

FEBRUARY 2026

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BEST

of Des Moines

More than 12,000 votes cast in our annual readers' poll in categories ranging from the best service, best food, best doctors, best clothes, best drinks and even the best bathrooms. See full results inside.



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FROM THE PUBLISHER

A poll for the decades

And cheaters never win.

A reader recently asked how many years we have been conducting our Best of Des Moines readers' poll. Good question.

I bought CITYVIEW in 2004, and we have organized the poll for more than two decades now. I received some archives of past issues dating back to 1993 as part of the acquisition, but they were incomplete. We researched this as best we could with what we have to attempt to answer the question. Unfortunately, it's not as easy as doing a Google search. We do think we found the answer, though. See the Ask CV column on page 8.

In those early years, the poll was truly revolutionary. It didn't have as many votes as today, but it was entertaining and did represent what was hot in Des Moines at the time, just as it does now. Readers then were required to fill out a hand-written ballot and mail it in. We continued that process for a while, but as the digital age came upon us, readers wanted to be able to vote online. And vote they did. The number of people voting today is more than 10x what it was in the early years, and we thank you all you who are so passionate about the people, places and events of Des Moines and central Iowa.

Of course, others have tried — and some continue to try — to imitate our poll. Other publications. Radio stations. Some chambers of commerce. Even the Des Moines Convention and Visitors Bureau. But none of those efforts can even come close to what our Best of Des Moines poll has become. The people of Des Moines and central Iowa know it. We know it. You know it. There is only one Best of Des Moines, and the latest results are in this issue.

Being recognized as the Best of Des Moines is such a prestigious honor that some folks go to great lengths to win. Many do so in creative ways by encouraging their customers or members to vote for them. Some offer incentives for them to do so. That's smart.

Others are not so honorable. They attempt to vote multiple times by clearing their cookies on their computers and voting again and again. Others are now attempting to use AI to beat the system. We catch them through our own use of technology now, including AI, and we throw those votes out, exactly as we stated we would do on our rules page. Those who attempt to cheat waste a great deal of time and, in many cases, money to win. That's not smart.

There have always been, and always will be, cheaters in this world including right here in Des Moines. Years ago, people would fill out the printed ballot and then make dozens of photo copies, sending them all in the same envelope to us, despite the rules clearly stating one vote per reader. Amazing. And today, some try to bend the rules in a digital way to do the same. It doesn't work.

What does work is being a great person, being involved in a great organization or running a great business — and that is what the winners in this year's readers' poll are. And, not only are they great. They are the best. ■

Shane Goodman

Editor and Publisher

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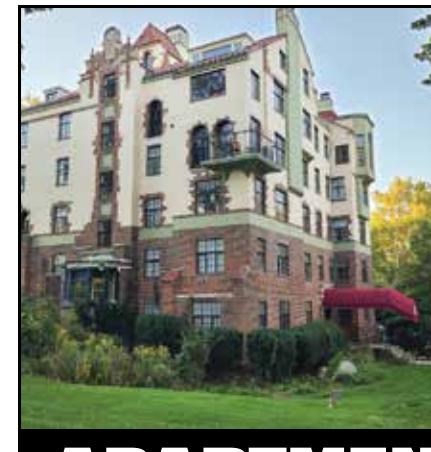


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By CITYVIEW staff

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Q. When was the first CITYVIEW Best of Des Moines poll?

A. The answer doesn't appear to be as cut and dried as one might think. We dug deep through our archives to find the answer. The oldest complete copy we could find was from 1994. The answer was not spelled out plainly, so we had to do some more searching. One helpful clue came from a Pizza Hut ad.

"For 5 years, you've called for the best... and we've delivered!!!"

That would put the poll starting in 1990, if Pizza Hut, noted local chain, as the winner of Best Delivered Pizza since the award's inception.

Another hint, in the intro to the 1993 readers' poll, it states that 1,500 ballots were received in the mail. It also stated they were adding several businesses into the Best of Des Moines Hall of Fame for winning a category three years in a row: Hy-Vee, Hull Avenue Tap, The Metz and The Tavern. But the pages containing the results and that year's Hall of Fame were missing. Onto a 1995 edition we went.

Another hint. An ad placed by another Hall of Famer, Movies To Go Entertainment Superstore, which once featured locations in Ames, Ankeny, Cedar Rapids, Centerville/Iowa City, Des Moines, Urbandale and West Des Moines, said thank you for voting them winners for seven years in a row. That would take us back to 1988. Another ad from Waterfront Seafood Market & Restaurant thanks voters for choosing them since 1988 as well.

We thought we had figured it out. Then we flipped a few more pages, and we found yet another clue. Chi-Chi's Mexican Restaurant took out a thank you ad for being selected for nine years in a row. Now, we're in 1986.

At that time, CITYVIEW was The Skywalker. Unfortunately, we did not have any copies of The Skywalker in our archives, so voting in 1985, heading into 1986, is the best we can place the first Best of Des Moines poll. Just keep that in mind the next time you see one of the many new "Best of Des Moines" plaques or awards located around town. That black and white giant BEST has been around since the mid 1980s. ■

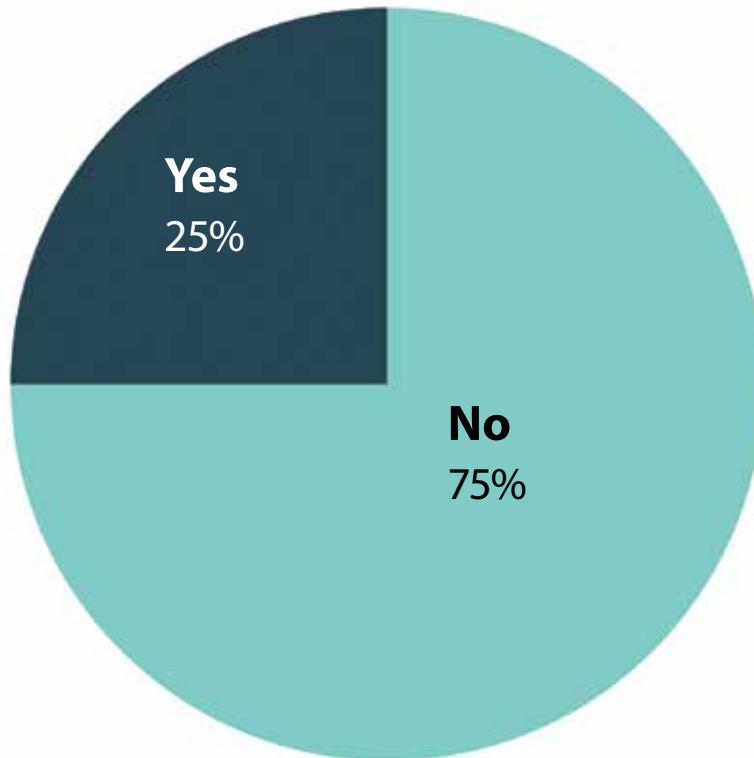
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POLL POSITION



Results from last month's poll at www.dmcityview.com

Do you run a space heater in your home?



Join the conversation!

Do you have a comment or photo you'd like to share with readers of CITYVIEW through this page? Use the hashtag #dmcityview on Facebook, Instagram or Twitter — or email editor@dmcityview.com.

RETWEETS X

(comments unedited)

@JamieBonkiewicz: These first ten years of January have been really exhausting

@dietz_meredith: my dad said the word "frogger" and i cut him off to go "i hardly know her" and he sighed big and went "just... stop. Stop it. What would it mean to frog a woman"

@Nugjokes: Love when someone at work says "you literally can't mess this up" Buddy I'm not sure you know who you're talking to

@shreyabasu003: You buy something from a company once and they make it their personal mission to make your email inbox unusable

@powerfulwizard: If i were in the matrix i would have taken the pill that just lets you go back home. Not trying to get mixed up in all of that

@tofeelhealed: everyone should deliver pizzas once in their life to see how wild some peoples lives are, the moment that door opens you never know what you're gonna see inside that house

@joeljeffrey: I hate when people accuse me of lolly gagging when I'm quite clearly dilly dallying

@ALEXFORREST: sometimes i struggle to adjust to civilian life after coming home from the movies

@dougbonearth: Hiring Manager: So, tell me about yourself. Me: I'd rather not. I really need this job.

@schiz04renic: hand sanitizer will find a cut you didn't even know you had

FACEBOOK COMMENTS



cityview magazine
(comments unedited)

CITYVIEW magazine: What will you do with your \$2,000 tariff rebate, assuming you get one?

Jesse Aldridge: Still waiting on my \$5000 DOGE rebate.

The Abandoned Iowa Project: Buy Half-Life 3.

Chris Lang: Ain't happening

Kevin Slimp: I ran into a guy who owns this bridge. I think I'll buy it from him.

Nina Finch: Add it to my DOGE rebate, and buy a piece of gum, with money at the bottom of my purse.

Dennis Frank: I have concepts.

Jeremy Bates: Give me 2 weeks to give you an answer maybe

Don McLaughlin: Buy bitcoin. It's working well for the Trump boys

Anthony Garza: I'm going to buy an imaginary bag of Cheetos.

Laura Lynn Dehnke: Put it all on red.

Ray G Lakers: A trip to a legal weed state

Adam Swihart: Flux capacitor.

Terri Mork Speirs: Try to pay for some of the stuff the tariffs raised prices on. I'm happy to help you with questions.

CITYVIEW magazine: What restaurant serves the best ranch dressing?

Lori Anderson: Hickory Park in Ames

Lynn Isley: Francie's Bar and Grill

Zach Dawson: Any full court press restaurant

Shelby Lynette Hisel: Christina McCleary

Megan Bolds Nacey: Consistently? Texas Road House, Black Bear Diner, Spaghetti Factory (pesto)

Amber Schmidt: Wing stop

Ann Smith Williams: Simon's

Sarah Perez Van Dam: The Public House & Lounge

Katie Cleereman: Chicken Coop

Barattas: Barattas

Ashley Jones: Mullets hands down!!!

Jen Bailey: The Palms Theatres & IMAX café

Jill Brown Krausman: The Landmark -bistro-!! They sell it by the bottle!!!

Club 2000: Club 2000

Cathy Murray: Eastside Eddie's

Nicole McDonough: Simon's

Melissa Hollister: Christopher's

Jane Nguyen Lawson: Francies!

Carrie Moreno: Food Depot

Maria Romeo Davis: Bevy's, three sons chicken coop, any full court press restaurant.

Kristi Weigel: Francie's!

Kristina Marie Linnane: I used to make it and still use the same recipe and the restaurant is Hessen Haus. ■

STRAY THOUGHTS

BY RANDY EVANS

Who deserves sympathy should not depend on politics

Help me understand...

Truth should be measured by evidence, not by political allegiance.

Can't we all agree on that?

With that in mind, a useful question for citizens and journalists to ask at times like this is simple: "Help me understand..."

The phrasing invites the person being questioned to explain his or her views on some matter of interest without the questioner coming across as accusatory.

Had I been in the White House press briefing room in recent weeks for one of Karoline Leavitt's Q&A's, I would have framed a question like this about the Minneapolis woman's shooting death by a federal agent:

"Help me understand why the president and his top allies have called Renee Good an agitator and domestic terrorist, whereas they have portrayed Ashli Babbitt as a really good person and said the U.S. Capitol Police officer who shot her got away with murder?"

Had I attended one of Attorney General Pam Bondi's press gatherings in recent weeks, I would have put this question to her:

"Help me understand the \$5 million settlement your lawyers reached with Ms. Babbitt's family. The government's official investigation concluded the officer acted appropriately when he shot her as she and rioters broke into the House speaker's offices at the Capitol. Does the settlement mean Renee Good's family deserves a similar settlement?"

Were I in the swarm of reporters at Homeland Security Secretary Kristi Noem's media availability in recent weeks when she announced that Good's actions were domestic terrorism and that Good deliberately "weaponized" her vehicle against one of Noem's officers, I would have asked the secretary:

"Help me understand how the government's investigation of this shooting can be trusted when you have already stated your official conclusion without equivocation only an hour or so after her death."

As America comes to grips with another controversial shooting by law enforcement officers, an uncomfortable fact of life these days: Who gets sympathy depends on politics.

Ashli Babbitt, a 35-year-old Air Force veteran and supporter of President Trump, joined a mob of hundreds of protesters who forced their way into the U.S. Capitol as members of Congress were certifying the results of the 2020 presidential election. The mob's goal was to block the tabulation.

Babbitt was shot and killed by a U.S. Capitol Police officer as she tried to climb through a broken window into the locked door leading to the House speaker's offices while members of Congress were fleeing for their safety.

President Trump later praised Babbitt and called her "a really good person." His supporters called her a patriot and termed her death an execution.

After returning to office in 2025, Trump pardoned all Capitol rioters and questioned why the Capitol Police officer was allowed to "get away with murder."

Babbitt has taken on martyr status in the past five years. The president's allies point to her death as evidence the government overreacted to events on Jan. 6, 2021, at the Capitol.

Contrast that with reaction last week from the president and administration officials after the shooting of Renee Good, 37, a military veteran's widow and mother of three. She had no criminal record and was protesting on Jan. 7 what she and her neighbors believe was an overreach by federal law enforcement officers in Minneapolis.

In the first hours after three gunshots rang out in the neighborhood, our nation's top leaders did not take what has been the customary approach by past leaders — expressing concern and empathy, urging people to remain calm and reserve judgment, and asking the public to wait for a thorough investigation to separate fact from conjecture.

Instead, the president, vice president and secretary of the Department of Homeland Security immediately reached identical conclusions: Good was engaged in domestic terrorism and weaponized her Honda Pilot against an ICE officer. The officer acted in self-defense when he shot her. Case closed.

Many of the same people who praised Babbitt portrayed Good as an agitator and violent threat to the Immigration and Customs Enforcement officer.

The disconnect between the reactions to two tragic deaths illustrates a disturbing pattern in our country. When a shooting aligns ideologically or politically with a narrative that fits in with a group's views, the need for a thorough, unfettered investigation gives way to allegiance to group think.

If Ashli Babbitt's supporters are opposed to what they see as unjust government violence, then they should be equally outraged by Renee Good's death, too. If they truly believe every shooting by law officers must be thoroughly and independently examined, they should demand that Minnesota state investigators be allowed to work alongside the FBI and not be excluded from the Good case.

Instead, we see selective outrage, with empathy being apportioned according to political usefulness. ■

Randy Evans can be reached at DMRevans2810@gmail.com.



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CIVIC SKINNY

BY CITYVIEW STAFF

'Medieval Magic' sabbatical. Good night, Captain Trang.

Each February, we review the sabbaticals (or, as stated by the Iowa Board of Regents, "professional development assignments") granted to the professors at the state's three public universities: Iowa State University, the University of Iowa, and the University of Northern Iowa. For us common folk, a sabbatical may be used to take time off of work for a lengthy vacation. For these professors, the PDAs are used to do research, develop curricula, write books and create art. And other things.

Some of the requested PDAs are fascinating, others are head-scratching, and some actually garner curiosity about what the profs might learn. For the fiscal year 2027, there were 105 total requests at a taxpayer cost of \$325,092. The bulk, \$291,161, is from the University of Iowa. ISU has only \$3,624, and UNI has \$30,307. The Board of Regents has stated in recent years that the findings and accomplishments of these PDAs have resulted in millions of dollars in grants and external funding.

Iowa State University

The Cyclones had 35 PDA recipients. Many of these were related to academic findings related to agriculture, healthcare and veterinary science. Seven were related to artificial intelligence or machine learning findings. None related to why **Matt Campbell** decided to leave for Penn State. These are some of the ones we found the most interesting.

Michael Bailey, a history professor with 22 years of service, will study "Medieval Magic: A History of Disbelief." Bailey is a professor and global expert in the history of medieval magic, witchcraft and superstition. He will study how disbelief developed in the Middle Ages, enriching the understanding of an important component of medieval culture. The results will be published in a book, sharing the same title and contributing to his teachings. He also requested \$270,000 in external funding to support this assignment.

History Professor **Brian Behnken**, with 16 years of service, will write the first draft of "The Rise and Fall of Blockbuster Video." The book will detail the history of the once popular video lending service and Behnken says it will fill a much-needed gap in modern American business history.

The PDA is expected to lead to a new Iowa State course chronicling popular businesses that have failed.

Tao Wang, an associate professor of history with 11 years of service, will complete a book, "The Hawkeye State and The Middle Kingdom: A History of Relations Between Iowa and China." He says the work will result in peer-reviewed journal articles, public presentations, exhibitions, and enhancements for ISU courses, including a new course on the history between Iowa and China.

University of Iowa

The Hawkeyes had, by far, the most requests, which has been common for them over the last few years. For 2027, UI had 67 requests ranging from serious work in medical fields of all sorts to ecology in river ecosystems and religious studies. There were also some unique topics.

Paul Dilley, associate professor of liberal arts and sciences-religious studies with 15 years of service will work on "The First Edition and Translation of the Life of Eupraxia: The Therapeutics of Laughter in Ancient Monasticism." Dilley brings some scientific findings to the age-old quote "laughter is the best medicine." Eupraxia, a Greek saint in fifth-century Egypt, allegedly provides the best evidence for

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a positive assessment of laughter and humor within early Christianity. Dilley will use the resulting digital edition in multiple courses at UI.

Associate professor of liberal arts and sciences-social work, **Man Guo**, with 15 years of service, will research "Psychological Well-being in Older Adults: Exploring the Impact of Race/Ethnicity and Immigration Status." The U.S. population is growing older and more diverse. Guo will use data from the Health and Retirement, the largest national study on older Americans, to examine how race, ethnicity and immigration background shape psychological well-being in aging populations. Guo says the research will find key challenges, resources and resilience factors that influence mental health across different groups of older adults. The expected outcome is to publish multiple journal articles and develop new instructional materials for courses.

Marc Linder, a law professor with 34 years of experience, will write the third volume of work relating to cigarettes. "A History of the Regulation of Cigarettes and Smoking Since the 19th Century. Volume 3: The Merchants of Fire Death." Much is known about the health issues caused by smoking to the smoker and those surrounded by it, but this book looks at the history and death toll caused by deaths and injuries in cigarette-caused fires. It says that the third volume of the 10,000-page work unearths and presents in detail the full sweep of this public safety catastrophe from rural national forests to urban workplaces.

University of Northern Iowa

The Panthers only have three PDAs in the 2027 report. Without our judgment on which ones are the most interesting, here are all three.

Todd Bohenkamp, associate professor of communication sciences and disorders with 20 years of service, will work on "Exercise-Induced Laryngeal Obstruction (EILO): Investigating Prevalence, Comorbidities, and Barriers to Diagnosis and Care." EILO is an upper airway disorder that can result in airflow obstruction in response to irritants or physical exertion and exercise. EILO has been reported as high as 30% in athletes in cold weather and most commonly affects adolescents and young adults, especially females, and is often misdiagnosed as asthma. This can result in ineffective treatments and unnecessary use of medicines. The project will examine the health impacts of EILO among student athletes at UNI and Auburn University and could eventually serve to benefit athletes across Iowa.

Aleksandar Poleksic, a computer science professor with 20 years of service, will work on a project titled "Advancing SARDS Research Through Academia-Industry Partnership." Sudden Acquired Retinal Degeneration Syndrome (SARDS) is a rare eye condition in dogs that causes sudden, irreversible blindness. Mainly affecting middle-aged dogs, it occurs within weeks or sometimes days. This is allegedly the first effort to develop and validate machine learning models to understand SARDS. Poleksic will partner with the Animal Eye Consultants of Iowa in Hiawatha to provide access to a database of canine medical records.

Professor of languages and literatures with 17 years of service, **Jeremy Schraffenberger**, will write a novel called "The Spiritualists," which is based on the true story of two historical figures from 19th-century Boston: Alonzo Newton and Sarah Newton. Alonzo was a spiritualist journalist and lecturer, and Sarah was a medium who claimed to communicate with the dead. The book is written from the perspective of their now elderly daughter, Ada Trowbridge, who is visited by the ghost of her dead father. ...

George Formaro has been closing the Kitchen Insider radio show each Saturday morning on KFMG with his take on Jimmy Durante's legendary close. Skinny found out what "And good night to you, Captain Trang, wherever you are" is all about.

"Captain Trang" is Des Moines restaurateur **Trang Pham**, owner of Egg Roll Ladies in the Equitable Building. She is currently deployed with her Iowa Army National Guard troops to the Middle East. ...

Greenwood Lounge, the Ingersoll dive bar with extraordinary free music six nights a week, has new management. In "the Wood" tradition of first names only, **Shelleigh** and **Lisa** are managing, and **Bobby** and **Bill** are still running the bar like Paul, George and Jimmy before them. The roof has been repaired and is guaranteed for 20 years, reversing a long pattern of serious leaks every time it rained more than half an inch. There is an ice machine for the first time in five years, and the soda gun is working for the first time in five months. The liquor shelves have been upgraded considerably. The free music policy and lineup remain the same. ■

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POLITICAL MERCURY

BY DOUGLAS BURNS

Having a kid at 15 and more straight talk from 'The AOC of Iowa'

Congressional candidate Stephanie Steiner, who supports women's reproductive rights, says she didn't have an internal struggle with what to do as a teenager with an unexpected pregnancy.

Early into the first speech I heard her give, Stephanie Steiner said she had a child at age 15.

It's defining in many ways for Steiner, an Iowa Democratic congressional candidate who would go on to have six more kids, battle her way through a truant and self-described wayward childhood in Alabama and Iowa to success as a caregiver — a neonatal nurse and, first and always, a mother who in a recent interview was reached while helping one of her kids change a tire on a remote rural road in northwest Iowa near her home in Sutherland. On another call, she was beside a sick kid with a stubborn stomach problem. That daughter is fine now.

"My life has been spent taking care of people. That's what I do," Steiner said. "And, I love it."

One of the rules of engagement in contemporary American cultural discussion involving identity is this: if you are it, you can say it — or at least talk about it.

Steiner and I are not the same, but we are both formed from one of the more challenging decisions a human being can make: what to do with an unwanted child?

I'm adopted, the product of a teenage mother who made a different decision than Steiner. She gave me up. I'm at once thankful and bitter for it, and I was up front with Steiner, telling her just that when I talked to her about her frame of mind when she learned of her own pregnancy early in her teen years.

"I was 15 when I had my first kid," Steiner said in an interview. "You just do it. You just do it."

Steiner, now 44, would have four kids by the time she was 21. Seven total biologically. And three more in step fashion through her second marriage to Mark Steiner Sr., a welding supervisor, who, along with Stephanie, manages a 10-acre goat farm in O'Brien County near the South Dakota border.

A candidate who supports women's reproductive rights, Steiner didn't have an internal struggle with what to do herself — at age 15 — with an unexpected pregnancy.

Abortion was not an option, she said.

"When I had my first child at 15, I never considered it," she said.

"I'm personally pro-life," Steiner said. "I chose not to have an abortion. I'm glad I had that choice. And, I support women that had abortions as well because it is personal to them."

She added, "It's like this: I love my kids. And that was the choice I made. I think everybody deserves to make their own choice. I'm not saying it was the easiest thing, but it has been very rewarding."

Steiner spoke at an Iowa event with one of her political heroes, U.S. Sen. Bernie Sanders of Vermont, shortly after announcing her campaign in the state's sweeping 4th Congressional District. For her part, Steiner didn't demure when I suggested she might very well be "The AOC of Iowa" — a reference to the straight-talking Congresswoman Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez of New York who has a rare and authentic connectivity with working people, one earned through shifts as a bartender and the relatability of making a living through sweaty routines.

Is Stephanie Steiner "The AOC of Iowa?"

"That's my hope, yeah," Steiner said. "I know what it means to be an everyday Iowan. I lived it. It is my lived experience. I share these lived experiences."

A native of Athens, Alabama, who speaks with a decided Southern lilt and sports tattoos and peppers her speech with anecdotes of a hardscrabble upbringing, a life of full houses of kids and frugal cupboards, Steiner can summon the earned working-class grievances of economically dislocated, dismissed MAGA voters. She would not look out of place at any of the Trump rallies I have covered over the last decade.

But, where others react with cruelty and self-interest, Steiner, who has lived in Iowa



Congressional candidate Stephanie Steiner following a speech on Labor Day in Sioux City. Photo By Douglas Burns



Congresswoman Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez of New York campaigns for then-presidential candidate Bernie Sanders in Council Bluffs during the 2020 Iowa caucuses. Photo By Douglas Burns

since 1996, said she reaches for kindness and connection.

"I'm a person that looks at things and says, 'How do we make this better?'" Steiner said. "A lot of people, they have a lot of struggles, they have a lot of hardships, and they get bitter and they get angry, and I always took those as opportunities to grow."

Steiner supports Medicare for all, "non-negotiable" medical privacy, a repeal of the so-called Big, Beautiful Bill and policies she says will put farmers and Iowa's environment over corporate interests and greed.

She is thinking a lot about artificial intelligence these days, about how unregulated technological advances will steal American jobs, from factories to law firms to perhaps even the delivery rooms she inhabited as a women's health nurse. No one is safe from the AI job-killing monster, she said.

"I hear it everywhere," Steiner said.

"It's going to take people's jobs away," she said.

She gets furious seeing self-check-outs at grocery and convenience stores.

"Yes, yes, that's some of the problem," she said. "It is disconnect. It is all of this Internet and AI. It is pulling people apart. People rely on that instead of human connections. All of this stuff, it goes between people."

Steiner said she won't back down on civil rights, or from defending marginalized demographics of Iowans from bullying. She has lived experience here, too, as Steiner has three daughters in the LGBTQ+ community — trans, lesbian and bisexual daughters.

"Everybody should have the same civil rights. These are absolute necessities," Steiner said. "To say 'you are only worthy if you believe the way I do' — that just desecrates our Constitution, our Declaration of Independence. That is why we fled a tyrant king."

There are two other announced candidates in Iowa's 4th District Democratic congressional primary — Dave Dawson of Lawton, a prosecutor in the Woodbury County Attorney's Office and a former state legislator, and Ashley WolfTornabane of Storm Lake, who has experience as a public school instructional assistant. Republicans have a full primary field as U.S. Rep. Randy Feenstra, R-Hull, is running for governor. ■

Douglas Burns of Carroll is fourth-generation journalist and founder of Mercury Boost, a marketing and public relations company.





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COMING UP

SUBMIT ENTRIES AND PHOTOS TO EDITOR@DMCITYVIEW.COM

NOTE: The following events and attractions are subject to cancellation or changes. Before attending, be sure to check with each event individually to verify details.

THINGS TO DO



Previous performance at xBk Live. Jameson Malone by Joelle Blanchard of Flgment Art Photo

XBK LIVE

1159 24th St., Des Moines

www.xbklive.com

- Feb. 6: Naughty Nerds Cabaret presents: Nerdstravaganza at 7 p.m.
- Feb. 7: Cupid's Lounge at 7:30 p.m.
- Feb. 12: Elise Trouw presents: The Diary of Elon Lust Tour at 7 p.m.
- Feb. 13: The Last Revel at 7 p.m.
- Feb. 15: SosMula at 6 p.m.
- Feb. 20: Clay Street Unite and Jason Scott & The High Heat at 7 p.m.
- Feb. 21: Jinnouchi Power - Album Release at 6 p.m.
- Feb. 24: Camping in Alaska at 6 p.m.
- Feb. 25: Wheel at 7 p.m.
- Feb. 28: K-Winterland K-POP Dance Party at 7:30 p.m.

ANDERSON GALLERY

Harmon Fine Arts Center,
1310 25th St., Des Moines
www.andersongallery.wp.drake.edu

Upcoming exhibits

- Feb. 5 to March 13: "Transformative Expressions: Richard Black International Juried Print Exhibition"

TALLGRASS THEATRE COMPANY

2019 Grand Ave., Suite 100,
West Des Moines

www.tallgrasstheatre.org

- Feb. 13 to March 1: "Disenchanted!"



Photo by Jasey Michelle, Picture Iowa

IOWA WOLVES

Casey's Center, 233 Center St., Des Moines
www.iowa.gleague.nba.com

Home games:

- Feb. 7 at 6:30 p.m. vs. Maine Celtics (Boston Celtics) | Basketball for All
- Feb. 10 at 10:30 a.m. vs. Austin Spurs (San Antonio Spurs) | Education Day
- Feb. 11 at 6:30 p.m. vs. Austin Spurs
- Feb. 22 at 3 p.m. vs. Rio Grande Valley Vipers | State Fair Day / State Fair-inspired Jersey
- Feb. 27 at 6:30 p.m. vs. Mexico City Capitanes | Get Lucky

DES MOINES BUCCANEERS

MidAmerican Energy RecPlex,
6500 Grand Ave., West Des Moines
www.bucshockey.com

Home games:

- Feb. 6 vs. Omaha Lancers at 7:05 p.m.
- Feb. 13 vs. Cedar Rapids RoughRiders at 7:05 p.m. | Des Moines Barkaneers
- Feb. 27 vs. Omaha Lancers at 7:05 p.m.
- Feb. 28 vs. Sioux Falls Stampede at 7:05 p.m. | Guns N Hoses

DES MOINES HOME AND GARDEN SHOW

Des Moines Home and Garden Show. Iowa Events Center, 730 Third St., Des Moines
www.iowaeventscenter.com

Feb. 12-15

Craig Conover from Bravo's hit show "Southern Charm" makes an appearance. There will also be feature gardens to get ideas and tips from top local landscapers, a children's entrepreneur market for young business owners, made in Iowa market, home project experts and plenty more.

2026 WINTER BLUES FEST

Des Moines Marriott Downtown,
700 Grand Ave., Des Moines
www.cibs.org

Feb. 13-14

Two nights, 20 acts and five stages of blues. A full-service restaurant plus drinks and concessions available across all three festival floors. The Winter Blues fest has grown from a small one-night showcase to a two-night event featuring local, regional and international talents.

COMING UP

SUBMIT ENTRIES AND PHOTOS TO EDITOR@DMCITYVIEW.COM



Photo by Tim Garland, courtesy of the Iowa Wild

DRAKE BASKETBALL

Knapp Center
2601 Forest Ave., Des Moines
www.godrakebulldogs.com

Men's home games

- Feb. 9 vs. Valparaiso
- Feb. 12 vs. UIC
- Feb. 18 vs. Southern Illinois

Women's home games

- Feb. 5 vs. Belmont
- Feb. 14 vs. Indiana State
- Feb. 19 vs. Valparaiso
- Feb. 22 vs. UIC



Photo courtesy of Drake University



Photo courtesy of Iowa Beef Expo

IOWA BEEF EXPO

Iowa State Fairgrounds,
3000 E. Grand Ave., Des Moines
www.iowastatefairgrounds.org
Feb. 14-22

The Iowa Beef Expo celebrates 50 years this year. Throughout the weekend at the fairgrounds, there will be shows, parades, sales and much more.

THE 100TH YEAR TOUR HARLEM GLOBETROTTERS

Casey's Center, 223 Center St., Des Moines
www.iowaeventscenter.com

Feb. 12

The Harlem Globetrotters have captivated audiences for 100 years thanks to their unique brand of basketball. You won't find this kind of hoops anywhere else. ■

IOWA WILD

Casey's Center
233 Center St., Des Moines
www.iowawild.com

Home games:

- Feb. 13 vs. Springfield Thunderbirds at 7 p.m. | Women In Sports Night
- Feb. 14 vs. Springfield Thunderbirds at 6 p.m. | Pink In The Rink
- Feb. 24 vs. Milwaukee Admirals at 7 p.m.

IOWA AG EXPO

Iowa Events Center,
730 Third St., Des Moines
www.iowaagexpo.com

Feb. 3-5

The Iowa Ag Expo takes over the Casey's Center with the biggest names and newest innovations in agriculture. There will be more than 700 exhibitors covering 7.25 acres of space. The Iowa Ag Expo is the third-largest indoor agricultural show in the country.

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CITYVIEW'S

BUSINESS JOURNAL



Mixing **FAMILY** and **BUSINESS**

The challenges and realities in operating family-owned companies

By Lindsey Giardino

Family businesses often blur the line between work and home, where dinner-table conversations double as strategy sessions and legacy weighs as much as the bottom line. For these local business leaders, working with family isn't just a career path; it's a daily challenge and a source of deep pride.

After Bob Jones and Richard Jones retired, Christy Jones sold R Jones Collision 1 to Caliber Collision.



Growing up in hospitality

Pritesh Patel's family has owned and operated hotels for more than 25 years. Most recently, they have brought a new concept to the industry.

Hotel Pommier is the family's independent hotel brand, beginning with the renovation and conversion of the Apple Tree Inn in Indianola. The brand grew when the family converted the Super 8 in Chariton into Hotel Pommier Chariton.

Like many small-business owners, Patel's role has evolved over time — from covering front desk shifts and laundry to setting high-level strategy and obsessing over the guest experience.

"In a family-run hotel, you don't really 'join' the business as much as you grow up within it," he shares. "My early involvement was helping parents fold towels, clean rooms and even do payroll. I had always helped behind the scenes throughout college in areas my parents couldn't outwork, like technology."

After college, Patel spent his early career as a consultant, traveling across the nation and staying at dozens of hotels. Ultimately, he decided to return to the family business after recognizing a unique opportunity to apply what he had learned from modern, big-city properties to a local setting.

"I wanted to prove that you don't have to be in a major metro area to offer a sophisticated, tech-forward and design-conscious guest experience," he says.

With Hotel Pommier, he's done just that. Still, as with many family businesses, work doesn't always stay at work — it often follows him home.

"Great way to annoy the heck out of family that could care less about what towels we are going to buy," Patel jokes.

Despite the challenges, working in the family business remains a point of pride. Patel credits his parents' years of hard work and sacrifice as the foundation that made Hotel Pommier possible.

"Taking an existing property and breathing new life into it as an independent brand versus a corporate chain was a risk," he says. "But, seeing the community and guest support has been incredibly rewarding. I hope we turn each of our hotels from another place to sleep into a point of local pride."

The family recently acquired a third Hotel Pommier location in Winterset and is eager to get it up and running.

"Madison County has so many local gems, and we hope our hotel earns its place as a small part of what makes the community so special," Patel says.



Pritesh Patel's family has owned and operated hotels for more than 25 years.

Continuing a legacy

For Christy Jones, there was never a time when she wasn't surrounded by her family business.

R Jones Auto Body was founded in 1971 by her father, Bob, and his business partner. Over the years — and through several name changes — the business became R Jones Collision 1, a premier collision repair facility on Merle Hay Road in Urbandale.

It was truly a family-run operation. After buying out his partner, Jones' father, who ran production, brought in his brother Richard as a body technician. Jones' mother, Ann, joined the business in the mid-1980s, handling accounting while Jones and her siblings were in school full time, keeping every part of the operation within the family.

Yet, Jones says she never felt pressured to join the business. She had the freedom to choose her own path, so she earned a teaching degree and spent a year in the classroom before realizing it wasn't her calling.

That realization led her to North Carolina, where she gave herself space to figure out her next chapter.

"Life, however, had other plans, and when my mom became ill, coming home to support both my family and the business felt like the right thing to do," Jones shares.

In 2015, Bob and Richard retired, and Jones purchased the business. Six years later, she sold it to Caliber Collision, though her work today still reflects her family legacy.

"I now work as a business coach, helping other family-owned and small businesses navigate growth,

succession and sustainability — many of the same challenges I experienced firsthand," Jones explains.

When it comes to working with family, Jones says there is rarely a clear separation between business and personal life.

"When your coworkers are also your dad and your uncle, the business naturally becomes a topic of conversation at family dinners, holidays and gatherings," she says. "The lines between personal and professional life blur quickly, and learning when to talk business — and when not to — is one of the biggest challenges of working in a family-run company."

On the flip side, Jones says working with family taught her patience and compromise.

"When multiple family members are involved, everyone brings strong opinions, history and emotional investment to the table," she says. "You learn quickly that you won't win every battle, and that's OK. Learning how to listen, stay patient and find middle ground is critical, not just for the business, but for preserving relationships."

Ultimately, Jones is proud of what her family built together.

"Our business served customers with integrity and supported our community for decades," she says. "Most of all, I'm proud that we truly were better together. Each of us brought different strengths to the business, and that combination is what made it successful."

Those lessons continue to shape Jones' life today.

"It taught me that businesses are about more than



P&M Apparel is a third-generation custom apparel and branding company in Polk City.

numbers — they're about people," she says. "That experience continues to influence the work I do today, helping other business owners build strong teams, healthy cultures and sustainable legacies of their own."

Running a business with a sibling

Megan Griffith never intended to join the family business — P&M Apparel, a third-generation, family and woman-owned custom apparel and branding company in Polk City founded in 1987.

"I wanted to be a big shot graphic designer and move somewhere like New York and work at a magazine," Griffith says. "I realized pretty quickly that the sacrifices you have to make to get in those big shot positions weren't sacrifices I wanted to make. So, when my mom needed a designer, we went into it as a temporary solution, and I came to appreciate the freedom to make creative choices, and the impact we can make in the community."

P&M Apparel, named for Griffith's grandparents, Phyllis and Melvin, offers custom screen printing, embroidery, promotional products and more. The shop was taken over by Griffith's mom when Griffith was a teenager. About two and a half years ago, Griffith and her brother Ryan assumed ownership.

Griffith manages art and day-to-day operations, while Ryan oversees web work and larger strategic initiatives.

"Both Ryan and I kind of grew up in the business: first visiting our grandparents and playing around in

their shop when we were little, spending days as a shop kid hanging around if we were sick or had the day off from school, to then jumping in and helping with production as we got older," Griffith shares. "I finally joined full time in 2012 and have been here ever since."

One reality she has learned is that it is impossible to completely separate work from life in a family business.

"At a normal job, you punch a clock and go home, celebrate the holidays with your family, spend the weekend not thinking about work," she says. "But working with family, I leave work and I'm texting my brother ideas within a couple hours, or I'm bringing my kids to work, or we celebrate holidays with my mom and start talking shop within a few minutes. My life is woven right into my job and vice versa."

Griffith also believes family dynamics shape her leadership style as an employer.

