viewers and listeners with our locally curated and focused content.

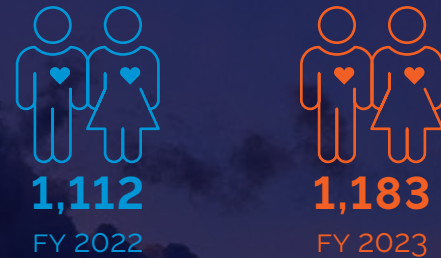


We had over **6,000,000** unique page views the homepage of our website, will.illinois.edu, not including all other web traffic.



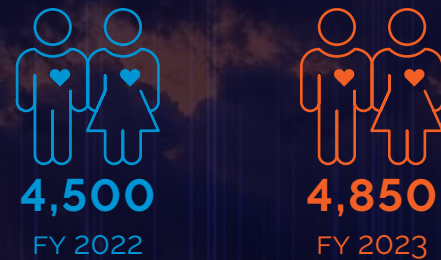
Our social media audience grew by **25%** with more than **9,800** followers by the end of 2023.

NEW DONORS



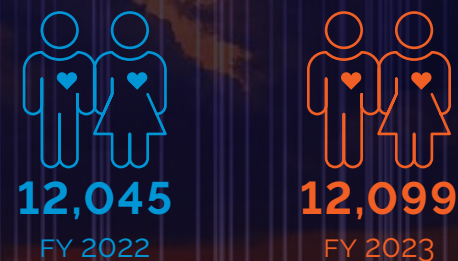
6.4 % INCREASE

SUSTAINING FRIENDS OF WILL



7.8% INCREASE

TOTAL FRIENDS



0.5 % INCREASE

To view a complete audited financial statement, please visit will.illinois.edu/about/compliance.



ILLINOIS PUBLIC MEDIA

Today Illinois Public Media's news, outreach efforts, music programs, and more can be found on multiple platforms. Our original programming now reaches even bigger audiences both over the air and in the streaming space, and those streaming capabilities allow our listeners and viewers to take us with them anywhere.

Our local environment, our talented staff, and the needs of those around us will always drive the efforts of the organization. You, the friends and neighbors of WILL, have always been the reason for our work. And you will continue to be what connects us as we lay new foundations for future innovations, acknowledging the changes we must make to represent and serve everyone.

To that end, we pledge to continue the conversations with our listeners, our viewers, and our community as we move forward together. Even as we change to keep up with the times, you can count on IPM to remain a robust public media organization meeting the needs of our community, state, and region...on and off the air.



Atomic Age
COCKTAIL PARTY

CLASSIC  MORNINGS

PRAIRIE  FIRE

THE **21**ST



Mid American
GARDENER

willag.org
COMMODITY WEEK | CLOSING MARKET REPORT

217
Today

Classics  *of the* Phonograph

 **Illinois** RADIO
READER

Prairie Performances



THE EVENING  CONCERT

Afternoon at the Opera

CLASSICS
BY REQUEST