

AUGUST 2026

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JAMMIN'

AT THE IOWA STATE FAIR

Rozonda "Chilli" Thomas of TLC talks about performing with Salt-N-Pepa and En Vogue as the trio of hip hop titans perform at the fair.

FOOD DUDE

The Big Steer proves that sometimes the best strategy is to not change.

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We take Iowa's street-legal LSVs for a spin.

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IowaStateFair

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FROM THE PUBLISHER

Corn dogs, concerts and a crowd full of memories

Iowa State Fair grandstand shows offer a uniquely Iowa mix of nostalgia, people-watching and unforgettable moments.

There is something uniquely entertaining about an Iowa State Fair concert. You can buy a deep-fried pickle. Pet a champion bull. Admire a butter sculpture. And then spend the evening singing along with thousands of strangers who somehow all know every word to a song released years before many of them were born.

Yes, fair concerts are their own unique experience. Let's start with the seating. You may have paid for a reserved chair, but that doesn't guarantee you will actually see the stage. Right in front of you is a guy who is 6-foot-8 and wears his favorite cowboy hat to every concert. Two seats over is someone who believes every song deserves to be recorded on a cellphone held directly over the giant cowboy's head.

Then there are the people who arrive late. Nothing says "excuse me" like squeezing past 32 people while carrying four beers, along with three pork chops on a stick and a bucket of cookies that were smuggled in. By the time they find their seats, the opening act has finished and half the audience knows exactly what they had for supper.

Of course, the Iowa State Fair attracts artists from every genre. One night, it's country. The next, it's rock. Then classic pop. Sometimes you attend because you absolutely love the performer. Other times you realize halfway through the first song that you only know the one they played during a beer commercial 20 years ago. It doesn't matter. By the second chorus, everyone is singing anyway. Including me.

The Iowa State Fair also provides some unforgettable aromas. Depending on which way the breeze blows, you might catch hints of funnel cakes, smoked turkey legs, livestock barns or sunscreen. It is a sensory buffet unlike any other concert venue in America.

And let's not forget the weather. The concert might begin with 92-degree heat and end with everyone digging out sweatshirts. Iowa weather enjoys being part of the entertainment.

What I enjoy most, though, is watching the crowd. Grandparents introduce grandchildren to the music they grew up with. Teenagers discover bands older than their parents. Couples celebrate anniversaries. Friends who only see each other once a year pick the fair concert as their reunion spot. For a couple of hours, politics, deadlines and everyday worries fade into the background. The performers may headline the grandstand, but the audience steals the show.

When thousands of Iowans clap in rhythm, belt out lyrics they barely remember and sway beneath the August sky, you realize the Iowa State Fair isn't just about blue-ribbon livestock or outrageous food. Sometimes the best exhibit is 10,000 people proving that music, like the fair itself, is meant to be shared — preferably with a cold beverage in one hand and absolutely no one holding a cellphone over your head. ■

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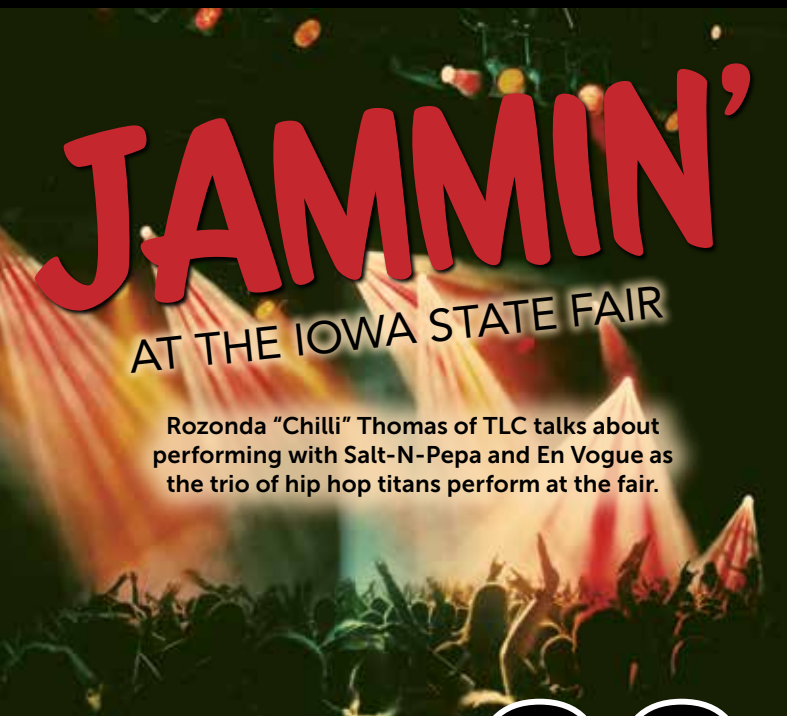
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ASK CITYVIEW

By CITYVIEW staff

Ask CITYVIEW anything by emailing editor@dmcityview.com.

Q. When will the lighting be fixed on the north end of the Coleman Bridge, where walkers/bikers are in the dark after sunset?

A. We forwarded your question to the City of Des Moines. Here is the answer: "The lights on the Coleman Bridge have unfortunately been the target of recurring vandalism and component theft. Because of the extensive damage, simply replacing the parts hasn't been enough; troubleshooting the entire electrical system to get everything running safely has proven to be a complex challenge. While our teams are actively working on solutions, we do not have a definitive completion date for the full repair at this time."

Q. Lighting around Gray's Lake trail has many fewer lights out this summer, but still too many. The unlighted parts are downright dangerous after sunset. When will the lights be fixed?

A. We also forwarded this similar question to the City of Des Moines, and here is the answer: "Safety is a top priority, and being seen on trails is important. While our maintenance crews have made progress reducing the number of outages, we know there is still work to do to keep existing fixtures operational and repair work will be completed in a timely manner as resources and staff allow. Please note that large portions of the trail system are not designed to be illuminated. Because significant stretches are intended to remain unlit, we strongly encourage all trail users, especially bicyclists and walkers out after sunset, to bring a personal headlamp, flashlight or bike light to ensure you can safely see and be seen by others."

Q. What's up with the WHO tower across Grand from Central Campus and its strobe lights? It feels like being in a club with bright flashing lights all night long in my apartment bedroom.

A. We forwarded this message to WHO13. They replied to the reader who asked this question, who shared the response from Brad Jurens, Chief Engineer at WHO13: "Yes, we're aware of the tower lighting issue downtown. It's a failure in a control board which is preventing our mid-level beacons from going to night-mode properly. We should be able to force the system into night-mode manually, but that's part of the failure. The same control board that triggers our top beacon also controls the triggering in and out of night-mode and it's getting stuck in day mode, most likely as a safety to make sure the tower was seen at all times of day in the event of a control board failure like this. We've had three of these control boards fail in the last 18 months so we're replacing the tower lighting system to take care of this issue permanently. We ordered a replacement system at the end of June, and we're expecting delivery the first week of August from the manufacturer; then we'll have our installers in as soon as possible to perform the system swap. I apologize for the inconvenience, and the extra light, but know we are working on getting it replaced as soon as possible. I'm being sticky with the installation vendor to make sure it doesn't slide any further into August then necessary. If you have any other questions, please let me know. Thanks." ■



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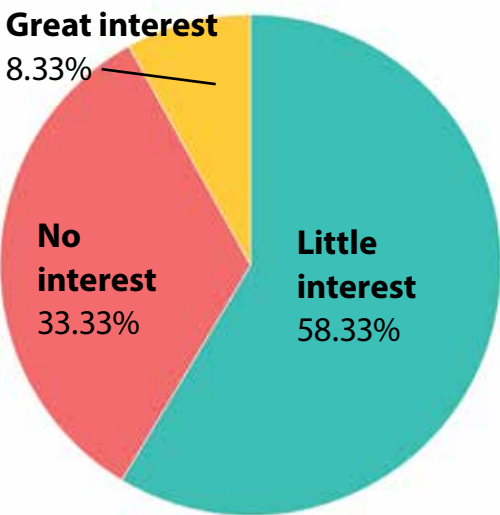
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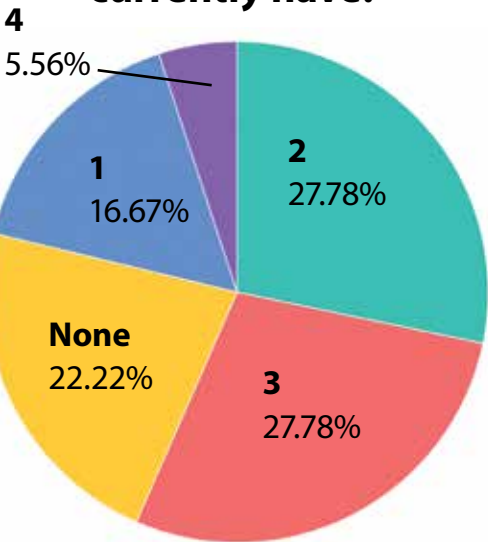
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POLL POSITION Results from last month's poll at www.dmcityview.com

How would you describe your interest level in World Cup soccer?



How many pets do you currently have?



LETTER TO THE EDITOR

Letters are edited for space, spelling and clarity.

You really missed the boat with your camping issue in July. Polk County (and other counties) have some of the best camping around. Yellow Banks, Thomas Mitchell, Jester Park and Chichaqua are a few. Failing to mention these is a disservice to all who camp. - Celeste Kelling

Editor's note: We would hate to miss the boat, especially while we are camping. These are all great suggestions and worthy of a visit.

FACEBOOK COMMENTS cityview magazine (comments unedited)

CITYVIEW magazine: Do you attend your high school class reunions? Why or why not?

Kristi Kolbe: Hell no. 3/4 didn't speak to me then, why would they now???

Shawn Rhoades: I showed up to graduation practice and everyone asked why I was there. They didn't even realize I was a classmate lol, so no I didn't attend.

Dennis Frank: I usually arrange class reunions and a dozen might show up but, I've discovered the magats have their own reunions.

Hannah Hope Harthoorn: I don't think we've had any! My 20-year reunion will be in a few years.

Barbara Kay: Just had my 40th this weekend. I have been to several. There is always someone there who isn't any different than they were then. Most of the rest of us have grown, matured and realized we all had our own issues then and greet the classmates as they are here and now. I've had my faith restored in humanity with each reunion. I've soothed my inner child and teenager. I know how amazing I've become and others see it. I'm not who I was in 1986. They have been healing.

Lori Anderson: Yes, if price isn't over \$50.

Paula Northway Poland: I went to a few. My 50th is next year, but I don't plan to go. The people I really knew and cared about back then are still a part of my life. That's enough for me.

LaDonna Cowdin Russell: We just had our 50th. My experience echoes Barbara's—it's been good therapy for me to attend. We've gotten kinder with age and we are quite interesting people!

Scott McClure: I went to my 45th and it was great. High school reunions get a lot negativity from people who

hated high school and believe me I didn't love high school either, but coming together with people who you grew up with is something everyone should experience. Your old classmates are happy you're there and it's good for the soul. That's my take anyway.

Stacy McKee Bjork: I've planned the last three. Last time we had lower numbers, I'm hoping next year we have the whole class. Unfortunately, we are losing our class members and we need all to show up. Perry, Iowa Class of 1992!!!!

Brenda Cosner: YES!!!

Julie Bright: My high school class hasn't had a single reunion.

Denver Vorwald-Ritz: No. I have no reason to reconnect with people like that. If I care enough about you, you're in my life. I don't even attend family reunions.

Wes Vk: Wasn't even aware they had any. Not even remotely surprised that invites were obviously cliquey, based on what few photos I've seen. F 'em.

Mahalie Sheets: Yes to my 20th. Haven't seen a lot of people in 20 years.

Deb Sheeder-Moss: I'm headed to my 40th tomorrow.

Nichole Wiser: High school was terrible. I keep in touch with like two people.

Jess Goodenow Finke: I was always trying to, but now that I live several hours away and have had some health issues, it makes it a little difficult to travel. It's a big bummer not to be able to make it. We only have so much time left as we're all getting quite a bit older.

Liz Tarr: Nope! My high school class has never bothered having one. We're at 24 years. Kind of disappointing honestly.

RETWEETS X (comments unedited)

@errai: Oh man I (washed hands) love cooking so much (washes hands) and it's so easy to (washes hands) make anything you want

@sourberryvi: just got hospitalized for being cringe. they put me in the awk ward

@Eden_Eats: Sorry I can't come, the internet service provider guy is supposed to come between 9am and 2028.

@FromN5_: You turn the AC off in your car for one second and it feels like the sun hopped in the passenger seat

@umlarp: putting in my too weak notice

@alexSSN: Hey man, that's really awesome that you saved some of your 4th of July fireworks so you could set them off at noon on the 13th of July

@neet_sol: The economy is so bad that scam messages went from "you won the lottery" to "remote job available \$18/hr"

@ElyKreimendahl: "you did it queen" i whisper as I move everything from Friday's to do-list to Monday's to-do list

@FB_Viktor: Abbreviation is such a long word for what it actually means

@lastgrlon_earth: why does my stomach have the nerve to growl when the fat is literally right there for it to eat ■

STRAY THOUGHTS

BY RANDY EVANS

Turning the page still leaves judge with a hole to climb from

When District Judge Adria Kester studied at the Drake University Law School, she must have opted out of the “Law of Holes” coursework.

I have written before about the first Law of Holes, in connection with Davenport city officials and their penchant for hiding facts from taxpayers. The Law of Holes is common-sense advice that says when you are in a hole and want to get out, the best thing to do is put down the shovel and stop digging.

Judge Kester found herself in a hole — actually, a Boone County highway ditch — on the night of Nov. 4, 2025. She ended up there in her GMC Canyon Denali after an evening of drinking too much.

The wine cooler sheriff’s deputies found inside the travel tumbler in the center console held only told part of the story.

It was on Nov. 4, 2025, that the Iowa Supreme Court took its “Court on the Road” program to Jefferson to hear oral arguments at Greene County High School. The county is one of 22 in the Second Judicial District, where Kester was the chief judge.

Kester reportedly attended some but not all events surrounding the Jefferson visit by the seven Supreme Court justices. Less than an hour after they concluded the court session and a juice-and-cookie reception hosted by the Greene County Bar Association, Kester held her own “court on the road” event as she headed home to adjoining Boone County.

Motorists alerted the Boone County sheriff that a vehicle was traveling slowly eastbound in the westbound lanes of U.S. Highway 30. The driver appeared slumped over the steering wheel. When deputies arrived, the vehicle was in the median and Kester was inside.

Deputies quickly realized this woman who could barely stand unassisted was a local judge. She was taken to the Boone hospital to test her blood for alcohol. She then was booked at the jail for first-offense drunken driving.

A month later, Kester pleaded guilty. She was fined \$625 and received a suspended one-year jail sentence. She also was ordered to complete a drunken-driver offender course.

While that chapter of the saga ended, Kester soon

learned firsthand about the Law of Holes, the part about needing to stop digging if you are in a hole.

When journalists requested public access to Boone County sheriff’s body camera video and other arrest information, Kester sued the sheriff seeking to prevent him from releasing the records. Her civil lawsuit also named the Boone County clerk of court and asked for an order keeping the filings in her public-records lawsuit sealed.

Kester claimed this secrecy was needed because no “government accountability gap” existed. She said she would have to relive the “trauma” of her arrest if access were granted.

Soon after she sued the sheriff and court clerk, I wrote commentary about the incongruity of her request for preferential treatment that few other criminal defendants receive. I discussed the important roles played by public records and court access laws in keeping government officials like Kester accountable.

About the same time, a Polk County judge ruled Kester’s request to seal judicial records was unsupportable given Iowa’s history of open courts.

Last week, as her case moved toward a court hearing on Aug. 6, she dropped her lawsuit. Kester put down her shovel and stopped digging.

After ending her lawsuit, the body camera video of her arrest became public. That has opened the door for Kester to move on to second and third parts of the Law of Holes, which are:

“Even when you stop digging, you are still in a hole,” and

“The only way out of a hole is to climb.”

The second law certainly applies to Kester. She finds herself in a hole professionally. Since her arrest, she has been on paid administrative leave and continues to receive her annual salary of \$172,000.

But the State Judicial Qualifications Commission is investigating her actions. Ultimately, the commission will make a recommendation to the Supreme Court, and the same seven justices who were in Jefferson on the night of Nov. 4 will have the final say on her future as a judge.

Perhaps realizing that doing nothing would not help her cause, Kester has started the climb. Along with dropping her lawsuit, she issued a thoughtful

statement in which she shared her embarrassment and anguish and apologized.

Kester wrote:

“I understand that wearing a judicial robe means more than applying the law correctly — it means earning the public’s trust every day. My actions that night fell short of that responsibility, and I am deeply sorry to the people I served, to my colleagues, and to everyone who expected better judgment from someone entrusted with that office.

“Public trust matters, and accountability matters, especially for judges.”

Kester also reflected on what she learned from the experience and on people who face similarly life-altering mistakes.

“Throughout my career, I worked with people who believed the worst thing they had ever done would define the rest of their lives,” she wrote. “I often ended those hearings with the same message: This is one chapter in your book. It is not the end of your story. Turn the page. Start a new one.”

Months after her arrest, Kesler said someone she knew reached out with a question that changed her thinking.

“They asked me a question I wasn’t expecting. ‘Why aren’t you practicing what you preached?’” Kester wrote. “And I realized that person was absolutely right. ... Admitting that I needed help was one of the hardest — and most important — lessons.

“I cannot rewrite the chapter that brought me here. I am turning the page and starting a new one.”

While Kester’s statement would have been more powerful had she issued it when she pleaded guilty, it is a start. Kester dug a mighty deep hole in front of two important audiences.

First, the Supreme Court justices will have to decide whether Kester can keep her job. Second, the communities she serves and the taxpayers still paying her salary will have to decide if she remains worthy of the public trust.

And that may present the harshest reality of the Law of Holes: When you dig too deep, the climb back is long and steep. ■

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





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CIVIC SKINNY

BY CITYVIEW STAFF

Nine university coaching contracts. And Krause buys another soccer team.

Each year, we publish several of the coaching contracts at our state's publicly funded universities: Iowa State University, University of Iowa, and University of Northern Iowa. There is widespread reporting on some of the larger contracts like those of **T.J. Otzelberger** at Iowa State and **Kirk Ferentz** at Iowa, receive much press, but many of the others go by unnoticed. We requested several of the lesser-known contracts to see what they earn in comparison.

IOWA STATE UNIVERSITY

The Cyclones saw their football program transform at the hands and mind of **Matt Campbell**. In an unexpected turn, Campbell left Ames for Penn State in State College, Pennsylvania. Before leaving, he was earning \$5 million in total compensation at ISU. His replacement, **Jimmy Rogers**, won't be making as much, but he won't have to worry about putting food

on the table.

Rogers' base compensation is \$3 million per year with his contract taking him through 2032. Some of his potential performance-based incentives include:

- \$250,000 if the team wins seven regular season games
- \$500,000 if the team wins eight games, the total achieved last season under Campbell
- \$750,000 for nine wins
- \$1 million for 10 wins
- \$1.25 million for 11 wins, the most won under Campbell, and also the highest number in school history
- \$1.5 million for 12 wins.
- Rogers could also earn \$100,000 for appearing in the Big 12 conference championship game, and \$500,000 if the team finishes in first place and wins the conference title game.

Rogers is provided the use of one team car, and it is likely not the Cyclone Helmet Car, which did make a reappearance last season after being retired in the 1990s.

In order to release Rogers from his recently signed contract with Washington State University, the Cyclones paid WSU a \$4 million contract termination expense, which stated, "The University acknowledges that the payment of the Contract Termination Expense was necessary to obtain the services of Rogers, and, therefore, substantially benefits the University." With football season looming, that sentence will be put to the test sooner rather than later.

ISU cut ties with its women's gymnastics program this past year after "unresolvable" issues between players, coaches and parents. In its place came women's wrestling, one of the fastest growing sports in the nation. With it, came a new coach: **Alli St. John**. ISU



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Attorney
Dennis VanDerGinst



already has one of the more successful men's wrestling programs in the country, and one of Jamie Pollard's final acts as athletic director is to start the women's program on a similar trajectory.

St. John's contract goes through 2029 with a base compensation of \$125,000. Her list of performance incentives is much shorter than Rogers', with the bonuses being \$25,000 for winning the NCAA championship, \$15,000 for finishing second, \$10,000 for finishing third, \$5,000 for fourth and \$2,500 for fifth. If St. John were to be named NCAA Coach of the Year, she would receive \$2,500. She will also be provided the use of one car or \$5,000 annually for a vehicle allowance.

Iowa State's head women's soccer coach, **Matt Fannon**, joined the team in 2019 from Bowling Green State University. To lure him away, the team had to pay \$25,000 to fulfill contract termination terms.

Fannon's original compensation was \$150,000 on a five-year contract through 2024, which included a vehicle or allowance, as well as a golf, swimming, tennis and social membership to Ames Country Club. His performance incentives include two weeks' pay for every Big 12 regular season championship, two weeks' pay for every Big 12 conference championship, two weeks' pay for a bid to the NCAA Soccer Championships, one week's pay for a regional semifinal and final appearance, a College Cup appearance and winning the College Cup.

Fannon has had several amendments to his contract, the first being a 10% temporary salary reduction due to the pandemic; an extension, taking his contract through 2026, signed in 2022; a raise to \$165,904, signed in 2024, and another raise to \$170,881, signed in 2026. His squads have yet to post a winning record with their highest conference finish being eighth in 2021.

UNIVERSITY OF IOWA

In 2021, the University of Iowa became the first NCAA Power Five (now the Power Four) school to add women's wrestling as an intercollegiate program. The team hired **Clarissa Chun**, a two-time Olympian who wrestled at the senior level for 18 years. The team started competing in 2023-2024, and Chun continues to lead the program today.

Chun signed an extension this year that will take her through 2031. She has led the Hawkeyes to two NCWWC national championships with a runner-up finish in 2026. She has also won two Coach of the Year awards.

Her salary is \$133,900 and for each of the following years, she is eligible for a raise no less than 2.5% but possibly more. She also earns a \$5,000 bonus by being a sport ambassador with speaking engagements, TV, radio, etc. and earns a longevity and retention bonus of \$10,000 each year starting in 2027. For NCWWC championships, she earns \$15,000; \$3,000 for one to four individual champions; and \$5,000 for five or more individual champions. She earns \$5,000 for being named National Head Coach of the Year and \$5,000 if the annual team GPA is a 3.0 or higher.

The Hawkeye women's gymnastics head coach, **Jennifer Llewellyn**, became the fifth head coach in the program's history in 2024, signing a deal that would make her the head coach through 2029 with a base salary of \$155,000. Her annual salary raises mirrors Chun's.

Llewellyn's incentives include \$10,000 for a regular season Big 10 conference title; \$5,000 for a top three championship finish; or \$10,000 for a conference championship title. If the Hawkeyes were to make an NCAA Regional selection or appearance, she would earn \$7,500 and \$25,000 for a national title. Llewellyn can also earn \$1,500 for four different academic-based incentives relating to finishing in the top half of the Big 10 women's gymnastics for APR, FGR or GSR, as well as underrepresented minority GSP-60% or better. If Llewellyn is still in charge by the end of June 2028, she will be paid a longevity payment of \$15,000.

Another sport the Hawkeyes have that the Cyclones don't is a baseball program, headed up by **Rick Heller**. Heller took over the program in 2014 and started his coaching career at Upper Iowa in 1988. Even though his original contract with the Peacocks was likely written by quill and ink, his most recent extension with the Hawkeyes was DocuSigned in 2022, keeping him on board until 2029.