"Prioritizing the person over the action, considering love languages and how to best understand them and communicate in a way they will understand, all play pivotal roles as an employer," she says. "My mom always put family before business if there was a disagreement or emergency, and we treat our staff the same way."

As a third-generation owner, Griffith feels the weight — and pride — of legacy. When her grandparents started the business, their goal was to earn \$300 a week. Today, P&M Apparel operates out of a large facility with a dedicated staff and a strong foundation of community involvement.



Megan Griffith and her brother, Ryan, assumed ownership of their family business, P&M Apparel.

"At a normal job, you punch a clock and go home, celebrate the holidays with your family, spend the weekend not thinking about work.

But working with family, I leave work and I'm texting my brother ideas within a couple hours, or I'm bringing my kids to work, or we celebrate holidays with my mom and start talking shop within a few minutes. My life is woven right into my job and vice versa."

— Megan Griffith

"We are responsible for putting food on the tables of every person in our company, and that's not something Ryan or I take lightly," Griffith says. "Our clients are walking into our building with the things they're most passionate about in all the world, and it's our responsibility to be passionate about it, too, so we can deliver them the exact products they need to tell their story. We are the picture of a small business: we're local people, coming together to serve the local community in a way you can't receive from big business. And I'm incredibly proud of what we've built and the legacy we've built on." ■



Cyd's Catering

We are incredibly grateful for the continued support of our community. Being welcomed into homes, offices, and local gatherings year after year is something we never take for granted. It's an honor to serve the people who support us, and we're proud to continue catering meaningful moments - both big and small! We look forward to many more seasons of sharing great food and heartfelt hospitality with the community that makes it all possible.

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COMMERCIAL REAL ESTATE

COMMERCIAL REAL ESTATE TRANSACTIONS IN POLK COUNTY FROM AUG. 19, 2025, TO SEPT. 12, 2025

3721 INDIANOLA AVE., DES MOINES
 SALE DATE: 2025-08-19
 SALE PRICE: \$2,747,000
 SELLER: ELSIE RAE HOLDINGS LLC
 BUYER: IOWA SHELLY ROSE LLC
 ACRES: 1.571
 SQUARE FEET: 33,768

704 13TH ST., WEST DES MOINES
 SALE DATE: 2025-08-19
 SALE PRICE: \$5,800,000
 SELLER: SWIFT PROPERTIES LLC
 BUYER: WDM MEADOWS LLC
 ACRES: 2.815
 SQUARE FEET: 63,516

NO ADDRESS LISTED
 SALE DATE: 2025-08-19
 SALE PRICE: \$5,100
 SELLER: EJAA LLC
 BUYER: CITY OF ANKENY
 ACRES: 0.008
 SQUARE FEET: 0

920 MORGAN ST., DES MOINES
 SALE DATE: 2025-08-20
 SALE PRICE: \$4,400,000
 SELLER: 920 MORGAN STREET LLC
 BUYER: ASTERISK REALTY INC
 ACRES: 4.683
 SQUARE FEET: 72,000

3218 S.W. NINTH ST., DES MOINES
 SALE DATE: 2025-08-20
 SALE PRICE: \$1,720,000
 SELLER: TURSI LC
 BUYER: PARK AVENUE PLAZA LLC
 ACRES: 1.628
 SQUARE FEET: 27,638

NO ADDRESS LISTED: 2025-08-20
 SALE PRICE: \$19,500
 SELLER: ST ANNE'S BY THE FIELDS
 EPISCOPAL CHURCH OF ANKENY
 BUYER: CITY OF ANKENY
 ACRES: 0.060
 SQUARE FEET: 0

2203 E. GRAND AVE., DES MOINES
 SALE DATE: 2025-08-21
 SALE PRICE: \$90,000
 SELLER: NIXON, LAWRENCE
 BUYER: C&Z PROPERTIES LLC
 ACRES: 0.133
 SQUARE FEET: 4,044

NO ADDRESS LISTED
 SALE DATE: 2025-08-21
 SALE PRICE: \$121,750
 SELLER: CATHOLIC HEALTH
 INITIATIVES-IA CORP
 BUYER: CHILDSERVE HABILITATION
 CENTER INC
 ACRES: 0.652
 SQUARE FEET: 3,780

NO ADDRESS LISTED
 SALE DATE: 2025-08-25
 SALE PRICE: \$2,600,000
 SELLER: USA
 BUYER: 123 E WALNUT LLC
 ACRES: 1.631
 SQUARE FEET: 66,765

413 S.W. CHERRY ST., ANKENY
 SALE DATE: 2025-08-25
 SALE PRICE: \$615,000
 SELLER: KNOX, PAMELA M
 BUYER: MURPHY ENTERPRISES LLC
 ACRES: 1.300
 SQUARE FEET: 10,937

4150 S.E. DELAWARE AVE., ANKENY
 SALE DATE: 2025-08-25
 SALE PRICE: \$40,000,000
 SELLER: PERISHABLE DISTRIBUTORS
 OF IOWA LTD
 BUYER: JBS PREPARED FOODS INC
 ACRES: 18.904
 SQUARE FEET: 198,454

3820 GRAND AVE., DES MOINES
 SALE DATE: 2025-08-26
 SALE PRICE: \$525,000
 SELLER: J&M INVESTMENTS
 BUYER: 3820 GRAND AVE LLC
 ACRES: 0.487
 SQUARE FEET: 4,133

106 SECOND ST. N.W., MITCHELLVILLE
 SALE DATE: 2025-08-26
 SALE PRICE: \$535,000
 SELLER: R&J PROPERTY LLC
 BUYER: 106 2ND ST NW LLC
 ACRES: 0.417
 SQUARE FEET: 6,407

3610 SIXTH AVE., DES MOINES
 SALE DATE: 2025-08-27
 SALE PRICE: \$596,000
 SELLER: FW REHAB LLC
 BUYER: ANDERSEN REAL ESTATE LLC
 ACRES: 0.202
 SQUARE FEET: 11,420

1120 NINTH ST. N.E., ALTOONA
 SALE DATE: 2025-08-27
 SALE PRICE: \$280,000
 SELLER: MEADOWLAND II LLC
 BUYER: SLP2 PROPERTIES LLC
 ACRES: 2.884
 SQUARE FEET: 0

622 35TH ST., DES MOINES
 SALE DATE: 2025-08-27
 SALE PRICE: \$100
 SELLER: WALGREEN COMPANY
 BUYER: EXCLUDED PROPERTY
 PROPCO LLC
 ACRES: 0.179
 SQUARE FEET: 0

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 9 a.m. to 3 p.m.
 PHC Medical Dental Clinic
 101 Iowa Ave., W, #102
 Marshalltown, IA

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NO ADDRESS LISTED

SALE DATE: 2025-08-27
 SALE PRICE: \$5,000
 SELLER: ALLEN M & M PROPERTIES LLC
 BUYER: CITY OF ANKENY
 ACRES: 0.008
 SQUARE FEET: 0

1532 OHIO ST., DES MOINES

SALE DATE: 2025-08-28
 SALE PRICE: \$644,900
 SELLER: AVAILABLE MATERIAL HANDLING LLC
 BUYER: THE OHIO STREET LLC
 ACRES: 0.448
 SQUARE FEET: 6,630

2925 SECOND AVE., DES MOINES

SALE DATE: 2025-08-29
 SALE PRICE: \$200,000
 SELLER: REHAN FAMILY TRUST
 BUYER: OAK FLAIR LLC
 ACRES: 0.344
 SQUARE FEET: 4,736

203 N.E. BEAVERBROOKE BLVD., GRIMES

SALE DATE: 2025-09-04
 SALE PRICE: \$810,000
 SELLER: PJC FAMILY TRUST
 BUYER: KTJ 439 LLC
 ACRES: 5.116
 SQUARE FEET: 0

601 S.W. ORALABOR ROAD, ANKENY

SALE DATE: 2025-09-04
 SALE PRICE: \$1,600,000
 SELLER: SNYDER DEVELOPMENT LLC
 BUYER: CASEY'S MARKETING COMPANY
 ACRES: 1.879

2701 ONTHANK DRIVE, DES MOINES

SALE DATE: 2025-09-05
 SALE PRICE: \$7,964,902
 SELLER: PDM SLB LLC
 BUYER: TENET EQUITY FUNDING SPE IV LLC
 ACRES: 2.975
 SQUARE FEET: 97,053

2701 ONTHANK DRIVE, DES MOINES

SALE DATE: 2025-09-05
 SALE PRICE: \$3,429,783
 SELLER: PAST PROPERTIES II LLC
 BUYER: PDM SLB LLC
 ACRES: 2.367
 SQUARE FEET: 81,808

2730 SIXTH AVE., DES MOINES

SALE DATE: 2025-09-05
 SALE PRICE: \$955,070
 SELLER: 6TH AVENUE PROPERTIES LC
 BUYER: PDM SLB LLC
 ACRES: 0.608
 SQUARE FEET: 15,245

4001 INGERSOLL AVE., DES MOINES

SALE DATE: 2025-09-05
 SALE PRICE: \$806,000
 SELLER: 111 MAPLE LLC
 BUYER: BLOCK 39 LLC
 ACRES: 0.324
 SQUARE FEET: 2,186

8365 UNIVERSITY BLVD., CLIVE

SALE DATE: 2025-09-05
 SALE PRICE: \$255,000
 SELLER: JEM II TRUST
 BUYER: A&A UNIVERSITY CORP
 ACRES: 0.396
 SQUARE FEET: 3,600

5330 N.W. BEAVER DRIVE, JOHNSTON

SALE DATE: 2025-09-05
 SALE PRICE: \$550,000
 SELLER: DEPHILLIPS, LEONARD C
 BUYER: NEW EDGE AUTOMOTIVE & DETAILING LLC
 ACRES: 0.658
 SQUARE FEET: 4,860

2419 COTTAGE GROVE AVE., DES MOINES

SALE DATE: 2025-09-08
 SALE PRICE: \$630,000
 SELLER: HARRELL WAGNER, JANE TUCKER
 BUYER: NIA HOLDINGS LLC
 ACRES: 0.148
 SQUARE FEET: 8,631

4200 S.E. CAPITOL CIRCLE, GRIMES

SALE DATE: 2025-09-09
 SALE PRICE: \$1,085,000
 SELLER: TERRY A ORR REVOCABLE FAMILY TRUST
 BUYER: GOLDMAN PROPERTIES LLC
 ACRES: 2.160
 SQUARE FEET: 12,000

1889 S.E. MIEHE DRIVE, GRIMES

SALE DATE: 2025-09-10
 SALE PRICE: \$3,000,000
 SELLER: 19MIEHE LLC
 BUYER: ELSIE RAE HOLDINGS LLC
 ACRES: 2.522
 SQUARE FEET: 42,446

NO ADDRESS LISTED

SALE DATE: 2025-09-10
 SALE PRICE: \$10,200
 SELLER: PTL HOLDINGS LLC
 BUYER: CITY OF ANKENY
 ACRES: 0.016
 SQUARE FEET: 0

3610 FIFTH AVE., DES MOINES

SALE DATE: 2025-09-11
 SALE PRICE: \$100,000
 SELLER: INVEST DSM INC
 BUYER: HIGHLAND PARK FLATS LLC
 ACRES: 0.297
 SQUARE FEET: 0

2437 E. WALNUT ST., DES MOINES

SALE DATE: 2025-09-11
 SALE PRICE: \$285,000
 SELLER: MCCLAFLIN FAMILY TRUST
 BUYER: PP&LP PROPERTIES LLC
 ACRES: 0.253
 SQUARE FEET: 2,041

8600 NORTHPARK DRIVE, URBANDALE

SALE DATE: 2025-09-11
 SALE PRICE: \$67,349
 SELLER: FISCHER, WILLIAM V
 BUYER: FRANK STEINBACH JR REVOCABLE TRUST
 ACRES: 4.520
 SQUARE FEET: 95,039

8701 DOUGLAS AVE., URBANDALE

SALE DATE: 2025-09-11
 SALE PRICE: \$19,474,435
 SELLER: HY-VEE INC
 BUYER: HDC HV SPE LLC
 ACRES: 12.820
 SQUARE FEET: 94,467

206 SIXTH AVE., DES MOINES

SALE DATE: 2025-09-12
 SALE PRICE: \$31,600,000
 SELLER: 206 6TH AVENUE LLC
 BUYER: PGSAH DES MOINES LLC
 ACRES: 0.404
 SQUARE FEET: 97,135 ■

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Paul Bouwers, Jason Uhlenhake, Ben Buenzow, Tyler Fromm, Chad Lyons, Taylor Carey. Not pictured: Faith Dorn-Spicer, Steve Plym

Send information on new hires, promotions, expansions, openings and other business news to editor@dmcityview.com.

Boelman named senior VP and commercial lending officer at First National Bank in Ankeny

First National Bank announced the appointment of Troy Boelman as senior vice president and commercial lending officer serving the Ankeny market. Boelman brings extensive experience in commercial banking and a proven track record in business development, reinforcing First National Bank's commitment to growth in Ankeny and the greater Des Moines Metro area.

Spieker promoted to senior counsel at MVS

McKee, Voorhees & Sease, PLC (MVS) announced the promotion of Julie L. Spieker to senior counsel, recognizing her exceptional legal expertise and valuable contributions to the firm's patent practice.

Since joining MVS, Spieker has distinguished herself as a highly skilled intellectual property attorney, providing strategic patent counseling and prosecution services across a diverse array of technical fields. Spieker's combination of technical and legal training, anchored by a Bachelor of Science in chemical engineering and extensive experience in semiconductor R&D prior to law school, allows her to adeptly navigate complex patent landscapes and provide clients with tailored, technically informed IP strategies.



Julie Spieker

Schreurs to retire from Strategic America

Strategic America (SA) announced that CEO & President John Schreurs will retire in 2026 following the appointment of his successor. Schreurs' retirement will conclude a seven-year tenure as chief executive and a 42-year career with the integrated marketing and communications firm headquartered in West Des Moines. Schreurs joined SA a few years after its founding in Waterloo in 1983 and became CEO in 2018. During his leadership, he guided the organization's growth into an employee-owned firm of more than 100 associates, serving a diverse portfolio of clients, from national brands to local nonprofits.



John Schreurs

Miller and Jennett promoted at First Interstate Bank

First Interstate announced the promotion of two bankers into key leadership roles for the bank. Jim Miller has been with First Interstate for more than

three years, previously serving as market president for the Cedar Valley. John Jennett has been with First Interstate for 14 years, previously serving as market president for North Central Iowa.



John Jennett



Jim Miller

Smith steps into administrator role at DMU Clinic

Des Moines University Clinic has welcomed Angela Smith, MBA, as its new chief clinical administrative officer, marking a significant transition for the university's health care operations. Smith brings decades of experience in clinical practice and senior operational leadership. She steps into the role with a clear mission to foster a high-performing, patient-centered environment that bridges the gap between expert medical care and the training of future health professionals.



Angela Smith

Halbach appointed as vice president for mission and campus culture at Mercy College of Health Sciences

Mercy College of Health Sciences has appointed Deacon Matthew Halbach, PhD, as vice president for mission and campus culture. Dr. Halbach will provide executive leadership for campus ministry, mission integration, and student affairs, advancing initiatives that foster belonging, human flourishing, and holistic well-being across the college community.



Matthew Halbach

Dr. Halbach brings more than 15 years of executive leadership experience in Catholic education, evangelization, and organizational management. His career has focused on strengthening mission-driven institutions through strategic leadership, formation, and accompaniment, with a commitment to faith enrichment and service.

DMU's Gray receives certifications from ACCME

Vanessa Gray, DHA, MHA, CMP, CHCP, director of continuing medical education in the Center for Educational Enhancement at Des Moines

University Medicine and Health Sciences, has received two professional certifications from the Accreditation Council for Continuing Medical Education (ACCME). The ACCME Certificate in Implementing the Standards for Integrity and Independence in Accredited Continuing Education demonstrates advanced expertise in ensuring content validity, preventing commercial bias, and maintaining transparency in financial relationships. The ACCME Certificate in Data Management in Accredited Continuing Education reflects proficiency in the systematic collection, analysis, and reporting of continuing education activity and learner data.

Holmes Murphy announces Chase as newest board of managers member

Holmes Murphy, one of the nation's largest privately held companies, announced Lindsay Chase, chief financial officer, as the newest member of its board of managers. Chase joins 14 other leaders from across the Holmes Murphy enterprise to lead the company in its mission of providing exceptional service and care for every client's unique potential.

YPIowa announces new board members and leadership

YPIowa has welcomed five new members to its 2025 board, including new leadership for the organization. Justine Paradiso from the Dubuque Young Professionals has been named the new Co-Chair of the organization, serving alongside Joseph Herst. The co-chairs will provide strategic direction, strengthen community partnerships, and support the continued growth and impact of the organization. In addition to Paradiso, YPIowa welcomed the following new board members: Bryan Stewart, Morganne Dennis, Rebecca Vasquez and Jenna Weiland.

Strategic America and Nebraska Corn Board win two regional NAMA awards

Nebraska Corn Board and Strategic America (SA), an employee-owned, integrated marketing and communications firm based in West Des Moines, won two regional National Agri-Marketing Association (NAMA) awards at the 2026 Region 2 Best of NAMA Event Jan. 8 in Kansas City, Missouri. The awards were given for the Nebraska Corn Board's "I'm a Nebraska Corn Farmer" campaign — and included a merit award for print and first place for outdoor. Both are eligible to advance to the national competition, to be presented at the Agri-Marketing Conference in St. Louis on April 15. ■

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RDC Marketing LLC	Redfield	DALLAS	03	\$126,000	2	0	EXISTING	All Other Professional, Scientific, and Technical Services
NT GROUP ENTERPRISE INC	WEST DES MOINES	DALLAS	03	\$900,700	10	10	NEW	Limited-Service Restaurants
Herman Construction, LLC	MILFORD	DICKINSON	04	\$2,800,000	0	10	NEW	Industrial Building Construction
A&G PRESCHOOL AND DAYCARE CENTER, IN	Spirit Lake	DICKINSON	04	\$263,000	7	0	EXISTING	Child and Youth Services
Accounting & Tax Services PLLC	FAIRFIELD	JEFFERSON	01	\$1,030,000	1	3	NEW	Offices of Certified Public Accountants
Aaron Adam	FAIRFIELD	JEFFERSON	01	\$578,000	0	0	EXISTING	Beef Cattle Ranching and Farming
RUSSELLOY IRON FOUNDRY, LLC	CORALVILLE	JOHNSON	01	\$1,321,300	0	19	EXISTING	Iron and Steel Mills and Ferroalloy Manufacturing
The Cone Shoppe LLC	MONTICELLO	JONES	01	\$400,000	0	12	NEW	Snack and Nonalcoholic Beverage Bars
Peters Legacy, Inc.	CEDAR RAPIDS	LINN	02	\$597,000	8	63	NEW	Home Health Care Services
Arends Golf, LLC	Cedar Rapids	LINN	02	\$330,000	2	0	NEW	All Other Amusement and Recreation Industries
WHITE SAND ENTERPRISES LLC	HIAWATHA	LINN	02	\$40,000	0	2	NEW	Exterminating and Pest Control Services
JCB Legacy Group, LLC	MARION	LINN	02	\$229,000	3	7	EXISTING	Masonry Contractors
Ulrich Meat Market, Inc.	Pella	MARION	01	\$556,000	2	0	EXISTING	Meat Retailers
GAPEN COMPANY	STATE CENTER	MARSHALL	04	\$25,000	2	2	NEW	Sporting and Recreational Goods and Supplies Merchant Wholesalers
Botna Express LLC	SHENANDOAH	PAGE	03	\$50,000	1	2	EXISTING	General Freight Trucking, Local
Prairie View Animal Hospital PLLC	GRIMES	POLK	03	\$155,000	0	11	EXISTING	Veterinary Services
Infinity Chiropractic Center LLC	JOHNSTON	POLK	03	\$1,890,000	0	30	EXISTING	Offices of Chiropractors
Trudough LLC	URBANDALE	POLK	03	\$400,000	3	0	NEW	Child and Youth Services
Josina supplies LLC	West Des Moines	POLK	03	\$15,000	0	1	EXISTING	Gift, Novelty and Souvenir Retailers
1800 West Broadway Holdings LLC	Council Bluffs	POTTAWATTAMIE	04	\$473,000	2	0	EXISTING	Offices of Physical, Occupational and Speech Therapists, and Audiologists
King Products, Inc.	DAVENPORT	SCOTT	01	\$338,300	2	12	NEW	Commercial and Industrial Machinery and Equipment
RDBR LLC	ELDRIDGE	SCOTT	01	\$465,000	0	50	NEW	Landscaping Services
RDBR LLC	ELDRIDGE	SCOTT	01	\$200,000	0	50	NEW	Landscaping Services
KHALSA REAL ESTATE LLC	AMES	STORY	04	\$4,400,000	1	21	NEW	Hotels (except Casino Hotels) and Motels
Little Pluto Ventures LLC	AMES	STORY	04	\$443,000	0	2	NEW	General Freight Trucking, Local
Heartland Crane Services LLC	KEOSAUQUA	VAN BUREN	01	\$250,900	0	1	NEW	All Other Specialty Trade Contractors
Plumb Construction, LLC	NORWALK	WARREN	01	\$150,000	0	2	EXISTING	Framing Contractors
BoldStep Strategies Inc.	Fort Dodge	WEBSTER	04	\$1,510,500	5	5	NEW	Furniture Retailers
DRIFTLESS SECURITY SOLUTIONS LLC	Decorah	WINNESHIEK	02	\$193,500	3	1	EXISTING	Other Personal and Household Goods Repair and Maintenance

TRANSACTIONS FROM NOVEMBER 2025

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BEST

of Des Moines



More than 12,000 votes were cast in our annual readers' poll in categories ranging from the best service, best food, best doctors, best clothes, best drinks and even the best bathrooms.

See full results inside.



By Cyote Williams

Traveling around Des Moines guarantees a few things. At some point, you will need to stop for food. Lucky for us, Des Moines has one of the most underrated food scenes in the entire country, but it's certainly not underrated by its diners. You can shop in most any part of this city and find locally owned shops selling the metro's finest creations. You can receive top-notch medical care from head to toe thanks to qualified professionals who grew up right next door.

How do those in the capital city know where to go when wanting the best of all things? The iconic, black and white, circular CITYVIEW Best of Des Moines logo tells them. The more than 12,000 voters signal locals that inside that business is the best service, best food, best doctors, best clothes, best drinks, even the best bathrooms.

So, do yourself a favor, and trust the people of Des Moines who have chosen the 2026 Best of Des Moines winners and runners-up. From CITYVIEW, thank you to the voters and readers, and congratulations to the winners and runners-up.

EATS

Best New Local Restaurant

Palms DSM

Palms DSM, an African-Caribbean style restaurant, took the metro and its taste buds by storm in 2026. Braised oxtail and honey suya wings deliver a flavor profile that had Best of Des Moines voters salivating. A delectable list of sides and sweets only enhance the meal, and a cocktail list that will make you stay longer, earned the Ingersoll restaurant its win. 1905 Ingersoll Ave., Des Moines, 515-214-1213; www.eatpalms.com.

Runners-up: Judges; Masao

Best-Kept Secret on the Local Restaurant Scene

Simon's

Simon's selection in this category marks a decade that readers have chosen it as the Best-Kept Secret on the Local Restaurant scene. After 10 years in a row, we wonder if it's much of a secret, yet Simon's consistent excellence in food, customer service and attracting repeat customers is beyond doubt. 5800 Franklin Ave., Des Moines, 515-255-3725; www.simonsdsm.com.

Runners-up: Early Bird Brunch; Railroad Bill's Dining Car

Best Local Restaurant Period

Simon's

With a decade as the Best-Kept Secret, and now, four straight years as the Best Local Restaurant Period, Simon's delicious dynasty in these two categories continues. The restaurant's incredible selection of wines to pair with dishes such as steak deBurgo, lamb chops or one of their pastas makes this restaurant the best. 5800 Franklin Ave., Des Moines, 515-255-3725; www.simonsdsm.com.

Runners-up: Early Bird Brunch; Charlotte's Kitchen

Best Local Fine Dining

Oak Park

Oak Park burst onto the scene last year, winning Best New Local Restaurant, as well as this category. It has once again been voted as the Best Local Fine Dining by Best of Des Moines voters. Oak Park features one of the best wine selections in the city, and with menu items such as duck raviolo, pappardelle and wonderful cuts of steak, this restaurant makes for a great choice for a special occasion — or when you feel like treating yourself. 3901 Ingersoll Ave., Des Moines, 515-620-2185; www.oakparkdsm.com.

Runners-up: Simon's; Harbinger

Best Valley Junction Restaurant

Cooper's on 5th

Make that five years in a row for Cooper's on 5th being chosen as Best Valley Junction Restaurant by Best of Des Moines voters. There are some great restaurants in



Palms DSM is the Best New Local Restaurant according to CITYVIEW readers. Photo courtesy of Palms DSM

this area, but this one continues to take the cake. Try tasty appetizers like the eggroll du jour, sandwiches such as their Junction Burger, which comes with a house bourbon glaze, crispy and white cheddar cheese, or get fancy with short ribs, filets or a seafood carbonara. 227 Fifth St., West Des Moines, 515-255-9895; www.cooperson5th.com.

Runners-up: Bix & Co.; G Mig's 5th Street Pub

Best West Glen Restaurant

Anna Dolce Ristorante

Competing with the legacy Italian restaurants that dot Des Moines, Anna Dolce Ristorante makes its claim to join them, according to CITYVIEW readers. A staple in West Glen, the business boasts a great happy hour during the week and treats, such as their calamari fries, lobster arancini and a list of pastas, sure to please. 5585 Mills Civic Parkway, West Des Moines, 515-223-2302; www.annadolceristorante.com.

Runners-up: El Fogon; Irina's Steak & Seafood

Best East Village Restaurant

Lucca

Lucca, a fine dining Italian restaurant, has captured the favor of East Village diners and the votes of CITYVIEW readers. Come in for lunch if you work in or are visiting the area or make a reservation and sink your teeth into their prix-fixe dinner menu. Lucca has been serving the area for

more than two decades, and another win in this category helps show they have staying power. 420 E. Locust St., Des Moines, 515-243-1115; www.luccadsm.com.

Runners-up: Early Bird Brunch; Alba

Best Prairie Trail Restaurant

District 36 Wine Bar & Grille

There has not been a single year in this category's existence that District 36 Wine Bar & Grille has not won it. For seven years straight, this Ankeny establishment has wined and dined the local populace with its excellent selection of wines and cocktails and its brick oven pizzas and signature pastas from Creole to cavatelli. 1375 S.W. Vintage Parkway, Ankeny, 515-261-2502; www.district36winebar.com.

Runners-Up: 30hop; Early Bird Brunch

Best Ingersoll Area Restaurant

Eatery A

Also known for its incredible happy hour, Eatery A wins this award once again. With Spanish, Moroccan, Egyptian and Italian tastes melding together for crispy, flavorful wood-fired pizza options, bacon-wrapped dates, sweet potato muhammara, spinach rigatoni and so much more, the restaurant has been pleasing palates for more than a decade. 2932 Ingersoll Ave., Des Moines, 515-282-8085; www.eateryadsm.com.

Runners-up: Sakari Sushi Lounge; Lachele's Fine Foods

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EATS



Iowa Heartland Beef Stew at Fiesta Mexican Restaurant, winner of Best Local Mexican Food. Photo courtesy of Fiesta Mexican Restaurant

Best Beaverdale Area Restaurant Christopher's

There are not many restaurants in the area that can match Christopher's longevity — 50-plus years. With its selection of traditional and classical Italian dinners, there is no need to mess with a good thing. Beaverdale residents know this lesson well enough, as they and CITYVIEW readers voted for Christopher's for this award for another year. 2816 Beaver Ave., Des Moines, 515-274-3694; www.christophersdsm.com.

Runners-up: The Dam Pub; Basic Bird

Best Drake Area Restaurant Drake Diner

This restaurant, which shares its namesake with the neighborhood it feeds, has won the Best Drake Area Restaurant for another year running. The upscale retro Drake Diner has been family owned and operated since 1987 and has been bringing the metro some of the most welcoming and tasteful foods ever since. 1111 25th St., Des Moines, 515-277-1111; www.drakediner.com.

Runners-up: Lucky Horse Beer & Burgers; University Library Cafe

Best Local American Food Lachele's Fine Foods

When it comes to American food, specifically cheeseburgers, Lachele's Fine Foods has dominated the local scene ever since it opened in 2021. Spoiler alert, this Ingersoll restaurant also won Best Local Burger once again. Their signature sauce,

crispy fries and rotating specials give American food enjoyers plenty of reasons to return time and time again. So much so, that they opened a second location. 2716 Ingersoll Ave., Des Moines, 515-330-6876; www.lacheles.com.

Runners-up: Drake Diner; Gastro Grub & Pub

Best Local Vegetarian/ Vegan Food Early Bird Brunch

Early Bird Brunch, as you might have noticed already, has made several runner-up appearances in 2026. It moves into the winner's circle thanks to vegetarian and vegan CITYVIEW readers. Breakfast food is their specialty, serving up all kinds of interesting and tasty, meals. Locations in Ankeny, East Village and West Des Moines, 515-528-2212; www.earlybirdbrunch.com.

Runners-up: Gastro Grub & Pub; Lucky Lotus

Best Local Gluten-Free Food

Destination Grille

Nobody does gluten-free food quite like Destination Grille. One look at their menu, and you can quickly see how many of their menu items can be made without gluten. This is to the delight of CITYVIEW readers once again. Pizza, lobster mac and cheese, even creamy Cajun alfredo can all be made to suit your dietary needs. 2491 E. First St., Grimes, 515-355-1153; www.destinationgrille.com.

Runners-up: Louie's Wine Dive; Early Bird Brunch

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EATS

Best Local Italian Food

Così Cucina

Make that back-to-back selections for Cosi Cucina as Best of Des Moines voters' choice for Best Local Italian Food. In a city with more award-winning Italian restaurants than one can imagine, Cosi Cucina serves up pastas, pizzas, calamari and other Italian favorites the best, say CITYVIEW readers. 1975 N.W. 86th St., Clive, 515-278-8148; www.cosicucina.com.

Runners-up: Tumea & Sons Restaurant; Baratta's

Best Local Mexican Food

Fiesta Mexican Restaurant

Fiesta Mexican Restaurant is back again as CITYVIEW readers' choice for Best Local Mexican Food. With multiple locations serving up classic, quality Mexican favorites like flautas, pozole and delicious slow braised birria beef, this restaurant is one to try, if you have not already. And, don't forget their flavorful choices for margaritas as well. Put those together, and patrons are sure to have a memorable meal. Locations in West Des Moines, Adel and Pleasant Hill, 515-207-2577; www.fiestaiowa.com

Runners-up: Faustinos Taqueria; Tasty Tacos

Best Local Thai Food

Thai Flavors

Thai Flavors has become Best of Des Moines voters' consistent choice for Best Local Thai Food, as they win this award once more. They say, "Thai dishes are prepared fresh and require a skilled and patient hand to season and cook the ingredients in the proper sequence. Because of this, some dishes require a little more time to prepare, but are definitely worth the wait." CITYVIEW readers agree. Locations on East 14th Street and Ingersoll Avenue; www.thaiflavorsiowa.com.

Runners-Up: Cool Basil; Eat Thai, Thai Eatery

Best Local Chinese Food

Tsing Tsao

Tsing Tsao offers its Best of Des Moines-award winning food at locations that serve several parts of the metro with Chinese favorites at reasonable prices. That's a hard combo for the competition to beat, much like the combo specials on their menu from broccoli beef to sweet and sour shrimp. Locations in Urbandale, Waukee and Des Moines; www.tsingtsao.com.

Runners-up: Shanghai Restaurant; Lucky Bamboo

Best Local Japanese Food

Sakari Sushi Lounge

Ingersoll area restaurants have been a major feature in this year's awards, and you can add Sakari Sushi Lounge to that list of winners, as they have been voted Best Local Japanese Food again. Sakari has Japanese favorites and classics while serving up, you guessed it, excellent sushi, bento boxes and much more. Not only that, but Sakari has a great list of cocktails and other adult beverages to make an already great meal better. 2605 Ingersoll Ave., Des Moines, 515-288-3381; www.sakarisushilounge.com.

Runners-up: Wasabi; Akebono 515

Best Local Mediterranean Food

The Green Olive

The Green Olive has been serving delightful, traditional Mediterranean food since 2002. Meats such as steak, ground beef, chicken, lamb, salmon, shrimp and gyro bring you right to the Mediterranean coast with all of its regional flavors. Kabob wraps or plates are bright, fresh and tasty. Not to mention healthy salads, sides and sweet treats for dessert. Locations in Des Moines, West Des Moines, 515-285-9179; www.thegreenolivedsm.com.

Runners-up: Fresh Mediterranean Express; OPA! Italian & Greek

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Best Local Seafood Waterfront Seafood Market

Waterfront has had a vice grip on this category for years. Its reputation for getting fresh fish directly from fishers and brokers since its opening in 1984 is a big reason why. Its seafood market is elite if you're looking to cook something at home, but everything they make in house from smoked salmon, clams and oysters to swordfish is what garners them the Best Local Seafood votes. Locations in West Des Moines, Ankeny, 515-223-5106; www.waterfrontseafoodmarket.com.

Runners-up: Splash; Laughing Crab

Best Local Sushi Sakari Sushi Lounge

Doubling up for the second year in a row as both CITYVIEW readers' choice for Best Local Japanese Food and Best Local Sushi is Sakari Sushi Lounge. Their sushi menu hits all of the favorites with various tempura, sashimi and maki. Sakari also gets creative with its Snake, Hawkeye and Godzilla rolls. Do not worry, no snakes, Hawkeyes or mythical creatures were harmed in the making of these tasty rolls. 2605 Ingersoll Ave., Des Moines, 515-288-3381; www.sakarisushilounge.com.

Runners-up: Wasabi; Akebono 515

Best Local Steakhouse Iowa Beef Steakhouse

This storied steakhouse opened in 1982, best known for huge cuts of steak cooked over charcoal. The wood that makes the restaurant cozy, and a majority of the décor, came from a southern Iowa barn. From New York strips to ribeyes, with plenty of great sides to choose from, Iowa Beef Steakhouse is sure to serve up a tasty and hardy dinner for any occasion. 1201 E. Euclid Ave., Des Moines, 515-262-1138; www.iowabeefsteakhouse.com.

Runners-up: The Big Steer; 801 Chophouse

Best Local Brunch/Breakfast Early Bird Brunch

Early Bird Brunch has been capturing the brunch and breakfast aficionados who are Best of Des Moines voters for four years in a row. Whether you are visiting for a family meal after church, grabbing a bite to eat before a day of shopping, or trying to cure a hangover, Early Bird's breakfast and cocktail menu gets creative while still providing the breakfast basics. Locations in Ankeny, East Village and West Des Moines, 515-528-2212; www.earlybirdbrunch.com.

Runners-up: HomeGrown; Waveland Cafe

Best Local Delicatessen Manhattan Deli

Other local delicatessens have been aiming to knock off Manhattan Deli as the Best Local Delicatessen for some years now, but the leader takes home this award once more. This institution has been serving sandwiches and cold cuts since the 1980s. Sandwiches such as The Hula Girl and The Big Apple are new to the menu, offering neat twists to classics. But, have no fear, the original subs are here as well, and they are still great. 3705 Ingersoll Ave., Des Moines, 515-274-1208; www.hansensmanhattandeli.com.

Runners-up: Palmer's Deli & Market; A Taste of Italy

Best Local Burger Lachele's Fine Foods

Lachele's burst onto the scene in 2021 and has not looked back, winning this award every year since its opening — and for good reason. Lachele's signature smashed patty creates a lovely, salty crisp, while the patty still retains juice and flavor. A soft bun complements the meat. With rotating specials to create new tastes, it's no wonder this restaurant quickly became, and has stayed, a local favorite. Two Des Moines locations, 2716 Ingersoll Ave., and 3621 Sixth Ave., 515-330-6876; www.lacheles.com.

Runners-up: B-Bop's; Zombie Burger + Drink Lab

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Best Local Pizza

Taste of New York Pizza

Taste of New York Pizza brings the world-renowned flavors of a slice from the Big Apple right into our backyards. The pizza gets cooked in a ripping hot 550-degree oven to give a crispy crust. Then, cut into large slices, it is easy to take on the go or enjoy at home with friends and family. They have got all the classics but get creative with lasagna and chicken pesto pizzas. Locations in Waukee, West Des Moines and Pleasant Hill, 515-223-8669; www.tasteofnypizza.com.

Runners-up: Pepp's Pizzeria; The Tavern



Margherita Pizza at the 2026 Best Local Pizza, Taste of New York Pizza. Photo courtesy of Taste of New York

Best Local Bakery

La Mie

La Mie Bakery brings the delectable world of French pastries to Des Moines much to the delight of its residents and CITYVIEW readers. Step inside and try out their other menu items ranging from Italian sandwiches to green quinoa and French toast. 841 42nd St., Des Moines, 515-255-1625; www.lamiebakery.com.

Runners-up: ChaCha's Hiland Bakery; The Bake Shoppe

Best Local Cupcake Shop

Molly's Cupcakes

Molly of Molly's Cupcakes used to bake cupcakes for her students on their birthdays. Now, after being a runner-up last year, she returns with the 2026 Best Local Cupcake Shop. With locations spanning several states and awards from national outlets, Molly's Cupcakes beg to be eaten in abundance. With a lineup featuring cookie monster, Samoa, churro and peanut butter Nutella, these cupcakes scratch most any sweet tooth's craving. 215 East Third St., Suite 101, Des Moines, 515-244-0778; www.mollyscupcakes.com.

Runners-up: Crème; ChaCha's Hiland Bakery

Best Local BBQ

Smokey D's BBQ

For the eighth year in a row, Smokey D's BBQ takes the top spot for Best Local BBQ. The local BBQ joint has racked up more than 1,000 awards over the years from various outlets and has been featured on Food Network's "Diners, Drive-ins and Dives," but, most importantly, they serve up comforting, flavorful BBQ of all kinds. 5055 N.W. Second Ave., Des Moines, 515-243-2747; www.smokeydsbbq.com.

