

# Living

MAGAZINE

# Holiday recipes

Residents share how to create the foods that make their season bright.

**Meet Chris Vierling**

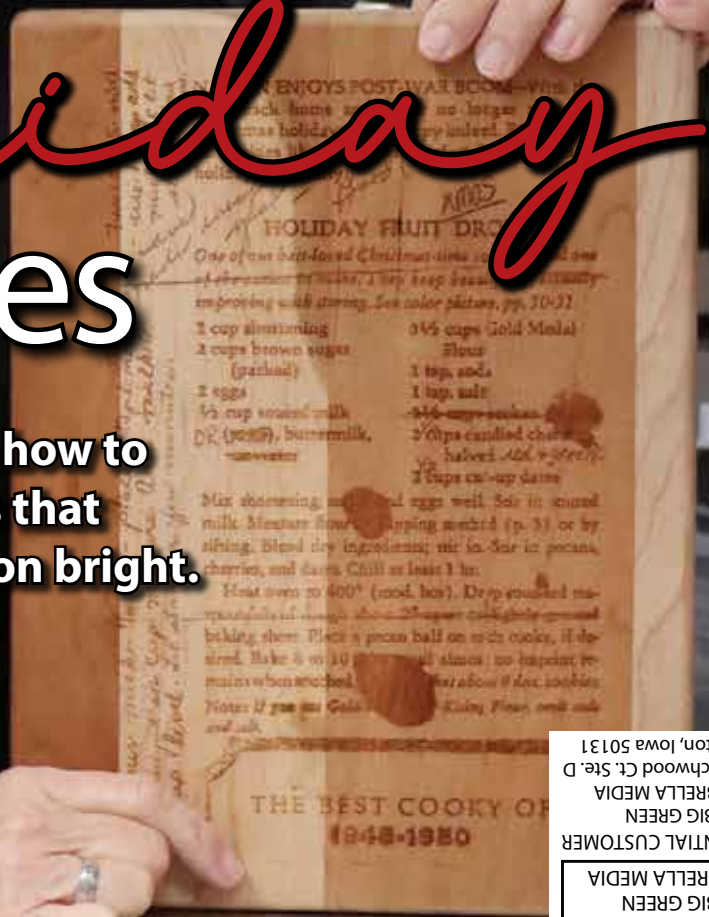
EDUCATION

**Hot honey chicken and waffle**

RECIPE

**Light named to EMS Association Hall of Fame**

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WELCOME

# PORK favor

We dedicated our cover story this month to holiday recipes, and why not? The Christmas season wouldn't be complete without the treasured family foods that pop up this time of year. From the elaborate five-course dinners to a simple cookie, most all of us have some connection with a family favorite.



Jolene's family introduced me to a family tradition they served each Christmas Eve. Her mother would make oyster soup and Spamwiches. Yes, Spamwiches — a holiday ritual for the Poraths. I would have preferred a ribeye, but nobody asked my opinion. So, I ate oyster soup and Spamwiches with Dean and Lois for a few years.

What exactly was this Spamwich, you ask? Well, to the best of my knowledge, it was chopped-up Spam, pickle relish and cheese toasted on half of a hamburger bun in the oven. At least that was the Porath version. I have to admit, it was delicious. The oyster soup? Not so much.

I recognize some of you may have never tried Spam, and for good reason. My friends who grew up on farms said, if they wanted meat, they got the real thing. For us city kids, though, canned meat was an alternative.

When Jolene and I started our own family, we continued the Spamwich tradition with our kids, and we still serve them each Christmas Eve. The oyster soup has been replaced with a choice of potato soup or broccoli cheese soup, thank goodness.

I wrote about this Spam tradition more than a decade ago in this column, and my email in-box was full the next day with favorite Spam recipes from readers. One person even shipped a Spam coin bank to me. It was then when I began to understand the Spam-lovers cult. In a conversation with a local Hy-Vee manager about Spam, my eyes were opened even more. Just to put this in perspective, more than 44,000 cans of Spam are produced every hour. Hawaiians alone consume approximately 7 million cans of Spam per year. Barack Obama even admitted he likes it.

Truth be told, I won't be rushing to the grocery store to buy Spam anytime soon, but I will continue to enjoy our Spamwiches on Christmas Eve, and I hope you can enjoy a few of your family favorites, too.

Merry Christmas, and thanks for reading. ■

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**HOLIDAY  
GREETINGS**

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# Holiday recipes

**Residents share how to create the foods that make their season bright.**

**By Joe Baumgarten**

Favorite dishes are often at the heart of holiday gatherings. Their aromas wafting through the house signal time to join family and friends in celebration, reminiscing and gratitude. Their tastes spark memories and conversation. For many, certain recipes are a holiday must. They are inextricably woven into the fabric of the season, and the festivities wouldn't feel complete without them.

Rhonda Golightly, Sharon Gengler and Susan Pogge enjoy sharing their favorite holiday recipes each year.

**CRANBERRY CAKE WITH HARD SAUCE**

**INGREDIENTS**

- 2 cups flour
- 1 cup sugar
- 2 teaspoons baking powder
- 2 tablespoons butter, melted
- 1 cup milk
- 2 cups whole, raw cranberries

**DIRECTIONS**

- Mix dry ingredients, then milk and butter. Mix in berries.
- Pour into 9-inch by 9-inch or 8-inch by 11-inch pan. (Use 1 1/2 recipe for 9-inch by 13-inch pan.)
- Bake 1 hour at 350.