Heller's base salary is \$383,000 with a 3% increase each year and some interesting incentives. If the Hawkeyes are regular season champions, or tournament champions, Heller would receive a \$15,000 bonus plus a salary increase of 7%. Heller and the Hawkeyes won the Big Ten tournament in 2017 and had two second-place regular-season finishes. If the team makes an NCAA regional appearance, he receives a \$15,000 bonus, plus an 8% salary increase. UI made a regional appearance in 2023.

Heller is also earning longevity payments of \$25,000 per year, as long as he is employed by June 1 of each year. That payment increased to \$35,000 in 2025 and will remain at that level through the rest of his current deal.

UNIVERSITY OF NORTHERN IOWA

The University of Northern Iowa went through its own massive coaching change this year, with longtime shepherd of the men's basketball program, **Ben Jacobsen**, leaving the program for Utah State after leading the Panther pack since 2006.

In his place comes **Kyle Green**. Green was an assistant from 2001-2003 and again from 2012 to 2021. He spent the last five seasons as an assistant in Ames, now returning to Cedar Falls. His contract will take him through 2031 with a base salary of \$400,000. Green will also receive an additional \$87,500 media fee, paid in installments throughout the contract.

His performance incentives include \$10,000 if he wins MVC Coach of the Year. If the Panthers are MVC regular season champions, Green earns \$20,000. If they make the NCAA tournament, he receives \$25,000 and \$40,000 for every victory. Should they make the Final Four, Green would earn \$100,000. Green also receives a courtesy vehicle/allowance up

to \$500 a month — as well as a club membership. He also gets plenty of complimentary tickets to other UNI sporting events: two volleyball season tickets, two football season tickets, 12 men's basketball season tickets and 12 general admission tickets per game, two women's basketball season tickets, and 16 NCAA Tournament tickets should the Panthers get there.

Head softball coach, **Ryan Jacobs**, joined the program in 2015 and signed an extension in 2023 to keep him on board until 2028 with a base salary of \$72,500. Some of his incentives include \$1,000 for winning MVC Coach of the Year; \$2,500 for being MVC regular season champions; \$4,000 for an at-large selection to the NCAA Championship tournament; \$5,000 for advancing to super regionals; and \$5,000 for each win in super regionals.

Jacob's Panthers broke the conference record for homeruns in a season last year, were regular season champions in 2022 and 2023, and finished in the top four each year since 2021.

The Panthers' head men's and women's track and field and cross-country coach, **David Paulsen**, signed on in 2015 at a base salary of \$54,837 and has risen to \$80,000 on the most recent extension that keeps him on until 2017.

Paulsen is entitled to a monthly cellphone allowance to assist in his job performance, which is to be reviewed annually. Show this to your kids the next time that they harp on you about the phone bill you pay for, that even division one college coaches are subject to the same scrutiny. Paulsen also receives a courtesy vehicle for personal and or business use.

Like other UNI coaches, he receives some sets of free tickets, including five volleyball season tickets, five football season tickets, and five men's and women's basketball season tickets. For performance incentives, if he is named indoor or outdoor MVC Coach of the Year, he gets \$1,500; \$2,500 per team for indoor or outdoor championships; \$500 per indoor or outdoor individual qualifier; and \$1,000 per NCAA First Team Track and Field All-American. ...

The World Cup may have ended and left the United States, but **Kyle Krause** apparently still has soccer fever. Krause recently announced that he had purchased another soccer team, Casa Pia in Portugal. Krause has acquired a majority stake in the first division Portuguese side.

Krause appears to be drawn to teams that need, or are in the process of needing, a new home. Parma Calcio, his team in Italy, went through an entire restoration of its historic stadium to the tune of €140 million, reportedly paid entirely by the club. The Pro Iowa Soccer stadium, set to finally be built after clearing funding hurdles, which include, according to Krause Group, a \$7 million grant from the Des Moines City Council; \$40 million in private donations; \$23 million from Kyle and Sharon Krause; \$17.9 million from Iowa's State Reinvestment act; \$5 million from Iowa's Destination Iowa fund; and a \$200,000 donation from Prairie Meadows. His new team has reported plans of building a new 5,000- to 8,000-seat stadium in Lisbon at a reported €15 million. ■

Book uncovers Des Moines' darkest secrets

David and Rose Donovan trace the city's hidden history of crime, corruption and exploitation in a meticulously researched account of early 20th-century Iowa.

In an inviting and richly reported new book populated with larger-than-life figures cut from the fabric of everyday life in early 1900s central Iowa, the city of Des Moines emerges as the most riveting character.

David and Rose Donovan's "The Nastiest Saloon in Iowa: Murder, Prostitution, and Corruption in the Heartland" reveals an early Des Moines that is shocking and scandalous, hilarious and haunting — and, at times, all of those things on a single page. The nonfiction book is now available in bookstores and online, and the couple, both accomplished journalists with deep Iowa roots, are making media appearances to promote it.

"The Nastiest Saloon" centers on a bar and brothel operated by Rose Donovan's great grandfather, Erastus Wallace Scott of Des Moines — who sadly dismissed his fitting first name in favor of the middling "Wallace." The bar, described in the media in 1908 as a "notorious saloon," was ground zero on East Court Avenue for a range of criminal activity and formed the core of what was an industrial-scale level of prostitution and booze-fueled corruption and cruelty.

"It tells a story of America that people in the Midwest don't know," David Donovan said.

Venereal disease, chiefly syphilis, described at the time as a "scarlet monster" ran so rampant in the state's capital city that The Des Moines Register in 1908 reported that 80% of the deaths of women in Des Moines were caused by "social" diseases, and that 75% of the men in the city had been affected by STDs. The Donovans write about a "scarlet trust" of landlords and businessmen, brothels and bar owners, and others, who lured young women into prostitution and trapped them as "inmates" in houses of "ill fame" with punitive rents and interest and other fees, shackling them to lives of abuse until venereal disease killed them — or they committed suicide. The latter could be accomplished by "gulps" of carbolic acid, the book reports.

"Some things never change," Rose Donovan said. "We have sex trafficking happening today."

The Donovans spoke with Political Mercury in Carroll, David Donovan's hometown, and joined Julie Gammack on her Iowa Writers' Collaborative podcast this week.

"I love your book; it's very fact based," Gammack said of "The Nastiest Saloon."

The book's roots were the results of the pursuit by the Donovans of information about Scott. Rose Donovan grew up in Des Moines with but whispers, little confirmed knowledge, about her family, and this most infamous of great grandfathers.

"It started as a forgotten family history," Rose Donovan said.

Soon, the research and writing of this book rivered into a project revealing a dark underbelly of Des Moines, and Iowa itself, that had been lost to history.

"It's not that long ago," David Donovan said.

The book, much of it gleaned from newspapers, deals with high-profile murders in the early 1900s and outrageous criminal schemes of theft and fraud, in addition to prostitution. Some of the defenses used in court are so outlandish that readers

likely will laugh out loud, such as two defendants, who clearly paid witnesses to leave town, seeking relief because they did not see how this was a crime at the time in Iowa law. Some journalists in pre-1910 Iowa even gave alleged ghosts credibility in their news stories.

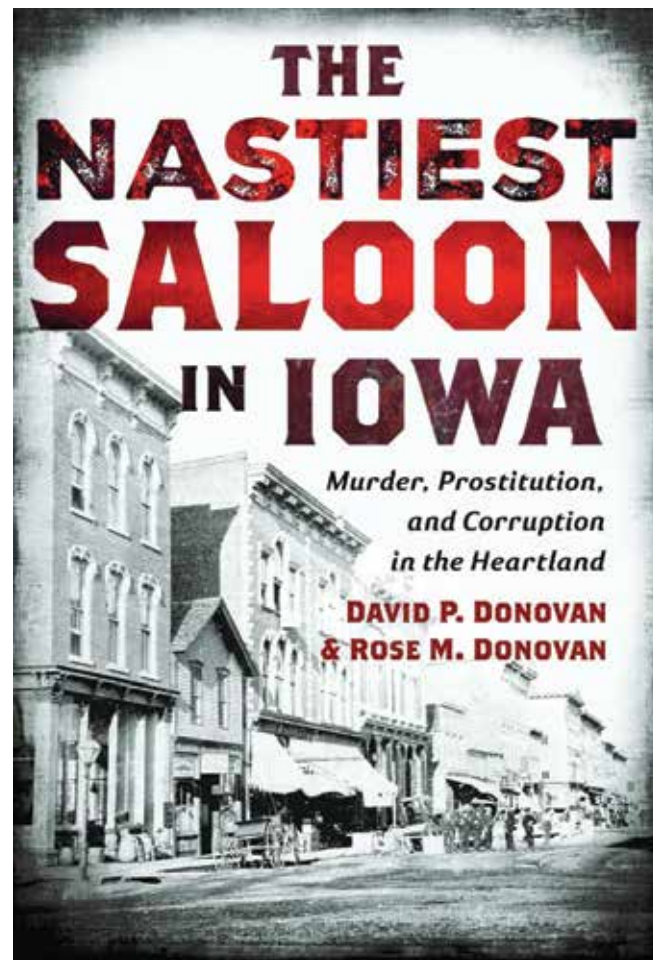
We learn in "The Nastiest Saloon" about a huckster of epic audacity — Count Nathoo — "The Wizard Of The Nile" — who ran daring confidence schemes in Iowa,

some of them out of a front called The Temple Of Psychology in Des Moines. His misconduct raged for two decades in the Midwest — and the media, remarkably, loved him for it at times even though few people in history took advantage of Iowa Nice as unapologetically as The Count. Author David Donovan correctly notes that a full book could be dedicated just to Count Nathoo, who is a blend of Harry Houdini and Bernie Madoff.

"The Nastiest Saloon," written with verve and flair, and grounded in the reporting of the times by authors who understand journalism, is, in the end, an accounting that holds a mirror to Des Moines as early fortunes that feed status of families today were built on the bodies of women imprisoned, quite literally, in prostitution. Yes, there are murders and confidence men in the book, but the haunting parts of this work are the accounts of shattered and destroyed lives of countless women on East Court Avenue.

That history, lost for more than a century, is alive again in our conversations because of the Donovans' book. ■

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



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COMING UP

SUBMIT ENTRIES AND PHOTOS TO EDITOR@DMCITYVIEW.COM

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

THINGS TO DO

IOWA SPEEDWAY

3333 Rusty Wallace Drive,
Newton

www.iowaspeedway.com

The paved track at the Iowa Speedway is 7/8-mile long and entertaining all the way around. For those of you with an RV, bring it to the multi-tiered viewing area situated along the backstretch to watch in style. This season's events include:

- Aug. 7: ARCA Menards Series Race
- Aug. 8: HyVee Perks 250
- Aug. 9: Iowa Corn 350



Two people enjoying the sounds of Ingersoll Live.
Photo submitted

INGERSOLL LIVE

Along 2300 Ingersoll Ave.,
Des Moines

www.theavenuesdsm.com

AUG. 29

One of Des Moines most well know street's hosts its own block party. Complete with live entertainment, family-friendly activities, food and more.



Photo by Dylan Heuer

IOWA CUBS

Principal Park, 1 Line Drive, Des Moines
www.iowacubs.com

Home games:

- Aug. 11 MLB Field of Dreams game vs. St. Paul at 6:30 p.m. (In Dyersville)
- Aug. 12 vs. St. Paul at 6:38 p.m.
- Aug. 13 vs. St. Paul at 6:38 p.m.
- Aug. 14 vs. St. Paul at 7:08 p.m. | Friday Night Fireworks
- Aug. 15 vs. St. Paul at 6:08 p.m. | Catch On The Field
- Aug. 16 vs. St. Paul at 1:08 p.m. | Kids Run The Bases
- Aug. 25 vs. Omaha at 6:38 p.m. | Dog Day
- Aug. 26 vs. Omaha at 12:08 p.m.
- Aug. 27 vs. Omaha at 6:38 p.m. | Iowa Oaks
- Aug. 28 vs. Omaha at 7:08 p.m. | Friday Night Fireworks
- Aug. 29 vs. Omaha at 6:08 p.m. | Catch On The Field
- Aug. 30 vs. Omaha at 1:08 p.m. | Demonios de Des Moines | Kids Run The Bases



ADEL SWEET CORN FESTIVAL

Town square, Adel

www.adelpartners.org

AUG. 7-8

In a state that is mostly known for growing corn, it only makes sense that one of its cities builds a festival around it. From 7:30 a.m. to midnight.



Photo courtesy of The Lyceum Movement

DES MOINES FESTIVAL OF IDEAS

Sheslow Auditorium, 2507
University Ave., Des Moines
Aug. 7-8

www.lyceummovement.org/desmoineslyceum

The fourth annual Des Moines Festival of Ideas, featuring leading journalists, philosophers, artists and normal people. This year's theme will be "The Pursuit of Happiness." In a time of political fracture, dizzying technological development and increasing social isolation, what does it mean to pursue happiness?



WOOLY'S

504 E. Locust St., Des Moines
www.firstfleetconcerts.com/woolys

- Aug. 6: Annabelle Dinda at 8:30 p.m.
- Aug. 13: The Crane Wives - Act III at 8 p.m.
- Aug. 14: Fooz Fighters at 8 p.m.
- Aug. 21: Umphrey's McGee at 7 p.m.
- Aug. 26: G. Love & Special Sauce at 8 p.m.
- Aug. 27: Jason Boland and The Stragglers at 7 p.m.
- Aug. 28: Rebel Queens at 8 p.m.
- Aug. 30: Chad Gray at 7 p.m.



COMING UP

SUBMIT ENTRIES AND PHOTOS TO EDITOR@DMCITYVIEW.COM



Photo courtesy of the Iowa State Fair

IOWA STATE FAIR - AMERICA250

Iowa State Fairgrounds, 3000 E. Grand Ave., Des Moines
www.iowastatefair.org

Aug. 13-23

National acts hit the grandstand, the best livestock in the state is shown off, and fried food from most every corner of the world is all found in one place. This year, the fair's theme is America250, celebrating the country's 250th birthday.



The Grandstand fills with passionate music fans all week long during the fair. Photo by Matthew Putney, courtesy of the Iowa State Fair

IOWA STATE FAIR GRANDSTAND

Iowa State Fairgrounds 3000 E. Grand Ave., Des Moines
iowastatefair.org/entertainment/grandstand

- Aug. 13: Hardy at 8 p.m.
- Aug. 14: Rod Stewart at 8 p.m.
- Aug. 15: The Red Clay Strays at 8 p.m.
- Aug. 16: Lainey Wilson at 8 p.m.
- Aug. 17: Staind at 8 p.m.
- Aug. 18: TLC & Salt-N-Pepa with En Vogue at 8 p.m.
- Aug. 19: AJR at 8 p.m.
- Aug. 20: Riley Green at 8 p.m.
- Aug. 22: BigXthaPlug at 8 p.m.
- Aug. 23: Josiah Queen at 6 p.m.



The skies over Indianola fill with colorful hot air balloons for the National Balloon Classic. Photo submitted

NATIONAL BALLOON CLASSIC

1136 150th Ave., Indianola
www.nationalballoonclassic.com
Through Aug. 8

The skies come alive for The National Balloon Classic, a premier nine-day hot air balloon event held each summer in Indianola. Taking place at the Memorial Balloon Field, the event features more than 100 hot air balloons and attracts pilots from across the country and around the world. Plus, a full lineup of entertainment for the entire family.



Photo courtesy of Greater Des Moines Partnership

WORLD FOOD AND MUSIC FESTIVAL

Western Gateway Park, 1205 Locust St., Des Moines
www.dsmpartnership.com/worldfoodandmusicfestival
Aug. 28-30

A city often defined by its food shows its stuff at the World Food and Music Festival. Food stalls reach nearly every corner of the world all while music from equal lengths is played, much to the delight of its attendees. ■



BUSINESS JOURNAL



Don't trash YOUR TECH

Old computers and electronics can expose sensitive business information if disposed of improperly. Here's how Des Moines businesses can securely erase data, stay compliant with Iowa law and keep e-waste out of landfills.

By Gracie Kayko

When it's time for small businesses in the Des Moines area to upgrade their technology, what should they do with their old electronics?

The answer is not to throw them away.

Electronics do not belong in landfills, and the sensitive data stored on the hardware should never end up in someone else's hands. Knowing how to properly dispose of both electronic devices and the information they hold is critical to protecting businesses and the environment.

Many people believe that deleting files or performing a factory reset removes data from their devices. However, that information — customer records, health information, financial data and passwords — can stay on the drive and be easily recovered, Paul Schwegler, founder of Electronic Asset Security, said.

Old electronics are donated to Metro Waste Authority. Photo courtesy of Metro Waste Authority.

When it comes to proper data destruction, identity theft is a major concern.

"Think about identity theft on a personal level, now figure on a corporate level of what you're about to lose," Metro Waste Authority CEO Michael McCoy said. "Say you're a small insurance agent and you have 500 clients, now I have all 500 clients' information."

"In January 2025, the Iowa Consumer Data Protection Act took effect, Iowa's own consumer privacy law. Now, it's not only businesses under federal industry rules paying close attention to data destruction," Schwegler said.

The act applies to businesses based on how much personal data they handle, rather than the industry they're in, to make sure data is properly destroyed when disposing of old equipment. A business can be fined significantly if the data is not disposed of properly under the act.

"There is a straightforward financial reason to handle it correctly, and beyond that it is simply good practice," Schwegler said.

McCoy said the first step to responsibly disposing of hardware is to determine what to do with the data stored on the device and how to destroy it.

"There are a lot of parts inside a computer that hold data, not just the hard drive," McCoy said,

mentioning the motherboard, SD cards, memory sticks and the random access memory (RAM). "So, unless you dispose of it properly, you're going to expose a lot of your private information by not getting rid of it."

Businesses that are not sure where to begin can contact Metro Waste Authority, a recycling and disposal service for the Des Moines Metropolitan area, to start the process.

"If you're a small business, call us. We'll walk you through it," McCoy said.

Metro Waste Authority recommends securely disposing of the data on hardware before donating electronic devices to them or other recycling facilities and not just going through a light deletion of files.

"Metro Waste Authority does not currently provide data destruction services, although it's something they'll look at in the future," McCoy said. "Instead, they expect its third-party buyers to provide secure data destruction."

It is possible for a business to do data destruction on their own. There are information and instructions widely available online and can be found through artificial intelligence tools. However, businesses that need guaranteed secure data destruction should work with a company in the area that specializes in data destruction.



Goodwill employees handle donated electronics. Photo courtesy of Goodwill of Central Iowa

"That's our advice to businesses and residents," Kayla Burkett, Metro Waste Authority's vice president of public affairs, said. "Before you donate or recycle your device, make sure you are doing your due diligence to clear your memory and data."

Once electronics are donated to Metro Waste Authority, they will break down the device and sell it to third party buyers. Data-storage components, such as a hard drive and the motherboard, are sent to companies that guarantee secure data deconstruction

"You're basically donating that equipment to us," McCoy said. "I say you're donating it because we'll look at it to see if it can be refurbished or if it simply

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Ann M. Hartz
34 years experience



needs to be torn down into individual parts and then recycled.”

Electronic Asset Security, Iowa's only R2v3-Certified electronics recycler, provides both data destruction and electronic recycling services to the Des Moines area. They use NIST 800-88-aligned data destruction for proper media sanitization and physical destruction. NIST 800-88, now on Revision 2, published by the United States National Institute of Standards and Technology, is the current globally recognized data destruction standard.

“Data erasure removes the data so the original information can no longer be read, while leaving the device intact and reusable,” Schwegler said.

The Department of Defense method, a multi-pass DoD wipe, is now considered outdated and has been removed from the federal manual.

When wiping the data isn't enough, Electronic Asset Security will shred the physical device, ensuring the data is irrecoverable. It's important to know what size to shred the media, because one size does not fit all.

“Our shredder reduces mechanical hard drives to three-quarter-inch pieces, which is appropriate for a platter drive,” Schwegler said, but solid state drives require a three-eighths of an inch shred because the memory chip is only about half an inch. “A vendor that runs SSDs through a hard-drive shredder is not really destroying the data on them.

Schwegler said another method being advertised as a complete data destruction solution is degaussing, where a strong magnetic field erases magnetic media. He does not recommend relying on it for guaranteed data destruction, though it can work on a mechanical hard drive, it doesn't work on a solid state drive.

“Our focus starts with the data and follows the hardware all the way to its end state, with documentation at each step,” Schwegler said.

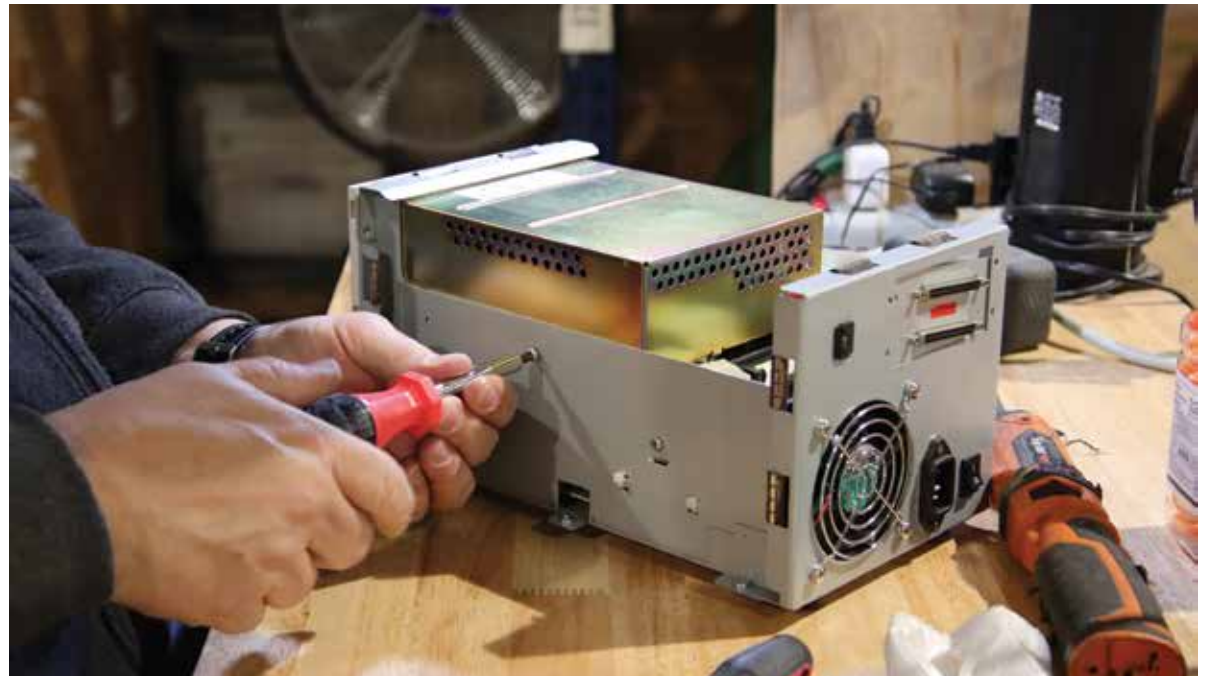
Devices that are wiped and used for a second life are checked a second time through an independent system to guarantee that the data was properly destroyed, and when a business requires that their devices be physically destroyed, Electronic Asset Security does just that.

Some equipment is resold to their sister company, Little Dog Tech, after being tested and refurbished.