Runners-up: Whatcha Smokin' BBQ & Brew; Kue'd Smokehouse

Best Local French Fries

B-Bop's

B-Bop's wins this award for another year running thanks to its salty, crispy fries. They are the perfect pairing to one of their cheeseburgers, chicken nuggets or other sandwiches. Dunk them in a side of ranch or get the perfect mix of sweet and savory by dipping them into a milkshake. Don't forget the ones at the bottom of the bag, either. Multiple locations; www.b-bops.com.

Runners-up: Francie's Bar & Grill; Gastro Grub & Pub

Best Local Chicken Wings

Sakari Sushi Lounge

You might be scratching your head, saying the best sushi place also has the Best Local Chicken Wings? Well, stop scratching and taste their chicken wings for yourself. Wonderfully decorated and just as flavorful. 2605 Ingersoll Ave., Des Moines, 515-288-3381; www.sakarisushilounge.com.

Runners-up: The Chicken Coop Sports Bar & Grill; The Station on Ingersoll

Best Local Nachos

University Library Cafe

Nachos are arguably the most sharable food on any restaurant menu. They are easy to grab, pass around and enjoy. University Library Cafe has perfected its Best Local Nachos over time, winning this award again thanks to Best of Des Moines voters. The old school bar in the Drake neighborhood serves nachos with pinto beans, shredded cheddar cheese, Monterey cheese sauce, salsa, mild banana pepper rings, Pico de Gallo, sour cream and your choice of hamburger, chicken, roast beef, bacon or corned beef for an extra \$3. Yum. 3506 University Ave., Des Moines, 515-255-0433; www.thelibrarydm.com.

Runners-up: The Pelican Post Bar & Grille; Francie's Bar & Grill

Best Local Tacos

Tasty Tacos

Tasty Tacos continues its reign in being voted the Best Local Tacos. Their signature fired flour shell puffs up into a pillow, fluffy vessel to be filled with steak, beef, chicken or beans. Top that off with lettuce and cheese, and their house hot sauce, and it's no wonder CITYVIEW readers turn to the local chain time and time again. Multiple locations; www.tastytacos.com.

Runners-up: Faustinos Taqueria; Tacos La Familia

Best Local Tenderloin

Smitty's Tenderloin Shop

Smitty's has been serving the original king tenderloin since 1952. With Iowa being known for its tenderloins across the nation, being voted the Best Local Tenderloin is no small feat. At Smitty's, tenderloins are fried thin and crispy while still retaining plenty of juice and flavor. The king tenderloin might take up your entire plate, but CITYVIEW readers are not complaining. 1401 Army Post Road, Des Moines, 515-287-4742; www.facebook.com/smittytenderloins.

Runners-up: Goldie's Bar & Grill; Bix & Co.

Best Local Bar Food**Francie's Bar & Grill**

Best of Des Moines voters have been hard pressed to find a place better than Francie's when it comes to the Best Local Bar Food. A multi-time winner of this award for its burgers, sandwiches, hot wings and more, it is not difficult to see why. A classic neighborhood bar with a relaxed, inviting interior, TV screens all around to catch the game, cocktails, beers and attentive service all make for a great experience. 2100 Wakonda View Drive, Des Moines, 515-285-5207; www.franciesbarandgrill.com.

Runners-up: The Pelican Post Bar & Grille; The Station on Ingersoll

Best Local Coffee/Coffeehouse**Smokey Row Coffee Co.**

Need a cup of joe to start your day? A latte or cappuccino as a little treat? An espresso to get you through that late-night study session? Or, even a place to open your books and laptop to study? Smokey Row, voters' choice for Best Local Coffee/Coffeehouse, has connoisseurs covered on all these fronts at any of their locations. Multiple locations; www.smokeyrow.com.

Runners-up: Northern Vessel; Zanzibar's Coffee Adventure

Best Local Wine Selection at a Restaurant**Louie's Wine Dive**

We counted more than 60 on Louie's Wine Dive's online menu for the total number of wine options. Now, quantity is not the only factor in what makes Louie's wine selection the best in the Best of Des Moines poll. The business also has high-end options. Cabernet, citrus, reds, whites, you name it. They offer affordable options, as well as pricier ones for any pocketbook. 4040 University Ave., Suite A, Des Moines, 515-777-3416; www.louieswinedive.com.

Runners-up: Cooper's Hawk Winery & Restaurant; Oak Park



A delectable display of donuts at the Best Local Place to Get a Donut, Donut Hut. Photo courtesy of Donut Hut

Best Local Hangover Food**Early Bird Brunch**

Early Bird pops up in the Best of Des Moines polling again — this time as a great place to cure a hangover. This brunch spot has cocktails for a little "hair of the dog," if that's your cure of choice, or red velvet pancakes if you like something sweet to cure what ails you. Breakfast sandwiches, omelets and so much more are also featured. Locations in Ankeny, East Village and West Des Moines, 515-528-2212; www.earlybirdbrunch.com.

Runners-up: Waveland Cafe; Mullets

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4500 Fleur Drive, Des Moines
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4565 86th Street, Urbandale
855 E Hickman Road, Waukee
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EATS



A Dong Restaurant offers this year's Best Local Vietnamese Food. Photo courtesy of A Dong Restaurant

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Best Local First Date Spot Sakari Sushi Lounge

Sakari Sushi Lounge wins the Best Local First Date Spot for another year in a row. Perhaps love is in the air at Sakari, creating relationships that last a lifetime while filling bellies with a sushi roll or two, or three. It could just be the award-winning cocktails, but Best of Des Moines voters seem to think it is a combination. 2605 Ingersoll Ave., Des Moines, 515-288-3381; www.sakarisushilounge.com.

Runners-up: Gastro Grub & Pub; Early Bird Brunch

Best Local Restaurant Patio Big Grove Brewery

Big Grove Brewery migrated to Des Moines in 2022, bringing with it an incredible patio to match its food and drink options. During the warmer months, and for the brave of heart during the chillier ones, Big Grove's patio is spacious enough to hold events, a date night, or a fun night with friends. Multiple fireplaces set the mood but also keep you warm while enjoying one of their original brewed concoctions. 555 17th St., Des Moines, 515-777-2337; www.biggrove.com.

Runners-up: The Pelican Post Bar & Grille; Either/Or

Best Local Place to get a Donut Donut Hut

Make that back-to-back wins for Donut Hut as the Best Local Place to Get a Donut. Just take a quick scroll through the photos of their donuts and try to keep your mouth from watering. Double chocolate, chocolate chip, strawberry frosted, long johns and apple fritters each look just as scrumptious as the last. 4941 Douglas Ave., Des Moines, 515-331-4205; www.thedonuthutdsm.com.

Runner-up: ChuChu Donuts; ChaCha's Hiland Bakery

Best Local Caterer Cyd's Catering

Cyd's Catering has won the Best Local Caterer award every year since 2021. Menu highlights include a Thanksgiving feast (keep that one in the back pocket for next year), three terrific trays of charcuterie and a thoroughly modern taco bar. That only scratches the surface of choices for your next special event. 5405 N.W. 78th Court, Johnston, 515-208-2091; www.cateringbycyd.com.

Runners-up: Destination Grille; Great Caterers of Iowa

Best Local Vietnamese Food A Dong Restaurant

Menu items such as pork egg rolls, fried chicken cream cheese rolls, stir fried squid, simmered catfish and coconut curry stew speak to the wide-ranging yet wonderfully tasty options at A Dong Restaurant, winner of Best Local Vietnamese Food according to Best of Des Moines voters. Authentic meals are a big reason for the business' continued success since 1989. 1511 High St., Des Moines, 515-284-5632; www.adongdesmoines.com.

Runners-up: Pho 888; Snack & Go

Best Local Food Truck Charlotte's Kitchen

In addition to their food truck, Charlotte's Kitchen has two brick and mortar locations in the metro serving up the same great food. The menu is kept short and simple. Choose an entrée of either a sandwich, wrap or salad with their crispy or grilled chicken options from original, Nashville hot, crab Rangoon or the weekly special, and dig in. Don't forget a side of cheese curds while you are at it. Locations in Johnston, Altoona, 515-859-6257; www.charlotteskitchendsm.com/food-truck.

Runners-up: Pho Wheels & Sushi; Hot Off The Presses

Best Local Chocolate/Candy Store

Chocolatarie Stam

Chocolatarie Stam says, "We proudly offer the highest quality of delights, treating every patron and employee as an extension of our family." Their luxe and jewel boxes have a variety of delectable sweets and even offer up a plethora of coffee options. Locations in Des Moines, West Des Moines, Altoona and Ames; www.stamchocolate.com.

Runners-up: Chocolate Storybook; Nan's Nummies

Best Local Korean Food

DZÔ Korean BBQ

Another restaurant that has taken over its category since it came onto the local food scene is DZÔ Korean BBQ. With three years in town, it has racked up three Best Local Korean Food awards. The table-top grill has a large selection of meats for you to dress up your own way and plenty of flavorful sides to enhance the experience. You'll leave feeling full, satisfied and wanting to return soon. 2611 Ingersoll Ave., Des Moines, 515-216-1472; www.dzokoreanbbq.com.

Runners-up: Basic Bird; KPOT Korean BBQ & Hot Pot



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Best Server

Denise Sullivan, Iowa Beef Steakhouse

Denise Sullivan takes home this year's Best Server award thanks to CITYVIEW readers and Iowa Beef Steakhouse diners. When you're serving at the Best Local Steakhouse, the excellent food might help, but, in the end, an attentive server can take any dining experience from good to great, and Denise Sullivan has been doing just that.

Runners-up: Ted Blackwood, The Big Steer; Zoey Osteen, Gastro Grub & Pub

Best Local Ice Cream or Gelato Shop

Black Cat Ice Cream

Black cats might be a sign of bad luck, but a Black Cat Ice Cream sign is a sure fire tell for great ice cream. Black Cat wins Best Local Ice Cream or Gelato Shop for the fourth year in a row thanks to its artisanal creamy delights. Fun flavors such as bananas foster, glazed cherry donut or killer bee have been found on their menu. Get a scoop and try one of them for yourself. Locations in Des Moines and West Des Moines, 515-689-7466; www.blackcaticecream.com.

Runners-up: Home Sweet Cone Ice Cream; Snookies Malt Shop

Best Local Boba Shop

Zenko Tea

Zenko Tea was runner-up last year but takes home Best Local Boba Shop this year. Boba shops have been sweeping the nation and Des Moines as of late, bringing delicious variations of milk tea. This year, Zenko Tea does it the best. Beverages ranging from Black Sugar Milk Tea, Honeydew Smoothie and Red Dragon (dragon fruit and raspberry) fruit tea have all satisfied customers. Locations in Waukee, Des Moines, West Des Moines and Ankeny; www.zenkotea.com.

Runners-up: Ocha Bubble Tea; Pho Real Kitchen and Bar

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SHOPPING

Best Local Store (Overall)

Bing's

Bing's appears to be the gift that keeps on giving, winning Best Local Store (Overall). The Valley Junction store becomes a favorite over the holidays for people shopping for Christmas presents. However, business does not slow down for the rest of the year, as their fun and wacky selection of toys and art excite customers, and their book selections satisfy. The store has something for most anyone. 213 Fifth St., West Des Moines, 515-279-3141; www.bingsdsm.com.

Runners-up: Tandem Brick Gallery; Josephs Jewelers

Best Local Men's Clothing Store

Mr. B

With this year's selection, Mr. B joins an exclusive club that has won 10 straight Best of Des Moines awards in a row — a decade of dominance for the men's clothing store that helps guys look like gentlemen. Whether it be for a wedding, new job or fancy dinner, Mr. B's selection ensures its patrons will be dressed to the nines. 1995 N.W. 86th St., Clive, 515-276-8589; www.mrbclothing.com.

Runners-up: Von Maur; Many Hands Thrift Market

Best Local Women's Clothing Store

Von Maur

This Iowa-founded business made runner-up last year and wins Best Local Women's Clothing Store this year. Von Maur was founded in the late 1800s in Davenport and has since expanded to have stores located all over the Midwest. Their women's selection is extensive, with shoes, dresses, activewear, tops, bottoms and everything in between. 101 S. Jordan Creek Parkway, West Des Moines, 515-223-1311; www.vonmaur.com.

Runners-up: Tulip Bloom Boutique; Harlow + James

Best Local Thrift Shop

Many Hands Thrift Market

Thrift shopping has become a favorite for shopaholics, especially with stores like Many Hands Thrift Market providing great finds at affordable prices. Its various locations have recycled more than two million items over the years and raised more than \$86,000 for local nonprofits. Items found inside include clothes, trinkets, dinner sets and much more. Multiple locations in Clive, Grimes, Merle Hay and Indianola; www.manyhandsthrift.com.

Runners-up: St. Vincent de Paul of Des Moines; Goodwill of Central Iowa



Real Deals in Ankeny, voted this year's Best Ankeny Store, has its Valentine's Day collection on display. Photo courtesy of Real Deals

Best Ankeny Store

Real Deals – Ankeny

Real Deals - Ankeny has a great selection of items from cozy knit sweaters to jewelry, skirts, shoes and more. A visit to Real Deals makes for a great stop as part of a shopping spree, whether you're treating yourself or looking for a gift for a loved one. 315 S.W. Maple St., Ankeny, 515-410-2106; <https://ankeny.realdeals.net>.

Runners-up: Jay's CD & Hobby; Tanique

Best Local Frame Shop

Tandem Brick Gallery

We're not sure which lasts longer: a frame from Tandem Brick Gallery or their reign as the Best Local Frame Shop. Either way, Best of Des Moines voters have chosen this store as their favorite for when they want to artfully display an



award, degree, family photo or artwork. 2722 Ingersoll Ave., Des Moines, 515-282-1031; www.tandembrickgallery.com.

Runner-up: The Great Frame Up; Dot's Gallery & Frame Shop

Best Local Bridal Shop

Celebrations Couture

A bride's big day can be made all the more special with a wedding dress from Celebrations Couture, which Best of Des Moines voters named the Best Local Bridal Shop. The Valley Junction store offers beauty and elegance in its bridal offerings. Check the store's website for dress preservation services that ensure your gown is properly stored. 304 Fifth St., Suite 101, West Des Moines, 515-808-2531; www.celebrationscouturedsm.com.

Runner-up: Kalon Bridal Studio; Stacey's Bridal

Best Local Tuxedo Shop

Skeffington's Formal Wear

Skeffington's Formal Wear is CITYVIEW readers' top pick for Best Local Tuxedo Shop. Their website showcases a wide selection of tuxedos in various styles and colors, available to rent or buy, making it a great spot to get that classic, elegant tuxedo look. Multiple locations; www.skeffingtons.com.

Runners-up: Celebrations Couture; HENRY'S

Best Local Children's Store

Janes – Family Shop

Janes – Family Shop, recognized by CITYVIEW readers as the Best Local Children's Store, is operated by Sarah and Jennifer, a mother-daughter team. The store offers a wide selection of children's clothing and toys, not to mention teethers, pacifiers and quilts. 350 E. Locust St., Suite 102, Des Moines; www.janesdsm.com.

Runners-up: Learning Post & Toys; Once Upon a Child

Best New Local Store

Celebrations Couture

It has been a great opening year for Celebrations Couture, winning both Best Local Bridal Shop and Best New Local Store. CITYVIEW readers who celebrated their special days must have been pleased with the fancy new kid on the block's bridal services. 304 Fifth St., Suite 101, West Des Moines, 515-808-2531; www.celebrationscouturedsm.com.

Runners-up: Tulip Bloom Boutique; Black Sheep Craft Shop

Best Local Record Store

Vinyl Cup Records

Records have been making a comeback as of late. These days, you can find records and record players at major retailers, but, thankfully for Best of Des Moines voters, local businesses like Vinyl Cup Records are available to scratch that vinyl itch. This store is consistently bringing in new records while still supplying the classics to make your own collection one worth browsing. 2702 Beaver Ave., Des Moines, 515-207-9738; www.vinylcup.com.

Runners-up: Jay's CD & Hobby; Raccoon Forks Trading Company

Best Local New or Used Book Store

Reading in Public Bookstore + Cafe

There is something special about sipping on a freshly brewed beverage while perusing the aisles and shelves in search of your next favorite mystery, thriller, sci-fi, fantasy or non-fiction bestseller. At Reading in Public Bookstore + Cafe, you can find your next best read as well as signature drinks like the Rosebud, a matcha latte infused with rose



Reading in Public Bookstore + Cafe was chosen by Best of Des Moines voters as the Best Local New or Used Book Store. Photo courtesy of Reading in Public Bookstore + Cafe.

milk, or the Lavender Fog, a Hugo grey tea, with rotating specials to match the season. 315 Fifth St., Suite 100, West Des Moines, 515-864-9089; www.readinginpublic.com.

Runners-up: Beaverdale Books; Half Price Books

Best Local Car Dealership (Domestic)

Stivers Ford Lincoln

Purchasing a new or used car can be a stressful experience for some, but not for the CITYVIEW readers who got their new ride at Stivers Ford Lincoln. Since 1980, this dealership has been providing drivers with a great selection of vehicles. As of writing this entry, their website stated they have more than 1,000 new, used and certified vehicles for sale. No wonder Stivers was voted Best Local Car Dealership (Domestic). 1450 E. Highway 6, Waukee, 1-800-747-2744; www.stivers-waukee-ford.com.

Runners-up: Willis Automotive; Karl Chevrolet

Best Local Car Dealership (Foreign)

Willis Automotive

In a city with as many worthwhile car dealerships as we have, it is a testament to Willis Automotive's selection and service that they win the award for Best Local Car Dealership (Foreign) once again. Choose from Lexus, Mini, Volvo and more for your next sweet ride. 2121 N.W. 100th St., Des Moines, 515-253-9600; www.willisauto.com.

Runners-up: Toyota of Des Moines; Ramsey Subaru

Best Local Motorcycle Shop

Big Barn Harley-Davidson

Fair weather can be short and sweet in the metro, but when the weather does behave, the motorcycles come out. Big Barn Harley-Davidson is a big supplier of those choppers, cruisers, various touring and sport models that keep them winning Best Local Motorcycle Shop time and time again. 81 N.W. 49th Place, Des Moines, 515-265-4444; www.bigbarnhd.net.

Runners-up: Mean Machine Cycles; Stroom Powersports

Best Local Bicycle Shop

Bike World

Central Iowa features some of the nation's best bike trails. Countless miles of trails, whether they be dirt and surrounded by woods, or paved, circling a lake, are begging to be traversed. CITYVIEW readers vote for Bike World as their optimal choice for their biking needs to make this happen. Locations in Urbandale, West Des Moines and Clive; www.bikeworldiowa.com.

Runners-up: Kyle's Bikes; Ichi Bike

Best Local Liquor Store

Wall to Wall Wine & Spirits

Wall to Wall Wine & Spirits is aptly named. Step inside and it's a paradise for those looking to make their next best cocktail at home, find a delicious red wine to pair with a home-cooked meal, or a case of beer to bring to the

SHOPPING

tailgate. 375 S. Jordan Creek Parkway, West Des Moines, 515-341-9900; www.walltowallwine.com/pages/west-des-moines-location.

Runners-up: Liquor Lovers; Central City Liquors

Best Local Wine Store

Wall to Wall Wine & Spirits

For another year, Wall to Wall Wine & Spirits wins both Best Local Liquor Store and Best Local Wine Store. Step into the wine aisle and begin perusing. It might take you a while to narrow down your choice, but, in the end, Best of Des Moines voters find what they want from white to red to dry to sweet. 375 S. Jordan Creek Parkway, West Des Moines, 515-341-9900; www.walltowallwine.com/pages/west-des-moines-location.

Runners-up: WineStyles; Gateway Market

Best Local Grocery Store

Fareway

This Iowa-grown grocery has won Best Local Grocery Store for the fourth year in a row. Fareway first opened in 1938 and has since expanded into several states with more than 140 stores. It's a major employer in the state but also provides hungry patrons a place to grab their grocery needs at great prices. Multiple locations; www.fareway.com.

Runners-up: Hy-Vee; Gateway Market

Best Local Jewelry Store

Josephs Jewelers

With an extensive selection of rings, necklaces, earrings and bracelets, Josephs is chosen as CITYVIEW readers' choice for Best Local Jewelry Store. The local jeweler has won this award multiple times. Treat yourself or a loved one to one of their finely crafted accessories. 5425 Mills Civic Parkway, West Des Moines, 515-440-2991; www.josephsjewelers.com.

Runners-up: Prism Jewelry & Piercing; Christopher's Fine Jewelry

Best Local Antique Store

Brass Armadillo Antique Mall

A trip to Brass Armadillo Antique Mall could be considered its own shopping spree. The massive, sprawling store is chock full of antiques, clothing, furniture, lights and about 1,000 other things that could take up this entire magazine if listed out. The awesome selection is one worth browsing many times over. We challenge you to leave without buying at least one item. 701 N.E. 50th Ave., Des Moines, 515-282-0082; www.brassarmadillo.com/desmoines.

Runners-up: Raccoon Forks Trading Company; The Picker Knows



Bikes, bikes, bikes, at the Best Local Bicycle Shop, Bike World. Photo courtesy of Bike World

Best Local Art Gallery

Liz Lidgett Gallery and Design

Liz Lidgett has committed to keeping a diverse portfolio within this gallery, with at least 50% women's artists being represented. Art can be purchased at the gallery from anywhere between \$150 to \$15,000. New shows are consistently on display and, according to Best of Des Moines voters, worth a visit. 2921 Ingersoll Ave., Des Moines, 515-288-8990; www.lizlidgett.com.

Runners-up: Moberg Gallery; Olsen-Larsen Galleries

Best Local Hardware Store

Ace Hardware

Need to replace a window? Fix a floorboard? Change a light fixture? Do you need to replace some old, worn down tools for something new? Ace Hardware, according to CITYVIEW readers, is the place to go for all those needs and more. Multiple locations; www.acehardware.com.

Runners-up: True Value; Porter Do It Best Hardware & Rental

Best Shopping District

Valley Junction

Hitting the top spot for Best Shopping District again is Valley Junction. The area covers most every need for a day's shopping spree. Boutiques, antiques, candles, outdoor gear and almost anything in between can be found on Fifth Street. The district is home to the Best Local Store (Overall), Bing's, as well as plenty of bars and restaurants to break up the day. Fifth Street in West Des Moines, 515-222-3642; www.valleyjunction.com.

Runners-up: East Village; Jordan Creek

Best Local Flower Shop

Boesen The Florist

Three generations of Boesens have run the flower shop, with each of them delivering some of the freshest and brightest flowers in the city. Head to Boesen The Florist for all your floral needs, whether it be a Valentine's gift for your significant other, or a birthday or anniversary bouquet. There are many great occasions to take in the sights and smells of one of the area's longest-running businesses. Multiple locations; www.boesen.com.

Runners-up: Wildflower; Camen's Flowers

Best Local Gift Shop

Bing's

It is eight years in a row now for Bing's being voted the Best Local Gift Shop by Best of Des Moines voters. Also the Best Local Store (Overall), Bing's has clearly been a top destination for shoppers in 2026. 213 Fifth St., West Des Moines, 515-279-3141; www.bingsdsm.com.

Runners-up: Tandem Brick Gallery; The Boho Vase

Best Local Place to Purchase a Musical Instrument

Rieman Music

Since 1953, Rieman Music has been serving the metro area's musical needs. Their extensive range of instruments, equipment and accessories help make a musician's life easier. Plus, they have lessons and instruments for the newbies. Locations in Des Moines and Urbandale; www.riemanmusic.com.

Runners-up: Uptempo Music; Guitar Center

Thank you to CITYVIEW readers and our customers for voting Stivers "Best Auto Dealer Domestic" 13 years in a row! 2013-2025.



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SHOPPING

Best Local Computer Repair Shop

Little Dog Tech

Tech issues can stress out even the smartest people. Sometimes the solutions are simple, like a cracked screen. Other issues, like a problem with your Bluetooth, are more complicated. Either way, the team at Little Dog Tech has the fix. Does your computer have a nasty virus you can't seem to shake? They're the best doctors in town according to CITYVIEW readers. 5946 Ashworth Road, West Des Moines, 515-422-1995; www.littledogtech.com.

Runners-up: Mobile Spot; Dymin

Best Local Phone Repair Shop

Mobile Spot

Mobile phones have become quintessential to modern day life. Most people carry around a smart phone with them everywhere they go. The magical devices do make life easier but sure make it difficult when they're on the fritz. Mobile Spot has the capabilities to fix your phone's ailments thanks to their savvy techs. Locations in Clive and Ankeny; www.mymobilespot.com.

Runners-up: CPR Cell Phone Repair; uBreakiFix

Best Local Convenience Store

Kwik Star

Convenience is defined as "the state of being able to proceed with something with little effort or difficulty." Being able to stride into a Kwik Star, grab a bite to eat, buy something to sip on, or perhaps pick up a few essentials and fill your tank up as well — all while receiving friendly service — well, that's about as convenient as convenient gets. Multiple locations; www.kwiktrip.com.

Runners-up: Casey's; QuikTrip

Best Local Place to Buy Cigars/Tobacco

Tobacco Hut

Tobacco Hut has been a family-owned business for more than 20 years, offering more than 500 premium products. Cigars to pipes to hookah, all the way to E-cigs, Tobacco Hut covers the bases. Locations in Des Moines and Ankeny; www.tobaccohuts.com.

Runners-up: David's Fine Tobaccos; Leaf Brothers Cigars

Best Local E-Cigarette Shop

Central Iowa Vapors + Alternatives

The range of products at Central Iowa Vapors + Alternatives includes vapes, cannabis (hemp-derived) products, nootropics products, and alternative lifestyle products. The teams at each location are willing and able to help new customers find the products that best suit their needs or provide returning patrons with what they are searching for. Multiple locations; www.civplus.com.

Runners-up: Greenleaf Tobacco & Vape; Atomic Vape CBD + THC



Boesen The Florist wins 2026's Best Local Flower Shop. Photo courtesy of Boesen The Florist

Best Valley Junction Store

Bing's

Bing's adds Best Valley Junction Store to its list of accolades. You are sure to lose track of time looking for a gift, as they have a myriad of items such as felted coasters, lazy Susans, and just about any wacky style of sock you can imagine. 213 Fifth St., West Des Moines, 515-279-3141; www.bingsdsm.com.

Runners-up: Reading in Public Bookstore + Cafe; MoMere

Best West Glen Store

Josephs Jewelers

Not only does Josephs have one of the best collections of jewelry in the city, but the Best West Glen Store also has the ability to clean and check jewelry, as well as provide jewelry and watch repair, diamond upgrades, and even custom designs. 5425 Mills Civic Parkway, West Des Moines, 515-440-2991; www.josephsjewelers.com.

Runners-up: WineStyles; WORN

Best East Village Store

RAYGUN

CITYVIEW readers once again select RAYGUN as the Best East Village Store. Several of their snarky designs and slogans have gone viral over the years, most of them related to what's happening locally and around the Midwest. 505 E. Grand Ave., Des Moines, 515-288-1323; www.raygunsite.com.

Runners-up: Raccoon Forks Trading Company; KIN

Best Beaverdale Area Store

Beaverdale Books

Its neighborhood is in its name, after all. Beaverdale Books helps support local authors with their Iowa Author section but always makes sure to have the current bestsellers stocking the shelves as well. The cozy, warm and inviting store welcomes any and all to find what page-turner best suits them. 2629 Beaver Ave., Des Moines, 515-279-5400; www.beaverdalebooks.com.

Runners-up: Beaverdale Confections; Vinyl Cup Records

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SHOPPING

Best Drake Area Store

Huckleberry Home

Huckleberry Home is locally owned and operated, providing customers with home décor, local art, houseplants and plenty more. Runner-up in this category last year, Huckleberry Home in the Drake Area is a must stop in the neighborhood. 1141 42nd St., Des Moines; www.facebook.com/HuckleberryHome515/.

Runners-up: Nos Books; Shelf Love DSM

Best Ingersoll Area Store

Tandem Brick Gallery

Like very few others in our Best of Des Moines awards, Tandem Brick Gallery has now won this award for the ninth straight year, one shy of a decade straight. Much like their dominance with the Best Local Frame Shop award, this Ingersoll institution, much like its frames, will be a difficult one to take down. 2722 Ingersoll Ave., Des Moines, 515-282-1031; www.tandembrickgallery.com.

Runners-up: Renovation Jungle; Zzz Records



Valley Pool & Hot Tubs wins Best Local Pool and Spa Store. Photo courtesy of Valley Pool & Hot Tubs

Best Local Furniture Store

Homemakers

Best of Des Moines voters turn to Homemakers when it comes to their furnishing needs. The local furnishing giant has its roots in the Cyclone state, with Carl and Ina

Merschman's first store opening in St. Paul, Iowa, in the 1940s. In 1974, Homemakers was opened in Urbandale, and the rest is history. 10215 Douglas Ave., Urbandale, 515-276-2772; www.homemakers.com.

Runners-up: Amish Haus Furniture; Redekers

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Best Local Home Decor Store

CKD HOME

Decorating a home presents many challenges and opportunities. There are far more moving pieces than one might think: chairs, couches, pillows, coffee tables, end tables, rugs, book shelves, etc. Finding a way to blend all of them together can take a home to the next level. CITYVIEW readers chose CKD HOME as the best place to help accomplish that task. 520 S.W. Ninth St., Unit 114, Des Moines; www.shopckdhome.com.

Runners-up: Huckleberry Home; Homemakers

Best Jordan Creek Area Store

Scheels

Known for its incredible array of sporting goods, with shoes to help play most any sport, as well as the equipment and other necessary clothing, Scheels is also a retail destination inside Jordan Creek Mall. Candy, toys and fashionable clothing make it a one-stop shop for many of your retail needs. 101 Jordan Creek Parkway, Building 4000, West Des Moines, 515-727-4065; www.scheels.com.

Runners-up: Von Maur; Costco

Best Local Appliance Store

Metro Appliance

They're called appliances, but they should be called necessities. Any home worth its weight has an oven, refrigerator, dishwasher and more. With more than 30 years of local experience, Metro Appliance's selection and repair skills have garnered the favor of CITYVIEW readers, who have voted it the Best Local Appliance Store. 2905 Delaware Ave., Des Moines, 515-271-8870; www.metro-appliance.com.

Runners-up: Appliance Warehouse; Warners' Stellian

Best Local Shoe Store

Brown's Shoe Fit Co.

Brown's Shoe Fit Co. is the shoe that fits for Best of Des Moines voters. The company takes home this award again for offering an extensive selection of all things footwear and outstanding customer service, as they have been doing for more than a century. Locations in West Des Moines, Ankeny and Dallas Center; www.brownsshoefitcompany.com.

Runners-up: Von Maur; Fleet Feet

Best Local Pool and Spa Store

Valley Pool & Hot Tubs

The warmer months are fleeting in Des Moines, but when they are here, there's nothing quite like taking a dip in the pool to cool off. Valley Pools says, "Reasonable prices, competitive services and products, and a staff that knows what they're talking about." Sounds like a recipe for success — and for being voted the Best Local Pool and Spa Store. 1417 Fuller Road, West Des Moines, 515-225-2431; www.valleypoolandhottubs.com.

Runners-up: Central Iowa Pool & Spa; WCI Pools & Spas

Best Local Greenhouse

Goode Greenhouses

Goode Greenhouses has been a longstanding fixture at its location since 1905. If you are looking to elevate your garden or flowerbed, their extensive plant catalogue offers plenty of inspiration. Visitors will enjoy vivid blooms, delightful fragrances and expert assistance from the friendly staff. These reasons and more are why CITYVIEW readers have chosen it as the Best Local Greenhouse. 1050 N.E. 50th Ave., Des Moines, 515-262-6504; www.goodegreenhouses.com.

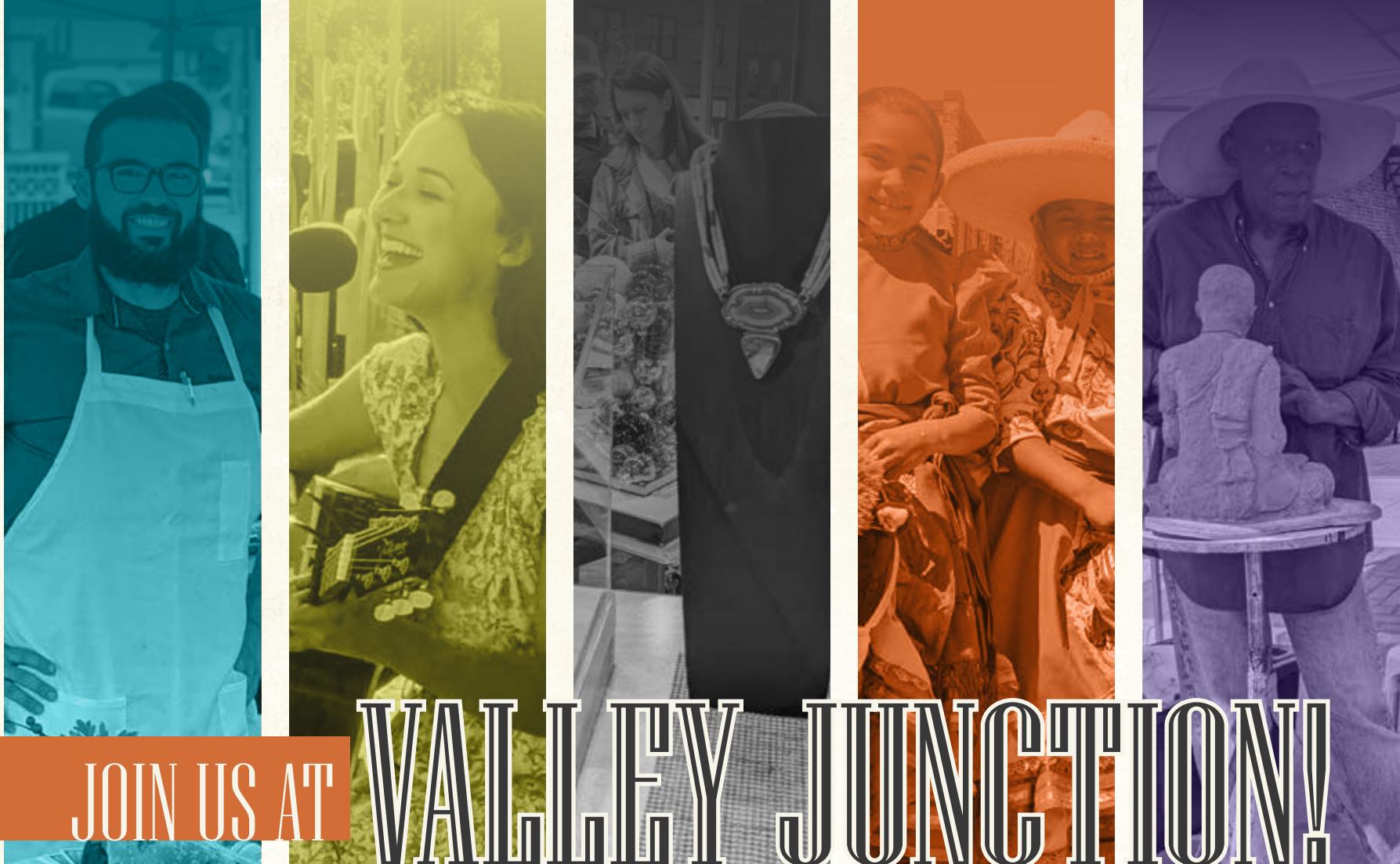
Runners-up: Canoyer Garden Center; Piney Ridge Greenhouses

Avery

The Avery Collection exudes a quiet elegance through softly rounded corners and smooth, flowing lines.



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JOIN US AT VALLEY JUNCTION!

Come celebrate with us during these fun events throughout 2026. We offer a variety of events including cultural events, farmers market, art festivals and more!

FEBRUARY

DIY in the Junction Saturday, February 21

APRIL

Spring Gallery Night Friday, April 17

Spring Sale-A-Bration Saturday, April 25

MAY

Farmers Market May-Sept Thursdays

Music in the Junction May-Sept Thursdays

Cinco de Mayo Saturday, May 2

Yoga in the Park Saturday, May 9

VJ Art Festival Sunday, May 17

JUNE

Farmers Market Thursdays

Music in the Junction Thursdays

Yoga in the Park Saturday, June 13

Valley Junction Pride! Sunday, June 28

JULY

Farmers Market Thursdays

Music in the Junction Thursdays

Junction Street Party Friday, July 3

Yoga in the Park Saturday, July 11

Summer Sale-A-Bration Saturday, July 25

AUGUST

Farmers Market Thursdays

Music in the Junction Thursdays

Yoga in the Park Saturday, August 9

SEPTEMBER

Farmers Market Thursdays

Music in the Junction Thursdays

Vintage, Thrifted, & Handmade

Sunday, September 6

Yoga in the Park Saturday, September 12

OCTOBER

Fall Gallery Night Friday, October 9

Yoga in the Park Saturday, October 10

Sip-n-Shop Thursday, October 22

Pumpkin Walk Sunday, October 25

Sip-n-Shop Thursday, October 29

NOVEMBER

Sip-n-Shop Thursday, November 5

Jingle in the Junction Thursday, November 19

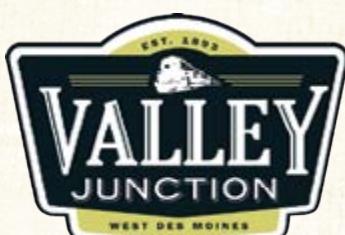
Small Business Saturday Saturday, November 28

DECEMBER

Jingle in the Junction Thursday, December 3

Jingle in the Junction Thursday, December 10

Jingle in the Junction Thursday, December 17



HISTORIC VALLEY JUNCTION FOUNDATION

137 5th Street, West Des Moines, IA 50265 (515) 222-3642

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NIGHTLIFE

Best Whiskey

Prairie Fire

For the eighth year in a row, Iowa Distilling Company's Prairie Fire whiskey has won Best Whiskey thanks to Best of Des Moines voters. The hot cinnamon flavored spirit is perfect for cocktails, like one of the 29 listed on Iowa Distilling Company's website. Give them all a try, maybe not in one night, but we don't think you'll be disappointed. 4349 Cumming Ave., Cumming, 515-981-4216; www.iowadistilling.com.

