Researchers have long thought that certain nanomaterials and synthetic nanocrystals were similar only in size. Now, U. of I. chemists have found that they can add reactivity to the list of shared traits. Atoms in a nanocrystal can cooperate with each other to facilitate binding or switching, a phenomenon widely found in biological molecules.

The finding could catalyze manufacturer projects for smart sensors, solar cells, tiny transistors for optical computers, and medical imaging. Led by chemistry professor Prashant Jain, the team published its findings in the journal Nature Communications.

“In geological, industrial and domestic eras, controlling the properties of a material undergoes chemical transitions when they are put under reactive conditions,” Jain said. “Recent experiments have shown that the transformation occurs not as a slow diffusion process, but as a rapid switching thanks to co-operativity.”

The researchers saw that once the cadmium-selenium nanocrystal has taken up a few initial copper “seed” impurities, atoms in the rest of the lattice can cooperate to rapidly swap out the rest of the cadmium for copper. Jain compares the crystals to hemoglobin, the molecule in red blood cells that carries oxygen. Once one oxygen molecule has bound to hemoglobin, other binding sites within hemoglobin slightly change conformation to more easily pick up more oxygen. He posits that similarly, copper impurities might cause a structural change in the nanocrystal, making it easier for more copper ions to infiltrate the nanocrystal in a rapid cascade.

Jain also is affiliated with the department of physics and the Federick Seitz Materials Research Laboratory at the U. of I. CNN said. “This is allowing us to learn hidden details about how the transition actually proceeds. We are also learning how one nanocrystal behaves differently from another.”

Next, the researchers plan to explore biomolecule-like cooperative phenomena in other solid-state materials and processes. For example, co-operativity in catalytic processes could have major implications for solar energy or manufacturing of expensive specialty chemicals.

“In the long term, we are interested in exploiting the co-operative behavior to design artificial smart materials that respond in a switch-like manner like hemoglobin in our body does,” Jain said.

Chemical transitions
Nanocrystals of cadmium selenide, known for their brilliant luminescence, display intriguing chemical behavior resulting from positive cooperation between atoms, a behavior akin to that found in biomolecules. At right, chemistry professor Prashant Jain; and his team transformed tiny crystals of cadmium selenide to crystals of copper selenide.

Atoms in a nanocrystal cooperate, much like in biomolecules

Initiative to advance economic development statewide

By Christy Levy
UIC News Bureau

University trustees on Dec. 13 approved a $5 million grant to support a new manufacturing initiative and heard presentations about the university’s efforts to advance economic development across the state.

The meeting was held at UIC just hours after Gov. Pat Quinn announced the Illinois Manufacturing Lab are the key to driving our economy forward.”

The Illinois Manufacturing Lab begins its charge to solve manufacturing challenges with 10 pilot projects at small- to mid-sized companies.

“The Illinois Manufacturing Lab is going to help our state remain a national leader in making quality products and creating good jobs,” Quinn said in a statement. “The Illinois Manufacturing Lab will be a marquee attraction for companies around the globe to come to Illinois so they can work with cutting-edge technologies and help our economy forward.”

The Illinois Manufacturing Lab will work with UI Labs, which is modeled after UI Labs, the first program within UI Labs, a nonprofit research technology center affiliated with the university that began earlier this year and aims to drive economic development for the state. UI Labs will provide opportunities for collaborations between industry leaders and university scholars.
Easter: Trustees to review supplemental pension options

By Mike Helenthal
As assistant editor

U

Easter said the U. of I. will have to continue to steward its resources effectively if the university wants to take its "next steps," he said. "We will have to take the earliest possible moment, what we know and what we propose to do." Senate Executive Committee chair Roy Campbell said the vote on pension changes showed that the "business as usual" backroom dealing often associated with Illinois state faculty interest groups and the university was a "long time coming.

"If it raises all sorts of questions about how state government operates," he said, "it might be a useful exercise to list all those legal bodies who voted on the measure to have actually read and comprehended it. All of the area's legislators voted against the pension law. It could be a perfect opportunity for legislators to learn about the university's competitive in attracting quality job candidates. The administration is fully aware of our concerns, and we share our concerns," he said. "(Finding a solution) is in all of our interests.