“For businesses, we also buy back certain equipment that still holds value, generally newer machines, either as a credit toward services or as a payment, handled case by case,” Schwegler said.

Little Dog Tech, a computer repair company in West Des Moines, provides electronic recycling services, accepting electronics such as computers, monitors, switches, flash drives, televisions, printers and more. A comprehensive list can be found on their website.

Through their partnership, Little Dog Tech will take in the waste and send it over to Electronic Asset



Goodwill of Central Iowa accepts old electronics that will either be refurbished for a second life or responsibly recycled. Photo courtesy of Goodwill of Central Iowa

Security.

“We're really close with the company,” James White, the lead commercial technician at Little Dog Tech, said. “Electronic Asset Security refurbishes them and then we buy them in a refurbished state from Electronic Asset Security, and then we sell them.”

The rest is recycled with partners that are R2v3 certified, requiring Electronic Asset Security to prove where the materials end up.

To utilize Electronic Asset Security's services, a business can call, email or submit a request through their website.

Goodwill of Central Iowa also accepts used electronics and provides secure disposal of data before recycling or resale.

“Protecting confidential information is a critical part of responsible electronic recycling, and we take that responsibility seriously,” according to Goodwill's electronic recycling documentation. “Whether your equipment is prepared for reuse or responsibly recycled, you can be confident that your data will be handled using secure, documented processes.”

Goodwill uses the KillDisk Industrial Sanitization System to permanently delete information. According to Goodwill, this system supports HDD and SSD media, erases multiple drives, utilizes U.S. DoD 5220.22-M erasure standards along with other international sanitization standards, makes data unrecoverable by permanently destroying it, supports SATA, SAS, NVMe, M.2, USB-connected and provides secure and documented data destruction before resale.

Goodwill has partnered with First America, an electronic recycling provider, to handle electronics

that cannot be refurbished and resold. First America is responsible for making sure the electronics donated go through a certified data destruction process before recycling its materials.

According to Goodwill, First America is certified in ISO 9001: Quality Management Systems, ISO 14002: Environmental Management Systems, ISO 45001: Occupational Health and Safety Management Systems and HIPAA-compliant data handling practices, all industry-recognized.

Jonathan Henson, director of retail operations at Goodwill of Central Iowa, said any Goodwill location will accept electronic waste items. However, the organization cannot accept console televisions and monitors.

There are key steps to proper hardware disposal: secure data destruction, environmentally responsible recycling, value recovery through resale, donation and value resale on rare earth elements.

“Globally, electronic waste contains about \$91 billion worth of recoverable metals,” McCoy said. However, according to the United Nations, that wealth is dissipated because less than 25% of global electronic waste is properly recycled. Global electronic waste was projected to reach 65.3 million metric tons in 2025.

Many of the materials inside electronics are rare and valuable metals that can be recycled.

“Why not gather what we already have?” McCoy said.

“We have to protect our landfill place,” McCoy said. “And one step in doing so is not letting electronic waste go there. If it's not disposed of properly, then what's inside the electronics can leach into drinking and ground water.” ■

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COMMERCIAL REAL ESTATE

COMMERCIAL REAL ESTATE TRANSACTIONS IN POLK COUNTY FROM MARCH 2, 2026, TO APRIL 9, 2026

317 E. COURT AVE., DES MOINES
DATE: 2026-03-02
SALE PRICE: \$2,523,223
SELLER: 317 E COURT LLC
BUYER: GBI-ANKENY LLC
ACRES: 0.661
SQUARE FEET: 9,771

322 E. COURT AVE., DES MOINES
DATE: 2026-03-02
SALE PRICE: \$3,112,777
SELLER: 322 E COURT LLC
BUYER: GBI-ANKENY LLC
ACRES: 0.547
SQUARE FEET: 14,400

6240 N.W. BEAVER DRIVE, JOHNSTON
DATE: 2026-03-04
SALE PRICE: \$1,224,000
SELLER: GREEDY INVESTMENTS LLC
BUYER: NW BEAVER LLC
ACRES: 1.352
SQUARE FEET: 14,400

9351 SWANSON BLVD., CLIVE
DATE: 2026-03-05
SALE PRICE: \$800,000
SELLER: WILLIAMS TURF FARMS INC
BUYER: STRUCTURED REAL ESTATE LLC
ACRES: 1.002
SQUARE FEET: 12,210

951 28TH ST., DES MOINES
DATE: 2026-03-05
SALE PRICE: \$172,500
SELLER: GOLDEN, FRENCH N
BUYER: CITY OF DES MOINES
ACRES: 0.161
SQUARE FEET: 771

NO ADDRESS LISTED
DATE: 2026-03-06
SALE PRICE: \$4,045,159
SELLER: LOUNSBURY, BENJAMIN L
BUYER: WEST GRAND PROPERTIES LLC
ACRES: 8.073
SQUARE FEET: 0

3301 111TH ST., URBANDALE
DATE: 2026-03-09
SALE PRICE: \$245,000
SELLER: NEXT TEN LLC
BUYER: MCCANN HOLDINGS LLC
ACRES: 0.107
SQUARE FEET: 1,500

7800 FLEUR DRIVE, DES MOINES
DATE: 2026-03-09
SALE PRICE: \$500,000
SELLER: FLEUR PROPERTIES LC
BUYER: PENTA PARTNERS LLC
ACRES: 3.198
SQUARE FEET: 0

1075 33RD ST., DES MOINES
DATE: 2026-03-09
SALE PRICE: \$836,000
SELLER: JKSULLY02 LLC
BUYER: BRICK ROW LLC
ACRES: 0.809
SQUARE FEET: 10,523

2936 E WALNUT ST., DES MOINES
DATE: 2026-03-09
SALE PRICE: \$215,000
SELLER: PETERSON, THOMAS
BUYER: ALLEGIANT PROPERTIES LLC
ACRES: 0.283
SQUARE FEET: 2,224

129 S.E. 18TH ST., DES MOINES
DATE: 2026-03-10
SALE PRICE: \$806,000
SELLER: HOLT SALES & SERVICE LLC
BUYER: 20 E 18TH DES MOINES LLC
ACRES: 3.641
SQUARE FEET: 37,852

5601 DOUGLAS AVE., DES MOINES
DATE: 2026-03-11
SALE PRICE: \$550,000
SELLER: SHREVE PROPERTIES INC
BUYER: FULL CIRCLE RECOVERY COMMUNITY CENTERS
ACRES: 0.975
SQUARE FEET: 8,446

2910 E. UNIVERSITY AVE., DES MOINES
DATE: 2026-03-11
SALE PRICE: \$1,680,000
SELLER: EAST UNIVERSITY PROPERTY LLC
BUYER: KING'S GROVE REALTY LLC
ACRES: 0.764
SQUARE FEET: 9,312

401 SHERIDAN AVE., DES MOINES
DATE: 2026-03-12
SALE PRICE: \$200,000
SELLER: ANAGO OIL COMPANY INC
BUYER: COLIN, JOSE C
ACRES: 2.204
SQUARE FEET: 0

209 FOURTH ST., WEST DES MOINES
DATE: 2026-03-13
SALE PRICE: \$500,000
SELLER: JUNCTION HOLDINGS OF IOWA INC
BUYER: VALLEY JUNCTION HOLDINGS LLC
ACRES: 0.499
SQUARE FEET: 10,573

1245 21ST ST., DES MOINES
DATE: 2026-03-16
SALE PRICE: \$80,000
SELLER: ITM SERVICES LLC
BUYER: JJR HOLDINGS LLC
ACRES: 0.433
SQUARE FEET: 0

2701 DELAWARE AVE., DES MOINES
DATE: 2026-03-16
SALE PRICE: \$2,400,000
SELLER: NL VENTURES XII MORTON LLC
BUYER: CHARLIE'S PROPERTIES LLC
ACRES: 2.296
SQUARE FEET: 29,480

3911 S.E. FOUR MILE DRIVE, ANKENY
DATE: 2026-03-17
SALE PRICE: \$515,000
SELLER: DRA PROPERTIES LC
BUYER: STARKENBURG PROPERTY MANAGEMENT LLC
ACRES: 2.224
SQUARE FEET: 0

3607 INGERSOLL AVE., DES MOINES
DATE: 2026-03-17
SALE PRICE: \$1,900,000
SELLER: AHC INGERSOLL LLC
BUYER: AMES, STEVE
ACRES: 0.359
SQUARE FEET: 19,653

NO ADDRESS LISTED
DATE: 2026-03-17
SALE PRICE: \$60,000
SELLER: THE KNOLLS LLC
BUYER: R2 HOLDINGS LLC
ACRES: 0.154
SQUARE FEET: 0

2717 N.E. THRESHOLD DRIVE, ANKENY
DATE: 2026-03-18
SALE PRICE: \$2,099,328
SELLER: DRA PROPERTIES LC
BUYER: NELSON DEVELOPMENT 1 LLC
ACRES: 6.024
SQUARE FEET: 0

229 COLLEGE AVE., DES MOINES
DATE: 2026-03-18
SALE PRICE: \$300,000
SELLER: JEWETT HOLDINGS LLC
BUYER: SPARKS, JACOB BRANDT
ACRES: 0.275
SQUARE FEET: 2,392

NO ADDRESS LISTED
DATE: 2026-03-19
SALE PRICE: \$400,500
SELLER: HORIZON ADVISORS LC
BUYER: CITY OF GRIMES
ACRES: 5.905
SQUARE FEET: 0

6025 S.E. 14TH ST., DES MOINES
DATE: 2026-03-20
SALE PRICE: \$2,675,000
SELLER: STICKFORT REAL ESTATE HOLDINGS LLC
BUYER: EXCHANGERIGHT ESSENTIAL INCOME 10 DST
ACRES: 0.836
SQUARE FEET: 9,963

1454 30TH ST., UNIT 208, WEST DES MOINES
DATE: 2026-03-23
SALE PRICE: \$267,500
SELLER: TODD SRB LLC
BUYER: 932 N SHADYVIEW LLC
ACRES: 0.496
SQUARE FEET: 5,866

3315 E. 15TH ST., DES MOINES
DATE: 2026-03-23
SALE PRICE: \$2,270,000
SELLER: SENGER DES MOINES INVESTMENTS LLC
BUYER: DELJRN ESTATES LLC
ACRES: 2.209
SQUARE FEET: 35,880

NO ADDRESS LISTED
DATE: 2026-03-23
SALE PRICE: \$60,612
SELLER: EBH INC
BUYER: CITY OF GRIMES
ACRES: 1.127
SQUARE FEET: 0

5806 MEREDITH DRIVE, URBANDALE
DATE: 2026-03-24
SALE PRICE: \$2,300,000
SELLER: DARBQUEENOF CARS LLC
BUYER: CK ENTERPRISES LLC
ACRES: 1.334
SQUARE FEET: 11,196

5800 PARK AVE., DES MOINES
DATE: 2026-03-24
SALE PRICE: \$422,314
SELLER: AIRPORT DEVELOPMENT LC
BUYER: NEXT PHASE DEVELOPMENT LLC
ACRES: 2.766
SQUARE FEET: 0

1 SYSCO PLACE, ANKENY
DATE: 2026-03-25
SALE PRICE: \$22,760,000
SELLER: SYSCO IOWA INC
BUYER: SYANIA001 LLC
ACRES: 25.660
SQUARE FEET: 291,855

115 EUCLID AVE., DES MOINES
DATE: 2026-03-25
SALE PRICE: \$1,275,000
SELLER: BERCH PRINCETON HOLDINGS LLC
BUYER: CELEBRATE HOLDINGS HIGHLAND PARK LLC
ACRES: 1.056
SQUARE FEET: 4,946

1418 E. NINTH ST., DES MOINES
DATE: 2026-03-26
SALE PRICE: \$290,000
SELLER: GIBBS, MATTHEW RAY
BUYER: SHAGBARK RIDGE LLC
ACRES: 0.322
SQUARE FEET: 3,710

1115 W. FIRST ST., ANKENY
DATE: 2026-03-26
SALE PRICE: \$5,800,000
SELLER: RJ PARTNERS LLC
BUYER: CALIA 9 LLC
ACRES: 2.612
SQUARE FEET: 59,946

110 S.E. GRANT ST., SUITE 103, ANKENY
DATE: 2026-03-26
SALE PRICE: \$300,000
SELLER: JAMES J BURRIGHT & DONNA A BURRIGHT REVOCABLE TRUS
BUYER: NORTH CENTRAL PROPERTIES LLC
ACRES: 0.093
SQUARE FEET: 1,920

2855 S.W. VINTAGE PARKWAY, ANKENY
DATE: 2026-03-26
SALE PRICE: \$36,954,791
SELLER: PRAIRIE TRAIL SENIOR LIVING LLC
BUYER: 2855 SW VINTAGE PKWY PROPCO LLC
ACRES: 7.189
SQUARE FEET: 143,249

COMMERCIAL REAL ESTATE

2340 E. NINTH ST., DES MOINES
DATE: 2026-03-27
SALE PRICE: \$300,000
SELLER: SHERMAN LODGE NO 576
INDEPENDENT ORDER OF ODD FELL
BUYER: MACHARIA, ELIJAH
ACRES: 0.627
SQUARE FEET: 4,900

5210 N.E. 17TH ST., DES MOINES
DATE: 2026-03-27
SALE PRICE: \$1,358,555
SELLER: CMI PROPERTIES LC
BUYER: TENET EQUITY FUNDING SPE
V LLC
ACRES: 1.840
SQUARE FEET: 11,124

1902 DEAN AVE., DES MOINES
DATE: 2026-03-27
SALE PRICE: \$500,000
SELLER: KENNETH W DEEVER JR
REVOCABLE TRUST
BUYER: 20 E 18TH DES MOINES LLC
ACRES: 0.835
SQUARE FEET: 10,028

130 S. NINTH ST., WEST DES MOINES
DATE: 2026-03-30
SALE PRICE: \$2,425,000
SELLER: PASCO STORAGE UNLIMITED
INC
BUYER: NELSON DEVELOPMENT 1 LLC
ACRES: 7.059
SQUARE FEET: 0

1700 N.E. BEAVERBROOK BLVD., GRIMES
DATE: 2026-03-31
SALE PRICE: \$884,311
SELLER: DSRK LLC
BUYER: HOPE DEVELOPMENT & REALTY
LLC
ACRES: 2.852
SQUARE FEET: 0

1251 N.E. GATEWAY DRIVE, GRIMES
DATE: 2026-03-31
SALE PRICE: \$884,311
SELLER: DSRK LLC
BUYER: STANBROUGH COMPANIES LLC
ACRES: 3.385
SQUARE FEET: 0

2450 N.W. 66TH AVE., DES MOINES
DATE: 2026-03-31
SALE PRICE: \$285,000
SELLER: RDM HOLDINGS LLC
BUYER: SPAIN, SAWYER
ACRES: 3.354
SQUARE FEET: 0

5536 N.W. BEAVER DRIVE, JOHNSTON
DATE: 2026-04-01
SALE PRICE: \$2,850,000
SELLER: BEAVER GROUP LLC
BUYER: BRILAND PROPERTIES LLC
ACRES: 3.492
SQUARE FEET: 41,698

5645 WEST PARKWAY, JOHNSTON
DATE: 2026-04-01
SALE PRICE: \$180,000
SELLER: RAL LC-JOHNSTON SERIES
BUYER: RUJK PROPERTY HOLDINGS
LLC
ACRES: 1.178
SQUARE FEET: 0

1829 N.W. 86TH ST., CLIVE
DATE: 2026-04-01
SALE PRICE: \$389,335
SELLER: DONATI, KATHY
BUYER: CITY OF CLIVE
ACRES: 0.275
SQUARE FEET: 3,000

12345 UNIVERSITY AVE., CLIVE
DATE: 2026-04-02
SALE PRICE: \$5,450,000
SELLER: STRATFORD PARTNERS LLC
BUYER: FORTRESS BANK
ACRES: 2.488
SQUARE FEET: 39,732

3430 MARTIN LUTHER KING JR PARKWAY, DES MOINES
DATE: 2026-04-02
SALE PRICE: \$696,000
SELLER: ATERRA 1 LLC
BUYER: VANITY BEAUTY SHOP LLC PS
UNITED
ACRES: 1.129
SQUARE FEET: 12,212

1100 N.E. DESTINATION DRIVE, GRIMES
DATE: 2026-04-03
SALE PRICE: \$400,679
SELLER: SIGNATURE ERNST HOLDINGS
LLC
BUYER: SIGNATURE INVESTMENTS OF
IOWA LLC
ACRES: 1.150
SQUARE FEET: 0

401 GRAND AVE., WEST DES MOINES
DATE: 2026-04-08
SALE PRICE: \$415,000
SELLER: MODERN DESK LLC
BUYER: MAP INVESTMENTS LLC
ACRES: 0.178
SQUARE FEET: 1,464

NO ADDRESS LISTED
DATE: 2026-04-09
SALE PRICE: \$1,720,000
SELLER: IOWA NATURAL HERITAGE
FOUNDATION
BUYER: POLK COUNTY
ACRES: 131.986
SQUARE FEET: 0

315 N.W. 36TH ST., ANKENY
DATE: 2026-04-09
SALE PRICE: \$1,198,475
SELLER: NORTH ANKENY BOULEVARD
LLC
BUYER: DB ANKENY 376 LLC
ACRES: 1.101
SQUARE FEET: 0

3501 WESTOWN PARKWAY, WEST DES MOINES
DATE: 2026-04-09
SALE PRICE: \$2,300,000
SELLER: HURD VALLEY WEST LLC
BUYER: KWIK TRIP INC
ACRES: 1.896
SQUARE FEET: 11,184 ■



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Iowa Sweet Corn on a Stick [8 pieces - 1/2 pan]

Corn Dog on a Stick [8 pieces - 1/2pan]

Cyd's Fried Pork Tenderloin [8 pieces - 1/2 pan]

- slider roll
- lettuce
- pickles
- mustard
- ketchup

Cubed Mint Watermelon [80oz]

Churros with Cinnamon Sugar [80oz]

- Vanilla Whipped Cream [48oz]

Sliced Apples with fresh-ground honey peanut butter

- apples [48 oz]
- peanut butter [24oz]



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Borrower Name	City	County	Cong. District	\$ Amount	Jobs Created	Jobs Retained	New Vs. Existing	Business Type
Acorns and Twigs, LLC	CENTERVILLE	APPANOOSE	03	\$236,300	2	2	EXISTING	Gift, Novelty and Souvenir Retailers
MASTER CERTIFIED MOBILE RV SERVICES	WALFORD	BENTON	02	\$40,000	0	1	NEW	General Automotive Repair
Splendore Wellness, P.L.L.C.	CEDAR FALLS	BLACK HAWK	02	\$75,000	0	0	EXISTING	All Other Personal Services
Denny's Heating, A/C & Plumbing, LTD.	Cherokee	CHEROKEE	04	\$734,000	3	6	NEW	Plumbing, Heating, and Air-Conditioning Contractors
Coltan Ketelsen	Perry	DALLAS	03	\$373,000	0	0	EXISTING	Soybean Farming
B&A MOVEMENT, LLC	WEST DES MOINES	DALLAS	03	\$50,000	2	2	NEW	Fitness and Recreational Sports Centers
B&A MOVEMENT, LLC	WEST DES MOINES	DALLAS	03	\$707,500	2	2	NEW	Fitness and Recreational Sports Centers
Alger Companies, Inc.	Milford	DICKINSON	04	\$318,000	0	0	EXISTING	Metal Coating, Engraving (except Jewelry and Silverware), and Allied Serv
Marathon Media Services, LLC	Charles City	FLOYD	02	\$350,000	0	1	NEW	Advertising Agencies
Five and Two Holdings, LLC	GRUNDY CENTER	GRUNDY	02	\$236,000	2	6	EXISTING	Offices of Physical, Occupational and Speech Therapists, and Audiologists
ZE Properties LLC	FOREST CITY	HANCOCK	04	\$123,000	0	2	NEW	Fitness and Recreational Sports Centers
Pringnitz Property LLC	Garner	HANCOCK	04	\$250,000	0	1	NEW	Lessors of Miniwarehouses and Self-Storage Units
Rosin Imperial Group LLC	North Liberty	JOHNSON	01	\$452,600	2	2	NEW	Drinking Places (Alcoholic Beverages)
Pathway Plus Services LLC	Cedar Rapids	LINN	02	\$216,000	1	1	NEW	All Other Personal Services
MASSRBJR, LLC	Cedar Rapids	LINN	02	\$456,000	34	0	EXISTING	Full-Service Restaurants
B ZOLLINGER COMPANY LLC	ROCK RAPIDS	LYON	04	\$23,300	0	1	NEW	Industrial Machinery and Equipment Merchant Wholesalers
Chet Jantzen	Riceville	MITCHELL	02	\$515,000	0	5	EXISTING	Floriculture Production
SLN HOTELS IOWA LLC	RED OAK	MONTGOMERY	03	\$1,305,000	0	8	NEW	Hotels (except Casino Hotels) and Motels
TSI Enterprises Inc	Muscatine	MUSCATINE	01	\$3,200,000	0	289	EXISTING	Temporary Help Services
Ascension Sports LLC	Des Moines	POLK	03	\$230,600	1	8	NEW	Fitness and Recreational Sports Centers
Michael's Legacy Group, LLC	JOHNSTON	POLK	03	\$250,000	6	1	NEW	Automobile Driving Schools
Exclusive B3 Company	URBANDALE	POLK	03	\$252,000	2	0	NEW	Plumbing, Heating, and Air-Conditioning Contractors
Main on State Inc	Bettendorf	SCOTT	01	\$282,800	11	1	NEW	Drinking Places (Alcoholic Beverages)
Snyder Ventures LLC	DAVENPORT	SCOTT	01	\$100,000	2	2	NEW	All Other Specialty Trade Contractors
The Dancer's Place	Davenport	SCOTT	01	\$150,000	0	10	NEW	Dance Companies
Chrono Pop LLC	Davenport	SCOTT	01	\$300,000	0	1	EXISTING	Convention and Trade Show Organizers
JBL Enterprises, LLC	AMES	STORY	04	\$517,000	3	3	NEW	Fitness and Recreational Sports Centers
Palek Bookkeeping, LLC	SLATER	STORY	04	\$100,000	0	0	EXISTING	Other Accounting Services
CHAZZ'S SMOKE SHACK LLC	MOVILLE	WOODBURY	04	\$10,000	0	2	EXISTING	Mobile Food Services

TRANSACTIONS FROM JUNE 2026

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

CITYVIEW BEST

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BEST CLASS

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

Small business group announces Carlson as new state director in Iowa

The nation's leading small-business association, the National Federation of Independent Business (NFIB), announced that Cody Carlson is its new state director in Iowa. Carlson will be responsible for all aspects of the organization's state advocacy, operations, political engagement, communications and programming on behalf of NFIB members across the state.



Cody Carlson

Foster joins Des Moines University Clinic - Physical Therapy

Jenilee Foster, PT, DPT, MHA, has joined the providers at Des Moines University Clinic - Physical Therapy. Foster brings a wealth of experience to the clinic, located at 3200 Grand Ave. at the DMU32 Health and Business Complex in Des Moines. Foster is a certified spinal manual therapist through the International Spine and Pain Institute and Evidence In Motion. She is also certified in dry needling and her training includes the treatment of pelvic pain, urinary and fecal incontinence, constipation, bowel dysfunction, pregnancy and postpartum-related conditions. She is certified in perimenopause and menopause care and is experienced treating athletes with pelvic pain, incontinence and related dysfunctions.