Runners-up: Revelton; Jack Daniel's

Best Vodka

Tito's Handmade Vodka

Tito's was the most consumed spirit in the state last year with sales topping \$31 million. That's a whole lot of Tito's for bars, restaurants and homes. The smooth, crystal clear spirit goes great as the base for vodka cocktails. www.titosvodka.com.

Runner-up: Zone Vodka; Grey Goose

Best Rum

Steel Drum Rum

Another one of Iowa Distilling Company's creations, Steel Drum Rum, wins its category once again. This spirit is on the sweeter side and made from pure Caribbean molasses, sourced from Caribbean sugar cane. As with Prairie Fire, Iowa Distilling Company has a list of recipes to try. Try the Drunkin' Pumpkin, made with the aforementioned rum, pumpkin syrup, orange juice, and orange bitters, strained over ice and topped with ginger beer. Yum. 4349 Cumming Ave., Cumming, 515-981-4216; www.iowadistilling.com.

Runners-up: RUMCOQUI; Captain Morgan

Best Local Craft Beer

Confluence Brewing Company

Located on the south side of Des Moines, Confluence Brewing Company takes home the Best Local Craft Beer for another year. This year, the brewery has been doing a "Beer-A-Week" initiative, where they bring back an old favorite or present a brand-new beer for a week, all year long. A beer enjoyer's personal heaven. 1235 Thomas Beck Road, Des Moines, 515-285-9005; www.confluencebrewing.com.

Runners-up: Barn Town Brewing; Exile Brewing Company

Best New Local Bar

Monsterama Pubcade

Self-proclaimed "your newest hangout," Monsterama Pubcade has had a monstrous (in a good way) first year. Inside the fantastical-themed bar are tons of arcade games, darts and pool to be played. Add in a bevy of great drinks and a short and simple menu of good eats, and it makes sense why CITYVIEW readers dubbed Monsterama Pubcade as the Best New Local Bar. 3108 S.W. Ninth St., Des Moines, 515-528-2015; www.monsteramapubcade.com.

Runners-up: The Contrary; Shirley's Bar & Grill



A cold one at Confluence Brewing Company, voted Best Local Craft Beer. Photo courtesy of Confluence Brewing Company

Best Local Patio Bar

Big Grove Brewery

The downtown brewery sweeps both Best Local Patio Bar and Best Local Restaurant Bar, for all the reasons mentioned before. Their beer list ranges from light and refreshing, to hoppy, sours and dark and malty. Not only that, but the fully stocked bar can craft up most any cocktail you can imagine. Stop in for a drink on their best in class patio. 555 17th St., Des Moines, 515-777-2337; www.biggrove.com.

Runners-up: The Pelican Post Bar & Grille; Destination Grille

Best Local Irish Pub

Sully's Irish Pub

Make that another year as the Best Local Irish Pub for Sully's. They claim to be the number one seller of Guinness in the state of Iowa. We can confirm they serve the Irish drink and serve it well. With great specials occurring all week long, metro bargoers are treated well by this popular pub. 860 First St., West Des Moines, 515-255-9970; www.sullysdesmoines.com.

Runners-up: Magee's Irish Pub & Eatery; Mickey's Irish Pub



Best Local Dive Bar

Toad's Tavern

This east side bar has made runner-up several times in this category but takes home the title as the Best for 2026. Toad's has all the classic staples of a neighborhood dive bar: unassuming, dimly lit, pool contests, a solid food menu, and drinks at great prices. Spend an evening here and you'll quickly see why Best of Des Moines voters made this selection. 3002 State Ave., Des Moines, 515-264-8623; www.facebook.com/toadstavern/.

Runners-up: Carl's Place; Doc's Lounge

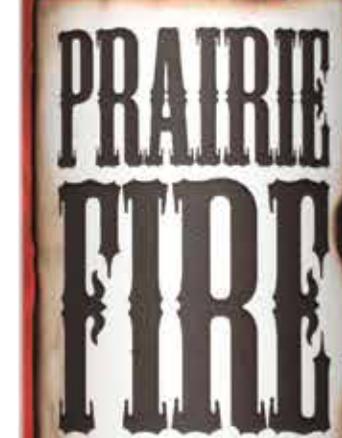
Best Local Fancy-Pants Bar

Winchester Public House

When searching for an upscale cocktail in a fancy-pants environment, Winchester Public House in Valley Junction is the choice for CITYVIEW readers. Just listen to some of these cocktail names: Butterfly Effect, Dude Abides and Banana Chai Affair. Sounds fancy, doesn't it? There are also plenty of brews on tap and a sharables menu to keep your belly full. 224 Fifth St., West Des Moines, 515-499-4002; www.winchester.pub.

Runners-up: Hello, Marjorie; The Cork 50131

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Best Local Sports Bar

The Station on Ingersoll

Catching a game at your local sports bar with the drinks flowing, the food hot and tasty, and the vibes unmatched is an experience worth having. Spend an NFL Sunday at The Station on Ingersoll and watch the hours fly by. Take in a day of baseball, a night of basketball, whichever sport is your favorite, and The Station is going to make it a memorable one. 3124 Ingersoll Ave., Des Moines, 515-381-0052; www.thestationdsm.com.

Runners-up: Bix & Co.; Doc's Lounge



Monsterama Pubcade was voted Best New Local Bar by CITYVIEW readers. Photo courtesy of Monsterama Pubcade

Best Local Bar (Overall)

Toad's Tavern

Toad's Tavern clearly made a positive push last year, taking the top spot in another category after being runner-up the year before. With recurring pool tournaments, friendly service and beer as cold as it is cheap, Toad's wins Best Local Bar (Overall). 3002 State Ave., Des Moines, 515-264-8623; www.facebook.com/toadstavern/.

Runners-up: Doc's Lounge; Iowa Distilling Company

Best Ankeny Bar

Jake's Pub

A casual bar in Ankeny, Jake's Pub takes the Best Ankeny Bar honor. Ankeny residents adore this bar, as it reminds them of Ankeny before its rapid growth. A dive bar in a city full of bright, glistening, brand new toys, it stands out in a good, down-home way. 605 N Ankeny Blvd., Ankeny; www.instagram.com/jakespub_ankeny/.

Runners-up: Yankee Clipper; Whiskey River

Best Drake Area Bar

University Library Café

University Library Café captures the same two awards it took home last year with Best Local Nachos and, now, Best Drake Area Bar. Someone has to serve up cold drinks and great food to the college students of the area, and, sure, there are plenty to choose from, but Best of Des Moines voters choose University Library Café once more. 3506 University Ave., Des Moines, 515-255-0433; www.thelibrarydm.com.

Runners-up: Lucky Horse Beer & Burgers; Peggy's Tavern

Best Beaverdale Area Bar

The Dam Pub

The Dam Pub is nestled between buildings in Beaverdale with bright colors and art adorning the walls. Lights illuminate the patio, and drinks and food satisfy hunger and deliver great times. Stop in for brunch for "where's my dam breakfast," or dinner for a chicken goat cheese pizza. Wacky? Sure. Tasty? No doubt. Worth a stop in one of Des Moines' coziest neighborhoods? According to our readers, absolutely. 2710 Beaver Ave., Des Moines, 515-279-4449; www.dampubdsm.com.

Runners-up: Beaver Tap; GoodSons

Best Downtown Bar

The Stuffed Olive

It has been a full year since The Stuffed Olive got an upgrade and moved across the street. Court Avenue bar goers enjoyed it last year, and that sentiment remains this year as it wins Best Downtown Bar. We counted more than 100 different types of martinis on their menu. The classics remain, but why not be adventurous and try the Drunken Monkey, which comes with peanut butter whiskey, Crème de Banana, and caramel, garnished with a monkey. 216 Court Ave., Suite 100, Des Moines, 515-243-4456; www.stuffedolivedsm.com.

Runners-up: Hello, Marjorie; The Lift

Best West Side Bar

Shotgun Betty's

Winning this award for another year is Shotgun Betty's. For those who like to attend a bar on the rowdier side, the Best West Side Bar is your destination. Country music blasts, line dances ensue, and the cold beer flows. 5535 Mills Civic Parkway, Suite 100, West Des Moines, 515-309-0744; www.facebook.com/shotgunbettys.

Runners-up: Doc's Lounge; The Pelican Post Bar & Grille

Best East Village Bar

The Blazing Saddle

Opening in 1983, The Blazing Saddle is the oldest gay bar in the city. Their motto is, "Where it's always a double and never a cover!" Two things that are hard to beat. Add in The Saddle Gurls performances and lively music, all located in the heart of the East Village, and it is a recipe for a great time. 416 E Fifth St., Des Moines, 515-246-1299; www.theblazingsaddle.com.

Runners-up: 85 Bar; The Republic on Grand

Best East Bar

Toad's Tavern

Toad's Tavern adds another award to its 2026 list; this time it's a spot where it reigns: the Best East Bar. With happy hour from 11 a.m. to 6 p.m. (that's a lot of hours of happiness, but we're not complaining), the bar welcomes patrons to enjoy drinks, play pool, catch the game, or even make some new friends. 3002 State Ave., Des Moines, 515-264-8623; www.facebook.com/toadstavern.

Runners-up: Gerri's Bar & Grill; Kelly's Little Nipper



Toad's Tavern wins Best Local Bar (Overall), Best East Bar and Best Local Dive Bar thanks to Best of Des Moines voters. Photo courtesy of Toad's Tavern

Best South Bar

Francie's Bar & Grill

Also home to the Best Local Bar Food is the Best South Bar, Francie's. This bar and grill has been treating the southside to satisfying food and drink since 1987. They have domestics, including local favorites on tap, bottles, cans, seltzers, cocktails and even a solid wine selection — not something you often find at bar and grills. 2100 Wakonda View Drive, Des Moines, 515-285-5207; www.franciesbarandgrill.com.

Runners-up: Angry Goldfish Pub & Eatery; Monsterama Pubcade

Best Local Winery

Jasper Winery

Jasper Winery has reached a decade atop the Best Local Winery chart, a feat few others have been able to accomplish any and all categories. Jasper's grapes are grown in full display, making some excellent bottles like their sweet Front Porch or their dry Behind the Shed Red. The winery also has a killer sangria recipe that can be tasted at its weekly summer concert series, which continues to grow in popularity. 2400 George Flagg Parkway, Des Moines, 515-282-9463; www.jasperwinery.com.

Runners-up: Covered Bridges Winery; Cooper's Hawk Winery & Restaurant

Best Local Brewery

Confluence Brewing Company

That is back-to-back years for Confluence as the recipient of the Best Local Craft Beer and the Best Local Brewery. Step into this brewery, which also boasts an inviting patio next to Gray's Lake, and start sampling some of their award-winning beers. CITYVIEW readers certainly have. 1235 Thomas Beck Road, Des Moines, 515-285-9005; www.confluencebrewing.com.

Runners-up: Barn Town Brewing; Lua Brewing

Best Local Moscow Mule

The Copper Cup

Moscow Mules are most often served in copper cups, so it makes sense that the aptly named Copper Cup in downtown Des Moines serves the best of them, according to Best of Des Moines voters. At this bar, they have plenty of twists on the sweet cocktail. We challenge you to try them all... just not in one sitting. 207 Fourth St., Des Moines, 515-554-2606; www.thecoppercupdm.com.

Runners-up: Gastro Grub & Pub; The Big Steer

wood-fired pizza, beer and wine. 2932 Ingersoll Ave., Des Moines, 515-282-8085; www.eateryadsm.com.

Runners-up: Toad's Tavern; Doc's Lounge

Best Local Bloody Mary

Early Bird Brunch

There are five Bloody Marys on the menu at Early Bird Brunch: the Mary Me, the Big Flocking Bloody, the Triple Bacon Bloody, the Spicy Chili Mary and the E.B. Bloody Mary. Try them all and see which is your favorite. Locations in Ankeny, East Village and West Des Moines, 515-528-2212; www.earlybirdbrunch.com.

Runners-up: Iowa Distilling Company; Mullets

Best Local Bar to Play Games

Up-Down

It's hard to beat Up-Down for the Best Local Bar to Play Games. After all, the East Village barcade boasts more than 60 classic arcade games for patrons to enjoy. Hit the favorites from your childhood like Donkey Kong or Pac-Man, or take on some of the new games that make appearances in the sprawling landscape of bright flashing 8-bit lights that is Up-Down's basement. There are also video game-themed cocktails and large, tasty slices of pizza to complete the experience. 500 E. Locust St., Des Moines, 515-243-4322; www.updownarcadebar.com/des-moines.

Runners-up: Monsterama Pubcade; Ricochet

Best Local Place to See Beautiful People

Coachlight Clinic & Spa

Des Moines is a beautiful city, from its skyline to its sunsets to its murals and back again. It's only natural that plenty of beautiful people reside here, too. According to CITYVIEW readers, the best place to find those beautiful people is at Coachlight Clinic & Spa. 6420 Coachlight Drive, Suite 200, West Des Moines, 515-221-9999; www.dsmcoachlight.com.

Runners-up: ReNew You Spa & Suites; Doc's Lounge

Best Local Happy Hour

Eatery A

Happy hours are aplenty around this city full of elite bars and restaurants, but Eatery A continues to dominate this category for its hard-to-beat deal. From 2-6 p.m., the Mediterranean-inspired restaurant serves half-price

wood-fired pizza, beer and wine. 2932 Ingersoll Ave., Des Moines, 515-282-8085; www.eateryadsm.com.

Runners-up: Toad's Tavern; Doc's Lounge

Best Local Bartender

Jake Weller, Shotgun Betty's

The Best West Side Bar is once again home to the Best Local Bartender, Jake Weller of Shotgun Betty's. Bartenders have the cure to a broken heart or the jumpstart to a great time when serving up vibes and drinks. Best of Des Moines voters agree on Weller for the second year in a row. 5535 Mills Civic Parkway, Suite 100, West Des Moines, 515-309-0744; www.facebook.com/shotgunbettys.

Runners-up: Zoey Osteen, Gastro Grub and Pub; Cycrena Eischeid, The Cork 50131

Best Local Martini Menu

The Stuffed Olive

We mentioned the more than 100 specialty martinis at The Stuffed Olive in its win for the Best Downtown Bar, so it isn't surprising that CITYVIEW readers would also choose it for Best Local Martini Menu. Here is another random selection from the almost endless martini menu: The Pineapple Basil, with New Amsterdam Pineapple Vodka, New Amsterdam Mango Vodka, basil, lime, pineapple and orange juice. We'll take two, please. 216 Court Ave., Suite 100, Des Moines, 515-243-4456; www.stuffedolivedsm.com.

Runners-up: The Lift; The Big Steer

Best Local Margarita

Coa Cantina

Coa Cantina wins this award for the second year in a row. Margaritas at Coa Cantina take many different forms, with sweet and spicy options, and even combinations of the two. Give the watermelon margarita a taste, made with Blanco Tequila, house made watermelon puree, lime, tajin and, of course, fresh watermelon. 425 E. Grand Ave., Des Moines, 515-280-3097; www.coacantinadsm.com.

Runners-up: Iowa Distilling Company; Mi Mexico



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Here, weekdays feel just like weekends, and every moment invites you back for more. **Come see why Destination Grille is the ultimate dining experience.**



THANK YOU FOR VOTING D|G & HELPING US GET NOMINATED FOR:

- Best Local Caterer
- Best Local Gluten Free Food
- Best Local Patio Bar
- Best Local Rooftop Bar
- Best Local Place for a Wedding Reception
- Best Local Special Events Venue (non-wedding)

MONDAY-SATURDAY, 11AM-9PM | SUNDAY, 11AM-8PM

NIGHTLIFE

Best Local Dance Club

Denny Arthur's

Denny Arthur's recently celebrated its 45th anniversary. The cash-only bar brings a more mature crowd to the dance floor if you are wanting to avoid the jumping and shouting found at some other clubs in the city. 2400 86th St. Apt. 7, Urbandale, 515-561-6420; www.facebook.com/over30danceclub/.

Runners-up: Nightengale Cocktail; Shotgun Betty's

Best Local Drag Queen

Domita DeBaun Sanchez

Domita DeBaun Sanchez is a veteran of the local drag scene. Sanchez has developed a large following over the years thanks to her incredible outfits, performances and personality. For the second year in a row, this Saddle Gurl wins the Best Local Drag Queen award as chosen by Best of Des Moines voters. www.solo.to/domitasanchez.

Runners-up: Tyona Diamond; Peaches Diamond

Best Local Place to Karaoke

AJ's on East Court

Karaoke is not everyone's idea of a great time, but with the right environment, even the most sheepish of introverts can be turned into rockstars when the microphone hits their hands. Such is the case at AJ's on East Court. CITYVIEW readers prefer this bar to deliver their favorite shower, car or empty-home ballad to the stage. 419 E. Court Ave., Des Moines, 515-282-1888; www.ajsbar.com.

Runners-up: Doc's Lounge; Spare Time Entertainment

Best Local Place for a Bachelor/Bachelorette Party

Your Private Bar

The mobile bartender service keeps busy all year long, working an event for nearly every single day of the year. But, for this category, it is their own venue that gets to shine. The team at Your Private Bar can serve most any event's needs. 1701 25th St., West Des Moines, 515-599-1205; www.yourprivatebar.com.

Runners-up: Spare Time Entertainment; AJ's on East Court

Best Local Trivia Night

Doc's Lounge

Doc's Lounge has found itself as runner-up on several of these awards, but, for the second straight year, they are able to claim Best Local Trivia Night, thanks to Best of Des Moines voters. Trivia night at Doc's is every Tuesday from 7-9 p.m. Show up with your thinking cap on and see if you can be the best, at the best. 8805 Chambery Blvd., Johnston, 515-278-7090; www.docsinjohnstoniowa.com.

Runners-up: Iowa Distilling Company; Smash Park

Best Local Distillery

Iowa Distilling Company

The third and final award for Iowa Distilling Company makes sense, after all, this is the distillery responsible for the Best Whiskey (Prairie Fire) and Best Rum (Steel Drum Rum). What helps their case, besides the delightful spirits they produce, are the events at their bar. Trivia nights and live music are aplenty here just a short drive south of Des Moines. 4349 Cumming Ave., Cumming, 515-981-4216; www.iowadistilling.com.

Runners-up: Revelton Distilling Company; Foundry Distilling Company

Best Local LGBTQ Hangout

The Blazing Saddle

In addition to The Blazing Saddle's Best East Village Bar award, they also take home the Best Local LGBTQ Hangout award as voted by CITYVIEW readers. As mentioned previously, The Saddle is the city's original gay bar, pours the drinks strong, and brings the vibe to the East Village. 416 E. Fifth St., Des Moines, 515-246-1299; www.theblazingsaddle.com.

Runners-up: The Garden; AJ's on East Court

Best Whiskey Menu

Winchester Public House

Winning this year's Best Whiskey Menu for the second year in a row is also the winner of this year's Best Fancy Pants Bar award: Winchester Public House. The warm, friendly and inviting bar has an excellent selection of whiskeys for the dark spirit drinkers in your life. 224 Fifth St., West Des Moines, 515-499-4002; www.winchester.pub.

Runners-up: Gastro Grub & Pub; Fresko

Best Local Rooftop Bar

Destination Grille

Destination Grille earned runner-up for Best Local Restaurant Patio, among several wins and runners-up, but its rooftop seating is one desired most by CITYVIEW readers. Comfortable seating, TVs to keep your attention, and great food and drink to keep the good times rolling. 2491 E. First St., Grimes, 515-355-1153; www.destinationgrille.com.

Runners-up: The Republic on Grand; The Garden

Best Local Dog-Friendly Bar

Paws & Pints

Plenty of DSM bargoers also have furry friends at home. When these pet owners would normally have to leave man's best friend behind, at Paws & Pints, the dogs are the main guests, and humans are an afterthought. The massive outdoor area can tucker out the most energetic of dogs, all while you sip on a brew or cocktail. 6218 Willowmere Drive, Des Moines, 515-969-2275; www.pawsandpintsdsm.com.

Runners-up: Big Grove Brewery; Sully's Irish Pub

Best Local Mobile Bar Service

Your Private Bar

Planning a party can be difficult for even the most seasoned of hosts. Take one of the party-planning aspects off of your plate with Your Private Bar. A multi-time award winner in this category thanks to Best of Des Moines voters, they bring the bar to you. 1701 25th St., West Des Moines, 515-599-1205; www.yourprivatebar.com.

Runners-up: Top It Off Liquid Catering; Apres Bar Co.

Best Speakeasy

Chicago Speakeasy

Good news for metro area diners, this speakeasy is not difficult to find. Prime rib is a favorite here, hand-cut steaks make the mouth water, and classic cocktails make the night all the more enjoyable. Weeknight specials outside of the prime rib include spaghetti and meatballs, BBQ pork ribs and crispy fried chicken. 1520 Euclid Ave., Des Moines, 515-243-3141; www.chicagospeakeasyrestaurant.com.

Runners-up: In Confidence; Good News, Darling

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CULTURE & RECREATION



Best Local Place to Play Golf

Waveland Golf Course

Golf. A game of patience and skill, paired with the sights of rolling hills and forests. Or, if you're like us, sand traps, lakes and the wrong fairways. Either way, metro golfers and CITYVIEW readers voted for Waveland Golf Course as the Best Local Place to Play Golf for another year. With more than 40,000 rounds played here a year, the numbers appear to match up. 4908 University Ave., Des Moines, 515-248-6302; www.golfwaveland.com.

Runners-up: Topgolf; Jester Park Golf Course

Best Local Community to Live In

West Des Moines

The neighbor of Iowa's capital may have a similar name, but it also has its fair share of differences. West Des Moines, incorporated in 1893, is home to plenty of its own local legacy restaurants and businesses, as well as the state's largest shopping mall, Jordan Creek, and one of the city's best shopping districts in Valley Junction. Its school district is one that has received plenty of acclaim, and the area hosts family-friendly events all year long, helping to make it Best Local Community to Live In, according to Best of Des Moines voters.

www.wdm.iowa.gov/home.

Runners-up: Beaverdale; Ankeny

Best Local Place to Worship

Lutheran Church of Hope

Lutheran Church of Hope has churches throughout central Iowa, with branches in West Des Moines, Ankeny, Des Moines, Grimes, Waukee, Ames and several other communities. The church also has an active presence online, where you can catch up on a service or watch from home if you are not able to attend. Main location at 925 Jordan Creek Parkway, West Des Moines, 515-222-1520; www.hopewdm.org.

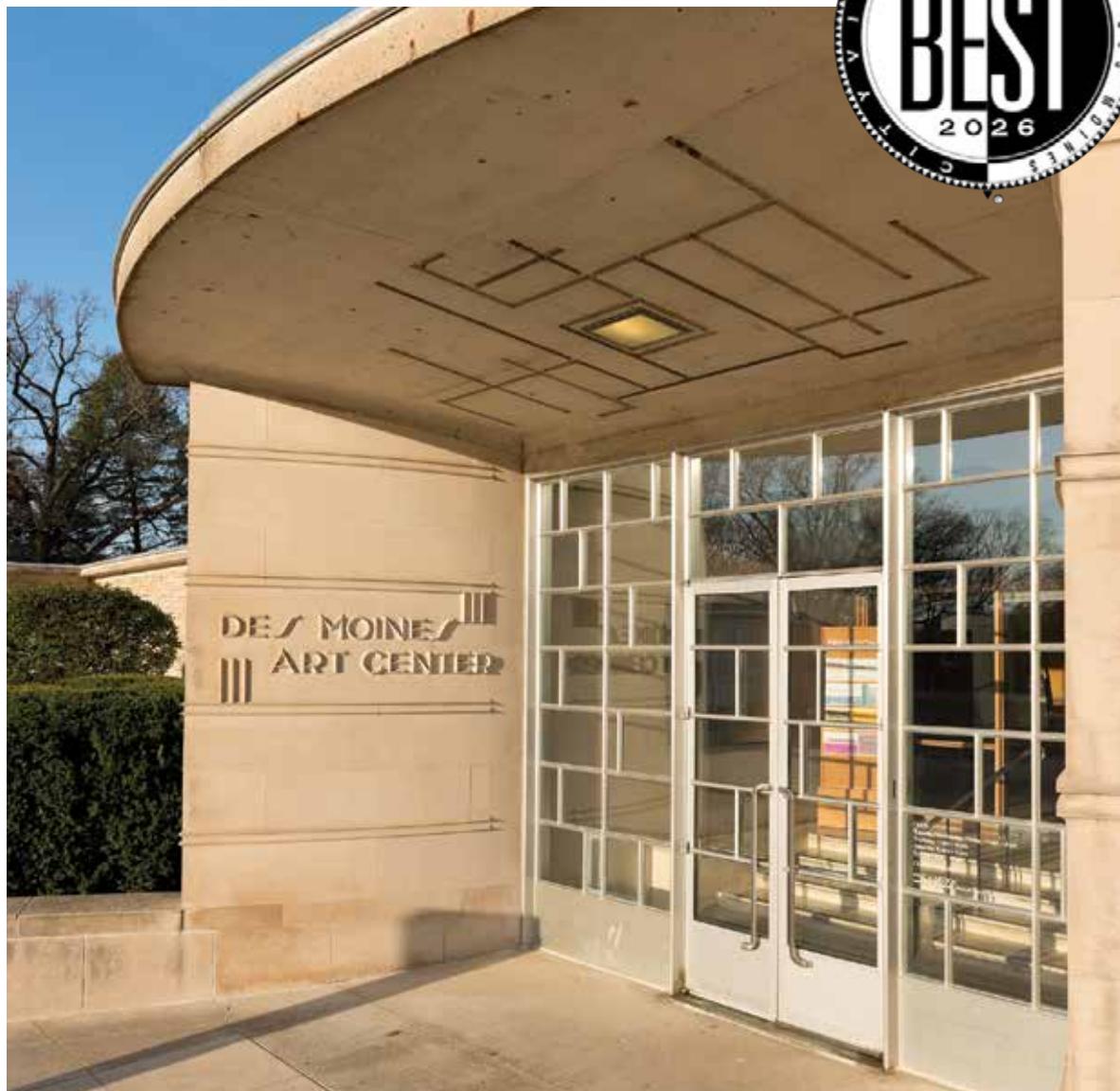
Runners-up: Plymouth United Church of Christ; Eternity Church

Best Local Nonprofit

Animal Rescue League of Iowa

The Animal Rescue League of Iowa wins the Best Local Nonprofit award thanks to CITYVIEW readers. This year, the ARL of Iowa set a record for most adoptions in a single year. The nonprofit is constantly posting tips to help you take care of your pets, success stories from the furry friends they have helped rescue, and information about several other pet services. 5452 N.E. 22nd St., Des Moines, 515-262-9503; www.arl-iowa.org.

Runners-up: ChildServe; Many Hands Thrift Market



The Des Moines Art Center has been voted Best Local Museum by CITYVIEW readers. Photo courtesy of Des Moines Art Center

Best Local School District

Waukee Community School District

The Waukee Community School District has 19 facilities under its watch, fostering the youth of one of Iowa's, and the country's, fastest growing communities. With 14,000 students, it makes the back-to-back winner of this category as the third-largest school district in the state. www.waukeeschools.org.

Runners-up: Des Moines Public Schools; West Des Moines Community Schools

Best Local Party/Event

Transportation

515 Party Bus

Drinking and driving is never the right choice. Thanks to 515 Party Bus, you can enjoy your libations and keep the vibes high without having to stress about the drive home. The company has a fleet of party busses from the

King Limo Bus to the Kodiak Limo Bus, holding you and up to 40 friends in certain vehicles. 515-650-7463; www.515partybus.com.

Runners-up: Front Row Transportation; Charters on Vine

Best Local Place to Hold a Corporate Event/Party

Animal Rescue League of Iowa

It may surprise you that the Best Local Nonprofit also hosts an excellent party. The ARL of Iowa has indoor and outdoor event spaces for meetings, trainings, wedding receptions, holiday parties and more. One hundred percent of the proceeds go toward the animals in their care, so getting a little too tipsy at your work Christmas party was actually a good thing. 5452 N.E. 22nd St., Des Moines, 515-262-9503; www.arl-iowa.org.

Runners-up: Iowa Wild; Spare Time Entertainment

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CULTURE & RECREATION

Best Local Place for a Wedding Reception Destination Grille

Destination Grille has several event spaces to cater (literally) most any wedding reception size. Spaces range from the Boardroom that fits 25 cocktail guests, all the way up to the entire seven-level buyout, which can hold more than 300 guests. With the excellent food and drink already there, that was enough for Best of Des Moines voters to select it the winner for Best Local Place for a Wedding Reception. 2491 E. First St., Grimes, 515-355-1153; www.destinationgrille.com.

Runners-up: Willow on Grand; The Monroe

Best Local Place to Gamble

Prairie Meadows Casino, Racetrack & Hotel

From 1996 to 2024, Prairie Meadows has given \$2.3 billion to Iowa through taxes and charitable giving to promote economic development, agriculture, job creation and tourism. Not only that, but you could win a few bucks playing table games, slots or at the racetrack. Whether Best of Des Moines voters chose them for the first, or the second, reason is not clear, but both are solid reasons why. 1 Prairie Meadows Drive, Altoona, 515-967-1000; www.prairiemeadows.com.

Runners-up: Meskwaki Bingo Casino & Hotel; Lakeside Hotel Casino

Best Local Musician

Damon Dotson

Damon Dotson is known to perform at venues across the metro often. A quick look on his socials show performances at The Yankee Clipper, Striking Sparrow Lounge, Wellman's Pub and Doc's Lounge. He has several albums to his name and can be found all around the city performing his tunes. www.facebook.com/damondotsonmusicpage.

Runners-up: Jordan Beem; Sierra Griggs

Best Local Band

Damon Dotson Band

Here he is again, this time winning the Best Local Band category. The Damon Dotson Band performs his style of pop and rock that brings an upbeat tempo, mixing original songs with covers. His band includes talented musicians playing on guitar, bass, drums and the saxophone. www.facebook.com/damondotsonmusicpage.

Runners-up: The Nadas; The Sierra Griggs Band

Best Local Place to Go for a Comedy Show

Funny Bone Comedy Club

Who doesn't enjoy a good, belly-clutching, tear-inducing laugh every once in a while? Those hearty laughs can be found at West Des Moines' own Funny Bone Comedy Club. This club has hosted some of the biggest names in comedy over the years and consistently has shows throughout the year for standup comedy fans. West Des Moines, 560 S. Prairie View Drive, Suite 100, West Des Moines, 515-270-2100; www.desmoines.funnybone.com.

Runners-up: Hoyt Sherman Place; Teehee's Comedy Club

Best Local Artist

Tanner Saltzman

Tanner Saltzman takes home this year's Best Local Artist award thanks to CITYVIEW readers. Saltzman is a tattoo artist at Lucky Gal Tattoo and Piercing. He regularly posts his work online and where you can find the pieces he's selling. www.facebook.com/tanner.saltzman/.

Runners-up: Amy Ross; Tiara Young



Thank You

FOR NOMINATING OUR TEAM

Best Local Financial Planner

Best Local Insurance Agent

Best Local Customer Service (Overall)



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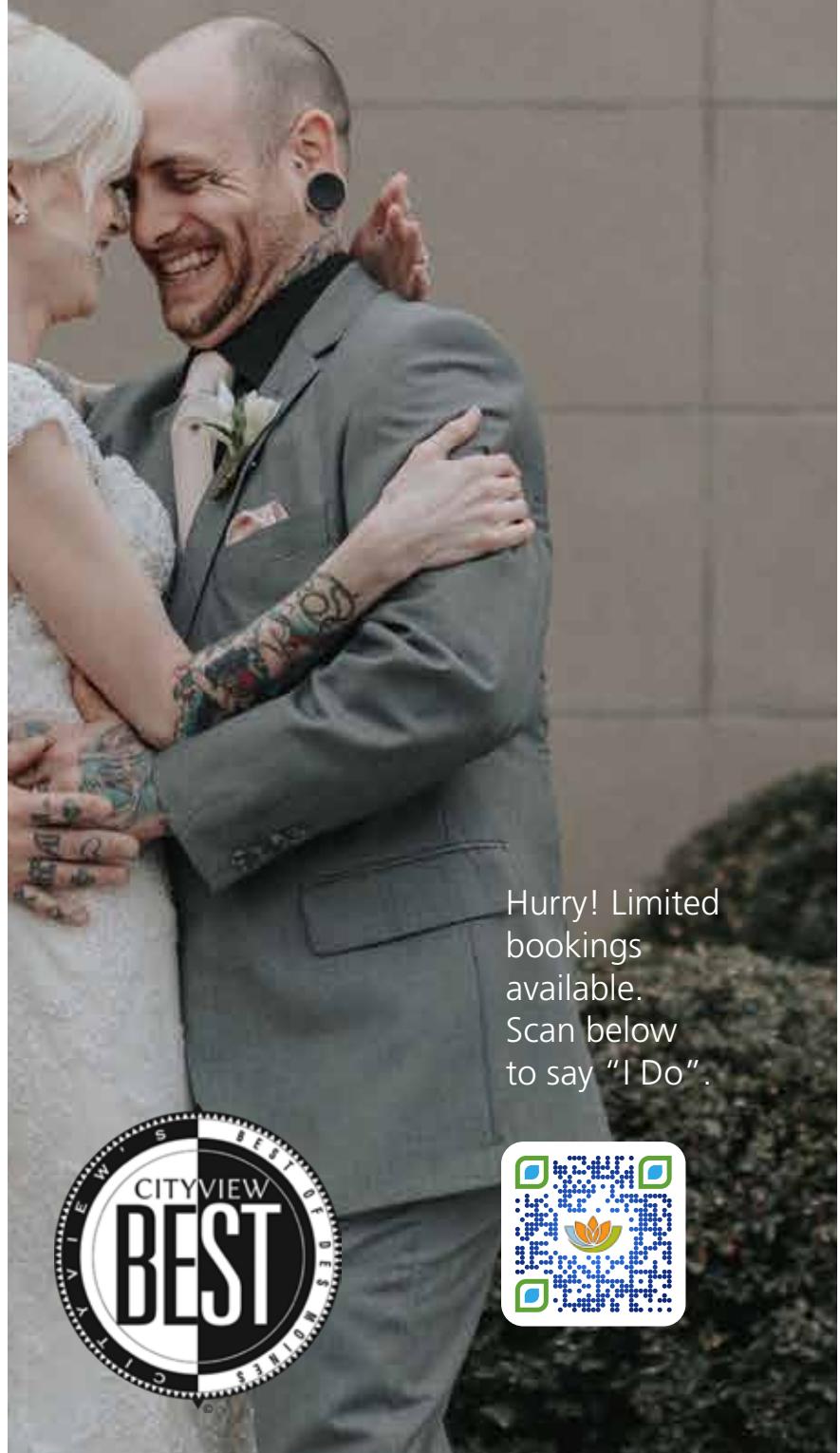
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CULTURE & RECREATION



The Iowa Wild are winners of the 2026 Best Local Indoor Sporting Event.
Photo by Tim Garland, courtesy of the Iowa Wild

Best Local Live Music Venue

Wooly's

An even rarer feat than winning for a decade in a row is winning 15 years in a row. Wooly's could be considered one of the longest-reigning winners thanks to Best of Des Moines voters. Wooly's books a wide range of artists and genres. Some of their selections have gone on to become the biggest names in music. 504 E. Locust St., Des Moines, 515-244-0550; www.firstfleetconcerts.com/first-fleet-venues/woolys.

Runners-up: xBk Live; Hoyt Sherman Place

Best Local Theatrical Venue

Des Moines Playhouse

Theatre fans in Des Moines are lucky to be treated to as many local theatre options as the area has. CITYVIEW readers' favorite? The Des Moines Playhouse. The Playhouse regularly hosts musicals, comedies and dramas for all ages. This community stalwart has been in operation since 1919. Today, the venue averages 45,000 attendees through the year thanks to a staff of 13 and more than 750 volunteers. 831 42nd St., Des Moines, 515-277-6261; www.dmplayhouse.com.

Runners-up: Des Moines Civic Center; Hoyt Sherman Place

Best Local Place to Catch a Flick

The Palms Theatres & IMAX

Much ado has been made of the death of movie theaters. A new streaming service seems to pop up every other week. You wouldn't be able to tell at The Palms Theaters & IMAX during the opening weekend of a blockbuster, though. Catching a movie at The Palms means comfy seats, salty popcorn, a sweet drink, and even a full dinner menu. 200 N.E. Westgate Drive, Waukee, 515-444-5006; www.fridleytheatres.com.

Runners-up: Varsity Cinema; Flix Brewhouse

Best Local Museum

Des Moines Art Center

The Des Moines Art Center is a cultural gem in Des Moines. Its shows are carefully curated, installed and admired by thousands. At any given moment, for free, visitors have the chance to view some of the world's best art. Not only that, but the Art Center is consistently hosting classes and demonstrations. 4700 Grand Ave., Des Moines, 515-277-4405; www.desmoinesartcenter.org.

Runners-up: State Historical Museum of Iowa; Science Center of Iowa

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Jester Park wins Best Local Camping Spot. Photo courtesy of Polk County

Best Local Place to Have a Kid's Birthday Party

Animal Rescue League of Iowa

The ARL is racking up the awards this year thanks to Best of Des Moines voters. Adding to its trophy haul this year is a category they won last year as well. If your child is a fan of furry friends, and, let's face it, most are, the ARL can host with the best of them. You might just take home your next pet while you are at it. 5452 N.E. 22nd St., Des Moines, 515-262-9503; www.arl-iowa.org.

