



Banks eye potential Venezuela investment

BUSINESS, 3A

THE MONROE NEWS

FRIDAY, JANUARY 16, 2026 | MONROENEWS.COM

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In this 2012 photo, Austin Smith, 15, is shown after lifting a 1991 Buick Century off his grandfather, Ernie Monhollen, 74. The two were trying to fix the brakes on the car when Monhollen became pinned waist-up under the car. BRYAN BOSCH/MONROE NEWS

Life after heroics Ida teen who saved grandpa in 2012

Suzanne Nolan Wisler
The Monroe News
USA TODAY NETWORK

In 2012, an Ida teen's story made national news and was a guest on "The Ellen DeGeneres Show."

Austin Smith, then 15, lifted a 2,000-pound 1991 Buick Century off his grandfather, Ernie Monhollen, then 74. Monhollen had just had knee surgery and was pinned waist-up under the car. Smith knew jacking up the car would take too long, so he lifted the car and slid it back a little so his grandfather could crawl out.

The story was told all over the country.

"It's an odd thing to have the spotlight on your family. We live such a basic life. We're very normal people. We work everyday and go to church every week," said Lori Monhollen-Ignatowicz of Petersburg, Smith's mom and Monhollen's daughter. "We don't really bring it up very much. A lot of people forgot about it."

What happened after the spotlight dimmed? Where are Smith and

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Ernie Monhollen, 87, and his grandson, Austin Smith, 29, are shown together in January, 2026. PROVIDED BY THE MONHOLLEN FAMILY

FRENCHTOWN, DUNDEE

Anti-data center rally planned

Group plans event Jan. 18 in Monroe

Suzanne Nolan Wisler
The Monroe News
USA TODAY NETWORK

An anti-data center rally has been set in Monroe.

"Monroe County Says No to Data Centers" is set for 1-3 p.m. Sunday, Jan. 18 at the Custer Statue, corner of Elm Avenue and Monroe Street, near St. Mary's Park in downtown Monroe.

The rally is co-sponsored by Protect Frenchtown and Citizens Against a Dundee Data Center. Cloverleaf Infrastructure is proposing to build data centers in Frenchtown Township and Dundee.

"We will have a speaker from each of the communities," said Kim Giarmo, a rally organizer.

The event flyer says the organizations are "united by water, wildlife and a will to protect."

"Citizens are concerned about the environmental impact," Giarmo said. "Our intent is to show we are united in our fight (against) data centers, to protect our wildlife, state park and rivers and farmland."

Giarmo said Monroe County people of all political affiliations are coming together to rally against data centers coming to the county.

"It's the most bi-partisan unity I've ever seen. This has really brought people together," she said. "Frenchtown has been getting a lot of attention for our organization and the fact we put our politics aside. We need to unite statewide. We are also reaching out and supporting other nearby communities."

Giarmo is hoping for a large crowd

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Donate fresh food online to support local families

Janis Reeser
AI-assisted reporter
The Monroe News
USA TODAY NETWORK

The Monroe County Opportunity Program has launched a digital food drive to collect fresh fruits, vegetables and other healthy items for families in need.

The drive, which runs through Jan. 30, is being conducted entirely online, according to a community announcement.

Donors can select food items to purchase through MCOP's online store,

which will be shipped directly to the organization.

This innovative approach aims to make donating more convenient, allowing individuals to support their neighbors from the comfort of their homes.

"Proper nutrition is linked to numerous positive health outcomes; however, prices at the grocery store make putting food on the table difficult for many Monroe County residents," Tamara Courts, MCOP Food Programs director, said in

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YULIA ZAIKINA, GETTY IMAGES

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