Susan E. Easter, the university's finance vice president and chief financial officer, said he also is optimistic the university will continue to address the exemption authority issue and are working to find a legislative solution. The U. of I. has spent millions of dollars on various projects that have the power to exempt certain positions from a civil service classification. The faculty parliament has grown over the years and includes a variety of positions that have been added to the university's roster in recent years. The university has the authority to exempt certain positions from a civil service classification and make them academic professional. The designation of these exempt positions remains a challenge for the university, as they need to be familiar with on-campus opportunities and will network with community leaders to find employment opportunities outside the university.

Senators offered support of the 2013 IT Strategic Plan and called for further discussion with the agency on remaining procurements and state projects. The senators have discussed the need for a competitive salary and benefits package that is key to attracting and keeping high-level faculty members and staff.

"It needs a much deeper analysis and further study," he said. Other issues

■ Wilson said the Provost's Office is formulating a Provost Communication on specialized faculty members, specifically all non-tenure track academic employees.

The initiative arose from recommendations earlier in the year led by senator Harry Hilton, a senior research scientist for the National Center of Intellectual Property. The new communication will better define job titles, offer a list of best practices related to hiring specialized faculty members, and provide developmental tracks for certain job categories.

"We can do better, we know we can," Wilson said. "Illinois can be a leader in this." The final recommendations will be presented to the Board of Trustees at its Jan. 23 meeting in Chicago.

Easter will also review the supplemental pension package. "For now, simply understanding the implications of the massive new pension law is a challenge," Wilson said. It is more than 300 pages long and contains complexities that can lead to multiple interpretations. The university faces, which include late and diminishing state payments, rising operations costs and tuition-revenue limits. The goal is to ensure a very fair playing field for everyone involved in the university's competitive edge won't be easy considering the financial restraints the university would lead such an effort.

"I don't know if we've embraced (technology) to the extent we could," he said, noting other universities have "made some good cases" to convince state legislators to address procurement rules to reduce their impact on the university.

"Utilizing technology is important, but he said, "That doesn't always mean reducing or eliminating positions," he said, noting other ways, including the use of computer technology, to maintain efficiency in the future.

"The permanent increased cost (of taking on pension responsibilities) is not easy (for the university to deal with)," he said.
On the Job

Christopher Learned

The experience also reminded him what a special place the U. of I. is and how he’s enjoyed every minute of his employment on campus.

“I jumped around from job to job before I came here,” he said.

Learned said he’s proud to work at the U. of I, knowing that his small role is so important to the research being conducted.

“I like working with the animals and the people,” he said. “I work with some of the brightest, but also the nicest people here. It’s really amazing here. Everybody’s willing to take the time to speak with you and everyone’s just willing to explain what they’re working on and what they’re trying to accomplish.”

Learned, who lives in Ramoul, grew up on a farm in Penfield, Ill., where he helped care for livestock and did the other chores required of farm children.

Despite the rural existence, between farm work and three brothers, there was always something to do, he said.

“Our closest neighbor was a half-mile down the road, so it wasn’t like we could just go to the playground like most kids would,” he said. “If we wanted something, we go down to the river and see what kind of trouble we can get into.”

Despite that childhood experience, he said being an animal caretaker at the U. of I. is far different from being a farmhand. “What you do on the farm is different, because on the farm, you don’t really worry that much about things getting dirty,” he said. “They’re a little more particular here.”

Learned is taking courses at Eastern Illinois University in an effort to finish a bachelor’s degree in organizational and professional development.

On the Job features U. of I. staff members. To nominate a civil service employee, email dicasa@illinois.edu.

NEW faces 2013

Sharon M. “Shelly” Nickols-Richardson

A professor and head of the food science and human nutrition in the College of Agricultural, Consumer and Environmental Sciences

Education: Ph.D. and M.S. (foods and nutrition), University of Georgia; B.S. (nutritional sciences), Oklahoma State University
Research Interests: Determinants of obesity prevention and body weight regulation across the life span to lower the burden of chronic diseases, ranging from metabolic syndrome to osteoporosis; and the impact of medications on osteoporosis

Courses teaching: FSHN 322, Nutrition and the Life Cycle

Why Illinois?

“Shelly continues that tradition.”

