



JULY 2026

# CITYVIEW

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## AROUND THE CAMPFIRE

Where to camp, explore and gear up  
for the great outdoors.

### BELLY UP TO

The Soggy Frog brings waterfront vibes to Saylorville with lake views, frozen drinks, casual fare and live music.

### IOWA ARTIST

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# FROM THE PUBLISHER

## Lasting contributions that have shaped Iowa's food culture

CITYVIEW's Hall of Iowa Culinary Excellence (CHOICE) Awards celebrate Iowa's enduring culinary pioneers and institutions. Established in 2015, the awards recognize individuals and businesses whose lasting contributions have shaped the state's food culture. The 2026 Master Class honors four recipients. Mariana Gomez of Tacos Mariana's is recognized for three decades of authentic Mexican cuisine and community leadership. Tony Lemmo of Aposto is celebrated for restoring a historic Sherman Hill mansion and building a nationally respected scratch-made Italian restaurant centered on garden-grown ingredients. Shawn and Ted Hanke of Waterfront Seafood are honored for four decades of pioneering fresh seafood in Iowa. Ling Wong of Wong's Chopsticks is recognized for preserving traditional Cantonese cuisine and authentic dim sum in central Iowa. Read about each in this feature story by Jim Duncan.

### Around the campfire

Whether campers prefer pitching a tent beneath the stars or parking a luxury RV with modern conveniences, central Iowa offers plenty of nearby options. Outdoor gear experts recommend beginners start with quality used equipment and essential items like water filters, comfortable chairs and bug spray. Private campgrounds such as Cutty's Camping Resort provide a community atmosphere with full hookups, family activities, pools and an elaborate Fourth of July celebration. Those seeking a more traditional outdoor experience can visit Iowa state parks like Pine Lake State Park, which offers campsites, cabins, hiking, biking, fishing and paddling. With more than 4,300 campsites statewide, Iowa's parks and private campgrounds make it easy to enjoy nature without traveling far from home. Be sure to read this feature story by Cyote Williams before your next trek into the great outdoors.

### Craftsmanship and dedication

When favorite shoes wear out, many people replace them. But for hundreds of customers in the Des Moines metro, Jamie Blackford helps give them new life. Blackford, owner of Blackford Shoe Repair in Urbandale, has spent 42 years repairing everything from work boots and cowboy boots to running shoes, Birkenstocks and dress shoes. Operating as a one-man shop, he repairs more than 500 pairs of shoes at a time while also answering phones and managing the business. Although the workload is heavy, Blackford enjoys the challenge, especially complex repairs. In this month's Business Journal feature, writer Gracie Kayko shares how his craftsmanship and dedication have helped keep a traditional trade alive while saving customers money and extending the life of their footwear.

Enjoy these stories and much more in this issue of CITYVIEW. As always, I thank you for reading. ■

**Shane Goodman**  
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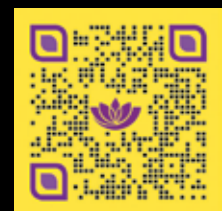
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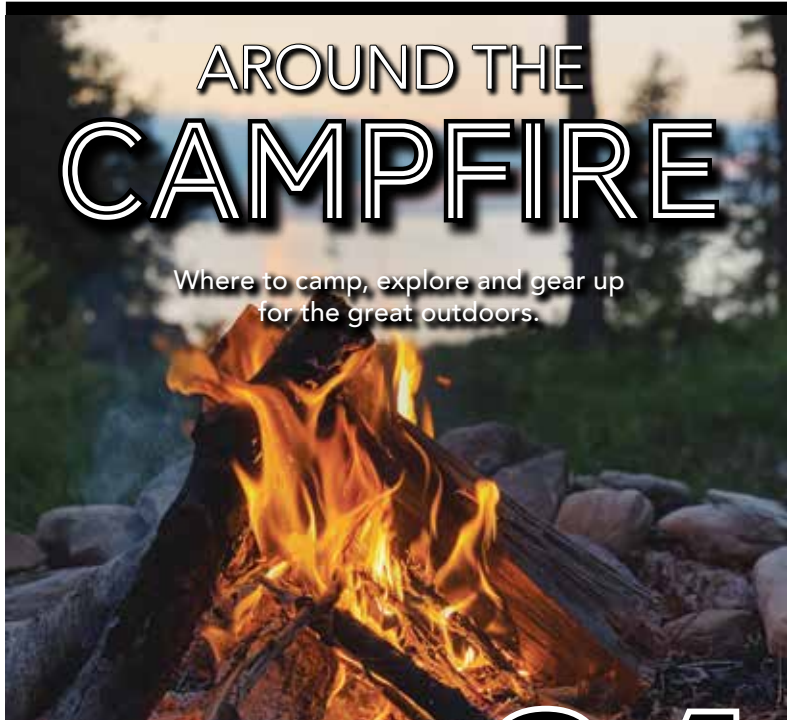
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JULY 2026



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# FACES

O F ( 5 1 5 )

Great businesses are built by great people. In this special section of CITYVIEW, we shine a light on the local business leaders who lead with integrity, serve with enthusiasm, and show up for the communities they call home. They are the ones who make doing business in Des Moines feel personal. Look for their photo pages throughout this issue.

PHOTOS BY SARAH RIPPERGER



# FACES OF (515)



## THE FACE OF **TATTOOS, PIERCINGS, PARAMEDICAL TATTOOS AND TATTOO REMOVAL** Lucky Gal Tattoo and Piercing

Westley Dickerson, Bailey Carpenter, Susie Maj, Brianna Nutter, Ashleigh Andersen,  
Severino Christianson, Corey Kruger  
Michele Pruisner, Jimmy St John, Ricky Hathaway, Ryan Hammel, Charlie Fuller, Ryan Anderson  
Kendall McKay, Galen Thornburg, Curt Peterson, Tanner Saltzman  
Chris Pruisner, Maverick Pruisner, Derek Mills, Henry Kaufmann  
Not pictured: Macee Pruisner, Amy Ross, Bri Brown, Cameron Kelly, Meressa Moriarity, Hunter Witt,  
Mercury Fuhs, Chance Hoelting, Natasha Fialkov, Tracey Fanning

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As we celebrate our 15th anniversary, we want to sincerely thank our loyal customers, artists, piercers, friends, and families for supporting local and making Lucky Gal Tattoo Cityview's Best year after year. We truly couldn't have done it without you.

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After overcoming her own battle with Lyme disease and complex chronic symptoms, Dr. Sarah Outlaw turned her personal health journey into a mission to help others uncover the “why” behind frustrating symptoms and unanswered health concerns.

As founder of the Natural Health Improvement Center in Waukee, Iowa, Dr. Sarah specializes in the “tough stuff,” helping children and adults facing complex wellness challenges who often feel overlooked, dismissed, or stuck despite searching for answers. A Board-Certified Doctor of Holistic Health, Clinical Nutritionist, Master Herbalist, and Functional Bloodwork Specialist, she takes a natural, systems-based approach using

functional bloodwork, clinical nutrition, herbal medicine, and muscle testing to help identify hidden imbalances that may impact overall wellness.

Known for supporting individuals navigating concerns related to Lyme and tick-borne illness, PANS/PANDAS, ADHD, autoimmune patterns, digestive and thyroid concerns, mold exposure, heavy metals, toxicity, nutritional deficiencies, parasites, fatigue, inflammation, and heart health, Dr. Sarah focuses on areas of wellness not always fully explored through traditional testing. She works with patients locally and virtually nationwide.

Learn more at [nhiccenters.com](http://nhiccenters.com).

# FACES OF (515)



## THE FACE OF **SHOPPING LOCAL** Valley Junction

Kirk McVey, The Spice & Tea Exchange; Dina Bechman, Five Monkeys; Maria Abbas, Candle Bar DSM & The Boho Vase; Ben Trannel, Red House Remodeling; Aaron Gremler, Gremler Wealth Management; Ryan Wiederstein, WB Realty; Daniel Porter, Two Oaks Wealth; Bambi Helm, Bix & Co.; Nick Johnson, KCL Engineering; Cindy Lane, Cindy's Boutique; Jamie Malloy, Studio Melee

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Historic Valley Junction, West Des Moines' Main Street, is home to an eclectic mix of successful small businesses. With its hometown downtown vibe, Valley Junction attracts local business owners who are dedicated to curating merchandise, experiences and personalized service that you won't find elsewhere.

Visit Valley Junction to browse several blocks of clothing and home boutiques, gift shops, a book store, art galleries, professional services and specialty food retailers, or plan

a visit to one of our experiential creative studios. There's even a cat café! When it's time for food or drink, stay in the district for flavorful foods and craft cocktails at your choice of bars and restaurants.

Historic Valley Junction is also home to more than 60 special events each year, including Thursday evening farmers markets and Music In the Junction concerts from early May through late September, and Jingle In the Junction during the holiday season.

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# ASK CITYVIEW

By CITYVIEW staff

Ask CITYVIEW anything by emailing [editor@dmcityview.com](mailto:editor@dmcityview.com).

**Q. What will happen to the 55 mph signs now that the speed limit is changing?**

**A.** Gov. Kim Reynolds signed Senate File 378 on June 1, increasing the speed limit on most rural, two-lane state highways from 55 miles per hour to 60 miles per hour. This change took effect on July 1.

According to a document from the Fiscal Services Division, the Iowa Department of Transportation temporarily began replacing speed limit signs with an overlaying material before fully replacing the speed limit signs. There are 1,794 55 mph signs that will cost \$52 each for an overlay, and \$171 each to be replaced by the DOT. There are 3,465 55 mph signs controlled by the state, which will cost \$111 each to replace. The fiscal impact is estimated to be a one-time cost of \$783,000.

As for what the DOT and State could do with the soon-to-be defunct 55 mph signs, we suggest donating them to college dorm rooms, or covering up the words speed limit with a "+" to be given to senior communities, or donating them to the Greater Des Moines Soap Box Derby track to keep those speeds in check.

**Q. What was Sevastopol?**

**A.** Before the southside of Des Moines became known for Lincoln High School, Italian restaurants and Ewing Park, it was the settlement of Sevastopol. According to Project Des Moines, a website that explores the history of the city developed by the Des Moines Public Library, Sevastopol began in 1855. It was laid out by James Sherman in 1862 and incorporated in 1877 or 1878. The boundaries were Southeast Fifth, Hartford Avenue, Bell Avenue and Pioneer Park.

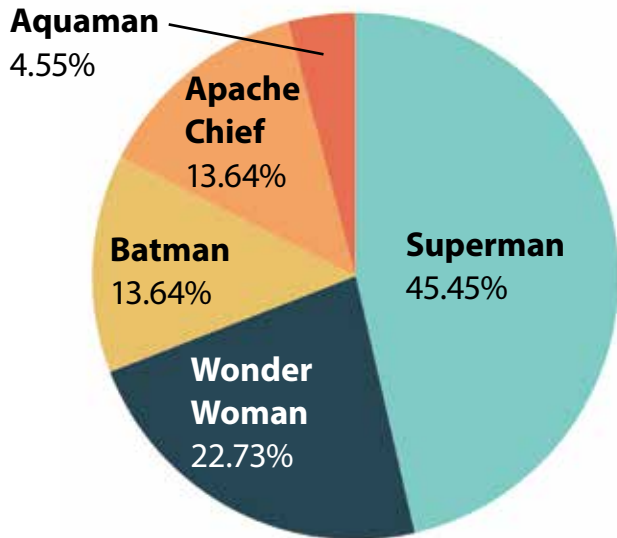
It was said to have been named by John Weber after a famous Crimea war fortress that was Russian and is now Ukrainian. A large brewery and the largest coal mine in the county were in Sevastopol. The Sevastopol brewery was located at Southeast Sixth Street and Hartford Avenue. That location may sound familiar, because it is the same four-way intersection where south-side staple B&B Grocery, Meat and Deli is located. Des Moines annexed Sevastopol in 1890 along with the City of North Des Moines, Capitol Park, Easton Place, Greenwood Park, Gilbert (Chesterfield) and Grant Park.

**Q. Why has another bridge been built across the Raccoon River north of Gray's Lake? It's only a short distance from the Chris and Marcie Coleman Bridge. Who built it? Why?**

**A.** This temporary bridge does not belong to the City of Des Moines. It was installed by ICON Water Trails for in-river construction access and will be removed when the work in the area is complete. ■

## POLL POSITION Results from last month's poll at [www.dmcityview.com](http://www.dmcityview.com)

**Who was/is your favorite superhero in the Justice League of America?**



## 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](mailto:editor@dmcityview.com).

## FACEBOOK COMMENTS

cityview magazine  
(comments unedited)

### CITYVIEW magazine: What actor should be the next James Bond?

- Beth Drees Brandt:** I vote for Henry Cavill.
- Dallas Hosey:** Sacha Baron Cohen
- Aaron Winters:** Gilbert Gottfried
- Pammie Aldrich:** Bond is so ew
- Shari Woods:** Sam Heughan
- Sam Hawk:** Idris Elba
- Joshua Felix:** Bring back Sean Connery using A.I.
- Jordan Campbell:** Zendaya
- Jordan Campbell:** Tom Holland
- Jordan Campbell:** Matt Berry
- Brian John Davidson:** Wallace Shawn.
- John Gemmell:** Tom Hardy
- James Stephen Riley:** When are we actually getting a new James Bond film?
- Sarah Elwood House:** Jack Lowden
- Tone' Davis:** Will Farrell...
- Paul Primavera:** Dante Powell is the only right answer.

sense/courtesy.

- Diana Felice:** People with kids that are not supervised, they need to hand out benadryl at the gate!
- Amber Cahill:** People that take up too much overhead bin space because they won't check their luggage.
- Suzy Lynn Henriksen:** Paying for seats. Which you have to do now to sit with your person. Traveling overseas & spent a lot to choose seats.
- Kevin D. Hyberger:** Delays
- Adam Swihart:** Airports.
- Scott McClure:** Connecting flights, THE WORST
- Neal Tracy:** People who are drunk when they board a plane and makes a scene with the flight attendant. Causes a delay. Then the whole family gets kicked off the plane.
- Deb Mineart:** Delays especially if you have a connection
- Stephanie Gonzales:** Germs. People are gross.
- David Tweedt:** Pretty much every single part of it.
- Barbara Kay:** People in the back half of the plane that jump out of their seats when you land.
- Phyllis Biermann Flatt:** People that recline
- Mason Miller:** Ohare airport
- Grant Wilson:** TSA
- Natalie Gamble Hill:** I stopped flying as soon as they made you start paying to check luggage. I also knew TSA presence wasn't going to be temporary, like it was originally planned. So yeah, I haven't flown since 2002.
- Chelsea M. Lavelle:** Crying babies.

### CITYVIEW magazine: What is the worst part about airline travel?

- Lori Anderson:** The ticket price
- Karen Anne:** Delays and cancellations
- Teddi Yaeger:** Having to sit in such a tight space for so long.
- Dan Gregory:** Turbulence
- Betsy Freese:** Lack of direct flights from DSM.
- Stacey Lea McJolliffe:** To close to people, they fill the front of the plane before the back.
- Paddie La Bruyere':** Passengers with no common

## RETWEETS (comments unedited)

- Eden\_eats:** Me: can you print out these 3 pages for me real quick.
- Printer: no
- @mattbtweets69:** Guy who thinks The Doors are opening up at every local show
- @sadgirlyboss:** love how we say "slept like a baby" when babies are, objectively speaking, the worst demographic of sleepers
- @dialectits:** "cravings are your body's way of communicating its needs :)" what essential nutrient am i missing that can only be found in a red starburst
- @TheMovieMermaid:** My 80-year-old dad has an ex from high school trying to get back together with him after 62 years so basically his life is more exciting than mine rn
- @wombpatrol:** i understand preventing theft but we gotta unlock the deodorant aisle we gotta let people steal that shit during summer as a public good
- @wormpuller:** my card declined at the massage therapist and they started bending my arms and neck in weird directions
- @CrankyFed:** The best part about Hinge is meeting people in their 30s and getting to be, apparently, the first person they've ever tried to have a conversation with
- @Drayne\_the\_Wolf:** Kinda wish cars had brake lights on the front too. Would be nice to know when I'm at a red light if the altima in my mirror going 1,000,000,000mph is planning on stopping or rear ending me into the 9th dimension ■

# STRAY THOUGHTS

BY RANDY EVANS

## It's not the crime, it's the cover-up

It's a shame Judge Kester has not seen the light.

Here's betting District Judge Adria Kester does not read the Aspen Daily News. That Colorado newspaper's front-page slogan declares, "If you don't want it printed, don't let it happen."

What happened to Judge Kester occurred outside of her usual venue — the 22 courthouses of north-central and northwest Iowa where, until recently, she served as chief judge of the Second Judicial District.

It happened when that Boone County resident found herself on the other side of the law, as a criminal defendant.

Now, she is keeping the story alive by filing a civil lawsuit seeking special treatment she likely did not accord to those who appeared before her.

Judge Kester's encounter with the criminal justice system began on the night of Nov. 4, 2025, when Boone County sheriff's deputies arrested her outside of Boone.

Two motorists called 911 and said a pickup truck was traveling eastbound in the westbound lanes of U.S. Highway 30. One reported the driver appeared slumped over the steering wheel and possibly unconscious.

The criminal charges state that deputies found a cup containing what smelled like alcohol next to the driver's seat. They also reported the driver was unable to stand without assistance.

The officers obtained a court warrant to take a sample of her blood. She was booked into the county jail around 4 a.m., and her mug shot was made.

Boone County Sheriff Andy Godzicki expressed relief no one was injured that night. He said the arrest created a difficult situation because he and his staff know the Kester family. The judge's husband is a Boone police officer.

But Godzicki made clear he instructed his staff to treat the judge as any other criminal suspect.

A month later, Judge Kester pleaded guilty to a charge of driving while intoxicated and was fined \$625. She also received a suspended one-year jail sentence. She was not required to serve jail time because she received credit for the night of her arrest and attended drunk-driver classes.

Kester resigned as chief judge but remains a district judge. The Iowa Judicial Branch placed her on paid suspension while officials investigate her conduct. Eight months later, that investigation

continues. Ultimately, the Iowa Supreme Court will decide whether to impose any administrative punishment.

Kester collected \$172,106 in gross pay and \$9,356 in travel reimbursements in fiscal year 2025.

None of this is recent news. But there is more.

The latest developments highlight two recurring tensions in Iowa and beyond — the conflict between personal privacy and public access to government records, and the pursuit of special treatment by those in power.

Judge Kester returned to court in Boone County several weeks ago, filing a civil lawsuit against the county and sheriff. Plaintiff Kester asks that another judge enjoin public officials from releasing records related to her arrest and conviction. She also requests that a judge seal from public view the court records of her lawsuit.

She argues the continued availability of her arrest information, body-camera video, blood test results and court records would not serve any public interest or fill any "government accountability gap." Instead, she claims releasing the records would cause her substantial and irreparable injury and force her to relive the trauma of her arrest.

She also questions the legitimacy of a request from Julia Hayes, who she described as "independent media," for access to various records about the case. The judge claims Hayes should not receive the records because she cites only a general interest in transparency.

Yet, Iowa's public records law does not limit records access to journalists, affiliated or otherwise, any more than it requires people seeking access to explain why they want public records or how they will use them. The law gives every person the right to access and use public records for any reason, or none at all.

Lastly, the judge's lawsuit states the public would gain nothing from disclosure of the requested records, so her personal privacy interest outweighs the societal need for information.

The judge is as wrong on the law as her request is intemperate.

Public officials, influential figures and prominent institutions know openness goes with the territory. When questions about temperament, conduct,

competency or judgment arise, they understand more information is needed, not less. Transparency promotes accountability and public acceptance.

The need becomes greater when individuals and institutions wield significant authority. And this is why our society expects transparency even if it sometimes comes with personal costs.

Society understands that people charged with crimes, involved in accidents or caught in traumatic events often wish those experiences could remain private, just as they wish they had never occurred.

But experience has taught us that often, "It's not the crime, it's the cover-up."

That is why the Iowa Legislature built this into the public records law for cases like the one pending in Boone County. Lawmakers wrote in the statute: "In actions brought under this section, the district court shall consider the policy that free and open examination of public records is generally in the public interest, even if it causes inconvenience or embarrassment to public officials or others."

Our legislature acknowledged that supplanting accountability with secrecy fails us all. The legislature understood citizens cannot evaluate public officials if important facts become state secrets and government decides what to release.

This need for transparency reaches an apex when it involves judicial officers. Judges make decisions affecting personal freedoms, financial well-being, family relationships and even life and death. They hold this authority because the community trusts them to exercise sound judgment and uphold the rule of law.

Beyond that, our system of government relies on an independent judiciary to check the legislative and executive branches, leaving the courts accountable only to the people.

But if the free flow of information about the courts becomes subject to the personal preferences of a plaintiff, a defendant, a judge, or a person acting as all three, neither the courts nor the people can do their jobs.

It's a shame Judge Kester has not seen the light. ■

Randy Evans can be reached at [DMRevans2810@gmail.com](mailto:DMRevans2810@gmail.com).



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# CIVIC SKINNY

BY CITYVIEW STAFF

## Sand and Lahn posture for independents. Not-so-golden arches. Education concerns. And the 'most passive aggressive' road in Des Moines.

The nominees for Iowa's Governor's race are officially locked up by State Auditor **Rob Sand** and businessman and farmer **Zach Lahn**. Meanwhile, their lieutenant governor picks — Crawford County Supervisor **Dave Muhlbauer** for Sand and Iowa Representative **Derek Wulf** for Lahn — have been donning cowboy hats and spurring each other across social media and in TV advertising. Seriously.

Since **Randy Feenstra's** campaign focusing on Lahn's history of investing in "pornographic products" failed to gain traction, Sand and his campaign are taking a different approach. This time, the attempt is to point out the ties between

Lahn and Kansas. Lahn co-founded a private school in Kansas in 2018 and voted in Kansas elections in 2018, 2020 and 2022. He changed his voter registration to Iowa in 2024. The Sioux City Journal said Lahn voted in Iowa elections in 2014, 2016, 2024, 2025 and 2026. It was also reported that Lahn flew in his personal airplane to Kansas 37 times since October 2025. Sand was quick to note Lahn's Kansas ties on the night of his democratic primary win. Sand has since added, "He said if elected governor, he'll change his living situation to be in Iowa as much as humanely possible."

Lahn has been clapping back on X.com regularly.



Derek Wulf



Dave Muhlbauer



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9/8-9/15	Veteran's Salute to Washington D.C.	\$2700
9/19-10/1	New England's Painted Hills	\$3600
9/26-9/27	St. Louis Cardinals at Milwaukee Brewers	\$525
10/2-10/10	Fall In Love With Myrtle Beach	\$2500
10/5-10/13	Albuquerque Balloon Fiesta	\$3200
10/13-10/20	Almost Heaven, West Virginia	\$2800
10/23-10/25	Shipshewana Fall Vintage Market	\$715
11/16-11/20	Season's Greetings from Branson	\$1375
12/2-12/4	Holiday Mystery Tour	\$650
12/5-12/13	Holiday in New York City	\$4300
12/9-12/13	Holly Jolly Holiday Hop	\$1075
JANUARY	Caribbean Cruise	TBA
3/9-3/14	Sandhill Cranes Migration: Sky Dancers	\$2355
MARCH	Daytona Beach	TBA
4/6-4/9	Ark Encounter & Creation Museum	\$1100
4/26-4/29	Tulip Time in Michigan	\$955
MAY	Eureka Springs & The Passion Play	TBA
6/3-6/14	Canyons & Clouds - Utah to Colorado	\$5400
6/20-6/30	Musical Triangle - Memphis, Mussel Shoals &	\$4430
JULY	Newport Mansions - Cape Cod & Rhode Island	TBA
8/11-8/15	Bootleggers & Badmen: The Prohibition Years	\$1635

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## CIVIC SKINNY CONT...

In one post, he stated, “Rob thinks every illegal deserves a place in Iowa. But our family isn’t enough for him?” A leaked audio recording showed Sand speaking about the merit-based judicial system, saying Republicans have weakened it to make it more political, and that he wants to reverse those changes but not before his first term as governor ends. “These are not the words of a unifying moderate. This is the mindset of an Ivy Leaguer that thinks he’s better than you,” Lahn posted.

Although Lahn bemoaned Sand’s quick jump to prod at Lahn’s Iowa roots, it appears he simply wanted to wait a week or so before joining in. Where it appears the two agree (or at least how they both want — and need — to attract independents) is their shared disdain for the two-party — or uniparty — system. Sand’s campaign slogan since the jump has been “not redder or bluer, but better and truer,” opting for green and orange colors. Lahn has been criticizing the “uniparty” politics and also opted for green colors to promote his campaign. ...