Runners-up: Let's Slumber It; Iowa Wild

Best Local Place to Take Your Kids

Blank Park Zoo

When Abraham Harry Blank donated the money for a children's zoo in the 1960s, he had no idea that it would one day be the Best Local Place to Take Your Kids. That's probably every local philanthropist's goal, right? Accredited by the Association of Zoos and Aquariums, the zoo houses animals from across the globe, educates the area, and makes for one great afternoon. 7401 S.W. Ninth St., Des Moines, 515-285-4722; www.blankparkzoo.com.

Runners-up: Iowa Wild; Spare Time Entertainment

Best Local Place to Take Visitors

Greater Des Moines Botanical Garden

The sights, smells and overall friendly and welcoming vibe inside the Greater Des Moines Botanical Garden helped CITYVIEW readers make this choice. Add in their signature events like Dome after Dark, Botanical Blues, Dome for the Holidays, and several others, and we can understand why this landmark was chosen Best Local Place to Take Visitors. 909 Robert D. Ray Drive, Des Moines, 515-323-6290; www.dmbotanicalgarden.com.

Runners-up: Pappajohn Sculpture Park; Iowa State Capitol

Best Local Annual Event

ARL Raise Your Paw Auction

Did you miss them? Here is the ARL being honored again, this time for their Raise Your Paw Auction. It is the nonprofit's largest event of the year and helps support the thousands of pets in their care. There is food, live music, and plenty of silent auction items, typically held in April each year. 5452 N.E. 22nd St., Des Moines, 515-262-9503; www.arl-iowa.org.

Runners-up: Iowa State Fair; Des Moines Arts Festival

Best Local Sports Team

Iowa Cubs

The Cubbies are once more the area's Best Local Sports Team as voted by CITYVIEW readers. The Iowa Cubs are the longest running affiliated AAA team with its pro franchise, the Chicago Cubs. Each year brings the chance to see who the next brightest and best future MLB player will be right here at home. One Line Drive, Des Moines, 515-243-6111; www.mlb.com/iowa.

Runners-up: Iowa Wild; Des Moines Buccaneers

Best Local Place to Go Swimming

Clive Aquatic Center

Each summer brings the opportunity to get out of the sun and into the water. Iowans will be hard pressed to find better relief from the heat than a nice afternoon spent at the pool. The pool of choice in 2026 for CITYVIEW readers? The Clive Aquatic Center. 1801 N.W. 114th St., Clive, 515-440-0599; www.cityofclive.com/parkandrecreation/aquatic_center/index.php.

Runners-up: Life Time; Ashworth Swimming Pool

Best Local Place to Bowl

Spare Time Entertainment

Spare Time Entertainment wins the Best Local Place to Bowl award for another year. Whether you roll a strike, spare, split or even a gutter ball doesn't matter here, as good times are aplenty. Also at Spare Time is a full menu, arcade, escape rooms and more. 340 Jordan Creek Parkway, West Des Moines, 515-414-2824; www.sparetimeentertainment.com/desmoines.

Runners-up: Val Lanes; B&B Theatres Ankeny & B-Roll Bowling

Best Local Indoor Sporting Event

Iowa Wild

While the hockey players do their thing on the ice, the rest of the Iowa Wild staff are also hard at work making sure the gameday experience is one to remember. Often recognized around the American Hockey League as having some of the league's best marketing, it's no wonder Best of Des Moines voters have a great time with the Iowa Wild. 233 Center St., Des Moines, 515-564-8700; www.iowawild.com.

Runners-up: Des Moines Buccaneers; Iowa Barnstormers

Best Local Outdoor Sporting Event

Iowa Cubs

The snow melts, the sun comes out, the I-Cubs hit the field, and the fans take to the stands. Each summer, the Iowa Cubs give the fans 144 chances to watch the Best Local Sports Team play in the Best Local Outdoor Sporting Event. That's a lot of chances. Don't take them for granted, CITYVIEW readers sure aren't. 1 Line Drive, Des Moines, 515-243-6111; www.iowacubs.com.

Runners-up: Iowa State Football; Principal Charity Classic

Best Local Farmers Market

Des Moines Downtown Farmers Market

This year will be the 50th season of the Des Moines Downtown Farmers Market. While it may not have 50 Best Local Farmers Market awards to its name (though it might have, had we been around then), it is once again voted the best. The Court Avenue district is jam packed every Saturday with jellies, arts and crafts, foods of all kinds, flowers and more from May until October. 300 Court Ave., Des Moines, 515-286-4950; www.dsmpartnership.com/desmoinesfarmersmarket.

Runners-up: Valley Junction Farmers Market; Uptown Ankeny Farmers Market

Best Local Camping Spot

Jester Park

Just outside of Des Moines, a camper's dream awaits at Jester Park. There are 148 campsites along the lakeshore, 80 with electric, and more than 1,500 acres of land to explore in the area. Whether you set up shop in a massive RV, or like to rough it in tents, Jester Park has what you need right here in central Iowa. 12130 N.W. 128th St., Granger, 515-323-5338; www.polkcountyiowa.gov/conservation/parks-trails/jester-park.

Runners-up: Cutty's Des Moines Camping Club; Prairie Flower Campground

Best Local Place to Have an Adult Birthday Party

Your Private Bar

Just because you turn 21, 30, 40, 50 or 60 (wow, you are getting old), and beyond does not mean the party has to stop. There are plenty of reasons to celebrate yourself, a friend, or a loved one, but birthdays are arguably the best. And Your Private Bar is the place for the party, according to CITYVIEW readers. 1701 25th St., West Des Moines, 515-599-1205; yourprivatebar.com.

Runners-up: Spare Time Entertainment; Let's Slumber It

Best Local Wedding Venue

Magnolia Farms

Just a few minutes outside the hustle and bustle of Des Moines, one will find Magnolia Farms. This modern, charming farmhouse was built from scratch in 2020 and has been celebrating brides and grooms alike with success ever since. 34386 Old Portland Road, Adel, 515-443-3393; www.magnoliafarmsia.com.

Runners-up: Rollins Mansion; The Monroe

Best Local Event Decor/Rental Company

Let's Slumber It

Let's Slumber It has more than 50 themes for your sleepover extravaganza. Have a Taylor Swift fan in your life? There's a theme for that. Big on Squishmallows? There's a theme for that. A purveyor of mermaids? There's a theme for that. www.letsslumberit.com.

Runners-up: Bella Flora Event Design; Wildflower Vault

Best Local Special Events Venue (non-wedding)

Destination Grille

Best Local Gluten-Free Food, Best Local Rooftop Bar, Best Local Place for a Wedding Reception, and, now, the Best Local Special Events Venue (non-wedding) honor for



The colorful lanes of the Best Local Place to Bowl, Spare Time Entertainment. Photo courtesy of Spare Time Entertainment

Destination Grille. A big year for them, and a great spot for celebrating special occasions, according to Best of Des Moines voters. 2491 E. First St., Grimes, 515-355-1153; www.destinationgrille.com.

Runners-up: Your Private Bar; The Loft

Best Local Spot to Pop the Question

Greater Des Moines Botanical Center

Could there be a better backdrop for a proposal than some of the jaw-dropping flora at the Greater Des Moines Botanical Garden? Not according to Best of Des Moines voters. 909 Robert D. Ray Drive, Des Moines, 515-323-6290; www.dmbotanicalgarden.com.

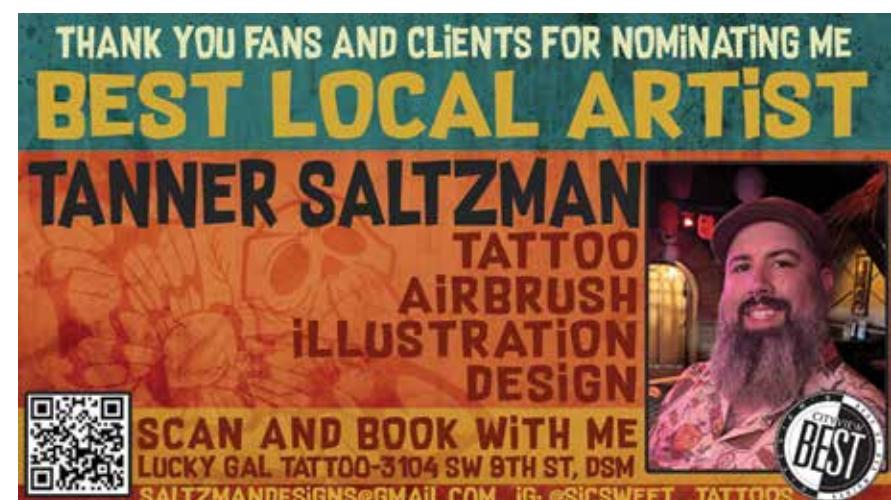
Runners-up: AJ's on East Court; Pappajohn Sculpture Park

Best Local Landmark

Iowa State Capitol

While there may be plenty of disagreements going on inside of this building, there is little disagreement when discussing the wonder that is the Iowa State Capitol. It is consistently dubbed one of the best capitol buildings in the nation, and within it can be found one of the country's most stunning libraries. 1007 E. Grand Ave., Des Moines, 515-281-5591; www.legis.iowa.gov/resources/tourCapitol.

Runners-up: Pappajohn Sculpture Park; Greater Des Moines Botanical Garden



HEALTH & BEAUTY

FEATURE STORY

Best Local Pharmacy

Hy-Vee

There are helpful smiles in at least one of those aisles. Picking up a prescription at the Best Local Pharmacy while also grabbing the rest of your essentials makes running those errands just a little bit easier. With Hy-Vees located all over the metro, that helps even more. Multiple locations; www.hy-vee.com.

Runners-up: Medicap Pharmacy; Adel HealthMart

Best Local Place to get LASIK Eye Surgery

Wolfe Eye Clinic

According to Wolfe Eye Clinic, more than 140 million Americans have a refractive disorder causing near and farsightedness or astigmatism. LASIK eye surgery can help rectify those disorders, and CITYVIEW readers say Wolfe Eye Clinic is the Best Local Place to get LASIK Eye Surgery. Locations in West Des Moines, Ankeny and Pleasant Hill; www.wolfeeyeclinic.com.

Runners-up: Associated Ophthalmologists; Des Moines Eye Surgeons

Best Local Place to Kickbox

Farrell's eXtreme Bodyshaping

Whether you are trying to learn self-defense or just get a great workout in, Farrell's eXtreme Bodyshaping is the choice for Best Local Place to Kickbox for Best of Des Moines voters. If you are in the market for some lessons, take a swing or a kick at theirs. Multiple locations; www.extremebodyshaping.com.

Runners-up: Krave Gym; NLXF

Best Local Martial Arts Studio

Bishops Elite Martial Arts Academy

Bishops Elite Martial Arts Academy has lessons for kids, teens and adults alike who are looking to master martial arts. The practice is one that can not only teach great self-defense techniques but also serve as a good workout while meeting new people. The academy also has White Tiger Kung Fu and Tai Chi classes. 2706 Beaver Ave., Des Moines, 515-858-0455; www.bishopselitemartialartsacademy.com.

Runners-up: Black Eagle Martial Arts; Two Rivers Martial Arts

Best Local Group Fitness

Life Time

Life Time has a little something for everyone on their fitness journey. There are indoor and outdoor pools, eight indoor tennis courts, spaces for kids, and a spacious workout floor with all the gym equipment you need to get that summer bod. When it comes to Best Local Group Fitness, readers say Life Time offers it. 11911 Hickman



The Lucky Gal Tattoo and Piercing family, voted Best Local Tattoo Studio. Photo courtesy of Lucky Gal Tattoo and Piercing

Road, Urbandale, 515-362-3500; www.lifetime.life/locations/ia/des-moines.html.

Runners-up: Power Life Yoga Barre Fitness; Rooted Yoga + Fitness

Best Local Running Event

Des Moines Marathon

The Des Moines Marathon has been held since 2002. The run takes over the city, almost serving as a tour of the downtown area, running through Court Avenue, hitting the East Village, winding through the Drake neighborhood, crossing through Water Works Park and going along Gray's Lake. Sign up and see if you have what it takes to complete this year's Best Local Running Event. www.desmoinesmarathon.com.

Runners-up: EMC DAM to DSM; Drake Relays

Best Local Personal Trainer

Ashley Wilson, Iron Chapel Barbell

Ashely Wilson of Iron Chapel Barbell wins this award for the second year in a row. A personal trainer can be critical to one's fitness journey. Having a professional to guide one through proper techniques and workout plans can often make all the difference. Plus, it helps having someone encourage you along the way. It looks like she has got tough competition in her own gym, as two other trainers from Iron Chapel Barbell are runners-up. 812 S.W. Cherry St., Suite 102, Ankeny, 641-275-5987; www.ironchapelbb.com.

Runners-up: Anthony Wilson, Iron Chapel Barbell; Jake Harre, Iron Chapel Barbell

Best Local Orthodontist

Stork Orthodontics

The stork used to symbolize a newborn baby. In the metro area, Storks signify healthy teeth. First impressions are often influenced by one's smile, and Best of Des Moines voters say Stork Orthodontics has their smiles radiant and their teeth healthy. 4090 Westown Parkway, Suite 101, West Des Moines, 515-608-8722; www.storkorthodontics.com.

Runners-up: Ankeny Orthodontics; Smile Orthodontics

Best Local Place to Work Out

Iron Chapel Barbell

With a clean sweep of the Best Personal Trainer category, we are not surprised that the buffest of CITYVIEW readers also chose Iron Chapel Barbell as their Best Local Place to Work Out. Just try not to tear these pages as you turn them, Iron Chapel Barbell goers. 812 S.W. Cherry St., Suite 102, Ankeny, 641-275-5987; www.ironchapelbb.com.

Runners-up: Bishop's Elite Martial Arts Academy; Life Time

Best Local Yoga Studio

Power Life Yoga Barre Fitness

For those of you not looking to pump iron but still wanting challenging workouts, look no further than a power or hot yoga session at Power Life Yoga Barre Fitness. This studio wins the award for another year and has plenty of options to help you get started. Multiple locations; www.powerlife.com.

Runners-up: Rooted Yoga + Fitness; DM Wellness & Yoga

Best Local Maternity Care or Birthing Center

Broadlawns Medical Center

The birthing center at Broadlawns Medical Center includes services such as care for low- and high-risk pregnancies; a C-section suite; breastfeeding, pumping and postpartum support; and more, all with experienced labor and delivery nurses. 1801 Hickman Road, Des Moines, 515-282-2200; www.broadlawns.org.

Runners-up: UnityPoint Iowa Methodist Medical Center; MercyOne Des Moines Maternity & Infants' Care

Best Local Place to Get Your Eyelashes Done

Nova MedSpa

Best of Des Moines voters chose the lash extensions and lash lift and tints at Nova MedSpa as their Best Local Place to Get Your Lashes Done for 2026. 320 S.E. Delaware Ave., Ankeny; 563-599-7422; www.novamedspa.org.

Runners-up: Ethereal Beauty Lounge; Simple Beauty with Laura

Best Local Place to Get a Massage Nova MedSpa

At the end of a long year, month, week or even a long day, the thing someone might need the most is a massage. Put on the robe, grab a cup of tea and get a deep tissue, sports, Swedish or even prenatal massage to melt away all your aches and pains. 320 S.E. Delaware Ave., Ankeny; 563-599-7422; www.novamedspa.org.

Runners-up: Massages by Andrea; East Village Spa

Best Local Place to Get Your Nails Done

4 Seasons Nails & Spa

Winning this category once again thanks to Best of Des Moines voters is 4 Seasons Nails & Spa. Manicures, enhancements, powder dipped, polished, you name it, they nail it. Locations in Grimes, Windsor Heights and Norwalk; www.4seasonnailsandspa.com.

Runners-up: Oscar Nail Bar; East Village Spa

Best Local Herbal/Nutritional Supplement Store

Campbell's Nutrition

Campbell's is just a decade away from being in business for a century. At first, they were a local juice and lunch counter. These days, they provide groceries, supplements, body care, home goods, books, and a kids corner. Locations in Des Moines and Urbandale; www.campbellsnutrition.com.

Runners-up: Natural Health Improvement Center; Fit Pharm Nutrition

Best Local Tattoo Studio

Lucky Gal Tattoo and Piercing

Lucky Gal Tattoo and Piercing is the 2026 winner for Best Local Tattoo Studio. With multiple locations across the metro, those looking to get inked have ample selection for their tattoo needs. With as many locations and artists as they have, it is likely you'll be able to find someone who matches your desired style. Locations in Ankeny, Clive and Des Moines; www.luckygaltattoo.com.

Runners-up: Empire Tattoo; Warrior Tattoo

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Best Local Body Piercing Shop

Mint Piercing Studio

Piercings, much like tattoos, can be scary for first timers. But, also just like tattoos, once you get one, you likely won't want to stop there. The professionals at Mint Piercing Studio will provide insight and knowledge beforehand to help ensure you are getting the piercing you desire. Locations in West Des Moines and Ankeny; www.mintpiercing.com.

Runners-up: **Lucky Gal Tattoo and Piercing;**
Prysm Jewelry & Piercing

Best Local Place for Cosmetic Surgery

Koch & Carlisle Plastic Surgery & Spa

The list of cosmetic surgery options at Koch & Carlisle Plastic Surgery & Spa should meet the needs of most anyone in search of some fine tuning. Their providers are highly skilled and board certified. Whether one is looking for face, breast or other body surgeries, Koch & Carlisle are the ones that Best of Des Moines voters chose for 2026. 4855 Mills Civic Parkway No. 100, West Des Moines, 515-277-5555; www.kochandcarlisle.com.

Runners-up: **Des Moines Plastic Surgery; The Iowa Clinic**

Best Local Tanning Salon

Tanique

Tanique takes home the Best Local Tanning Salon honor for a second year in a row. Tanning in central Iowa, especially once we exit the summer months, is nearly impossible without salons such as Tanique providing the rays. Locations in Ankeny and West Des Moines; www.tanique.com.

Runners-up: **Sun Tan City; That Tanning Place**

Best Local Waxing Salon

MetroWaxx

MetroWaxx joins the select club of businesses who have reached a decade atop of their category with their 2026 selection by CITYVIEW readers as Best Local Waxing Salon. Most people assume waxing is just for the ladies, but fear not, fellas, they have services for you, too. If you want to hold someone's hand when you go, we won't judge. Locations in West Des Moines, Ankeny and Johnston; www.metrowaxx.com.

Runners-up: **Coachlight Clinic & Spa; Nova MedSpa**

Best Local Place for Non-Surgical Cosmetic Treatment

Coachlight Clinic & Spa

It is three in a row for Coachlight Clinic & Spa atop this category. Their non-surgical cosmetic treatments are one of several reasons why Best of Des Moines voters return to them time and time again. Locations in West Des Moines and Ankeny; www.dsmcoachlight.com.

Runners-up: **Koch & Carlisle Plastic Surgery; Nova MedSpa**

Best Local Spa

Coachlight Clinic & Spa

Being able to relax for a day, even for a couple of hours, at a spa, is an excellent way to distract yourself from the stressors of life. Coachlight Clinic & Spa offers traditional spa facials, body scrubs, day spa packages and amenities, soaks and scrubs and more. Locations in West Des Moines and Ankeny; www.dsmcoachlight.com.

Runners-up: **Koch & Carlisle Plastic Surgery; Nova MedSpa**



ppnccs.org | 1.800.230.7526

Thank you, CITYVIEW readers, for voting Planned Parenthood a finalist for "Best Local Family Planning Services" in 2026!

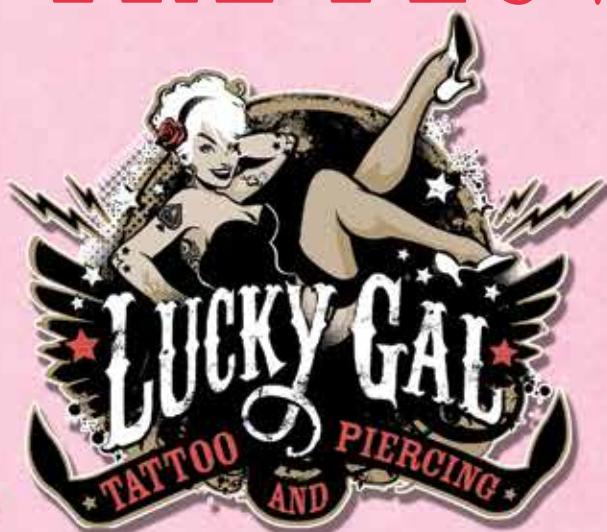
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Best Local Holistic Health Center Vero Health Center

"Vero Health Center has been rated the top West Des Moines, Iowa, medical clinic for helping our patients live the life they deserve through a natural, effective and state-of-the-art approach to pain management," says Vero Health Center, readers' choice for Best Local Holistic Health Center. They attempt to master the control system of the body, starting at the nervous system. 630 S 50th St., West Des Moines, 515-422-9552; www.verohealthcenter.com.

Runners-up: Nova MedSpa; Thrive Family Chiropractic

Best Local Hair Salon Neon Heart Salon

Extensions, color and blonding, head spa, treatments, special occasion styles and, of course, haircuts, are all available at Neon Heart Salon. The business is operated by the husband and wife duo of Jacob and Erin Poindexter, aiming to bring the best hairstyles possible to their customers. 6110 N.W. 86th St., No. 104, Johnston, 515-577-4448; www.neonheartsalon.com.

Runners-up: Serenity Couture Salon & Spa; Hair by Ashley Haack

Best Local Health Food Store Campbell's Nutrition

Taking a look at Campbell's specials in January, we found organic kombucha, keto-friendly cereal, organic sparkling water, grain-free tortillas, and even a recipe for pumpkin corn soup. That all sounds healthy to us, and it appears it did to CITYVIEW readers, who voted for Campbell's for this honor for another year. Locations in Des Moines and Urbandale; www.campbellsnutrition.com.

Runners-up: Gateway Market; Natural Grocers

Best Local Family Planning Services

Planned Parenthood

Planned Parenthood offers many services from health care options to education and more. This winner of Best Local Family Planning Services in the Best of Des Moines poll offers expert sexual and reproductive health care in a safe and welcoming environment. 2304 University Ave., Des Moines, 877-859-0542; www.plannedparenthood.org.

Runners-up: InnerVisions HealthCare; AGAPE

Best Local Chiropractor Vero Health Center

Testimonials for Vero Health Center about their ability to care for back pain range from individuals from all walks of life. Whether you pulled a disc in your back at the gym or just woke up feeling off, their chiropractic services can bring you back to normal. 630 S. 50th St., West Des Moines, 515-422-9552; www.verohealthcenter.com.

Runners-up: True Roots Chiropractic; Thrive Family Chiropractic

Best Local Doctor's Clinic

UnityPoint Clinic Family Medicine

Going to the doctor can feel like a chore at times. But when you have a broken bone, sprained ankle or a cold you just can't seem to shake, it is best to leave it to the professionals at UnityPoint Clinic Family Medicine, which Best of Des Moines voters chose as the 2026 Best Local Doctor's Clinic. Multiple locations; www.unitypoint.org.

Runners-up: The Iowa Clinic; MercyOne Family Medicine

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Best Local Eye Clinic

Wolfe Eye Clinic

Wolfe Eye Clinic's eye surgeons are fellowship-trained and provide excellent eye care for issues ranging from cataracts to cornea disease, LASIK eye surgery, retina disease and more. Locations in West Des Moines, Ankeny and Pleasant Hill; www.wolfeeyeclinic.com.

Runners-up: Des Moines Eye Surgeons; Elite Eye Care

Best Local Hearing Center

Iowa Ear Center

We heard Best of Des Moines voters loud and clear on this one. They chose Iowa Ear Center, with its various audiology resources and professionals, as the Best Local Hearing Center. 12499 University Ave., No. 200, Clive, 515-418-9960; www.iowaearcenter.com.

Runners-up: Merit Hearing; Wolfe Audiology

Best Local Hospital

UnityPoint Health Iowa Methodist Medical Center

UnityPoint Health Iowa Methodist Medical Center has been voted the Best Local Hospital for the eighth year in a row by CITYVIEW readers. The hospital got its start in 1993, and, since then, has served almost eight million patients, perform roughly 100,000 surgeries and delivered

upwards of 20,000 babies. Maybe some of those babies went on to vote for them this year. 1200 Pleasant St., Des Moines, 515-241-6212; www.unitypoint.org/desmoines/iowa-methodist-medical-center.aspx.

Runners-up: MercyOne Medical Center; Broadlawns Medical Center

Best Local Physical Therapy Clinic

Kaizen Health and Wellness

Coming back from a major injury or surgery is a tall task for even the strongest people and best of athletes. Kaizen Health and Wellness helps them to do so, as well as helping those with chronic pain. Treatments range from ACL rehab to treating balance and gait disorders, foot and ankle pain, neck pain, shoulder pain and more. 11119 Plum Drive, Urbandale, 515-207-2450; www.kaizendsm.com.

Runners-up: Core Physical Therapy; Rock Valley Physical Therapy

Best Local Dentist Office

Fleur Dentistry

CITYVIEW readers seem to keep their teeth bright, shining and lacking cavities thanks to Fleur Dentistry. Knowing one size does not fit all when it comes to teeth, Fleur Dentistry treats their patients with respect and care. Their team of dentists can fix a tooth, get them clean, help with at home care and plenty more. And, they do it all with a smile. 4551 Fleur Drive, Des Moines,

515-287-2493; www.fleurdentistry.com.

Runners-up: Lush Family Dentist; Furrow Family Dentistry

Best Local Pediatric Clinic

Waggoner Pediatrics

Not many businesses in the area can claim 12 selections in their respective category, but thanks to their 25 years of children's health services, Waggoner Pediatrics can. Whether it be getting your child up to date on vaccines or being provided resources for newborns, Waggoner's services delight Best of Des Moines voters. 2555 Berkshire Parkway, Suite A, Clive, 515-987-0051; www.waggonerpeditiatrics.org.

Runners-up: The Iowa Clinic; Be Well Pediatrics

Best Local Dermatology Clinic

Dermatology P.C.

Sure, living in central Iowa has its perks. One of the downfalls is the rough elements we encounter on a regular basis. Extreme cold, winds that blow semi-trucks over, heat that bakes everything it touches, the list goes on. Taking care of one's skin in such conditions is crucial to one's overall health. Dermatology P.C. helps alleviate all of those challenges. Locations in Ankeny, Indianola and West Des Moines; www.dermatologypc.com.

Runners-up: Greater Des Moines Dermatology; Central Iowa Dermatology

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HEALTH & BEAUTY

Best Place for Laser Hair Removal Coachlight Clinic & Spa

Coachlight Clinic & Spa walks away with another 2026 award, this one for being the Best Place for Laser Hair Removal. 6420 Coachlight Drive, Suite 200, West Des Moines, 515-221-9999; www.dsmcoachlight.com.

Runners-up: Nova MedSpa; Koch & Carlisle Plastic Surgery & Spa

Best Local Orthopedic Clinic

DMOS Orthopaedic Centers

For 65 years, the mission of DMOS Orthopaedic Centers has been "to help our patients get back to living pain and injury free." Their specialized care has served countless Iowans, and, apparently, CITYVIEW readers, who voted DMOS the Best Local Orthopedic Clinic. Locations in Des Moines, West Des Moines, Urbandale and Ankeny; www.dmos.com.

Runners-up: Iowa Ortho; Capital Orthopaedics & Sports Medicine

Best Local Mental Health Clinic Optimae Behavioral Health Services

Mental health challenges, just like physical health challenges, do not come with simple solutions. Anxiety, stress, depression, relationship issues, trauma and psychotic disorders require specialized treatment. Treatments for those afflictions can make all the difference in a loved one's life. 600 E. Court Ave., No. 200, Des Moines, 515-243-3525; www.optimaelifeservices.com/our-services/behavioral-health.

Runners-up: Diamond Heart Therapy; Magnolia Connections

Best Local CBD Store

CBD American Shaman

Oils, gummies, skincare, capsules and more are available at the CBD American Shaman locations in the metro. CBD benefits are believed to include helping balance, managing physical and emotional stress, aiding in sleep and much more. Locations in West Des Moines and Altoona; www.cbdamericanshaman.com.

Runners-up: Your CBD Store | SUNMED; Bud & Mary's

Best Local Allergy or Immunology Clinic

Iowa Allergy, Asthma & Immunology

A sneeze here, a cough there, a runny nose, puffy eyes — allergies get to the best of us. Voted Best Local Allergy or Immunology Clinic for another year by Best of Des Moines readers, Iowa Allergy, Asthma & Immunology helps get to the bottom of many ailments. Locations in West Des Moines and Ankeny; www.iowaallergyclinic.com.

Runners-up: Allergy Institute P.C.; The Iowa Clinic

Best Local Home Health Provider

Infinity Home Care

Infinity Home Care wins Best Local Home Health Care Provider. Their services include non-medical care services, such as bathing, dressing, homemaking, meal planning and more, as well as nursing services, such as lab collection, skin and wound management. Care management services such as medication management and advanced planning are also available. 7524 Hickman Road, Windsor Heights, 515-414-8787; www.infinityhomecareia.com.

Runners-up: Optimate Home Health Services; Innovative Health of Iowa

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BEST OF THE REST



Best Elected Official

Rob Sand

State Auditor Rob Sand wins the Best Elected Official honor as chosen by CITYVIEW readers. Sand is in the middle of a campaign for Governor of Iowa, a position held by previous seven-time winner of this award, Gov. Kim Reynolds. Office of Auditor of State Room 111, State Capitol Building, Des Moines, 515-281-5834; www.auditor.iowa.gov.

Runners-up: Kim Reynolds; Sarah Trone Garriott

Best Local Home Painter

Budget Pro Painting & Remodeling

They can paint the inside and they can paint the outside. The team at Budget Pro Painting knows how to get the job done. They can also stain and provide commercial painting. 5729 Holcomb Ave., Des Moines, 515-505-6429; www.budgetpropainter.com.

Runners-up: GLS Painting; Peterson Painting

Best State University in Iowa

Iowa State University

Matt Campbell may have left, but the legions of proud ISU alum and Cyclone fans sure have not, voting for Iowa State University as the Best State University in Iowa once more. With several excellent departments under its wings, the Cardinal and Gold school has put graduates at the top of career fields all around the world. Ames, 515-294-4111; www.iastate.edu.

Runners-up: University of Iowa; University of Northern Iowa

Best Private College or Private University in Iowa

Drake University

The Bulldogs are voted the 2026 Best Private College or Private University in Iowa by CITYVIEW readers. Drake University's journalism school is one of the most well-regarded in the country, and the Drake Relays are one of the area's best outdoor events — just two of the many reasons Drake is so well regarded. 2507 University Ave., Des Moines, 1-800-44-DRAKE; www.drake.edu.

Runners-up: Grand View University; Simpson College

Best Community College in Iowa

Des Moines Area Community College

DMACC has campuses in several cities in central Iowa, providing more than 220 programs, certificates and transfer degrees. It has served as a solid alternative for continuing education for those young and old. Locations in Ankeny, Boone, Carroll, Newton, Des Moines and



One of the many successful paint jobs done by Budget Pro Painting & Remodeling. Photo courtesy of Budget Pro Painting & Remodeling

West Des Moines with additional learning centers around the metro; www.dmacc.edu.

Runners-up: Iowa Central Community College; Kirkwood Community College

Best Local Doggy Daycare/Boarding

Raccoon River Kennels

Raccoon River Kennels has overnight and doggy daycare services for your furry loved one. Having a space with five outdoor play yards and two indoor play rooms offering 15,000 square feet of space helps keep your pup mentally and socially engaged when you cannot take it with you. 7502 Raccoon River Drive, West Des Moines, 515-987-9794; www.raccoonriverkennels.com.

Runners-up: Dogwoods Lodge; Amore Pets

Best Local Employer

Vero Health Center

The winner of this year's Best Local Employer is also the Best Local Holistic Health Center and Best Local Chiropractic Clinic. Vero Health Center receives the nod from Best of Des Moines voters. 630 S 50th St., West Des Moines, 515-422-9552; www.verohealthcenter.com.

Runners-up: Scottish Rite Park; Optimae LifeServices

Best Local Home Improvement Company

Right Roofing & Siding

Home improvement comes in all shapes and sizes: laying carpet, remodeling a bathroom, or replacing a light fixture. All that, however, would be for naught, without a solid roof above your head. And that is where Right Roofing & Siding comes in, providing commercial and residential services. 3250 99th St., Urbandale, 515-305-3113; www.rightroofing.com.

Runners-up: TMJ Construction Services; Shepherd Construction

Best Local Dog Groomer

Tribe of Paws

Owner Brittnie has been working with animals for more than two decades. Starting as a kennel assistant, she eventually discovered that grooming was her passion. That bodes well for the fuzzy friends who step through her doors and leave looking — and smelling — better than ever. 5480 N.E. First St., Des Moines, 505-331-7777; www.tribeofpaws.com.

Runners-up: Dogwoods Lodge; Amore Pets

BEST OF THE REST

Best Local Moving Company

TWO MEN AND A TRUCK

Sometimes, TWO MEN AND A TRUCK is all you need when moving. With more than 10 million moves completed, they certainly have more than just two men and one truck. According to CITYVIEW readers, their services are often desired by those moving around the metro. 2601 104th St., Suite 400, Urbandale, 515-216-3654; www.twomenandatruck.com.

Runners-up: The Affordable Movers; Adamantine Spine Moving

Best Local Credit Union

Veridian Credit Union

This is another one of those awards that has been dominated by one business: Veridian Credit Union. The credit union offers excellent services for both personal and business finances. What was once the John Deere Employees Credit Union has become one of the metro's most trusted businesses. Multiple locations; www.veridiancu.org.

Runners-up: GreenState Credit Union; Community Choice Credit Union

Best Local Bank

Central Bank

Central Bank has more than 140 locations across the Midwest and plenty of them in central Iowa. It is often recognized as one of the Top 25 Banks according to

Forbe's. And, now, it can add to its accolades Best Local Bank, according to CITYVIEW readers. Multiple locations; www.centralbank.net.

Runners-up: West Bank; Bankers Trust

Best Local Internet Provider

Metronet

Metronet provides services for those needing internet at home and services for small businesses. It is one of the growing fiber-to-the-home builders in the country, and, in a world where working from home and having internet access for school work and socializing has become even more vital, having a reliable provider is more important than ever. 1311 Buckeye Ave., Suite A, Ames. 855-595-1006; www.metronet.com.

Runners-up: Mediacom; Google Fiber

Best Local Auto Shop

Shade Tree Auto

What was once relegated to one small garage has grown into a thriving group of shops as well as the Best Local Auto Shop, according to Best of Des Moines voters. Shade Tree Auto's list of services covers most anything you would need to get your car back to running as smooth as possible. Locations in Urbandale, Grimes and Ankeny; www.shadetreeauto.biz.

Runners-up: FinishLine Auto Works; Scott's Automotive Service

Best TV Station for News

KCCI 8

Winning this category for another year running is KCCI 8. Having a reliable news network is as important as ever in today's society, and CITYVIEW readers trust KCCI 8 with their votes for the Best TV Station for News. www.kcci.com.

Runners-up: WHO 13; WOI 5

Best TV Station for Sports

WHO 13

Athletics in Iowa are incredibly popular. State high school championships fill arenas, the Cubs, Wild, Barnstormers and Wolves draw fans, and local university clashes often have sellout crowds. WHO 13 sports coverage gets the best out of all of those events and more according to Best of Des Moines voters. www.who13.com.

Runners-up: KCCI 8; ESPN

Best TV Station for Weather

KCCI 8

It's no secret to anyone who has lived in Des Moines for more than a few days that the weather here can turn on a dime. Blizzards, derechos, hail, burning heat and everything in between finds its way to metro doorsteps. The weather team of Jason Sydejko, David Koeller, Jon Rivas and Zane Satre at KCCI 8 keep the area up to date best, according to Best of Des Moines votes. www.kcci.com.

Runners-up: WHO 13

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Best Local TV Anchor**Erin Kiernan, WHO 13**

Erin Kiernan was a stalwart in Des Moines news, specifically for WHO 13, since 2005. Kiernan is stepping down from her post as the main anchor at the station, but thankfully for WHO 13 fans, she will still be contributing in a limited capacity. She leaves on a high as Best Local TV Anchor.

Runners-up: Stacey Horst, KCCI 8; Andy Fales, WHO 13

Best Local Sports Commentator or Columnist**Keith Murphy, WHO 13**

CITYVIEW readers love Keith Murphy, and who can blame them? Murphy is an icon in the local sports media scene and has been with WHO 13 since 1996. The sports anchor also helps lead "SoundOFF," which recently had its 1,200th show.

Runners-up: Scott Reister, KCCI 8; Andy Fales, WHO 13

Best Meteorologist**Ed Wilson, WHO 13**

In searching for the first year of the Best of Des Moines, one of the CITYVIEW covers featured the several-time Best Meteorologist Ed Wilson. That old copy of CITYVIEW might have faded a tad, but Ed Wilson's skills as a meteorologist sure haven't. www.who13.com.

Runners-up: Jason Sydejko, KCCI 8; Jeriann Ritter, WHO 13

Best Radio Voice that Turns You On**Gary Monte, KFMG**

We're not sure how KFMG listeners get anything done during a day of listening, considering the station swept this category. The best of them all? Gary Monte, who hosts The Morning Show, The Overnight and Sittin' With The Blues. www.kfmg.org/staff/gary-monte.

Runners-up: Ron Sorensen, KFMG; Don "T-Bone" Erickson, KFMG

Best Radio Station**KFMG 98.9 FM**

Are you surprised that the CITYVIEW readers who were turned on all day listening to KFMG also voted for it as the Best Radio Station? We're not. With its great lineup of programs, the station has plenty to offer listeners. www.kfmg.org.

Runners-up: Life 107.1; LAZER 103.3

Best Radio Personality**Ron Sorensen, KFMG**

It's a clean sweep in the winner's circle for KFMG. They add the Best Radio Personality to their awards haul with Ron Sorensen's Sunday Acoustic Brunch and the aptly named Ron Sorensen Show. www.kfmg.org/staff/marty-enslow

Runners-up: Simon Conway, WHO 1040 AM; Jeff Angelo, WHO 1040 AM

Best Local Real Estate Agent**Tim Scheib**

Tim Scheib wins Best Local Real Estate Agent in this year's Best of Des Moines poll. Real estate is a tricky business, but Scheib rises to the top. www.scheibrealestate.com.