Shelley was a professor of nutritional sciences and the director of their graduate program. She hit the ground running here in July, with a lot of emphasis on learning as much as she could as soon as she could about the research and teaching programs in FSHN, an exceptional loss, weight loss department that deserves the exceptional leadership that Shelly provides.”

Courses teaching: FSHN 322, Nutrition and the Life Cycle

Why Illinois?

“The department of food science and human nutrition at the U. of I. has a stellar international reputation due to exceptional and innovative research in health and wellness, energy and the environment, and sustainable food and nutrition applications.”

Nickols-Richardson said. “Moreover, the department is known for its rigorous and relevant undergraduate and graduate programs and its commitment to Extension, outreach and public service. The integration of food science, dietetics, hospitality management and human nutrition is somewhat unique to FSHN, and departmental synergy is what attracted me to the university. No other department blends these areas of science as well as FSHN.”

Dipanjan Pan

An assistant professor of biotechnology in the College of Engineering and the Beckman Institute for Advanced Science and Technology

Education: Ph.D. (synthetic organic chemistry), Indian Institute of Technology M.S. (organic chemistry) and B.S. (chemistry), Vidyasagar University, India
Research Interests: Novel wall-defined nanostructures for biomedical applications and nanomedicine; functional polymers; molecular imaging; and drug delivery and synthetic chemistry

Courses teaching: BIOE 498/598 DP Imaging and Therapeutic Probes

Why Illinois?

“I’m extremely delighted and proud about joining this renowned university and one of the top engineering schools in the country,” Pan said. “With a laboratory strategically located at the Carle Foundation Hospital and Biomedical Research Center, this is an intriguing opportunity to bring nanotechnology to the clinic, I’m fascinated by the university’s world-class infrastructure and collaborative ambiance and I look forward to closely working with the students and researchers with complementary expertise.”

Dec. 19, 2013

Insidet Illinois PAGE 3
Video game features music by honored composition professor

By Dusty Rhodes
Arts and Humanities Editor

ike most musicians, Erin Gee – a composition professor at the U. of I. – experiments incessantly with her instrument, trying to coax it into delivering an increasingly wide range of new sounds.

In Gee’s case, her instrument is simply her mouth, but what she does with it has earned her considerable recognition. It’s not singing, or scatting, or even beat-boxing. Instead, she has created her own musical toolbox, which has been described as “new vocal molecules created by recombining the atomic elements of speech.”

Gee’s compositions built on these sounds have won her a Guggenheim Fellowship, a Rudolf Fellowship, the Rome Prize, and a UNESCO Picasso-Miró Medal and commissions ranging from the New York Philharmonic to the Los Angeles Philharmonic to the Zurich Opera House.

Most recently, Gee’s music turned up in a new and novel video game called Blek, described by The New Yorker as “the sort of game you’d want to put on a touchscreen to create a doodle that repeats itself. The goal is to navigate the doodle hit all the colored dots while avoiding being sucked into the black holes. Over the course of levels, the puzzles become increasingly challenging. Blek’s environment, described by various reviewers as “gorgeous mini-mystic forest art,” “zen” and “an idyll of elegant, intuitive beauty,” has no music – just a simple, shimmering chime between levels, and a one- second utterance from Gee when the doodle finally falls into black holes. These sounds are tiny ex- cerpts from “Yamaguchi Mouthpiece,” part of a set of pieces based on Japanese vocal sounds that Gee wrote while in residency at the Akikoyside Interna- tional Art Village in Yamaguchi.

In 2012, a park or a swimming pool, or even a music background and he had been to some of my concerts in Vienna,” Gee said.

Gee, who grew up in Iowa, is passionate about the game and looking for sounds, has written about travel, religion, literature, art and music. He talked about gift giving in an interview with News Bureau social sciences editor Craig Chamberlain.

You talk about the language of gift giving. What does that mean?

We usually think of gifts as expressions of friendship or love. Birthday and holiday gifts are the most obvious ones that come to mind. But gifts can express a wide range of feelings and thoughts: Think of the gifts be- tween countries that demonstrate tribute or friendship, love, neighborliness and power – these too are gifts. Used well, gifts can garner wisdom about managing gifts by turning from examples by our own past as well as non-European societies.