Jenilee Foster

Silos & Smokestacks National Heritage Area welcomes Ver Mulm as director of development

As it celebrates 30 years of preserving and sharing the story of American agriculture, Silos & Smokestacks National Heritage Area (SSNHA) announced the addition of Calvin Ver Mulm as its new director of development. In this role, Ver Mulm will lead fundraising, donor relations, sponsorship development, grant support, and strategic initiatives designed to strengthen the organization's mission and support the preservation, interpretation and promotion of agricultural heritage across northeast Iowa.

Perez appointed to Des Moines University Alumni Board

Des Moines University Medicine and Health Sciences has appointed Andrea Perez, a 2002 Doctor of Osteopathic Medicine graduate, to its alumni board. Perez will serve a three-year term, supporting alumni engagement efforts and helping advance the university's mission.



Andrea Perez

Boelman named First National Bank market president in Ankeny

First National Bank announced the promotion of Troy Boelman to market president of its Ankeny location. Boelman succeeds Tom Friedman, who retired following an accomplished 45-year banking career, including 20 years of dedicated service with First National Bank.



Troy Boelman

Des Moines Public Schools introduces new leaders for the 2026-2027 school year

Des Moines Public Schools announced several leadership appointments. These leaders bring extensive experience in special education, digital learning, multilingual education, school finance and career and technical education. Together, they represent decades of service in public education and a shared commitment to creating opportunities for all students.

- Kristin Rourk, executive director of special education
- Kathleen Bottaro, director of digital literacy and innovation
- Natalie French, executive director of federal programs and school supports
- Eric Brown, director of financial planning and analysis
- Tascha Brown, director of career and technical education and postsecondary readiness

Des Moines University Medicine and Health Sciences announces promotions in facilities and marketing

Des Moines University Medicine and Health Sciences announced two internal promotions. Chris Schmidt, who directs facilities management, and Denise Lamphier, MA, who directs marketing and communications, became senior directors effective July 1.



Chris Schmidt



Denise Lamphier

United Way of Central Iowa welcomes new board members

The United Way of Central Iowa Board of Directors announced the addition of eight new members, who began their two-year terms on July 1. These individuals bring a wealth of experience and fresh perspectives that will further strengthen the organization's leadership and strategic direction.

- Philip Blumberg, chief executive officer, Iowa Donor Network
- Aaron Boushek, chief financial officer, American Equity
- Brian Brown, campus lead pastor, Hope+Elim Church
- Kimberly Graham, Polk County attorney
- Brian Ohorilko, president and CEO, Prairie Meadows Racetrack and Casino
- Lindsey Riley, vice president, head of enterprise planning and insights, F&G

- Kara Wilson, partner, PwC
- Andrea Woodard, executive director, Iowa State Association of Counties

MidAmerican Energy's Kunert elected ABI board chair

The Iowa Association of Business and Industry (ABI) welcomes Kathryn Kunert, vice president economic connections and integration at MidAmerican Energy, as chair of its board of directors for the 2026-27 term. A native of Mason City and a graduate of the University of Northern Iowa, Kunert has spent three decades with MidAmerican Energy, where she leads initiatives that strengthen relationships between business, communities and economic development partners across Iowa. ■

CITYVIEW

HOW-TO GUIDE



HOW TO CHOOSE A SWIM SCHOOL

Swimming is a valuable life skill that builds confidence, promotes physical health and could even save a life. Whether you are helping a toddler get comfortable in the water or looking to improve your own technique, finding the right swim school is an important step. With so many options available, it is worth taking time to explore your choices and find the best fit.

SAFETY AND CLEANLINESS

Safety should always come first. A reliable swim school will have clean, well-maintained pools and locker rooms. If a facility looks dirty or poorly organized, that is a sign to keep looking. Ask if certified lifeguards are present during all lessons and whether safety rules are clearly posted and enforced. It is also important to find out how the school handles hygiene for babies and toddlers. Make sure there are clear policies about swim diapers and procedures for cleaning the pool in case of accidents. These details can help you feel more confident that the facility takes health and safety seriously.

TYPES OF CLASSES AND SCHEDULING

Swim schools vary in the kinds of classes they offer. Some are designed specifically for children, while others welcome swimmers of all ages. If you are enrolling a child, look for a class that matches their age group, comfort level and skill. Some children thrive in private or semi-private lessons, especially if they are nervous or shy. Others do well in small group settings where they can interact and learn alongside peers.

When reviewing schedules, think about what times of day work best for your child. Younger children may do better in morning classes when they are more alert and energetic. School-age kids often benefit from lessons in the late afternoon or early evening.

INSTRUCTOR QUALIFICATIONS

The experience and training of the instructors matter. Ask whether the staff is certified in CPR, first aid and swim instruction. It is also a good idea to find out how long the instructors have been teaching and whether they have experience working with specific age groups.

You can ask about the school’s history as well. If a facility has a long track record and no serious safety incidents, that’s a strong sign of quality.

PERSONAL RECOMMENDATIONS

Sometimes the best leads come from people you know. Ask friends, family, neighbors or coworkers if they’ve had good experiences with any local swim schools. Your child’s school might also have suggestions. In many areas, city parks and recreation departments offer lessons or can point you in the right direction.

LOCATION AND CONVENIENCE

Try to find a swim school that fits easily into your weekly routine. If lessons are too far away or difficult to get to, you are less likely to keep up with them. Choosing a school near home, work or your child’s school will help you stay consistent and make swimming a regular, stress-free part of life.

With the right swim school, you are setting the stage for confidence in the water and a lifetime of enjoyment. ■





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• Pre-Competitive Swim Clinic	• Pelvic Floor Yoga	• Water Walking	• Children’s Swimming Lessons

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HOW TO CHOOSE A CPA FOR YOUR BUSINESS

When it comes to choosing a CPA firm for your business, there is a lot more to it than just finding someone who can prepare a tax return. You need a long-term partner who can help you understand your finances, make informed decisions, and navigate the challenges that come with running your business. But how do you know what to look for?

START LOCAL

Your CPA firm should understand your community and the people you serve. Furthermore, working with a local firm can make it easier to foster a personal relationship with the people handling your finances.

As a small business owner, you will often have questions that can't be answered by a generic online service and their chatbot. Having a team you can actually get ahold of, meet in person, and form a bond with can make all the difference when you need guidance.

LOOK BEYOND TAX PREPARATION

Tax season may be the reason you first reach out to a CPA, but your business will eventually

need more. As your business grows you will find you can no longer do everything yourself, and you may want help with bookkeeping, payroll, accounting services or business consulting. Choosing a firm that offers a wide range of services, even if you don't need them yet, means you can work with a team that already knows your business rather than starting over with a new provider every time your business grows.

Starting with just tax preparation may be right for your business. But, over time, your CPA should also become a resource for understanding your financial statements, planning for growth and making important business decisions.

ASK ABOUT YEAR-ROUND SUPPORT

Tax Season is just one small part of running your business, with the rest of the year bringing its own questions and decisions. When choosing a firm, ask how they work with clients outside of tax season. Are they available to answer questions? Can they help you understand financial information? Do they offer guidance when making important decisions for your

business?

You need a CPA who works with you throughout the year and provide a more complete understanding of your business and its financial position.

FINDING SOMEONE YOU CAN TALK TO

Financial information and taxes can be confusing. You should feel comfortable asking questions and be confident that your answers will be explained in a way you can understand. A good relationship with your CPA firm should feel personal. They should take the time to understand your business, your goals, and the challenges you face rather than treating your company like just another tax return.

Choosing a CPA comes down to finding a partner for your business that you can trust. Look for a local firm that offers the services you need now, that can grow with you, takes time to understand your goals, and can continue supporting you as your business grows. Your CPA should be more than someone you see once a year during tax season, they should become a part of your team. ■

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HOW TO CHOOSE A PIERCER / PIERCING STUDIO

Seeking out a professional piercer can be a challenge. Many factors separate one practitioner from another, and not all of them will be obvious. In a sea of options, many buzzwords and catchphrases are used to help clients feel comfortable. While the intention may be good, talk is cheap and can mislead clients into a false sense of security.

Asking the right questions and taking a tour of the facility will help you determine the right choice for you.

First, consider what is important to you in your piercing experience. Cleanliness, sterility, quality jewelry, great customer service, and a good overall experience are common concerns. Nobody is actively looking for the worst experience with subpar products and services.

Unfortunately, many people focus primarily on finding the lowest-cost option. This often leads to that subpar piercing experience and result.

SEEK EXACTLY WHAT YOU'RE LOOKING FOR: FIND A SPECIALTY STUDIO

Specialty body piercing studios hire dedicated practitioners who specialize in just piercing. These piercers take their careers seriously as the entire business model revolves around this.

They tend to have dedicated countless hours into continued education and perfecting their art. It can take multiple years to become a competent professional piercer. Establishments that hire non-piercers to perform piercing services raises the question: What sacrifices are being made to the client?

COMPARE EDUCATION AND EXPERIENCE

Ask, "How long have you been piercing?" This will give you a baseline for their years in the industry. However, years of experience alone do not determine the quality of the service or product you will receive.

Then ask, "How did you learn to pierce?" This question addresses their initial introduction to the industry and provides information about the quality of education they initially received. There are many ways people enter the industry, again this answer should not be the sole deciding factor.

Finally, ask, "What have you done over the last several years to continue your education?" This response, alongside the previous answers, will help complete the picture of the practitioners you are considering. Legitimate continued education is available through the APP (Association of Professional Piercers, safepiercing.org) The goal

here is to find the education and experience of the piercer that contribute to the values you seek.

While answers can be nuanced, good piercers revel in answering any questions you may have.

TAKE A TOUR, ASK MORE QUESTIONS, AND MAKE A SELECTION

Once you have narrowed your choices to your top three establishments, schedule a consultation and take a tour. Look at the studio, see how it operates behind the scenes, and learn what separates it from other facilities.

Ask the piercer about your desired piercing, including the procedure, placement, appropriate jewelry options, and sterilization practices. This will give you a sense of the experience you can expect.

Look at the jewelry selection. Is there a variety of suitable options? Can you find something that fits your style? Only at this point should you consider price. Buy it once. Enjoy it forever.

After touring your preferred studios, ask yourself which piercer best matches the level of education, experience, cleanliness, sterility, attention to detail and quality you desire.

Your piercing matters because you matter. Be confident asking questions; you're worth it. ■

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HOW TO ADVERTISE YOUR BUSINESS FOR GROWTH

Small businesses often operate with limited resources, tight margins and strong local competition. In that environment, advertising isn't a luxury, it's a necessity for survival and growth. Without it, even the best products or services can remain invisible to potential customers. Here are six ways to make advertising work harder for your business.

1. BUILD AWARENESS BEFORE YOU NEED IT

Unlike large, established brands, small businesses usually lack name recognition. Start advertising before you are relying on it to save a slow month. Introducing your business to new audiences and continually reminding existing customers that you exist keeps you top of mind when they're ready to buy. Consistent visibility, not a single big push, is what gets you there.

2. ADVERTISE REGULARLY TO EARN TRUST

Consumers trust businesses they see regularly. A well-crafted advertisement signals professionalism and stability, even for a newer company. Aim for repeated exposure rather than a single ad that runs once and disappears. When potential customers encounter your business multiple

times, they're far more likely to view it as legitimate and reliable. That familiarity does some of the selling before a customer ever walks through the door.

3. USE URGENCY AND CLEAR OFFERS TO DRIVE ACTION

Promotions, limited-time offers and clear messaging move people from noticing you to buying from you. Without that kind of advertising, potential buyers may never learn about your special deals or what makes you different from the competition. In crowded markets, staying silent often means losing customers to whoever is more visible, not necessarily whoever is better.

4. THINK BEYOND THE NEXT SALE

Advertising supports long-term growth, not just immediate sales. It is also how you build a brand. Over time, consistent messaging shapes how customers perceive your business, its personality, values and quality. That brand identity becomes a powerful asset, helping small businesses compete with larger companies that may have more resources but less personal connection with their customers.

5. LET YOUR CAMPAIGNS TEACH YOU SOMETHING

Advertising isn't just an output; it is a feedback loop. Track which campaigns perform best and pay attention to what that tells you about customer preferences and behavior. That data can inform more than future marketing. It can shape product development, pricing strategies and customer service improvements, too, giving even a modest budget more value over time.

6. TREAT ADVERTISING AS YOUR VOICE IN THE MARKETPLACE

Put these steps together and advertising becomes more than a line item. It increases visibility, builds trust, drives sales and supports long-term success. Without it, even the most promising small business risks being overlooked.

You don't need a full strategy on day one. Pick the step that feels most out of reach right now, whether that is showing up more consistently or finally tracking what your ads actually do, and put it into practice this month. Small, steady efforts compound. The businesses that keep showing up are the ones customers remember when it is time to buy. ■

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Tionne “T-Boz” Watkins and Rozonda “Chilli” Thomas.
Photo courtesy of TLC

JAMMIN'

AT THE IOWA STATE FAIR

Rozonda “Chilli” Thomas of TLC talks about performing with Salt-N-Pepa and En Vogue as the trio of hip hop titans perform at the fair.

By Cyote Williams

At the 2026 Iowa State Fair, the Grandstand is once again being treated to national- and world-renowned performers. Some of the biggest names in country, rock and hip hop are taking the stage in Des Moines to give fairgoers shows they won't forget. On Tuesday, Aug. 18, fairgoers will be getting treated particularly well, as three of the most iconic female hip hop and rap groups of all time are teaming up to take the stage and perform their timeless tracks.

TLC, Salt-N-Pepa and En Vogue, three pioneers of female hip hop, rap and RnB, have joined each other for the aptly named, “It’s Iconic” tour. Between the three groups, they have accumulated more than five billion streams despite producing music before the streaming era. Together, they have five Grammys and 24 total nominations. Bringing these three titans together to share the stage is almost unheard of.

To hear some of her own story, how this collaboration came

together, and what concert attendees should expect, we spoke to TLC’s Rozonda “Chilli” Thomas.

We started the conversation off with a question about some of the wacky foods that are found at the Iowa State Fair. Chilli, a workout fanatic, responded on if she would try the butter dipped ice cream.

“Listen, it sounds amazing, and like I’ll have a heart attack right after I eat all of it. It sounds delicious, and I know it is. But I will not partake,” Chilli said.

She said her early music inspirations were Michael Jackson, Janet Jackson and Cyndi Lauper — three performers known from their stage presence.

“I love singing and dancing. You know, I always would have like a brush in my hand, pretending it’s the mic, singing like pretending I’m on stage,” Chilli said.

As for how the three major groups were able to come together, Chilli credits Roc Nation, the entertainment company founded by Jay-Z.

“Roc Nation is the one who made the call, and everybody was like, yeah! En Vogue actually came on at the last minute, and then it was complete,” Chilli said. “We’re super fans of each other, you know, and we have so much love and respect for each other, and we’re so excited about this tour.”

Chilli said in another interview that she was going to be working hard to get everyone into the best shape possible for this tour. She said she was going to have everyone on a strict schedule but was kind enough to offer an hour for lunch.

“The days are long. Rehearsals from 11 a.m. to 8 p.m. I did tell them prior to us rehearsing to start getting ready and get yourself together for rehearsals because rehearsals is a lot. Especially for Tionne (“T-Boz” Watkins, her partner in TLC), because we’re dancers, too, so we really work very hard,” Chilli said. “In the past, you know, I have gotten some complaints from agents. They’ll call and be like, the dancers are saying Chilli is working everybody too hard. And, I promise you, I wasn’t working them alone. Like we’re working together. Like, OK, I gotta sing and dance. Y’all better come on. And you guys are like 10-plus years younger. No excuses.”

Many of the songs from TLC and their touring partners are still played in clubs, at dances, on the radio, even in grocery stores. Songs like “No Scrubs,” “Waterfalls,” “Unpretty,” and “Red Light Special” remain in heavy rotation for the generation that grew up on them in 1990s and 2000s. But, with this tour, Chilli and T-Boz have the chance to introduce their songs to another generation.

“It’s beyond exciting to me because you love your day ones, right?



Tionne “T-Boz” Watkins and Rozonda “Chilli” Thomas. Photo courtesy of TLC

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They’ve just been there since the beginning. The younger generation has a different type of excitement in their eyes because it’s new to them. It is so amazing to look out in the audience and see like, 5- and 6-year-olds dressed like us and singing all the words to ‘No Scrubs.’ It’s crazy to see, as if the song had just come out. We’re very blessed to have our catalog. The other girls are, too, you know, because you just never know if your songs are gonna have longevity. Time tells you that,” Chilli said.

She says knowing that those songs have such a cultural impact means a great deal to her.

“Being in the studio and recording those songs, we were excited. Some of them were obvious. I was like, ‘All right, that’s a smash,’ you know. Then you just really hope that the listeners feel the same way, and that it touches them in some way,” Chilli said. “Most of our songs have been a good cushion for some people, because they’ve shared stories with us. You know, like ‘Unpretty’ and ‘Waterfalls.’ It’s funny to hear each song that somebody says that meant something to them, where they were in their lives, and what was going on with them at that time, and just how it made them feel better in whatever way. It’s always wonderful to hear those stories.”

Rapid-fire questions with Rozonda “Chilli” Thomas

Q: What is your favorite song to perform?

A: I like the high-energy ones, probably “Ain’t 2 Proud 2 Beg.”

Q: What is the most difficult song to perform?

A: “Way Back.” Because it is eight hours long, it’s like the longest song ever. After the hook, I’m like, that was five minutes right there. I’m serious. The song is great. The groove is crazy, and all the things — with singing — you don’t really have much room to catch your breath.

Q: What is your favorite city you’ve performed in?

A: I’m gonna be honest. I don’t have a favorite. I just love performing, going everywhere to see everybody.

Q: What is something about you that people would be surprised to find out?

A: I’m a homebody. I’m like a little hermit. I like being outside. It’s cool and everything, but I’d rather be inside.

GRANDSTAND ACTS

HARDY

Thursday, Aug. 13 at 8 p.m.

\$54-\$109

Opener: McCoy Moore

Country artist HARDY has more than eight billion streams throughout his career, has won five ACM awards and two CMA awards, and has earned praise from some of the biggest names in country music. His songs have topped the charts, with 18 number ones. “Favorite Country Song,” three-time platinum “TRUCK BED,” and four-time platinum “ONE BEER” have all been in rotation among country music fans.



Rod Stewart

Friday, Aug. 14 at 8 p.m.

\$69-\$134

Opener: Richard Marx

Rod Stewart is one of the most synonymous names in rock music history, selling more than 250 million albums and singles worldwide. He has 10 U.K. No. 1 albums, 31 U.K. top 10 singles and 17 top 10 albums in the U.S. Stewart is also a two-time Rock and Roll Hall of Fame inductee, is part of the U.K. Music Hall of Fame, and was even knighted at Buckingham Palace for his contributions to music and charity.



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The Red Clay Strays

Saturday, Aug. 15 at 8 p.m.

\$54-\$109

Opener: The Bends

This country and rock group bonded over a shared love of Lynyrd Skynyrd and has gone on to be one of today's fastest-growing rock groups. They self-released their debut album in 2022 and had a viral hit, "Wondering Why," which helped propel them into the spotlight. Since then, the group has continued to hit the charts and catch the attention of the public.



Lainey Wilson

Sunday, Aug. 16 at 8 p.m.

\$69-\$134

Opener: Tigirlily Gold

Lainey Wilson has been taking over the country music scene and popular culture since 2025. Her show was already sold out as of the writing of this entry, speaking to her name's drawing power. Wilson is a 12-time Country Music Award winner, 16-time Academy of Country Music award winner and Grammy-winning artist. Best known for her No. 1 songs "Watermelon Moonshine" and "Heart Like a Truck," Wilson is one of the biggest acts performing at the Grandstand this year.



Staind

Monday, Aug. 17 at 8 p.m.

\$54-\$89

Opener: Hoobastank

Staind have been performing as a rock group since 1995, releasing seven studio albums and eight top 10 songs. Their 2001 album, "Break The Cycle," went five times platinum and included their biggest song, and one of 2000's rock music's biggest, "It's Been Awhile," which spent 20 weeks at No. 1. The group reunited after a five-year hiatus in 2019 and is back to touring and regularly releasing music.



TLC, Salt-N-Pepa and En Vogue

Tuesday, Aug. 18 at 8 p.m.

\$44-\$104

TLC, Salt-N-Pepa and En Vogue are three of the most recognizable artists from the original hip-hop and R&B booms from the 1990s and 2000s. TLC

is the best-selling girl group of all time and has stuck together for more than 30 years. Salt-N-Pepa became the first all-female rap group to earn platinum certification. Hopefully, state fairgoers won't go breaking any "Waterfalls" when they "Jump Up" out of their seats during this performance. En Vogue has also been credited as being one of the best-selling female groups of all time, with songs like "Hold On," "My Lovin' (You're Never Gonna Get It)," "Free Your Mind," "Whatta Man," and "Don't Let Go (Love)."



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AJR
Wednesday, Aug. 19 at 8 p.m.
 \$54-\$94

Opener: Em Beihold

AJR has managed to top chart after chart since debuting in 2012, making them one of the most successful indie bands in the world for the past decade. AJR has amassed more than five billion streams, with songs like “Weak” and “Bang!” hitting more than 500 million each. Their songs are catchy and bouncy, and their latest album, “The Maybe Man,” has continued to keep them in the cultural spotlight.



Riley Green
Thursday, Aug. 20 at 8 p.m.
 \$54-\$109

Opener: Mackenzie Carpenter

Another one of country music’s biggest names is hitting the Grandstand stage: Riley Green. Green has had his share of big hits like two-time platinum song “There Was This Girl” and three-time platinum “I Wish Grandpas Never Died” (us, too). He’s got several other chart toppers to his name — some fun, some sad, some heartbreaking and some heartwarming.



Alabama
Friday, Aug. 21 at 8 p.m.
 \$31-\$81

Opener: Exile

Not many bands can claim to have stayed together as long as Alabama has. Over the course of 40 years,



the group from, you guessed it, Alabama, has sold more than 73 million albums of their country music. From their first breakthrough song, “My Home’s in Alabama,” to arguably their most popular, “Dixieland Delight,” they have 43 No. 1 singles and more than 178 awards from various organizations and already have a spot in the Country Music Hall of Fame.

BigXthaPlug
Saturday, Aug. 22 at 8 p.m.
 \$29-\$69

Opener: XOLEX

He might not be the biggest, but he is certainly the largest, in his own words, of the performers at the Iowa State Fair this year. BigX has a voice unique to himself, deep and full of bass, that has helped him perform platinum songs such as “Texas,” “Mmhhh,” and “Levels.” He has taken over rap music the last two years due to his catchy songs and magnetic personality. He will feel comfortable among the large number of country artists performing at the fair, as BigX dabbled in country music himself with the chart-topping song “All The Way,” featuring Bailey Zimmerman.



Josiah Queen
Sunday, Aug. 23 at 6 p.m.
 \$19-\$59

Opener: Ben Fuller

Christian music artist Josiah Queen has been blowing up in the genre recently. With more than 744 million streams, his breakout song “The Prodigal” catapulted him to prominence among his peers. His debut album debuted at No. 1 on the Billboard Christian Album Charts, the first time this has occurred in Christian music history.



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Josh Baldwin

Thursday, Aug. 13 at 8 p.m.

Josh Baldwin is a songwriter and worship leader known for his songs “Praises” and “You deserve it all.”

Montgomery Gentry featuring Eddie Montgomery

Friday, Aug. 14 at 8 p.m.

