



The Lincoln Academy of Illinois

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*Honoring the great citizens of today
Celebrating the great citizens for tomorrow*

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Seven to be presented with state's highest honor April 13 in Chicago

Seven individuals will be presented with the state's highest honor on Saturday, April 13 when The Lincoln Academy of Illinois holds its 60th Annual Convocation starting at 5:30 p.m. at the Chicago History Museum.

The recipients of the prestigious Order of Lincoln presented by The Lincoln Academy of Illinois include Evelyn Brandt Thomas, co-founder of Brandt Consolidated; higher education pioneer and leader Lewis Collens; retired Illinois Supreme Justice Rita Garman; singer and songwriter Alison Krauss; Lester McKeever, a leader and pioneer in the certified public accountant profession; Raul Raymundo, co-founder of The Resurrection Project community investment organization; Jim Thome, a member of the Baseball Hall of Fame.

Established in 1964, the Order of Lincoln honors Illinois residents whose work uplifts every community in the state. The seven recipients join more than 350 distinguished Illinois residents who have joined the Order of Lincoln over the last five decades.

Evelyn Brandt Thomas

Evelyn Brandt Thomas has lived nearly a century in Illinois and is a dedicated and active philanthropist, businesswoman, and mentor, described by *Farm World* as "a pioneer who helped create an agricultural empire." Her remarkable contributions began on a farm near Pleasant Plains, where like many farm youth, she learned the "family business" through daily tasks, acquiring skills that would serve her well in the future as a resilient and resourceful leader. In the early 1950s, Brandt Thomas and her brother, Glen, started a business to supplement the family's income on the farm. Over the course of nearly 70 years, Brandt Thomas and the Brandt team grew Brandt Consolidated (Brandt.co) into the global powerhouse it is today, providing innovative solutions through more than 250 products to farmers throughout the world. Loyal to its roots, the company remains headquartered in Springfield and employs hundreds; Brandt

Thomas continues to be active on the Board of Directors, guiding the company's corporate strategy.

Lewis Collens

A life-long resident of Illinois, Lewis Collens' significant and far-reaching accomplishments continue to shape the contours and direction of higher education in Illinois and beyond, bringing his unique vision to ensuring academic success, entrepreneurship, innovation and interdisciplinary education for all students. Collens' transformative leadership as the President of the Illinois Institute for Technology for 17 years created what has been called IIT's Renaissance, transforming not only the physical campus, but providing invaluable insights into redefining success for institutions across the nation. He cofounded what is now the BARBRI bar review test preparation company. The company started in Illinois in 1967 and created a dramatically different bar preparation system that drew upon the talent of some of the most prominent law professors in the country. Within a short period of time the company became the main bar review test preparation organization in the United States.

Hon. Rita Garman

Aurora native Rita B. Garman retired in 2022 as an Illinois Supreme Court Justice after nearly five decades of service to the citizens of Illinois. Garman passed the Illinois Bar exam in 1968, was appointed associate judge in Vermilion County in 1974, elected to circuit judgeship in 1986, and appointed to the Fourth District Appellate Court in 1995. In 2001, Garman was appointed to the Illinois Supreme Court, and went on to serve as Chief Justice from 2013-2016. She was only the second woman to hold that position.

Alison Krauss

Born in Decatur and raised in Champaign, Alison Krauss has sold more than 12 million records to date and has made 14 albums, including two collaborations with Robert Plant. Among her honors are 27 Grammys from 42 nominations, nine Country Music Association Awards, 14 International Bluegrass Music Association Awards, two Academy of Country Music Awards, and two Gospel Music Association Awards. Krauss is second only to Beyonce in receiving more Grammys than any other female in the history of the award and is tied for fourth all-time by any artist in Grammy history. Krauss received the National Medal of Arts in 2019 and has frequently collaborated with artists from various genres including Yo-Yo Ma, Dolly Parton, Taylor Swift, Garth Brooks, Sting, James Taylor, and Andrea Bocelli.

Lester McKeever

Born and raised in Chicago, Lester H. McKeever, Jr. became the 60th Black Certified Public Accountant in the United States in 1960. He joined Unity Mutual Life Insurance, where a pivotal professional partnership began when he met the nation's first Black female CPA, Mary Washington. McKeever had a long affiliation with the accounting firm of Washington and Pittman (which would later become Washington, Pittman & McKeever) and he became a Managing Principal of the firm. The Illinois CPA Society created the "Lester H. McKeever Jr. Advancing Diversity Award" in 2016 in his honor. McKeever led the board of the Federal Reserve Bank of Chicago as its chairman, and his civic board engagements have included the Chicago Urban League, the Chicago Symphony Orchestra, and he has served his undergraduate alma mater as treasurer of the University of Illinois Board of Trustees.

Raul Raymundo

With seed capital of \$30,000 from six area parishes in 1990, Chicago native Raul I. Raymundo co-founded The Resurrection Project (TRP), which has gone on to leverage those initial funds into more than \$640 million in community investments, benefiting nearly a quarter of a million people throughout the western suburbs and the city's southwest side. These include the development of more than 800 affordable homes plus early childhood centers, senior centers, community centers, and a charter school serving thousands of families. Raymundo's financial acumen and leadership were instrumental in helping many to avoid foreclosure during the failure of a financial institution and he remains active on several bank advisory boards, including Fifth Third Bank, CIBC Bank, Huntington Bank, and local divisions of Self-Help Federal Credit Union.

Jim Thome

Peoria native Jim Thome is a member of the National Baseball Hall of Fame and Museum for his performance through 22 seasons of professional baseball. Thome first distinguished himself as an athlete at Limestone High School and went on to play for Illinois Central College, where the sports complex named in his honor. Thome played for the Cleveland Indians, Philadelphia Phillies, Chicago White Sox, Los Angeles Dodgers, Minnesota Twins, and Baltimore Orioles. A five-time All-Star, he won a Silver Slugger Award and was American League Comeback Player of the Year in 2006. Of the more than 1,000 athletes from Illinois who have played Major League Baseball, Thome ranks first in home runs (612), runs batted in (1,699), on-base percentage (.402) and slugging (.554). Thome was named the 2002 Roberto Clemente Award Winner, bestowed annually to the player who best represents the game through extraordinary character and community involvement. His fellow athletes named him the 2001 and 2004 Marvin Miller Man of the Year, recognizing his inspirational contributions to others. In 2024 he received the prestigious Lou Gehrig Memorial Award, an honor given annually to the major league player who best exhibits the character and integrity of the late Lou Gehrig.

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