**INGREDIENTS FOR HARD SAUCE**

- 1 cup sugar
- 1 tablespoon cornstarch
- 1 cup butter
- 1 cup half and half
- 1 tablespoon vanilla

**DIRECTIONS FOR HARD SAUCE**

- Mix ingredients together then bring to a boil to thicken slightly.
- After refrigerating, may need to add more half and half to bring it to a good consistency.
- Serve warm



**Cranberry cake with hard sauce**

“My favorite holiday recipe did not come from my actual family; it came from my nursing family,” Sharon Gengler says. “As a young R.N., my first time on surgery call over Christmas kept me from driving the 120 miles to spend the holiday at home. That distance seems insignificant now, but, in North Dakota, way back in the 1960s, no one moved around as

easily as we do now.

“One of the older nurses brought in treats for the holiday crew. By ‘older,’ I can tell you that she had to carry coal buckets to heat the floors when she first started nursing. Her best treat, I thought, was the cranberry cake with hard sauce. I wanted to eat the whole thing and drink the hard sauce.

“I copied her recipe and used it for various

parties. After a few years, I decided that it was pretty enough to use just for Christmas parties. Friends and neighbors certainly agreed. We have been in our neighborhood for about 45 years now and have a pretty solid group of neighbors. We take treats to each house for Christmas greetings. Our friends and neighbors each get a cranberry cake with hard sauce from the Genglers for Christmas.”

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**MAGGIE'S CORN PUDDING**

**INGREDIENTS**

- 1 can (12 ounce) vacuum-packed corn
- 3 tablespoons butter
- 2 tablespoons flour
- 3 eggs
- 1/4 cup sugar
- 1 1/2 cup 2% or whole milk
- 1/8 teaspoon salt

**DIRECTIONS**

- Melt butter in a glass baking dish and stir in the flour and corn.
- Beat eggs slightly with sugar; add to corn mixture and mix well. Stir in milk and salt.
- Bake at 350 degrees for 45 minutes. Stir once after 20 minutes.

**Maggie's Corn Pudding**

"This recipe was always included in the holiday fare, but it is also a delicious side with just about anything," Victoria Templeton says.

**Grandmom's oatmeal bread**

"This oatmeal molasses bread has never missed a Thanksgiving or Christmas as long as I can remember," Martha Matthews says. "It is served with the holiday meal, but a leftover turkey sandwich on this bread is as much a tradition as the holiday meal itself. I like the strong molasses flavor, so I choose the darker molasses, but a lighter molasses can also be used. The optional sugar was not part of the original recipe, but it gives the bread a sweeter taste if that is desired.



Martha Matthews

"I'm guessing my mother made it the first time about the year I was born (1956). When Thanksgiving dinner was ready, the bread was there right along with the turkey, mashed potatoes, dressing and gravy. There was always a slice with real butter (a Thanksgiving treat). Even better

**GRANDMOM'S OATMEAL BREAD**

**INGREDIENTS**

- 2 packages active dry yeast (4 1/2 teaspoons)
- 1/2 cup molasses
- 1/2 cup water
- 2-4 tablespoons sugar (optional)
- 1 teaspoon sugar
- 1 1/2 cups boiling water
- 1 cup quick cooking rolled oats
- 5 1/2 to 6 cups flour
- 1/3 cup shortening
- 2 beaten eggs
- 1 tablespoon of salt (1-2 teaspoons is fine)

- In a large bowl, combine oats, shortening, salt, molasses, sugar and boiling water. (Tip: Measure the molasses first then use the boiling water to rinse the cup.)
- Cool to lukewarm.
- Stir in 2 cups of the flour; add eggs and beat well.
- Stir in softened yeast, beat well.
- Add remaining flour to make a soft, sticky dough.
- Grease top lightly, cover tightly and let rise in a warm place until double.
- Punch down, make into two loaves.
- Bake at 350 degrees about 45 minutes to an hour.

**DIRECTIONS**

- Soften active dry yeast in warm water and sugar. Allow to foam and "proof"

**PEANUT BRITTLE**

**INGREDIENTS**

- 1/2 cup water
- 2 cups sugar
- 1 cup white Karo syrup
- 2 cups raw peanuts
- 2 tablespoons butter
- 1 1/2 teaspoons baking soda
- 2 teaspoons vanilla



**DIRECTIONS**

- Bring water to a boil. Add sugar and corn syrup.
- Boil until thread-like, about 240 degrees.
- Add peanuts and cook on medium heat for 20 minutes.
- Take off heat and add butter, baking soda and vanilla.
- Pour on greased cookie sheet and let cool.

**MICROWAVE PEANUT BRITTLE**

- Mix together:
- 1 cup raw Spanish peanuts

- 1 cup white sugar
- 1/2 cup Karo syrup.
- Microwave for 4 minutes on high.
- Remove from microwave and stir in 1 teaspoon of vanilla and 1 tablespoon of butter.
- Microwave for 3 minutes on high.
- Remove from microwave and stir.
- Microwave for 1 1/2 minutes on high.
- Remove from microwave and stir in 1 teaspoon of baking soda.
- Spread on greased cookie sheet and let cool.

was the leftover turkey sandwich. That was two slices of oatmeal bread, a little butter, a little Miracle Whip, turkey, Mom's home canned sweet pickle slices and a smidge of barbecue sauce. There was nothing better. I don't believe I ever asked how it got started. It was just part of our celebration. It's so special to me. It's not Thanksgiving without it."