Eddie Montgomery has been inducted into the Kentucky Music Hall of Fame and has five No. 1 country radio songs under his belt.

Moon Taxi

Saturday, Aug. 15 at 8 p.m.

The group has garnered more than 500 million streams across platforms, with “Two High” being their highest at more than 166 million.

La Sonora Dinamita

Sunday, Aug. 16 at 7 p.m.

This group of artists make 100% Colombian music and performs that country’s classics.

Hairball

Monday, Aug. 17 to Tuesday, Aug. 18, both at 8 p.m.

We interviewed a singer from the hair-raising, pyro-shooting and rock-singing group last year, who said, “I wear more makeup than your aunt, your mom and your sister combined. I wear higher heels, too, and I blow fire. We play the greatest hits in the history of rock and roll.”

Asleep at the Wheel

Wednesday, Aug. 19 at 8 p.m.

Asleep at the Wheel has had more than 100 members come and go during its time making music and has been releasing albums consistently since the 1970s.

The SugarHill Gang

Thursday, Aug. 20 at 8 p.m.

SugarHill Gang had one of rap music’s first major hits with “Rapper’s Delight,” which was arguably the first major commercially successful rap song.

Eli Young Band

Friday, Aug. 21 at 8 p.m.

Eli Young Band has three Billboard top-five albums to its name, and back-to-back No. 1 songs in 2011 to 2012 with “Crazy Girl” and “Even If It Breaks Your Heart.”

Chancey Williams

Saturday, Aug. 22 at 8 p.m.

Chancey Williams might be the only artist at this year’s fair who would be equally comfortable inside of the 4-H building, as he comes with a history of competing on horseback in the rodeo.

Aaron Watson

Sunday, Aug. 23 at 7 p.m.

Aaron Watson has had his tracks hit the Billboard Country Album top 10 five times including his album, “The Underdog,” which was the first independent album to debut at No. 1.

ANNE AND BILL RILEY STAGE

Tonic Sol-fa

Thursday, Aug. 13 through Friday, Aug. 14 at 7 p.m. and 9 p.m.

Emmy-award-winning touring group making pop, gospel and Christmas music.

Iowa State Fair Queen Coronation

Saturday, Aug. 15 at 7 p.m.

The annual Iowa State Fair Queen competition is between county queens from across the state.

Tribute to the Troops

Sunday, Aug. 16 through Monday, Aug. 17 at 7 p.m. and 9 p.m.

A salute to the stars and stripes performed by a female trio performing American classics.

The Britins

Tuesday, Aug. 18 through Wednesday, Aug. 19 at 7 p.m. and 9 p.m.

One of the longest-running Beatles tribute bands in the country, performing since 1977.

Dirty Rotten Scoundrels

Thursday, Aug. 20 at 7 p.m. and 9 p.m.

Bringing classic hits from the likes of Johnny Cash to Chuck Berry to Jerry Lewis, all on one stage.

Ron Diamond

Friday, Aug. 21 through Sunday, Aug. 23 at 5 p.m., 7 p.m. and 9 p.m.

Ron Diamond returns once more to perform his magical act, adding to the 22,000 career shows he has done.

MIDAMERICAN ENERGY STAGE

Jake Worthington

Thursday, Aug. 13 at 8 p.m.

Country artist inspired by Ray Price, Merle Haggard and George Jones.

The Nadas

Friday, Aug. 14 at 7 p.m. and 9 p.m.

The Nadas are one of Des Moines’ most well-known bands performing over the last three decades.

Jammy Buffet

Saturday, Aug. 15 through Sunday, Aug. 16 at 8 p.m.

Picking up right where the famous Margaritaville artist left off.

PetRock

Monday, Aug. 17 at 8 p.m.

No, this isn’t your child’s favorite stone; it’s an acoustic-based group ready to bring listeners back to the 1970s.

Tyler Halverson

Tuesday, Aug. 18 at 8 p.m.

Tyler Halverson bucks Nashville polish for South Dakota grit.

Colt Ford

Wednesday, Aug. 19 at 8 p.m.

Colt Ford has five consecutive top 10 debuts on the Billboard Country Albums Chart.

Slaughter

Thursday, Aug. 20 at 8 p.m.

Slaughter topped the charts in the 1990s and has been steadily performing and releasing music ever since.

Not Quite Brothers

Friday, Aug. 21 at 8 p.m.

This local group is becoming Iowa’s fastest-growing cover band with an eclectic setlist.

Jason Brown

Saturday, Aug. 22 at 8 p.m.

Jason Brown has seen songs of his like “Mamma Was A Rebel” hit Billboard charts.

Dwayne Gretzky

Sunday, Aug. 23 at 7 p.m.

This party band plays classic hits from the 1970s, 1980s and 1990s.

FUN FOREST STAGE

Brad Weston

Thursday, Aug. 13 through Sunday, Aug. 23

Clean, fast-paced show full of surprises.

The Rubber Chicken Show with Greg Frisbee

Thursday, Aug. 13 through Sunday, Aug. 23

Greg Frisbee makes rubber chickens the star of his comedy show.

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Art meets flavor

Couples are looking for ways to surprise, delight and tell their story through edible art. According to trend reports from TheWed.com, this year's biggest food ideas push the boundaries of creativity and presentation.



CAKES AS SCULPTURES

Wedding cakes are no longer just multi-tiered confections. They're becoming sculptural showpieces. Pastry chefs are experimenting with dramatic, architectural designs that resemble works of modern art. Expect to see angular tiers, asymmetrical stacking and innovative textures that make cakes look like stone, fabric or even floating structures. These cakes are as much a visual centerpiece as they are a dessert.

For couples hosting a themed wedding (another trend still growing in 2026), the cake can reflect that theme; sculpted in the shape of a dragon, a soccer ball, a castle or a passport.

PERSONALIZED PLATES

Personalization is taking center stage, with monogrammed food appearing across receptions. From initials dusted on macarons to embossed logos on chocolates, edible branding allows couples to weave their story into every bite. Monogrammed cocktails, complete with custom stencils and foams, are adding to the fun. It's a trend that lets couples quite literally put their name on the menu.

DINING AS THEATER

Culinary theater is transforming receptions into interactive experiences. Think chefs preparing flambé dishes tableside, mixologists crafting cocktails with smoke and vapor, or servers presenting surprise elements

hidden under domes. The dining experience is no longer just about taste; it's about performance and memory-making. Guests are invited to watch, interact and enjoy food as a form of entertainment.

EDIBLE LACE AND CROCHET

Another delicate trend for 2026 is edible lace and crochet. Pastry chefs are creating intricate, lace-like designs from sugar and chocolate that mimic embroidery or crochet patterns.

These delicate accents can be draped over cakes, desserts or even savory dishes for a romantic and whimsical touch. It's a way to blend traditional textile artistry with modern culinary technique.

A FEAST FOR THE SENSES

Together, these trends reflect a larger shift: weddings are becoming immersive, sensory experiences. Couples want food that sparks conversation and wonder. The goal is to leave guests with flavors and images they won't soon forget.

With artistry and creativity leading the way, 2026's food trends prove that wedding dining is about more than just the meal. It's about telling a story one unforgettable bite at a time. ■

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Playful details, bold statements

Brides walking down the aisle in 2026 are embracing a mix of nostalgia, romance and modern flair.

Designers are delivering playful embellishments, innovative fabrics and bold silhouettes that allow every bride to showcase her personal style. From dramatic bows to bubble skirts, this season's bridal fashion is anything but ordinary.

STATEMENT DETAILS TAKE CENTER STAGE

Oversized bows are making a big return, either draped across the back of a gown, cinched at the waist or perched on a shoulder. These eye-catching accents add a touch of whimsy and drama, perfect for brides who want a memorable entrance.

Unique lace is also trending, with designers experimenting beyond traditional floral patterns. Expect geometric motifs, abstract designs and even metallic threads woven into lace overlays, offering fresh takes on a timeless fabric.

Another revival is the Juliet cap, a romantic headpiece (think Romeo's sweetheart) that recalls vintage bridal styles. Often paired with a sheer veil, the cap frames the face with delicate embroidery or beading, striking the right balance between old-world charm and contemporary sophistication.

MODERN SILHOUETTES WITH MOVEMENT

For brides seeking a fashion-forward edge, draped silhouettes are a standout. Soft folds of fabric create elegant shapes that flatter without feeling overly structured. These gowns flow gracefully with movement, offering comfort as well as style. Basque waists — which dip into a V-shape below the natural waistline — are also reappearing on runways. This detail elongates the torso and adds a regal air to ballgowns and fitted dresses alike.

Bubble skirts are bringing volume back in a playful way. Gathered hemlines create rounded shapes that feel youthful and daring, particularly in shorter styles designed for receptions or after-parties. For brides who want versatility, removable sleeves are one of the most practical trends of the year. They allow a gown to transform from a romantic, long-sleeved ceremony look into a strapless or off-the-shoulder style better suited for dancing.



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COLOR AND CUSTOMIZATION

While white will always remain a classic, 2026 is seeing more brides step into color. Pale blues, blush pinks, champagne tones and even soft lavender are finding their way into bridal collections. These hues add personality without straying too far from tradition.

Customization is key, whether through detachable details, bold accessories or mixing unexpected elements. A bride might pair a sleek gown with a bubble overskirt for the reception, or layer a Juliet cap over a colorful veil.

This year’s fashion is about flexibility and storytelling, creating a look that reflects who the bride is and how she wants to be remembered.

In 2026, bridal fashion celebrates both heritage and individuality.

With so many options, brides can feel free to be bold, romantic or playful and sometimes all three in one unforgettable ensemble. ■



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Simple tips for a better bridal registry

Keep these tips and etiquette guidelines in mind to get the most out of your registry.



For some couples, the idea of registering for wedding gifts is an exciting way to start planning for the home they'll be sharing as newlyweds. For others, the registry is just one more chore to check off the wedding to-do list.

Regardless of where you fall on the love-it-or-hate-it spectrum, most experts agree a registry is a good idea, especially for couples who will be setting up a home together for the first time. Keep these tips and etiquette guidelines in mind to get the most out of your registry.

TAKE INVENTORY OF WHAT YOU HAVE AND WHAT YOU NEED

For couples who've lived alone or together, the registry may be a way to fill in gaps for necessities neither of you already have. It's also a good way to begin upgrading the less expensive kitchen items and furnishings you had as college students or singles. Make a list of your needs and wants so you don't forget any essentials. If you're still in doubt, request a checklist from the store where you'll be registering so you can do some planning.

REGISTER FOR THINGS AT A WIDE RANGE OF PRICE POINTS

The whole purpose of a registry is to make it easy for your guests to get you things you'll like and need. Part of making it easy is recognizing your guests have diverse financial situations. While it's customary to gift the bride and groom, not everyone can afford an extravagant gift, especially if they've spent money on travel and attire to attend. While it's a good idea to offer modest options, don't shy away from bigger ticket items that a small group might chip in on together.



KEEP ACCESS IN MIND WHEN YOU CHOOSE WHERE TO REGISTER

Avoid stores that are local or regional if you have many guests who live out of the area. Also avoid the temptation to choose online only options, as some guests will prefer to see what they're buying. Aim for a mix of large national stores and online retailers.

PLAN TO BLOCK OFF AT LEAST A FEW HOURS FOR AN IN-PERSON REGISTRY

It will take time to get everything set up. Traveling through the store, debating options and making your selections could take longer than expected. Also be sure to ask how you can add to or edit your registry after your initial visit.

GET YOUR PARTNER INVOLVED

There are bound to be some parts of the registry your partner may not care about, but asking for input and making decisions together lets you both share in the excitement. Focus on things you'll each find useful as you settle into your new home. For example, the person who will be responsible for taking out the trash should get to pick the new kitchen trash can.

Find more inspiration for planning your way to wedded bliss at eLivingtoday.com. ■

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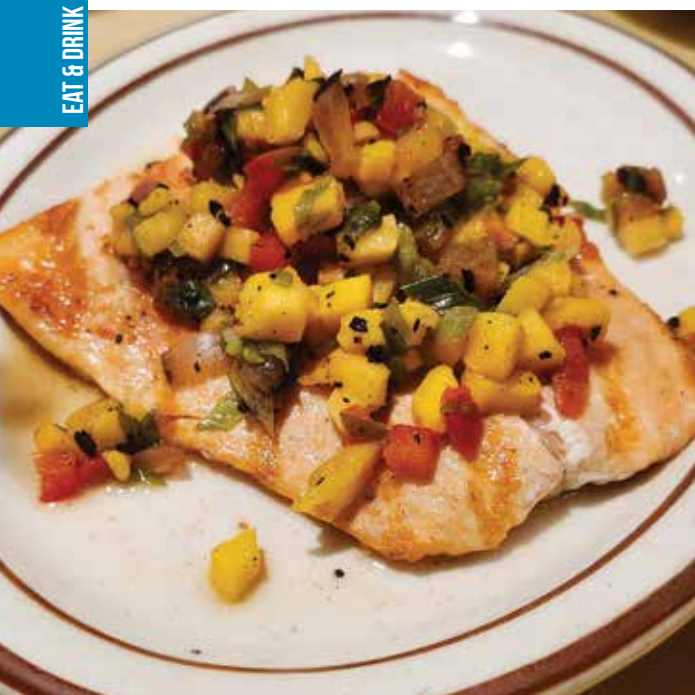
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Des Moines is a brutal place for its icons. Claes Oldenburg's brilliant "Crusoe Umbrella" should be our proudest civic monument. Instead, we have abused it with everything from satellite antennas to graffiti and disrepair. Closed, century-old schools sit without purpose. Anderson Erickson's 2,700-pound cows, Annie and Eric, have been vandalized and kidnapped.

At least they have names. Their Altoona cousin remains nameless after beckoning to interstate travelers from his open range home on Adventureland Drive since the ominous year of 1984. Even without a name, he knows his role — representing a restaurant deserving its many honors as the home of "Iowa's finest prime rib" and as one of few surviving veterans of Iowa's wind-grieved supper club era.

The massive fiberglass steer began life as mascot for a Sirloin Stockade outlet in the land of Paul Bunyan's blue ox. He was built by Don Lamberti's Casey's Construction Company, better known for convenience stores. His belly underwent a gastric by-pass in Altoona to hold an illuminated marquee.

Such messaging is not the medium of the restaurant's reputation. That would be four and a half decades of word of mouth. I have yet to meet anyone who has had a bad experience at The Big Steer. That consistency has prevailed over tornado level headwinds of challenge. Just days after the COVID-19 shutdown passed, a

fire resulting from a derecho closed the place for an additional 11 months. A national craving for all-prime steakhouses brought new competition, as close as one in the casino across the street. Two years after COVID-19 lost its ability to intimidate diners, the steakhouse bully Texas Roadhouse built a store just a few blocks west with a cheaper imitation of the steakhouse experience.

Sometimes the best strategy is to not change. The 2020 fire forced a total interior remodeling, but the ranch house spirit remains in all its red leather, shiny brass and old wood splendor. Like most steakhouses of long standing, the furniture exudes the bull-like testosterone of cowboy dreams and campfire expectations. Three distinctively different rooms include 150 seats. Reservations will be honored but are far from required, or expected.

Meals are still served with complimentary loaves of bread straight out of the oven. Butter is still whipped. Salad plates and salad makings are still served ice cold. Steaks come on sizzling platters and can still be ordered to five different levels of doneness all explained with exact definitions of the menu.

Seafood is not shortchanged. Crab cakes, lobster tails, prawns, wild salmon, scallops and orange roughy are prepared in fried, broiled and sauteed versions.

Since the reopening, the restaurant runs monthly specials. These are new dishes auditioning for a place

on the menu, which is redesigned every January. Mostly they involve new toppings for steaks, but lobster rolls have been so successful it will likely become permanent. Fried chicken has been called back from retirement out of popular demand. Side dishes are treated like stars — especially the always perfect hash browns and six cheeses macaroni.

The lounge keeps time to the beat of new drinks — the martini list is also redesigned each January. Yet, old-fashioned cocktails still star. That includes ice cream drinks from brandy Alexanders to banana banshees.

Desserts are so well regarded here that they have their own display case. One walks by it when entering the main dining room as it reminds us to save room for one. Freshly whipped cream adorns the "house special" lemon cake with raspberry sauce. There is always a dessert menu surprise and all desserts are made in-house.

The Big Steer is still owned by the founding family led by Randy and Sherri Fix. Three generations have worked here now. It is still open seven days a week, usually with a line of people waiting when the doors open. ■

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



Scott Turczynski at the T12 Distillery

We met at a time when Turczynski was taste-testing a new tequila with staff, including Templeton Rye founder Scott Bush.

Scott Turczynski bought the former Landus Cooperative property in downtown Bondurant that he is redeveloping into The Grain District. That project includes 25 acres, multiple silos and a vision to become something similar to The District in Ankeny. Recently, he purchased The Foundry in Valley Junction from Templeton Rye founder Scott Bush. That property is up and running as a distillery.

We asked Turczynski to lunch, and he suggested ordering in at his Valley Junction property. We met at a time when he was taste-testing a new tequila with staff, including Bush who is consulting with the new owner.

"I am here to help until it's time for me to get completely out of the way. My wife and I are two years away from becoming empty nesters, so it was time to think about a change," Bush explained.

The two Scotts share a bond reserved for the star-crossed. The explanation for that came up spontaneously.

"Aug. 28, 2010," said Turczynski out of nowhere.

"May 31, 1982," Bush injected.

"You were young. I didn't know that," Turczynski responded to Bush.

They were referring to the dates on which their lives and bodies were transformed permanently into challenges and destiny.

"I fell over a 6-foot retaining wall, fractured the T12 thoracic vertebra in my spine," Turczynski explained.

"I was 7. Was run over by a car and lost my arm," Bush added.

Along with the production staff, they were tasting a new tequila product they were developing.

"Because it's illegal to reuse whiskey barrels for new whiskies, we are aging different products in old barrels, some ours, some from Revelton. This tequila is infused with jalapenos and lime. Tweaks focus on the percentage of the seeds to remove. Right now, we are trying some with two thirds removed. The seeds give the jalapeno their heat, so we are looking for a kick that doesn't overpower the tequila," Turczynski explained.

Whiskey barrels must be oak. Des Moines is shaded by a magnificent canopy of oak trees. Are the barrels locally made?

"No. The closest we can get is a cooper in southern Minnesota," Turczynski answered.

Twenty years ago, rearmed with a Master of Decision Analytics degree from MIT, Bush transformed a fabled moonshine product of the Prohibition era from a Carroll County fable and historical asterisk into Iowa's signature whiskey

of the third millennium. Engineer Turczynski is developing nostalgic remnants of pre-industrial agriculture, in a farm town turned hot suburb, into a tourist attraction and entertainment destination. Is it ironic that both followed paths leading to boozy destinies?

"I just want to create a place where people can go and have fun. Silos were the intersection between the grains of a mostly rural America and the grocery stores. Now they represent a nostalgic connection to that historic time," Turczynski explained.

His vision for that place includes condominiums, a hotel and a place to eat and drink. It is still years away from reality. Was the purchase of The Foundry an interim project?

"This is a place to develop our product. We don't own the property, just a lease. For now, we are concentrating on branding products for third parties. Lots of businesses want a signature product to mark special occasions. Personalized bottles of whiskey make excellent presents for clients. Restaurants like Bubba and Oak Park want a product that is unique for their diners. That's the core of the business at this point," Turczynski said as Bush left for the day.

Silos are probably the most visible relics of a bygone era. Industrial agriculture's rise after World War II moved too fast for them. They were rendered functionally obsolete. Horizontal, transportable storage facilities for grains were more practical. Why do silos even still exist?

"It costs millions to tear them down. I think they symbolize an era that connects people to fond memories. They also are mostly unique to grain producing states like Iowa. They have a positive appeal that can be seen miles away."

Angela Harrington in Grinnell repurposed that town's old middle school building into a boutique hotel. A former silo in South Africa has a five-star hotel rating. What will draw guests to a silo hotel in Bondurant?

"We are just the core part of an entire entertainment district there. The Chichaqua Valley Trail runs directly through the Grain District, positioning downtown as a destination for cyclists and trail users. The city is planning a sports facility there, too. Also, we will be the first fully accessible distillery in America."

T12 itself is a unique brand. Not many businesses choose to identify with a personal handicap. Why did Turczynski?

"I hope to raise money for thoracic spine injury projects. When we are fully operational, we will donate



a percentage of profits to research and recovery causes."

Branding is core to the current business of private labels for individual clients. Is that contracted out to a design company?

"No, that is done in house."

An adjacent facility, formerly known as The Hall, is vacant now after the most recent renters lost their license to operate a bar. Sadly, it was also vandalized. Is that property part of T12's future?

"Not for now. If we did rent it, we would use it mostly for storage and special events. Not as a bar or restaurant."

When the distillery is running full throttle, what will be the core product?

"Whiskey, wheated whiskey to be precise."

Wheated whiskies are considered to be smoother than traditional Bourbon or Scotch. Is that what T12 is shooting for?

"Bourbon must be made with 51% corn. The rest of its mash is usually rye. Wheat replaces the sharp spice of rye with a smoother flavor. We will produce a full line of products — vodka, tequila, maybe even rum and absinthe."

How can one experience the products?

"We have a bar and a lounge, open Thursdays and Fridays 4-9 p.m. and Saturday 1-9 p.m. We also host special events in the distillery." ■

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





The Latin King's chicken spiedini has been the restaurant's best seller for decades.

HUNTING DOWN GREATER DES MOINES' ULTIMATE ITALIAN DISH

From lasagna and risotto to osso buco, ravioli and tiramisu, we explore the rich history behind Italy's most iconic foods — and ask readers to decide on the ultimate Italian dish.

By Jim Duncan

Each August, CITYVIEW asks its readers to find the ultimate food of a specific category. This year, we are seeking the supreme Italian dish of greater Des Moines. Since we have searched several times for the ultimate pizza, we are not including those amongst this year's choices.

Italian cuisine is a complex of contradictions and extremes. In the 1950s to 1970s, southern Italy birthed the "Mediterranean Diet" that was widely credited as the healthiest way to eat, especially for longevity. In the third millennium, the same part of Italy became the peninsula's

biggest consumer of junk food and carrier of obesity.

Italians credit their most famous food with superhuman properties. Sophia Loren, possibly the most voluptuous incarnation of 20th century cinema sirens, famously proclaimed, "Everything you see I owe to pasta." Her great friend Federico Fellini said, "Life is a combination of magic and pasta."

Celebrity chef Wolfgang Puck saw an opposite quality: "Italian food is all about ingredients and it's not fussy and it's not fancy."

CITYVIEW's



TV star restaurateur Lidia Bastianich also noted that the beauty of Italian dishes is their simplicity: “A box of spaghetti can take seven minutes to cook, and you can make a sauce at that time with perhaps garlic, olive oil and zucchini. Then you’ve got yourself a complete meal. The whole thing shouldn’t take more than half an hour.”

On the other hand, historical novelist Crystal King writes about the extreme decadence of dining in Ancient Rome. Her “Feast of Sorrows” celebrates infamous epicurean Marcus Gavius Apicius and his personal chef Thrasius. Apicius’ own books have been lost since the Dark Age, but King’s remind us of Italian food’s extremes.

Apicius took foie gras far beyond force feeding geese and ducks. He starved his piglets, then let them gorge on dried figs. Next, he would get them drunk on as much wine as they could drink, causing the figs to expand in their stomachs and ferment, thus killing the pigs. They were promptly slaughtered and served to Rome’s elite.

