

For Immediate Release:

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Altamont, Illinois: As a community bank, Peoples Bank & Trust recognizes the value of volunteerism in our communities. To recognize, commend and promote the volunteerism, Peoples Bank & Trust has established a program to recognize outstanding community members for their volunteer efforts of improvement to our community.

Ruth Rhodes has been chosen as our Volunteer of the Quarter for the 1st qtr. of 2026 for her work with the Lake Sara Dam Run. Ruth is the race coordinator of the Lake Sara Dam Run that takes place in April every year and benefits several of the Effingham County Special Olympic athletes with their various programs.

In 1998, Ruth and a few friends decided to start the "Lake Sara Dam Run". It was decided that all proceeds from the race would go to the Special Olympics each year. The race is held annually in April, with this year's race on April 4, 2026.

Each year, the race has become increasingly popular. While some of the original friends who helped begin the race still do volunteer, Ruth is in charge of and is the decisionmaker for all things leading up to the race day. This includes contacting and coordinating sponsors, designing and ordering the race bibs, medals, shirts, etc., posting social media content, finding local photographers, finding reliable vendors to record running time of participants, scheduling and placing all volunteers, and so much more. As the race director, her job is now a year-round process.

Over the past 25 years, the proceeds have amounted to over \$200,000, all of which has been donated to Special Olympics. Additionally, local businesses and organizations are contacted to be sponsors for the run. Over 60 local businesses are sponsoring the run in 2026.

In 2017, Ruth was awarded with the first Area 9 Law Enforcement Fundraiser of the Year award at the Opening Ceremony of the 2016 Area 9 Spring Games at Eastern Illinois University. The Lake Sara Dam Run has also received a significant amount of recognition as a popular race in the Midwest for which people travel from several other states to attend.

For over two decades, Ruth volunteered with the "Law Enforcement Torch Run" in June which also raises money for the Special Olympics. In 2012, Ruth and her daughter, Stacy Nelson, started an obstacle race during the summer called "Big Earl's Extreme Race" in Effingham. It was held on the Budde family property on the south side of town. During the four consecutive years the race was held, thousands of dollars were donated to individuals suffering from cancer, Shop with the Cop and Ag in the Classroom.

For the past 12 years and this coming year on July 25, Ruth has planned and coordinated "Jeeps on the Run". This is a jeep event that is also hosted by the local car dealership, Goeckner Brothers. The Jeep run was created initially by Ruth to raise money towards college scholarships in the names of and the honor and remembrance of two young children whose lives were taken far too soon, Torie McMahon and Hunter Barns.

Between the Lake Sara Dam Run, Big Earl's Extreme Race, Jeeps on the Run and the Law Enforcement Torch Run, Ruth has dedicated countless hours and raised hundreds of thousands of dollars towards the Special Olympics, cancer victims and scholarships over the last 27 years. While doing so, she has involved local businesses and organizations with each event. Ruth has not received any compensation whatsoever for her efforts. She chooses to help because of her selfless attitude toward the world and because she genuinely enjoys it. You can hear the joy in her voice when she talks about presenting the checks to the beneficiaries of each event. In addition to her volunteer work, Ruth is now retired and is a proud wife, mother and grandmother. She babysits for six of her grandchildren. She is also a devoted member of St. John's Lutheran Church. Ruth was recently named the Effingham County Volunteer of the Year.

Peoples Bank & Trust will be honoring Ruth Rhodes with a monetary donation to the Lake Sara Dam Run and her name will also be placed on a plaque to be displayed at the bank.

Peoples Bank & Trust is an independent Community Bank with thirteen offices located in Pana, Taylorville, Altamont, Tower Hill, Charleston, Springfield, Arthur, Arcola, Tuscola, Morrisonville, Palmyra, Waverly and White Hall. Peoples is a full service bank offering outstanding customer service to consumers, small businesses, and farmers in Central Illinois. People First Bancshares, Inc., with corporate offices in Pana, Illinois, is the holding company for Peoples Bank & Trust.