According to a recent study from Restaurant Furniture based on 8.7 million customer reviews, Iowa has the 13th-lowest rated **McDonald’s** restaurants in the U.S. In Iowa, based on 84,144 reviews, our golden arches average ranking sits at 3.33. Of those, Davenport shines with the best average rating in Iowa at 3.52. Roswell, New Mexico, ranks the highest at 3.97, which is clearly due to alien manipulation. The lowest rating belongs to Auburn, Alabama, at 2.86. ...

This is a better ranking for Iowans. **KIDS Count Data Book** ranks Iowa 10th for overall child well-being. This is a drop from last year’s ninth-place ranking. The reason for the decline is because of education, where Iowa has fallen below the national average. Nearly 75% of eighth graders fell below proficiency in math, and nearly 75% of fourth graders fell below proficiency in reading.

Almost every state has seen declines in education outcomes since 2019, but Iowa’s have been notably bad. Iowa now ranks 26th in preschool participation, 32nd in fourth-grade reading, 24th in eighth-grade math and 26th in high school graduation rate. Iowa’s ranking was spared from the bottom due to high composite scores in overall well-being (813) and family and community (732). The education score is 394. ...

Here is some good news for Iowans. According to **Everway**, a company that provides solutions for neuroinclusion through its assistive technology software, Iowa ranks eighth in the nation for disability-inclusive employment. The report states that 54.7% of people with disabilities in Iowa are currently in work. South Dakota ranked first with 61.5%, Nebraska at 58.7%, Colorado at 57.8%, Utah at

57.5% and Minnesota at 55.5% rounded out the top five. The bottom five were all southern states, with West Virginia at the lowest with 36.4%. ...

The **Minnesota Star-Tribune**, a media organization covering the Twin Cities, reported that the newspaper may soon become owned by a nonprofit. The privately owned company is not required to make financial disclosures, but it reportedly has about 170,000 subscribers, which includes nearly 110,000 on digital platforms. This number dwarfs The Des Moines Register, which we recently reported as having 26,235 subscribers for the Sunday Register and 20,039 for the Monday through Friday average between print and digital. ...

The **Des Moines Area Association of Realtors** released its May 2026 housing statistics. The number of available homes rose by 4.7% to 4,130; home sales increased by 2.3% to 1,435; the median sale price went up 2% to \$306,000; and days on the market increased by 8.2% to 66 days. As for homes that were financed, 1,005 were conventional, 204 were with cash, and 117 were by FHA loans. ...

University Avenue drivers who have felt particularly perturbed by their commute have had their feelings validated by **American River Wellness**, self-described Substance Abuse Professionals. The company might be in line for some new customers if people keep driving on the road that they say is Des Moines’ most passive aggressive. The traffic issues may not send drivers into full-blown road rage, but those who refuse to let people merge, those who close gaps, those who block intersections and those who sit in the passing lane do cause enough frustrations to make this road the top of the list in the metro.

University Avenue, which spans Des Moines and West Des Moines, was ranked the 60th most passive-aggressive road nationwide, with the report stating, “It has a way of turning simple cross-town driving into a slow contest over who gets to keep their place. It is polite Midwestern stubbornness with a blinker on.” ...

Heading toward the end of her tenure as Iowa’s governor, **Kim Reynolds** signed Executive Order 19, establishing the Office of Outdoor Recreation. Not to be confused with Darth Sidious’ Order 66, this office will be an extension of the Iowa Tourism Office, a division of the Iowa Economic Development Authority. Reynolds said that outdoor recreation contributes nearly \$6 billion annually to Iowa’s economy and supports nearly 50,000 jobs. She says the executive order will aim to support, enhance and expand Iowa’s outdoor recreation sector while also creating a centralized structure for public and private stakeholders that actively invest in outdoor recreation. This makes Iowa the 25th state to establish an outdoor recreation office. No Jedi were harmed in the creation of this office. ■

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# POLITICAL MERCURY

BY DOUGLAS BURNS

## Sand turns to rural Iowa with Muhlbauer as lieutenant governor pick

Democratic nominee taps Crawford County supervisor and farmer to broaden appeal across western Iowa and bridge the state's partisan divide.

Democratic candidate for governor, Rob Sand, has selected Crawford County Supervisor Dave Muhlbauer, a cattleman-farmer and deeply rooted rural Iowan from Manilla in western Iowa who ran for the U.S. Senate five years ago, as his lieutenant governor running mate.

The pick fortifies Decorah native Sand's efforts to bridge the partisan divide in rural Iowa and brings a geographic balance to the ticket.

"A fifth-generation family farmer and cattleman from Crawford County, Dave Muhlbauer represents the best of our state: hard-working, honest and always willing to help out. I'm proud to have him on Team Sand," Sand said in a statement. "Dave has a track record of working with everyone to deliver for western Iowa and knows it's time to rotate the crops in state government. He'll be a great partner on the trail and an even better lieutenant governor for the people of Iowa."

Muhlbauer, 42, a son and grandson of former state representatives, the late Dan Muhlbauer and Louis Muhlbauer, farms corn, soybean and rye and raises cattle and hogs in Manilla, at the southern edge of Crawford County. All three Muhlbauers have served as Democrats on the Crawford County Board of Supervisors — Dave Muhlbauer for eight years.

"I am in tune with what the people of my community are saying and asking and their concerns," Muhlbauer said in an interview.

Muhlbauer described Sand as "grounded" and "compassionate."

"It's not about one side or the other," Muhlbauer said. "It's about doing what's right versus wrong. I know he says it a lot, 'not redder or bluer, but better or truer.' That is so true."

Muhlbauer's father, the late State Rep. Dan Muhlbauer, D-Manilla, represented Carroll, Crawford and Audubon counties. He died Oct. 1, 2020, at age 62.

"This is very personal to me. Growing up farming and being in a farm family, taking care of the land, and doing what we do, is deeply embedded in our DNA," Dave Muhlbauer said. "That's the same to me with what grandpa and dad did with serving as a Crawford County supervisor, and later, legislator. I grew up campaigning for my grandpa when I was just a little kid."

Several members of Dave Muhlbauer's family — sister and brother-in-law Megan and Robert Riesselman and cousin Jared Muhlbauer — are engaged in the farming-agricultural operation just a stone's throw from Shelby County and close to the Carroll County city of Manning, where Muhlbauer's wife, Linda, is the library director.

"I first and foremost think there should be a place for any size farm," Muhlbauer said. "Every farmer is a little bit different with how they operate and what they want to do or don't do. We need to see the state work hand in hand with farmers on policies that are best practices."

Muhlbauer says he has cover crops because he feels it helps his soil and water quality, as well as the fertility of the land and the health of the soil.

"I think we need to have more communication with farmers on how to make practices at hand more available to them," he said.

Muhlbauer said at the core he and Sand have the same goals for the state and are equipped with the electoral track records to end a decade of one-party control in Iowa by Republicans.



Crawford County Supervisor Dave Muhlbauer speaks with Political Mercury at his family's farm and cattle operation. Photo courtesy of Sand-Muhlbauer campaign

"For us, it's about making government work for the people and fixing a broken political system," Muhlbauer said.

As a local elected official, Muhlbauer lives among the people he represents in Tuesday morning supervisors' meetings at the Crawford County Courthouse in Denison.

"People are upset. They don't feel like government represents them," Muhlbauer said. "They don't feel like their voice is being heard. They feel like legislators are more interested in special interests and powerful insiders. To me, it's about giving that voice back to people."

Through the years, Muhlbauer has often described himself as an "old-school farming-labor Democrat."

Muhlbauer ran for the U.S. Senate in the 2022 cycle but left the race before the primary to spend time with family after the death of his 4-year-old nephew Jed Riesselman in an accident. The Riesselmans have established a nonprofit foundation, Stables 4 Jed, and developed a mental-health/grief facility, one with a focus on horse therapy, right on their farm, 5 miles southwest of Manning on the east side of 370th Street just north of Dave Muhlbauer's home.

Dave and Linda Muhlbauer have one son and two daughters: Chas, 18; Ava, 17; and Roslyn, 15, all high school students. ■

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](mailto: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

## MOONLIGHT CLASSIC

Captain Roy's, 1900 Saylor Road, Des Moines  
[www.orchardplace.org/orchard-place-moonlight-classic](http://www.orchardplace.org/orchard-place-moonlight-classic)

JULY 11

This nighttime ride supports Orchard Place's commitment to children's mental health and welcomes cyclists of all skill levels and includes fun contests like best helmet light and best costume.

## CONCERTS

Casey's Center,  
223 Center St., Des Moines  
[www.iowaeventscenter.com](http://www.iowaeventscenter.com)

- July 7: Journey
- July 15: Tyler Childers
- July 16: Lil Wayne

## WAUKEE CELEBRATION OF INDEPENDENCE

Centennial Park in Waukee  
[www.waukee.org/777/Celebration-of-Independence](http://www.waukee.org/777/Celebration-of-Independence)

JULY 3-4

Waukee's celebration includes a fireworks display, food vendors, a pie-eating contest, volleyball tournaments and much more.



Photo by Dylan Heuer

## IOWA CUBS

Principal Park, 1 Line Drive, Des Moines  
[www.iowacubs.com](http://www.iowacubs.com)

Home games in July

- July 7 vs. St. Paul at 6:38 p.m.
- July 8 vs. St. Paul at 12:08 p.m.
- July 9 vs. St. Paul at 6:38 p.m.
- July 10 vs. St. Paul at 7:08 p.m. | Friday Night Fireworks
- July 11 vs. St. Paul at 6:08 p.m. | Catch On The Field
- July 12 vs. St. Paul at 1:08 p.m. | Demonios de Des Moines | Kids Run The Bases
- July 28 vs. Scranton/WB at 6:38 p.m. | Dog Day
- July 29 vs. Scranton/WB at 12:08 p.m.
- July 30 vs. Scranton/WB at 6:38 p.m. | Iowa Oaks
- July 31 vs. Scranton/WB at 7:08 p.m. | Friday Night Fireworks



Photo courtesy of Beaverdale Neighborhood Association

## BEVERDALE BLUEGRASS FESTIVAL

Tower Park, 4900 Hickman Road, Des Moines  
[www.beaverdalebluegrass.com](http://www.beaverdalebluegrass.com)

JULY 11

The Beaverdale Bluegrass Festival is a celebration of local music and community. It is free to the public and sponsored by the Beaverdale Neighborhood Association and local businesses. Some of the best bluegrass talents in Iowa pack the neighborhood park.

## CLIVE FESTIVAL

Northwest 114th Street, Clive  
[www.cityofclive.com/parkandrecreation/programs\\_and\\_events/clive\\_festival.php](http://www.cityofclive.com/parkandrecreation/programs_and_events/clive_festival.php)

JULY 17-18

The metro is full of fun community celebrations, and Clive's is no exception. Fireworks, events, live music and more.



## IOWA BARNSTORMERS

Wells Fargo Arena, 730 Third St.,  
Des Moines  
[www.theiowabarnstormers.com](http://www.theiowabarnstormers.com)

Home games in July:

- July 11 vs. Green Bay Blizzard at 5 p.m.
- July 24 vs. San Antonio Gunslingers at 7 p.m.

Photo by Picture Iowa

# COMING UP

SUBMIT ENTRIES AND PHOTOS TO [EDITOR@DMCITYVIEW.COM](mailto:EDITOR@DMCITYVIEW.COM)



Photo by Jose Calderon – Digital Jose Photography

## DES MOINES MENACE

Mediacom Stadium, 1427-1483 25th St., Des Moines

[www.menacesoccer.com](http://www.menacesoccer.com)

Home games in July:

- July 3 vs. Santafe Wanderers at 7 p.m.
- July 11 vs. FC Ambush at 7 p.m.



Photo courtesy of Urbandale 4th of July Celebration

## URBANDALE 4TH OF JULY CELEBRATION

7404 Prairie Ave., Urbandale

[www.urbandale4thofjuly.org](http://www.urbandale4thofjuly.org)

JULY 2-4

Urbandale goes all out for its Fourth of July event every year, and this year is no different. This event is arguably the largest of its kind in the metro, which includes a two-mile-long parade, carnival, entertainment, live music and more.

## ANKENY SUMMERFEST

The District at Prairie Trail,  
1500 S.W. Main St., Ankeny

[www.ankenysummerfest.com](http://www.ankenysummerfest.com)

JULY 10-12

Ankeny celebrates the summer with a carnival, parade, entertainment garden, lip sync contest, fireworks and more. There will be plenty of music entertainment each day as well, featuring multiple bands.

## GOODGUYS 35TH SPEEDWAY MOTORS HEARTLAND NATIONALS

Iowa State Fairgrounds,  
3000 E. Grand Ave., Des Moines

[www.good-guys.com](http://www.good-guys.com)

JULY 3-5

One of the premier events for car junkies for the summer. There will be more than 5,000 of the country's coolest 1999 and older hot rods muscle cars, trick trucks and more. Saturday night will be the fireworks extravaganza. There will be racing, burnout competitions, live music and more.

## STARS AND STRIPES JULY 3RD WEEKEND

1 Prairie Meadows Drive,  
Altoona

[www.prairiemeadows.com](http://www.prairiemeadows.com)

JULY 3

Prairie Meadows Racetrack and Casino invites all to their family-friendly Stars and Stripes July 3rd Weekend to witness one of the largest fireworks displays in central Iowa. There will be live racing, free outdoor music and entertainment.

## WAUKEE ARTS FESTIVAL

1255 Warrior Lane, Waukee

[www.waukeearts.org/waukee-arts-festival](http://www.waukeearts.org/waukee-arts-festival)

JULY 17-18

Artists vendors, day time music, food trucks, beer garden and plenty of more will take over Waukee from July 17-18.



Photo courtesy of Waukee Area Arts Council

## CITYVIEW'S EAST VILLAGE SUMMER STIR

[summerstirs.dmcityview.com](http://summerstirs.dmcityview.com)

JULY 31

Our traveling cocktail party is back in Des Moines' East Village. Sample many of summer's finest drinks at some of the area's best bars and restaurants. Try 10 different drinks for only \$25 with your online order (\$35 at the door). ■



# BUSINESS JOURNAL



## Local cobbler keeps WORN SHOES WALKING

After 42 years in the business, Jamie Blackford continues repairing hundreds of pairs of shoes each month, proving that quality craftsmanship still has a place in the Des Moines metro.

By Gracie Kayko

When shoes start to wear down and their soles fall apart, some people head to a department store or shop online for a new pair, while old ones are donated or end up in the trash. But when they can be saved, Des Moines-area residents can take their beloved shoes to one of three independently owned and operated shoe repair stores.

Jamie Blackford, the owner and master cobbler of Blackford Shoe Repair, sands down a black pair of boots in his workshop.

## FEATURE

The Des Moines shoe repair market is dominated by locally owned master cobblers — people who specialize in repairing footwear and leather goods — rather than large chains. Blackford Shoe Repair in Urbandale, Des Moines Shoe Repair in Historic Valley Junction and El Zapatito Shoe Repair, located in Radio City Mobile Home Park in Des Moines, are among the metro's best-known repair businesses.

Jamie Blackford is the owner and sole repairman of Blackford Shoe Repair. He shared his experiences with us.

In the last year, Blackford has experienced an influx of shoes in need of repair. As the economy weakens and everyday necessities become more expensive, people are opting to repair what's broken instead of buying new.

"When the economy is bad it's cheaper for people to get their shoes repaired than to buy new ones," Blackford said.

Inside Blackford's white brick building on the corner of 69th Street and Douglas Avenue, shoes of every style and size pile up along the long glass display counter. Everything sitting up front has accumulated over the last two weeks while Blackford was on vacation in New Mexico for his niece's wedding. With no one else to help, he will be busy for the foreseeable future.

From work and cowboy boots to running shoes, tennis shoes, Birkenstocks, umpire shoes, children's shoes, heels, dress shoes and UGG boots, Blackford will take nearly any pair in need of repair.

"Any kind of shoe — you name it, I got it," he said.

### An introduction to the trade

Blackford, who was born and raised in Des Moines and graduated from Hoover High School, started repairing shoes part-time at age 18 in Beaverdale after meeting someone in the business.

He has now been in the trade for 42 years, working in several businesses in Des Moines and even in Florida.

He spent about four years in Florida, working in Sarasota, Clearwater and the Tampa Bay area before moving back to Des Moines and taking a job repairing shoes for Red Wing. After saving enough money while working there, he branched out on his own and started Blackford Shoe Repair. He has operated at 6833 Douglas Ave. in Urbandale for the past 27 years.

Blackford celebrated his 60th birthday back in May and has no plans for retirement in the near future.

"All the stuff I got here," he said, gesturing to



Blackford Shoe Repair at 6833 Douglas Ave., Urbandale.

the shoes lining the counter and walls and stacked in boxes, "it'll be awhile before I retire."

Blackford runs his business as a one-man operation. At one point, he had three employees, but they have all since passed away.

Since then, he has brought in people and taught them the skills of shoe repair, but none have stayed. For now, he alone answers the phone calls, balances the books and repairs the more than 500 pairs of shoes scattered throughout his shop.

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### MENU

#### Starter Salad:

**Fresh in-season garden greens** [80oz.], with **Marcona almonds** [8oz.], **tomatoes** [48oz.], **carrots** [48oz.], **cucumbers** [48oz.], and **peppers** [48oz.]. **Buttermilk ranch** [16oz.] and **champagne vinaigrette** [16oz.] dressings are served on the side.

**Bourbon Sriracha BBQ Pork Ribs** [1/2pan]  
**Hickory Smoked Sliced Beef Brisket** [1/2pan]

#### Sides:

- Iowa farm-fresh heirloom tomatoes [48oz.]
- Fresh & festive fruit, such as watermelon, blueberries, and strawberries [48 oz. each]
- Iowa Sweet Corn [1/2 pan]
- Cheesy Party Potatoes [1/2 pan]

**Dessert:** Strawberry Shortcake [6 - individual shortcakes]

- Sliced Strawberries [48oz]
- Vanilla Whip Cream [48oz]

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## Always something new

Although some might be overwhelmed by the amount of shoes and work Blackford has to do, especially after a vacation, Blackford enjoys what he does.

“Every shoe is different,” he said.

That’s what he likes most about the job. There is always something new to keep him busy.

Blackford said the shoes that come into his shop seem to arrive more damaged each year, but that has kept the work interesting. He doesn’t back down from a challenge or turn down service unless he knows, from his years of experience, that the shoes are beyond saving.

He actually prefers the more difficult repairs

About 15 years ago, he was brought a pair of boots that seemed destined for the trash.

“I mean they completely fell apart,” he said. “You could see through the shoe.”

But with determination, Blackford managed to put them back together. That particular repair has stayed with him ever since.

Amid the challenging jobs, Blackford also receives a lot of Birkenstocks, which are relatively easy and less time-consuming to repair.

Because he is the only one at and behind the counter, and depending on his backlog and the condition of the shoes, customers can expect a turnaround time of about one month to six weeks.

## As busy as ever

He is as busy as ever, and so is Des Moines Shoe Repair, he said. While he was away in New Mexico, he had to turn away some customers and refer them to Des Moines Shoe Repair.

Blackford primarily performs half-sole and full-sole replacements, while also handling glue-sole repairs and, when time allows, purse and luggage repairs. A half-sole repair consists of replacing the front portion of the outsole where toe and tread wear appear. A full-sole repair includes the front and midsole, along with the heel.

He primarily works with three materials for sole repairs: rubber, crepe rubber and leather.

The condition of the sole isn’t what determines price.

“A full sole is a full sole,” Blackford said.

Instead, the type of material used on the shoe and whether the repair requires a half sole or full sole determine the cost.

Blackford measures and cuts all of the material by hand, uses a stitching machine to attach the new sole and finishes the repair with a professional S-1000 shoe repair finishing machine, which sands the material down to the welt — the a strip of leather, rubber or plastic that connects the upper sole.

The finishing machine roars to life as Blackford maneuvers one shoe at a time across the fast-spinning sander, creating a smooth finish.

In addition to sole replacements, Blackford polishes and performs button repairs for his customers. However, he prefers to refer zipper repairs to his neighbors next door at Geysa’s Tailors & Boutique, an alteration shop.

For Blackford, the work that does not involve repairing the shoes is the hardest part of the job. Going back and forth between his workspace and the front counter, answering phone calls and keeping track of more than 500 pairs of shoes is his least favorite part. But because he is the only employee, every responsibility falls on him.

Blackford Shoe Repair is open Tuesday through Saturday from 10 a.m. to 3 p.m. and is closed Sunday and Monday. Customers can stop by in person or call Blackford’s business to inquire about their shoe repair needs. ■

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## COMMERCIAL REAL ESTATE

## COMMERCIAL REAL ESTATE TRANSACTIONS IN POLK COUNTY, IOWA, FROM DEC. 17, 2025, TO FEB. 23, 2026

**423 S. ANKENY BLVD., ANKENY**

SALE DATE: 2025-12-18  
 SALE PRICE: \$1,160,000  
 SELLER: ZELCER, NONA  
 BUYER: ANKENY BOULEVARD LLC  
 ACRES: 0.859  
 SQUARE FEET: 13,297

**5705 MERLE HAY ROAD, JOHNSTON**

SALE DATE: 2025-12-18  
 SALE PRICE: \$11,801,500  
 SELLER: JOHNSTON MERLE HAY & 57TH LLC  
 BUYER: AT JOHNSTON GARDENS LLC  
 ACRES: 4.502  
 SQUARE FEET: 80,559

**2727 82ND PLACE, URBANDALE**

SALE DATE: 2025-12-18  
 SALE PRICE: \$22,000,000  
 SELLER: ESSEX BULIGO URBANDALE LLC  
 BUYER: THE ARBORDALE OF IOWA LLC  
 ACRES: 5.950  
 SQUARE FEET: 197,385

**8190 HICKMAN ROAD, CLIVE**

SALE DATE: 2025-12-19  
 SALE PRICE: \$600,000  
 SELLER: KOEPP, DEVONNE E  
 BUYER: ALVIV PROPERTIES LLC  
 ACRES: 0.512  
 SQUARE FEET: 4,576

**2307 UNIVERSITY AVE., DES MOINES**

SALE DATE: 2025-12-19  
 SALE PRICE: \$525,000  
 SELLER: MATHEY HOLDING LLC  
 BUYER: SRM HOLDINGS LLC  
 ACRES: 0.149  
 SQUARE FEET: 3,278

**5880 UNIVERSITY AVE., WEST DES MOINES**

SALE DATE: 2025-12-19  
 SALE PRICE: \$36,700,000  
 SELLER: HR WEST DES MOINES SPE LLC  
 BUYER: 5880 UNIVERSITY AVE LLC  
 ACRES: 7.816  
 SQUARE FEET: 79,916

**4270 N.W. SIXTH DRIVE, DES MOINES**

SALE DATE: 2025-12-19  
 SALE PRICE: \$845,000  
 SELLER: FORRET, MICHAEL J  
 BUYER: TRIPLE CIRCLE L LIMITED COMPANY  
 ACRES: 0.780  
 SQUARE FEET: 8,028

**1200 12TH ST., WEST DES MOINES**

SALE DATE: 2025-12-19  
 SALE PRICE: \$2,350,000  
 SELLER: UNITED COMMUNITY SERVICES INC  
 BUYER: DES MOINES CHILDREN'S MUSEUM  
 ACRES: 7.273  
 SQUARE FEET: 17,345

**5901 WESTOWN PARKWAY, WEST DES MOINES**

SALE DATE: 2025-12-19  
 SALE PRICE: \$12,900,000  
 SELLER: 5901 WESTOWN PARKWAY MOB LLC  
 BUYER: 5901 WESTOWN PKWY LLC  
 ACRES: 5.618  
 SQUARE FEET: 82,072

**10400 BUENA VISTA COURT, URBANDALE**

SALE DATE: 2025-12-19  
 SALE PRICE: \$1,200,000  
 SELLER: FLEX INVESTORS LLC  
 BUYER: ALLIANCE DENTAL SERVICES LLC  
 ACRES: 1.950  
 SQUARE FEET: 18,608

**5240 N.W. BEAVER DRIVE, JOHNSTON**

SALE DATE: 2025-12-19  
 SALE PRICE: \$870,000  
 SELLER: SUSAN R TYLER LIVING TRUST  
 BUYER: DBART PROPERTIES LLC  
 ACRES: 2.707  
 SQUARE FEET: 5,000

**5909 N.W. 90TH ST., JOHNSTON**

SALE DATE: 2025-12-22  
 SALE PRICE: \$200,000  
 SELLER: 7G DEVELOPMENT LLC  
 BUYER: INTEGRITY POINT REAL ESTATE LLC  
 ACRES: 1.463  
 SQUARE FEET: 0

**8951 WINDSOR PARKWAY, JOHNSTON**

SALE DATE: 2025-12-22  
 SALE PRICE: \$2,700,000  
 SELLER: 7G DEVELOPMENT LLC  
 BUYER: INTEGRITY POINT REAL ESTATE LLC  
 ACRES: 1.394  
 SQUARE FEET: 11,595