**Peanut brittle**

"My grandmother made this recipe every Christmas during the 1960s," Rhonda Golightly says. "My mother carried on the tradition from 1970 until 2000. At that point, I started making the original stovetop recipe. My mother and I started to hear that some folks were making peanut brittle in their microwaves, so we decided to try it with the stovetop recipe. We had a bunch of bad batches: some overcooked, some undercooked. Eventually, we reached the perfect recipe. I've been making it every Christmas for the last 15 years. It's a fool-proof recipe for a delicious holiday treat that my family and friends all enjoy."

**Christmas candy**

"Sixty years ago, my next-door neighbor gave me this recipe, and it has been a family must at Christmas ever since," Shirley A. Duffy says. "These are a few instructions that were passed on to me. You definitely need a heavy pan and a very good candy thermometer and Pride of Iowa butter or Land o'Lakes. It will separate if you use cheap butter (been there, done that). I also found out that it won't get hard enough to crack if you live in high altitudes. I've always been proud of myself as it usually turns out perfect, and I've had friends that could never make it turn out. Once you try it, you will love it."



Shirley Duffy

CHRISTMAS CANDY

INGREDIENTS AND  
HARDWARE NEEDED

- Two cookie sheets, unbuttered
- 1 pound pecan halves
- 1 pound top grade butter
- 1 pound chunk chocolate (brown or dark or both )
- 2 1/4 cups sugar
- 1/3 cup water
- Candy thermometer (good one)

DIRECTIONS

- Spread pecans onto the cookie sheets.
- Cook the butter, water and sugar to a hard crack on the thermometer or brown in color.
- Pour over the pecans and let cool.
- Melt 1/2 chocolate and pour over top of candy-covered pecans.
- When cool, turn over and do the same with other side.

HOLIDAY FRUIT DROPS

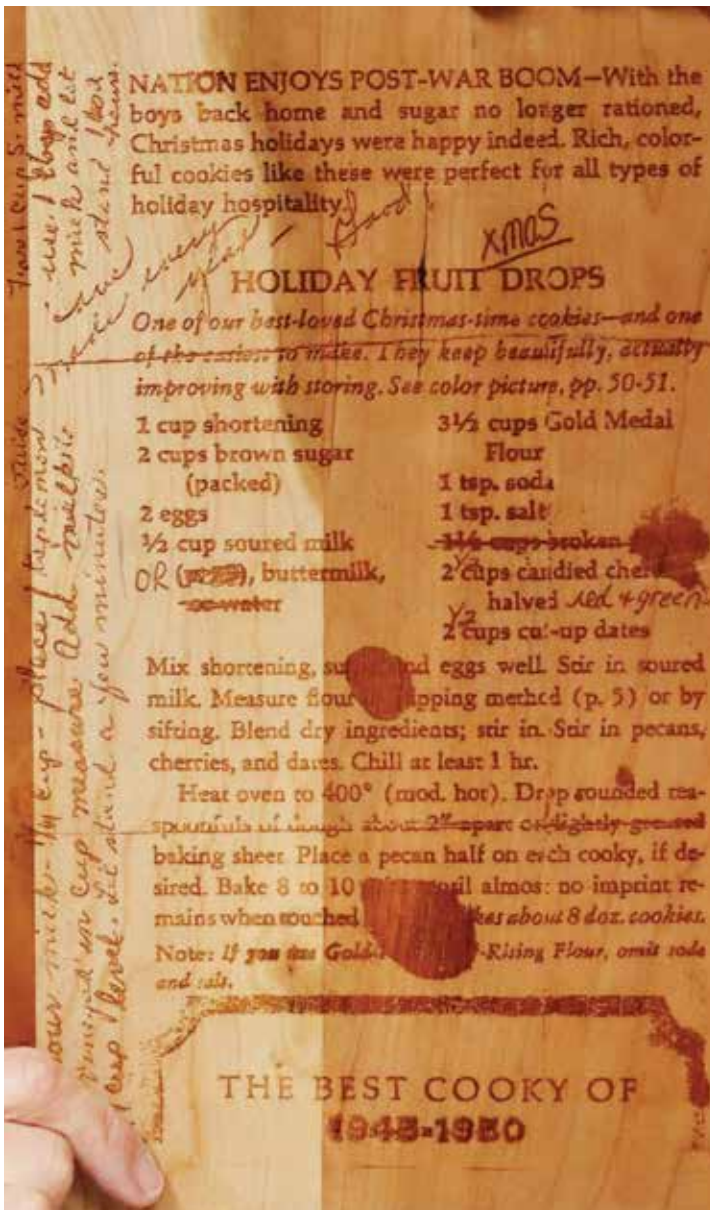


INGREDIENTS:

- 1 cup shortening
- 2 cups brown sugar (packed)
- 2 eggs
- 1/2 cup buttermilk
- 3 1/2 cups flour, sifted (If you use self-rising flour, omit the salt and baking soda)
- 1 teaspoon salt
- 1 teaspoon baking soda
- 1 1/2 cups pecan pieces
- 8 dozen pecan halves (if desired)
- 2 cups candied maraschino cherries (red and green), cut in half
- 2 cups cut-up dates

DIRECTIONS

- Mix brown sugar, shortening, buttermilk and egg. Stir in flour, baking soda and salt. Stir in cherries, dates and broken pecans. Cover and refrigerate at least 1 hour.
- Heat oven to 400 degrees.
- Drop mixture by rounded teaspoonfuls about 2 inches apart onto ungreased cookie sheet. Press pecan half in each cookie before baking (if desired). Bake until almost no indentation remains when touched, 8-10 minutes. Immediately remove from cookie sheet; cool.
- Makes about 8 dozen cookies.



Holiday fruit drops have been part of Susan Pogge’s family holiday traditions for many years.