We complain endlessly about the commercialism of the holiday, and there’s a sense that many may feel as much dread as joy in the required hours at the mall. Do we risk losing the point?

Every one of us makes a choice about how to give. The right start is to think about the recipient. Maybe the best new parents need cash, not a silver spoon. An unexpected phone call, visit or letter – these too are gifts. Used well, gifts can heal an old wound, make a new con-nection, deepen an existing one, or reaffirm a romance. When we get it right, the gift fulfills rounds of giving and receiving. Yes, our holiday gift giving is intertwined with commerce, but gifts have always involved mixed motives. By instru- menting well we recognize the humanity of those around us. Their thanks are the first and best return.

UI LABS, CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

For every research dollar the university receives, it leverages those funds to provide $2 of economic impact back to the state. Urbana Chancellor Phyllis M. Wise told trustees.

“The University of Illinois has always been a powerful force for economic develop- ment for our state, nation and world,” she said. “We are a powerhouse for prod- ucts, innovation, and ideas.”

The UI Labs initiative will help the state become a global leader in technol- ogy, Wise said.

“We are truly standing at the cus- p of the industrial revolution of this century,” she said.

Illinois faces challenges to its eco- nomic growth, said David Merriman, a professor of public administration in the U. of I. Institute of Government and Pub- lic Affairs. The state consistently contrib- utes more in federal taxes than it receives in federal dollars, he told trustees.

“The challenges, with meager funding from the federal government, present with a difficult environment,” Merriman said. “Chicago has tremendous potential to be a source of innovation and growth.”

Editor’s note: There’s more to giving gifts than just the price tag. It would lead to a general mean- ing of the gift, in which everything had a spirit of the gift, in which everything had a spirit of generosity that percolates through our public life.

To look at Homer’s “Odyssey” for the role of gift giving in ancient society, the Greek poet imagined them as a counter-force to chaotic violence; look to the historian Natalie Z. Davis’ book on the gift in France in the 1500s for the gift as an expression of friendship, love, neighborliness and power in early modern Europe. In different ways, gift exchange still pervades our lives today;
Team reports on U.S. trials of bioenergy grasses

By Diana Yates
Life Sciences Editor

The first long-term U.S. field trials of Miscanthus x giganteus, a towering perennial grass used in bioenergy production, reveal that its exceptional yields, though reduced somewhat after five years of growth, are still more than twice those of switchgrass (Panicum virgatum), another perennial grass used as a bioenergy feedstock. Miscanthus grown in Illinois also outperforms even the high yields found in earlier studies of the crop in Europe, the researchers found.

The average annual yield of Miscanthus grown in seven Illinois locations over a period of eight to 10 years was 10.5 tons per acre, compared with 4.5 tons per acre for switchgrass grown in side-by-side trials in Illinois, the researchers report. Miscanthus yields in Europe are about half of those reported in the Midwest.

The study took into account differences in yield that were the result of annual weather changes (primarily heat and precipitation, both of which increased growth). The new findings appear in the journal Global Change Biology: Bioenergy. U. of I. plant biology professor Stephen P. Long, who led the study, founded and edits the journal. The Energy Biosciences Institute at the U. of I. supported the research.

Miscanthus does almost as well in poor soils as in fertile cropland, Long said.

"That was the earliest finding in Europe and now we can confirm this for the Midwest," Long said. "It takes a little bit longer to establish Miscanthus in poorer soils, but once it’s established the yields seem to be almost as good as in the very best soils," he said. The difference in yield between richer and poorer soils was less than 10 percent.

Several growers in the U.S. pelletize Miscanthus for use as a renewable, carbon-neutral energy source. The pellets are burned to produce electricity or heat. There is a growing market for pelletized Miscanthus in the U.S. and in Europe, Long said.

"However, the expected long-term and larger market for Miscanthus is in digesting the cellulose in the biomass to sugars for fermentation to ethanol and other liquid fuels," Long said. "This would complement corn ethanol, since it would allow the use of land unsuited or marginal to corn and other row crops," he said. Long and his colleagues calculated the total land area needed to produce enough Miscanthus to meet the U.S. Renewable Fuel Standard mandate for cellulosic ethanol production by the year 2022. They found that the RFS mandate of 16 billion gallons (60 billion liters) of cellulosic ethanol by 2022 would require 17 million acres of Miscanthus x giganteus or 39 million acres of switchgrass.