**10400 BUENA VISTA COURT, URBANDALE**

SALE DATE: 2025-12-22  
 SALE PRICE: \$3,015,636  
 SELLER: ALLIANCE DENTAL SERVICES LLC  
 BUYER: 2828-2844 104TH ST LLC  
 ACRES: 1.950  
 SQUARE FEET: 18,608

**1515 E. EUCLID AVE., DES MOINES**

SALE DATE: 2025-12-23  
 SALE PRICE: \$3,750,000  
 SELLER: JRL HOLDING COMPANY LC  
 BUYER: CORKERY, LAWRENCE P  
 ACRES: 3.869  
 SQUARE FEET: 65,620

**802 E. FIRST ST., ANKENY**

SALE DATE: 2025-12-23  
 SALE PRICE: \$1,500,000  
 SELLER: RW HURD LLC  
 BUYER: QT ANKENY LLC  
 ACRES: 1.151  
 SQUARE FEET: 3,250

**509 E. 26TH ST., DES MOINES**

SALE DATE: 2025-12-23  
 SALE PRICE: \$225,000  
 SELLER: CHAVEZ, JOSE A  
 BUYER: VELAZQUEZ CORTINA, DESHAY  
 ACRES: 0.068  
 SQUARE FEET: 2,142

**4451 112TH ST., URBANDALE**

SALE DATE: 2025-12-24  
 SALE PRICE: \$3,856,050  
 SELLER: ZB INVESTMENTS LC  
 BUYER: AB COLLECTIVE LLC  
 ACRES: 2.920  
 SQUARE FEET: 47,840

**NO ADDRESS LISTED**

SALE DATE: 2025-12-29  
 SALE PRICE: \$32,500  
 SELLER: DIEM PROPERTIES INC  
 BUYER: GONZALEZ, MARCO  
 ACRES: 0.284  
 SQUARE FEET: 0

**1346 SEVENTH ST., DES MOINES**

SALE DATE: 2025-12-29  
 SALE PRICE: \$350,000  
 SELLER: COMMUNITY CHRISTIAN FAMILY CHURCH  
 BUYER: KIPER LAGI YESU, WOONI YIEYO  
 ACRES: 0.496  
 SQUARE FEET: 2,604

**1614 FULLER ROAD, WEST DES MOINES**

SALE DATE: 2025-12-29  
 SALE PRICE: \$1,473,000  
 SELLER: THE FULLER GROUP LLC  
 BUYER: JD & SONS PROPERTIES LLC  
 ACRES: 1.070  
 SQUARE FEET: 13,200

**3505 104TH ST., URBANDALE**

SALE DATE: 2025-12-29  
 SALE PRICE: \$790,000  
 SELLER: OLSON, KIM  
 BUYER: MOSSBERG HOLDINGS LLC  
 ACRES: 0.680  
 SQUARE FEET: 5,760

**4740 N.W. 59TH AVE., JOHNSTON**

SALE DATE: 2025-12-29  
 SALE PRICE: \$360,260  
 SELLER: ENCLAVE AT BEAVER PINES LLC  
 BUYER: NEWTON PROPERTIES INVESTMENTS LLC  
 ACRES: 1.486  
 SQUARE FEET: 0

**2025 BOYD ST., DES MOINES**

SALE DATE: 2025-12-29  
 SALE PRICE: \$156,865  
 SELLER: DELAWARE PROPERTIES LLC  
 BUYER: GAYTAN PROPERTIES LLC  
 ACRES: 1.367  
 SQUARE FEET: 0

**1225 COPPER CREEK DRIVE, PLEASANT HILL**

SALE DATE: 2025-12-30  
 SALE PRICE: \$3,565,000  
 SELLER: GEORGE CATALDO REVOCABLE TRUST  
 BUYER: COPPER CREEK HOLDINGS LLC  
 ACRES: 4.060  
 SQUARE FEET: 29,506

**116 S.E. LORENZ DRIVE, ANKENY**

SALE DATE: 2025-12-30  
 SALE PRICE: \$2,000,000  
 SELLER: 116 SE LORENZ DRIVE LLC  
 BUYER: LIMITLESS CHURCH INC  
 ACRES: 2.391  
 SQUARE FEET: 14,641

**4911 S.W. 19TH ST., DES MOINES**

SALE DATE: 2025-12-30  
 SALE PRICE: \$3,630,000  
 SELLER: VIA PROPERTIES FLEUR LLC  
 BUYER: PH FLEUR HEIGHTS LLC  
 ACRES: 4.625  
 SQUARE FEET: 52,919

**1832 INDUSTRIAL CIRCLE, WEST DES MOINES**

SALE DATE: 2026-01-01  
 SALE PRICE: \$844,000  
 SELLER: MD MANAGEMENT INC  
 BUYER: WOODGRAIN INC  
 ACRES: 0.999  
 SQUARE FEET: 18,000

**1454 30TH ST., SUITE 101, WEST DES MOINES**

SALE DATE: 2026-01-02  
 SALE PRICE: \$200,000  
 SELLER: MKK PROPERTIES LLC  
 BUYER: BARDEEN STEVENS HOLDINGS LLC  
 ACRES: 0.248  
 SQUARE FEET: 2,933

**2804 S.W. NINTH ST., DES MOINES**

SALE DATE: 2026-01-06  
 SALE PRICE: \$250,000  
 SELLER: KENNEDY, KATHLEEN A  
 BUYER: CS FAMILY PROPERTIES LLC  
 ACRES: 0.320  
 SQUARE FEET: 2,631

**1420 10TH ST., DES MOINES**

SALE DATE: 2026-01-06  
 SALE PRICE: \$90,000  
 SELLER: KI PROPERTIES LLC  
 BUYER: CUNARRO REAL ESTATE LLC  
 ACRES: 0.149  
 SQUARE FEET: 1,949

**351 S.E. GATEWAY CIRCLE, GRIMES**

SALE DATE: 2026-01-08  
 SALE PRICE: \$953,964  
 SELLER: SSD PROPERTIES LLC  
 BUYER: GOODWILL INDUSTRIES OF CENTRAL IOWA  
 ACRES: 3.650  
 SQUARE FEET: 0

**1218 S.E. BELMONT DRIVE, ANKENY**

SALE DATE: 2026-01-09  
 SALE PRICE: \$1,905,000  
 SELLER: SPG INC  
 BUYER: CALIA 8 LLC  
 ACRES: 1.192  
 SQUARE FEET: 21,186

**118 N.W. STATE ST., ANKENY**

SALE DATE: 2026-01-09  
 SALE PRICE: \$640,000  
 SELLER: BIG SKY PROPERTIES LLC  
 BUYER: ANKENY CHRISTIAN HOLDINGS LLC  
 ACRES: 0.305  
 SQUARE FEET: 5,808

**114 N.W. STATE ST., ANKENY**

SALE DATE: 2026-01-09  
 SALE PRICE: \$1,280,000  
 SELLER: BIG SKY PROPERTIES LLC  
 BUYER: ANKENY CHRISTIAN HOLDINGS LLC  
 ACRES: 0.708  
 SQUARE FEET: 8,704

**1606 N.W. SECOND ST., ANKENY**

SALE DATE: 2026-01-09  
 SALE PRICE: \$640,000  
 SELLER: BIG SKY PROPERTIES LLC  
 BUYER: ANKENY CHRISTIAN HOLDINGS LLC  
 ACRES: 0.481  
 SQUARE FEET: 5,808

**1517 N. ANKENY BLVD., ANKENY**

SALE DATE: 2026-01-09  
 SALE PRICE: \$850,000  
 SELLER: KMG PROPERTIES 2400 LLC  
 BUYER: SCHUESSLER ENTERPRISES INC  
 ACRES: 0.921  
 SQUARE FEET: 6,804

**1606 N.W. IRVINEDALE DRIVE, ANKENY**

SALE DATE: 2026-01-09  
 SALE PRICE: \$2,950,000  
 SELLER: DAYTON PARK LLC  
 BUYER: 1606 NW IRVINEDALE DR LLC  
 ACRES: 2.280  
 SQUARE FEET: 12,960

**15 MAIN ST. S.E., BONDURANT**

SALE DATE: 2026-01-13  
 SALE PRICE: \$380,000  
 SELLER: BAD FRIEND LLC  
 BUYER: JADE STREET LLC  
 ACRES: 0.096  
 SQUARE FEET: 2,944

**1901 N. JAMES ST., GRIMES**

SALE DATE: 2026-01-13  
 SALE PRICE: \$2,629,057  
 SELLER: YBRDM22 CRE PARTNERS LLC  
 BUYER: NNN REIT LP  
 ACRES: 0.684  
 SQUARE FEET: 6,695

**1620 S.W. WHITE BIRCH CIRCLE, ANKENY**

SALE DATE: 2026-01-13  
 SALE PRICE: \$2,070,383  
 SELLER: STILLWATER CRE PARTNERS LLC  
 BUYER: NNN REIT LP  
 ACRES: 1.148  
 SQUARE FEET: 8,000

**2860 S.E. GRIMES BLVD., GRIMES**

SALE DATE: 2026-01-13  
 SALE PRICE: \$2,053,951  
 SELLER: DES MOINES CHILDCARE HOLDINGS LLC  
 BUYER: NNN REIT LP  
 ACRES: 1.634  
 SQUARE FEET: 8,000

**415 W. BRIDGE ROAD, POLK CITY**

SALE DATE: 2026-01-13  
 SALE PRICE: \$3,122,005  
 SELLER: DES MOINES CHILDCARE HOLDINGS LLC  
 BUYER: NNN REIT LP  
 ACRES: 1.393  
 SQUARE FEET: 12,036

**907 EIGHTH ST. S.W., ALTOONA**

SALE DATE: 2026-01-13  
 SALE PRICE: \$1,595,148  
 SELLER: ALTOONA CHILDCARE HOLDINGS LLC  
 BUYER: NNN REIT LP  
 ACRES: 1.199  
 SQUARE FEET: 3,144

**110 S.W. MAPLE ST., ANKENY**

SALE DATE: 2026-01-13  
 SALE PRICE: \$1,092,702  
 SELLER: DES MOINES CHILDCARE HOLDINGS LLC  
 BUYER: NNN REIT LP  
 ACRES: 0.334  
 SQUARE FEET: 4,400

**2501 S.E. CREEKVIEW DRIVE, ANKENY**

SALE DATE: 2026-01-13  
 SALE PRICE: \$1,643,161  
 SELLER: DES MOINES CHILDCARE HOLDINGS LLC  
 BUYER: NNN REIT LP  
 ACRES: 1.328  
 SQUARE FEET: 6,522

**2501 S.E. CREEKVIEW DRIVE, ANKENY**

SALE DATE: 2026-01-13  
 SALE PRICE: \$1,643,161  
 SELLER: DES MOINES CHILDCARE HOLDINGS LLC  
 BUYER: NNN REIT LP  
 ACRES: 1.328  
 SQUARE FEET: 6,522

**175 S. NINTH ST., STE. 615, WEST DES MOINES**

SALE DATE: 2026-01-13  
 SALE PRICE: \$260,000  
 SELLER: DEL BOCA VISTA LLC  
 BUYER: JAMESSON ENDEAVORS LLC  
 ACRES: 0.044  
 SQUARE FEET: 1,920

COMMERCIAL REAL ESTATE

**NO ADDRESS LISTED**

SALE DATE: 2026-01-13  
 SALE PRICE: \$62,500  
 SELLER: HARRIS, DIANA  
 BUYER: HARRIS, OWEN W  
 ACRES: 0.367  
 SQUARE FEET: 1,342

**1008 NINTH ST. N.E., ALTOONA**

SALE DATE: 2026-01-14  
 SALE PRICE: \$1,600,000  
 SELLER: ELLE GROUP LLC  
 BUYER: BGI HOLDINGS LLC  
 ACRES: 3.675  
 SQUARE FEET: 12,000

**756 NINTH ST., DES MOINES**

SALE DATE: 2026-01-14  
 SALE PRICE: \$4,272,218  
 SELLER: YBRDM22 CRE PARTNERS LLC  
 BUYER: NNN REIT LP  
 ACRES: 0.739  
 SQUARE FEET: 37,574

**NO ADDRESS LISTED**

SALE DATE: 2026-01-16  
 SALE PRICE: \$1,220,000  
 SELLER: IOWA-MAP II LLC  
 BUYER: ROBERT L MADDOX III IDG TRUST  
 ACRES: 1.433  
 SQUARE FEET: 0

**4105 S.W. NINTH ST., DES MOINES**

SALE DATE: 2026-01-21  
 SALE PRICE: \$140,000  
 SELLER: KING HERITAGE LLC  
 BUYER: MERIC INVESTMENTS LLC  
 ACRES: 0.768  
 SQUARE FEET: 2,870

**1400 WALNUT ST., DES MOINES**

SALE DATE: 2026-01-22  
 SALE PRICE: \$12,742,058  
 SELLER: DIF II FLUX LLC  
 BUYER: RITTENHOUSE SQUARE LLC  
 ACRES: 0.550  
 SQUARE FEET: 75,862

**NO ADDRESS LISTED**

SALE DATE: 2026-01-22  
 SALE PRICE: \$6,120  
 SELLER: MIDAMERICAN ENERGY COMPANY  
 BUYER: CITY OF GRIMES  
 ACRES: 0.234  
 SQUARE FEET: 0

**607 E. EUCLID AVE., DES MOINES**

SALE DATE: 2026-01-22  
 SALE PRICE: \$157,620  
 SELLER: CDM HOLDINGS LLC  
 BUYER: NEIL & COLLETTE BRANKIS LIVING TRUST  
 ACRES: 0.209  
 SQUARE FEET: 1,080

**1245 34TH ST., DES MOINES**

SALE DATE: 2026-01-23  
 SALE PRICE: \$475,000  
 SELLER: PHI DELTA THETA HOUSEHOLDING CORP  
 BUYER: TOP SHELF LOGIC INC  
 ACRES: 0.580  
 SQUARE FEET: 4,131

**4800 S.E. 14TH ST., DES MOINES**

SALE DATE: 2026-01-23  
 SALE PRICE: \$1,350,000  
 SELLER: MICHELE HUDSON ROTHE REVOCABLE TRUST OF 2003  
 BUYER: DB DES MOINES 375 LLC  
 ACRES: 1.277  
 SQUARE FEET: 3,716

**908 EIGHTH ST., WEST DES MOINES**

SALE DATE: 2026-01-26  
 SALE PRICE: \$200,000  
 SELLER: 908 8TH LLC  
 BUYER: ASB PROPERTIES LLC  
 ACRES: 0.200  
 SQUARE FEET: 1,472

**5925 S.W. NINTH ST., DES MOINES**

SALE DATE: 2026-01-27  
 SALE PRICE: \$100,000  
 SELLER: GREGORY J DONAHUE REVOCABLE TRUST  
 BUYER: DONAHUE HOLDINGS LLC  
 ACRES: 0.334  
 SQUARE FEET: 4,000

**4779 N.W. 62ND AVE., JOHNSTON**

SALE DATE: 2026-01-27  
 SALE PRICE: \$1,081,005  
 SELLER: NGUYEN PROPERTY LLC  
 BUYER: HD INVESTMENTS GROUP LLC  
 ACRES: 0.964  
 SQUARE FEET: 10,560

**2100 DELAWARE AVE., DES MOINES**

SALE DATE: 2026-01-27  
 SALE PRICE: \$4,407,375  
 SELLER: HARC LLC  
 BUYER: 2100 DELAWARE LLC  
 ACRES: 4.542  
 SQUARE FEET: 88,188

**1330 SECOND AVE., DES MOINES**

SALE DATE: 2026-01-28  
 SALE PRICE: \$615,000  
 SELLER: AHQUABI PROPERTIES LLC  
 BUYER: SCHRIER, MARK  
 ACRES: 0.186  
 SQUARE FEET: 2,394

**1537 E. EUCLID AVE., DES MOINES**

SALE DATE: 2026-01-28  
 SALE PRICE: \$1,025,000  
 SELLER: SWAICH ENTERPRISES LLC  
 BUYER: HAUSER PROPERTIES LLC  
 ACRES: 0.839  
 SQUARE FEET: 19,680

**NO ADDRESS LISTED**

SALE DATE: 2026-01-28  
 SALE PRICE: \$35,000  
 SELLER: RHC-16 LLC  
 BUYER: 1354 E OVID LLC  
 ACRES: 0.152  
 SQUARE FEET: 0

**3921 INGERSOLL AVE., DES MOINES**

SALE DATE: 2026-01-29  
 SALE PRICE: \$782,000  
 SELLER: HICKMAN HOLDINGS LLC  
 BUYER: BLOCK 39 LLC  
 ACRES: 0.395  
 SQUARE FEET: 6,552

**2771 104TH ST., URBANDALE**

SALE DATE: 2026-01-29  
 SALE PRICE: \$3,200,000  
 SELLER: AM ANDERSON PROPERTIES LC  
 BUYER: ONE04 PARTNERS LLC  
 ACRES: 3.852  
 SQUARE FEET: 29,210

**2831 FIFTH AVE., DES MOINES**

SALE DATE: 2026-01-29  
 SALE PRICE: \$450,000  
 SELLER: BEELER, RICK  
 BUYER: J&J GLOBAL LLC  
 ACRES: 1.343  
 SQUARE FEET: 2,960

**2101 W. FIRST ST., ANKENY**

SALE DATE: 2026-01-29  
 SALE PRICE: \$3,528,000  
 SELLER: 1ST STREET FLATS LLC  
 BUYER: 2109 W 1ST STREET INVESTORS LLC  
 ACRES: 2.096  
 SQUARE FEET: 25,920

**1458 NORTHRIDGE CIRCLE N.E., ALTOONA**

SALE DATE: 2026-02-02  
 SALE PRICE: \$100  
 SELLER: NWT 1458 LLC  
 BUYER: NWT RE LP  
 ACRES: 8.986  
 SQUARE FEET: 7,500

**518 35TH ST., DES MOINES**

SALE DATE: 2026-02-02  
 SALE PRICE: \$240,000  
 SELLER: FIERCE PROPERTIES LLC  
 BUYER: SEHGAL, ROHIT B  
 ACRES: 0.189  
 SQUARE FEET: 2,463

**NO ADDRESS LISTED**

SALE DATE: 2026-02-03  
 SALE PRICE: \$270,000  
 SELLER: GERALDINE J MONK REVOCABLE TRUST  
 BUYER: CARING HANDS OUTREACH CENTER INC  
 ACRES: 3.120  
 SQUARE FEET: 0

**5600 WEST PARKWAY, JOHNSTON**

SALE DATE: 2026-02-04  
 SALE PRICE: \$300,000  
 SELLER: RAL LC-JOHNSTON SERIES  
 BUYER: WEST PARK 1 LLC  
 ACRES: 2.103  
 SQUARE FEET: 0

**5335 MERLE HAY ROAD, JOHNSTON**

SALE DATE: 2026-02-04  
 SALE PRICE: \$2,100,000  
 SELLER: CLARK PROPERTIES LC  
 BUYER: WILLIAMS TURF FARMS INC  
 ACRES: 2.509  
 SQUARE FEET: 12,500

**NO ADDRESS LISTED**

SALE DATE: 2026-02-04  
 SALE PRICE: \$235,000  
 SELLER: PMI ESCROW LLC  
 BUYER: JSG PROPERTIES LLC  
 ACRES: 2.060  
 SQUARE FEET: 0

**7705 UNIVERSITY AVE., CLIVE**

SALE DATE: 2026-02-04  
 SALE PRICE: \$353,000  
 SELLER: KAYE-PAUL FAMILY TRUST  
 BUYER: CITY OF CLIVE  
 ACRES: 0.432  
 SQUARE FEET: 4,980

**1107 E. ARMY POST ROAD, DES MOINES**

SALE DATE: 2026-02-04  
 SALE PRICE: \$4,900,000  
 SELLER: NATIVE REAL ESTATE LLC  
 BUYER: RAYMOND J O'CONNOR REVOCABLE LIVING TRUST  
 ACRES: 6.185  
 SQUARE FEET: 66,314

**1318 23RD ST., DES MOINES**

SALE DATE: 2026-02-06  
 SALE PRICE: \$206,000  
 SELLER: CRG PROPERTIES LLC  
 BUYER: RUESGA, SARAH  
 ACRES: 0.198  
 SQUARE FEET: 2,122

**5501 N.W. 86TH ST., JOHNSTON**

SALE DATE: 2026-02-06  
 SALE PRICE: \$1,800,000  
 SELLER: CLEARVIEW DEVELOPMENT LC  
 BUYER: TIC PROPERTIES LLC  
 ACRES: 1.077  
 SQUARE FEET: 7,966

**11411 FOREST AVE., CLIVE**

SALE DATE: 2026-02-09  
 SALE PRICE: \$1,497,000  
 SELLER: GEORGILAS FAMILY TRUST  
 BUYER: BIGIA FOREST AVE LLC  
 ACRES: 1.862  
 SQUARE FEET: 5,321

**NO ADDRESS LISTED**

SALE DATE: 2026-02-10  
 SALE PRICE: \$100,000  
 SELLER: 36 ON 6TH LLC  
 BUYER: INVEST DSM INC  
 ACRES: 0.087  
 SQUARE FEET: 0

**3101 COTTAGE GROVE AVE., DES MOINES**

SALE DATE: 2026-02-10  
 SALE PRICE: \$175,000  
 SELLER: IOWA NOTE & REAL ESTATE SERVICES LLC  
 BUYER: INVEST DSM INC  
 ACRES: 0.225  
 SQUARE FEET: 3,067

**3801 DELAWARE AVE., DES MOINES**

SALE DATE: 2026-02-11  
 SALE PRICE: \$2,750,000  
 SELLER: DELAWARE-DIXON-THOMPSON LLC  
 BUYER: 3801 DELAWARE LLC  
 ACRES: 2.551  
 SQUARE FEET: 28,000

**12802 MEREDITH DRIVE, URBANDALE**

SALE DATE: 2026-02-11  
 SALE PRICE: \$1,350,000  
 SELLER: NEWBLOOD DEVELOPMENT LLC  
 BUYER: THOMAS E JUCKETTE MARITAL TRUST  
 ACRES: 2.266  
 SQUARE FEET: 0

**412 EIGHTH ST. S.W., ALTOONA**

SALE DATE: 2026-02-12  
 SALE PRICE: \$1,581,530  
 SELLER: 8TH STREET ALTOONA PROPERTY LLC  
 BUYER: RUSTIN PROPERTIES LLC  
 ACRES: 0.855  
 SQUARE FEET: 9,700

**NO ADDRESS LISTED**

SALE DATE: 2026-02-12  
 SALE PRICE: \$72,900  
 SELLER: BRITSON, DENNIS N  
 BUYER: CITY OF GRIMES  
 ACRES: 1.355  
 SQUARE FEET: 0

**250 S.E. GATEWAY DRIVE, GRIMES**

SALE DATE: 2026-02-13  
 SALE PRICE: \$729,931  
 SELLER: MLT HOLDINGS LLC  
 BUYER: GRIMES PLAZA PARTNERS LLC  
 ACRES: 0.626  
 SQUARE FEET: 2,000

**810 PAYTON AVE., DES MOINES**

SALE DATE: 2026-02-13  
 SALE PRICE: \$2,585,000  
 SELLER: HILLS OF GREEN INVESTMENTS LLC  
 BUYER: MERIC INVESTMENTS LLC  
 ACRES: 2.308  
 SQUARE FEET: 42,570

**1656 MARTIN LUTHER KING JR. PARKWAY, DES MOINES**

SALE DATE: 2026-02-13  
 SALE PRICE: \$188,000  
 SELLER: MOLINERO VELAZQUEZ, JOSE EDUARDO  
 BUYER: CITY OF DES MOINES  
 ACRES: 0.412  
 SQUARE FEET: 1,442

**4708 S.W. NINTH ST., DES MOINES**

SALE DATE: 2026-02-18  
 SALE PRICE: \$220,000  
 SELLER: RANDLEMAN, DORETTA J  
 BUYER: BUDGET GARAGE PROPERTIES LLC  
 ACRES: 0.164  
 SQUARE FEET: 1,410

**2020 S.E. 44TH COURT, GRIMES**

SALE DATE: 2026-02-20  
 SALE PRICE: \$715,000  
 SELLER: FRENCH, WILLIAM JEFF  
 BUYER: DURACHEM LLC  
 ACRES: 0.990  
 SQUARE FEET: 9,102

**901 THOMAS BECK ROAD, DES MOINES**

SALE DATE: 2026-02-20  
 SALE PRICE: \$310,000  
 SELLER: QUECK CAPITAL MANAGEMENT LLC  
 BUYER: DEPOT PROPERTIES LLC  
 ACRES: 2.144  
 SQUARE FEET: 12,547