Holiday fruit drops

“I always loved coming home from college to see what cookies and bars my mother had baked for Christmas,” Susan Pogge says. “She always had 14 different kinds — some, our favorites, plus some that were new, ready to be reviewed by our family. The standard favorite was holiday fruit drops. It wasn’t until I was married and wanting to make them in my own home that I actually looked at the recipe for the first time. It seemed like a great recipe because of the special ingredients. It is an easy-to-make soft cookie chock full of candied cherries and expensive dates. These are not the kind of fruit that is used for fruit cakes; instead, they are the delicious red and green candied maraschino cherries that only appear in grocery stores at Christmas time.

“So now, 51 years after I married, I still make holiday fruit drops every year and fondly remember my mother doing the same for probably 30 years before that. Our family loves them and considers it to be their favorite holiday recipe. The cookies store beautifully and seem to get better each day.”

Pogge has a copy of the recipe from a newspaper that calls it “The Best Cooky of 1945-1950.” The paragraph at the top of the recipe says: “Nation Enjoys Post War-Boom Baking. With the boys back home and sugar no longer rationed, Christmas holidays were happy indeed. Rich colorful cookies like these were perfect for holiday hospitality.” ■

# NAVIGATING retirement: strategies for tackling inflation

Inflation erodes the purchasing power of your hard-earned savings during retirement, making it a significant concern for nearly every pre-retiree we encounter. It's crucial not to overlook this factor when planning for a retirement that may last 20 to 30 years. Developing a robust strategy to address inflation is essential to maintain the lifestyle you desire.



Inflation plays a major role in the everyday expenses retirees face, whether at the grocery store, gas station or during leisure activities. Many families are surprised to see how much their costs can rise over a 25-year period. For instance, if a family plans to spend \$7,500 a month in retirement, they will need about \$12,300 per month in 25 years to sustain the same lifestyle, assuming a modest 2% inflation rate. This highlights the critical importance of factoring in inflation when developing your

retirement income strategy.

Maximizing guaranteed income sources, such as Social Security and pensions, can significantly aid in planning for inflation. A reliable income stream provides retirees with a sense of security and allows for confident spending. If you don't have a pension, you're not alone, but creating a personal pension or maximizing Social Security benefits through strategic planning can make a world of difference.

Inflation impacts your retirement savings. \$500,000 saved today, will only be worth about \$300,000 in 25 years, using 2% inflation. It's crucial to balance the need for growth with the need to preserve capital. As you transition into retirement, your investment strategy will likely need to change. The market risks you took when building your retirement savings may not be appropriate for managing those savings through retirement. This security allows you to withstand market downturns without impacting your day-to-day living expenses.

Having a forward-thinking strategy is

another important way to combat inflation. Understanding how taxable, tax-deferred and tax-free income sources will impact your overall tax burden can create significant advantages. One strategy to consider is a Roth conversion, which involves converting pre-tax money from a traditional IRA or 401(k) to a Roth IRA. This offers tax-free growth and qualified distributions. While the converted amount is taxed as ordinary income in the year of conversion, a Roth IRA is not subject to Required Minimum Distributions (RMDs), providing flexibility that can reduce your retirement tax bill.

Taking proactive steps now can help you create a secure and enjoyable retirement. This approach will allow you to focus on living out your retirement vision without the worry that inflation could force you to change your lifestyle. ■

Information provided by Loren Merkle CFP®, RICP®, Certified Financial Fiduciary®, Merkle Retirement Planning, 1860 S.E. Princeton Drive, Grimes, 515-278-1006.



Learn how to combat inflation for a secure retirement lifestyle in this episode of *Retiring Today with Loren Merkle*. Scan the QR code to watch now.



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# URBANDALE COUNCIL RECAP



With Councilmember Larry McBurney's upcoming resignation, following his election to the Iowa State House of Representatives, the Council established a process to fill the seat by appointment.

## December 6, 2024 - Council Meeting

The Mayor and City Council convened on Friday, December 6, for a special meeting outside its regular schedule to approve the employment agreement for the new city manager. Mr. David Jones, currently the city manager in Ankeny, will become Urbandale's next city manager. This past summer, the City of Urbandale launched a nationwide search to replace the current city manager A.J. Johnson, who is retiring at the end of this year. That search process yielded over 40 candidates from 19 different states. Jones has over 25 years of local government management experience, receiving a Master's Degree in Public Administration from the University of Tennessee at Chattanooga and a Bachelor of Science Degree in Communications from Kennesaw State University in Georgia. Jones will start his new role with the City of Urbandale on Monday, January 27, 2025.

## December 3, 2024 - Council Meeting

The Mayor and City Council met on Tuesday, December 3, 2024 and addressed critical updates and initiatives, including sustainability efforts, public art, and a significant process for filling an upcoming Council vacancy.

The Council approved the purchase of an electric 2025 Chevrolet SUV for \$38,000. This purchase is part of Urbandale's ongoing emphasis to advance sustainable practices to foster a resilient community. The funding for this purchase was made possible in part by the U.S. Department of Energy's Energy Efficiency and Conservation Block Grant (EECBG) program.

The City Council also approved selections for the 2025-26 Urbandale Art Park Exhibition. After receiving 42 applications, the Council approved works by artists Tim Adams, Jon Kamrath, Zach Schnock, and V. Skip Willits for display. These dynamic pieces will enhance the Art Park and reinforce Urbandale's support of public art and cultural enrichment.

The Council also took action to address an upcoming vacancy. With Councilmember Larry McBurney's upcoming resignation, following his election to the Iowa State House of Representatives, the Council established a process to fill the seat by appointment. Applications will be accepted online through Monday, December 16, 2024, with interviews scheduled for Saturday, January 4, 2025.