"That 39 million acres sounds like a lot and is a lot, but keep in mind that the 48 contiguous states have only 2,000 million acres," he said. "We use only about a fifth of that in our row-crop agriculture – cotton, corn, soybean, wheat, etc. And we actually have at least 550 million acres that have been abandoned from agriculture in the last 150 years. This is not land that has been lost to urban sprawl."

Because Miscanthus grows well in poor soils, it could be planted on former agricultural lands left unused after the Dust Bowl to prevent soil erosion, Long said. Or it could be grown on Conservation Reserve Program lands, agricultural areas left fallow to avoid farm surpluses in the U.S., he said.

"We have 40 million acres in Conservation Reserve Program lands, agricultural areas left fallow to avoid farm surpluses in the U.S., he said. "We have 40 million acres in Conservation Reserve Program lands, agricultural areas left fallow to avoid farm surpluses in the U.S.," he said.

"A crop like Miscanthus would be suitable for that land because it doesn’t have the same erosion problems of an annual crop. You’re not plowing the land every year, and you have a dense perennial root system that binds the soil.

"In fact, Miscanthus is arguably better than leaving this land fallow," he said. "Not only is it a productive use, but the rapid growth of its root system will bind and improve the soil more rapidly. As well as being productive above ground, Miscanthus was shown in Illinois to accumulate more roots over a period of five years than fallow land or even a native prairie ecosystem."

An added advantage is that Miscanthus can be grown with little or no added fertilizer, he said. In the autumn and winter the nutrients drain out of the stems and leaves and are retained in the roots, stimulating new growth the following spring.

The recycling of nutrients is not 100 percent efficient; however, and the team wanted to know if adding nitrogen would compensate for the age-related yield declines.

In another study published in Bioenergy Research, Long and his colleagues report that adding nitrogen to Miscanthus and switchgrass significantly improved yields over time (by 25 percent and 32 percent, respectively). This eliminated the age-related declines in yield seen in switchgrass and about 40 percent of the loss found in Miscanthus. But the increases were small compared to the effects of fertilizing crops such as Zea mays (corn), and probably not large enough to justify the added cost of fertilizer, the team reported.

"The bottom line is if we simply plant Miscanthus and leave it, we don’t see the same yield at year eight and year 10 that we saw in years three and five," Long said. "But we’re still seeing a very high yield."

The first decade Researchers grew Miscanthus x giganteus (the taller grass) and switchgrass in side-by-side field trials in seven locations in Illinois. They measured the long-term yields when grown on prime cropland and on marginal soils.
Arboretum to remove trees in January

A group of about 30 mature and dying trees at the U. of I. Arboretum will be removed in January. About 100 of the Lombardy poplars were planted 20 years ago to protect the property’s Crimean lindens, which have a life expectancy of about 50 years. There are only about 30 poplars left, with four to eight dying annually.

William Kruidenier, the Arboretum director, said the remaining poplars have lasted well past their life expectancies.

“We could wait until each tree dies, but they are located at the front door of the Arboretum and are beginning to annoy people,” he said. He said the Arboretum continues to flourish and change with smart landscape management practices.

Some of the new regulations that take effect Jan. 1 on the U. of I. campus:

Drivers with disabilities must pay at meters

Two Illinois laws that go into effect Jan. 1 are designed to offer new protections in the system that grants parking privileges to drivers with disabilities. The laws increase the fine for the unauthorized use of a disability license plate or parking decal and fines doctors who falsify disability certifications.

The law also ends the parking-meter fee exemption for those with disability placards, although drivers who are unable to access or operate a parking meter would still be exempt. For more information, visit cybderdriveillinois.com.

Campus becomes smoke free

The Smoke-free Campus initiative was announced more than a year ago and the start date of Jan. 1 is less than two weeks away. In announcing the initiative, Chancellor Phyllis M. Wise said the campus would become smoke-free in order to promote a healthy living, learning and working environment.

