



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Photo attachments: A. Jessica Dietz, Walnut, IL; B. Callista Ridgely, Parkersburg, IL; C. Shay Layden, Hoopeston, IL

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ILLINOIS LICA ANNOUNCES ANNUAL SCHOLARSHIP RECIPIENTS

April 7, 2026 – Strengthening its dedication to supporting members and their families, Illinois LICA recently established a scholarship program to help its members’ families offset rising costs associated with pursuing post-high school education. Open to high school seniors and upperclassmen pursuing ANY post-high school education (including 2 or 4 year degrees and trade schools) and ANY course of study, applicants must submit transcripts, an essay, and 3 letters of recommendation to complete the application process. For 2026, the selection committee awarded three outstanding individuals with \$1,500 scholarships each:

Jessica Dietz (Walnut, IL) – Eastern Kentucky University - Fire, Arson, and Explosion Investigation

Daughter of Paul & Kimberly Dietz, Jessica is a junior at Eastern Kentucky University, maintaining a 3.38 GPA. Being engaged with her local fire department in her teens and attending her first fire investigation by age 16, Jessica became inspired at an early age to pursue her current career path and has already gained years of hands-on experience. While making the Dean’s List and Honor Society, she has served on two local fire departments and assisted with her family’s drainage company, Dietz Drainage. Currently, she is a member of the Walnut Fire Protection District, an Emergency Medical Responder, and works at Ace Hardware, while maintaining her college coursework. After graduation, Jessica plans on working for either the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives (ATF) or Fire Tech, Inc.

Callista Ridgely (Parkersburg, IL) – Richland County High School - Chemical Engineering

Granddaughter of Allen & Patricia Yonaka and daughter of Austin & Suzanna Ridgely, Callista is a senior at Richland County High School where she is dual enrolled in both high school and college credit courses, maintaining a 5.0 GPA. She is engaged in a wide variety of extracurricular activities including Marching Band, Symphonic Band, Jazz Band, Honors Wind Ensemble, Scholar Bowl, FBLA, Tri-M, Student Council, FFA, Interact Club, Brain Games, and ACES. Callista serves as class treasurer, Tri-M Music Honor Society treasurer, and a council member for FBLA. She is a Big Future Rural and Small School Scholar and a recipient of the STRIPES award for respect, integrity, and self-discipline. Outside of school, Callista has committed time to volunteering with multiple organizations and service projects, from visiting nursing homes and assisting with the Christmas Bucket Brigade to volunteering at the Parkersburg Chowder and serving food at local fundraisers like the Noble Airport Fly-In. With plans to attend Rose-Hulman Institute of Technology in pursuit of a chemical engineering degree, Callista has a strong desire to work in the energy and/or materials sector.

Shay Layden (Hoopeston, IL) – Hoopeston Area High School – General Studies

Daughter of Eric & Angela Layden, Shay is a senior at Hoopeston Area High School, maintaining a 3.51 GPA. She is actively involved in Marching Band, FFA, National Honor Society, Drama Department, Student Council, basketball, golf, and softball. Shay serves as Vice President of her FFA Chapter and team manager for the softball team. Outside of school, she attends St. Anthony Catholic Church, where she is a member of the youth group and attends Catholic Heart Work Camp every summer. She also works part-time at a local ice cream shop. Shay’s aspiration is to become a Master Electrician with a focus on becoming an Outside Lineman.

Illinois LICA is honored to support these outstanding scholars as they work toward their future goals. Their dedication and passion exemplify the values of our association, and we look forward to seeing all they accomplish!

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Illinois LICA is a not-for-profit trade association dedicated to the professional conservation of soil & water resources. For over 65 years, ILICA has been providing contractors construction & conservation education, business & legislative resources, and industry discounts.