**10950 PLUM DRIVE, URBANDALE**

SALE DATE: 2026-02-21  
 SALE PRICE: \$1,870,860  
 SELLER: RIDER CORNER DEVELOPMENT LLC  
 BUYER: AUTOZONE DEVELOPMENT LLC  
 ACRES: 4.090  
 SQUARE FEET: 0

**505 N. ANKENY BLVD., ANKENY**

SALE DATE: 2026-02-22  
 SALE PRICE: \$1,044,173  
 SELLER: HARLAN J NODDLE Q-TIP MARITAL TRUST  
 BUYER: KIRSHENBAUM, JOSEPH  
 ACRES: 5.196  
 SQUARE FEET: 53,490

**4424 S.E. 14TH ST., DES MOINES**

SALE DATE: 2026-02-23  
 SALE PRICE: \$550,000  
 SELLER: CS FAMILY PROPERTIES LLC  
 BUYER: SMART SHOP LLC  
 ACRES: 0.427  
 SQUARE FEET: 1,462

**101 SECOND ST. S.E., ALTOONA**

SALE DATE: 2026-02-23  
 SALE PRICE: \$235,000  
 SELLER: HRM 101 LLC  
 BUYER: CPS PROPERTIES LLC  
 ACRES: 0.020  
 SQUARE FEET: 880 ■

Borrower Name	City	County	Cong. District	\$ Amount	Jobs Created	Jobs Retained	Existing Jobs	New Vs. Existing	Business Type
Go Yard Sports LLC	WATERLOO	BLACK HAWK	02	\$1,122,500	5	2	NEW	Sports and Recreation Instruction	
Jordan Family Enterprises, LLC	Waterloo	BLACK HAWK	02	\$123,300	5	17	EXISTING	Full-Service Restaurants	
Goodwin Insurance, Inc.	WATERLOO	BLACK HAWK	02	\$45,500	0	0	NEW	Insurance Agencies and Brokerages	
GANSEN FULFILLMENT LLC	SPENCER	CLAY	04	\$45,000	2	2	EXISTING	Other Justice, Public Order, and Safety Activities	
CENTER OF THE MAC LLC	WAUKEE	DALLAS	03	\$240,000	1	1	NEW	Full-Service Restaurants	
Rise Overhead Door LLC	Spirit Lake	DICKINSON	04	\$339,000	2	0	EXISTING	Other Foundation, Structure, and Building Exterior Contractors	
Tracey Properties LLC	CHARLES CITY	FLOYD	02	\$92,000	0	1	EXISTING	Lessors of Nonresidential Buildings (except Miniwarehouses)	
HIGHPARK CONSTRUCTION LLC	LOGAN	HARRISON	04	\$50,000	2	1	NEW	Residential Remodelers	
DAYS INN NEWTON	NEWTON	JASPER	01	\$920,000	0	11	EXISTING	Hotels (except Casino Hotels) and Motels	
Ironwood Equity Corp.	CEDAR RAPIDS	LINN	02	\$990,000	7	7	NEW	Commercial and Industrial Machinery and Equipment	
NBT Enterprises LLC	Cedar Rapids	LINN	02	\$307,000	2	0	EXISTING	Offices of Physical, Occupational and Speech Therapists, and Audiologists	
Rumble Inc	Cedar Rapids	LINN	02	\$149,000	1	15	EXISTING	Drinking Places (Alcoholic Beverages)	
Iowa Powerhouse LLC	Cedar Rapids	LINN	02	\$88,000	2	2	NEW	Fitness and Recreational Sports Centers	
DIVERSIFIED BUILDERS LLC	CEDAR RAPIDS	LINN	02	\$50,000	0	1	EXISTING	Residential Remodelers	
Hitchin Post Grill	BEVINGTON	MADISON	03	\$200,000	0	2	EXISTING	Full-Service Restaurants	
DJAAGOU A. EXPORT, L.L.C.	Muscatine	MUSCATINE	01	\$50,000	0	2	EXISTING	General Line Grocery Merchant Wholesalers	
SoDak Manufacturing, LLC	Akron	PLYMOUTH	04	\$553,000	2	0	EXISTING	All Other Miscellaneous Fabricated Metal Product Manufacturing	
Rocha Group LLC	ANKENY	POLK	03	\$40,000	1	1	NEW	Facilities Support Services	
OTP, LLC	Johnston	POLK	03	\$1,547,000	3	15	EXISTING	Fitness and Recreational Sports Centers	
NABRU MANAGEMENT PARTNERS LLC	WEST DES MOINES	POLK	03	\$1,425,000	11	2	NEW	Homes for the Elderly	
Titan Industrial Storage LLC	Council Bluffs	POTTAWATTAMIE	04	\$1,783,000	2	30	EXISTING	General Freight Trucking, Long Distance, Truckload	
PAPPY'S GUN SHOP LLC	UNDERWOOD	POTTAWATTAMIE	04	\$9,700	0	0	EXISTING	Other Personal and Household Goods Repair and Maintenance	
Huff Logistics Group Inc.	ELDRIDGE	SCOTT	01	\$2,502,500	0	0	NEW	General Freight Trucking, Long Distance, Truckload	
CRESTON TOBACCO LLC	CRESTON	UNION	03	\$50,000	0	0	EXISTING	Tobacco and Tobacco Product Merchant Wholesalers	
1421 Sunset Drive, LLC	Norwalk	WARREN	01	\$763,000	2	0	EXISTING	Offices of Physical, Occupational and Speech Therapists, and Audiologists	
Iowa Aviation Services Corp	NORWALK	WARREN	01	\$443,000	0	12	NEW	Other Support Activities for Air Transportation	
BLACK HAWK TRANSPORT INC	SIOUX CITY	WOODBURY	04	\$5,000,000	2	42	NEW	Couriers	
WISEPACE PROPERTIES LLC	SIOUX CITY	WOODBURY	04	\$1,773,700	2	38	NEW	Limited-Service Restaurants	
HUGO'S CONSTRUCTION LLC	SIOUX CITY	WOODBURY	04	\$15,000	0	2	EXISTING	Residential Remodelers	

TRANSACTIONS FROM MAY 2026

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

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Send information on new hires, promotions, expansions, openings and other business news to [editor@dmcityview.com](mailto:editor@dmcityview.com).

## Netherton named VP and CFO of Heart of America Group

Heart of America Group, a hospitality and real estate development company, has named Shane Netherton as vice president and chief financial officer. Netherton will be based at the company's Operations Support Center in Des Moines. Netherton brings more than 19 years of finance and accounting experience to the role. He joins Heart of America Group from Bernau Capital Partners, where he served as a senior member of the leadership team, overseeing a diverse portfolio spanning retail, real estate, manufacturing and banking.

## MercyOne names Baxter as new president and CEO

After a nationwide search, Robert Baxter, FACHE, has been named the new president and CEO of MercyOne. He will succeed Michael Taylor, who has served in an interim capacity since the beginning of January. Baxter brings more than 30 years of health care experience, most recently serving as president of the Toledo market for Bon Secours Mercy Health, the largest health care system in Ohio. There, he created strategies to improve trauma performance, increase retention and recruitment, regionalize and negotiate new joint ventures while leading Mercy Health to a CMS Five-Star rating. In joining MercyOne, Baxter returns to the state where he earned his MBA and MA in hospital and health administration at the University of Iowa.

## Haaland named Des Moines Community Playhouse executive director

The Des Moines Community Playhouse announced that Chelsea Haaland has been named executive director. She joins Katy Merriman, artistic director, as part of the theatre's leadership team. Haaland joined The Playhouse staff on June 15, immediately assuming the role of executive director. She most recently served as the related arts curriculum facilitator for the Waukee Community School District (CSD), Iowa's third-largest district, where she promoted collaborative culture-building and organizational effectiveness in support of the district's artistic programming. Under her guidance, Waukee CSD was the 11th district in the United States to be recognized as an Educational Theatre Association Premier Community for Theatre Education.

## Hardman steps down as LSI president and CEO

Lutheran Services in Iowa (LSI) announced that President and Chief Executive Officer Renee Hardman stepped down from her role July 1 to pursue other interests.

## Belay named executive director of Iowa Center for Children's Justice

The Iowa Center for Children's Justice named Steve Belay as its new executive director. Belay brings more than 30 years of experience in family law to the role, with a career focused on ensuring children and families are heard and supported in complex legal matters. Before joining the organization, Belay practiced law in Decorah, where he handled a broad range of family law cases, including custody, adoption, termination of parental rights and surrogacy. He also served as an assistant county attorney, working on juvenile court matters such as child welfare and delinquency cases.

## Grimes Area Chamber of Commerce announces leadership transition

The Grimes Area Chamber of Commerce announced a transition in executive leadership. Jennifer Chittenden, IOM, assumed the role of president of the organization on May 11. Chittenden succeeds Brian Buethe, who is departing the organization after nearly two decades of service. Buethe led the chamber and a number of economic development initiatives.

## SCI welcomes five new members to board of directors

The Science Center of Iowa (SCI) announced the appointment of Jose Garcia, Matt Weber, Brian Mathey, Lauren Ugulini and Lawrence Cunningham to its board of directors. They will support the organization's mission to inspire Iowans along their journey of lifelong science learning through strategic leadership, advocacy and community engagement. Their appointments come as SCI says it continues to expand science learning opportunities, strengthen community partnerships and invest in innovative experiences that engage learners of all ages.

## DMU welcomes Kozor as new director of corporate, foundation and grants relations

Des Moines University Medicine and Health Sciences welcomed Elizabeth, MBA, as its first-ever director of corporate, foundation and grants relations. Kozor will provide leadership in those strategic fundraising efforts for the university, building high-impact relationships locally and nationally to drive significant philanthropic investment in DMU.

## DMU Clinic - Behavioral Health welcomes Rice

Julie Rice, LMHC, joined Des Moines University Clinic - Behavioral Health as a licensed therapist. She will provide individual and group therapy to clients ages 18 and older. Her experience includes helping people in outpatient mental health settings, using a range of approaches to teach coping skills and support change such as talk therapy, problem-solving strategies and techniques to manage thoughts, behaviors and emotions.

## Lead DSM honors Andeweg and Federal Home Loan Bank of Des Moines with Distinguished Leadership Awards

Lead DSM recognized two leaders whose impact has helped strengthen Greater Des Moines. The organization presented the A. Arthur Davis Community Leadership Award to Robert Andeweg and the Workplace Community Leadership Award to Federal Home Loan Bank of Des Moines during its Annual Alumni Reunion on June 24. The awards celebrate the individuals and organizations whose leadership creates lasting impact through service, collaboration and commitment to community. ■

**FACES**  
OF (515)



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Shade Tree Auto

Left to right: Dan M., Clint D., Chris C.,  
Stacey S., Ryan N., Dan K.

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As Shade Tree Auto celebrates 25 years of serving central Iowa, the company reflects on a journey built on trust, integrity and exceptional customer service. Founded in a modest Johnston garage in 2001, Shade Tree Auto began with a simple mission: provide clear, honest information so customers could make confident decisions about their vehicle's safety and repairs. Over the past quarter century, that commitment has fueled steady growth and earned numerous accolades, including Small Retail Company of the Year at the

2018 International Business Awards in London. To accommodate increasing demand, a new 11-bay facility opened in Grimes along Highway 141 in 2017, followed by a second location in Urbandale in 2022 and a third shop in Ankeny in 2023. Owner Clint Dudley credits the company's success to a dedicated team, loyal customers and strong community support. While automotive technology has evolved dramatically, Shade Tree Auto's dedication to honest service remains unchanged after 25 years.

**FACES**  
OF (515)



**THE FACE OF**  
**AFFORDABLE SENIOR LIVING**  
Luther Park Community

**Left to right:**

Vicki Martin, Executive Director of Marketing & Senior Housing  
Malori Mayfield, Director of Independent Living & Marketing  
Alissa Albright, RN, BSN, Admission Coordinator

1546 Hull Ave, DES MOINES  
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[WWW.LUTHERPARKCOMMUNITY.ORG](http://WWW.LUTHERPARKCOMMUNITY.ORG)

For generations, Luther Park Community has been dedicated to enriching the lives of older adults through compassionate care, affordable housing, and a commitment to dignity and independence. Incorporated as a not-for-profit organization, Luther Park Community serves seniors across a full continuum of care, including Luther Park Apartments for affordable independent living, Rose Glen Apartments for independent living, The Gardens for assisted living, and Trinity for long-term care and skilled rehabilitation.

Guided by its vision to be the trusted leader of senior living services in the community, Luther Park Community is driven by faith, stewardship, and a commitment to excellence. Every service, program, and interaction is centered on helping seniors live safely, confidently, and with purpose.

At Luther Park Community, residents are more than individuals receiving care—they are family. The organization believes every senior deserves security, respect, and the opportunity to maintain independence for as long as possible while receiving the support they need to thrive.

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# AROUND THE CAMPFIRE

Where to camp, explore and gear up for the great outdoors.

By Cyote Williams

We dedicate pages of ink to highlight the many ways to spend your free time in central Iowa. From concerts and community events to art festivals and sports, we cover them all in an effort to help you make the most of every season. But what about those who enjoy getting away in the great outdoors without traveling too far? We have you covered there, too.

In and around the metro, and just beyond, both private and public camping options are available for those looking to escape the bright lights of the

city and reconnect with nature. At Cutty's Camping Resort, those bright lights might follow you in the form of its renowned Fourth of July celebration. At Pine Lake State Park, they may come from the night sky, where stars shine brighter away from the city's light pollution. And before you head out, you will need the right gear.

We spoke with people representing each part of the camping experience to gather ideas on where to buy equipment, park your RV or pitch your tent.

# PREPARE YOURSELF

Before exploring various campgrounds, make sure you are prepared with essentials such as coolers, boots, hammocks, fishing poles, tents, sleeping bags and bug spray. We spoke with Collin Smitherman, owner of Stoked, an adventure gear and clothing store in Des Moines' East Village, about what campers should look for.

Smitherman grew up in Iowa and has spent plenty of time backpacking, tent camping and camper van camping. He pointed to a few essentials for any camping trip.

"I always bring a really nice water filter, just because you know how water is in Iowa these days. That's number one. Some more comfort-related stuff. If I'm tent camping, I always bring a nice, lightweight chair," Smitherman said.

For new campers, Smitherman often recommends starting with used gear.

"If you don't do a lot of camping, or you maybe are just trying it out, I tell them to check out the used gear section first. I just try to meet them where they're at on their needs. I never like to sell people on gear that they don't need, because it's just going to become waste. They're not going to use it; it'll just sit in their garage," Smitherman said.

The store's used section offers options for beginners and experienced campers alike, including tents, sleeping bags, cookware, clothing and footwear. With relatively



Eureka tents on display during a photoshoot with Stoked, guitar not included. Photo courtesy of Stoked

few major camping gear suppliers in Iowa, it also provides an opportunity to buy and sell locally.

"It helps people get out there and get camping without all the barriers of being expensive. When people bring it in, it keeps that money local. We're buying that gear from a local person, and then that money stays local, and then we sell it to a local that's going to use it. I'd say 90% of the time, anything that we have in our used gear section is just people from Des Moines," Smitherman said.

## OUTDOOR GEAR SHOPPING LOCATIONS


- **Sierra**  
6306 Mills Civic Parkway, West Des Moines | [www.sierra.com](http://www.sierra.com)
- **REI**  
5901 Mills Civic Parkway, Suite 4100, West Des Moines | [www.rei.com](http://www.rei.com)
- **Active Endeavors**  
4520 University Ave., Suite 130, West Des Moines | [www.activedsm.com](http://www.activedsm.com)
- **Stoked**  
518 E. Grand Ave., Des Moines | [www.stokeddsm.com](http://www.stokeddsm.com)
- **Scheels**  
Jordan Creek Parkway, Building 4000, West Des Moines | [www.scheels.com](http://www.scheels.com)
- **Bass Pro Shops**  
1000 Bass Pro Drive N.W., Altoona | [www.basspro.com](http://www.basspro.com)
- **Fontenelle Supply Co.**  
524 E. Grand Ave., Des Moines | [www.fontenellesupplyco.com](http://www.fontenellesupplyco.com)
- **BW Outdoors**  
513 Elm St., West Des Moines | [www.getbwoutdoors.com](http://www.getbwoutdoors.com)

# Huff Theatre

## TEEN IDOL and DREAM ANALYSIS

Written by William A. Johnson

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# PRIVATE CAMPING

Dick and Judy Cutler opened Cutty's in 1968, and the camping club has undergone several transformations since then. At one point, the campground nearly went bankrupt. Members pooled their money and purchased all the shares to keep it operating. The move made Cutty's member-owned in 1980, and members later adopted bylaws similar to those of a homeowners association.

Marketing Manager Steve Hamilton has been camping at Cutty's since childhood and eventually became a member himself. Today, he works there, giving tours, explaining pricing, managing social media and more.

Those staying at Cutty's tend to favor the glamour camping, or "glamping," experience. The campground is filled with large campers that resemble small homes, some even featuring attached decks.

"The size of the campers, when we used to come, they were much smaller — pop-ups, tents. Now you see campers that have three air conditioners on the top of them and slide-outs and decks that pop out," Hamilton said. "Just the evolution of the campers, going from your family station wagon to these monsters that come out with all the amenities, bathrooms, showers."

Hamilton said campers once relied on compact bathrooms and multipurpose storage spaces.



The camping scene at Cutty's is almost exclusively campers, with the various styles of RVs, pop-ups and campers lining the streets. Photo courtesy of Cutty's

"Now they have big enough bathrooms that a lot of people use their own bathrooms and showers rather than our shower houses," he said.

Hamilton most often sees travel trailers and fifth-wheel campers, although preferences vary. Most visitors come to Cutty's specifically rather than longer journeys to national parks.

Tent camping is allowed, but Hamilton says it is relatively uncommon. Many guests stay for extended periods, giving the campground a small-town atmosphere.

"We have multigenerational members here. I came here with my grandparents. I remember it vividly. Now

I have grandchildren. I want them to remember it. We've got many families that we've turned over their membership to. All of a sudden, the kids got it, and the grandkids. It's interesting when I give someone a tour, and I hear that they used to come here as a child, and they're much older now. I like to hear those stories," Hamilton said.

That sense of community sets Cutty's apart from a traditional state park experience.

"Some people walk, some people ride electric scooters, some people ride bicycles. A lot of people drive golf carts, and you get to know people and develop friendships with them, because you're going to see them



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Cutty's outdoor pool gets filled up with water and campers during the summer months. Photo courtesy of Cutty's

over and over during the year — and the next year, and the next year,” Hamilton said.

About 75% of sites include electricity, water and sewer service. The remaining sites offer water and electricity. Although the campground is open year-round, campers are limited to 14 days in one location before moving to another site.

“That way everybody gets a chance to have the nice sites on the lake or near the pools and things,”

Hamilton said.

Perhaps the biggest difference between Cutty's and a state park is its Fourth of July celebration. There's a parade with golf carts and floats tossing out candy as it winds through the campground before the evening concludes with a fireworks display.

Amenities include disc golf, mini golf, a splash pad, a playground, basketball courts, and indoor and outdoor swimming pools. Family-oriented events such

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as movie nights and hayrack rides are also common.

Smitherman also recommends Hipcamp, an online platform connecting campers with private landowners.

“People can put up their private land for rent, which is really cool. The way Iowa is, there's not a ton of public land, so I like to use Hipcamp. It supports smaller local campgrounds, like micro campgrounds per se, where people are setting up their own land with sites, and then you can rent it directly from them,” Smitherman said. “I found the best people and the best campsites are using Hipcamp, because you not only meet really cool landowners that also like to camp, but you just get a different experience.”

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# STATE PARK CAMPING

For a more traditional camping experience, Iowa's state parks offer abundant natural beauty. We spoke with Jordan Munson, park manager for Pine Lake and Union Grove state parks, about Pine Lake State Park.

Located about 90 minutes north of the Des Moines metro, Pine Lake is celebrating its 100th anniversary, making it one of Iowa's oldest and most beloved state parks. While improvements have been made over the years, the park still retains much of its original charm.

"We have a 76-site campground that offers full hook-up sites, which are electric, water, and sewer, and we have two of those, and then we have electric sites, and those are as advertised, just electric sites," Munson said. "We offer two shower buildings that have restrooms and showers with hot water and then we also have four overnight cabins, so if someone wasn't looking to come and camp, they could come and stay in some of our cabins as well."

Pine Lake offers access to Pine Lake, Upper Pine Lake and the Iowa River.

"A lot of what people are doing is fishing, boating, kayaking, canoeing on the lakes around the river. Families from everywhere around the state just come here and utilize the resources that we offer," Munson said.

Unlike many private campgrounds, Pine Lake



Pine Lake State Park has various campsites for campers or tents. Photo courtesy of Iowa DNR

attracts a mix of tent campers, pop-up campers, travel trailers and RVs.

Activities largely depend on what visitors want to experience.

"We offer about a two-and-a-half-mile bike trail that

runs through the park, and then that connects to some of the other Rails-to-Trails and other bike trails around the area, so we get quite a few people that are out biking those trails, and then also utilizing our hiking trails as well," Munson said.

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The lake at Pine Lake, ready for kayaks, canoes and fishing. Photo courtesy of Iowa DNR



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- **Walnut Woods State Park**  
3155 Walnut Woods Drive, West Des Moines
- **Elk Rock State Park**  
811 146th Ave., Knoxville
- **Lake Ahquabi State Park**  
16510 118th Ave., Indianola

While Pine Lake has its regular visitors, many come specifically to experience the area's natural beauty.

"Get out and explore the park if you're in Pine Lake. Definitely get out and explore our bike trail, along with kayaking or canoeing on the river. It's about a three-hour trip between Steamboat Rock and our river access, and it's a really cool section of the Iowa River that people can use," Munson said.

Munson also recommended Ledges State Park in Boone and Rock Creek State Park in Kellogg. Smitherman cited Whiterock Conservancy as one of his favorite destinations.

Camping reservations at Iowa state parks are required, but the process is designed to be convenient.

"State parks in Iowa are 100% reservable campgrounds with same-day reservations. So, if you



Paddling can be found at various state parks and lakes, with this trip happening in Madison County. Photo by Collin Smitherman

wake up one day and you want to go camping, you can look up online or call the call center and get real-time availability for a campsite, make the reservation that morning, and then show up and camp at the park that day," Munson said.