The new policy will apply to everyone — students, faculty and staff members and visitors. It will include all forms of burning tobacco, including cigarettes, cigars, pipes, hookahs and cigarillos. It will ban smoking on all campus-owned property and in private vehicles parked on campus-owned property. It does not affect the use of smoke-free products such as chewing tobacco.

To help faculty and staff members and students adapt to the new policy, the campus will continue to offer tobacco-cessation programs through McKinley Health Center and the U. of I. Wellness Center. For more information, visit campusrec.illinois.edu/Smoke-Free.

Gun law doesn’t change on campus

The new Illinois law allowing citizens to carry a concealed handgun won’t have much effect on campus. All of the rules and regulations governing the possession of weapons on campus will continue to apply.

The only difference will be the new exception for those with a concealed-carry permit, which still restricts the actual carrying of a firearm on campus (outside of storing the weapon in a vehicle) – a provision that was pushed by university and state law enforcement officials during legislative discussions in Springfield.
Alistair Black, a professor of library and information science, is the recipient of the Library History Essay Award for 2013. The prize is awarded annually by the Library and Information History Group of the Chartered Institute of Library and Information Professionals for the best essay on library history relating to, or published in, the British Isles in the previous calendar year. Black’s essay, “Organizational Learning and Home-Grown Writing: The Library Staff Magazine in Britain in the First Half of the Twentieth Century,” appeared in “In-Formation & Culture,” Volume 47, Number 4 (2012). Black’s research focuses on the history of librarianship, library science, and information management.

PRAIRIE RESEARCH INSTITUTE

Subhash Bhagwat, a retired principal mineral economist with the Illinois State Geological Survey, served as a Senator of the Illinois Senate. In August, Bhagwat presented a series of lectures in Kansas on a range of energy experiences from the perspective of the United States in the decades since 1950. The lectures formed the core of a summer college program at two prominent universities in Kazakhstan: Al-Farabi National University in Almaty and Nazarbayev University in Astana. The program represented the beginning of Kazakhstan’s national preparedness initiative for Expo 2017 to be held in Astana on the theme “Energy for the Future.” Although Kazakhstan is rich in oil reserves as well as uranium deposits, the country envisions a much larger role for alternative energy sources. The grant provides 1 percent of its GDP to promote the development. In addition to the summer college lectures, meetings and discussions were held with prominent researchers and top officials to discuss a range of topics related to energy and economics.

The Prairie Research Institute recently announced the appointment of seven Illinois State Scientists. “These designations are in keeping with a long and successful tradition in Illinois of science in the public interest,” said William Shultz, the executive director of the institute. State Archaeologist, State Biologist, State Hydrologist and Pollution Prevention Scientist are new designations. All designations are filled by employees of the state scientific surveys. The state scientists serve as the authoritative spokespeople in their fields for the surveys, the institute and the state. They provide current information on research and scientific inquiries to the public at large, other scientists, industry and governmental agencies.

The appointments:

- Illinois Pollution Prevention Scientist: Kiashore Rajagopalan, the associate director for applied research, Illinois Sustainable Technology Center
- State Archaeologist: Thomas E. Emerson, the director of the Illinois State Archaeological Survey
- State Biologist: Brian D. Anderson, the director of the Illinois Natural History Survey
- State Climatologist: James R. Angell, reappointed State Climatologist, Illinois State Water Survey
- State Entomologist: Christopher H. Di etrich, a systematic entomologist, Illinois Natural History Survey
- State Geologist: E. Donald McKay III, reappointed State Geologist, the director of the Illinois State Geological Survey
- State Hydrologist: Misganaw Demisie, the director of the Illinois State Water Survey

PROVOST FELLOWS

Three faculty members were recently appointed Provost Fellows for this academic year. The program provides academic leadership experience in key campus administrative roles for distinguished faculty members. Fellows will have 50 percent FTE appointments in leadership roles in the Office of the Provost, maintaining 50 percent appointments in their home units.

Lauren Goodlad, a professor of English, is the director of the Unit for Criticism and Interpretive Theory. Her scholarly work is that milk infused with pressurized carbon dioxide began to foam. He experimented with this principle with cream and used nitrous oxide because the carbon dioxide left a bitter taste. This led to the development of “portable” whipped cream. His patented method was used by professor G. Frederick Smith to create Instantwhip Foods. This image is one of hundreds of thousands from the University Archives holdings of the university’s photo laboratory subject file.