Figpeckers are little garden warblers that devour figs. They were eaten by Romans like the epicurean French eat ortolans — cooked in a sauce and devoured whole, bones and all. Apicius used figpeckers as one of the layers in a dish that some historians think might be the precursor of lasagna.

Few, if any, animals were taboo amidst the epicurean



Linguini and clam sauce at Lucca.

lust of ancient Rome. Apicius believed that entrées of peacock occupied the first rank, provided they be dressed in such a manner that the hard and tough parts be tender. Today, duck tongues are still eaten in Europe as a delicacy, but in ancient Rome, all manner

of bird tongues were loved by those who could afford them. In his “Natural History,” Pliny tells us, “Apicius established the view that the flamingo’s tongue has an especially fine flavor.”

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Half and half (cavatelli and ravioli) with meatballs at Noah's Ark.

consumption in 1971, but ancient Romans loved to eat them. An Apicius recipe calls for soaking them in milk, straining, breaking two eggs inside them, plus a little salt, and mixing in a spoonful of honey before tying off, boiling and slicing.

The dormouse isn't eaten much today, but ancient Romans stuffed, fried and ate them whole, bones and all. Apicius stored his dormice in a special terracotta pot with holes and little shelves inside, like today's live lobster tanks.

Private parts of female pigs are usually taboo today. In ancient Rome's orgies, it was a common to eat the vulva of a sow either after it miscarried or had given birth. Womb was considered best eaten when it was sterile, so sows were spayed for that purpose. Apicius tells us that the full udder, with the paps still on, should be stuffed with spiced, ground sea-urchin, sewn up and cooked, then served with a mustard sauce.

Vedius Pollio was the son of a freed slave who became the most notorious of slaveowners. His cruelty included a habit of throwing misbehaving slaves alive into a pool of moray eels that would rip them to pieces in a matter of minutes. He believed that eels tasted best after feeding on human meat.

That was then. As for now, ideas of an ultimate Italian meal steer clear of Roman extremes. In fact, as noted by Puck and Bastianich, ideal Italian dishes find beauty in simplicity. We asked several AI platforms what people today think of as the greatest Italian dish, worldwide. Pastas were the most frequent answers. They are sumptuously simple, but simplicity in Italian dishes comes with complex nuances.

All pasta are simply flour and water, with eggs and salt optional. While a popular legend credits Marco Polo with bringing pasta from China in the 13th century, historical records prove pasta was being made in Italy long before his travels. Archaeological evidence from 400 BC shows Etruscans making early pasta dishes.

In the 9th century, Arab traders introduced dried durum wheat noodles to Sicily. Sicily's dry climate made it an ideal hub for producing this non-perishable food, which quickly spread to mainland Italy. By the Middle Ages, Italians had refined dried dough, popularizing it across the peninsula. During the Renaissance, regional variations of pasta exploded, with Naples and Rome creating their own distinct shapes and pairing them with diverse sauces.

Italian cuisine is dynamic. Consider that the food that is most identified as Italian only came to Italy in 1544 and was hardly eaten until the mid 1800s. Francisco de Orozco, a captain in Hernán Cortés' Conquistador army, was the first European to eat tomatoes when he marched into Mexico's Valley of Oaxaca.

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RISOTTO

Risotto originated in Northern Italy during the Middle Ages, after Arab traders introduced rice to Sicily. Later, the humid climate of the Po Valley provided ideal growing conditions and, by the 15th century, rice became a staple in Lombardy, Piedmont and Veneto. The modern slow-cooked method evolved from there.

The most famous legend centers around “risotto alla Milanese.” In 1574, Valerio of Flanders, a glassmaking apprentice working on the Duomo in Milan, became known for using saffron to tint his stained glass. As a prank at his master’s wedding, he added a large amount of the yellow spice to a pot of rice, inadvertently creating the golden, saffron-infused dish.

The first cookbook recipe for risotto is from 1809, “riso in padella.” The rice was sauteed in butter; sausage, onions and saffron were gradually absorbed in chicken broth. As Puck noted, Italian dishes are about the ingredients. While arborio, carnaroli and vialone nano rices rule the risotto realm, chefs have used red rice, black rice and other short grain varieties to create risotto dishes. Cooking broths prefer poultry stocks but all manners are used including red and white wines.

Mushrooms are a preferred enhancer and truffles are considered the ultimate mushroom, especially in the northern provinces of risotto’s fame and founding. All manner of mushrooms are used. Combinations as varied as duck, game, pumpkin, sausage, snails, squid ink, seafood and almost everything else are used

in this classic dish.

Radicchio risotto is the most complicated enhancer of risotto. In the Veneto, radicchio is the preferred ingredient for the dish. The best radicchio, which is a chicory, comes from Veneto where specific growing areas hold the prestigious IGP (Protected Geographical Indication) status. The most highly prized varieties are natively named after, and exclusively grown in their exact towns of origin.

In his book “Steak,” food writer Mark Schatzker writes about how residents of the Veneto can identify exactly where different radicchios were grown. Named after a small fishing port in Venice’s lagoon, radicchio di Chioggia refers to the chicory of Precoce and Tardivo varieties, grown within the provinces of Venice, Padua and Rovigo. Rosa di Gorizia is a variety originating from Gorizia and Collio area in Friuli Venezia-Giulia. It looks similar to a rosebud that’s just about to open, hence the name “Gorizia rose.”

Created in the 17th century by crossing radicchio di Treviso and escarole, the variegated radicchio di Castelfranco Veneto is a type of chicory grown within the provinces of Treviso, Padua and Venice. Thanks to its peculiar shape and blanched yellow leaves covered in red flecks, it is nicknamed “orchid lettuce” or “winter rose.”

Risotto is such a popular dish that a whole festival is organized in its honor. The Festival Nazionale del Risotto takes place in Biella, Italy, every year in the Piedmont.



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This marrow bone from Aposto represents a half order of osso buco.

OSSO BUCO

The story of osso buco begins in 19th century Lombardy, the prosperous region surrounding Milan. The name literally translates to “bone with a hole,” a direct and humble reference to the cross-cut veal shank and the prized marrow found within it. Historically, diners use a special, slender marrow spoon to scoop out every last morsel.

The original preparation was known as “in bianco,” meaning without tomatoes. Early recipes relied on a restrained palette of ingredients: veal shank, butter, onions, white wine and broth. The resulting sauce was pale and delicate, emphasizing the natural flavor of the meat rather than masking it with acidity or sweetness.

Later interpretations introduced tomatoes, sometimes fresh, sometimes in small quantities, to create a richer sauce with more umami. While that version has become common in restaurants, historians generally consider the tomato-free preparation the truest expression of the Milanese tradition.

In Des Moines today, veal is optional. Ruth’s Chris makes a veal osso buco ravioli appetizer. The dish is more often made with pork (Anna Dolce), beef or lamb (Aposto, HoQ). One element, however, has remained constant: gremolata. This simple garnish is made from finely chopped parsley, garlic and lemon zest. Aposto adds mint from their garden. Sprinkled over the finished dish just before serving, gremolata cuts through the richness with bright, aromatic freshness. The citrus oils from the lemon zest awaken the palate, while the parsley adds herbaceous lift and the garlic contributes a sharp, savory edge.

Taken from the lower leg of whatever animal, the shank is rich in connective tissue, collagen and marrow. In its raw state, they make the meat tough. But when cooked slowly in liquid, the collagen gradually dissolves into gelatin. As this transformation occurs, the sauce thickens naturally and the meat becomes exceptionally tender. What begins as a firm, sinewy cut evolves into a silky, almost spoon-soft texture. Magic.

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Lobster ravioli at Ruth's Chris.

RAVIOLI

The word ravioli comes from the old Italian word “riavvolgere,” which means “to wrap.” One of the first historical documents mentioning ravioli is a late 12th-century contract from Liguria. By the Renaissance, ravioli were a favorite at noble courts in Lombardy. Today, fillings differ heavily by region, with northern areas preferring rich meats and central regions like Tuscany leaning into fresh ricotta and spinach

Italian food historian Oretta Zanini De Vita writes in her “Encyclopedia of Pasta,” that ravioli began in high society but soon became a favorite of farmworkers.

Today they are the most popular Italian dumpling, or stuffed pasta. Like their cousins cavatelli and gnocchi, they are wrappers for more exotic foods. In Des Moines, Ruth’s Chris and Prime and Providence make versions stuffed with lobster.

TIRAMISU

Tiramisu originated in northeastern Italy, with the Veneto and Friuli-Venezia Giulia regions both claiming its invention. The most widely accepted origin story points to the restaurant Le Beccherie in the 1960s. Owner Alba Campeol and pastry chef Roberto Linguanotto created the dessert by modifying “sbatudin” (a whipped mixture of egg yolk and sugar) by adding coffee, mascarpone cheese and ladyfingers. The name “tiramisù” was coined there to describe its restorative energy.

A popular folk legend claims the dish was born in the mid-19th century in the brothels of Treviso. The madams of those establishments allegedly served the high-calorie, highly caffeinated dessert to male patrons to provide an energy boost and an aphrodisiac effect before they returned to their wives. The Italian name “tirami sù” translates literally to “pick me up.”

Those are just five dishes, each with nearly infinite variations. Now it’s up to readers to select their idea about where to find the ultimate Italian dish of the metro. ■

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BELLY UP TO:

BY JACKIE WILSON

Fair warning: Come hungry

With 84 new menu items and more than 200 food vendors, this year's Iowa State Fair offers adventurous eaters plenty of reasons to loosen their belts.

EAT & DRINK



All American Scrambled Egg Roll



Cheese curds



Chicken on a frisbee



Strawberry Bliss



Ice cream trio



Potato gnocchi



Dubai Chocolate strawberry

For foodies who love discovering new dishes, the Iowa State Fair offers a giant menu of fried delights, foods-on-a-stick and cool confections to try, all within steps in one central locale.

This year, the Iowa State Fair vendors will debut 84 new foods. With more than 200 food stands, options vary, and fair food goes beyond the traditional corn dog or funnel cake.

I joined 75 other fair food judges to narrow down our top three favorites, and our stomachs thanked us for not sampling all 84 foods. However, we did eat our way through 11 new foods and voted on the top three: Porky Parm Gnocchi, Ultimate Minneapple Pie and the All-American Scrambled Egg Roll. During the fair Aug. 13-23, fair goers can vote, and one food will be crowned the champ.

A top vote getter — and one of my picks — was the Porky Parm Gnocchi (\$14) from Destination Grille. The gluten-free potato gnocchi and Graziano sausage is tossed in an AE cream parmesan sauce with a pesto drizzle and shaved parmesan, topped with a souvenir piggy.

The sauce was rich, creamy and flavorful. The entrée felt like it should have been served on fine China with cloth napkins instead of in disposable bowl. The squeaky pig is a fun, noisy addition and will most likely drive you nuts.

Speaking of squeaky, cheese lovers know the key to fresh cheese curds is the squeak it makes when you bite into it. One of my favorites was the Garlic Dill Pickle Cheese Curds (\$9) from Brad and Harry's Cheese Curds.

The garlic and dill flavor curds are made with fresh cheese curds from Ellsworth Cooperative Creamery in Wisconsin. Owners drive to Wisconsin to get fresh cheese every three days during the fair.

Another one of my favorites was a decadent dessert from The Strawberry Station, the 1776 Dubai Strawberries. Sure, Dubai chocolate is trendy, but it goes beyond Instagram or TikTok mentions. It includes fresh strawberries topped with milk chocolate, pistachio crème and crunchy kataifi. The rich flavor includes Belgian milk chocolate made by Callebaut. The pistachio cream is made specifically for Dubai candy bars. It's healthy

since it includes fruit, right? The layers of chocolate and fruit is a splurge, but it's worth it for \$19.

Chocolate and strawberries make its way in another dish — the Strawberry Bliss (\$8) from Iowa Specialty Crop Growers Association. The presentation of the strawberry atop shortbread, covered in sweet meringue and dipped in hard shell milk chocolate, offered an elegant presentation. However, the chocolate melted quickly, so don't save this dish for the sky glider ride.

If you want to play with your food, get the Cajun Cluck 'N' Chaos (\$14) from Cluckin' Coop. It's a Cajun crunchy chicken sloppy joe with coleslaw; topped with a skewer of spicy pickles, pickled egg and pickle flavored cotton candy, served on a Frisbee (\$14).

For fairgoers eager to experience creative culinary delights alongside farm animals, live entertainment and people-watching, this year's Iowa State Fair serves up something for every appetite. ■

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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BOOK REVIEWS

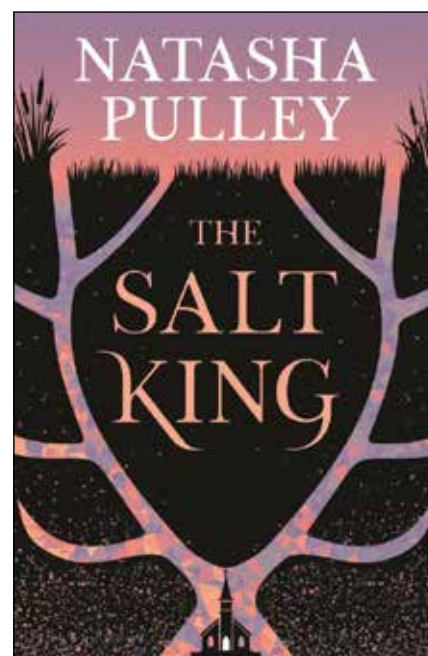
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'The Salt King'

Look, I'm all for breezy, simple reads that whisk me away and rest my weary brain. There are times, however, in which my brain needs to be pulled out of its malaise and shaken up, like a good margarita. Thankfully, Natasha Pulley has the magical ability to write books that are dense and lyrical and positively brimming with the perfect amount of weird.

A Jesuit priest puts both his faith and heart to the test when miraculous healings begin to happen in a small town. Sent to investigate the matter, and with the help of the local doctor, Avelyn begins to uncover a wide series of salt-based strangeness that soon spreads. This book is about love, community and how faith can be both healing and destructive — especially in dire circumstances.

If you have never read any of Pulley's previous works, oh, my friend, you are in for a treat. Her writing is never boring and never simple. She has written far beyond genre so many times, and she is at the top of her game with this book. It is both romantic and apocalyptic in equal measure, exactly the kind of book to kick-start a melancholy brain. ■ — *Review by Julie Goodrich*



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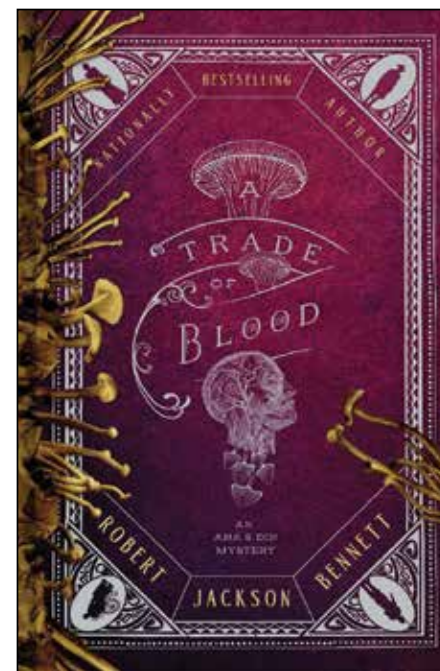
'A Trade of Blood'

I will admit, I quavered a bit about writing this review. I try not to review sequels too often for fear of scaring people away from a series that will take up too much of their time. Here's the thing, though; this series is absolutely worth your time.

A pair of the Empire's most powerful families stand on the precipice of war, ready to risk the entire realm's food supply on a matter of honor — all because of a locked room mystery that turns out to be so much more. Ana and Din, with their unique gifts and timely connections, are in a race to stop an ancient power that wants chaos above all else.

Whether you start here or go back to the first installment, "The Tainted Cup," I cannot recommend Ana and Din's adventures enough. The mysteries are delicious, and the world-building even more so. The prose is measured and always moving but never lazy or bland. Ana's painfully sharp wit is often brutally funny, while Din has my whole heart, as one of the most gorgeously miserable bisexual disasters in fantasy. If you are looking for a mystery that is both familiar and utterly, completely new, I cannot recommend this book — this whole series — highly enough. ■

— *Review by Julie Goodrich*



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FILM REVIEW

BY DAVID ROWLEY

Nolan's 'The Odyssey' delivers an epic journey with surprising emotional depth

Christopher Nolan transforms Homer's classic into a visually stunning and emotionally resonant meditation on leadership, sacrifice and the cost of coming home.

Christopher Nolan's "The Odyssey" places audiences alongside Odysseus and his exhausted crew from its opening moments. You do not simply watch their voyage — you feel it. Every hard-earned victory comes with another loss. Every clever escape demands another sacrifice. When Odysseus begins questioning the cost of every decision he has made, the audience is right there with him.

This is not another swords-and-sandals epic or a straightforward retelling of Homer's poem. Instead, Nolan transforms one of literature's oldest oral traditions into a sonic spectacle that rattles theater seats while presenting an intimate meditation on guilt, leadership and survival. Every mile closer to Ithaca raises the same difficult question: What happens when the person returning home is not the same person who left?

Odysseus is not portrayed as an untouchable hero blessed with divine certainty or simply as a fearless warrior destined to overcome impossible odds. Instead, he is presented as something far more compelling: a man burdened by responsibility.

The war has finally ended, and every member of his crew longs to return home. To survive the journey, Odysseus makes decisions that gradually force him to abandon the principles that once defined him. He follows plans requiring terrible acts, watches loyal men pay the price for his choices and slowly realizes that every mile closer to Ithaca comes at the cost of becoming someone he barely recognizes.

Rather than asking whether Odysseus can survive monsters and gods, Nolan asks whether he can survive becoming someone he never wanted to be. The mythical creatures and supernatural encounters are spectacular, but they are never the point. The real conflict is internal. The film continually asks whether a man can truly return home after war has fundamentally changed him.

The story also reminds viewers that Odysseus' journey is not his alone.

While he struggles across the sea, Penelope (Anne Hathaway) and Telemachus (Tom Holland) fight battles of their own in Ithaca, trying to preserve a kingdom that is beginning to lose hope. Their perspective gives the film emotional balance, reminding audiences that the cost of war is measured not only in lives lost on distant battlefields but also in the years stolen from families waiting for loved ones to return.

The production is extraordinary. Cinematographer Hoyte van Hoytema consistently captures grand scale



"The Odyssey"

R | 2 hours, 53 minutes

Director: Christopher Nolan

Writer: Christopher Nolan, Homer

Stars: Matt Damon, Tom Holland, Anne Hathaway

without sacrificing intimacy. Massive sets tower over the characters, reinforcing the sense that ordinary mortals struggle beneath the watchful gaze of gods.

The sound design is equally remarkable. Rather than merely supporting the action, sound becomes another storyteller. Every crack of thunder shakes the auditorium. Every clash of steel carries weight. Groaning ships, crashing waves and haunting echoes immerse audiences in a world that feels both ancient and immediate.

One sequence demonstrates those creative choices at their best: the encounter with the Cyclops. Visually, it is astonishing. Sonically, it is unforgettable. The creature's howl is unlike anything I have experienced in a theater, simultaneously terrifying and strangely heartbreaking. Nolan even complicates the audience's sympathies. Rather than presenting the Cyclops as a simple monster, he invites viewers to consider the creature's perspective. Its confusion and fury make it feel less like an unstoppable beast than a frightened child reacting to something it does not understand.

The performances deserve equal praise. This is one of those rare ensemble casts in which singling out individuals almost feels unfair because everyone contributes to the film's remarkable cohesion.

Rather than celebrating conquest, Nolan understands that "The Odyssey" has endured for nearly 3,000 years not because of its mythical creatures or impossible adventures, but because it asks timeless questions: What do we owe the people who trust us? Can we escape the consequences of our actions? After everything we have done to survive, can we still find our way home? By the time Odysseus reaches Ithaca, audiences understand that returning is not the same as recovering. ■

PREVIEWS

BY DAVID ROWLEY

"Ice Cream Man"

R | 1 hour, 26 minutes

Director: Eli Roth

Writers: Noah Belson, Eli Roth

Stars: Eli Roth, Darrin Baker, Ari Millen



"Ice Cream Man" is an upcoming horror film directed by Eli Roth that transforms a familiar suburban summer into a gruesome nightmare. Set in the seemingly peaceful town of Bayleen Bay, the story follows the arrival of a mysterious ice cream man (Ari Millen) whose frozen treats have horrifying effects on the local children. After eating the ice cream, the kids become violently homicidal, plunging the community into chaos as parents, teachers and neighbors struggle to understand — and survive — the escalating bloodshed.

"The Wrong Girls"

R | 1 hour, 39 minutes

Director/Writer: Dylan Meyer

Stars: Kristen Stewart, Alia Shawkat, Cate Blanchett



Frankie (Kristen Stewart) and Molly (Alia Shawkat), two inseparable best friends who are barely scraping by, spend their days drifting from paycheck to paycheck. Their already chaotic lives spiral out of control after a case of mistaken identity lands them in possession of a briefcase filled with experimental psychedelic drugs. The bizarre substance grants them telepathic abilities — allowing them to communicate with each other (and, in a surreal twist, with their cats) — while also making them targets of dangerous criminals and eccentric scientists desperate to recover the drug. Blending stoner comedy, absurdist sci-fi and crime caper elements, "The Wrong Girls" centers on the friendship between its two leads as they navigate increasingly outrageous situations with humor and heart.

"Late Fame"

R | 1 hour, 36 minutes

Director: Kent Jones

Writers: Samy Burch, Arthur Schnitzler

Stars: Willem Dafoe, Greta Lee, Jake Lacy



Ed Saxberger (Willem Dafoe) is an aging New York postal worker and long-forgotten poet whose obscure early collection is unexpectedly rediscovered by an enthusiastic young admirer. Drawn into a circle of ambitious twentysomething artists who celebrate him as a neglected literary genius, Ed experiences a late-life taste of the recognition he never achieved in his youth. As he becomes increasingly captivated by the group's attention — and especially by the charismatic actress Gloria (Greta Lee) — he begins to question whether their admiration is genuine or simply another form of artistic posturing. ■

Cloris' daughter to attend 2026 Cloris Awards

Dinah Englund returns to Des Moines as the guest of honor for the 2026 Cloris Awards, celebrating local theatre and the 100th anniversary of her legendary mother's birth.

Each year, a bounty of local theatres in the Greater Des Moines area produces dozens of shows. Celebrating these performances beginning in 2015, The Cloris Leachman Excellence in Theatre Arts Awards has become a pinnacle event for recognition. These awards provide a rare time when not only representatives from these companies convene but for the public to witness each year's memorable gathering. As this awards event continues to grow, more and more patrons have come to savor the euphoric atmosphere created when performers, technicians and production personnel celebrate each other's achievements from the previous season.

The Cloris Awards convene at a new venue, Drake's Sheslow Auditorium, on Sunday, Aug. 30. Hosted by award-winning actors Mary Bricker and Micheal Davenport, this year features a returning honoree. The evening will be filled with lively showmanship from the hosts and select musical performances.

Honoring the famous 2016 event when her mother and namesake for the awards attended, daughter Dinah Englund returns to Des Moines as a guest of honor. She shared some time and her thoughts about her famous mother and the Cloris Awards.

Dinah Englund talks about her return to the Cloris Awards

CS: Please recall memories from that 2016 Cloris Awards visit to Des Moines.