Runners-up: Cathy Stevermer; Bob Eisenlauer

Best Local Automotive Salesperson**Heidi Brickman, Stew Hansen Dodge****Ram Chrysler Jeep**

A runner-up two years ago, and now a back-to-back winner, is this year's Best Local Automotive Salesperson: Heidi Brickman at Stew Hansen Dodge Ram Chrysler Jeep. Buying a car presents all sorts of challenges, but the CITYVIEW readers who bought a car from Brickman appear to more than satisfied.

Runners-up: Tim Kapsch, Karl Chevrolet; AJ Highsmith, Volkswagen of Des Moines

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BEST OF THE REST

Best Local Photographer

Tracy Marie Photography

Tracy Marie is a natural light photographer who specializes in high school seniors, couples, maternity and small family portraits. When you want to capture a significant family moment, a wonderful portrait can keep the memory alive for a life time. www.tracymariephotography.org.

Runners-up: Belma Photography; Ivory House Photography

Best Local Financial Planner

Loren Merkle, Merkle Retirement Planning

Loren Merkle wins the award for Best Local Financial Planner for another year thanks to CITYVIEW readers' votes. Having a plan for retirement is crucial, and having the help of a professional is vital. After all, when you are done with the 9-5 life, don't you want to be as stress free as possible? 1860 S.E. Princeton Drive, Grimes, 515-278-1006; www.merkleretirementplanning.com.

Runners-up: Jeff Lohmeier, Edward Jones; Aaron Plaskas, Inspire Finance DSM

Best Local Insurance Agent

AnnaMarie Morrow, Merkle Retirement Planning

Merkle Retirement Planning also hosts the multi-time winner of the Best Local Insurance Agent: AnnaMarie Morrow. Morrow helps with coordinating enrollment and helps with key decisions along the way. www.merkleretirementplanning.com.

Runners-up: Blake Newton, Newton Insurance Group; Matt Reed, COUNTRY Financial

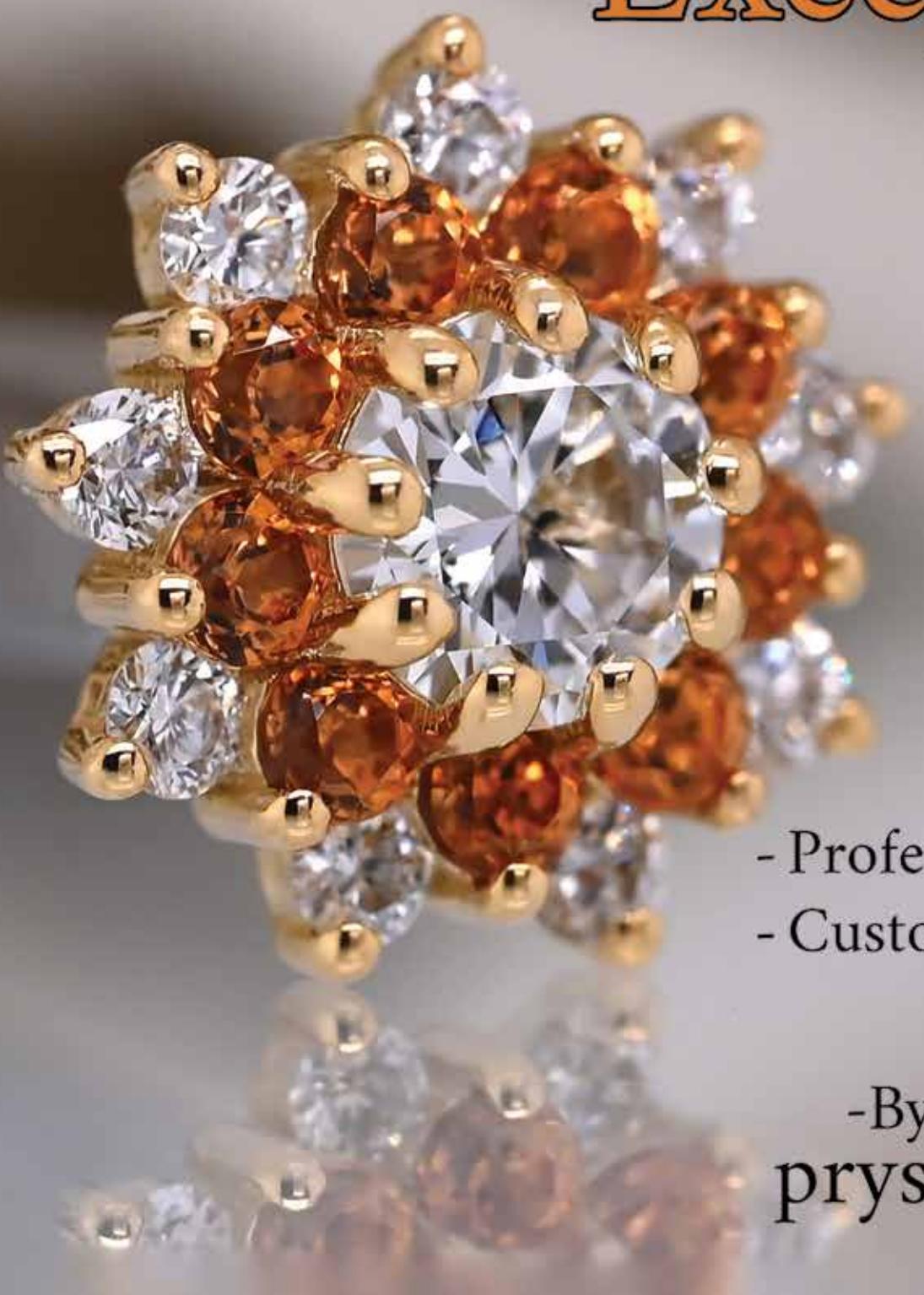


The Best Local Vet Clinic, Starch Pet Hospital, is so good, the pets check themselves in. Photo courtesy of Starch Pet Hospital



An advertisement for Local 5 ABC. The top right features the Local 5 ABC logo with "abc" underneath. Below it is the "WE ARE IOWA+" logo, which includes a stylized "IOWA" with a plus sign and a smiley face. The text "LIVE | LOCAL | ALWAYS ON" is displayed in large, white, sans-serif capital letters. Below that, "INSTALL TODAY ON" is followed by logos for "Roku", "fire tv", and "apple tv". The background of the ad is a dark, textured image of a city skyline at night.

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BEST OF THE REST

FEATURE STORY

Best Local Mortgage Company

Central Bank

Also voted the Best Local Bank is the 2026 Best Local Mortgage Company, Central Bank. Central Bank will review your unique financial situation and goals to get you ready for your home search. Multiple locations; www.centralbank.net.

Runners-up: Midwest Family Lending; Key Mortgage Group

Best Local Vet Clinic

Starch Pet Hospital

Starch Pet Hospital entered the Drake neighborhood in 1948 and never looked back. A new clinic, built in its current location in 1996, brought forth all kinds of new equipment, continuously meeting the growing needs of metro pet owners and their health. They care for dogs, cats, birds, ferrets, rabbits, guinea pigs, hedgehogs and rodents. 2222 University Ave., Des Moines, 515-283-1576; www.starchpethospital.com.

Runners-up: Ashworth Road Animal Hospital; Value Vet



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BEST OF THE REST

Best Local Home Builder

Claman Custom Homes

Their five-step home-building process makes it simple for the Best of Des Moines voters who had their home built by Claman Custom Homes: Meet, plan, design, build, finish. Sounds easy enough. Polk City, 515-290-7840; www.clamancustomhomes.com.

Runners-up: Showtime Homes; KRM Development

Best Local Landscaper

Ted Lare Design Build

If the online gallery is any indication of their landscaping ability, then it comes as little surprise to us that CITYVIEW readers chose Ted Lare Design Build for Best Local Landscaper. 2701 Cumming Ave., Cumming, 515-981-1073; www.tedsgardens.com.

Runners-up: Plant Life Designs; Solid Rock Landscaping

Best Local Chamber of Commerce

Urbandale Chamber of Commerce

New businesses in the area, as well as those that have their roots planted, benefit from the offerings of an effective chamber of commerce. The Urbandale Chamber of Commerce has been voted Best Local Chamber of Commerce for its support of businesses both big and small. 2830 100th St., Suite 110, Urbandale, 515-331-6855; www.uniquelyurbandale.com.

Runners-up: West Des Moines Chamber of Commerce; Ankeny Area Chamber of Commerce

Best Local Customer Service

(Overall)

Stork Orthodontics

Let's face it, going to the dentist may not be an enjoyable experience. One way that can improve? Having great customer service. And the Best Local Customer Service (Overall) belongs to Stork Orthodontics, leaving customers smiling as they walk out of the door for more reasons than one. 4090 Westown Parkway, Suite 101, West Des Moines, 515-608-8722; www.storkorthodontics.com.

Runners-up: Merkle Retirement Planning; Vero Health Center

Best Local Law Firm

VanDerGinst Law

Personal injury lawyers are dedicated to helping victims. Collecting national, and now local acclaim, VanDerGist Law steps in when you've been injured to make sure you receive the settlement you deserve. 2742 Hubbell Ave., Des Moines, 866-797-4529; www.vlaw.com/locations/des-moines/.

Runners-up: Baer Law Office; Wasker, Dorr, Wimmer & Marcouiller, P.C.

Best Local Daycare

Vine Street Child Care

Facing limited child care centers in the neighborhood, the Vine Street Child Care team took a leap and opened a center, much to the delight of area residents. With plenty of space including gym, music room and plenty of classrooms in the former school building, they are well-equipped to serve the needs of little ones. 2501 Vine St., West Des Moines, 515-327-0101; www.vinestreetchildcare.com

Runners-up: Generation Next Child Development Center & Preschool; KinderCare



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BEST OF THE REST

Best Local Marketing Agency

TH MEDIA

New to the marketing scene but already making waves is TH Media. Their services include video production, photography, website and branding design and social media services. They have already worked with some other Best of Des Moines winners like Charlotte's Kitchen and Destination Grille. Who knows who might be next? 4308 University Ave., Des Moines, 515-423-3221; www.thmediacreates.com.

Runners-up: Flynn Wright; Social Nickel

Best Local Apartment Complex

Tempo East Village Living

Also the winner of this category last year as a brand-new apartment complex is Tempo East Village Living. Designed with luxury, sustainability and community in mind, all in one of the best entertainment districts that Des Moines has to offer, and we can see why Best of Des Moines voters have made the apartment complex back-to-back winners. 317 E. Sixth St., Des Moines, 515-335-6484; www.tempoeastvillage.com.

Runners-up: LINC at Gray's Station; Cityville on 9th

Best Local HVAC Company

Modern Heating and Air

Modern Heating and Air has four guarantees: 12 years of comfort, no surprises, first service and competency. With a list of services sure to make home or business owners swoon, the team at Modern Heating and Air is determined to give their customers the best product possible. 675 N.E. 45th Place, Des Moines, 515-635-5525; www.modernhvacservices.com.

Runners-up: Golden Rule Plumbing, Heating, Cooling & Electrical; Bell Brothers Heating, Cooling & Plumbing

Best Local Senior Living

Community

Scottish Rite Park

Scottish Rite Park reigns supreme in this category. Also a runner-up for Best Local Employer, it makes sense their residents and CITYVIEW readers are fond of this senior living community. 2909 Woodland Ave., Des Moines, 515-274-4614; www.scottishritepark.com.

Runners-up: Copper Shores Village; WesleyLife

Best Local Place for Tax Preparation

Ann M. Hartz, CPA and Associates

Few things in life are certain. Death, taxes and Ann M. Hartz, CPA and Associates winning Best Local Place for Tax Preparation. Everyone says that, right? Best of Des Moines voters do and stay out of tax trouble in the meantime. 7109 Hickman Road, Urbandale, 515-259-7779; www.cpadesmoines.com.

Runners-up: The Vroman Group; Mansheim & Associates

Best Local Bathroom Facility

Shade Tree Auto

One might think the bathroom facility at an auto shop would be the messiest bathroom you could find. That's not the case at Shade Tree. If you want to check it out, at least get a headlight replaced. Locations in Urbandale, Grimes and Ankeny; www.shadetreeauto.biz.

Runners-up: Prism Jewelry & Piercing; Von Maur

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Best Local Hotel Hotel Fort Des Moines

Not many hotels around the entire country can make the claim that Elvis, Johnny Cash and John F. Kennedy once made a stop at their place. Hotel Fort Des Moines can. With all its class and elegance, it is this year's Best Local Hotel. Inside you can also find incredible dining options such as Proudfoot & Bird, Hobnob Coffee and Wine Bar, and In Confidence. Perfect for a night away from home inside the city. 1000 Walnut St., Des Moines, 515-528-7733; www.hotelfortdesmoines.com.

Runners-up: Des Lux Hotel; Surety Hotel

Best Local Plumber H & H Plumbing

Trust the experts when it comes to your plumbing. Sometimes the help of YouTube doesn't quite cut it. Trust CITYVIEW readers' opinion and call H & H Plumbing. 32411 170th St., Granger, 515-277-5755; www.handhplumbing.net.

Runners-up: Modern Heating and Air; Golden Rule Plumbing, Heating, Cooling & Electrical

Best Local Electric Company B & L Electric

Not just specializing in fixing your home or businesses electrical woes, B & L Electric can also install a charging station for numerous types of electric vehicles. They also offer 24/7 emergency services when that unexpected outage strikes your home. 10861 Douglas Ave., Suite B, Urbandale, 515-212-3277; www.bandlelectriciowa.com.

Runners-up: Tesdall Electric; Baker Electric

Best Local Flooring Company Louie's Floor Covering

It's only a matter of time before one gets tired of looking at scuffed up, scratched floors and fruit-punch-stained carpets. When that time comes, CITYVIEW readers say it is Louie's Floor Covering to the rescue, whether it be carpet, tile or hardwood. 2709 Ingersoll Ave., Des Moines, 515-243-8608; www.louiesfloorcovering.com.

Runners-up: Royal Flooring; Flooring Coverings International

Best Local Roofing Company Right Roofing & Siding

"Roof it once — roof it Right!" That's what the Best Local Home Improvement and Best Local Roofing Company says. Best of Des Moines voters agree. 3250 99th St., Urbandale, 515-305-3113; www.righthroofing.com.

Runners-up: Andrew's Roofing Company; TMJ Construction Services

Best Local Contractor Right Roofing & Siding

Thought they were done at the last award? You thought wrong. Add Best Local Contractor to Right Roofing & Siding's list of awards for 2026. Their list of services has satisfied the metro for more than 28 years at this point. 3250 99th St., Urbandale, 515-305-3113; www.righthroofing.com.

Runners-up: Iowa Plains Signing; TMJ Construction Services



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BEST OF THE REST

Best Local Interior Designer Erin Feddersen, Claman Custom Homes

The Idea Book at Claman Custom Homes, voted the Best Local Home Builder, shows their innovative designs that bring a great look together with the latest trends. Erin Feddersen, director of design and marketing, helps bring those great ideas to life. 1302 N.W. Arbor Drive, Ankeny, 515-800-7490; www.clamancustomhomes.com.

Runners-up: Alex Retallick, Showtime Homes; Lynsy Anderson, Royal Flooring

Best Local Pest Control Company Pro-Staff Termite & Pest Control

The creepy crawlies can make even the nicest of homes feel like a nightmare. Keep them out of sight and out of mind with the help of the multi-time Best Local Pest Control Company, as chosen by Best of Des Moines voters, Pro-Staff Termite & Pest Control. 3601 Douglas Ave., Des Moines, 515-279-7378; www.desmoinespestservice.com.

Runners-up: Diam Pest Control; Preferred Pest Control

Best Local Cleaning Company phClean

The team of cleaners at phClean offers home, commercial and disinfectant cleaning services. Coming home to a house feeling, looking and smelling brand new can help you feel on top of your game. Put those house chores in the hands of the experts. Locations in West Des Moines and Ankeny; www.phclean.net.

Runners-up: The Queen of Clean; Two Mops and a Bucket

Best Local Preschool

Vine Street Child Care

Chosen by CITYVIEW readers as the Best Local Daycare, Vine Street Child Care also wins Best Local Preschool. 2501 Vine St., West Des Moines, 515-327-0101; www.vinestreetchildcare.com/index.html.

Runners-up: Plymouth Nursey School; Grace Preschool

Best Local Swim School Natavi Swim School

Learning how to swim at Natavi Swim School is about more than just being able to jump into the lake or pool on a hot day. Being able to swim can save your life. Enjoy Iowa's cool bodies of water and pools by learning to swim at the Best Local Swim School. 275 S.W. Brookside Drive, Grimes, 515-300-3282; www.nataviswim.com.

Runners-up: Goldfish Swim School; Foss Swim School

Best Local Home Inspection Company

Wiemann Home Inspection

Wiemann Home Inspection goes beyond the American Society of Home Inspectors' standards to ensure that the home you are buying is up to snuff. First-time home buyers should have plenty of questions for what is likely their largest ever purchase, and Wiemann has the answers, according to Best of Des Moines voters. 515-865-0346; www.wiemannhomeinspection.com.

Runners-up: HomeMasters Inspection Services; Residential Recon Home Inspections

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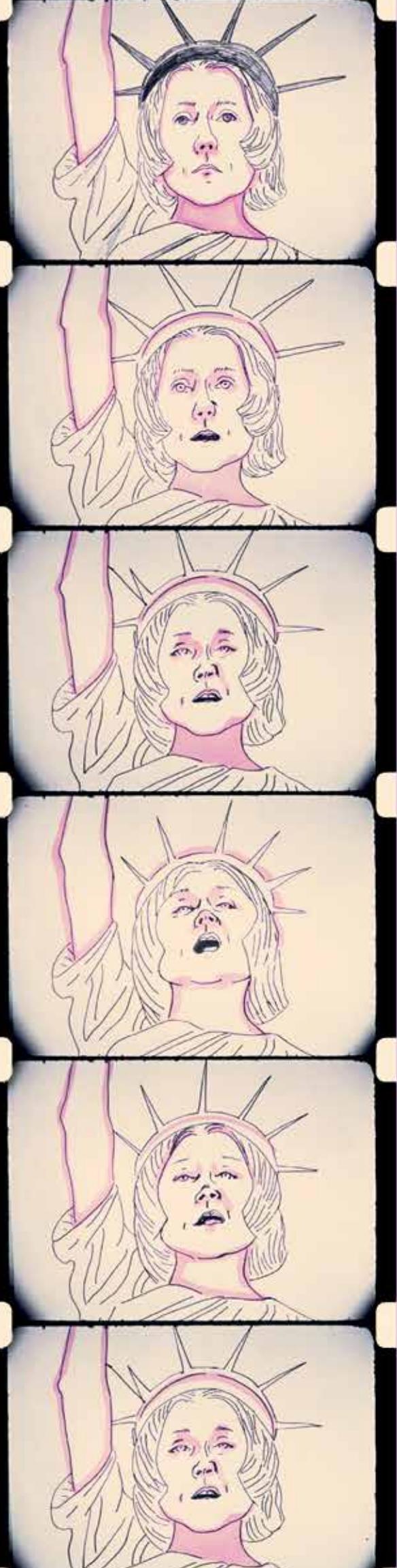
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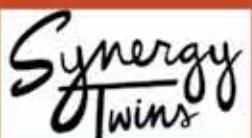
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Maria Lassnig (Austrian, 1919–2014). *Selfportrait*, 1971 (film stills)
16mm (color, sound, English OV). 4 min. © Maria Lassnig Foundation / Courtesy sixpackfilm

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BEST OF THE REST

Best Local Foundation Repair Company BAM! Basements and Masons

Mark Williams founded BAM! Basements and Masons in 2012 after working with several other basement repair companies. He decided he could bring better value and customer service to the game. BAM! Basements and Masons returns to the top spot thanks to CITYVIEW readers' votes. 5327 N.W. Second St., Des Moines, 515-963-0226; www.bambasements.com.

Runners-up: Thrasher Foundation Repair; Rock Solid Foundations

Best Local Sign Company Lashier Graphics & Signs

Lashier Graphics & Signs wins the 2026 title of Best Local Sign Company. This is not the company's first rodeo, as their work can be found all over the metro and all over the country. High schools, local businesses and events use their work to make their brands pop. 1601 S.E. Gateway Drive, No. 130, Grimes, 515-518-6100; www.lashier.com.

Runners-up: Iowa Plains Signing; Signarama

Best Local Place to Get Gas

Casey's

We all know about Casey's breakfast pizza, cake donuts, and growing list of Casey's branded snack options. Even though gas stations in Iowa are basically mini grocery stores, they all offer one thing: gas. Best of Des Moines voters prefer to fill their tanks up at Casey's. Multiple locations; www.caseys.com.

Runners-up: Kwik Star; Hy-Vee ■

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AROUND TOWN

Photos by Allyssa Ertz



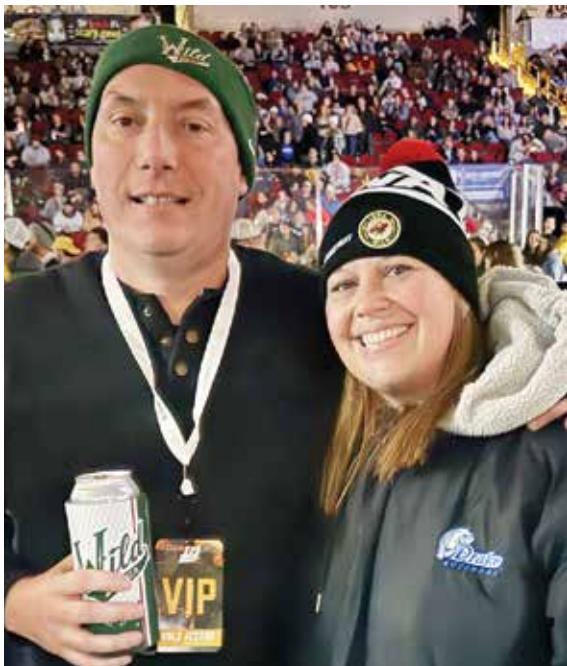
Delaney McCormick and Jared Oliveira



Lily Shaw, Maddie Paulsen, Abby Payne, Jack Shaw and Trey Holub



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IOWA WILD GAME/ LOCASH CONCERT

Casey's Center

Jan. 17



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Meghan Guter and Faith Bliss



Audrey and Zeke Craig



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BELLY UP TO: Heroics Sports Lounge

BY JACKIE WILSON

Ingersoll bar showcases women's sporting events, but men are welcome, too.

Des Moines' newest sports bar, Heroics, is like most any sports bar in some ways — a full bar, fascinating conversations and the latest game on the big-screen TV. However, there is one distinction that sets it apart from other sports bars — all the games shown feature women athletes.

Basketball, hockey, roller derby and whatever women's sport that is televised. Plus, music videos are aired when there is not a major game on.

Heroics Sports Lounge opened up in December 2025 at 2005 Ingersoll in the old Juniper Moon location. Co-owner Jami Behun visited a similar concept bar in Portland three years ago called the Sports Bra. She became intrigued with the concept of featuring only-women's sports, citing the "Caitlin Clark" effect on its popularity. As the Sports Bra began a franchise, Behun worried they might open in Des Moines. Luckily, it didn't, which catapulted Heroics into action.

Behun says the public has misread media reports.

"People get confused. This is not a women's-only bar. Men are welcome. It's not a lesbian bar. We're a queer-owned LGBTQ, and I want to provide a safe space for all



HEROICS SPORTS LOUNGE

2005 Ingersoll Ave., Suite 101, Des Moines

515-369-7786

www.heroicssportslounge.com

Wednesday - Thursday: 3-10 p.m.

Friday: 3-11 p.m.

Saturday: 11 a.m. to 11 p.m.

Sunday: 11 a.m. to 9 p.m.



people to come. People feeling safe makes my heart happy."

Heroics on a Friday night proved lively. The Vinyl and Rose Basketball Club game played on the tube. A mural painted by local artist Kristin Jones takes up an entire wall. There are several colorful seating combinations aside from the bar. A disco ball in a basketball hoop provides a sparkly pop of color.

Happy Hour is Wednesday through Saturday from 3-6 p.m. It includes \$2 off wells, domestic and tap beers, \$6 wine, plus \$8 select classic cocktails.

Their signature and classic cocktail menu includes sports-related names, including The G.O.A.T. made with Corazon Blanco, triple sec and agave, for \$10. The Cyclone Espresso is Midnight Bean Espresso Vodka, Buffalo Trace Bourbon Cream topped with cold brew coffee for \$10. The Heroics Hail Mary is made with Absolut Citron, cranberry, triple sec and lime for \$10.

Each one of the cocktails or wines on their signature list has been created, crafted or led by women businesses.



A popcorn machine pops up free popcorn for patrons. A couple who frequents bars that serves free popcorn rates the taste, and they report that Heroics offers the right salty crunch combination. I agree with the top rating — and the unique way to explore local bars.

No other food is served, and patrons can bring in their own food. The owners plan on serving pizza and snack food in the future and hope to offer foods from next-door Palms DSM.

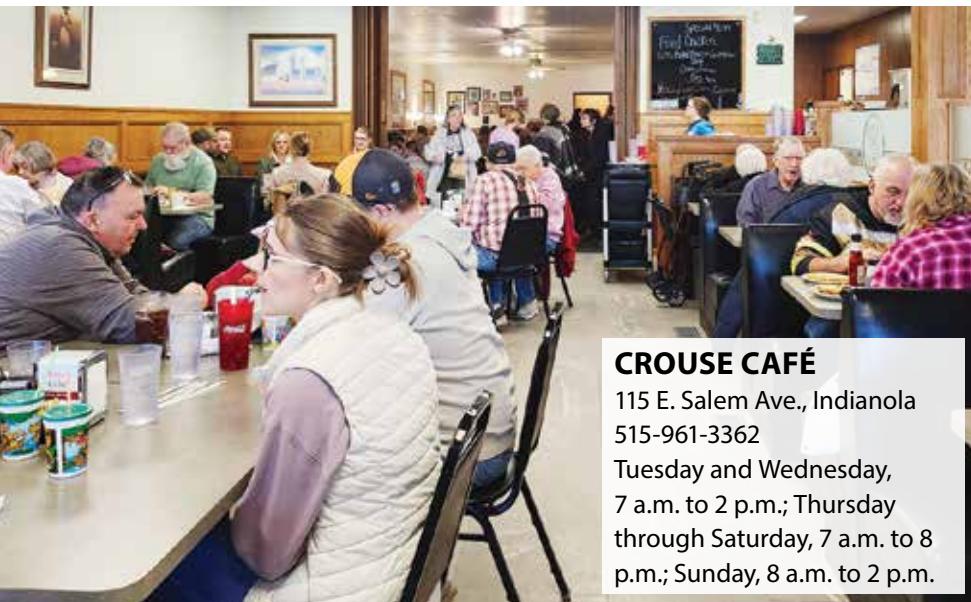
So far, they haven't had any local athletes visit, but they are ready to welcome any who stop by — especially Iowa native Caitlin Clark. With the Super Bowl on Feb. 8, Behun is contemplating airing the game.

"I'm not sure yet. We may make an exception," Behun reflects. "I want to stick to our mission of creating a space dedicated to women."

She invites the public to stop in, saying, "I'm thankful for the patrons who have supported us with all the positive comments. Come in and check us out." ■

Homemade history at Crouse Café

"Homemade from scratch" is not an exaggeration at Crouse.



Crouse Cafe on a Sunday

CROUSE CAFÉ
115 E. Salem Ave., Indianola
515-961-3362
Tuesday and Wednesday,
7 a.m. to 2 p.m.; Thursday
through Saturday, 7 a.m. to 8
p.m.; Sunday, 8 a.m. to 2 p.m.



Crouse's pan fried chicken dinner

Small-town cafés are so precious to nostalgia addicts that it is difficult to find much of anything negative written about them, even on the many social media platforms that attract the meanest critics. The reality is that most of small-town cafés are average at best, employing all the kitchen short cuts that keep labor costs minimum and top quality scarce. It is as if they are graded by the same people who give blue ribbons to everybody who just shows up and straight A's to everyone period.

What changes all that is a model so thoroughly honest and faithful to the hard work of true old fashioned goodness that it reinvents judgement of the entire genre. Such a place is Crouse Café, just off the Indianola square now since the 1960s and in small-town Iowa since 1946.

"Homemade from scratch" is not an exaggeration at Crouse; it's a mantra. Gravies are made without anything from cans or packets. Fried chicken is cooked in huge cast iron skillets. Things that are almost compulsory menu items in the family diner business are truly scratch made. Thus, mashed potatoes, baked beans and coleslaw all make visitors wonder why most restaurants make such lesser versions of these things.

My most recent among scores of visits to Crouse was on a Sunday around noon. As expected, we waited 20 minutes for a table in the 100-seat, three-room café. That gave us time to check out the farm art on the walls that reflects a time even older than Crouse's

origin. Customers looked like Iowa State Fair goers would look if the fair were held in winter. Overalls and suspenders were as well represented as the jackets and ties of church goers and the sweats of local schools.

One menu each from 1947 and 1964 reminded that no significant changes have been made, other than prices. When not compared to yesteryear, the prices are super bargains. Two pieces of fried chicken, with beans, slaw, mashed potatoes and gravy cost \$10.99 and included a complimentary basket of dinner rolls and butter.

Other scratch-made specialties include breaded pork chops, hot beef sandwiches, liver and onions, pot roast, French fried shrimp, catfish, and steak. All are also represented on the historic menus on the wall.

The two most popular aspects of Crouse — pie and breakfast — are also carryovers from 75 years ago. The pies are, of course, homemade daily from scratch. Savvy customers will order theirs at the get-go, knowing some will likely sell out before they finish dinner.

Retired Des Moines Register sports reporter John Naughton, who has visited more small-town cafés than anyone I ever knew, thinks the cherry pie is a bucket list item for people who eat desserts. The first raisin cream pie I ever tasted was Crouse's — decades before I read that a California Asian living in Brooklyn had proclaimed it "Iowa's official favorite pie." Five or six different types of pie are made each day, except Monday.



Crouse's hot beef sandwich

Breakfast has seen the most changes. Eggs Benedict, American fried potatoes, and several types of omelets have joined the traditional bacon (ham, or sausage) with eggs, hashed browns and toast.

Otherwise, expect a throwback experience here. I have a T-shirt I bought at Crouse on their 50th anniversary. The logo is the same as today's, except this is their 75th anniversary. Crouse's charms are so powerful that I once took a first-timer there for lunch. Afterwards, she began looking for real estate in Indianola. Vibes like that don't happen very often. ■

Jim Duncan is a food and art writer who has been covering the central Iowa scene for more than five decades.



LUNCH WITH...

BY JIM DUNCAN

Jamie Farrington at Lachele's Fine Foods

Over burgers, fries, tots and real sugar soft drinks, we talked about Farrington's wine/coffee bar, The Inklings and Romance in all its magnificent nuances.

EAT & DRINK

Jamie Farrington is a chef/mortgage broker who is opening The Rabbit Room in Johnston Feb. 9. To our minds, only a deep Romantic would open a wine bar devoted to the works of The Inklings, an early 20th century gang of Oxford professors who met regularly in the back room of The Eagle and Child Pub. C.S. Lewis and J.R. Tolkien led the group when they were not creating wondrous worlds and underworlds of imagination and romance.

Since this is the month of Romance, we asked Farrington to lunch, and he chose Lachele's Fine Food, a bustling burger joint with two Des Moines stores serving smash burgers of exceptional quality. Over burgers, fries, tots and real sugar soft drinks, we talked about Farrington's wine/coffee bar, The Inklings and Romance in all its magnificent nuances.

Very few people are familiar with Tolkien or Lewis, other than the Peter Jackson movies of the former's "Ring" trilogy and the Broadway hit of the latter's "Screwtape Letters," which is coming to Hoyt Sherman in March. **What led Farrington to this moment?**

"After high school, I spent six years in the Navy, then moved to Oklahoma. My intention was to transfer to Iowa State and study veterinarian medicine. But, some of my credits didn't transfer to ISU, so I went to Des Moines Area Community College to retake the basic credits. While there, I became interested in the Iowa Culinary Institute (ICI) and transferred there to become a chef.

"After ICI, I worked at Bistro Montage, Gateway Market, Gusto and Sodexho at the Principal. I always worked more than one job because I have three children. Then, along came COVID and its massive layoffs. I got my mortgage license, but along came 9% inflation. No one was refinancing, and not many could afford to buy homes. I worked for Midwest Ambulance as a dispatcher, for Stoney Creek Inn and at Wine Styles for Allan and Gina Graham. They were ready to retire and helped me find a way to buy the store."

Where did the idea to combine wine with books come from?

"I have always been an avid reader. My wife, a poet, and I took a trip with the boys to Iceland. In Reykjavik, we found a wine bar that was also a book store. I loved it."

F. Scott Fitzgerald, a great Romantic, said that sentimental people always believe that things will change but Romantics have a "desperate confidence

that they won't." Book stores have been disappearing rapidly since the rise of big block stores like Barnes & Noble, and then Amazon. How do you buck those odds?

"I think the store needs versatility. We will open in the early morning for coffee, close and reopen for wine late afternoon. The books are not for sale but to stimulate conversation. I want people to take them off the shelves and read them. I will pair wine with small dishes, and I will have ice cream. I have been told by many that my homemade ice cream is exceptional."

Those are very long hours.

"We will open at 6 a.m. till 10 in the morning. Then close and reopen at 3 p.m. till 10 p.m. I like the quiet times. I am often sleepless."

The recent death of Rob Reiner resurrected movies like "Sleepless in Seattle." That recalls the Meg Ryan character's situational hypocrisy. She played an independent book store owner who considered big chains to be evil. Yet she was frequently running off for coffee — at Starbucks.

"We pigeon hole ourselves into what we like and consume things that restrict us. There is a whole other world out there. Books and conversation can open doors to it. That's why I like to always try a different wine, or take a different wine to friends each time I visit. I have always tried to be open to new experiences, at least since high school when I gave up vegetarianism. I want to push myself and maybe others into new comfort zones — of wine, food and ideas."

How do you push a new wine, or idea on people?

"Allan was great at reading people. He was so good at it that they trusted him with judgments — wine choices for starters — because they thought he knew what they would like as well as they did. At Gateway, customers would come in looking for Abbe ('The Wine Lady' Davidson) because they trusted her. It took time before they would ask for me. Trust like that opens doors to new experiences. That's a premise to the store."

Books are a key part of The Rabbit Room furnishings. What kind of books will Farrington stock?

"I am building that library. It's not easy with the internet having taken down the used book store world. I will have the Harvard Classics and the World Book set. They are references that provide more depth than an AI search. I am shooting for about 500 books with strengths in literary classics and fiction. But, I will also



have books of more precise interest — 'Agriculture Practices of the 1940's,' the 'History of Keokuk County.'

Keokuk County is curious in that it does not include Keokuk the city.

"Yes, and Des Moines County is home to Keokuk but nowhere near Des Moines."

What kind of events does Farrington have planned for The Rabbit Room?

"A book of the day discussion. Story telling time — people telling or reading stories is such a comfort. That's why it is popular in nursing homes and general therapy. Bible Studies, because the Bible is a collection of paradigms — all great stories. Bottom line, I want to bring people together. Discussion and debate can do that when they are civil."

Wine keeps things civil, at least compared to whiskey. Because Farrington is opening in February, we had to ask him about Romance. What are his favorite romantic novels?

"'Wuthering Heights' and 'Jane Eyre' must top any list. But Tolkien's Ring Cycle is my favorite. Lúthien is the daughter of the elf king Thingol and the goddess Melian. Beren is human. Yet, she gives up her immortality to be with him. I cried when I read that, and I cried when I saw that Tolkien and his wife are buried with tombstones that refer to them as 'Lúthien' and 'Beren,' their nicknames for each other." ■

Jim Duncan is a food and art writer who has been covering the central Iowa scene for more than five decades.



BOOK REVIEWS

COURTESY OF BEAVERDALE BOOKS

'Honeyeater'

This is not an easy book to read. Just throwing that out there if you're not the kind of person who likes a challenging read. This is a slow-burn, convoluted, stream of consciousness style story that performs literary acrobatics while it breaks your heart.

If you are up for a complicated, foggy whirl of beautiful prose and haunted characters, then get ready; this is a doozy.

Charlie wants out of the flooded mess of Bellworth, a town full of childhood ghosts and regret. However, before he can break free, a woman with roses piercing her skin turns his world inside out. Grace drags Charlie into the depths of the secrets and mysteries of this creepy town, and terrifying choices await the pair when the muck comes loose.

Dizzy, unsettling, twisted and experimental, this is a whirlwind of a book I read twice, just to catch the things I missed the first time. I may tackle it a third time, to revel in the beauty of the writing. Be prepared for this one to seep into your bones in the best way. ■ — *Review by Julie Goodrich*



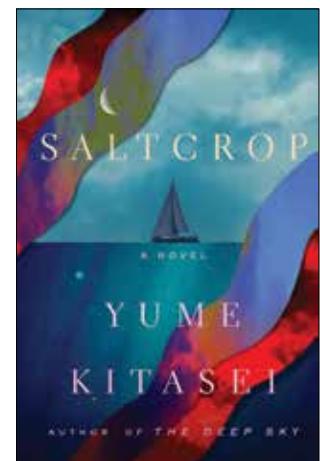
By Kathleen Jennings
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Tor Books

'Saltcrop'

Sisterhood is one of those things that is endlessly fascinating to me. I didn't grow up with a sister, and like many people who are always seeking the unfamiliar, stories about the complexities of sisters draw me in. "Saltcrop" delivers a powerful jolt of a story about sisters searching a crumbling world for answers, for themselves and, ultimately, for hope.