According to the Iowa Department of Natural

Resources, Iowa offers more than 4,300 campsites for overnight visitors. Options range from primitive hike-in sites and cabins to full-hookup sites with water, sewer and electrical service. Reserve at [IowaStateParks.reserveamerica.com](http://IowaStateParks.reserveamerica.com) or call the call center at 1-877-427-2757. ■

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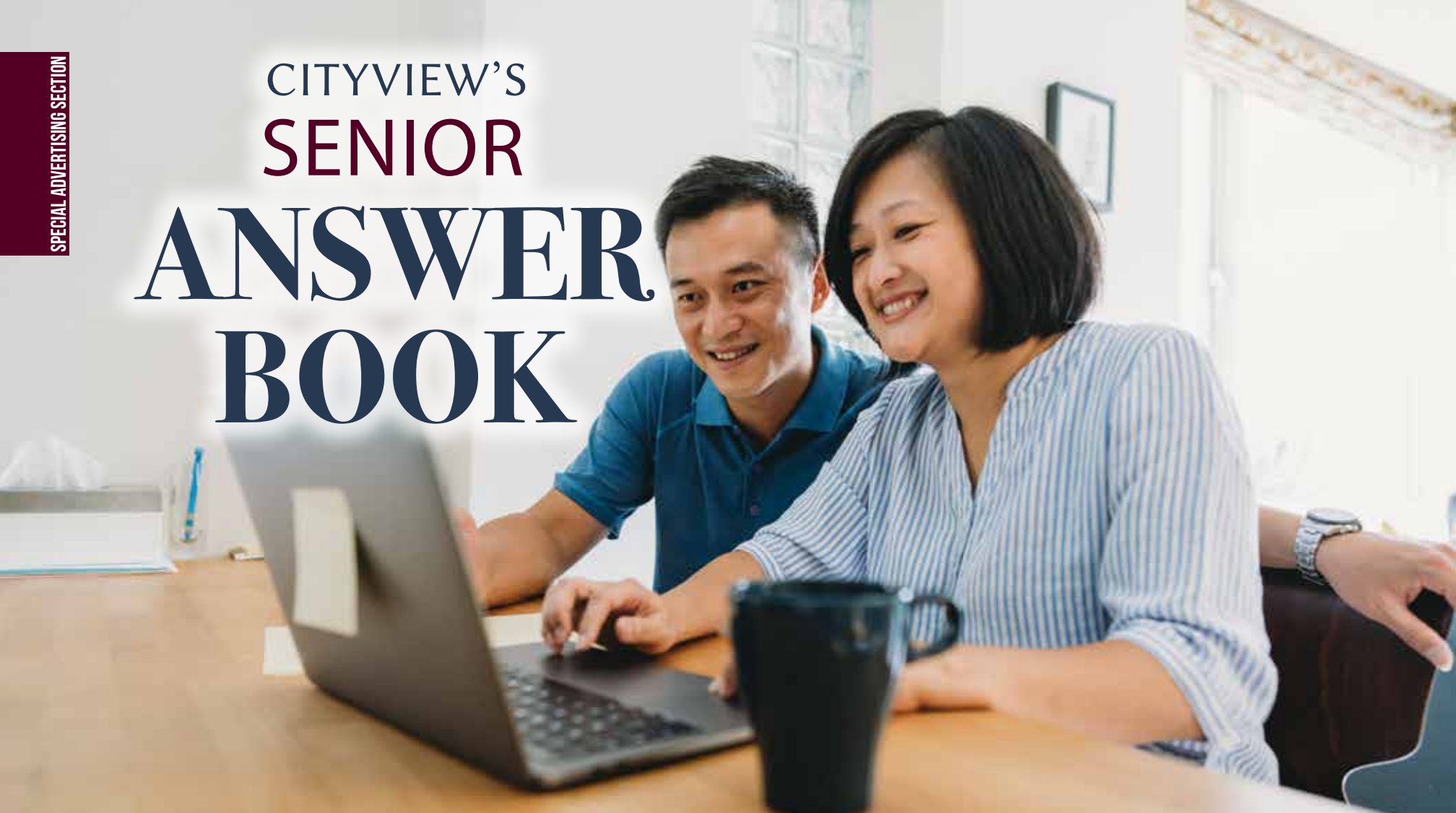
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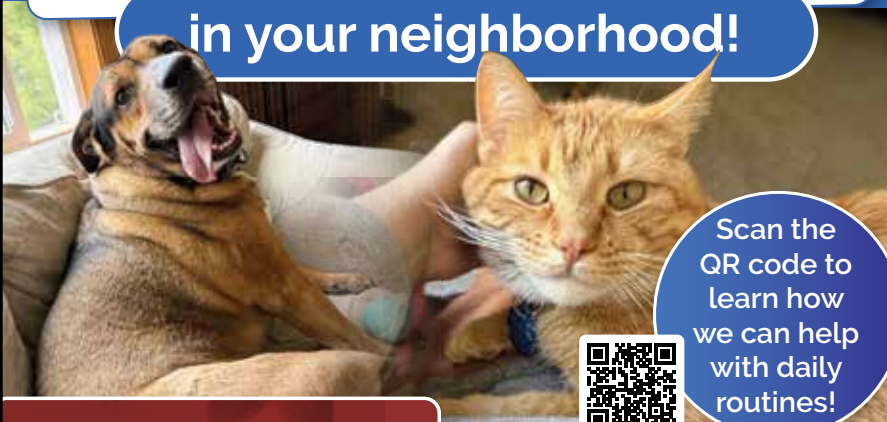
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Pet care services can cover a surprising range of needs — regular dog walks, litter box cleaning, feeding routines and wellness check-ins. For older adults managing mobility or chronic pain, these services can be a practical and affordable way to maintain a pet-friendly home without the daily physical demands. The bond stays intact; the burden doesn't have to. ■

Information provided by Erik Donner, owner, Pet Care Club, 515-981-3443, [www.thepetcare.club](http://www.thepetcare.club)

# Exploring alternatives to knee replacement

Emerging treatment targets inflammation associated with osteoarthritis and chronic joint pain.

For many older adults, chronic knee pain can significantly impact quality of life. Activities that were once simple — walking the dog, playing with grandchildren, golfing, gardening or even climbing stairs — can become difficult and painful. While physical therapy, medications, injections and surgery are common treatment options, many people are surprised to learn there may be another option available for certain patients suffering from knee osteoarthritis.

One emerging treatment gaining attention is called Genicular Artery Embolization, or GAE. GAE is a minimally invasive, image-guided procedure performed by specially trained vascular specialists. Rather than replacing the knee joint, the procedure focuses on reducing inflammation that contributes to chronic knee pain and other joint pain.

Research has shown that osteoarthritis is not simply a “wear and tear” condition. In many cases, inflammation within and around the joint plays a major role in pain and reduced function. GAE works by targeting tiny blood vessels that contribute to this inflammatory process. Using advanced imaging technology, physicians guide a small catheter through the blood vessels and deliver microscopic particles to reduce abnormal blood flow associated with inflammation.

One reason GAE has generated interest is that it does not require major surgery, large incisions or lengthy hospital stays. Most patients return home the same day and resume normal activities relatively quickly. While GAE is not intended to replace knee replacement surgery for everyone, it may be an option for individuals who are not ready for surgery, wish to delay surgery or continue to experience symptoms despite conservative treatments or previous joint replacement.

As with any medical procedure, candidacy is important. Factors such as the severity of arthritis, overall health, previous treatments and individual goals all play a role in determining whether GAE may be appropriate. A thorough evaluation by qualified health care professionals is essential.

The field of minimally invasive medicine continues to evolve, providing new possibilities for people seeking alternatives to traditional treatment approaches. For those living with chronic knee pain, learning about all available options can be an important step toward making informed health care decisions.

If knee pain has limited your ability to enjoy daily activities, it may be worthwhile to discuss emerging treatment options with your health care provider and determine whether you could be a candidate for newer approaches such as Genicular Artery Embolization. ■

Information provided by Dr. Ole J. Olson, D.C., Board Certified in Neuropathy and Chronic Pain Syndromes, Asuta Health, 210 N.E. Delaware Ave., Suite 110, Ankeny, www.AsutaHealth.org.

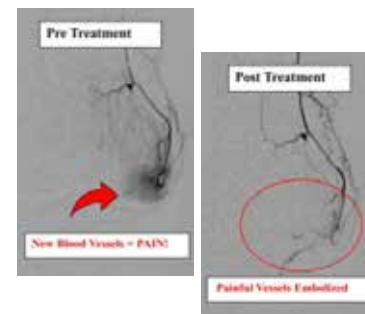


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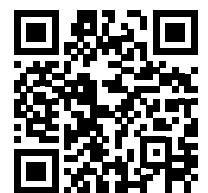
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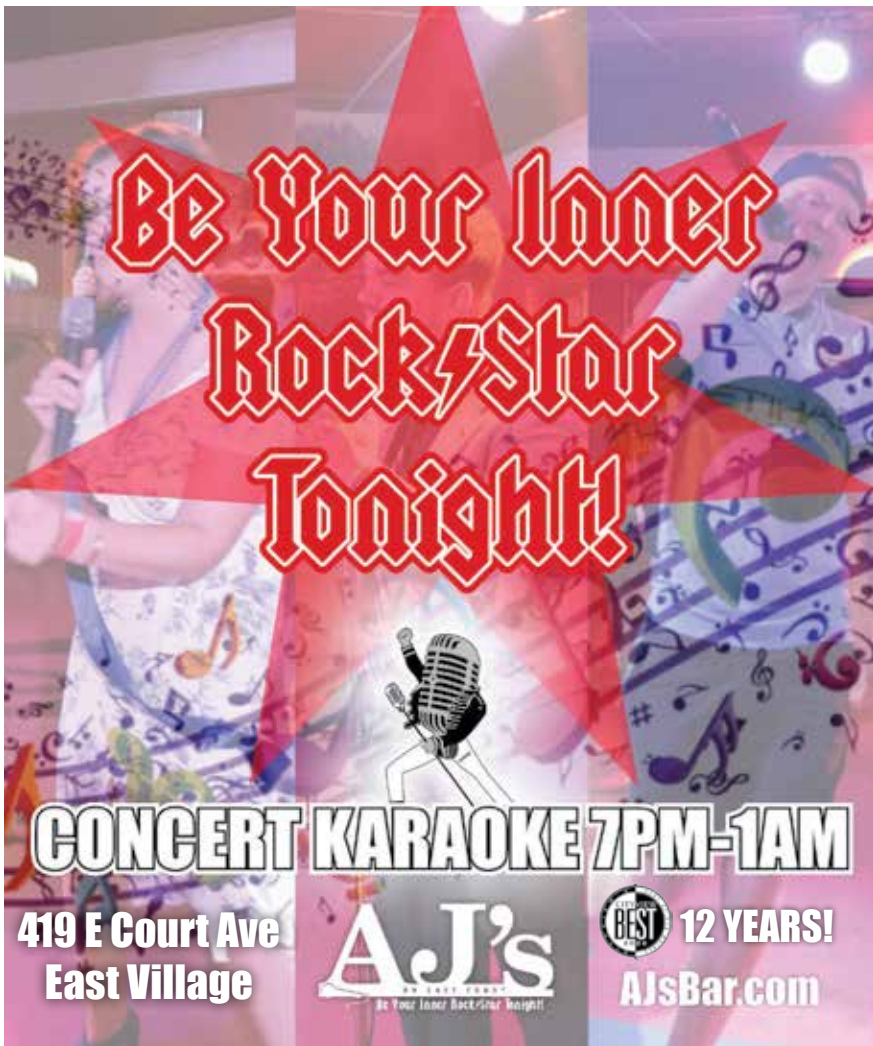
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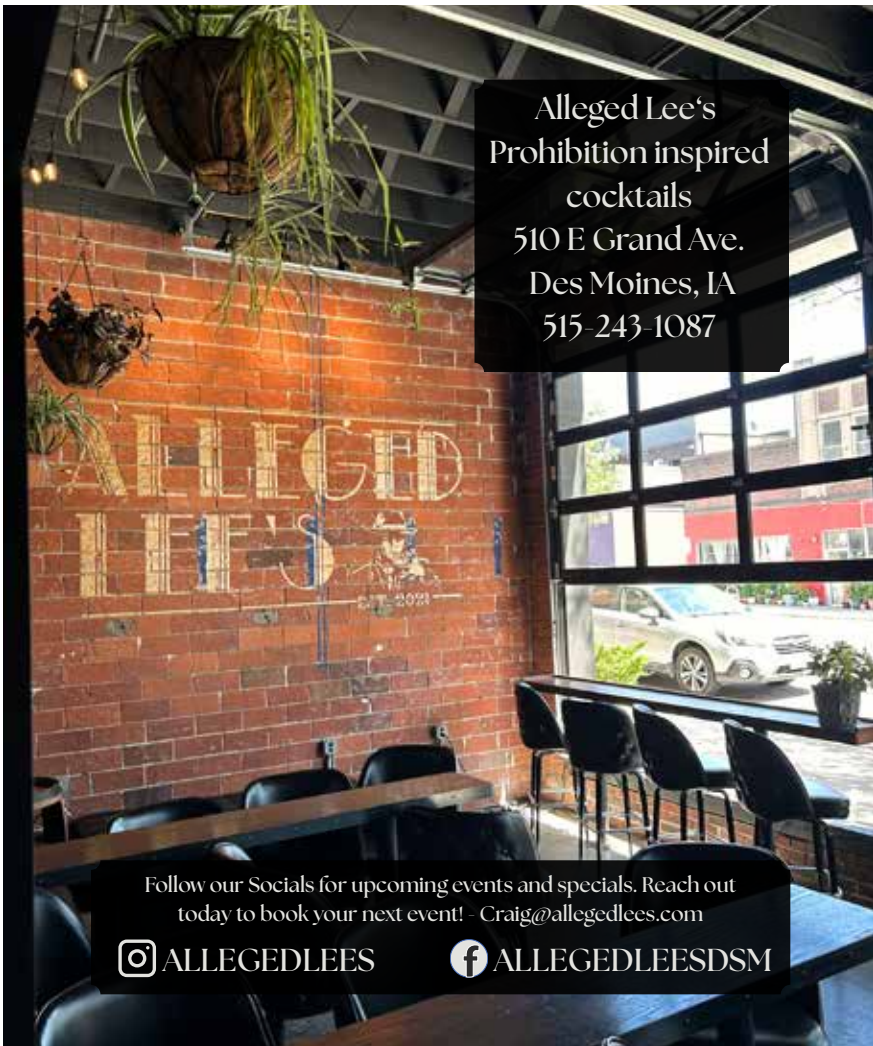
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EAT & DRINK

## The Soggy Frog brings waterfront vibes to Saylorville

New rooftop bar offers lake views, frozen drinks, casual fare and live music at Saylorville Marina.

BY JACKIE WILSON

When choosing a summertime watering hole in Iowa, one question rises to the top: Does it have a patio?

At The Soggy Frog, the answer is yes.

In fact, it offers more than one patio. With three distinct seating areas and stunning water views from nearly every angle, the venue feels more like a waterfront tiki bar in Florida than a marina destination in the Midwest.

The Soggy Frog is the new rooftop bar at Saylorville Marina, which opened in mid-May. The location has been home to more than a half-dozen bar concepts over the years, and each eventually folded. What may help this one stay afloat is its ownership. The Soggy Frog is a venture of Dark Side of the Spoon, the hospitality group behind several popular establishments, including Zeke's Rooftop, Wellman's Pub and Shotgun Betty's.

Getting there is part of the fun. Visitors can arrive by boat, car or bicycle. After parking, guests head down a steep walkway to discover three seating options: the rooftop bar, a lower-level deck and an outdoor patio.

The lower level overlooks Saylorville Lake and features garage doors that can be lowered when inclement weather rolls in. Some patrons gather along the dock railing with drinks in hand while watching boats come and go. Because the structure floats on the water, guests may notice a slight movement underfoot as waves pass.

The decor embraces a nautical theme with fish, water-inspired accents and beach-style touches throughout. The venue's logo — a tongue-wagging frog sporting a sailor hat — appears on T-shirts, koozies and other merchandise.

And what is a tiki-inspired destination without

frozen drinks?

The menu features dock drinks such as margaritas, piña coladas, Miami Vices and a rotating "seasonal catch" for \$12. Guests can add a floater shot to any drink for an additional \$4. Dockside Sips, priced from \$9 to \$12, include the Mile Long Island and the Saylorville Fresca, made with Bulleit Rye, Fresca, syrup, bitters, orange and cherry.

A full bar on both levels serves beer, seltzers, wine and other refreshing options. A mobile bar cart on the outdoor patio is a convenient stop for guests seeking a quick can of beer or seltzer.

Food options are equally approachable. Starters include pretzels with beer cheese for \$13. Those craving fair-style fare can order walking tacos for \$10. Bowl offerings include the Surf and Turf Bowl with blackened shrimp, grilled chicken, rice, corn, salsa and avocado for \$18. Flatbreads are priced at \$17, while handhelds include smash burgers and the Codfather, a cod sandwich served with a side for \$17. A "hoppy" kids menu offers several selections for \$10, and ice cream treats are available for \$4. No menu item exceeds \$18.

Live music is featured on the outdoor patio most Friday and Saturday evenings beginning at 5 or 6 p.m. Sunday Funday performances start at 1 p.m.

The Soggy Frog is a seasonal operation, so when colder weather arrives, the frog goes into hibernation. Until then, it is one of the metro's most unique places to enjoy a drink, a meal and a waterfront sunset. ■

Jackie Wilson has written hundreds of articles for CITYVIEW and the Iowa Living magazines. She has covered many ordinary people living extraordinary lives.



# BOOK REVIEWS

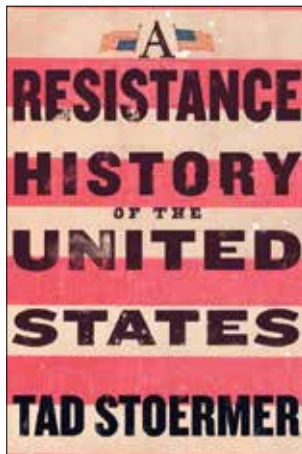
COURTESY OF BEAVERDALE BOOKS

## 'A Resistance History of the United States'

American history is, like all history, a giant tangled knot of perspectives and fables and winner's lies. The story that's been told is always angled in such a way to achieve a certain effect a reader has to work to uncover. So the recent spate of new perspectives on the stories we all think we know — and the revelation of all those we have never been told — has been eye-opening.

Stoermer, a historian with a gift for accessible storytelling, walks through key moments in U.S. history that were shaped by organized, deliberate resistance. The pre-Civil War sections are particularly rich, doing the important work of dismantling the mythology that is calcified around that era and made it so weirdly difficult to hold politicians accountable when they echo those same patterns. The Salem Witch Trials, the Metacomet War and so many other moments of resistance reverberate down throughout time, right to this moment. It is both haunting and fascinating in equal measure.

This is history as both mirror and toolkit. It is a call to action dressed up as a history book, and it works beautifully as both. Engaging, clear-eyed and arriving at exactly the right time. Don't miss it. ■ — *Review by Julie Goodrich*



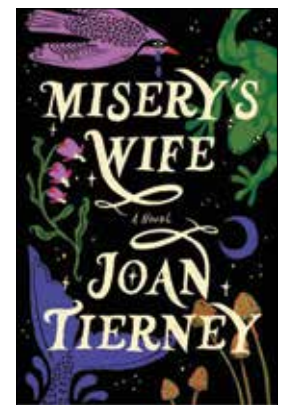
By Tad Stoermer  
6/2/26  
368 pages  
\$19.99  
Steerforth Press

## 'Misery's Wife'

The world needs more fairytales. Or, perhaps, we need to dive deeper to uncover the vast riches that are the fables of cultures outside our own. There is a mountain of untapped stories just waiting for their moment, and the inevitable animated movie. Enter this delightfully charming retelling of a Portuguese fairy tale that fits right in with the classics.

Elizane is on a mission from a toad to save her favorite sister from the King of Misery. Along the way, she will need the help of her other sisters, new friends Luck and Jinx, and a whimsical assortment of other characters in this lush and twisted wonderland. This is the dreamy adventure of a quest but also a magical story with a deep, philosophical heart, like all the best ancient tales.

There is so much love here — familial love, friendship, romance, and the love of a community that is so intrinsically human. So much of modern life is isolated and individual, but stories like this shine a light on what a lot of us are missing. I was charmed from the first page. This is the kind of story to get lost in. ■ — *Review by Julie Goodrich*



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## Tacos Mariana's — an international romance

There is nothing to notice from the outside that would hint about what lies inside.

EAT & DRINK



### TACOS MARIANA

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Thirty years old this year, Tacos Mariana's has no peer in Des Moines. Not as a taqueria. Not as what some call "a hidden gem" and others label a "hole in the wall." Certainly not as a vehicle for the transportation of expectations.

Mariana Gomez' taqueria occupies a little more than 2,000 square feet of real estate that few notice driving by on busy University Avenue. Its building also includes a convenience store in what was deemed a food dessert before Simon and Don Cotran took over a defunct city-subsidized supermarket five blocks to the east and turned it into the booming C Fresh Market.

There is nothing to notice from the outside that would hint about what lies inside. Mariana's is an oasis of food "romance," in the James Joyce sense of that word — that which transports one to another time or place. That other place is the Siera Madre mountain town San Sebastian del Oeste.

That town itself has become a "hidden gem" since its glory days as a gold, silver and lead mining jackpot in the 17th and 18th centuries. Today, it's little known beyond Puerto Vallarta, the coastal boom town about two hours west and a mile downhill, even though the Mexican government has proclaimed it a "Pueblo Magico."

Gomez loves her birthplace and is its unofficial cultural attaché to Iowa. She will tout its charms to anyone who will listen and even recommends two

hotels there. Her sister owns one, and her brother owns the other. Mariana has hospitality in her bloodline. She designed her restaurant's furniture after photos of the "magic town" in high Jalisco. Then she commissioned a wood artisan in Guadalajara to build booths, tables, benches, chairs and wall hangings in colors as bright and glorious as her memories.

The menu offerings are as carefully crafted as the décor. Tacos are the namesake stars. Gomez insists on La Michoacana tortillas. Her birria is made with beef, and she says it's her most popular order with Mexican customers along with steak, lomo (tenderloin) and weekend pozole.

Guacamole is non-Latinos' favorite order, and she makes hers with cucumbers, in addition to usual ingredients. Her beans are not like those at other local Mexican restaurants. She only uses yellow beans (Mayocoba or Canary) and does not re fry them.

"They cost a lot more, but they are the best." They just simmer in "chicken juice" into a delicious stew of beans and bean paste. Her homemade salsas are also good as any.

Mariana makes tacos and other corn masa treats with stomach and intestines but says she will never understand gringo customers' love of tongue. She uses rib meat and leg meat for pork dishes like carnitas and pastor.

Mariana's customers are as multi-dimensional as her

recipes. Neighborhood characters mix with a devoted band of professionals including restaurateurs, doctors, nurses and executives. Customers loaned her the money needed to buy her property because "no bank would even talk to a single Mexican mom."

Retired advertising guru Abe Goldstein dines here with his wife every Sunday. He says Mariana offers great vegetarian options and the "best guacamole ever."

"When I was representing the Iowa State Fair, I would take all the interns, college kids, to Mariana's. None had ever been there before, even the ones who grew up in Des Moines. They all loved it. I also used to order the exact same dishes at a Mexican place on Court Avenue, and they always cost about triple the same order here."

Gomez recently added daily specials that take her bargains to a new level. Fabulous tacos cost just \$2 some days, even less on Mondays, Wednesdays and Thursdays during World Cup. She also initiated a second kind of gorditas, from the fryer instead of the grill. The restaurant sells beer, including Micheladas — "beer Bloody Marys" in shrimp lined mugs. A once daunting parking lot is now paved. ■

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



## Nash Roe at St. Kilda's Collective

Over non-alcoholic beverages, (Roe is 17), pastries and avocado toast, we talked about his precocious career path.

Nash Roe is the producer, director, runner and star of Local TV 5's "Iowa Food Diary." His show is about to debut its season three. He is also a 17 year old, yet to begin his senior year at Valley High School. We asked him to lunch but had to wait until after the new season shooting wrapped and he took his final exams.

He chose St. Kilda's Collective, a Valley Junction café in an historic car dealership. The restaurant's owner Alex Hall was wrapping up his business in Des Moines and moving to England. The place may or may not be open when this interview is published.

Roe said he particularly likes St. Kilda's coffee drinks, including an Australian iced coffee with multiple shots of espresso. "Also, I like their consistent freshness. And the avocado toast is made with charred corn. No one else does that to my knowledge. It's a great touch."

**Over non-alcoholic beverages, (Roe is 17), pastries and avocado toast, we talked about his precocious career path. How did those final exams go?**

"I feel really good about them, especially chemistry and algebra."

**Those subjects are not what one thinks of as relative to filmmaking and journalism. Does Roe have a back-up plan career wise?**

"I want to stay open minded, but I am comfortable with the idea of a career in television and film. I might move more into production aspects rather than on-camera work. If I have a back-up plan, it's probably in the culinary field. I am really impressed with DMACC's Iowa Culinary Institute. I could see myself going that way."

**It's hard sometimes to remember that Roe still has his entire senior year of high school ahead of him.**

"Actually, I am taking early graduation. I am very lucky to be in the Valley High School district. I was able to take high school classes in middle school and to take full loads of classes rather than study hall. I only had one study hall. That way I could take 17 credits when 13 was all that were needed to stay on schedule to graduate."

**That must take a lot of family support? Talk a little about them.**

"My dad is a surgeon. Mom was a health professional, too, but has transitioned into more of a full-time mom. My little sister London is awesome. She's a high school freshman, but she is starting on

Valley's varsity softball team. She and I share a lot of food attitudes. We both like to keep open minded about new taste experiences. The only things neither of us can stand are bread sticks with cheese dip and stuffed crust pizza."

**How does a kid break into an industry that is heavily geared to the slow development of talent? Most on-camera talents grow gradually into the job.**

"I started with cooking. I made videos of baking for social media. Then I entered child baking competitions, like the Iowa State Fair. I also started judging 'kid's division' baking contests when I was 13. Mom was supportive, so I got more involved — with the back scene as well as with baking. Mom encouraged me apply to the Food Network, and I was accepted in their kids' baking competition."

**How far did Roe go in that competition?**

"I made it to round seven out of 10, so I had a good run. Cream puffs messed me up. But I did get invited back to Food Network for two special shows. One was a holiday show. We made reindeer cakes."

**What kind of equipment did he start with to make videos?**

"I didn't even have a video camera. I had an old Canon still camera that had a video feature. But I learned editing, coloring and synching sound and video on it."

**How did that develop into his own TV show?**

"Mom helped me a lot. One thing I became aware of in California (at Food Network) was how little Californians know about Iowa and our food traditions. I wanted to spread some appreciation for the Iowa food scene, to showcase my roots. I had met some really talented people at the Iowa State Fair. That's probably when I came up with the idea for Iowa Food Diary. I put together an episode and pitched it to Iowa PBS. They weren't interested, so I pitched it to Local TV 5 and they were."

**And now, he's working on season three. That alone is pretty amazing. Of all pilots pitched to network TV, less than one out of four are greenlit for production. Of those, only 30% make it to season two and of those, less than half ever have a season three, meaning Nash beat 17 to 1 odds against him.**

"Sometimes it's hard for me to look back at the first season. The production values are so much better now, mainly because I have a videographer who does all the hard technical stuff like synching and coloring. All I do now is cut and paste editing."