## November 19, 2024 - Council Meeting

The Mayor and City Council met on Tuesday, November 19, and began with a proclamation recognizing Saturday, November 30, as Small Business Saturday. The Council also honored two residents, Arlene Dabill and Bruce Bernard, for their outstanding volunteer service through a proclamation acknowledging their contributions. The Mayor expressed gratitude for their dedication and the positive impact they have made on the community.

The City Council approved a \$400,000 purchase for a replacement ambulance. This ambulance will provide the Fire Department with state-of-the-art equipment to enhance emergency medical services for residents.

Toward the end of the meeting, staff provided an update on the Urbandale downtown master planning efforts, highlighting its progress and confirming the direction of ongoing work. When complete, the plan will have defined action steps that the City Council can implement to help create a vibrant, dynamic downtown area that serves as a hub for community connection, commerce, and culture.

*This is a custom publication from the City of Urbandale. The Council Recap is not the official minutes of the Council meeting, it's an easy-to-read and easy-to-understand digest of the Council Meetings specifically designed for residents.*

*You can watch all the City Council meetings on YouTube and download Council agendas on the City's website.*

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POLK COUNTY

# HIGHLIGHTS



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BMC Crisis Observation Center (COC) - 515.282.5742  
Sv&P Sobering Center - 515.259.6262

The Polk County Board of Supervisors formally inaugurated the Life Services Center with a ceremonial ribbon-cutting event. This new facility represents an innovative approach to addressing the challenges faced by individuals facing addiction and mental health crisis. The establishment of the Life Services Center is a collaborative effort involving Polk County, the City of Des Moines, Broadlawns Medical Center, and St. Vincent de Paul. The Life Services Center will function as a secure environment where individuals in need of treatment can receive necessary care. The Life Services Center, located at 1914 Carpenter Ave. in Des Moines, is housed in a completely renovated building owned by Polk County. The City of Des Moines will split the operational costs of the facility 50/50 with Polk County. St. Vincent De Paul will provide case management personnel, while Broadlawns Medical Center will offer treatment services for individuals with addiction and mental health issues.



Polk County Sponsors On With Life 'Extreme Build'

Polk County was proud to participate in the construction of the On With Life two new family homes in Ankeny! These beautiful residences, part of Hubbell Realty Company 'Extreme Build' Homes of Hope initiative, were partially funded by a Polk County community development grant. These new homes will offer families a safe and peaceful retreat while supporting their loved ones receiving care at the On With Life campus. Together, we're building a brighter future for our community!



Polk County Helps Fund New Youth Mentoring Center

Polk County helped fund the renovation of a new Youth Mentoring Center for Big Brothers Big Sisters of Central Iowa. Spanning an impressive 10,500 square feet, the building will feature dedicated mentoring and community spaces, as well as serve as the new headquarters for staff. This state-of-the-art facility will empower the organization to meet the growing demand for mentorship, providing both "Bigs" and "Littles" a vibrant environment to cultivate meaningful mentoring relationships. Additionally, this space will enable corporate volunteer groups to witness firsthand the profound impact that Big Brothers Big Sisters has on our community, fostering stronger partnerships and engagement.



Iowa Events Center Naming Rights



Two esteemed local companies are set to elevate a cherished downtown destination. Polk County's Iowa Events Center will soon feature new names for two of its key facilities within the entertainment complex. The Wells Fargo Arena will be rebranded as the Casey's Center, while Hy-Vee Hall will transform into the EMC Expo Center. Both naming rights partnerships will commence in 2025, marking the beginning of a decade-long collaboration between Polk County and Oak View Group, the operators of the Iowa Events Center and these two new corporate partners. Polk County is thrilled that these respected local brands will contribute to the ongoing success and vibrant future of the Iowa Events Center.

# PLAN for the future

2024 is coming to a close. The end of the year is a good time to take stock of your personal situation and proactively plan for the future.



## Update your estate plan

Putting your legal affairs in order is important. It reduces the burden on loved ones in the event of poor health or death. It can save time and expense. And it allows you to have control over how your assets pass. Every person should have three basic estate planning documents: a last will and testament, a durable financial power of attorney, and a living will / health care power of attorney.

A will directs the distribution of your

assets upon your death. Through the power of attorney, you give another person the ability to make financial decisions for you should you become incapacitated. If you're too ill to speak for yourself, you can express your wishes and have your voice heard through a living will. This advance directive lets you detail your preferences for your medical care.

## Make a list of key contacts

When you update your estate planning documents, you should also make a master list of important information. If you die or become incapacitated, your family will spend time figuring out what you own and whom they should contact. List your investment advisor, insurance agent, tax professional, banker and attorney. Make sure you have the correct contact information for each professional listed.

## Review the title to your home

You should review how you hold title to your

home. When you purchased your house, the seller executed a deed. The deed contained important vesting information — the names on the title and the legal relationship between those titleholders.

If you are married, you probably want to ensure that both spouses are on title to the house. This may not be the case if the parties were married after one bought the house or if it is a second marriage. You also probably want to ensure that, if one titleholder were to die, the house would pass to the survivor. A simple review of who holds title and how title is held can prevent expensive problems later.

These are three simple yet very effective steps that can save time and expense in the future. Contact an experienced attorney to help you get 2025 off to a good start. ■

Information provided by Abendroth Russell Barnett Law Firm, 2560 73rd St., Urbandale, 515-278-0623, [www.ARPCLaw.com](http://www.ARPCLaw.com).