Skipper and Carmen are as unalike as two people can be, but they are sisters, nonetheless. Brought together by a strange plea from their eldest, accomplished sister Nora, they will have to travel through a world in the throes of ecological collapse and a society that may be imploding even faster.

Full of richly realized characters, strange vistas and threaded through with a strange sense of unease, this is a wildly beautiful story told with immense skill and pitch-perfect pacing. Kitasei is a powerful writer, and she absolutely shines in this one. I flew through it and have been recommending it to anyone who likes a good family drama, an ecological horror story or just a good heroine's journey. ■ — *Review by Julie Goodrich*



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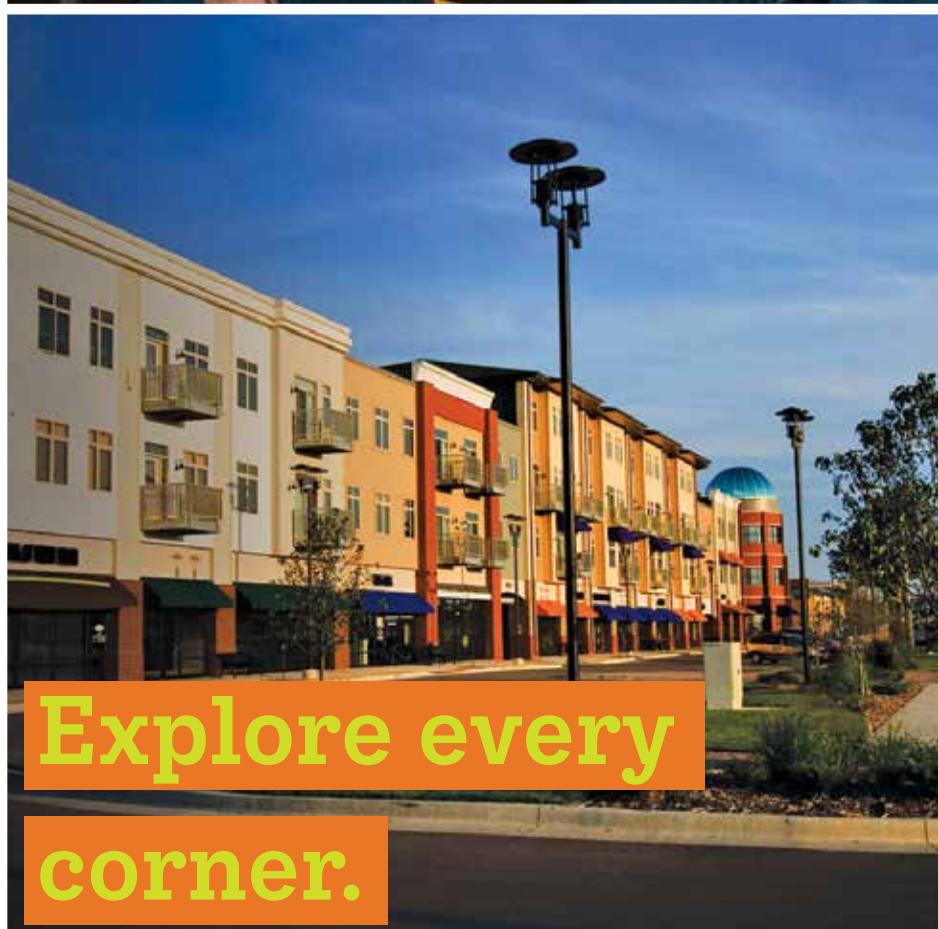
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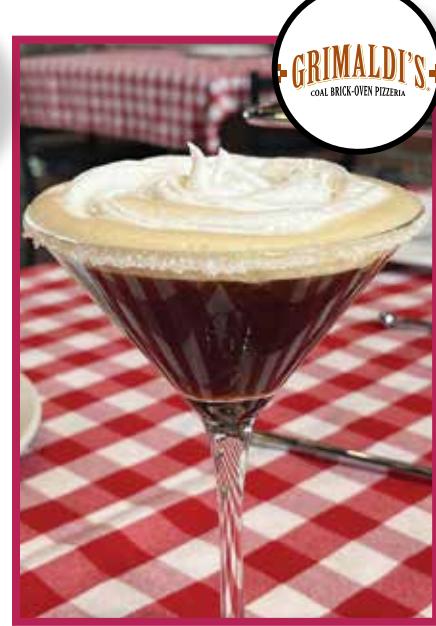
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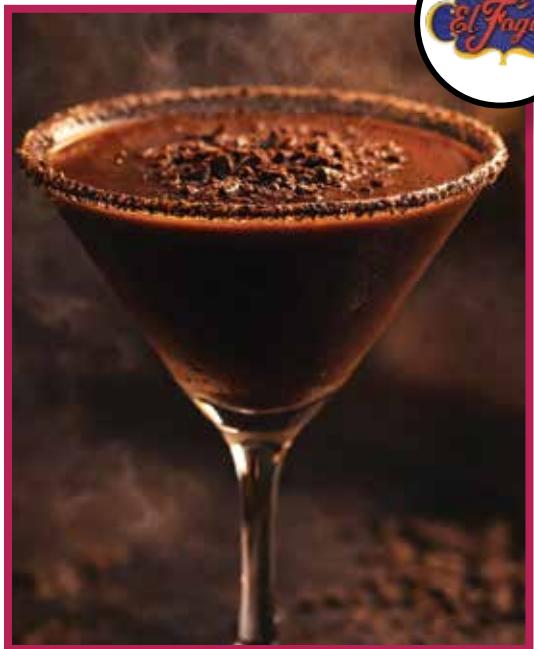

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FILM REVIEW

BY DAVID ROWLEY

'The Rip' runs on greed, paranoia and misdirection

Loyalty is the first casualty when millions in unclaimed cash is up for grabs.

In the shadowy glow of Joe Carnahan's "The Rip," the most dangerous criminals are not the cartel operatives lurking off-screen but the badges meant to protect and serve. This Netflix thriller, "inspired by true events" within the Miami Police Department, is a masterfully constructed pressure cooker of paranoia, a film where loyalty is the first casualty when millions in unclaimed cash is up for grabs. With a stellar ensemble led by real-life besties Matt Damon and Ben Affleck, "The Rip" delivers a gripping, high-octane and character-driven experience that prioritizes who-done-it tension over explosive spectacle.

The film opens with a terrific, brutal sequence: the ambush and murder of respected Captain Jackie Velez (Lina Esco). With her final act, she sends a cryptic text about a "rip" — police slang for a cash seizure. Six weeks later, with her case cold and bureaucratic frustration boiling, newly promoted Lieutenant Dane Dumars (Matt Damon) acts on her lead. He assembles his tight-knit Tactical Narcotics Team (TNT), including his volatile old friend Detective Sergeant J.D. Byrne (Ben Affleck), the calculating Mike Ro (Steven Yeun), and detectives Numa Baptiste (Teyana Taylor) and Lolo Salazar (Catalina Sandino Moreno). Their target: a derelict house at the end of a sleepy cul-de-sac, expected to hold a modest score.

Occupied by a young woman named Desi (Sasha Calle), her late-grandmother's house contains barrels neatly packed with more than \$20 million. This amount changes things from a simple rip to a life-altering temptation. Dane's immediate decision to withhold the true amount from his superiors is the first crack in the team's foundation. As they are forced to hole up and count the mountain of cash on-site — a procedural requirement that makes them sitting ducks — the initial adrenaline curdles into suspicion. The streets outside remain eerily empty; no cartel enforcers arrive. The silence is not relief but an accusation. As one character notes, what began as a dangerous job starts to feel "more and more like an inside operation."

Carnahan and Michael McGrane construct a fast-paced, brilliantly claustrophobic mystery. Much of the film unfolds within the stash house. Juanmi Azpiroz's cinematography, employing an ultra-wide aspect ratio and a monochromatic, Michael Mann-esque palette, drenches everything in oppressive gloom. The sun is conspicuously absent in the Sunshine State, replaced by night skies and interior shadows that hide as much as they reveal. This visual style does well to mimic the narrative: nothing is clear, everyone is partially obscured, and trust becomes impossible to discern.

The film's greatest strength is its exceptional cast and the non-stop adrenalin ride that kicks off and does not let up until the final frame. This is not a story of cartoonish villains but of flawed individuals grappling with desperation, grief and the tantalizing power of escape. Matt Damon's Dane is a raw nerve buried under a stoic facade, a man grieving his young son and shouldering a promotion he knows has bred resentment. Ben Affleck's J.D. is all



"The Rip"

R | 117 minutes

Director: Joe Carnahan

Writers: Joe Carnahan, Michael McGrane

Stars: Matt Damon, Ben Affleck, Steven Yeun

simmering rage and wounded pride, his friendship (and competition) with Dane fraying into something dangerous. Their real-life chemistry makes their conflict uniquely compelling; when they throw down, it feels like watching a foundational bond rupture.

The script is tight and focused, layering twists with purposeful misdirection, occasionally giving the "Ocean's Eleven"-esque style of showing audiences where the misdirections happened as the plot unfolds. The central question — who is clean, and who is dirty? — is sustained through meticulous editing that cuts between reaction shots, encouraging the audience to play detective alongside the characters.

However, "The Rip" is not without its flaws. As the tension culminates, Carnahan pivots to more conventional, loud action sequences. A chase involving a standard police cruiser and a heavy armored vehicle, and a lone detective pursuing an armed suspect through woods at night, stretch believability in ways the earlier, character-focused scenes carefully avoid. These moments feel like a concession to genre expectations and momentarily pull focus from the intricate human drama that makes the film so compelling. Additionally, a late-epilogue set on a conspicuously fake-looking Florida beach undermines the gritty authenticity established (and, honestly, feels more like an intimate moment of mutual assurance between Damon and Affleck on their decision to release a straight-to-streaming movie rather than a theatrical release).

Yet, these foibles do not ruin the experience. "The Rip" succeeds because it trusts its audience to follow a complex plot while exploring potent themes of institutional corruption, economic desperation and the corrosive tendency of temptation. It is a film more interested in the messiness of motives than the cleanliness of a shootout; more invested in the crackle of distrust between friends than in generic cartel villains. While its descent into a more routine action finale prevents it from reaching heights like "The Oceans" series or "Heat," it is a consistently engaging and satisfyingly tense ride from start to finish. It proves that sometimes the most gripping heist is not the one planned by an outlaw, but the one that happens in the hearts and minds of those sworn to uphold the law. ■

PREVIEWS

BY DAVID ROWLEY

"Good Luck, Have Fun, Don't Die"

R | 134 minutes

Director: Gore Verbinski

Writer: Matthew Robinson

Starring: Sam Rockwell, Haley

Lu Richardson, Michael Peña

Director Gore Verbinski



makes his return to theaters with this gonzo time-traveling adventure, his first feature in a decade. Academy Award winner Sam Rockwell stars as a scraggly citizen agent from the future who beams back to modern-day Los Angeles — in a Norms Restaurant, to be precise — on a mission to save humanity from impending AI-driven apocalypse. Enlisting a ragtag team of unsuspecting diners — played by Juno Temple, Zazie Beetz, Michael Peña and the consistently excellent Haley Lu Richardson — they ditch their smartphones and barrel into battle in this relentless dark comedy thrill ride.

"CRIME 101"

R | 140 minutes

Director: Bart Layton

Writers: Bart Layton, Don

Winslow

Stars: Chris Hemsworth, Mark Ruffalo, Halle Berry



Set against the sun-bleached grit of Los Angeles, "CRIME 101" weaves the tale of an elusive thief (Chris Hemsworth) whose high-stakes heists unfolding along the iconic 101 freeway have mystified police. When he eyes the score of a lifetime with hopes of this being his final job, his path collides with a disillusioned insurance broker (Halle Berry) who is facing her own crossroads, forcing the two to collaborate. Determined to crack the case, a relentless detective (Mark Ruffalo) closes in on the operation, raising the stakes even higher. As the multimillion-dollar heist approaches, the line between hunter and hunted begins to blur, and all three are forced to confront the cost of their choices — and the realization that there is no turning back.

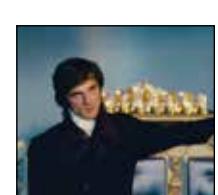
"Wuthering Heights"

R | 136 minutes

Director: Emerald Fennell

Writers: Emily Brontë, Emerald Fennell

Stars: Jacob Elordi, Margot Robbie, Owen Cooper



Academy Award-winning writer and director Emerald Fennell takes on Emily Brontë's quintessential gothic novel. A passionate and tumultuous love story set against the backdrop of the Yorkshire moors, "Wuthering Heights" follows Heathcliff (Elordi) and Catherine (Robbie) as desire gives way to obsession — and vengeance ripples across generations. After decades of adaptations by filmmakers from William Wyler to Luis Buñuel, Emerald Fennell's glossy reimagining rejects strict fidelity in favor of an unconventional reinvention for a new generation. ■

CENTER STAGE

BY JOHN BUSBEE

An explosion of shows in the month of love

The calendar looks like a cultural Whitman's Sampler with its variety.

We're past the January scarcity of performing arts opportunities, finally pushing into a February filled with a variety of alluring options. From a classic murder mystery to a sassy re-interpretation princess musical to Pooh and Oliver. Add an internet-based twist on Jane Austen and the national touring hit, "Kimberly Akimbo," and theatres are coming alive. Additional offerings from the Des Moines Symphony, Ballet Des Moines, and the Central Iowa Wind Ensemble mean that love is definitely in the air this February. At least, love of performing arts.

Some shows of special note

February renews many performing arts groups' seasons. With Valentine's Day infusing the entire month with love, especially the love of the arts, the calendar looks like a cultural Whitman's Sampler with its variety.

When Agatha Christie's name is bandied about, theatre-lovers pay attention. The Playhouse produces the longest-running play in the world, "The Mousetrap." This murder mystery promises a delectable denouement after a decades-long absence from central Iowa stages.

Family fare brings Winnie the Pooh (Des Moines Young Artists' Theatre) and Oliver (CAP Theatre) to engaging life. Elders should take advantage of such shared experience live theatre opportunities when such companies as these two are producing shows.

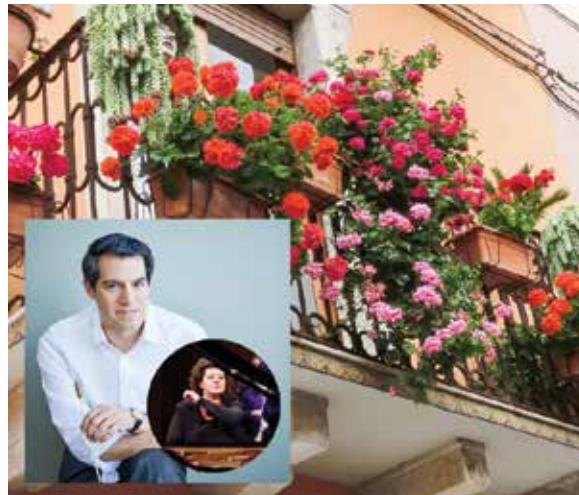
Tallgrass Theatre Company continues its stellar programming with a sassy, attitude-filled musical, "Disenchanted!" Princesses strip away their veneer of demureness, giving audiences a jocular journey through a fairy tale world.

Still stretching its aesthetic range, Ankeny Community Theatre brings a modern, internet-laced interpretation to patchwork of appeal in "Pride @ Prejudice." Jane Austen even intervenes through her letters as internet interplay is anchored by love and humor.

Lightning on stage, not in a bottle

"The Lightning Thief: The Percy Jackson Musical" breaks from the usual tradition of Kate Goldman programming of shows about an hour long. This is a full-length Broadway musical. From the advance buzz circulating in central Iowa, this column wanted to precede its early-March run with plenty of notice for patrons to capture a seat for what promises to be an epic musical immersion into an alluring retelling based on Greek mythology.

Rick Riordan's initial volume of his Percy Jackson and the Olympian series in 2005 became a middle grade children's fantasy action-adventure novel sensation. Adapted to cinema (2010), then to the stage (2023),



Miguel Harth-Bedoya leads the Orchestra over Valentine's Day weekend, featuring Tchaikovsky's beautiful "Romeo and Juliet." He also leads a free maestro class with attendees receiving a free ticket to the concert. Photo credit: Des Moines Symphony

the Playhouse is one of the largest community theatre producers of this show in Iowa. In it, teenager Percy Jackson discovers he is a demigod and embarks on a quest to find Zeus's stolen lightning bolt to prevent a war among the gods. "Center Stage" asked director, David VanCleave, about the special appeal for the Kate Goldman Family Series.

Center Stage: What makes directing a Kate Goldman show special?

David VanCleave: The Kate Goldman Family Series has a long history of being the first theatre experience for many young audience members, which can be such a transformative moment with lasting impacts. It's also common to see multiple generations come together to see a show, allowing us to play a role in core family memories. That's an extreme honor. The Kate Goldman series was my first theatre experience as an audience member (1999), actor (2000), and director (2012), so it will always hold a special place in my heart. I've also watched my nieces and nephews come alive in the audience, dancing along with actors without a care in the world. There's nothing more magical than that.

Center Stage: Talk about KGFS shows based on children's literature.

David VanCleave: Plays based on literature have a built-in jumping off point for the production team. The original literature can help inspire the look and feel of the world of the play and provide valuable insight on the play's themes and character motivations. There's also a different energy when audiences are already fans of the characters — they're not just watching a play; they're visiting their friends. Rick Riordan's Percy Jackson series

BARE BOARDS CHATTER

Des Moines Performing Arts: Feb. 3-8. "Kimberly Akimbo"

Des Moines Playhouse: Feb. 6 - March 1. Agatha Christie's "The Mousetrap"

Tallgrass Theatre Company – Broadway

Karaoke: Feb. 13 - March 1. "Disenchanted! A Hilarious Hit Musical"

Ingersoll Theatre: Feb. 14. "Love Letters" featuring Kevin and Mollie Cooney

Des Moines Symphony - Miguel Harth-Bedoya

Maestro Class: Feb. 14. Free to attend; attendees receive free ticket to symphony's concert

Des Moines Symphony: Feb. 14-15. "Love – Romeo and Juliet"

Des Moines Playhouse – AUDITIONS: Feb. 16. "Polkadots: The Cool Kids Musical"

Des Moines Performing Arts – National

Geographic Series: Feb. 16. "Life on the Move"

Des Moines Young Artists' Theatre: Feb. 20 - March 1. "Winnie the Pooh"

CAP (Class Act Productions) Theatre: Feb. 20 - March 8. "Oliver, Jr."

Tallgrass Theatre Company – AUDITIONS:

Feb. 22-23. "For Peter Pan on Her 70th Birthday"

Ankeny Community Theatre: Feb. 22-23. "Pride @ Prejudice"

Ballet Des Moines at Hoyt Sherman Place

Theatre: Feb. 27-28. "Nothing Holds Still" (three world premieres)

Central Iowa Wind Ensemble: March 1. "Global Dance Atlas"

Des Moines Performing Arts – Live at the Temple Series: March 1. "On a Winter's Night"

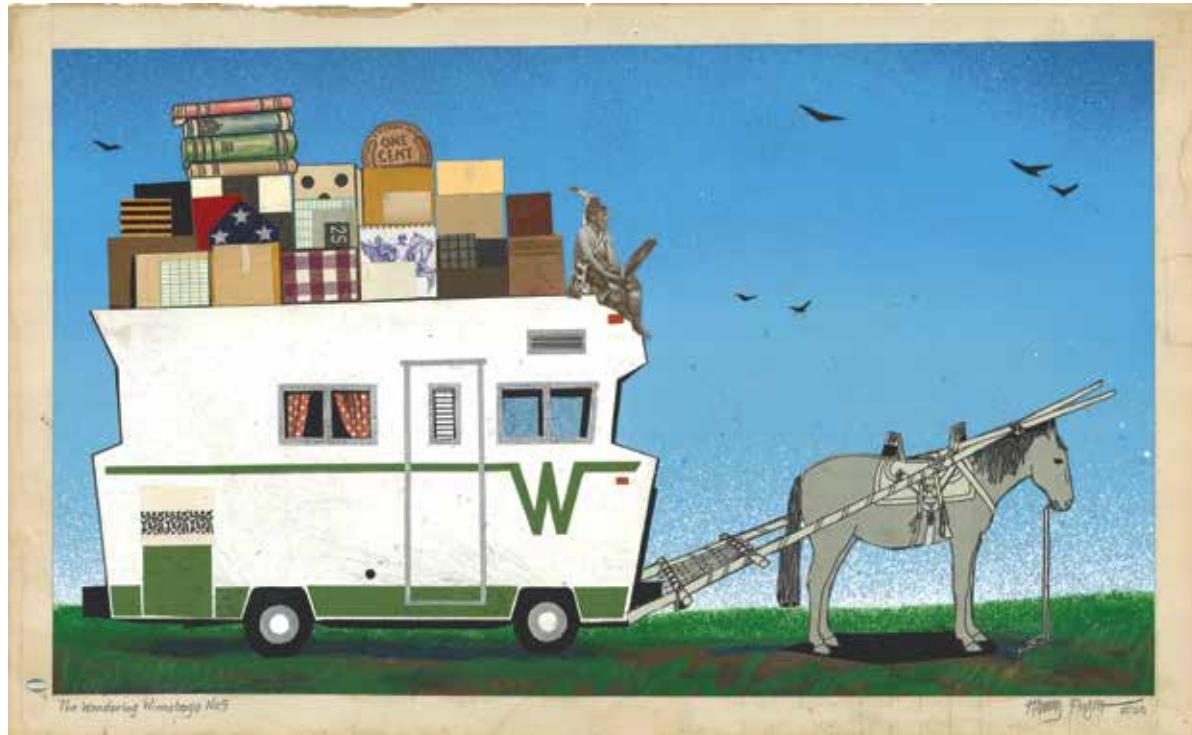
has a huge and passionate fandom — something that was clear throughout auditions. Not only was it the largest turnout I've seen, but the actors connected with the material in really profound and personal ways. It's also been a delightful challenge thinking of various easter eggs to include in our production — specific costume details, staging choices, etc. that fans will recognize immediately. ■

John Busbee produces The Culture Buzz, a weekly arts and culture radio show on www.kfmq.org, covering Iowa's arts scene with an inclusive sweep of the cultural brush. He received the Iowa Governor's Arts Award for Collaboration and Partnership in the Arts. He has performed in more than 100 musicals, including many leading roles.



Thieves, cons and native roots

The Gateway to America is more than an arch.



Henry Payer's "The Wandering Winnebago." Courtesy Des Moines Art Center

The juiciest story in the art world last month was that of Thomas Doyle, a Kansas-born con man who has been arrested numerous times under at least five different names. Wall Street Journal's Jenny Strasburg catapulted Doyle to the big time as far as infamy goes telling how he conned a revered London art dealer and Bruce Springsteen's long time manager Jon Landau over "Portrait of a Girl" by Jean-Baptiste-Camille Corot.

Landau was a Rolling Stone reporter in the early 1970s when he wrote, "I have seen the future of rock & roll, and his name is Bruce Springsteen." Then he quit his job and became The Boss' manager. He bought the Corot masterpiece from Doyle, although he had turned it down several times before. Doyle sold it for a super bargain price, about an eighth of its value. You get what you pay for.

Doyle planned a getaway by sending the dealer, who was never paid, a confession stating he planned to "turn on the Moody Blues, open a bottle of bourbon and eat my 1911 acp for dessert," referring to a semiautomatic pistol long used by the U.S. military. In truth, Doyle was arrested in Connecticut, where he had been living for weeks out of his car in a hotel parking lot.

As a Midwest chauvinist, our favorite story was that of the elite media discovering the awe-inspiring Anselm Kieffer exhibition "Becoming the Sea" in St. Louis. Even CBS did features on it, and it usually takes an act of God to get them to recognize anything that originates anywhere between the American coasts. Kieffer hung

seven 30-feet-tall paintings, made with lead and ash, of the Mississippi and Rhine rivers in the St. Louis Museum of Art. It was a grand show that reminded even New York critics that the Gateway to America is more than an arch.

Locally, the big story was that Hoyt Sherman Theater's age-appropriate pipe organ, a gift from the Maloof brothers (owners of the Sacramento Kings and The Palms hotel-casino in Las Vegas), will cost \$187,000 to install. That's nearly \$60,000 more than Landau paid for his stolen masterpiece.

Touts

February brings Des Moines two art events that also reflect historic times. Edgaard Camacho is a French-born Venezuelan whose journalistic and artistic works have forced him into exile in Des Moines. The depiction of a mass murder, seen by the artist, caught the interest of the Venezuelan National Cultural Center early this century. He was called to be part of "La Megaexposición: The Best of Venezuelan Art of the 21st Century." By the time that touring national art show took place, he had already found exile to the United States.

Close ties to Maharishi University, University of Iowa and Iowa State University brought him to Des Moines. Camacho is versatile, creating everything corporate logos to street life drawings. His show at Moberg is that gallery's first with Steven Vail as curator. Vail deals with international artists of renown. The partnership with



Henry Payer's "Seventh Generation Winnebago." Courtesy Des Moines Art Center

Moberg gives his artist a local presence that should be good for both Moberg and Vail. There may be more to follow as Moberg and Vail contemplate a more permanent partnership.

Des Moines Art Center launched an exhibition of Henry Payer, a Ho Chunk (white man's name — Winnebago) mixed media artist who seriously explores his native and post-appropriation roots in "Agakinak Haciwi: We Live Opposite Each Other."

This show, through June 17, is rife with delightful ironies and anachronisms. For instance, Payer likes to work on ledger paper, which was introduced to the Ho Chunk with their census, monetary transactions with the U.S. government, and even as legal tender. That gives Payer's surname an irony of historic proportions.

Payer also has considerable fun exploring ironic takes on the Iowa recreational vehicle company that shares the name given to the Ho Chunk, most likely on ledger paper. ■

Jim Duncan is a food and art writer who has been covering the central Iowa scene for more than five decades.



IOWA ARTIST



Visual learning

Nathan Wright is an illustrator who performs graphic recording and live notetaking.

BY JACKIE WILSON

Participating in a company meeting can be boring. The prospect of sitting through yet another PowerPoint presentation elicits yawns among restless employees.

Yet, when Nathan Wright is at the meeting, folks perk up. They are looking at Wright, drawing live illustrations of the concepts they have just talked about. Even though it is corporate speak, the presentation is engaging and entertaining.

Wright is an illustrator who performs graphic recording and live notetaking. Throughout a meeting, Wright puts ideas and bullet points into engaging and colorful graphics, also known as sketch notes.

"The point is to make an event more exciting. People are visual learners," he says. At the end of a meeting, a digital frame or outline of the meeting is given to clients.

"People leave a conference with big ideas but often forget what was said in a meeting," he explains. "This wraps up concepts in a digitized frame."

The feedback is positive.

"Clients love it. It beats a PowerPoint summary, and attendees love it because it makes the event more exciting."

In addition, he creates another popular graphic called Journey Mapping. These are trendy, cartoon-like overviews that visually explain a project, goal or vision board. For example, the president of Grand View University wanted a way to communicate to the public what their vision was with an easy and entertaining graphic.

Wright has a fine arts degree from Iowa State University and worked in corporate marketing for two decades. He illustrated and painted in his spare time. Nine years ago, he began full-time as a freelance graphic illustrator.

One day, a prospective client asked if he had done graphic recording for a conference meeting.

"I'd seen it done before, but I never did it myself," he admits.

The event went smoothly, and word got out among event planners about his skill and expertise, which helps engage employees.

Another aspect of his artwork is illustrating kids' books. Author Betsey Young's son,



Sage Young, went through cancer treatments. Betsey wrote two children's books about families facing a cancer diagnosis. Wright's job was to draw kid-friendly images interacting with cancer doctors.

Additionally, he illustrates comics, created a Wyatt Earp mural and sells various prints of his work. He applied for a Des Moines Ballet Artist in Residence program. He observed and sketched ballet dancers, celebrating the movement and poses in a 10-page comic book.

"One dancer experienced a dream sequence where she wakes up and questions if it was really a dream," he says.

Wright currently works from his studio at Mainframe Studios. It is his goal to fill in between corporate gigs with painting, his first love.

"It's fun to get back into the physical medium," he reflects.

Yet, he likes to create multiple levels of art. He has followed a career path that has been "winding and not in a straight line."

"I love creating for clients and bringing them something unexpected," he says.

For more info on his artwork, visit Mainframe Studios No. 321 or visit his website at www.nathanwright.com. ■

FIRE & ICE

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VETERAN OWNED

'Honest and simple' blues

Brandon Hudspeth, along with Jaisson Taylor, are a duo that will perform at Central Iowa Blues Society's Winter Blues Festival.

As a child, Brandon Hudspeth was intrigued with Big Bird and other characters from "Sesame Street." When the show featured various guest stars, Hudspeth took note of a man dressed in black, playing guitar and singing.

The famed musician, Johnny Cash, commanded more attention than Kermit the Frog, and Hudspeth begged his parents for a guitar. He began taking lessons when he was just 5 years old.

Fast forward to today, and Hudspeth is an accomplished, award-winning blues musician playing in two bands and a duo. Hudspeth and Jaisson Taylor, in the duo Hudspeth and Taylor, received nominations for the Blues Music Award, Blue Blast Award and an Independent Blues Award.

The duo is one of the featured performers at Central Iowa Blues Society's Winter Blues Festival on Feb. 14.

Hudspeth has performed several times at the Winter Fest in different bands. His band, Levee Town, was formed in 2002 in Kansas City. Levee Town represented the Kansas City Blues Society in the International Blues Competition twice, placing in the top 10 in Memphis in 2009.

Levee Town has also released nine albums. "Trying to Keep My Head Above Water" was nominated for a Blues Blast Award for best blues rock album.

Growing up in Oklahoma, his dad was big fan of B.B. King.

"I remember my dad waking me up when Johnny Carson was on and B.B. King was on the show. B.B. King was a big influence in my music career," he reflects.

He began playing in band gigs at age 16 and taught guitar lessons to his friends from school. He moved to Kansas City after high school, attended music school and has performed ever since.

With a background in jazz and classical music, he teaches guitar and music lessons, which helps during the slow times when not touring. He played on the Rhythm and Blues Cruise and has opened for Buddy Guy, Kenny Wayne Shepherd,



Brandon Hudspeth and Jaisson Taylor

Leon Russell, George Thorogood and others.

Hudspeth loves the "honesty and simpleness" when playing the blues genre.

"You have to put your heart and soul into making it work. If you don't put your gut and sweat into it, it won't work," Hudspeth reflects. "It's paying respect to where the music came from, along with the emotion and honesty of it."

Hudspeth is happy to return to the Winter Blues Fest, where in last year's performance, his duo recorded a live album at the festival.

"If you came last year, you might hear yourself cheering in the background of the album," he laughs.

Winter Blues Fest

The Central Iowa Blues Society has hosted the Winter Blues Fest for 31 years. Hundreds of musicians have performed the two-day festival, and 20 acts are featured for this year's festival.

Scott Allen, CIBS president, says the festival promotes live blues music. Typically they feature different regional musicians each year, and most are new every year.

"If I filled it with local bands who typically play for free, then not many folks would attend," he explains.

Yet, they want to showcase Iowa blues musicians. Heath Allen puts together a Blues Expo, a collaboration of local musicians for one of the concerts. Bob Pace assembles a Blues Hall of Fame Showcase, featuring Iowa Blues Hall of Fame musicians.

Additionally, the CIBS hosts a yearly Blues Challenge, where the winners, Weary Ramblers and Other Brothers, represented Iowa at the International Blues Challenge in Memphis. The Weary Ramblers recently won the 2026 International Blues Challenge on Jan. 17. for best solo/duo act out of 130 other acts. The Central-Iowa Weary Ramblers consists of Kathryn Severing Fox and Chad Elliott. Elliott also won first place in the solo/duo guitar. The Other Brothers made it to the semi-finals.

Allen encourages music lovers to attend the fest, as the lineup is diverse blues, such as jazz blues, rock blues, gospel and more.

"There's something for everyone. The blues genre is like a big family and a friend you haven't met yet," he says. "Iowa has good musicians, just as anywhere in the world." ■

WINTER BLUES FEST

Sponsored by the Central Iowa Blues Society

Feb. 13-14

Marriott Hotel, 700 Grand Ave., Des Moines

Tickets: Feb. 13 – \$30 advance/\$45 door; Feb. 14 – \$40 advance/\$55 door; weekend pass in advance, \$60. For a complete lineup and more info visit: <https://cibs.org/>

SOUND ADVICE

BY JACKIE WILSON

Celebrated roots sextet **Clay Street Unit** brings its energetic live show to xBk Live on Feb. 20. Hailing from the heart of the Rockies, Clay Street Unit is supporting its new album, "Sin & Squalor." The album captures the spirit of the west, folk and country traditions of the south and the verve of modern Americana. Opening act is **Jason Scott & The Hight Heat**. Advance tickets, \$25 at <https://xbklive.com>.

The Des Moines Botanical Garden celebrates bringing blues to the dome for the past 20 years with their **Botanical Blues** series. If you are looking for a warm indoor vibe, attend the Sunday concerts among bright greenery. On Feb. 8, **Jodi**

Bodey & Dewey Cantrell; Feb. 15, **Drama Kings** and Feb. 22, **Soul Searchers**.

Shows start at 1 p.m. and 3 p.m. and tickets sold at the door only. Admission: adults \$12; seniors/military \$11; free for members and kids younger than 2. For a complete lineup, visit <https://dmbotanicalgarden.com/>.

Need an idea for Valentine's Day? On Feb. 14, **RetroSpect** with **Jana West** hosts its Fifth Annual Valentine's Date Night at the Sherwood Forest Event Center. Ticket prices include a meal and concert for \$66. Find tickets at www.eventbrite.com. ■

PEOPLE & PETS

BY JACKIE WILSON

4-legged friends

Ashlee Crawford appreciates dogs and horses.

Ashlee Crawford's two passions are her four-legged friends.

Her dog, Layla, is a 4-year-old black labrador. She rescued her from a breeder who got out of the breeding business.

"When I saw her, she was the only female. I liked her personality," she recalls.

Crawford's love of the labrador breed began as a child when her family pets were labs. She says her 80-pound black dog can be intimidating for strangers in public.

"I can see some people get nervous when they see my dog," she says. "Most labs just want to run up and love on you. They are either lab people, or they are not."

The best thing she likes about Layla is her loyalty.

"Labs are high energy. I like their dedication and playing outside. They are committed to people and are always ready to rally," she explains.

Layla also shares in Crawford's other passion of riding and showing horses. When she was in high school, her great uncle gifted her a horse. She took riding lessons and attended college for equine science.

A friend of hers was a horse trainer, and, after college, she started showing horses along with her friend. She shows horses in the category of American Paint Horse and Pinto Horse competitions. These unique horses are bred for color.

Part of the competition is to make sure the horse is groomed properly to ensure the coat is pearly, if it is a white color. She may shave the hair for a cleaner look. Horses are bathed, and the mane is fashioned in a ponytail.

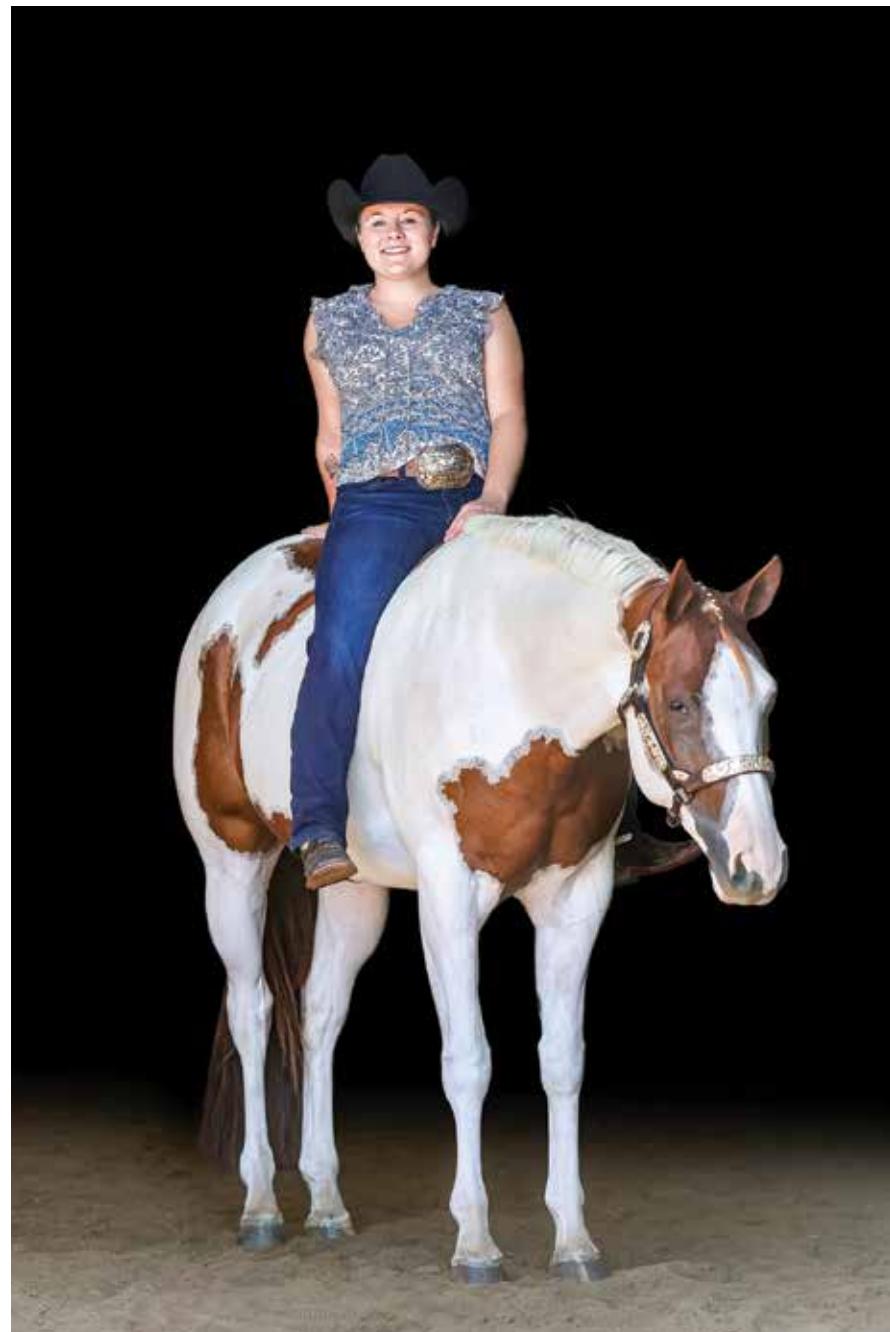
"There's a lot of bathing and brushing," she explains. "We really pay attention to detail."