**What will season three bring?**

"We go to Canteen in the Alley in Ottumwa. It's a great diner with homemade pies and old fashioned, loose meat sandwiches. That's an Iowa thing for sure. The diner was so popular that the city changed plans and built a parking garage over and around it."

"Then we go to Cajun Belle in Johnston, a southeast Texas place in northwest Des Moines. And Milk & Honey, a real farm to table restaurant in an historic building on the town square in Harlan. It used to be a Ford dealership, I think. They do lots of bakery items and cakes, so I love them."

"We went to Smitty's tenderloin in south Des Moines. They are iconic. Pork tenderloins and loose meat sandwiches are uniquely Iowan. Then Reyes Tamales in Pleasant Hill. I thought tamales were pretty much all the same before I met him. And Arcadia in Polk City; they are another farm to table restaurant. Then we have a show with Mae Thompson of Parinda Cupcakes. She's a cake designer from Thailand. That show was fun for me. I got to get my hands dirty."

"Finally, we hope to air our last show of the season at the end of the Iowa State Fair. I will be out there finding stories. It might be tough to get it done in time."

We aren't betting against Nash. ■

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



# THE LIVING TREASURES OF IOWA FOOD

2026 CHOICE inductees



Aposto

By Jim Duncan

Inspired by Japan's Living National Treasures, the idea for CITYVIEW's CHOICE awards originated 12 years ago. The Japanese program honors "preservers of important intangible cultural properties." In the years after World War II, anxiety arose in Japan that their unique cultural traditions — noh, kabuki, origami, kumi, sumo, teapot ceramics, noodle making — might be swamped by the conquering Western culture. By honoring revered exemplars of those arts, they preserved them and made them important to a new generation.

Our intention at CITYVIEW was to do something similar for Iowa's venerable, enduring food treasures. That evolved into a hall of fame for people and institutions that bestow a singular quality and identity on our city and state. CITYVIEW's Hall of Iowa Culinary Excellence (CHOICE) awards began focusing on venerability — enduring traditions and pioneers.



# THE MASTER CLASS OF 2026

## Mariana Gomez, Tacos Mariana's

Thirty years old this year, Mariana Gomez's taqueria is an homage to San Sebastian del Oeste, her birthplace and officially proclaimed a "Pueblo Magico" by the Mexican federal government. Its furniture was handcrafted and painted by Tapatia artists from Gomez's photos. It is the most identifiable restaurant décor in Des Moines, gay and welcoming as the owner/chef herself.

Gomez says she loves Des Moines and particularly how much it has changed since she first came here, from the downtown bustle of Los Angeles Old Town barrio.

"When I first came here, there were only two hours a day of Spanish language radio in the whole state." Now there are 10 stations including several 24/7 outlets.

Gomez has evolved with Iowa. Her downpayment to finance her purchase of the taqueria property, including a convenience store next door, came from customers because "no bank would even talk to a single Mexican-American mother." Mariana proudly paid it off before full term and watched four children grow up, including two daughters who graduated college and are now health professionals.

Nurses and doctors are customers now as are top restaurateurs, CEOs, and neighborhood characters. After paying off her debt, Gomez was able to pave her once daunting parking lot.



Mariana Gomez

FEATURE STORY

In that spirit, our charter members in 2015 all had histories dating back to at least the mid-20th century. Several topped more than a century of service to Iowa. The following classes of honorable food pioneers were younger, but all blazed new trails that influenced the culinary scene of Iowa in unique ways. Since then, we have expanded upon both categories of excellence.

Another impetus for the honors was that by 2014 we already noticed that most of the Iowa food media were primarily infatuated with "the next new thing." We feared enduring excellence might become obscured. For instance, Iowa's only James Beard Award semifinalists for best chef in the Midwest over the five-year period prior to this year were both from restaurants that have now closed down.

This year's honorees are carriers of torches lit by kindred spirits who died or retired from the business before we started our honor. Mariana Gomez is the senior active trailblazer of Latino women entrepreneurs like Margarita Viggers (El Patio) and Rosa Martinez (La Rosa). That group of jefe chef-owners is growing rapidly now. Tony Lemmo is a nephew of charter member Noah Lacona and son of Lu Ann and Big Tony Lemmo of Lemmo's. Waterfront is branching out after 42 years with a third generation of seafood pioneers, one of whom last year opened Masao, the most creative new restaurant here since Harbinger opened. Wong's Chopsticks represents a once formidable bunch of traditional Chinese restaurants that have become a rare breed in 21st century Iowa. Those are dwindling away in a century of all you can eat buffets and Southeast Asian cafes.

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
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Marianna's

Mariana prefers the kitchen to the front of the house. To my ken, the only other great restaurateur who did that in Des Moines was CHOICE member Jerry Talerico.

“I talk too much. That’s why the place runs better with me in the kitchen,” she explains.

Tacos Mariana’s is best known for: guacamole, which includes cucumbers; pozole, which takes more than 24 hours to make; bargain prices, which are taken to a recent new level with daily specials for as little as \$1.50; amazing “not-refried” yellow beans; and, of course, Gomez’s tacos, which can be made with 12 meat and four vegetarian options.

When not singing praises to San Sebastian del Oeste, Mariana will tout mariachis, local Mexican dance troupes and her eclectic customers. She is Des Moines’ unofficial ambassador of assimilation.

**Tony Lemmo, Aposto at di Scala house**

Tony Lemmo opened his first café in the wind-grieved Metro Market in 2003. He says that was the most frightening time in his life.

“I was 23 years old, and I was committing to \$787 a month rent. I was scared to death.” Metro Market was a brilliant incubator of food services but was doomed by its limitations. It could only be open on weekends.

Lemmo saw the writing on the wall and started looking for a more permanent place to grow. He discovered a dilapidated house in Sherman Hill, a few blocks east on Woodland. It had previously housed Le Chat Noir. The 1880 mansion was possessed by rodents, spiders and vagrants.

“It was definitely a money pit, but no one else wanted to buy it. My mom was so worried that she begged the owner not to sell it to me.”

Lemmo’s fully restored place, now called Aposto, is 21 now. Tony and the property took a long, strange trip between then and now. The restaurant, previously known as Café di Scala, vaulted Lemmo into several other ventures — Frank’s at Drake, Gusto, Guapo, The Breakfast Club, Anna Dolce and Gusto Pizza Bar. All that is over for him. Aposto is his sole business now.

“I love it. It took 20 years of sweat equity to get here, but now I am back to no partners and no mortgages — just the therapy of my gardens and one restaurant. No



Tony Lemmo

one told me how long it takes for a restaurant to find its identity. It takes time, even for Thomas Keller. Now I feel like the director of a big Broadway show. Aposto runs organically. (Host) Leslie Boyd, we all call her Mama, is the star, and it runs around her. I have been fortunate to have a lot of great chefs run through the kitchen, (Phil Shires, Hal Jasa, Corey Wendell and Joe McConville among them). But it all starts in the garden and the cellar.”

No other restaurant in the area employs a garden so successfully on its menu. Lemmo was raving about a new kind of finocchio the last time we saw him. The tiny flower buds burst with an intense flavor that would soon accent salad dressing, pasta and desserts.

The cellar houses the pasta maker. The restaurant has always specialized in 100% scratch-made pasta. Lemmo’s cavatelli are so good that even CHOICE member George Formaro quit making his own and just buys Tony’s for Centro.

Lemmo has given the lie to his mom’s worries. Lou Ann was his original host till her early death a decade ago. Diners now enjoy Victorian splendor from the inlaid bar to the porch furniture. The business is swift, even on nights the restaurant is closed, with private parties.

The menu changes frequently because of the garden, which is thoroughly Calabrese. Where else does one find alternate gazpachos, Caesar salad with heirloom tomatoes, carrot risotto, finocchio and minted gremolata?



Waterfront oysters

## Ted and Shawn Hanke, Waterfront Seafood Restaurant

Seafood is expensive compared to other proteins. The only way to compete for customers is to cut out the middlemen. But middlemen have the upper hand.

Independent seafood market-restaurants are a dying species in America. Giant distributors, a metastasizing species, have scared most independents from opening over the last 50 years. When Joe Tess Place closed in Omaha in 2023, Waterfront became the oldest such place between Chicago and Denver.

“Watermen and fishermen are dying out for the same reasons as independent Iowa farmers. Those jobs used to be inherited within families. But the last few generations of children didn’t want that life,” Waterfront chief Shawn Hanke explained.

He began this business in 1983, running his pickup truck to Louisiana docks to buy shrimp directly off the boats, then bringing them back to sell at an Amoco gas station on 22nd Street in West Des Moines.

“My dad Ted thought the west side needed a place like East Side Fish Market.



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I was 28 then, so I had the energy to run back and forth to the Gulf. But that wasn't sustainable, so I rented storage space and got into wholesaling. Then I opened here in Clocktower Square in 1984."

Shawn distinguished Waterfront from other fish markets by including table dining. He opened with 14 seats and 10 employees. Today, the West Des Moines store alone has 247 seats, plus another 50 in a party room — and 72 full-time employees. Some of them have been there since day one. An Ankeny store opened in 2008.

Waterfront offers Des Moines fresh fish that one finds nowhere else in Iowa. French chef David Baruthio shows up for John Dory. Others for sablefish, an Asian delicacy, soft shell crabs, King salmon, blue fin tuna, flounder, Chesapeake rock fish, parrot fish and Alaskan halibut, etc.

Waterfront also operates the oldest existing sushi bar in central Iowa. They still buy most seafood



Waterfront in West Des Moines

directly from old connections who fish it. Almost from the beginning, Waterfront has featured catfish nights on Monday, rotating specials on Wednesdays and half-priced oysters and shrimp cocktails on Saturday afternoons.

Shawn's son Nick opened the distinctly inventive Japanese/French café Masao last year. Its connection to Waterfront sources made it possible.

## Ling Wong, Wong's Chopsticks

Wong's Chopsticks was a gift to central Iowa from Chinese Los Angeles. When it opened in its Johnston strip mall 20 years ago, it provided suburban Des Moines a new taste sensation — West Coast Cantonese excellence.

At the time, Chinese food in suburban Iowa had been redefined by Hy-Vee. Their excursion behind the great culinary wall had created a new type of Chinese-American cuisine calibrated to appeal to Iowa taste buds. They did that, in our mind, by preparing every dish with lots of high fructose corn syrup. Thus, all dishes tasted much the same as that synthetic flavor overwhelmed all others.

Des Moines had a tradition of a purer form of Chinese cuisine that dominated dining here before Italian restaurants began popping up around WWII time. They introduced mysterious botanicals, which local newspapers described as forms of opium. In reality, they were bean sprouts. They also often ran into legal problems because prostitutes hung out there, especially the infamous "Duncan sisters."

One owner was given a choice by a local judge, move to Chicago or go to jail. Most of those original Chinese cafés had disappeared by the time Hy-Vee added their version of Chinese. Mandarin Noodle House, Kwong Tung and Great China were among the

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last, and they are gone now, too.

Wong's Chopsticks does not resemble Hy-Vee Chinese at all. Ling Wong, her daughter and their extended family are turning out something special in Iowa. Recipes are what one expects in California cities and suburbs with large Chinese populations. Things like chicken feet, fermented black beans sauces, jook and guy fun are safe here. Water chestnuts, bok choy, black mushrooms and bamboo shoots all taste fresh.

Wong's version of the Hong Kong classic walnut shrimp is unique — no mayo. Her sizzling rice soup takes four steps just to prepare the crunchy rice. Dim sum Saturdays and Sundays have become a prerequisite for calling oneself a local foodie. It can be packed, particularly on Sundays, but people are willing to wait for a table. The fried dumplings and sticky rice in lotus leaves are divine samplings of the world's oldest cuisine. All forms of dumpling are prepared here.

Remember, Chinese cuisine was sophisticated 500 years before the French evolved beyond surviving on acorn gruel. Wong's Chopsticks is our last toehold on its high culinary mountain. It is peerless, too. ■



Chopsticks Buddha



FEATURE STORY

Chopsticks dumplings

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- Graziano Brothers
- George the Chili King
- Crouse Café, Indianola
- In't Veld's Meat Market, Pella bologna
- Maytag Blue Cheese
- The Iowa State Fair
- Anderson Erickson Dairy
- B&B Grocery, Meat & Deli



## ADDITIONAL PAST HONOREES:

- Chuck's, and their pizza oven
- Practical Farmers of Iowa
- Seed Savers Exchange, Diana Ott Whealy
- Fareway
- Loose meat sandwiches
- Robert Anderson
- Pam and Harry Bookey
- Scott Carlson
- Larry Cleverley
- Don and Simon Cotran
- Kathy and Herb Eckhouse
- George Formaro
- Lisa and Mike LaValle
- Ralph Compiano
- Tasty Tacos
- Mrs. Clark's
- Full Court Press
- Bruce Gerleman
- Shad Kirton
- Darren Warth
- Moe Cason
- Eric Ziebold
- Wayne, Hing and Mei Wong
- Better Homes and Gardens New Cookbook
- Pioneer Hi Bred
- The Acorn and Sibley squashes
- The Talerico-Compiano steak de Burgo
- Jerry Talerico
- Mama Lacona's
- Bianchi's Hilltop Restaurant
- Dave Stark, Barbara's Champagne Cake
- Paul Willis
- Centro
- World Food Prize
- Steve and Joe Logsdon
- Christopher's
- Dive bars of Des Moines
- Ted's and Jim's Coney Island
- Hy-Vee
- Ron Pearson
- Baratta's
- Marie Hainline
- Susie Q, Mason City
- Northwestern Steak House, Mason City
- Canteen Lunch in the Alley, Ottumwa
- Lighthouse Inn, Cedar Rapids
- Archie's Waeside, Lemars
- Hamburg Inn #2, Iowa City
- Miles Inn, Sioux City
- Jaarsma Bakery, Pella
- Leopold Center, Fred Kirschenmann
- Bob Johnson, B Bop's
- Roberta Green and Howard Ahmanson, Hotel Pattee
- Mike Wedeking, Flying Mango
- Don Lamberti – Casey's General Store
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## Back to the toy box — and worth the trip

Against all expectations, “Toy Story 5” delivers fresh emotion, genuine laughs and a meaningful new chapter for Pixar’s beloved franchise.

When Pixar announced “Toy Story 5,” split feelings could be felt amongst the Millennials who grew up alongside Andy’s plastic companions. “Toy Story 3” (2010) was perfect. A tear-jerking trilogy closer that made adults ugly cry more than their kids. We watched as our beloved friends accepted the inevitable over an incinerator and a final childhood goodbye. While 2019’s “Toy Story 4” seemed unnecessary, it still managed to deliver a delightfully emotional send-off for Woody. Going into the theater, the burning question wasn’t whether Pixar COULD find value in their favorite toys-turned-collectables, but whether they SHOULD justify reopening the toy box a fifth time.

The answer is a surprising, but welcome, yes. Directed by Andrew Stanton and McKenna Harris, “Toy Story 5” is better than it has any right to be. It introduces fresh ideas that still feel in-universe with the toy gang. While it doesn’t reach the heights of the original 1995 film or its groundbreaking sequels, it remains a charmingly thoughtful return to a beloved world.

This story marks the beginning of a distinct new chapter for the franchise. While audiences might be weary at first to find Woody’s (Tom Hanks) presence underwhelming, keeping him in a supporting role alongside Buzz Lightyear (Tim Allen) proves to be the right narrative decision. Woody’s arc concluded in the fourth film; his and Buzz’s purpose here is to step back and elevate someone else.

After all, this is Jessie’s movie, and Joan Cusack delivers an incredibly emotional, anchoring voice performance that carries the weight of the film.

As the new leader of Bonnie’s room, Jessie strives to be the best toy she can be amid Bonnie’s (Scarlett Spears) changing habits. The emotional core of the movie lands squarely on Jessie’s shoulders, punctuated by a deeply moving sequence where she rediscovers her poignant history with her previous owner, Emily.

The central conflict of “Toy Story 5” provides a fantastic existential crisis for the gang. This time, the characters aren’t competing with a rival toy or an eccentric collector; they are fighting against technology itself. Bonnie is struggling to make friends in real life, so, feeling the isolation, she finds comfort in a sleek new tablet device named Lilypad (Greta Lee).

This sets up a very relevant, real-world discussion about how digital media can replace imaginative play with virtual screens that offer more than you even could imagine with none of the creative effort. For audiences who grew up with the franchise since 1995, the film acts as a mirror to modern society. It targets the anxieties of contemporary



### “Toy Story 5”

PG | 1h 42m

Directors: McKenna Harris, Andrew Stanton

Writers: Andrew Stanton, McKenna Harris

Stars: Tom Hanks, Tim Allen, Joan Cusack

parenting, highlighting how easily a screen offers parents a moment’s peace when it is placed in a child’s hands. Unfortunately, it also highlights how easy it is to forget screen time limits and the parents’ responsibility to set these to keep their child safe. Thankfully, the script avoids a purely binary “technology is evil” stance, exploring instead how digital and physical connectivity can coexist to form genuine friendships.

To counter Lilypad’s disruptive ideas, the movie introduces “The Double-A Team” — a hilarious gang of antiquated, battery-powered gadgets relegated to the margins. Conan O’Brien shines as SmartyPants, a toilet-training device who can only count to two, alongside Atlas (Craig Robinson), a highly questionable GPS, and Snappy (Shelby Rabara) a pixelated digital camera. Their inclusion yields brilliant comedic beats, including an internet-connected army of 50 defective Buzz Lightyears stuck in “demo mode,” allowing Tim Allen to unleash peak chaotic humor.

Visually, Pixar remains a gold standard of technical craftsmanship. The animation contrasts the matte, scuffed plastic of the classic toys with the modern, reflective glass of modern tablets. Whether the characters are navigating a suburban neighborhood, a barn outside the city, or a metaphorical deserted island, the production design is entirely immersive. Small details — like the fibers on Jessie’s yarn hair or the intricate wear on Woody’s new outfit — are stunning.

Ultimately, “Toy Story 5” is a worthy, highly entertaining installment that proves this franchise can still grow meaningfully alongside its multi-generational audience. While it lacks the devastating emotional climax of the third film, Jessie will leave you reaching for the tissues on more than one occasion. The message that “... we can’t control when they’ll leave us. What matters is that we were there to help them along the way” will leave some parents fighting back tears. ■

### “Gail Daughtry and the Celebrity Sex Pass”

R | 1 hour, 33 minutes

Director: David Wain

Writers: David Wain,

Ken Marino

Stars: Zoey Deutch,

Jon Hamm, John

Slattery

Small-town hairdresser Gail Daughtry (Zoey Deutch) is engaged to her devoted high school sweetheart, Tom (Michael Cassidy). Her life takes a turn when a trip to a book signing leads to Tom meeting — and sleeping — with his “celebrity pass.” Reeling from the betrayal, Gail impulsively joins her friend Otto (Miles Gutierrez-Riley) on a trip to Los Angeles, where a psychic convinces Gail that the only way to save her marriage is to “even the scales” with her own celebrity pass: Jon Hamm. Thus begins an epic journey through Tinseltown as Gail and Otto join forces with a talent agency assistant, a paparazzo, and actor John Slattery, all in the search for Hamm. Along the way, they collide with celebrities and are hunted by a group of Italian assassins as they get ever closer to finding the elusive star.



### “Jackass: Best & Last”

R | 1 hour, 32 minutes

Director: Jeff Tremaine

Writers: Jeff Tremaine,

Davon Wilson, Rachel

Wolfson

Stars: Johnny Knoxville,

Steve-O, Chris Pontius

Johnny Knoxville and the gang return for one final fling at the big screen. Featuring all-new stunts and stupidity along with the greatest hits and biggest laughs from the past, “Jackass: Best & Last” is a joyously raucous celebration of all the mischievous camaraderie that you’ve come to love and expect from these idiots over the past 25 years. So, grab your dumb little buddies, raise your glasses, and come experience the cinematic event that promises to be the last time you’ll ever laugh this hard at someone else’s expense.



### “The Odyssey”

R | 2 hours, 52 minutes

Director: Christopher

Nolan

Writer: Christopher

Nolan, Homer

Stars: Matt Damon,

Tom Holland, Anne Hathaway

“Why ‘The Odyssey?’ ‘The Odyssey’ is a story that has fascinated generation after generation for 3,000 years,” Director Christopher Nolan said at this year’s CinemaCon in Las Vegas. “It’s not a story. It’s THE story.” Based on Homer’s legendary saga, “The Odyssey” follows the Greek hero Odysseus, played by Matt Damon, as he travels the long and winding path back home after the Trojan War. ■



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## New leadership in local theatres

Des Moines Community Playhouse welcomes a new executive director as local theater organizations prepare for their next act.

While the shows receive most of the spotlight, it is the producing teams behind the productions that make the magic happen. Two major leadership transitions recently took place in central Iowa's performing arts community.

Monica Holt assumed the role of president and CEO of Des Moines Performing Arts. She previously served as senior vice president of artistic planning at The John F. Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts. This column looks forward to sharing an interview with her in the near future.

The Des Moines Community Playhouse welcomed Chelsea Haaland as its new executive director. The Playhouse's legacy, more than twice as long as that of Des Moines Performing Arts, began in 1919 when members of the Iowa Press and Authors Club founded the organization. Originally known as "The Little Theatre," it is now one of the six oldest continuously operating community theaters in the United States. Those founders must surely be watching from their celestial box seats with a well-deserved sense of pride.

### Meet Executive Director Chelsea Haaland

**CS: Share your journey into performing arts.**

**CH:** This is a big question that has so many answers. My first venture into performance was when I was in second grade. I was a shy, only child and my parents thought being part of a play might help develop my confidence. Boy, did that theatre bug bite. In middle school, my parents thought I might enjoy seeing a professional show. In middle school, my parents thought I might enjoy seeing a professional show. We are an Asian-American family; my parents had been excitedly following the development of a musical that uniquely featured primarily Asian performers that was touring to our Civic Center — and so, "Miss Saigon" became the first Broadway touring show I attended.

My first show with the Des Moines Playhouse was "Charlie and the Chocolate Factory" in 2000. When I was at UNI, I was lucky to fill a theatre education internship more than once under the leadership of both Carol Taylor and Kathy Pingel. I earned a degree in theatre and communication education.

Every kid deserves a chance to be part of a community as the unique person that they are; every story deserves to be told. I firmly believe theatre



Chelsea Haaland, the new executive director at the Des Moines Community Playhouse. Photo credit: Des Moines Community Playhouse marketing

provides the best pathway for its participants and patrons to learn more about themselves and others, and that has always been of interest to me.

**CS: Compare your perspective before and after securing the executive director position.**

**CH:** As I engaged in the interview process, I spoke about my belief that all humans want to do the best they can, and will do so under the right conditions — and how important this is because the Playhouse is not just the building, but the people. In an imaginative space like the Playhouse, we want all people — the staff, volunteers, students and patrons — to have the resources and safety nets that promote risk-taking, creativity and innovation in every experience. I believe the most effective leaders know how to purposefully orchestrate those conditions and then step aside to allow the art to bloom.

**CS: What do you see as the Des Moines Community Playhouse's unique role in Iowa?**

**CH:** The Des Moines Community Playhouse has more than a century of arts excellence in its history, and we are so fortunate to employ a staff with great talent and passion. As the central Iowa arts scene continues to grow, so has its theater scene. Local artists may share their talents with many venues. As we look forward to the next 100 years, I am excited to work with the Playhouse team to define the unique identity

### BARE BOARDS CHATTER

**Des Moines Performing Arts** — Storytime Under the Green Umbrella. Free family event. July 8 and July 22.

**Des Moines Playhouse** — "Legally Blonde!" July 10-26.

**Des Moines Performing Arts** — Polyglot Theatre's "Bees." Free family event at parks across the Des Moines metro. July 14 (10:30 a.m. and 12:30 p.m.); July 15 (6 p.m.); July 16 (11 a.m. and 6 p.m.); July 17 (4:30 p.m. and 7 p.m.).

**Iowa Stage Theatre Company** — Shakespeare on the Lawn: "Measure for Measure." Salisbury House and Gardens. July 15-19.

**Carousel Theatre of Indianola** — "The Marvelous Wonderettes." July 17-26.

**CAP Theatre** — "Twelfth Night." July 23-26.

**Des Moines Young Artists' Theatre** — "Rent: School Edition." July 24 - Aug. 2.

we would like to manifest in our theater community to ensure that we are a "can't miss it!" destination for local thespians and patrons alike. I am eager to get to work.

### Salisbury and Shakespeare: An Irresistible Summer Duet

Those who have attended this midsummer classical tradition eagerly anticipate another stellar Shakespeare production from Iowa Stage Theatre Company. For those making their first foray into the sublime setting of an Elizabethan castle backdrop among stately oaks and rose gardens, they will discover one of Iowa's premier performance experiences.