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# MEET Chris Vierling

## Connecting students to success

After graduating from Urbandale High School, Chris Vierling opted to enter the workforce instead of going to college. On the side, however, he coached younger kids in soccer and tae kwon do.

“I decided I liked working with kids through coaching,” he shares. “So, I went back to school and pursued an education degree.”

This year is his 25th year in education and 21st with the Urbandale district. He has taught sixth grade math, science and social studies and seventh grade math and science, but, since last school year, he has made a difference at Urbandale Middle School as an instructional coach.

“I partner with teachers to design instruction aimed at improving student outcomes,” Vierling says. “I chose this job because I wanted to try to increase the impact I could have in our system to help student achievement. It seemed like the logical next choice after being a teacher. Instructional coaches became more common about 10 years ago. Typically there are one to two coaches at most schools in the greater Des Moines area.”

Every day looks different for Vierling. One day he may work in a math classroom, and the next day he may be in a science classroom. One day he might work with sixth graders and the next with seventh graders.

“I’m constantly brainstorming with teachers for strategies to meet the specific needs of our students,” Vierling says. “Recently I worked with a teacher who wanted to increase student engagement. I went into the classroom to observe and collect data, and I presented the teacher with some strategies. Later, I went in to observe again to see if we were in fact getting more student engagement. This time we did, so that was good.”

One of the greatest challenges Vierling faces in his job each day is meeting the diverse needs of the students in the school. He does his best to tailor as much as possible to meet the needs of each student.

“It can sometimes be daunting,” he relates.

Despite the challenges, he says he “absolutely loves” his job.

“Anytime I get to work specifically with students is a highlight of the job,” he shares, “especially when they have an ‘A-ha!’ moment.”

As an instructional coach, his ultimate goal is to improve student learning. However, it helps the teachers to know there is an experienced person there to help them help the students to excel academically.

Vierling advises anyone who may be interested in learning more about becoming an instructional coach to first get some experience being a classroom teacher.

“It’s that experience that we want to pass on to other teachers, both understanding the successes and struggles,” he says. “There are coaches at all levels — elementary, middle school and high school. Good teaching strategies transcend all grade levels. However, if you’re interested in coaching, you may want to get classroom experience in the grade level you’re interested in coaching one day.”

Vierling says his inspiration for being an educator came from a combination of all the teachers he had as a student in the Urbandale schools.

“I’d give a shout out to every single one of them,” he says. ■



After teaching for more than 20 years, Chris Vierling is now an instructional coach.

# WHERE has the year gone?

I started the year by encouraging you with, “Don’t put it off another year.” So, my question to you now is, “Is it still on your to-do list?”

It may be getting that will in place, or cleaning out that closet, or perhaps it is getting your funeral prearrangements in place so that your final arrangements will not be a burden to your family and loved ones at a time that will be very emotional and stressful.

We hear it all the time: “I am so glad to have this taken care of.”

Planning your final arrangements begins with a simple conversation and can be a pleasant process. Planning ahead allows you time to give the thoughtful consideration that these important decisions deserve, and it allows time to visit with other family members to find out what will be important to them.

There are many options to think about when addressing your final arrangements, and there are even prepayment options available to those who wish to have their final financial obligations handled in advance.

An advanced planning consultant can walk you through these choices and options.

End the year by crossing one more item off your “to-do” list. Reach out to your funeral home of choice and schedule a meeting to start the conversation. You will be glad you did. ■

Information provided by Scott Eriksen, Director of Hamilton’s Advanced Planning, Hamilton’s Funeral Home, 605 Lyon St., Des Moines, 515-697-3670, [www.HamiltonsFuneralHome.com](http://www.HamiltonsFuneralHome.com).



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# THE POINT of Christmas



At this time of year, we typically go around asking those close to us what they want for Christmas. Most of us don't need anything, but we make a list of things we want. In all of our obsessing about possessing and procuring what others are preferring we can easily miss the point of Christmas.

Christmas isn't about getting what we want for or from others but about receiving God's provision for our greatest need.

- If our greatest need had been information, God would have sent us an educator.*
  - If our greatest need had been technology, God would have sent us a scientist.*
  - If our greatest need would have been money, God would have sent us an economist.*
  - If our greatest need had been pleasure, God would have sent us an entertainer.*
  - But our greatest need was forgiveness, so God sent us a Savior.*
- Anonymous

Sadly, most of us don't see our need for forgiveness, but God certainly does. "There is none righteous, not even one... There is none who does good, there is not even one" (Romans 3:11-12).

Our passive indifference ("I'm doing just fine without listening to God.") or active rebellion ("I know what God wants but I refuse to comply.") is what the Bible calls "sin" (Romans 3:23).

Our failure to measure up to God's standard of moral perfection (sin) deserves God's just wrath. "The wages of sin is death" (Romans 6:23) means the payment we receive for our rebellion is spiritual separation from God in conscious eternal torment (Matthew 24:51).

Mankind's greatest need is to be forgiven and restored into right relationship with our Creator forever. We cannot accomplish this on our own, but only through faith in Jesus Christ (Romans 3:21-22).

The cradle of Bethlehem sits in the ominous shadow of Calvary's cross because Christ was born to die as the sinless and sufficient payment for human rebellion. God's gift of Jesus wasn't to supply our want, but to secure our pardon (1 Peter 3:18).

"Chief of sinners though I be, Jesus shed His blood for me; Died that I might live on high, Lives that I may never die" (William McComb). "He Himself, bore our sins in His own body on the cross that we might die to sin and live to righteousness, by His wounds we are healed" (1 Peter 2:24).