DE: Oh, there are so many memories. How do I describe them? I have a picture of being there, in that auditorium, and gold and black and being with her. Everywhere we go, it's like this. She was beloved and an icon and a legend. She absolutely was and will continue to be. That we were in Des Moines was really special because my mom was definitely "you could take the girl out of Des Moines, but you couldn't take Des Moines out of the girl." To be home and with her extended family, that was the most important thing to her. Even times when she was working with Jack Nicholson and she would say, "Can you believe it? I'm working with Jack Nicholson," and I'd say, "What's wrong with you? Yes, I can believe it." That's the way she was when she was asked about these awards — "Can you believe it? They have an award named after me." That's the Des Moines in her. I felt more about how warm she felt, and how cared for she felt, how



Recalling the 2016 Cloris Awards, and Dinah Englund returning for the 2026 event celebrating the 100th anniversary of Cloris Leachman's birth. Photo credit: Cloris Awards.

beloved she felt and how joyous she felt in the moment of being there with all the people.

CS: Yours was a unique role with your mother, and one the public will never be able to fully understand or appreciate. Please talk about that relationship.

DE: I can't give a specific. It was just love all around her. It's hard for me to say what happened there at the 2026 Awards. It was a whirlwind. I remember that. After four brothers, she had me, the only girl and that last one. She kind of put me in her back pocket, and away we went and we never looked back, and that's my experience of my life with her. I've been her caretaker, her manager, her best friend and everything in her life. We were joined at the hips. I probably wasn't just sitting in the audience and enjoying the show. I was responsible for getting her everywhere and on time. That was my focus. My whole identity was wrapped around my mother until she died. And that's how it was for many, many years.

CS: Talk about attending the 2026 Cloris Awards.

DE: I am so excited to represent her and to be coming to these awards. I remember we had a blast last time. Also to represent that it is her 100th birthday. Five years ago, when she passed, I was in too much grief, but now I can handle it. It's her 100th birthday, and we're going to have a wild good time because I'm her daughter and you can bet your ass, we're going to have a wild good time.

BARE BOARDS CHATTER

Des Moines Young Artists' Theatre. "Rent: School Edition." Through Aug. 2.

Des Moines Playhouse – Penguin Project. Pixar's "Finding Nemo Jr." Aug. 13-16.

Urbandale Community Theatre. "The Melodies that Made Us." Featuring a cabaret celebrating 30 years on stage. Aug. 21-23.

Des Moines Performing Arts – Stoner Theater. "Narly's Fortnight of Frights." One writer, 1-3 actors, random object/phrase, create 10-minute horror play. Aug. 22.

Runaway Twain (comedy improv) at Des Moines Playhouse. Aug. 23.

Des Moines Performing Arts – Temple Theater. "Broadway Singalong with Des Moines Performing Arts." Aug. 28.

Des Moines Performing Arts – Cowles Commons. "Domino Effect" by Ingrid Ingrid. Aug. 29.

2026 Cloris Leachman Excellence in Theatre Awards in Drake's Sheslow Auditorium.

Special Guest: Dinah Englund, Cloris Leachman's daughter, with hosts Mary Bricker, Micheal Davenport. 5 p.m. Social Hour; 6 p.m. Awards begin. Free and open to the public.

Des Moines Playhouse – AUDITIONS. "Junie B Jones in Boo...and I Mean It." Aug. 31.

Preparing next-gen theatre people

Tallgrass Theatre Company's Seedlings Children's Theatre still has two weeks of summer camps available. Aug. 3-7 are two week-long camps, "Mainstage Ninjas" and "Story Alchemy: The Art of Storytelling" followed by five one-day camps the week of Aug. 10-14. Full details at the Tallgrass Theatre website.

The Des Moines Playhouse's Education programming is nationally recognized and has several class offerings the weeks of Aug. 3 and Aug. 10. These engaging classes offer different age groups acting, stagecraft and production learning opportunities. Check out their website for full details and availability. ■

John Busbee produces The Culture Buzz, a weekly arts and culture radio show on www.kfmg.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.



Hoobastank rocks on after 30 years

The alternative rock veterans prepare for their Iowa State Fair performance with Staind.

When Hoobastank hit the music scene in the mid-1990s, one question followed them everywhere.

“Interviewers ask, why such a stupid name?” co-founder Dan Estrin said. “We never said we love that name. We never walked around thinking we’re super cool and we came up with this brilliant name. There’s no reason for it. For better or worse, it is what it is.”

Despite the unconventional name, Hoobastank has been a mainstay in the alternative rock genre since forming in 1994. Hoobastank’s No. 2 hit song on the Billboard Hot 100 in 2004, “The Reason,” cemented the band’s popularity in the alternative rock genre.

Hoobastank sold more than 10 million albums and earned three Grammy nominations. “The Reason” is embraced by a new fan base on TikTok, thanks to a Netflix movie and other shows that feature the song.

“It has these moments where people are reminded, ‘Oh, yeah,’ and then they’ll go to Spotify and add the band,” he said. “They are more inclined to listen to our other songs and then come out to the show.”

Hoobastank is currently on tour this summer and is the opening band for Staind at the Iowa State Fair on Aug. 17.

The band has toured off and on since its inception and recorded albums for about 20 years. They stopped making albums as “life got in the way,” although Estrin was continually writing music while the band toured off and on.

Two years ago, the music ideas flowed again, and he and co-founder Doug Robb exchanged song ideas. They recently released a “punk-rock vibe” single, “How Do You Sleep?”

With a three-decade history of performing together, Estrin knows groups often break up. He cites “logical conversations” as the key to staying together.

“Maybe that’s the reason right why we stayed

together. The stereotype of most bands is not making it, and we wanted to be different,” he said. “We can bug the shit out of each other. But we’re extremely grateful to be at this age and still have a career and do what we love to do and set out to do when we were kids — and that’s play music for a living. Some of it has been beautiful, some of it has been kind of ugly, but we appreciate all of it because it gives us a lot of perspective and gratitude. And it’s really, really cool.”

Estrin hears their music played in the dentist’s office waiting room or at the grocery store. One time in India during a tour, the band was driving from the hotel to the venue. Their car sat next to a crowded bus at a stoplight, and a man on the bus stood, playing their song on his violin.

“He had no idea we were in the car next to him. It was random to us, but at the same time, it was a cool experience,” he said.

Estrin says social media has increased their visibility, yet all types of public comments emerge.

“We read stuff that’s extremely positive — we’ve changed people’s lives, and our song helped them through this or that,” he said. “I’ll also read very negative things about how shitty we are. We have our own threads between the band, and we’re sending each other merch ideas that are beyond stupid and over the top. We don’t take things seriously, and we’re always looking for that laugh.”



Photo credit: Kevin Baldes

When connecting with fans over the years, he has met people who tell him how their music has impacted them.

“It’s something that you created out of thin air with your best friends, and it’s changed their lives in ways that it didn’t change my life,” he said. “I know how I feel when other songs or other artists have done that for me.”

Estrin is excited to perform in Des Moines. He says getting up on stage at a concert and seeing people in the crowd singing along with their songs is why they keep performing.

“It’s kind of like a drug and feels like a high. It’s a euphoric feeling,” he said. “It makes us happy to see people enjoying themselves. It’s fulfilling and cool.” ■

SOUND ADVICE

BY JACKIE WILSON

Head to Jasper Winery, 2400 George Flagg Parkway, Des Moines, on Aug. 27 for a concert featuring **Phoenix Mendoza, Josh Leo and Kitty Steadman**. The free concert benefits Mary’s Meals, which helps feed children in the poorest countries. In addition to the concert, the family-friendly event offers kids activities and food available for a free will donation.

The indie rock band **The Crane Wives** are continuing their summer tour, performing a concert at Wooly’s, 504 E. Locust St., Des Moines, on Aug. 13. Their high-energy performances have been described

as “charged with emotion and technical skill” while their harmony-dense melodies support deeply resonant lyrics. Tickets cost \$36 and can be purchased at www.firstfleetconcerts.com/events.

Landyn Zane, a “DIY” pop artist, songwriter and multi-instrumentalist from Cedar Rapids, released his latest EP, “Coming Attractions,” on July 31. Zane crafted the cover art, posters and outfits similar to a movie premiere. He has recorded four EPs and earned a nomination for Top Pop Artist at the Iowa Music Awards. Find “Coming Attractions” at streaming

services.

The Simon Estes Amphitheater, 75 W. Locust St., Des Moines, has reopened after nearby bridge renovations closed the spot in 2018. They are offering a free concert series, **Vibes in the Village with Brian Herrin**, on Aug. 22 from noon to 5 p.m. ■

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



Iowa's big moment in the art world

How Iowa-rooted artists are shaping global and local creative landscapes.

ARTS & ENTERTAINMENT



"Wintering," a series of three by Warren Rosen



"Undertow" by Warren Rosen

This summer, 41 years after her murder, Ana Mendieta reached her career zenith headlining at London's Tate Modern. That's a top-five most-visited art museum in the world and number one for modern art. A retrospective of Mendieta's career opened in mid-July with more than 120 works, tracing her breakout years in Iowa City through 1984. It's the largest-ever U.K. exhibition of her work, with many pieces shown in Britain for the first time.

It is also being hailed as a striking curatorial moment: three powerhouse female artists are headlining at the Tate Modern, in London, at once, with Mendieta joining Tracey Emin (through Aug. 30) and Frida Kahlo (through Jan. 3, 2027) creating a capstone for outgoing director Maria Balshaw.

Mendieta landed in Sioux City as a child, part of the Operation Peter Pan airlift of Cuban children after the Cuban Revolution. She is best known for her "Silueta Series" exploring the presence and absence of the human body, using a number of natural materials including fire, water and flowers. These ephemeral works were recorded as photographs and films.

Active in the 1970s and early 1980s, the Cuban-born Iowa immigrant posed profound questions around displacement and identity, which remain highly relevant today. "Ana Mendieta" plays through Jan. 17.

Warren Rosen Launches Digital Art Gallery

Warren Rosen, an Oaxaca expatriate from Des Moines, opened his long-awaited digital art gallery Warren Rosen Art Gallery. www.warrenrosenart.com/artwork-3

Rosen is author of the autobiographical "Monk on the Run" and worked with Mendieta in her early career. Rosen even predated Mendieta in joining Hans Breder's legendary Intermedia Program at the University of Iowa. Rosen's work is often reminiscent of Breder and Mendieta's, particularly his "Undertow."

In Des Moines, preservation hopes are looking doomed for an early mural by b. Robert Moore. It was painted at 210 Euclid before the artist became famous. It's likely to be destroyed by the time you read this.



This mural by a young b. Robert Moore may be gone by press time.

First A.I. art museum debuts

Dataland, the world's first A.I. art museum, opened in June. Founded by artist Refik Anadol, whose visualizations of data made him a digital art superstar, the museum is housed inside the Grand L.A., a Frank Gehry-designed complex of high-end apartments, entertainment facilities and a luxury hotel in Downtown Los Angeles.

The museum's debut show, "Machine Dreams: Rainforest," is "a redefinition of what art can be in the age of machine intelligence" in Anadol's words. The five-gallery wide exhibition simulates alternate, possible

rainforests by processing ecological data (birdsongs, plant life, weather) which are turned into "digital sculptures."

One A.I. portrait by Anadol is based on soccer star Lionel Messi's favorite goal and just sold for \$1.8 million at Christie's, an art and luxury auction house.

What the world needs now — a road trip

Suzanne Jackson's latest exhibition at Minneapolis' Walker Art Center, through Aug. 23, poses a simple question: What is love? Across painting, poetry and dance, Jackson's works touch upon ideas spanning memory, nature, beauty and notions of Blackness. Yet, at its core, her practice is informed by love. For Jackson, "love is the act of making art."

Carcinogenic water art

A new public art piece at Wilson's Orchard doubles as a quilt and a water filter that can clean up nitrates. "It's in the Water" highlights Iowa's water quality crisis while combining art and science to hint at solutions. The floating sculpture, created by Drake University professors Emily Newman and Edward Kelley, captures nitrates from a pond at Wilson's Orchard, which agreed to showcase the piece. The quilt is made of recycled plastic, with buoys at each corner made from 5-gallon buckets in which spirulina algae absorb excess nitrates from the water and pull carbon from the atmosphere. Sensors and filters are also attached to the piece, and the buoys are periodically removed to weigh the saturated algae and estimate how much nitrate they capture. The installation is free and viewable outdoors at Wilson's Orchard & Farm in Cumming through September. ■

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



Making masterpieces, one cut at a time

Chainsaw carver Gary Keenan turns dead trees into lasting works of art while entertaining Iowa State Fair crowds and supporting the fair through annual sculpture auctions.

The whirl of chainsaw causes wood pieces and sawdust to scatter in all directions. After the dust settles, a tree stump is turned into a long-lasting piece of art.

For Gary Keenan, chainsaw carver, the noise, heat, wood and dust, along with precise cuts, create a sculpture of beauty and entertainment. Keenan established Carving by Keenan and has been the featured wood carver at the Iowa State Fair for 16 years. Three years ago, two additional chainsaw carvers, T.J. Jenkins and Clint Henik, were added.

At the fair, the trio will carve up to 50 pieces from logs of wood. The pieces are then auctioned off with money going back into the fair, benefitting the Blue Ribbon Foundation. During the fair, the carvers field the similar questions daily from onlookers.

“The state fair feels like the movie ‘Groundhog Day.’ It’s the same routine,” he reflects. “It’s fun. I like talking to the public and creating lasting projects for the fair.”

Keenan’s interest in chainsaw carving goes back 26 years. He admired artist’s sculptures in a variety of mediums. When he viewed wood sculptures, he imagined how he could replicate the method and do it himself. He and a friend saw a carved wood item and his friend challenged him to carve something.

“I carved a fish,” he recalls. “It was slow and crude, but I loved it.”

After that, he began carving in his garage on weekends using various wood pieces.

“I was irritating my neighbors with the constant chain sawing,” he says, “Then people started buying my carvings, and it took off from there.”

The majority of his carvings are made on tree trunks on location. If the owner’s tree is within 30 miles of Des Moines, he’ll examine the tree and often do a test cut or plug if necessary to make sure the tree is solid. If it’s hollow in the base, he won’t carve. Most people have ideas in mind for designs. Common themes include animals, birds and sports mascots. He often provides ideas to help folks narrow it down. His work appears all over the Midwest.

One of his carvings from a dead ash tree is located in Chicago’s Jackson Park, near Hyde Park, and was part of the Chicago Tree Project. Keenan carved “The Green Lady” a 15.5-foot-tall green goddess with branched arms and leaves, which was renamed “Transformation.”



In Iowa Falls, the city took out numerous diseased ash trees. They saved the trunks, and he carved 20 trees for the Scenic City Foundation. A carved keyboard and guitar are placed at the Rock and Roll Museum in Okoboji.

He recalls an unusual carving of a customer who owned a cabin at a lake, who wanted a buxom, bare-breasted mermaid carved in wood.

“His wife said, ‘We can’t have this,’ so I did a breast reduction and put clamshells on it,” he says.

With chainsaws weighing 10-20 pounds, carving requires strength. Keenan says his early years of working on a dairy farm and competing in gymnastics built muscles.

“You need a certain level of physical stamina to work in 95-degree weather,” he explains.

Keenan appreciates the nature aspect of his artwork and making people happy with his sculptures.



“I feel lucky and fortunate to do this. It’s good to see a dead tree turned into art instead of firewood or in the landfill,” he reflects. “I’m forever grateful to do something I enjoy.” ■

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



Magic and the Iowa State Fair

How to keep and nurture romance and wonder.

"I don't believe in gnomes," my granddaughter says.

I nod sagely — not being a believer in gnomes myself.

"But I do believe in fairies," she says seriously.

And there we have it. Magic. From the mouth of a child.

As an adult, that magic bucket gets pretty depleted. There are many guesses as to why. The most obvious may be because we are adults and actually have to mow the lawn, go to a job, get the kids to swim lessons and make dinner. There is no time for fairies or gnomes. Life is exhausting enough.

Or maybe magic is gone because anything that has even a speck of mystery can be solved with a quick question to your phone: "Siri, why does the moon look so large and orange on the horizon tonight?" Trust me, Siri will not respond, "The mighty gods are giving us a sign that it's going to be a great harvest." Siri is to magic what rain is to a picnic. A bit of a damper.

Nate Staniforth, a magician and author out of Iowa City, wrote a wonderful book called "Here is Real Magic." It lays out his journey as a magician performing around the country, his eventual disillusionment with his purpose, and then his search for wonder with the magicians, wise men and women, and gurus of India.

Staniforth writes about the danger of "Google it."

"If I don't have the answers now, I can find them," Staniforth says referring to all of us holding our phones, "and without even noticing we shrink our world down to the size of our certainties."

Yikes.

And remember Robert Waller of "Bridges of Madison County" fame? In "Just Beyond the Firelight," he wrote that romance is something that makes "all the living and doing" worthwhile. However, romance is fickle, Waller says. It can be lost if it isn't nurtured. Most importantly, romance "flees from the cold light of logic and data collection."

Both Staniforth and Waller spell out how to keep and nurture romance and wonder. But it's August. It's Iowa State Fair time. You want romance and wonder now.

Then go to the fair.

Listen, I am biased toward the Iowa State Fair. For starters, a whole slew of my relatives are involved — from food stands, to rides, to games, to being in charge of setting up the Midway. The fair is family.

And then there's the fact that I'm that sucker that is "born every minute," as P.T. Barnum is said to have remarked. I'm the teenager, at the now-defunct All-Iowa Fair in Cedar Rapids, who bought dice from a stand where the guy assured this Catholic-school boy if I put the magic dice in water overnight, a naked woman would appear in the dice the next morning. Fifty plus years later, I'm still waiting. My goodness.

Also the fair offers an old man just the right amount of thrill. I'm more than willing

to take a few years off my life and eat this award-winning concoction made by cousin's son at last year's fair. "Daredevil" is my middle name.

So I'm biased. But, trust me, the Iowa State Fair will fill your magic bucket if you just sit back and don't ask Siri.

Let's count the ways.

The butter cow in its total lack of seriousness makes you smile. The largest pig you've ever seen is jaw-dropping. The thunder of the big bull coming out of his trailer onto the arena floor so quickens your heart you look to the nearest exit. The carnival rides charm with all that sparkle and twirl and those flips and turns. The big yellow slide, chosen for its mellowness, causes your stomach to delightfully crash up and down and then roar to a stop. The homemade rugs and sweaters and paintings and photographs and baked goods and 4-H projects are humbling and make you proud of the Iowans who made them. And the homegrown singers and dancers and musicians and cow-chip throwers are an inspiration for the future.

I mean, come on, just look at these horses.

They might be angels visiting the earth.

Or this motley crew of brothers and sisters.

Wilbur would be envious.

And the farm-kid pranksters who coax a fake spider onto your shoulder in the livestock barns — an awesome moment of terror.

But we all know it's the people-watching that really is magical. You want to dress up like a bird? Be a flamingo. You want to wear a weird hat? Wear the one with the propeller. You want to sing as you're walking the concourse? Do the complete Taylor Swift catalogue. Just go for it.

We'll applaud your trumpet playing or smile at your frog costume or help you order ice cream from your wheel chair. The Iowa State Fair forces you to be in the moment and to look closely — that's why you bought the ticket. Your focus and intention win the day. And that's magic.

And, by the way, after you watch the baby chicks hatch from their shells, and a calf being born in the hay, and a lamb testing out her new legs, are you certain there aren't fairies? ■

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.



AROUND TOWN

PHOTOS BY MARY FOWLER



A ribbon cutting was held July 8 for 515 Brewing Company.



Nikki Nigg and Kristy Schmidt



Dave and Diane Faris



Paul Galloway, Candy Anderson and Seth Walker

RIBBON CUTTING

515 Brewing Company
July 8



Ken Locasha and Sue Otte



Matt Janssen, Tanner Stotts and Ben Chambers



Wil Hedderich, Jordan Leckband, Jason Kyte, Jeremiah Labresh and Megan Labresh

Pushing the right buttons

Using more than 125 word buttons, beagle mix Parker Posey tells Sascha Crasnow when she wants food, playtime and even a massage.



PERSONALITIES

Parker Posey, a beagle mix, lets her owner, Sascha Crasnow, know when she's hungry. But not by traditional means of barking or knocking a food bowl around.

Instead, Parker "speaks" by pressing word buttons on a special floor mat. For breakfast, Parker orders food by pressing the "food" and "play" button. Crasnow then asks Parker if she wants it in a puzzle or a snuffle mat, which is designed for foraging play when eating.

"She's picky. If she wants food in a puzzle, it's not about the food; it's about the experience," she explains.

Crasnow uses buttons based on augmented alternative communication technology, which was originally developed to help non-verbal people communicate. She discovered research by Christina Hunger, a speech pathologist who wrote a book about canine communication and founded the Talking Pet Movement.

Crasnow adopted Parker from a rescue in 2021. Her stepdad sent her TikTok videos of a talking dog and suggested she try it for her new dog. Intrigued, she order six buttons, including basic commands for food and play.

Buttons are recorded using Crasnow's voice. When training Parker, she says the word and models it, such

as opening the door when pressing the "out" button.

Parker caught on quickly and responded to two-phrase commands such as "out, all done."

Crasnow ordered more buttons and currently uses more than 125 words. She uses combination words, as play and toy.

"I'll give her a choice, and she responds with a button. I'll ask if she wants a squeaker toy or a box. She likes to shred cardboard," she explains.

When a friend visited, Parker pushed the "play" and the "visit" buttons, meaning she wanted affection from the visitor. When Parker gets tense in her back muscles, she depresses the "massage" button. Parker uses buttons to make jokes.

"She asked to refill her food, and I got up to do it, and she takes my place on the couch," she says with a laugh.

Crasnow keeps track of the words used on an app, with Parker averaging 80 buttons a day. She is also part of a research study that documents the dog's increasing vocabulary. Friends are often skeptical about her talking dog. Yet, when they view Parker in person, it's impactful.

"People get excited when they see it," she says.

She says dogs can easily be misunderstood.

"She's a dog in a human world. We can't read body



language in dogs. This helps me to better communicate with her. We are more equals in deciding what her day looks like. She can tell me what type of enrichment she wants in the moment," she explains. "It saves me time trying to figure out what she wants."

Crasnow says the method helps make Parker's life easier.

"This gives her a better quality of life and more agency in her life," she reflects. "She's taught me the depth of the personality that dogs have." ■

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



DES MOINES FORGOTTEN

BY KRISTIAN DAY

Neighborhood parking lots of the Iowa State Fair

My trek through the fairgrounds neighborhood uncovered the colorful entrepreneurs, unforgettable characters and quirky traditions that have been turning lawns into parking lots for generations.