In partnership with Salisbury House and Gardens, Iowa Stage has built a destination-worthy reputation through its annual homage to the Bard. With a mastery of sound, lighting and staging, the company is set for this year's production of "Measure for Measure." This dark comedy explores mercy and justice, with plenty of disguises and deceptions along the way. ■

John Busbee produces The Culture Buzz, a weekly arts and culture radio show on [www.kfm.org](http://www.kfm.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.



## XOLEX chases a dream

After overcoming a debilitating autoimmune disease, Alexis “Lex” Curran found her purpose in music, faith and bringing people together through song.

Ten years ago, country-rock singer Alexis “Lex” Curran was confined to a wheelchair because of an autoimmune disease. After prayers and treatments, she recovered. Struggling with what she describes as survivor’s guilt, Curran questioned why she had been given a second chance. Her answer, she believes, was to share her gift of singing and her faith in God.

Today, the Chariton native lives in Nashville, writes music and performs throughout the Midwest with her band, XOLEX. The stage name comes from the way she often signed her name: XO, Lex.

Growing up in small-town Iowa, sports took priority over music. After college, however, Curran experienced what she describes as an identity crisis and felt uncertain about her musical direction. She moved to Atlanta, where she sang R&B and country music and wrote songs for rap artists.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, she went into a studio to record a song she had written. When the session ended, the producer asked how long she had been singing and recording.

“I admitted, it’s my first time. He said, ‘You’re playing me.’ I told him I was honest,” she recalls. “He said I was meant to be a singer.”

Believing Nashville offered the best opportunity to advance her career, Curran moved there in 2023. While she performs regularly at venues throughout the Midwest, she rarely plays in Nashville.

“Nashville doesn’t pay, and I don’t want to play for free,” she explains. “I came here to write and do studio sessions.”

All of her music videos have been filmed in Iowa, and many of her songs draw inspiration from small-town life. One example is her song “Daisy Dukes.”

“I just think music is healing,” Lex reflects. “I feel like I write about what a lot of people go through.”

Performing comes naturally to her. Still, she admitted feeling anxious before her first ticketed show, unsure whether anyone would attend.

“I was nervous,” she recalls. “I was seriously taken aback by the amount of people that showed up for me and the amount of love that they gave and the energy of the audience.”

Since then, audiences have responded enthusiastically wherever she performs. Curran has appeared at the Napa Valley Festival and recently performed at the CMA Fest Whiskey Jam in Nashville. She believes each show helps her grow as an artist.

“Vocally I think every show just surprises the hell out of me, because I just keep getting better and better,” she reflects. “It’s honestly a gift from God.”

For emerging musicians, however, success requires more than talent. Curran says one of the biggest challenges is building a social media presence while continuing to create music.

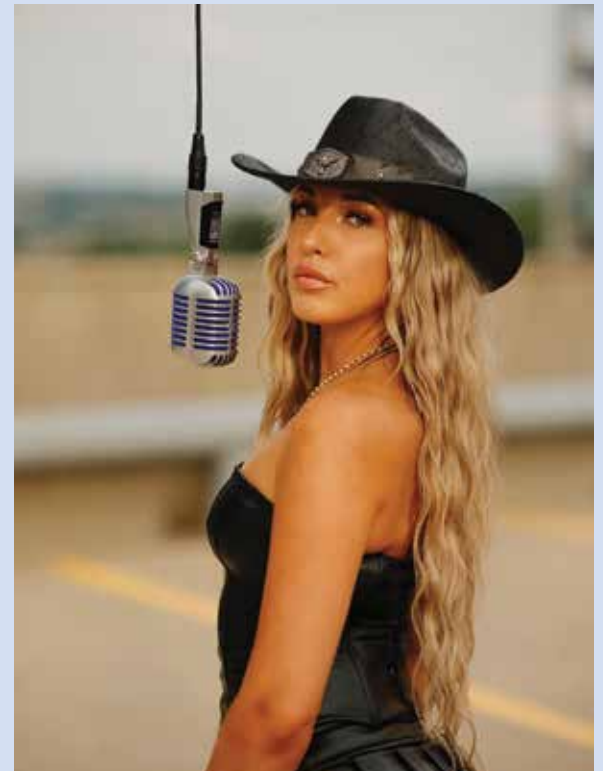
“You can’t just eat yourself up by saying, I’m not this or that, or look at what everyone else is doing,” she reflects. “I’m an artist, I’m not an influencer. Nowadays you have to be both. You have to be an influencer and an artist in order to even be seen.”

Despite the challenges, connecting with listeners remains her motivation.

“It’s not about getting famous and making money. Yeah, the money part is nice, but no one really wants to just be famous,” she says. “I want to reach others.”

When asked to describe herself, Curran keeps it simple.

“I think there is a bigger meaning to all of this, because it wouldn’t make any other sense,” she says. “To answer your question, I’m a girl who’s trying to sing and for my songs to bring people together. That’s just all I’m trying to do. I’m a girl from a small town, chasing a



dream.”

One dream has already become reality. Curran will perform as an opening act at an upcoming concert at the Iowa State Fair Grandstand.

“Looking back, I never would have thought I’d be performing in front of 20,000 people, but here I am,” she reflects. “I’m doing it with hard work and dedication. I want to give people hope to be bigger than what they are, because you can be.”

XOLEX will perform a free concert at the Waukee Arts Festival on July 17. The band also will open for BigXthaPlug at the Iowa State Fair Grandstand on Aug. 22 and has additional performances scheduled throughout the Des Moines metro area. ■

## SOUND ADVICE

BY JACKIE WILSON

July is jumping with free outdoor concerts across the metro. Bring your folding chairs, blankets and bug spray for a warm evening with fellow music lovers.

Jazz in July is located in front of the historic Hoyt Sherman Place. Each Tuesday in July offers free jazz on the EMC Plaza Stage. On July 7, **Nola Jazz with Abbie Sawyer**; July 21 is **Carson Parker Quartet with Avi Gedler**. For more info, visit hoytsherman.org.

Rendezvous on Riverview, located at Riverview Park in Des Moines, is in full swing this summer. Bring the kiddos, as there is a playground next to the music. July 17, **Mike Moody and the Outlaws**; July 24, **Stark Raving Madge** and July 31,

### Jesse & The Medicine Men.

Nights in the Heights is a laid-back concert series at Colby Park in Windsor Heights on Tuesdays. Ride your bikes or bring the kids, as there is a trail and playground nearby. July 14 is **RetroSpect**, July 21, **The Dick Danger Band** and July 28, **Sons of Gladys Kravitz**. ■

Jackie Wilson has written hundreds of articles for CITYVIEW and the Iowa Living magazines. She has covered many ordinary people living extraordinary lives.



## ‘While money doesn’t talk, it swears’



Parranderos Latino Combo

A red rectangular abstract by Mark Rothko sold for \$85.8 million at spring auction in New York. The seller of the 1957 work, “Brown and Blacks in Reds,” was the estate of art dealer Robert Mnuchin, who paid \$6.7 million for the work in 2003. That price was described as “art-becomes-reality” moment after French playwright Yazmina Reza’s comedy of the absurd “Art” won the best play triple crown of awards — the Moliere in France, The Olivier in the UK and The Tony in the U.S.

Crystal Bridges Museum of American Art, Alice Walton’s 200,000-square-foot museum in Bentonville, Arkansas, is expanding after just 15 years. Walton, 76, introduced architect Moshe Safdie, 87, and their 50-year plan to create a world-class art museum. The hard-to-get-to museum originally hoped to attract 250,000 annual visitors. Four times that many have been coming, even during COVID.

The new addition resembles the concrete, cedar and copper original. It opened last month, adding 114,000 square feet of new galleries, education and programming space. The architect installed skylights with an elaborate mechanism that funnels sunlight from different directions to create what he described as “a perfect, balanced white light.” Walton said that she and Safdie will be the only designers of their 50-year plan, suggesting that the world’s richest woman and her friend will live another 50 years.

### New heights for Hamlet

Basketball’s 7-foot 5-inch “All Universe” phenom Victor Wembanyama and his older sister Eve, also a basketball star in Europe, spent the day before game three of the NBA finals in Gramercy Park, one of just two world’s richest woman and her friend private parks in New York City, sketching a statue of Edwin Booth, the legendary 19th-century Shakespearean actor, as Hamlet. What can’t this guy do?

### July touts

Des Moines-based international band Parranderos Latino Combo will release a new production July 31 with a performance and dance party at Wooly’s in the East Village. The record is a collection of original salsa compositions that have been updated with new vocals, piano and trumpet tracks from current members. The songs were edited and remixed by Carlos Velazquez at Playbach Studio in Puerto Rico.

Founding member and lead singer Fernando Aveiga explained: “This album is for our fans that love salsa and includes our most streamed song ‘MaryJane & Mihaela’ on vinyl for the first time. We’ve had DJs around the world asking for the song on vinyl, their preferred format. The song has over 2 million streams on YouTube from fans based in Colombia.”

Bronx-based photographer Elle Pérez 2025 series “La Despedida (the world is always ending, the world is always again beginning)” is a series of photographs

taken in two gardens: Pérez’s grandfather’s backyard in Puerto Rico, and Claude Monet’s home in Giverny, France. Through Sept. 20 at Des Moines Art Center.

In “Topographies: Mapping Being and Belonging,” mapping serves as a metaphor for the ways artists draw meaning from their surroundings: how they transform our understanding of both the physical world and the societal forces that shape the places we inhabit. Through Sept. 28 at Des Moines Art Center. Gallery talk on July 19, 1:30 p.m.

America’s 250th birthday party gets more respect in Siouxland where “Pasture to Present,” at Sioux City Art Museum is inspired by Grant Wood’s 1926 “Corn Room” murals. The exhibition explores evolving relationships between American art, rural landscapes and the idealized vision of Midwestern life. A second section of the exhibition includes contemporary art that reinterprets agricultural themes. In pairing Wood’s original work with contemporary reflections on rural life, this exhibition considers the ongoing importance of rural America in the nation’s cultural landscape.

Olson-Larsen Gallery’s annual Sumer Landscapes show plays through July. Artists include Audrey Brown, Joshua Cunningham, Barbara Fedeler, Allison and Jonathan Metzger, John P. Moench, and Joseph Theroux. Through July. ■

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



# IOWA ARTIST



Kelly, Diane and Kendall Kunzler of Kunzler Studios will display their artwork at the Waukee Arts Festival.

## Creativity runs deep at Kunzler Studios

Parents Diane and Mike Kunzler, along with their children Kelly and Kendall, have turned a lifelong passion for art into a thriving family business and creative community.

BY JACKIE WILSON

Every family member brings unique strengths, talents and quirks to the table. For one family of artists, creating together has become a shared passion while still leaving room for each person to explore individual artistic pursuits.

Kunzler Studios is a family endeavor led by parents Diane and Mike Kunzler and their adult children, Kelly and Kendall.

The family currently operates two studios, including one at Mainframe Studios. Their Valley Junction studio offers a hands-on experience with retail sales, pottery classes and studio space for other artists.

The family creates a mix of pottery, ceramics, paintings and drawings. Their ceramics are featured in several local businesses, including the Palms Restaurant and Des Moines Mercantile.

This year, Kunzler Studios is the featured artist for the Waukee Arts Festival, which takes place July 17-18 at Centennial Park in Waukee. The family has participated in the festival since its inception, with each member winning various best-of awards.

The Kunzlers were raised in an artistic household. Diane was an art instructor for 38 years, and Mike is also an artist.

“The kids grew up around art. At night, everyone was drawing instead of playing or watching basketball,” Diane says.

Kelly knew he wanted to be an artist when he was in second grade. Both Kelly and Kendall attended Graceland University, where they often took the same art classes because they are only a year and a half apart in age.

“They used to call us Thing 1 and Thing 2,” Kendall recalls.

The pair works cohesively together, even sharing



tips and constructive criticism.

“Having an older brother in art, he was frank about critiques. It’s been super helpful as an artist. We bounce ideas off of each other all the time,” Kendall explains.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, the studio’s pottery classes took off. Today, the family rents space to 45 artists, recognizing that kilns and other pottery equipment can be costly.

“We didn’t have a formal plan. We knew there was a community of artists who needed a place to develop artistically,” Kendall says.

Kendall and Mike also formed The Least of These Foundation, which provides therapeutic art experiences and workshops for people with physical, cognitive or mental health challenges, as well as low-income and high-risk populations and those in hospice care.

Within the family business, each member brings different strengths. Kendall is known as the organized one. Diane says everyone “stay in their own lanes.”

### WAUKEE ARTS FESTIVAL

Centennial Park, Waukee

July 17-18

For more information, visit the Facebook page [Waukee Area Arts Council Org](https://www.facebook.com/WaukeeAreaArtsCouncilOrg) or [www.waukeeartsfestival.org](http://www.waukeeartsfestival.org).

Kelly says the family shares a strong commitment to the business.

“We’ve got enough skin in the game. We don’t fight much. We are all accountable if things need to be done,” he explains.

All agree that art provides a deep sense of satisfaction when creative ideas come to life.

“I feel accomplished,” Kelly says. “There’s a deep innate need to do it. It’s a part that needs to get out.”

Diane enjoys the problem-solving aspect of creating art.

“When recreating a piece, it’s a constant challenge that’s both frustrating and rewarding. Once you solve it and come to a resolution, nothing feels better. It’s risky, and you’re putting yourself out there,” she says. “It takes courage to be an artist and not compromise values.”

Diane recently retired and says she is busier than ever. Reflecting on the experience of working alongside her family, she says, “I feel lucky. Not many adults get to spend time with their grown adults kids.” ■

Jackie Wilson has written hundreds of articles for CITYVIEW and the Iowa Living magazines. She has covered many ordinary people living extraordinary lives.



# JOE'S NEIGHBORHOOD

BY JOE WEEG

## Cold plunges and daughters

You'll be happy to know it is possible to get eight stuffed dogs into an old Toyota van with no air conditioning on a hot summer day.

"Dad, you'll love the sauna. And then we'll do the cold plunge."

She smiles at me and nods up and down waiting for me to mirror her.

Yup, that's how you talk to your ancient dad: slow with lots of nodding and guidance.

And, if you didn't know, a "cold plunge" is exactly that — a dunk in frigid water. Now doesn't that sell itself?

So, "no" to the cold plunge.

My 36-year-old daughter and I have a complicated relationship. When she was 4 years old, she wanted a gigantic stuffed dog. I told her she didn't have enough space in her bed to keep a gigantic stuffed dog. So Lucy the giant stuffed dog came to stay. Go figure.

My daughter was 8 years old and wanted to take her stuffed dogs — 45 of them — on the family vacation. We couldn't bring 45 stuffed dogs, three kids, five bikes, two kayaks, six suitcases and a fed-up wife in a single car on vacation. There was no room for stuffed dogs. Surprisingly, folks, you'll be happy to know it is possible to get eight stuffed dogs into an old Toyota van with no air conditioning on a hot summer day. Easy peasy.

My daughter was 12 and wanted a real dog. You guessed it. I said no for all the right reasons — and, believe it or not, we soon had Mickey, a 130-pound lab, as the newest member of our family.

See what I mean?

So, in preparation for the cold plunge, I waded into the sea near my daughter's home in Ireland. It is cold — not as cold as a cold plunge (50 to 59 degrees), but cold. I am pretty much alone in the water except for two young boys who are leaping over the waves, laughing uproariously, and swimming underwater like sleek minnows. I blame joy for making them impervious to the cold.

Not me. First, I am more of a whale than a minnow. And, second, I have a slippery grasp on joy while freezing. As a result, I don't go into the water much past my ankles. Brrrrrr. This is crazy. Who does a cold plunge?

Well, cold plunges are certainly the craze. Even here in Des Moines, there are multiple opportunities to go to clubs that provide cold plunges among all their offerings. Or you can even go to a pop-up sauna with a cold plunge at Water Works Park. And, look — you can buy your own cold-plunge container from Target.

My goodness, what happened to the popularity of the beanbag chair?

Although, I do love the promos: "sleep deeper," "feel clearer," "have more energy for everything else." It sounds a little like snake-oil to me. But —

"Research indicates that icy water may have a positive effect on recovery after exercise by reducing inflammation and soreness." This is according to Mayo Clinic. "It also may help build resiliency, restore balance to the nervous system and improve cognitive function and mood."

Are you kidding me?

And the Stoic philosopher Ryan Holiday argues that you really do a cold plunge to tell your body who's in charge. The muscle you are growing, according to Holiday, is a mental muscle. By



jumping into the cold plunge you are saying, "I can do hard things."

Hah! Ms. Gellar, the first-grade teacher I follow on Instagram, has her students start their day by saying "I can do hard things." Great. Although I personally like the next affirmation — "I can make mistakes." A cold plunge sounds like a mistake to me.

Here we are in a sauna overlooking the Irish Sea.

The young woman sitting to my left in this communal sauna says she's always done cold plunges. She loves them. She thinks she will keep on doing them even when she's an old lady in her 60s. I inform her I'm nearly 72. My daughter on the seat across laughs delightedly at me.

When I have sweated all I can sweat, I shower off and walk over to the cold plunge.

My daughter waves encouragingly.

I make it into the cold plunge as far as my waist — perhaps for as long as 5 seconds. I then get out of the water and walk nonchalantly back into the sauna.

"Well, that was nothing," I say to my daughter, as I wipe away a tear caused by the wind.

Here's what I learned from my first dip: Cold plunges must have been the inspiration for Edvard Munch and his painting — "The Scream." It makes total sense.

After again warming up in the sauna, I try round two with the cold plunge. This time the young woman in the sauna is my partner in the adjacent cold plunge. She takes charge.

"Inhale, one two three. Exhale, one two three. That's it. Submerge your head. There you go. Let's do a minute. Inhale, one two three. Exhale, one two three. Perfect."

And we do a minute.

I am shocked to admit — I love it. It is exhilarating. It is thrilling. It is a delight. I'm totally hooked on cold plunges. They are just fun.

And the lesson learned?

Well ... just as the philosopher Ryan Holiday says, by doing the cold plunge I tell my body who's in charge.

And, yup, that would be my daughter. ■



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](http://www.joesneighborhood.com).



## Keeping pets and families together

As president of Pet Project Midwest, Tammy Crall helps struggling pet owners access food, supplies and support so beloved animals can remain at home.

When a co-worker encouraged Tammy Crall to become involved with a fundraising event for Pet Project Midwest, she eagerly agreed. With a passion for animals, she served as vice president and now serves as president of the nonprofit organization. She previously volunteered with other pet rescues in town, but those roles were not the right fit.

“The amount of time other rescues needed didn’t work with my schedule,” she recalls. “Pet Project really spoke to me, plus I can make an actual difference with the pet families.”

Pet Project Midwest is a nonprofit organization founded in 2009. It helps people in need obtain food, services and supplies to keep their pets at home and out of shelters. The organization was originally established as a partnership with Meals on Wheels called AniMeals. When volunteers delivered food to clients, they noticed some people were feeding human food to their pets so the animals would not go hungry.

Pet Project is a 100% volunteer-run organization with active board members who help ensure its services operate smoothly. For many volunteers, the mission is deeply personal.

“The community outreach aspect really spoke to me,” Crall says. “Knowing that something I do can make a big difference for pet owners — and help them avoid the difficult decision of surrendering a pet — is rewarding. I enjoy helping people in the community while also supporting pets and keeping families together.”

As a pet lover, Crall shares her home with two rescue dogs, Whiskey and Porter. When Crall found Porter, the dog had been returned to the shelter several times. She brought Whiskey to meet Porter, and the pair got along immediately. Crall adopted her.

“I think the reason she was probably returned is because she had some unknown food allergies, as we had to take her to the hospital several times,” she explains. “We got her on some special food now, and she hasn’t had any problems in years. We feel like she was meant to be with us.”

The dogs accompany Crall on long trips to enjoy nature. She says pets bring a sense of calm and comfort.

“Pets in general are good for your soul. Their spirits are so pure and they try to cheer you up. They can make a big difference in somebody’s attitude and mental health,” she reflects. “That’s why I think it’s so important to allow people to have pets, even if they’re in situations where it’s hard for them to care for pets.”

Crall recalls helping a woman whose employer unexpectedly closed, leaving her without a job.

“She called in a panic because feeding her Great Dane was expensive, and she wasn’t sure she could afford to care for him,” Crall says. “I told her, ‘Come on in. We’ll take care of you.’ When the woman arrived, she was crying. She said she never had to ask for help before. I told her, ‘That’s what we’re here for.’”

The Pet Project relies on community support to help care for a wide range of animals, including cats, dogs, rabbits, birds and hamsters. The organization accepts donated food and supplies, often items no longer needed after a pet has passed away or products that were never used.

“We accept almost anything pet-related,” Crall explains. “If we can’t find a use



PERSONALITIES

for it, we’ll work with area rescues to make sure it gets into the hands of someone who can.”

For more information about Pet Project Midwest, visit [www.thepetprojectmidwest.org](http://www.thepetprojectmidwest.org). ■

Jackie Wilson has written hundreds of articles for CITYVIEW and the Iowa Living magazines. She has covered many ordinary people living extraordinary lives.



# DES MOINES FORGOTTEN

BY KRISTIAN DAY

## Gary Monte signs off

KFMG station manager leaves behind a legacy of community radio and a commitment to independent music.

In the late 1990s, I discovered the late-night talk show “Coast to Coast,” hosted by Art Bell. It was more personal than watching television because it felt like it was just me and the host. He was filling me in on what was going on around the country in the world of paranormal and extraterrestrial life on this planet.

Then, in the 2010s, I began listening to KCRW out of Los Angeles via its internet stream, with Henry Rollins playing his punk and funk playlists on Sunday afternoons. My days of pursuing music projects were behind me, as filmmaking had become my full-time career. However, radio was still calling.

In 2018, Gary Monte, the station manager at KFMG, convinced owner Ron Sorenson to greenlight “Iowa Basement Tapes,” a show that was slightly off-book compared with the station’s normal programming.

Monte was born in Chicago and spent part of his childhood in Carbondale, Illinois, before his family moved to Postville in northeast Iowa and, eventually, Fairfield. Growing up during the 1970s, he witnessed Fairfield’s transformation as Maharishi University and the transcendental meditation movement arrived in town, bringing both cultural excitement and tension between longtime residents and newcomers. As a teenager, he became fascinated with music and late-night radio, discovering emerging rock acts through stations such as KFMH and developing a lifelong passion for independent music. That passion led him to study radio and television broadcasting at Grand View College in Des Moines. He is one of the few broadcasters of his generation to earn a formal degree in the field.

“KFMH was one of the reasons I got into broadcasting. I listened to programs like ‘The Late Show,’ but it was Mary of the Heartland’s ‘Off the Beaten Track’ that really opened my eyes to Iowa’s underground music scene. Through that show, I discovered bands like House of Large Sizes and realized there was all this incredible music being made right here in Iowa. I remember listening and thinking, ‘This is really cool. I’d like to do this.’”

After college, Monte landed his first professional radio job before eventually joining KFMH in Muscatine, the station that inspired him as a young listener. There, he immersed himself in both music programming and journalism, working alongside award-winning broadcasters while helping champion independent artists from across Iowa. His career later took him through news radio, a brief stint in Hawaii and, ultimately, to KFMG in Des Moines, where he became one of the station’s most recognizable voices and a tireless advocate for Iowa music and community broadcasting.

“Once I got into the journalism portion, I fell in love with it,” Monte said. “Our news director (at KFMH) taught me the ins and outs of broadcasting and journalism. She won more awards than anybody I’d ever seen, and she taught me things I wasn’t aware of. That’s where I got my love of journalism. When something happens in a community, radio can switch gears immediately and tell people what’s happening in real time. That’s something that’s difficult for a lot of other media to do.”

By the early 2000s, Monte had stepped away from broadcasting. After spending time in Hawaii, where he worked on film productions including “Windtalkers” and “Baywatch Nights,” he returned to Iowa and took a job at a local video store. Radio appeared to be behind him until a customer mentioned that KFMG had been revived as a nonprofit community station in Des Moines and was looking



Gary Monte at the KFMG studio.

for volunteers. Intrigued, Monte stopped by the station and signed up for a shift. What began as a volunteer position in a makeshift broom closet studio atop the Hotel Fort Des Moines soon evolved into his final job in radio as KFMG’s station manager.

“Somebody came into the video store where I was working and said, ‘You should go down there and check them out. You’ve got radio experience.’ I went down to volunteer, and that’s how I started here,” he said.

Over the years, Monte hosted several programs, including “The Morning Show,” “The Overnight” and “Sitting with the Blues.” He co-hosted “Iowa Basement Tapes” with me when I conducted in-studio interviews with bands and often chimed in with 2 cents of commentary.

Now, at the end of June 2026, Gary Monte is retiring from radio and moving to Florida. It is not something I was ready for, even though I knew it was coming. His words to me were: “I never thought I’d get this old, dude. I’m going to retire.”