This gift of forgiveness becomes ours only when we personally believe Christ died to pay for our sin and rose again as proof He conquered death (Ephesians 2:8-9).

This Christmas, I want the pardon God made possible through Christ's birth to be personal for you because you believe. ■

Information provided by Steve Smith, Creekside Church, 2743 82nd Place, Urbandale, 515-279-3919.



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# FROM BIKE trails to community spirit

Calahan finds the perfect balance in Urbandale.

For Alexson Calahan and her family, Urbandale has been the perfect blend of community and convenience.

Originally from out of state, the Calahans moved to Urbandale in 2015, drawn by the city’s unique balance of metro amenities and outdoor spaces. Since making the move, they’ve embraced all that the area has to offer.

“Urbandale allowed us to stay near bike trails for easy access to anywhere we wanted to ride,” she shares.

As their family grew, so did their need for space, leading them to purchase their current home. Over the years, they’ve made it their own, tackling DIY projects and personalizing every corner.

Calahan works from home, running her own public relations company, Small Adventures Communications, and also homeschools her children. This setup requires a home that offers quiet areas for work and study, as well as ample display space for the kids’ art projects. They’ve also dedicated time to restoring native prairie plants in their yard, turning it from a simple grassy area into a vibrant habitat full of native trees and plants.

“It’s come a long way from plain grass,” Calahan says.

The neighborhood itself is another reason she likes Urbandale. Friendly and close-knit, it’s a place where neighbors become friends, and parks and bike trails are just a short walk away. One of her family’s favorite traditions is watching the Urbandale Fourth of July fireworks from their neighborhood, which offers a front-row view of



The Calahan family enjoys the balance of metro amenities and outdoor spaces offered by life in Urbandale.

the city’s celebration.

Calahan’s appreciation for her community extends beyond her own family and neighborhood. Living on the east side of Urbandale gives her access to numerous cultural and recreational amenities, and she’s proud to be part of a city that actively supports accessible public art. As a member of the Urbandale Public Art Committee, she gets to see firsthand the city’s commitment to enriching the lives of residents through the arts.

“The level of dedication within that group is amazing,” she says. “Living in a place that commits resources to accessible art for all is really meaningful.”

That same community spirit was evident when a tornado struck Calahan’s Urbandale neighborhood this past July.

“We were obviously horrified at the destruction, but it was nice to see neighbors pulling together, checking on each other and helping to clean up,” she says.

Beyond her work on the art committee, Calahan also volunteers with Heart of Des Moines, a group of consultants who collaborate with nonprofits to make a difference in the community. She’s active in her child’s Scouts group as well, embracing every opportunity to give back and help build a vibrant, connected Urbandale. ■

## COMMUNITY

# FIRE station open house celebrated

The City of Urbandale held a bond-cutting ceremony and tours of Fire Station 42 on Nov. 23. The event marked the early retirement of the bonds used to finance the construction of Urbandale’s Fire Station, located at 3927 121st St.

Thanks to careful financial planning, Urbandale was able to pay off the bonds ahead of schedule, saving taxpayers more than \$1 million in interest costs. This milestone demonstrates the City’s dedication to using financial resources responsibly and efficiently. Mayor Bob Andeweg symbolically ripped up a ceremonial bond to commemorate the City’s achievement. ■



# LIGHT honored by EMS association

Named to group's hall of fame

This past November, Rob Light, former assistant chief of EMS with the Urbandale Fire Department, was inducted into the Iowa EMS Association Hall of Fame — a tribute to his decades of leadership and dedication.

"I was just doing a job that needed to be done," he says. "It is nice to be honored by my peers and people who I've worked with for decades, whether they be neighboring departments, former coworkers or other members of the Central Iowa EMS Association. It was also nice to hear how I've been a mentor to many of the people who carry that torch now."

One of those people is Michael Kaduce, who helped nominate Light for the recognition. He worked as a firefighter and paramedic at the Urbandale Fire Department for four years before moving to California. The impact Light made on him remains.

"He was a great mentor of mine in terms of helping provide his experience to me so that I could become a better paramedic," Kaduce says, noting that he even got to attend the Hall of Fame induction ceremony for Light. "It was nice to see him rewarded for the hard work and dedication he's put in over the last several decades."

Light's journey began in December 1987 when he joined the Urbandale Fire Department with aspirations of becoming a firefighter. He recalls how, at the time, the entire department was paid per call, and there were no career employees.

Early on, Light recognized the growing importance of emergency



Rob Light, former assistant chief of EMS with the Urbandale Fire Department, was inducted into the Iowa EMS Association Hall of Fame. He served in a variety of capacities through the decades.

medical services (EMS) as medical calls began to far outpace fire calls (and still do). By 1992, after earning his paramedic certification, Light took over the EMS division, determined to enhance the department's capabilities. His goal was to get the needed protocols, medications and equipment to provide paramedic-level care to the people of Urbandale.

With limited resources, Light innovated solutions, such as using an old police Ford Crown Victoria as a response vehicle, even rigging a space heater to keep drugs and IV fluids warm during the winter.

"The system was pretty primitive by today's standards, but I took what I was given to work with and made it work," he says.

Over the years, Light served as EMS chief, EMS director, and assistant chief of EMS, ensuring the department met state standards and had the tools to succeed.

Among his many accomplishments were delivering two babies and playing a critical role in several cardiac arrest saves. He also developed plans to protect medics during the ebola and COVID-19 outbreaks and introduced EMS capabilities to the police department's tactical team in 2000.