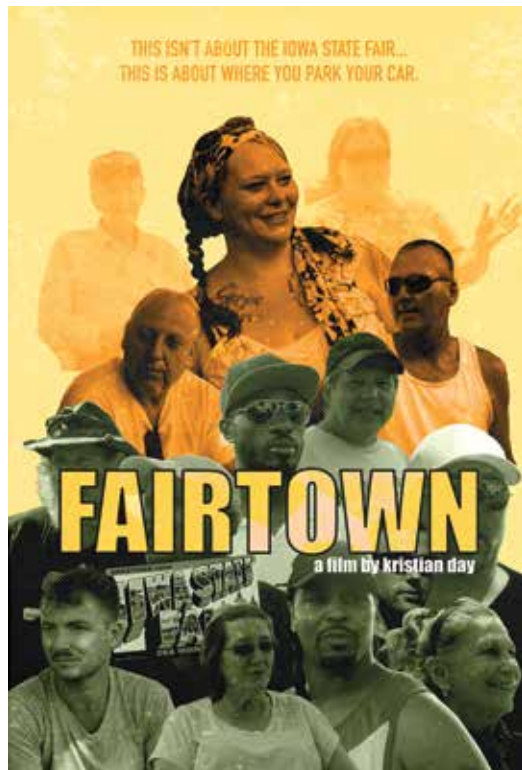
Iowa State Fair time is here once again. Over the years, I have written about strange stories from Iowa's celebrated event. In 2017, I became completely obsessed with the infamous neighborhood parking lots of the Iowa State Fair — the front lawns of the residents who live in the Fairgrounds Neighborhood on the east side. You might even call that area “The Gateway to the Iowa State Fair.” I even produced a short film about the subject.

In 2017, I was working on the series called “Play By Play,” a “Wonder Years”-style dramedy that was filming in Des Moines in the heart of the streaming-wars era of television. This was the era when multiple companies were starting their own streaming services and pumping lots of money into content creation. “Play By Play” was part of Verizon's Go90 streaming service, and unfortunately, the service would shutter before seasons two and three were released. That summer, I was also feeling inspired by the 1980s shot-on-video documentary “Heavy Metal Parking Lot.” It followed a two-person crew who drove into the parking lot of the coliseum in Landover, Maryland, as fans tailgated while preparing to watch Judas Priest onstage.

I got a call early that August that Vice News was coming to Des Moines to film a segment at the Iowa State Fair. I was already going to be out there with a crew filming a bit, so I thought there might be a way to piggyback on this. The crew and I spent a day together filming interviews and scenes, including our host getting stuck on the Ferris wheel. He was scared of heights. When we finished, the producer asked if I wanted their all-access passes. Why not?

The next day, a small crew of three and I ventured back down to the fairgrounds. We parked as far away as we could so we could film a Tolkien-level adventure from one end of the fairgrounds neighborhood to the gates of the State Fair. We drove around with the camera hanging out the window, catching folks with flags trying to grab people's attention so they would park in their yards. One person wore a bear mask, thinking she could catch people that way.

We walked from one lot to another, meeting people who had been offering this service for decades. Most just had stories to share about parking pimps and snake charmers. People had sex in their cars while parked next to residents' living room windows. One woman I like to refer to as the “Queen” owned a big plot of land just northeast of the fairgrounds. She would sit by her garage in a lawn chair while a few



large, tattooed men with beards parked people and collected cash. She wore pink, had her hair up in a ponytail and sipped on a Kum & Go lemonade. She explained to me that she had been doing this for 30 years. Some of her neighbors would sell parking spots on their lawns so they could pay their property taxes. She said she did it out of tradition. Her dad did it first, and then she took over to keep it going.

We found one gentleman who went by the name “AP.” He and his girlfriend had recently bought a house in the neighborhood, and this was their first year renting out spots on their lawn. He explained to me that he saw his neighbors doing it, so he thought he would make a little extra money to take his woman out to a nice dinner.

The Iowa Department of Revenue does require residents to get a sales tax permit and collect the 6%. Everyone was quick to tell me they paid their taxes, even when I didn't ask. Some just smiled. We continued our journey until we reached the gates of the Iowa State Fair. Then we pulled out our all-access passes and went in. Although we had those passes, we shot only a few frames of B-roll, and then we just had a good time. The story wasn't about the fair; it was about the people who live around it. ■

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



LEAVE AT THE END

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- ACROSS**
- 1 Lambastes
- 7 Poppycock
- 15 Earth model
- 20 Larynx locale
- 21 Tango cousin
- 22 "Whoopee!"
- 23 Altered totally
- 24 For an extended period of time
- 26 Angry feeling
- 27 Prefix with chic or tour
- 29 Papas' mates
- 30 Grafton's "-- for Evidence"
- 31 Video game in which players ride in skateparks and splash color around
- 38 Use a pew
- 39 "Dino" star Mineo
- 40 Filmmaker Perry
- 41 Feature of a carrot-top
- 43 Views more text, perhaps
- 46 Salamander
- 48 Make distress less painful
- 50 Hype (up)
- 53 Volcanic stuff
- 55 Large couch
- 56 Funnywoman Boosler
- 57 Whigs' rivals
- 60 Wane
- 63 "Devil Inside" rock band
- 65 Is completely harmless
- 70 Volcanic stuff
- 74 Enlarged
- 75 On terra --
- 76 Neighbor of Peru
- 79 Some dark breads
- 80 Exactly even division
- 83 Brilliant feat
- 85 Med. scan in a large tube
- 86 Pesto herbs
- 87 Mythical twin of Pollux
- 91 They go with oohs
- 95 Two after uno
- 97 Cove's cousin
- 98 Portable boat engine
- 102 Literary Leon
- 105 Covert movement
- 106 Like fatty tissue
- 108 New, in Italy
- 112 Atop, to bards
- 113 Yiddish cries of lament
- 115 Appetizer made with vegetable "hearts"
- 117 81-Down download
- 118 Guy who's a spin doc
- 120 Ring great Muhammad
- 121 Sinus-probing doc
- 122 Having paid to be freed from custody
- 128 Old dog star
- 131 Not reactive
- 132 Luminosity
- 133 Expunges
- 134 Pack-carrying beasts
- 135 Stopped from wobbling
- 136 What the last words of eight key answers in this puzzle are slangy synonyms of
- DOWN**
- 1 Not lenient
- 2 Sundae topper
- 3 Difficult experience
- 4 Bathroom, in Bristol
- 5 "Dapper" guy
- 6 Blade metal
- 7 Make a pick
- 8 Bathroom, in Bristol
- 9 "Honest" prez
- 10 Golfing goal
- 11 Stuff making a big bang
- 12 Former NPR talk show host Diane
- 13 Domains
- 14 Hand-reading fortuneteller
- 15 Ob- --- (delivery docs)
- 16 Time delay
- 17 "No kidding?"
- 18 Broth made by stewing
- 19 Vast periods
- 25 Old breakfast cereal brand
- 28 Things rolling in the aisle
- 32 Hankering
- 33 Mine find
- 34 IRA choices
- 35 "So that's your game!"
- 36 Lummoxes
- 37 Mambo great Puente
- 39 Japanese noodle
- 42 Match arbiter
- 44 Kinfolk: Abbr.
- 45 Stockholm is its cap.
- 47 Failed to be
- 49 Toe feature
- 50 In battle
- 51 Given to sulking
- 52 Puritanical type
- 54 Sly chuckle
- 58 Bits of land in la mer
- 59 Fielder Roush
- 61 Well-muscled
- 62 "I say!" sayer
- 64 Russian "no"
- 66 Cubes in miso soup
- 67 Give it a whirl
- 68 Dual radio designation
- 69 Decent
- 70 Indy circuits
- 71 Off-the-cuff
- 72 "Ta-da!"
- 73 Dilettantish
- 77 Prefix with pet or punk
- 78 D.C.'s home
- 81 Apple tablet
- 82 In shape
- 83 Trendy
- 84 Speechifiers
- 87 Bus. entities
- 88 Devices reproducing signatures
- 89 Spires
- 90 Ski lift type
- 92 Org. for docs
- 93 "Today" co-host Kotb
- 94 Move slightly
- 96 "The Fisher King" actress Mercedes
- 99 Rappers and poets, e.g.
- 100 Make a pick
- 101 French for "king"
- 103 Squid's squirt
- 104 Act litigiously
- 107 Climbed up
- 109 City in west Texas
- 110 Having more climbing plants
- 111 Best-suited
- 114 Anwar with a Peace Nobel
- 116 Greased up
- 117 Opera tune
- 118 Butter slices
- 119 Lymph bump
- 123 Sooner than, in poetry
- 124 Actress Vardalos
- 125 Sinful
- 126 Folk rocker DiFranco
- 127 Cola cubes
- 129 Exist
- 130 Devitalize

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!

Meddle

SPOON _____

Seep

CHALE _____

Copy

ONCLE _____

Pile

PHEA _____

TODAY'S WORD

SUDOKU

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

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.

	+		-		=	4		
+		+		-				
	-		÷		=	1		
÷		×		÷				
	+		-		=	5		
=		=		=				
17		42		1				
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9

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- Linda Slagle



IMAGE BY DAVID YOUNG FROM PIXABAY

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"The Zenith breed were outstanding in their field." - Brian Kreps

"This is taking TV dinner to a whole new level!" - Tom Stoner

"It's moovie night!" - Doug Dawson

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Trading horsepower for happiness

We take Iowa's street-legal LSVs for a spin.

This Cars in the City column typically spotlights the latest luxury SUVs and sporty sedans and highlights their many features.

This month, I'm behind the wheel of something different. This vehicle doesn't offer zero-60 mph acceleration in 5 seconds, cooling seats or adaptive cruise control. But, it costs significantly less and can be found only on side streets, campgrounds, small communities, fairgrounds and golf courses.

I took a spin on a low speed vehicle (LSV) cart, more commonly known as an electric golf cart.

LSVs are unique and aren't actually golf carts. LSV carts are street-legal motor vehicles and are built according to federal standards. Just like a regular vehicle, LSVs include a VIN (vehicle identification number) that is licensed by the Iowa DOT.

Because of safety features, Iowa law states that LSVs can be driven on any street with a posted speed limit of 35 mph or less. A city may ban unregistered golf carts; however, they can't stop state-licensed LSVs from using the public street. LSVs follow all traffic rules and can only be driven by a licensed driver age 16 years and older.

Todd Wilson, with EZip-N-Zoom, is passionate about educating the public about LSV usage and Iowa regulations. He says, "LSVs have the right to be on any Iowa road."

I test drove a Vcarts Eco 6. The "6" stands for six passengers. Other brands and models also come in four- and eight-seaters. The Vcarts offers many safety features — three-point seatbelts, mirrors, turn signals, headlights and a push-button start. I was surprised to see a backup camera and a built-in stereo. Passenger amenities include a USB charging port and cup holders. Need more room? Fold down the back seats. The lockable storage areas can be used as coolers or as other flex space.

It was super easy to get in and out. With no bulky door, drivers don't need to navigate their knees under the steering wheel. The padded seats are unexpectedly comfortable. Drivers do need both feet to drive, as the left foot depresses the parking brake.

The cart is quiet. With an all-electric motor, it's easy to carry on a conversation or listen to nature. It's an overall simple vehicle. It's easy to steer, to make sharp turns and to park, although car owners might grumble about how a little cart takes up a large parking spot.

These carts are fun, effortless and easy to drive.



They provide an open air feel without the loud engine of a convertible or a motorcycle.

The maximum speed is about 25 mph. If you see one going faster, it has most likely been modified by the owner. However, modifying one to go faster can remove the legal definition of an LSV.

The lithium ion battery doesn't require a different voltage to plug in like electric cars. Just plug it into a regular outlet, as you would for any appliance. A charge lasts 40-50 miles. There's no gas to put in and little maintenance or upkeep.

The Vcarts Eco 6 cost \$11,500. You can spend extra bucks for upgrades like special lighting, arm rests, weather enclosures, custom paint and more.

Golf carts were once considered a way to get from one tee box to the next. With today's LSVs, they have evolved into practical and fun vehicles. ■

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



Where creativity takes root

Volunteers in the Greater Des Moines Botanical Garden's Artisan Guild transform their talents into handcrafted treasures.

A visit to the Greater Des Moines Botanical Garden comes with the expected sights of colorful fauna from inside and out. Flowers are blooming, providing excellent visuals and alluring scents. It takes time and dedication from those who work there to make sure these plants can provide viewing pleasure. The same time and dedication are found in the various crafts and products made by the Botanical Artisan Guild, which is led by Laura Ruttman.

The Botanical Artisan Guild is a group of volunteers that sews, woodworks, embroiders, does photography and makes clay art, just to name a few, all for the Garden Shop. Profits from the handmade crafts go directly back into the Botanical Garden.

Ruttman is a scientist who used to work for Corteva in plant and insect control, engineering plants that are resistant to pests. Once she retired, she took a trip to the Botanical Garden and happened upon this opportunity.

"I ended up coming down here with some friends who were working on a project, and the volunteer organizer at that point, she's like, 'How would you like to manage the artisan guild?'" Ruttman said.

Ruttman, who has managing experience, plant experience and is a self-trained artist, fits into the role. Sometimes artists come in during events like Music in the Garden, set up an easel and start painting. Others do their work at home and bring it in. Sometimes they do big group meet-ups and work on their crafts together.

"I think it's a win-win for everybody. Sometimes, they're people who learned to sew when they were young, and then were busy in the middle part of their life, and now they want something to do. Sometimes, they're people that are making things like woodworking, and you have given products to all of your friends and all of your family, and you have nothing else to do with that stuff, but you still want to keep making it," Ruttman said. "It's a great way to make something you love, but give it to a good cause at the garden. Most of the volunteers that I work with are very passionate about the garden, and this is just their way of being able to help support the garden."

The size of the guild has grown tremendously under Ruttman's watch. When Ruttman began leading the organization in 2021, the group was only a handful. Now, the group boasts more than 100 volunteers. The quality and quantity of the items has increased the sales from just a few thousand dollars per year to more than \$33,000 in 2025 alone.

"I always make the joke that we should have



Kokedama is a centuries-old horticultural art form where a plant's root system is encased in a specialized soil sphere, wrapped in live green moss and securely bound with decorative twine or fishing wire. Here, one is being made by the guild. Photo by Laura Ruttman

our name on the big glass list of donors, because collectively we donate enough to be on the list," Ruttman said.

Having the number of skilled volunteers at her disposal means the guild is able to make high-quality products. Selfishly, Ruttman admits that seeing the attention to detail the guild puts into these products is a big perk of the job.

"I get a lot of satisfaction in seeing the ideas that come through working with really creative people. I'm a self-taught artist, and most of the people I work with are also in that realm, so we fit comfortably in this — not quite an artist but really want to create and have that outlet. It enriches your life," Ruttman said.

Being in charge means Ruttman does everything from recruiting new members and screening new ideas to teaching, organizing and leading meetings. Ruttman says they have made between 300 and 400 unique products for the shop.

While there are high-quality items in the shop from the guild, Ruttman makes sure affordable options are available as well.

"I try to make sure that the guild is filling out the lower range. We have some expensive things in the shop that the guild makes, but I also want to make sure that we have a product line like postcards or

things that are less than \$10, so that someone comes in and they really want to take something with them, and they don't have to spend 40 or 50 bucks," Ruttman said.

Ruttman was also recently honored with the Governor's Volunteer Award for 2025. Winners are described as "the people who show up, the people who invest in others and in our communities." We asked her for her reaction to the honor.

"I was just totally flattered. I feel like mostly what I do is facilitate; I feel like the things I do are small nudges. It doesn't seem like something grandiose, so I was surprised, mostly, and very flattered. It was a big honor. This is such a great place to work," Ruttman said. "I feel like I have a home here, and it's very fulfilling. Partly because of the management and the way the garden is run, but it's mostly because of the people I work with and the other volunteers." ■

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.



Laura Ruttman

Capturing Des Moines, one photo at a time

Charlie Borowicz talks about seeing Des Moines through his lens.

Charlie Borowicz grew up in a big family, being one of eight kids. That large family was constantly on the move because of his father being in the army. Living in and experiencing so many different areas helped shape his perspective and probably helped fuel his creative expression.

"I was always kind of artistic. I used to draw a lot when I was a kid. I really loved drawing; I still love to draw. I think that's why I like looking at things and to experience the place I'm in," Borowicz said.

Drawing might have been his first foray into the arts, but Borowicz ultimately found his niche in photography and filmmaking. That was far from where he thought he would end up.

"I really did not like photography when I was a kid. I was coming from this perspective of realistic drawing. I think a lot of kids get pushed in that direction. If you can draw realism, people are like, 'Wow, you can do that.' I think there was part of me that thought photography was the easy version of that, so I never really investigated photography until college," Borowicz said.

His original loves were still drawing and filmmaking. In trying to hone in on those skills, he ended up being pushed into photography.

"In high school, I was super interested in making movies. I made some really bad movies. When I went to college, I was like, I really can't get a job being a drawer, so I thought I was going to be a fantasy artist. So, I took painting, and to take painting, you have to take a photography class, and everything shifted for me," Borowicz said.

That's when he realized he had a passion for photography. What he was really interested in was the conceptual ideas behind making art.

"There's a whole world of interacting with people and viewers, and the ideas of art are really not about craft; they're really about the conversation that you are a part of, and that you can create with an audience that is not just your own thoughts, it's everybody's thoughts. I think photography, for me, was like an access to reality," Borowicz said.

Two of his photography inspirations are Cindy Sherman and Philip-Lorca diCorcia, who is known for his series, "Heads." A series that demonstrates that the true nature of subjects can only be caught if they are unaware of being photographed. The inspiration can be seen clearly in Borowicz's "Car Portraits" series, where he photographs individuals shot through the driver's side window while passing or being passed at speed on the interstate.

"These are beautiful, gorgeous photographs of people completely unaware, and I love that idea," he said.



The "Semblant" exhibit by Charlie Borowicz. His work can be found at cbruv.com.

Borowicz expressed the importance of capturing something without affecting it with either the lens or the person in the image becoming aware of being photographed.

"Artists are always trying to push their point of view, but my point of view is about what it is and how it seems as an image, and so I'm trying not to affect it too much by myself," Borowicz said.

One of his favorite projects was "Semblant," which was on display at the Indianapolis Museum of Art. It took four months, using CGI and photographic elements, and took over the entire fourth floor of the museum.

"I was picked as one of four artists to make a piece in that space of our own, so that was super exciting, super cool and massive," Borowicz said.

Another one of his favorite projects was "Science, Sex and The Ladies." An award-winning movie he made, in part, with his wife.

"We had our 10-year anniversary a while ago, which played at The Varsity, and that was a big accomplishment."

Borowicz said one project runs for three minutes, and the other is a feature-length documentary.

"They both had the same amount of footage," he said. "One I had to make in five months, and one I took seven years to make. I feel like that project taught me I could do something like that," Borowicz said.

Photography and filmmaking have also taken him some places he wasn't sure he would ever end up.

"I was hired to be in a dungeon, and it's like an S&M dungeon, and people getting spanked. What they wanted me to do is give a live feed for those people, and it gave

them a feed of them doing it to them while that was happening," Borowicz said.

His main advice for people looking to get into photography for themselves? Be a good consumer of the art.

"Consume a lot of stuff, see a lot of things and don't just look at the stuff that you want to look at. Look at the things that you hear about, too, because it's easy to get locked into one particular point of view, especially generational," Borowicz said.

Some local photographers he enjoys consuming are Brittany Brooke Crow, Joelle Blanchard, Anthony Brass and Ethan Edmondson.

"There are so many talented people in this town, which is really cool," he said.

Another piece of advice from Borowicz is not to wait around for inspiration to strike you.

"There's a quote I really love by Chuck Close: 'Inspiration is for amateurs. The rest of us just show up and get to work.' I think the inspiration is in the work. Show up, do it or fail at it that day. It's just like any other job, and be like, I'll do it better next time. I think getting things started and correcting is like the hidden secret. Do something wrong first; just do it," Borowicz 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.



WALKS OF LIFE

Backyard adventures

COMPILED FROM THE IOWA LIVING MAGAZINES

Unique play spaces spark local kids’ imaginations.

In backyards across the community, simple ideas are turning into unforgettable childhood spaces. Whether perched in a towering tree or built at ground level, these play areas invite creativity, independence and hours of outdoor fun.



Cooke
A tree fort of his own design
Bill Cooke says he previously built a large playhouse for his sons, but he is especially impressed with his younger son, Malachi, who built his own tree fort independently.

When asked about his inspiration, Malachi says he built it because his brother asked him to. He began the project in the fall of 2025. Snow delayed progress, but he completed the roof during the winter.

Malachi says his brother, Titus, taught him some techniques, but all of the labor was his own.

“My wife, Katie, and I never laid eyes on the play fort until it was finished,” Bill shares.

Malachi did not use a blueprint. He cleared land about 150 feet from his parents’ house and used a hatchet to cut 3-inch-diameter hedge trees. Most materials came from around the family farm, and he used simple tools, including a hand saw, hammer, hatchet and nails.

“It is an awesome tree fort,” Bill says.

The project took about two months, with Malachi working two to three hours per day. While he considers it mostly finished, he plans to make cosmetic improvements and trim back plants that have grown over the windows.

Source: Winterset Living, July 2026;
by Rachel Harrington

Read the full story here:



Dielschneider
A home in the sky
Ian and Lindsey Dielschneider had a tree in their yard that had to come down. It was Lindsey’s idea to build a treehouse on top of it.

“It’s a pretty special, fully custom treehouse built on top of an old tree we had to take down,” Lindsey says. “It’s been a special thing for our family and our neighborhood and anyone who brings their kiddos over to play. My husband, Ian, created it over a decade ago, and it’s still well loved and used.”

Building the treehouse involved a lot of math and problem-solving, mostly done by Ian, with some advice from his dad and collaboration between the couple. They wanted it to last a long time, so they researched the best materials and construction methods.

“We absolutely have advice for people looking to do this kind of thing, namely to choose your slide and then cut the tree to the appropriate height so the slope is correct. We ended up having to build a separate platform for the slide because the platform was too tall for it.”

Source: Grimes Living, July 2026;
by Ashley Rullestad

Read the full story here:



Wilkinson
Treasured treehouse
The story begins with a little girl on the east side of Des Moines, living the kind of childhood that feels like something out of a storybook. Wilkinson’s father and grandfather built the playhouse for her when she was 5 years old. They did it right: oak floors, electric lights, an outside lamp and handmade furniture crafted by her mother — a cupboard, a davenport, a chair and a kitchen table. On the walls were cheerful “Hey Diddle Diddle” decals. In the corners were dolls, tea sets and the laughter of little friends.

Decades passed. Wilkinson married, moved, then moved again — and the playhouse came with her every time, from her grandfather’s yard to her first home to the house she lives in today. It has never been left behind.

“I still have the little metal playhouse I got one Christmas when I was small,” she says with a smile, “and I still have the big one my dad and grandpa built.” She still has the furniture. She still has some of the dolls. She still has the memories of tea parties, faithful dogs underfoot and grandparents watching from nearby with easy smiles.

Source: Urbandale Living, July 2026;
by Joe Baumgarten

Read the full story here:



Sillanpaa
Playsets with stories
Last year, Sillanpaa’s son asked her husband, Matt, if he would build him a treehouse.

“The day Will asked Matt if he could build the treehouse, Matt went to pick up some lumber and supplies, and he got to work,” she shares. “He had a plan in his head, and he went with it and spent a couple of days putting it together. He was able to wing it without drawing something up.”

The treehouse was initially built on the ground, and Sillanpaa’s children helped put it together.

“Matt is always encouraging our kids to learn how to use power tools and square up corners,” Sillanpaa says.

“The kids are flying,” she says.

Sillanpaa’s mother-in-law contributed by putting flowerbeds around the treehouse.

“It’s kind of cool,” Sillanpaa says.

As a mom, Sillanpaa like that the 16 kids who live on her corner enjoy the playset and treehouse with her children.

“They all come over every day in the summer,” she says. “Between the two sets and our trampoline, we have kids playing at our house all the time. It’s an old-school feeling where kids come over, drop their bikes in the yard and play.” ■

Source: Bondurant Living, July 2026;
by Rachel Harrington

Read the full story here:



NATIONAL MARKETPLACE

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