Rumors are circulating that Monte might continue his long-running blues show, “Sitting with the Blues,” by recording in a remote studio at his new Florida home, but nothing has been confirmed.

Radio has a way of making strangers feel like friends, and Gary Monte mastered that better than almost anyone I have known. He gave Iowa musicians a voice, listeners a companion and me the opportunity to build something I never imagined. Some voices fade when the microphone goes silent. Gary Monte’s will not. ■

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



## Painting the sky

From Iowa Cubs games and State Fair spectacles to KISS concerts and a presidential campaign, Kelm Brueschke has spent decades turning explosions into art.

Who doesn't like fireworks? Maybe those with sensitive ears — or most dogs. But, by and large, Americans love a boom followed by a sparkle of light that paints the night sky. There may be no one more familiar with that feeling than Kelm Brueschke.

Brueschke has been in the fireworks business since 1991, but the spark happened when he was much younger when his father took him and his brothers to Sioux City to buy fireworks for the Fourth of July.

"We'd fill our truck full, and we would come home, and we would shoot fireworks in our backyard. That's what got me and my brothers interested in fireworks," Brueschke said.

Fast forward to 1991, when his brother, while looking for a new sales job, attended a fireworks convention in La Crosse, Wisconsin. He met representatives from J&M Displays, who were hiring a sales representative.

"He needed somebody to shoot shows. So, he kept bugging me, and at the time I was working at Principal Financial Group. He was doing the shows at the Iowa State Fair, and I finally said OK, I'll come out and I'll do one," Brueschke said.

That Iowa State Fair show in 1991 was one of the first of thousands of events. A year after that initial show, Brueschke became a lead shooter.

"It was just one of those things where I just got hooked on it. It's a lot different than going to a tent or a building and buying a bunch of fireworks, consumer-grade stuff, and shooting your own stuff. The professional stuff is totally different," Brueschke said.

He says the way fireworks are launched has changed significantly over the years, for the better.

"Most of them were all hand fires, where you're literally carrying and shooting fireworks. Somebody's shooting fireworks 15-20 feet away from you, lighting it with a flare, and they're going up and exploding over the top of you with all the fallout coming down. And I'm carrying a live explosive and reloading the mortars. That alone has been a huge adrenaline rush. Just the smell of the sulfur, and that chest-thumping, because you feel it when everything explodes above you. It's just an amazing feeling," Brueschke said.

In 1993, Brueschke took over the duties for the Iowa Cubs' Friday night fireworks shows. Chances are, if you have attended an Iowa Cubs game, watched from a nearby rooftop on a summer Friday night or parked somewhere to enjoy the display, you have seen Brueschke's work in action.

"I would get done with work at Principal, and I'd



rush down there, get changed, go and load everything up, and get ready for a 7 p.m. start time for the game. I would shoot stuff off the scoreboard when that team took the field during the national anthem, and then every time they hit a home run, and then at the end of the game. If they wanted me, we just shot it up," Brueschke said.

His work extends far beyond the Iowa State Fair and Iowa Cubs games. Brueschke has produced fireworks displays at Iowa State University football games and concerts featuring artists ranging from the Beach Boys and Slipknot to Green Day, Ozzy Osbourne, Metallica and KISS. The KISS concert remains a favorite memory.

"I mean, if you know concerts, and if you're a pyro technician, what show do you want to work on? KISS. Every damn song has got fireworks in it — you know, pyrotechnics. And it's just not pyro, but it's special effects. You got fog, you got cryo-jets, all kinds of different things going on there. It was at Hilton Coliseum in August of 2000," Brueschke said.

Making sure the proper arrangements are in place for all these events is crucial. Brueschke spends months planning many of his shows.

"There's a lot of stuff that goes into design," Brueschke said. "To me, it's artistry. I'm trying to paint a picture in the sky, or I'm trying to deliver what the customer wants to see. That is a big part of what I do — just trying to use creativity and come up with different ideas."

One example is the fireworks show at Prairie

Meadows, which

Brueschke describes as the largest display in the Des Moines area. He said he changed the display to add music and choreography to be more creative.

Brueschke said he has been fortunate to avoid major injuries throughout his decades in the industry with only one minor injury occurring in 2002. He credits that record to his attention to detail and commitment to safety.

His shows have taken him across the country, but perhaps none was more memorable than working on fireworks displays for Al Gore's presidential campaign in 2000.

"They were looking for that photo-op, the media, the picture that we can blast all around the country on the front-page news. They liked what I did, and then they moved on to the next state and called me and took me along, and we just kept going and going and going throughout the whole year," Brueschke said. "I went all the way to the end on election day, and I traveled all across the country with him, especially those last two weeks, just going from city to city, place to place, jumping around and working on the fly. Coming up with the creativity and stuff like that on the go is probably the neatest experience that I ever had." ■

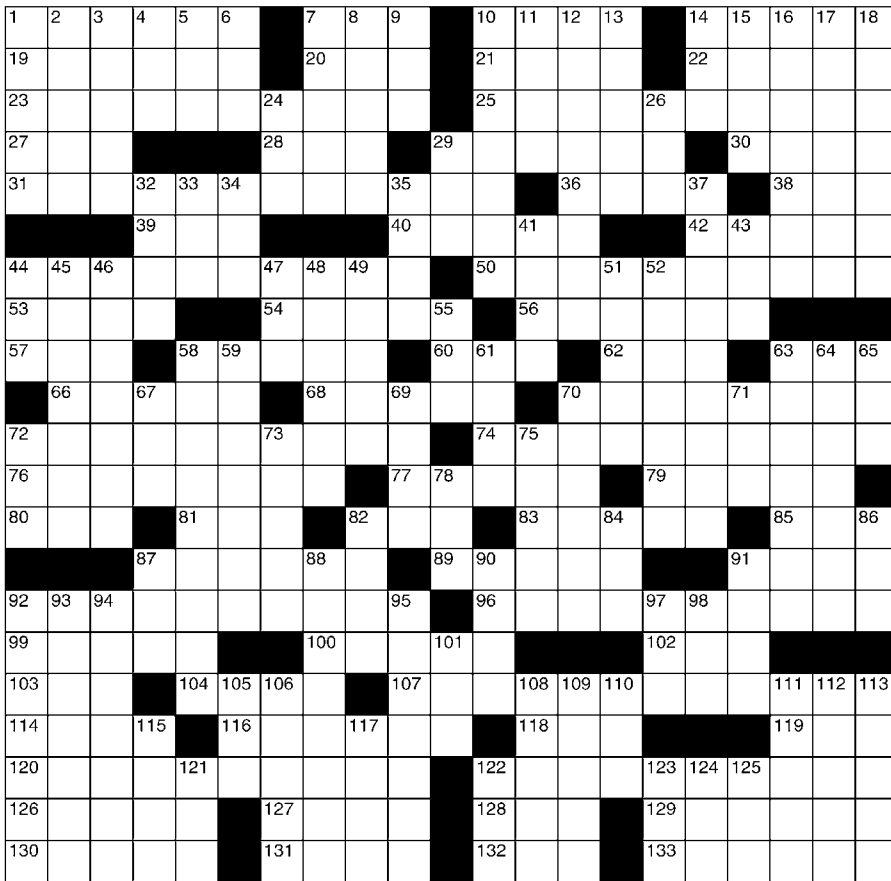
Cyote Williams was born and raised on the south side of Des Moines and writes about entertainment, sports and personalities across the Des Moines metro for CITYVIEW.



# PUZZLES

Find answers at [www.dmcityview.com/the-games](http://www.dmcityview.com/the-games)

## U2



- ACROSS**
- 1 Sleep out in a tent
  - 7 Nutrition std.
  - 10 Fishing throw
  - 14 Alpaca's kin
  - 19 "Moonlight" actress Harris
  - 20 Suffix of element names
  - 21 Analogy words
  - 22 Ancient Athens or Sparta, e.g.
  - 23 Construction vehicles with tilting beds
  - 25 Chooses a finger over a pacifier
  - 27 Before, in verse
  - 28 "The Raven" writer
  - 29 German art songs
  - 30 Qatari capital
  - 31 1920s-'30s American mobster
  - 36 Young lady
  - 38 "Bali --"
  - 39 Slugger Gehrig
  - 40 Plant swelling
  - 42 How food is often fried
  - 44 Title dragon of a '70s kids' show
  - 50 Silly sorts
  - 53 French suffix with jardin
  - 54 Neighbor of Venus
  - 56 Fish-tailed males of myth
  - 57 Hi-tech "appt. book"
  - 58 Radical type
  - 60 1040 org.
  - 62 Suffix with ball or bass
  - 63 Roman 901
  - 66 Northern French river
  - 68 Roofing piece
  - 70 Essential (to)
  - 72 Stiff-bristled bath item
  - 74 Dazed from a heavy blow
  - 76 Incentive
  - 77 GI no-shows
  - 79 Small needle cases
  - 80 Suffix with Canton
  - 81 Turkey Day vegetable
  - 82 GI R&R center
  - 83 Racecar fuel
  - 85 Articulate
  - 87 River crafts
  - 89 "Cool beans!"
  - 91 Get weary
  - 92 No-bake pie base
  - 96 Some heirs' cash sources
  - 99 Concerning kidneys
  - 100 Brooklyn art institute
  - 102 Granola bit
  - 103 Big bush bird
  - 104 Apiece
  - 107 Brand of popcorn with peanuts
  - 114 Part of UTEP
  - 116 Deep and hoarse, as a voice
  - 118 -- de toilette
  - 119 Hugs, in a love letter
  - 120 "Painful to face the reality!"
  - 122 Speechless from shock
  - 126 Very mad
  - 127 Actor Liu of "Shang-Chi and the Legend of the Ten Rings"
  - 128 Mined matter
  - 129 Seance state
  - 130 Stocking fiber
  - 131 Padlock part
  - 132 Oozy gunk
  - 133 Alternatives to Cokes
- DOWN**
- 1 Stopped
  - 2 Pacific island republic
  - 3 Sky stalker
  - 4 Band blaster
  - 5 Sch. in Cambridge
  - 6 According to
  - 7 Big name in photocopiers
  - 8 Blue Devils' sch.
  - 9 Mornings, in brief
  - 10 Inhabitant
  - 11 Tennis great Arthur
  - 12 Seven-card poker variety, e.g.
  - 13 Marisa of film
  - 14 Vinyl albums, in brief
  - 15 Booming
  - 16 Liquor
  - 17 Russia's Gorbachev
  - 18 Tears into
  - 24 Scannable ID in a market
  - 26 "It's cold!"
  - 29 U.K. "Inc."
  - 32 Sleuth's aid
  - 33 Great athletes get elected to it: Abbr.
  - 34 54-Across orbits it
  - 35 Headed out
  - 37 Compared with
  - 41 Daisy relatives, for short
  - 43 Mother Teresa, e.g.
  - 44 Place for a fanny pack
  - 45 Censors, as part of a text
  - 46 With 122-Down, rodent with a barklike cry
  - 47 Ready
  - 48 Ankle bone
  - 49 Eurasian mountains
  - 51 Horse to bust
  - 52 Suffocate
  - 55 Homer, e.g.
  - 58 Not for sale
  - 59 Matt of "Friends"
  - 61 Taken-back auto, for one
  - 63 Village People album with the song "Y.M.C.A."
  - 64 Kind of roof with four sloping sides
  - 65 Sort
  - 67 Addition total
  - 69 "Eureka!" moments
  - 70 As originally placed
  - 71 Minions' leader in "Despicable Me"
  - 72 Fresno-to-L.A. dir.
  - 73 Gossipy tidbit
  - 75 Pertaining to an arm bone
  - 78 Got the gold
  - 82 Gorbachev's fed.
  - 84 How--- (DIY manuals)
  - 86 "Of course!"
  - 87 Nashville awards org.
  - 88 Great elation
  - 90 Rebuke to "Brute"
  - 91 Ballet attire
  - 92 Entered stealthily
  - 93 Wed again
  - 94 Anomalous
  - 95 Affixes to a corkboard, e.g.
  - 97 Cargo weight
  - 98 Relatives, informally
  - 101 Test out
  - 105 Frau's "Alas!"
  - 106 Pulverize
  - 108 Prefix with biology
  - 109 Tiny role
  - 110 Wheel middle
  - 111 Verbs' counterparts
  - 112 Spherical bacteria
  - 113 Improves superficially, with "up"
  - 115 Filmmaker Preminger
  - 117 24/7 sources of \$20 bills
  - 121 Cackling bird
  - 122 See 46-Down
  - 123 Inits. at Indy
  - 124 Half of sei
  - 125 Jay-Z's genre

### SCRAMBLERS

Unscramble the letters within each rectangle to form four ordinary words. Then rearrange the boxed letters to form the mystery word, which will complete the gag!


Irony  
**AIRSET**

Deal  
**DACCOR**

Slice  
**CAVER**

Expand  
**DRAPES**

**TODAY'S WORD**



### SUDOKU

			4	7		1	5	
1	5	7	8	3	6			
			5	9	7			
		6				4	5	1
7	4					6		9
5							7	
	6	5	8		1			2
	7					3	9	
2		3		4	1	5	6	

Place a number in the empty boxes in such a way that each row across, each column down and each small 9-box square contains all of the numbers from one to nine.

**DIFFICULTY:** ♦♦

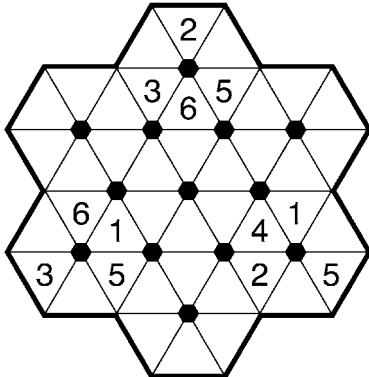
♦ Moderate ♦♦ Challenging  
 ♦♦♦ HOO BOY!

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### SNOWFLAKES

by Japheth Light

There are 13 black hexagons in the puzzle. Place the numbers 1 - 6 around each of them. No number can be repeated in any partial hexagon shape along the border of the puzzle.



**DIFFICULTY:** ♦♦♦♦

♦ Easy ♦♦ Medium ♦♦♦♦ Difficult

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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.

		+		-		=	2	
+			+			-		
	+			+		=	16	
×			+		×			
	+			×		=	18	
=			=		=			
30			17		2			
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9

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# WHAT THE...

## Think you're funny?

Send us your best caption...

Email to [celeste@dmcityview.com](mailto:celeste@dmcityview.com) — **BE SURE TO INCLUDE YOUR NAME**

Next month's photo:



IMAGE BY DAVID YOUNG FROM PIXABAY

## This month's winner

"Introducing the new Bonnie and Clyde."

— Linda Oleson



IMAGE BY GRATISOGRAPHY

## Runners-up

"Got any catnip... you'd be a lot cooler if you did!"

— RJ Lowney

"No matter how hard you try, you will never be as cool as a cat."

— Paul G.

"What's new, pussycat?" — Bryan Moon

"Officer, my seeing-eye cat is an excellent driver, and he refuses to take your catnip breathalyzer test." — John W.

Send your "What The...?" caption and image entries to [celeste@dmcityview.com](mailto:celeste@dmcityview.com).  
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# CARS IN THE CITY

BY JACKIE WILSON

## Classic cars, lasting connections

Valley Classic Car Show draws hundreds of vehicles and enthusiasts with free admission, free lunch and a shared passion for automotive history.



Valley Classic show, photo courtesy of Kent Carlson



Buick, photo courtesy of Kent Carlson



Porsche, photo courtesy of Kent Carlson

Summer is prime season for classic car shows.

Nearly every weekend, vintage vehicles fill parking lots, grassy parks and iconic gathering spots. With hoods popped open to showcase meticulously restored engines, shiny chrome and even the occasional pair of fuzzy dice, attendees stroll through decades of automotive history.

So what is the appeal of classic cars? Simply put, they do not make them like they used to. Today's roads are dominated by SUVs that often look similar, making it difficult to distinguish a Honda from a Toyota without spotting the logo. Classic cars, on the other hand, were designed with distinctive personalities, bold styling and craftsmanship that continue to turn heads decades later.

Each year over the Fourth of July weekend, the Goodguys Heartland Nationals attracts thousands of attendees and vehicles. Yet one local show has steadily gained popularity: the Valley Classic Car Show.

The Valley Classic Car Show is held at the Valley Community Center and was started by car enthusiast Scott Longstreet. As a member of Valley Church, he suggested the idea in 2015.

"We had a big area for it — at the Community Center. Let's see what happens," he recalls.

Initially, organizers hoped to attract 100 vehicles. Today, the show features as many as 500. The entire event is free with no entry fees for vehicle owners or attendees. It is a half-day event, and a free lunch is served.

Awards are presented, and the vehicles run the gamut, including Camaros, Corvettes, Ford pickups, Rolls-Royces, hot rods and more. Although Valley Church is affiliated with the event, it is not worship-related.

"It shocks people that it's all for free. Good Guys is a money maker. We don't charge a dime. People ask, what's the motive?" Scott says. "We're not preaching. We just love Des Moines, and that's the point."

Kent Carlson has showcased vehicles at the Valley Classic Car Show since its inception. A lifelong enthusiast, Carlson has owned more than 300 vehicles over the years and currently

owns 10. His favorite is a Porsche 928.

In his 20s, Carlson worked at a Des Moines Mazda-Porsche dealership selling new vehicles. His dream car was the Porsche 928, but he could not afford one at the time. He finally purchased one at age 28. Forty years later, he still owns it.

"It's entertaining to drive, but by today's standard, it's not that fast. It's a cool car that was featured in the 'Risky Business' movie."

Carlson grew up with a father who owned 18 Cadillacs over the years.

"He was a realtor, and he needed a nice car to haul people around in," Carlson recalls.

His 1957 Cadillac convertible is one of 10 Cadillacs he has owned.

"It's Orion Blue and looks like it should be on a beach in Miami," he says.

One of his purchases came after spotting a 1966 Buick LeSabre parked outside a bar on Ingersoll Avenue. He waited to see who owned it and eventually made an offer. The next day, the keys were in his pocket.

Carlson appreciates older vehicles because he can work on them himself.

"Today's cars need to be taken to a dealer. The styling is nothing like we've had in the past. Different era cars drive differently," he explains. "The 1957 Cadillac is a bear to drive. I turned down a Buick because it felt like I was driving a lumber truck."

During car shows, Carlson says the conversations are his favorite part.

"The car culture is interesting. Some people are trophy hunters," he reflects. "I prefer to park my car and walk away to look at others."

The Valley Classic Car Show will be held July 25 at 4444 Fuller Road in West Des Moines. ■

Jackie Wilson has written hundreds of articles for CITYVIEW and the Iowa Living magazines. She has covered many ordinary people living extraordinary lives.



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## Taxidermy takes shape at the hands of Embree

The tattoo artist creates taxidermy art through repetition, skill and subjectivity.

If you have stepped inside a museum, a zoo, Bass Pro Shops or your hunting friend's home, you have likely seen taxidermy. Step into Trinity Tattoo in Valley Junction, and it is impossible not to notice the taxidermy — and its quality — created by the hands of Jarod Embree.

"If I'm not here, I'm in a tree or doing taxidermy," Embree said. "I can't sing or dance, and I don't work well with others, and I don't like working for somebody else. So, the only way you can make money as an artist is either you're really lucky or you're dead, and then you're not making shit anyway, so this is a viable solution for a trade craft artist, hands-on guy."

If you consider "others" to be the people he tattoos — or the animals he works on — then Embree appears to at least work well on others.

The art of taxidermy was introduced to him by his uncle. Eventually, in 2017, Embree attended taxidermy school in Spirit Lake.

"Taxidermy school is not a requirement to be a taxidermist; however, it definitely helps at least get you out of the blocks," Embree said. "Unless you went to taxidermy school for about a decade, you're going to leave any school of taxidermy with about point 1% of the actual knowledge you need to be good, so it takes a shitload of practice."

And, by practice, he means failure.

Embree emphasizes practice and repetition — and failure comes with them. He also credits close friends and mentors, including Ken Howard, a national champion taxidermist, for helping him develop his skills.

"If you're trying to get good at artwork, or you're trying to get good at any trade craft, I don't care if it's welding or tattooing or anything else, find that person and sit in it, like latch onto them, fit in their back pocket if you want to get good," Embree said.

As for what separates an average taxidermist from a world-class one, Embree said it is not the materials they use but their expertise in the craft.

"They're clean. I could walk into Menards and find half the shit I use, or Home Depot or Lowe's. But you have to be a welder, you have to be a painter, you have to be a makeup artist, you have to be a sculptor, you have to have your head and ass wired together when it comes to knowing wildlife," Embree said.

Embree has entered some of his work in competitions. Most recently, he earned second place in the McKenzie Best Life-Size Award category at a state competition for the first wolf mount he had completed.



"I think I do a good job. I'm happy with what I've done," Jarod Embree said. "Am I happy with the growth I've made in it? Yeah, I think most people would be. That doesn't mean I don't want to be better in this arena."

"I've got more red ribbons than I would care to admit, but I do, and that's fine. Just means I've got room to grow versus falling on your ass from there. I'm assuming it's a hell of a lot nicer to move up than it is to be at the top and get your ass knocked down, so I'm trying to find some glory in that," Embree said.

Plenty of regulations surround what can and cannot be mounted. Understanding the technical, wildlife and legal aspects all contribute to quality taxidermy.

Embree's first mount was a mink, a member of the weasel family. The animal had been found as roadkill by his uncle. However, he is quick to note that does not mean he welcomes similar projects from the public.

"Don't bring me your roadkill, people. It's a miracle it turned out," Embree said.

Since then, Embree has mounted a wide variety of animals, including birds, deer, a brown billy goat, wolves and foxes. Visitors to Easter Lake may have seen a snowy owl displayed at one of the buildings. It is another piece of Embree's work.

He believes his strongest work involves canines.

"Canines in general — fox, small mammals — are what I like to work on. There's more validity, there's more validation for me, there's a better payoff for me, there's more art in it," Embree said. "Birds are kind of the same way, in that respect. You can get birds preening, flying, landing, standing dead. There's a lot

of variety. Birds are very pretty, you know, ducks are very pretty, lots of different varieties, small, big, divers, puddlers, sea ducks, all the bill colors, feet colors, all the plumage. There's all different kinds of artsy things you can do with them. You have to be very delicate. You have to really know your shit."

Embree acquires animals through a variety of legal sources, including clients, fur farms and hunting. When hunting, he prefers using a bow. His tattoo shop is named after his first Llewellyn setter, and Trinity's first pheasant is mounted inside the business.

When asked what animal he would most like to mount that he has not yet worked on, Embree paused before answering.

"Because for me, first, it's what do I want to hunt? You can buy anything and go to shows and buy something, but it's a hell of a lot cooler to go hunt it, kill it, and then mount it for myself. So, in that respect, from a hunting aspect, definitely big horn sheep, Rocky Mountain bighorn, or a Roosevelt elk, a mountain goat, caribou, any of those would be great. A mountain lion, for that matter," Embree said. ■

Cyote Williams was born and raised on the south side of Des Moines and writes about entertainment, sports and personalities across the Des Moines metro for CITYVIEW. Phone: 515-953-4822 x333.



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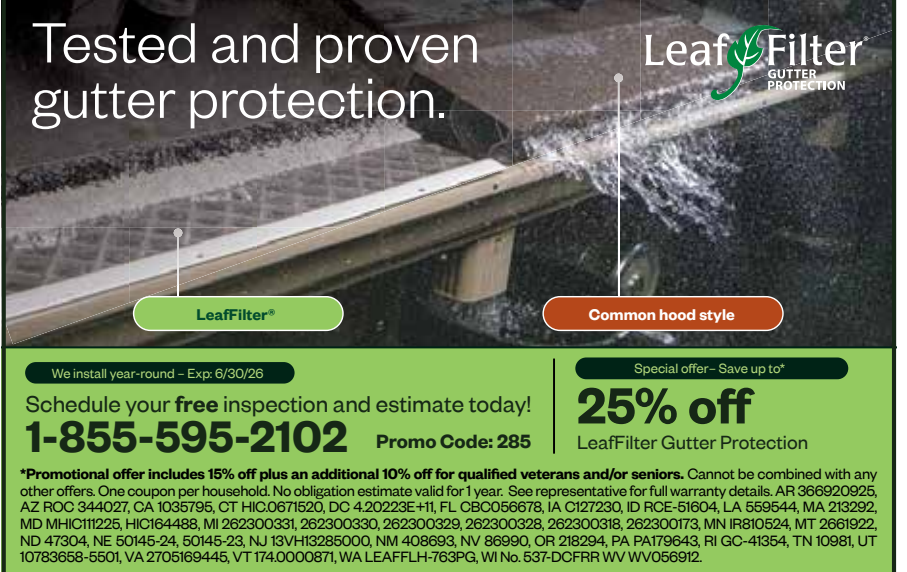
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