Crawford found success as she won the Amateur Cash for Color Walk Trot Futurity Championship in 2024 and an Iowa Pinto Championship for Trail. The category examines a horse's structure and movement. She says working with the show horses is her passion.

"It's a real cool experience, especially when winning. It's a fun community to be around. The hobby is expensive," she admits. "There's a lot of sportsmanship for the



Layla, taken by Lens and Leash Photography.



Ashlee Crawford

individual."

As Crawford is attending nursing school, she recently sold her horse. She still rides horses and helps with her friend's horse in her spare time.

"After nursing school, I hope to get back to it."

Meanwhile, Layla is her constant companion and forever friend.

"There's a sense of responsibility having a dog. Having that connection with Layla is important. We do everything together. I don't have kids, so it's like my kid. It's not just a dog," she reflects. "It's like a bestie to hang out with." ■

JOE'S NEIGHBORHOOD

BY JOE WEEG

The conundrum of kindness

Grant Number 5

"BE KIND!"

OK, OK, I heard you the first time. And I do want to be kind, but I'm in a rush and I don't want to be taken advantage of and shouldn't I first be kind to myself? All arguments I have made over the years to justify NOT being kind.

But don't we all in our hearts want to be kind — or are we "Bad to the Bone," as sung by George Thorogood and the Destroyers?

Rutger Bregman wrote a book in 2019, "Humankind," where he claims the science is as clear as clear can be — people default not to evil, but to kindness. He claims that when the Titanic is sinking, unlike in the movie, it is kindness that rules. When the Twin Towers are burning, it is kindness that is present in those stairways. When London is being bombed in World War II, it is kindness that motivates the population.

What? Is Bregman saying we lean toward goodness?

"I was born in 1925 on a farm south of Sioux City."

Whip thin. Large smile. Crinkly eyes. Her name is Mary Drossel.

One hundred years old. It's hard to believe her age as she greets me with a warm openness and curious gaze. She is so not jaded by life and gives off a feeling of apple pie and just-whipped cream.

Mary Drossel is a teacher. She started when she was 18 years old. She attended country school as a child, earned her teaching degree from Cedar Falls, and then she

was hired to teach at another country school in her home township.

"I had 19 students. They ranged from kindergarten to eighth grade. The oldest student was 17. I was 18."

And then what?

"I taught two years country school, and then I did public school in town. Then I was home for 12 years raising my kids. You see, I married a farmer who came home from the Second World War."

And then what happened after your kids were older?

"I went back to teaching. When I turned 44, I had a new baby. I kept teaching anyway. I taught a total of 35 years. I quit teaching in 1990. My husband died in 1993."

Mary now resides at a retirement community in Johnston. While wandering the halls recently, she ran across a professional photographer, Tim Abramowitz. His mom and dad had also been part of that retirement community, but both died a few years ago. Tim remained connected to the facility and was hanging his photographs of rural Iowa in a hall there in preparation for a presentation.



PERSONALITIES

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JOE'S NEIGHBORHOOD... CONT.

"Tim was hanging those pictures. My country school wasn't up there. But there was other country schools. So, I asked Tim if he thought the country school I taught at was still standing."

Tim is straight-backed and sober. Although his family came from Illinois, where his mom and dad were school teachers, he has the no-nonsense look of an old Iowa farmer who drinks black coffee at the cafe counter in his feed cap. Tim quietly gets things done.

"I asked Mary where her school house was located. She mentioned she was in Grant Township in Woodbury County — Grant Number 5," Tim said.

Was that helpful?

"Every township in Iowa had nine schools. At one time, over 14,000 one-room school houses in the State of Iowa because they built schoolhouses every two miles so that no student would have to walk more than one mile to school. And so I realized that I had photographed Grant Number 4 in Woodbury County, which was just two miles down the road from Grant Number 5. And so I figured, well, I'll be able to find it."

OK.

"And I'd really love to have a photo for Mary."

So Tim and his friend and fellow photographer, Bill Roach, packed up the car and travelled three and a half hours to a remote field where they found Grant Number 5. And took pictures.

"I didn't tell Mary I was going to do this. So, at the presentation the other day, I presented her with the photograph."

Wow!

"I could hardly keep the tears away," Mary said.

"Nor could I," Tim said.

OK, Tim drove seven hours, took this beautiful photo, gifted it to a stranger, and told no one (I found out from Tim's friend, Bill). Mary was touched to the core by Tim's kindness.



So... do I really NOT have time to be kind?

And, as Mary says, "There's a time for all of us to die. It's marked. We don't know, and we should not know."

So, BE KIND — before the buzzer goes off ending the game. Trust me, you want to anyway. ■

Joe Weeg spent 31 years bumping around this town as a prosecutor for the Polk County Attorney's Office. Now retired, he writes about the frequently overlooked people, places and events in Des Moines on his blog: www.joesneighborhood.com.



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DES MOINES FORGOTTEN

BY KRISTIAN DAY

Haunting the house

"Does your life change knowing they exist?"

Several times a year, I make the trek on Interstate 80 across the state of Iowa to the Quad Cities to visit family. My nieces and nephew are getting older. My sister and I have finally cultivated a relationship in our adult life. My dad is nearly 70, and, at some point, I know this list of people is going to get smaller. As the years go by, I am growing eager to hang on to the things that are fading away.

I spent my high school years in the small town of Ely, just outside of Cedar Rapids. My mom and I were the first occupants of that house, and it was a fine place to spend my teenage years, but it wasn't the house I grew up in.

Whenever I would leave my dad's place in Moline, Illinois, I would drive over to the town of Rock Island. The place that I called "my house" was located on 32nd Street and 18th Avenue. My first memory is in this house. All those early developmental

achievements happened there. So many birthdays, celebrations and deaths that I first experienced happened during the first 14 years of my life. I haven't lived in that house for 26 years, but I still feel more attached to that place than I ever did in Ely or even my house in Des Moines now. I had taken it to be a constant in my life, unseen but always there. It was as much a part of me as I was a part of it. I have felt its absence since the day we moved out. Over the years, I have watched that house fall apart. I would drive by, and the unkept yard, gutters falling off and the garage looking completely unusable. It did not look like that when we lived there. Each year, I have watched it die a little more, yet I can't seem to stop haunting my own house.

A few years ago, my dad and I were talking about the house he grew up in here in Des Moines. It was not the place he spent the largest part of his life, but

it was where his memories began. We have (or maybe had) family members here in Des Moines who were here decades before I showed up.

Dad's early years were spent on East 38th Street. The house was originally owned by his grandmother, and his Uncle Dennis eventually built an addition on top of it years after his family moved out. It sat up on a hill, and in the front yard there was an old fashioned swing set made from galvanized pipe that had survived every storm since the late 1950s when it was built. Down the hill, Dad told me he and his uncle would play in Fourmile Creek. My grandfather, Homer Day, worked for the Rock Island Lines railroad company, but his siblings, including Dennis, were all teachers.

I don't know the exact timelines, but before Dennis took over the house, my grandmother, Anne Day, was staying at home, but money wasn't great. As the story



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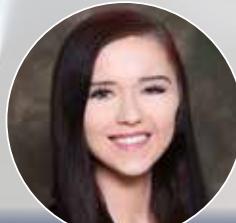
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DES MOINES FORGOTTEN... CONT.

goes, they made enough to feed the kids, but that was about it. Homer was transferred briefly to Trenton, Missouri, before eventually moving the family to Rock Island, Illinois.

This part of our family history is hazy, and, personally, I feel disconnected to it. In fact, my grandfather had a marriage prior to the one with my grandmother, but we haven't had any contact with them. My dad has half-brothers and half-sisters he doesn't know. I have cousins I have never met. Ten years ago, my sister and I went through the whole 23andMe genetic testing (making it difficult for me to ever commit a crime in this lifetime). We found all sorts of relatives from that first bloodline. The one that was the most impactful was a cousin who we both thought looked similar to me. She would be the same age as me and lives in Indiana now.

When I moved to Des Moines in 2007, I didn't know any of this. My dad would just say he lived here briefly, but that was the end of it. When we went looking for the old house, it made it feel real for me, but Dad seemed disconnected. All these Des Moines blood relatives I have never met, and my dad poses a blunt question, "Who cares? Does your life change knowing they exist?" No, it doesn't, but, in the last couple years, I have found myself over in that neighborhood more as my new favorite Mexican joint, Café con Leche, sits in the Hilltop Neighborhood. I drive by that street where my family tree started.

Am I haunting the house... or is it haunting me? ■

Kristian Day is a filmmaker and writer based in Des Moines. He also hosts the syndicated Iowa Basement Tapes radio program on 98.9 FM KFMG. Instagram: @kristianday | Twitter: @kristianmday



Homer Day, circa late 1960s



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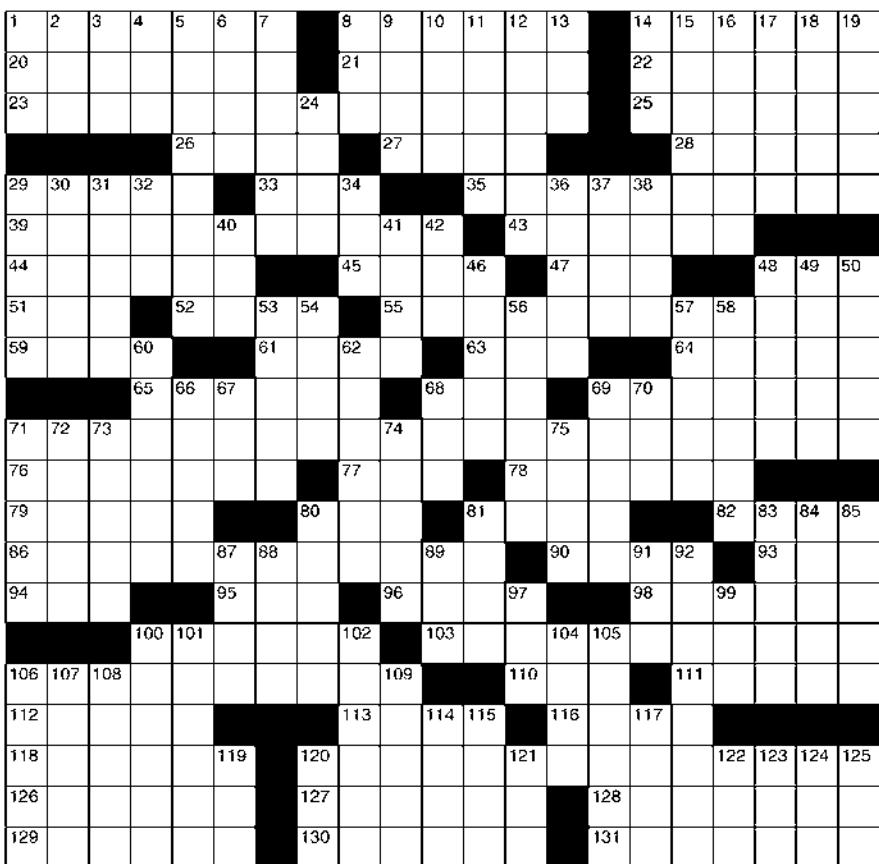
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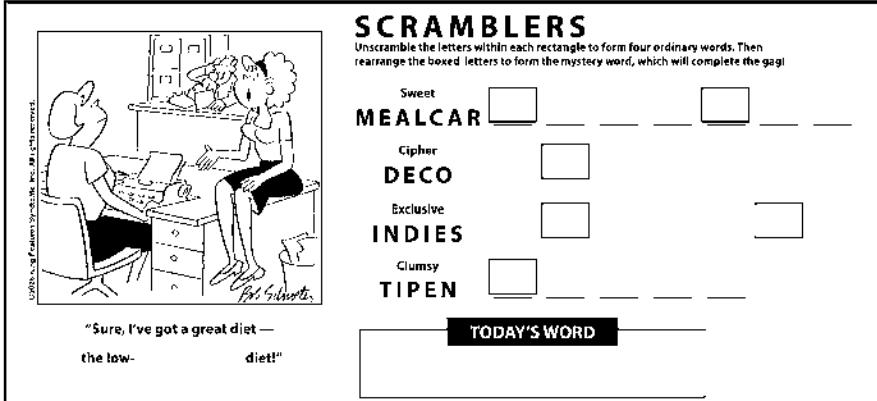
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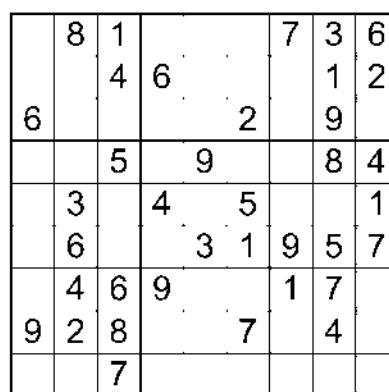


ACROSS

ACROSS		80	Passing vote	8	Bud	69	Susan of "Spring Fever"
1	Give a right to	81	As many as	9	Director Kazan	70	Nintendo console
8	Eye narrowly	82	Big lamb cut	10	Plus others: Abbr.	71	1974 dog film
14	Choir songs	86	Common weed of North America	11	Music genre for TLC	72	Artificial silk
20	Dog collar attachments	90	Universal donor blood type, in brief	12	Chachi's last name on "Happy Days"	73	"Orange -- New Black"
21	Ends of bridal paths	93	Shark feature	13	Mao -- -tung	74	Thoughts
22	See 1-Down	94	Ending for alp or salt	14	Free TV ad, for short	75	Taken with
23	Refrigerator, stove or dryer	95	Architect I.M. --	15	Drink inserts	80	"Two Guys and --"
25	Warship fleet	96	Red Sea canal	16	Target of antiperspirant	81	Operated
26	Over yonder	98	Get there	17	Minimal	83	In flames
27	Designer Gucci	100	Hive house	18	Bordeaux wine	84	Courteous
28	Lhasa -- (little dogs)	103	Suburb of Minneapolis	19	Secret store	85	Midleg joints
29	Mega Stuf cookies	106	June bugs, by another name	24	Grads' event	87	Sheriff Taylor's tyke
33	This second	110	Poetic "always"	29	Fictional Scarlett	88	Mess-free
35	Legendary figure in a 1999 horror film	111	Yule songs	30	Plan a new route for	89	Take to court
39	Azaleas are members of it	112	Post-teen	31	Cushy class	91	Jug handle
43	Not quite	113	Squeaks (out)	32	Mel the Giant	92	Pa's pa
44	Dutch beer	116	Ticked (off)	34	Jokester	97	Last letter
45	-- the line (obeyed)	118	Spring back	36	Solo	99	'16 Olympics site
47	Sturdy tree	120	Kentucky Derby venue	37	Mosque officiant	100	Flowering
48	Slimy gunk	126	"Little Women" author	38	Streaming set-top box	101	Small dress size
51	Shaft of light	127	Wanness	40	Viral misery	102	Cowboy's whoop
52	Common allergy trigger	128	Cry upon getting there	41	Soft throws	104	-- pot (sinus cleaner)
55	Condiment spicier than its yellow cousin	129	Joined (up)	42	-- out!" (ump's call)	105	Early tourney round
59	On -- with (similar to)	130	Baby hooters	46	"Death Be Not Proud"	106	Safin who won tennis' 2000 U.S. Open
61	Big name in dog food	131	Vain person's lack	48	Avant--	107	She sang the hit "Hello"
63	Born	DOWN		49	Mandate	108	New Mexico's state flower
64	TV announcer Don	1	With 22-Across, film "nightmare" locale	50	Smells	109	Brain protector
65	Riddle	2	Teachers' gp.	53	Exhales wistfully	114	-- Stanley Gardner
68	Strep-treating doc	3	-- Mahal	54	Pack firmly	115	"Nae" sayer
69	Person giving out prizes	4	Equal: Prefix	56	Cleaning tool in a bucket	117	Red Muppet
71	Eight of their last names are featured in this puzzle	5	Walloped	57	Muscle jerk	119	Inc., abroad
76	Egg-hiding holidays	6	Foliage bit	58	More citrusy, say	120	U.S. Navy noncom
77	Gridiron stats	7	Barcelona's land, to natives	60	Mary Lou of gymnastics	121	Divs. of days
78	Punctual			62	One suffering for a belief	122	Lyric verse
79	Sominex or Unisom rival			66	Atom studier Bohr	123	Film director Craven
				67	Leb. neighbor	124	Little peeve
				68	911 gp.	125	Hog hangout



SUDOKU

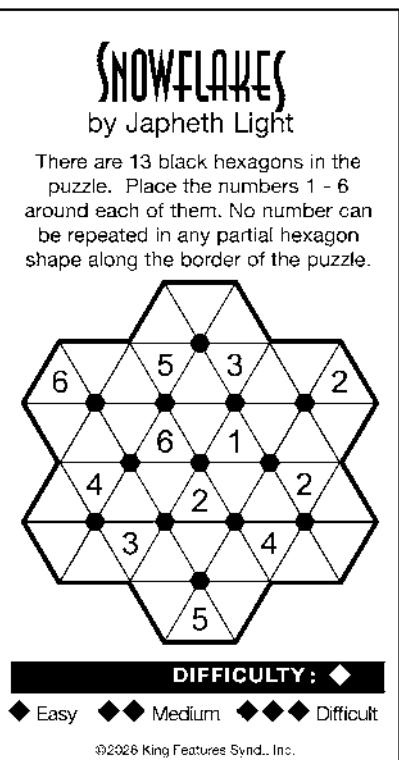


Place a number in the empty boxes in such a way that each row across, each column down and each small 3-box square contains all of the numbers from one to nine.

DIFFICULTY: ◆◆

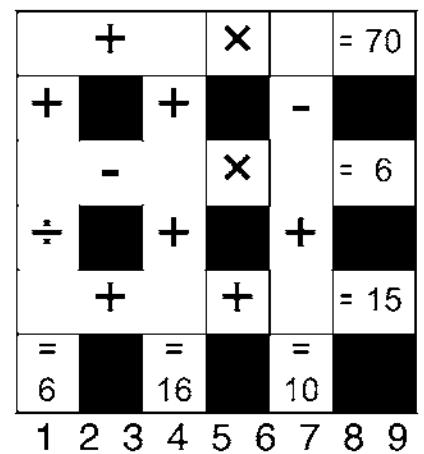
◆ Moderate ◆◆ Challenging

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GO FIGURE!

The idea of Go Figure is to arrive at the figures given at the bottom and right-hand columns of the diagram by following the arithmetic signs in the order they are given (that is, from left to right and top to bottom). Use only the numbers below the diagram to complete its blank squares and use each of the nine numbers only once.



WHAT THE...

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Send us your best caption...

Email to celeste@dmcityview.com — **BE SURE TO INCLUDE YOUR NAME**

Next month's photo:



IMAGE BY RYAN MCGUIRE FROM PIXABAY

This month's winner

**"I said don't freeze
me out. This feels
intentional."**

- Carol Bauer



IMAGE BY DORIS PECKA FROM PIXABAY

Runners-up

"Why do you keep giving me the cold shoulder, dear?"
- Alice Cross

**"George and Lydia missed the announcement that the
No. 5 no longer runs on weekends."**
- Terri Valentine

"Unexpectedly, their relationship grew cold."
- Hilde Hatten

"Honey, why the cold shoulder?"
- Toby Wisecup

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Connecting families

Jennifer Baldon volunteers with Jack's Basket to deliver an important message to those who will be raising a child with Down syndrome.

The stigma over those born and living with Down syndrome has lightened over the years, but it has not been an easy journey. The positive actions of Jennifer Baldon are helping parents in the area educate themselves about their children, while also celebrating them. She does this with the help of Jack's Basket.

Families deliver a basket that includes pamphlets with information on what the child has been diagnosed with, blankets, toys and other resources, from a member of a family that has experienced something similar.

"When I had my twins, my boy twin had Down syndrome, and, at that point, we'd known for a while that he probably would, but we didn't know for sure. We had absolutely no resources in front of us," Baldon said.

She was then connected with someone from Jack's Basket.

"We got to meet, and she sat down and talked with us about concerns, what a little bit of her experience has been, and it was just comforting knowing that there was somebody else out there who knew what we were going through. Just for the fact that we hadn't been provided any resources up to that moment, I wanted to be able to share that with other people," Baldon said.

Baldon says it is rare to have a set of identical twins with one of them having Down syndrome, but even rarer to have both twins be born with Down syndrome.

Inspired by what happened with her after the birth of her twins, Baldon decided to get involved with Jack's Basket.

"When a new mother or family is either referred to or signed up to receive a basket, the organization will match them with someone who may have similar birth diagnoses or someone who might just be in the area. As of right now, I'm the only person in central Iowa that delivers baskets," Baldon said.

Jack's Basket connects Baldon with families in the area who have children with a similar diagnosis to her son.

"When I am matched with someone, I will contact them. We will set up the time to deliver a basket and sit down and have a conversation and talk about their concerns or resources that they can go to," Baldon said. "There's a lot of local moms' groups that I wouldn't have known about. There's Gigi Playhouse. There's just a lot more out there that may not be readily available unless you're connected to part of the community."

The story of Jack's Basket comes from a mother who had just given birth via c-section. The nurse told her, "Are you aware of Trisomy 21? Your baby is showing signs of Down syndrome," followed by "Well, just enjoy your baby," before leaving the room. Baldon had a similar experience.

"They're good at what they do (doctors and nurses), but they're not great at



delivering that information. I did not have a very kind comment made to me when we were told that it was likely my son was going to have Down syndrome. I was 21 weeks along, and we were told that it was 'too late to do anything.' Not that that was ever the plan, but it was a shock that was said to me, and I have come across some people who have had worse comments," Baldon said.

The main thing Baldon has encountered is that families simply do not know what to expect when raising a child with Down syndrome.

"I've met with expecting families who are familiar with Down syndrome but don't necessarily know what to expect, what to ask, especially when they just first had their baby," Baldon said. "It's nice to be able to connect the people to the communities, because I don't think at the early stages, most of us are connected as well as we could."

Helping battle some of the stigma around those with Down syndrome is another front that Baldon is on.

"I think a lot of people think that having a child with a disability is a burden; it is a lot of work, but it is definitely not that. As much as people say that children with Down syndrome are always happy, there are lots of moments that they're not, but they're a joy. They see the world a little bit differently, and it's a lot of love and learning, a lot of acceptance, and there's learning a lot of grace with other people. And it's not the end. It is absolutely the beginning of everything," Baldon said.

Overall, Baldon just wants to spread the word that there are helpful and caring people out there. While she did ultimately receive warm words from a geneticist at Mayo Clinic after her child's birth, and further information about Jack's Basket, she wants to make sure other expecting parents do not get the same initial comments that she did.

"I just think that the main reason I wanted to be involved is because it was a very emotional time. And, for most women, just having a baby is an emotional time, and then there's that heightened sense of, you're scared, you don't know what to expect, maybe you haven't been received with the best community to accept your baby. It's very important to me to have somebody be like, this is going to be OK, and there are people here who care," Baldon said. ■

CARS IN THE CITY



Affordable luxury

BMW X3 30 offers high tech, quiet and comfort.

BY JACKIE WILSON

As SUV sales soar among seemingly all car manufacturing brands, inching in the market with an affordable version is essential. When it comes to BMW, can those two words — affordable and BMW — be used in the same sentence?

BMW believes “The Ultimate Driving Machine” can with its compact SUV, the BMW X3 xDrive 30. BMW offers seven SUVs from one to seven; with the ‘X’ representing SUV. The subcompact starts at \$44,000 and the price goes up to more than \$159,000 for the high-performance models.

The X3 30 base is \$50,900 with the 2026 model driven at \$60,325. What makes it special, besides the ability to say you drive a “beamer”?

Lots. With more than 100 years in the car business, BMW pays attention to details and is often at the forefront of tech and comfort.

First, pair your phone to personalize your drive. Adjust mirrors, seats and heads-up display on your phone app and, once you connect, it’s ready to go. It overrides any previous driver preferences instantly. When renting a BMW, take the personalized info into the new ride.

Infotainment displays can be confusing. When navigating to the home screen, it takes numerous annoying “back” buttons to get where you want. Yet, what three things do drivers use most? Phone, music or media and navigation. To make it easy, BMW placed

these three buttons on the center console. Just press Media, Tel or Nav, and you are there instantly.

Don’t want to press a button? Just say “Hey BMW.” This simple command can accomplish practically anything. I turned up the temperature to 69 degrees, navigated to the dealership and changed the ambient lighting to pink. The “Hey BMW” keeps your hands and eyes on the road. Trouble is, I got my bots mixed up, and I kept calling out Siri and Alexa.

The sink-in, buttery-soft seats have an extender on both the driver and passenger seats, adding extra inches for taller folks. Back-seat passengers experience comfort with ample leg room and climate controls. The steering wheel circumference is thick with a sportier, racecar feel designed to reduce fatigue. However, with my small hands, that half inch seemed significant.

The BMW is a smooth ride. With its adaptive suspension and weight distribution, you can barely feel the potholes and road bumps. It is one of the quietest drives I have experienced in the years I have written this column. BMW uses various insulators and thicker glass. It makes for a calming drive without any humming or wind blowing. In some vehicles, I double-check the window because it sounds like I have a window open. Not the BMW.

BMW’s iconic dual front grille, known as a “kidney grille,” has been standard since 1933. The sensors open

and close to either release the heating and cooling.

A “mild hybrid” system includes a 48-volt hybrid. This fairly new technology allows the engine to run more smoothly by exploiting the energy recovered during braking. It generates additional power for electrical devices and offers 27 mpg city/33 mpg highway.

For decades, BMWs has consistently make the “best luxury” list. With high resale value and comfort, affordable luxury is now also possible with a BMW. ■

A basement full of paintings

Marvin Freund has spent his life following his passion.

When some people have a passion, it is something they can never get away from. And, quite often, it is something they have no desire to run away from. They run toward it, because, for them, it is comfortable. Marvin Freund's passion for painting has survived several decades. Now in his retirement, he spends almost every day painting in his studio, doing what he loves most.

He did not always have this ability to paint as he pleased. Freund attended Iowa Central Community College to become an art instructor. He started working for a local sign company to continue saving money for his education, but before he could go back to school, he was drafted into the army.

"I got a draft notice, that was 1962, to come on down and talk to the Selective Service Board. I went down there. She said, 'Are you in college?' And I said, 'I'm trying to save for college.' And she said, 'Well, you don't have to worry about saving. You'll be going next month to the army,'" Freund said.

He then went to Missouri for basic training, Virginia for schooling, and then spent the next year and a half in Korea. Once he returned, he started working at the sign company again.

That job kept him close to painting. He was taught how to paint billboards, highway signs and trucks. Before the sign company, in high school, Freund's artwork started off a little "wackier" than the ones that now cover his entire basement and several of his friends and family members homes.

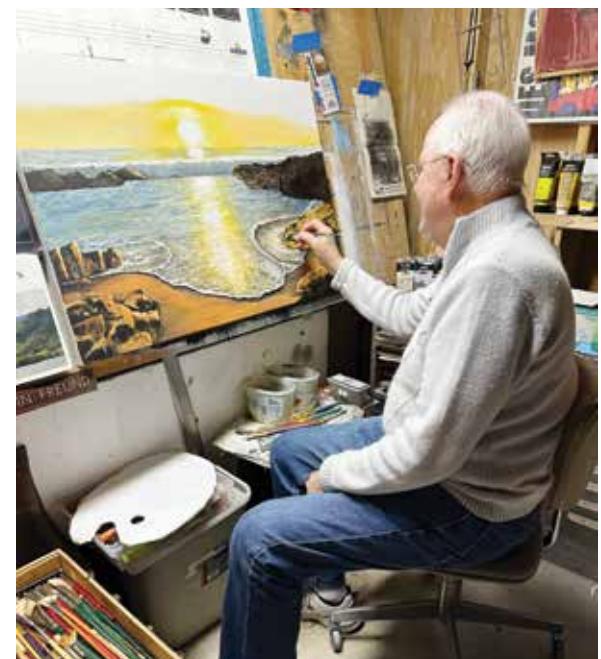
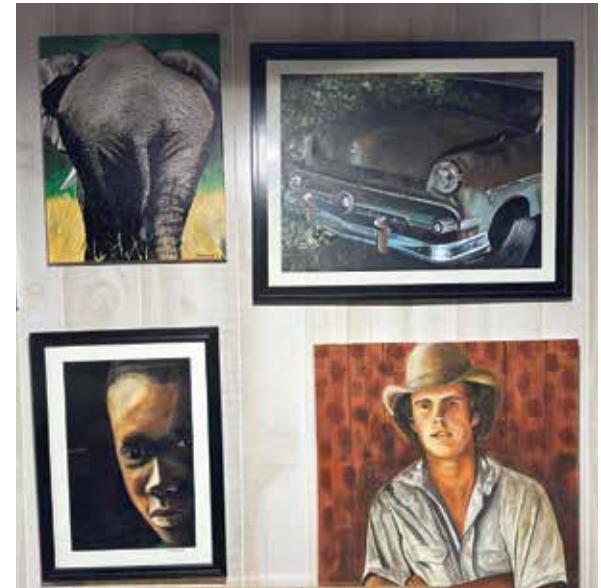
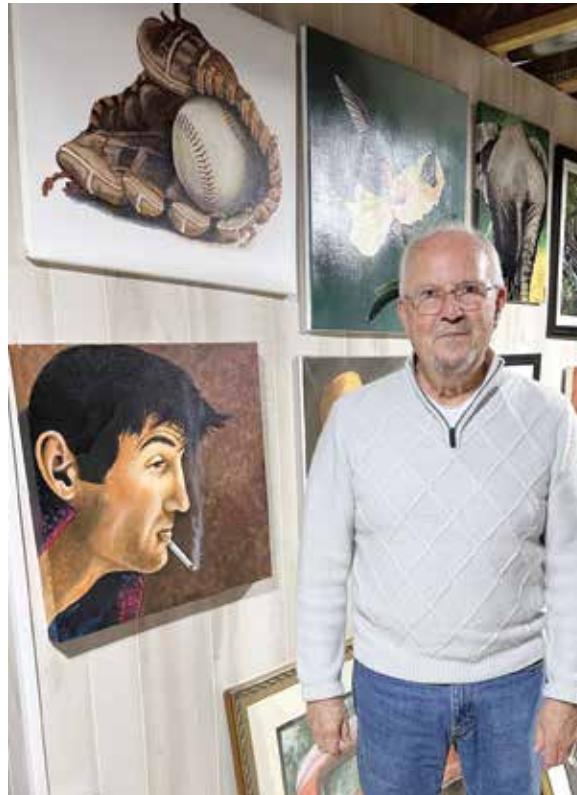
"Just giving an example, a plane falling out of the sky and a pilot leaning out and blood coming out of his mouth. This instructor said, 'Marvin, have you seen that?' I said, 'No, but I got a good idea.' He said, 'Paint things that you've seen,'" Freund said.

Now, every afternoon, Freund paints what he sees. And he paints those sights well. He does not hang on to all of his paintings, though.

"I've given them away. I've had shows. I've sold some. But, I just paint for the heck of it. If you want one, you can have one," Freund said.

Freund describes his style as realism. His paintings cover a wide range of subjects. Baseballs. People. Flowers. His favorite? Boats. If he sees something he would like to paint, especially while on vacation with his wife, he snaps a picture and brings it home. What's his process like?

"The first thing I think about is, do I have the right



color paint? Because I have to go out and get some if I don't. And, I've started some paintings that I blacked out because I didn't like them. So, it's got to be coming together. Otherwise, I just paint them white and start all over," Freund said.

His collection of brushes could merit its own story. They set beside him at his workbench, where he was currently working on a painting of a sunset over the water. His talent for realistic paintings doesn't keep him away from creating the strange, cartoon-like sketches and drawings he started out with. Some of them were also on the board beside his current project.

"I like to do cartoons, but I get carried away. As you can tell, it's sort of wild, isn't it? I've done a lot of them and ripped them up and thrown them away. They're fun, though, aren't they? I like to dabble in different faces," Freund said.

Most of all, for Freund, the practice is a great escape.

"I relax down here, and nobody bugs me. It's just me and throwing on some paint," Freund said.

He has done some paintings for friends. They bring him a reference photo, and Freund works his magic. He puts the brush to the surface and makes it happen.

One would think that, even with his skill, these paintings would be a challenge. ■

"You know, it's not really hard for me. It's sort of easy. Matter of fact, I have people sending me pictures of animals to paint, and I paint them. I don't know how many dogs or cats I painted. They're easy. I have no problem with them once I get started," Freund said.

That ease likely comes from years of practice.

Freund has participated in several art shows over the years. He is not sure exactly where all of his paintings will go, but his wife has a plan.

"My wife would like to see me get rid of them," Freund said with a chuckle. "I'm getting old. She's going to give them away at our funeral. So, who knows?" ■

WALKS OF LIFE

COMPILED FROM THE IOWA LIVING MAGAZINES



Tonya Strawn Friends, food and fondue

Tonya Strawn and her family members decided to start their Super Bowl "All Fat Sunday" event way back in 1997. It started simple with two boys just wanting to do something different and a love for hot wings. Now, more than 30 people usually attend.

"This consists of dozens of deep-fried appetizers and a fondue pot for tempura and beer batter items, even including desserts," Tonya says. "Over the years, we have taught many how to fondue without 'fondon't.' The air frier has recently appeared, so we can pretend to be healthy."

One of her favorite homemade items was an egg roll filled with chopped up sautéed mushrooms, Boursin and cream cheese, like a take on a stuffed mushroom. They also usually do a themed appetizer, like a homemade stuffed egg roll, while paying homage to the teams that are playing. An example would be barbecue smoked pulled chicken when Kansas City played.

"My favorite memories from the years could be placing a TV in the bathroom to not miss any commercials. Once our oldest friend was the only one who made it through a snowstorm to continue the tradition. My house smells of peanut oil for about a week, but it's so worth it."

Source: Johnston Living, January 2026; by Ashley Rullestad



Read the full story here:



Brooke Mickelson Party planning tips

Brooke Mickelson recently hosted 50 people for a Christmas party. The next week, more than a dozen friends gathered for another holiday party at her family's home.

When it comes to hosting and entertaining people, she is the go-to person to welcome guests into her home, no matter what the occasion is.

When asked for Super Bowl party ideas, Mickelson sprang into action to offer her best. She even set up a mock Super Bowl party table, complete with a variety of food.

For the Super Bowl theme, she found a stadium-shaped bundt cake pan. She arranged waffle cups with individual syrup "shooters." Pizza is always a winner, along with seasonal fruit, nuts and other grab-and-go appetizers. Fresh flowers and candles make for festive décor. After photos of the spread, her son and his friends eagerly ate the props.

Mickelson obtains ideas from online sources. She takes advantage of her creativity to make a unique experience for others.

"I do it because I love it. People should know they are welcome here. I want them to help themselves to the fridge if they need something. It's their place when they are here," she says.

Source: Jordan Creek Living, January 2026; by Jackie Wilson

Read the full story here:

Big game, big party

It's time for the big game, and that's the perfect reason to gather with your fellow fans around the big screen to see which team finishes the year with a championship ring. And, you won't be alone. Record-breaking viewership has been reported the last two years, with 127.7 million U.S. viewers last year, according to ESPN.



Miles Waage Super Bowl Kids Reporter

The majority of football fans are content to watch the Super Bowl game on television. Tickets are limited — and expensive — so it is rare to attend the Super Bowl game in person.

Yet Miles Waage, 14, of Waukeee was one of those fortunate fans. He not only attended, but appeared on television, interviewing the biggest athletes of the game.

The Super Bowl LVII in 2023 was a memorable event for the Waukeee student. He and about 68,000 fans attended the game, watching the Kansas City Chiefs take on the Philadelphia Eagles.

Miles, who was 11 years old at the time, was awarded the Panini America Kids Super Bowl Reporter. He collected Panini football cards over the years. Panini holds a contest every year for the Kids Super Bowl Reporter. Kids from all over the nation enter the contest by entering a code from the trading cards and creating a video.

"I played basketball with Kirk Cousins and threw the football around with Garrett Wilson," he says.

One of his favorite players he interviewed was Patrick Mahomes, quarterback for the Chiefs.

He received merchandise and several signed cards for his football card collection. He and his dad had great seats at the game. His friends thought it was a cool experience.

Source: Waukeee Living, January 2026; by Jackie Wilson

Read the full story here:



Eagles and Broncos fans Football, family and friendly rivalries

The long-standing rule says that one should never talk politics or religion in polite company. When it comes to football, however, all bets are off. It is not uncommon to have a group of people gathered who have vastly different opinions on which team is the best.

Such was the case one Saturday afternoon when a group of friends gathered at their favorite local dive bar. Margaret DeSio claims the Chicago Bears. Bryce Carlton and her husband, Zach, are the classic house divided: one went to Iowa, the other to Iowa State. Barb and Mark Pessolano are die-hard Eagles fans. They even have matching his and hers pickleball paddles proudly sporting the Eagles logo. Kathy Hanika is much more agnostic.

"I just root for the teams with the cute quarterbacks," she says with a grin.

Mark and Barb have hosted several Super Bowl parties for their large extended family. They have had as many as 26 family members crowding their house. They serve wings, beef balls, sandwiches, hot roast beef and, of course, Philly cheesesteaks. Their oldest daughter handles the desserts.

"It's bigger than Thanksgiving," Mark says. ■

Source: Urbandale Living, January 2026; by Joe Baumgarten

Read the full story here:



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