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A report on honors, awards, appointments and other outstanding achievements of faculty and staff members.
Program helps people cope with money management

By Shafta Forrest
Dec. 19, 2013
Inside Illinois

Y ears ago, when Jeannette Garunger Beck was a single parent, she knew the frustrations and stress of struggling to make ends meet. Although educational and professional achievement enabled Beck to put those days behind her, she’s sharing some of what she has learned about financial wellness by volunteering as a Money Mentor.

Sponsored by U. of I. Extension, the Money Mentors program matches trained volunteers with individuals or families who want assistance managing their finances.

The program, which began this fall, has 22 mentors working with mentees in Champaign and Vermilion counties, according to Kathy Sweedler, a consumer economics educator in the Extension office in Champaign.

Money Mentors also are available in Ford and Iroquois counties and will expand to McLean County next spring.

“A common misconception is that the Money Mentors program is limited to people who are low income or in crisis, but anyone can participate,” Sweedler said. “Money Mentors gives people an opportunity to get a fresh perspective on their financial situation and money-management challenges.”

The program is free and confidential. Mentees register online, providing basic financial information such as their employment, earnings and monthly expenses. Mentees also indicate the type of assistance they’re seeking – whether they want help with budgeting, managing their credit, building savings or establishing financial goals, for example.

Mentees are then matched with volunteer mentors who have had 30 hours of training, which encompasses basic money management, financial coaching and learning about resources that are available in the community. Mentees and their mentors decide when, where and how frequently to meet, although they are encouraged to meet in public places such as a library or the Extension offices, said Cayla Waters, the program coordinator of family and consumer sciences in the U. of I. Extension office in Danville.

“They can meet with the mentor once or 20 times – whatever helps people get back on track with their personal financial situation,” Waters said.

The Money Mentors program was developed at Ohio State University and has been adopted by Extension services in several other states.

This is the first time that the Money Mentors program has been offered in Illinois, and the U. of I. Extension’s program was closely modeled after a program in Florida, Waters said.

“They’ve had great success with helping people get back on their feet, learn how to budget their money, establish some goals and organize their finances,” Waters said.

“We’re hoping that we will see similar success – if not more. Our goal for the first year is really to get the word out and let people know that it’s something that’s available. Given the financial climate right now, we do know that this is a definite need for many people in the community.”

Beck, who went through the mentor training this fall, recently began working with a family in Champaign County that is struggling with credit card debt that they accrued while the head of the household was ill and unemployed.

Money matters
Money Matters is a new program offered by U. of I. Extension that provides trained mentors to people who need help managing their finances. Jeannette Garunger Beck, left, the business manager in electrical and computer engineering, volunteers with the program. Kathy Sweedler is an Extension consumer economics educator.

ON THE WEB
www.illinois.edu/MoneyMentors

After the initial mentoring session with Beck, the mentee decided to begin by organizing the household bills, tracking spending and looking for ways to economize.

“Nobody comes in with a magic answer or recipe and says, ‘If you follow this you’ll be fine,’ ” said Beck, who is the business manager in the department of electrical and computer engineering at Illinois. “It’s very stressful and very emotional. It took a long time for them to get in the situation that they’re in, and it’s going to take a long time to get out. We just need to change some habits.

‘It’s a brave, bold step to ask for a mentor and for help to try to fix it rather than take an ostrich, head-in-the-sand approach,’” Beck said. “It’s life changing, and hopefully they will find themselves less stressed, more able to cope and in control instead of being a hostage to their finances.”

People who want to volunteer as Money Mentors can apply online through the U. of I. Extension website. Potential mentors, who are screened with background checks and interviews, are not expected to have a degree or experience working in finance – just a desire to help someone in need.

Mentors, who complete training modules at home and participate in group training at the Extension offices, pay a one-time $40 fee to cover the costs of the materials. Mentors also participate in ongoing training and project planning sessions each month and must complete 12 hours of continuing education programs through Extension each year. They also must volunteer 50 hours annually in financial mentoring and community outreach projects.

More information about the program and how to apply for assistance or to become a mentor is online on the Money Mentors Web page.