Although Light retired from the fire department earlier this year, he continues to work at the Urbandale Water Utility, where he has served since 1983. Still, retirement has given him more time to enjoy hobbies like glamping and motorcycle riding.

In 2022, Light faced a life-changing diagnosis of multiple myeloma. The experience underscored the strength of the firefighter brotherhood, especially during his chemotherapy and bone marrow stem cell transplant process when he didn't have family available to assist.

"A handful of my firefighter 'brothers' stepped up and took turns staying with me in rotations for a week at a time," Light explains. "They will never know the depth of my appreciation for their willingness to help me in my time of need. After helping so many others over the many years, I never thought I would be the one who would need help."

Through it all, Light has maintained his optimism, even convincing his doctor to dub him a "star patient."

"I think my attitude about the whole situation and the Hawaiian shirts I wore every day for treatment made the difference," he jokes. ■

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## LIBRARY

By Staci Stanton,  
Programming & Outreach Manager

# URBANDALE Public Library news



• **November Puzzle Competition:** The competition to be the quickest to complete the 500-piece competition jigsaw puzzle was fierce, with 18 teams taking the challenge. Congratulations to Complementary Pieces,

who had the fastest time of 26 minutes and 47 seconds. A prize was awarded to the team of four, and all other teams were entered in a drawing for participating. Join us for another competition in February.

• **Mitten Tree:** During the month of December, help us decorate our Mitten Tree by donating newly purchased or hand-knitted mittens, gloves, scarves and hats. The donations will be distributed by the Urbandale Food Pantry to those in need throughout the community.

### Urbandale Public Library

3520 86th St., Urbandale  
515-278-3945  
www.urbandalelibrary.org  
Monday – Thursday: 9 a.m. to 8:30 p.m.  
Friday – Saturday: 9 a.m. to 6 p.m.  
Sunday: noon to 6 p.m.

### Winter programs

We have an exciting lineup of activities during school break, starting with a Winter Wonderland Craft Drop-in on Monday, Dec. 23 from 9 a.m. to 4 p.m. You won't want to miss our "fly-in" movie on Friday, Dec. 27 at 2:30 p.m. where you can decorate a cardboard box "rocket" before watching "Despicable Me."

• **Family Escape Rooms: This Place is a Zoo!** Is a chance for you and your family to test your code-cracking and puzzle-solving skills while also learning some fun animal facts along the way. Sessions on Monday, Dec. 30 start at 2:30, 3, 3:30, 4 or 4:30 p.m. and are recommended for families with children ages 5-11 (older siblings are welcome).

• **Noon Year's Eve:** Celebrate New Year's Eve early with a dance party at the library on Tuesday, Dec. 31 from 11 a.m. to noon. If you need to take a break from our dance party full of balloons and bubbles, check out one of our crafts during this drop-in event. The Urbandale Fire Department will make a special appearance for our disco ball drop, but we will need help from the crowd to count down to noon.

• **Volunteer Fair:** Stop by the library on Monday, Jan. 6 from 4-7 p.m. to visit with various local organizations about volunteer opportunities. Organizations that will be in attendance include the Urbandale Public Library, City of Urbandale Boards and Commissions, UCAN, and the Urbandale 4th of July committee. Visit each table to be entered in a drawing for library swag. ■



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# EVENTS IN THE AREA

To submit calendar items for consideration, send to [tammy@iowalivingmagazines.com](mailto:tammy@iowalivingmagazines.com)

Check for cancellations

## Upcoming in Urbandale Living magazine:



**First cars:** Do you remember your first car? Do you have a photo of yourself with it? Or maybe you still own it? We want to hear your stories. Email [tammy@iowalivingmagazines.com](mailto:tammy@iowalivingmagazines.com) by Dec. 25 to be included in the January issue.

### Grandparents who enjoy living near their grandchildren:

Share why you enjoy living near your grandchildren and how you spend time together. Email [tammy@iowalivingmagazines.com](mailto:tammy@iowalivingmagazines.com) by Jan. 24 to be included in the February issue.



## Urbandale Historical Society events

Second Sunday events, 2 p.m.  
Urbandale Public Library, 3520 86th St.

The Urbandale Historical Society will feature history programs at the Urbandale Public Library on the second Sunday of the month.


Upcoming programs are:

- **Jan. 12**, Street Cars in Urbandale, presented by Pat Finnerty.
- **Feb. 9**, McDivitt Cemetery, presented by Mary Polson and Ann Ulm.
- **March 9**, Urbandale High School Athletics and Activities, presented by Tim Carver.

## Miracle on 86th Street Winter Family Scavenger Hunt

Saturday, Dec. 21  
Charles Gabus Memorial Tree Park, 3600 86th St., Urbandale


Every winter, you can stroll through the Charles Gabus Memorial Tree Park from late November through early January. The park is lit with more than 50,000 holiday lights, and special events are held all season long. The park features a custom-built train, larger-than-life ornamental displays, a gingerbread house, an ice-skating rink and holiday-themed events. On Dec. 21, organizers will hand out a single clue sheet to each family, and you will need to collect the answers for each of the clues. Return the clue sheet to the Urbandale Parks and Recreation staff. All completed sheets will be collected in the order in which they are received. Prizes can be picked up at Urbandale Parks and Recreation, 3310 86th St., starting Dec. 27. Space limited. Register at [https://urbandale.activityreg.com/selectactivity\\_t2.wcs?leaguesid=5036](https://urbandale.activityreg.com/selectactivity_t2.wcs?leaguesid=5036).


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## Join the Boosters

The 2024-25 Urbandale Booster Club Fund Drive is now available. Donations directly support and impact current and future Urbandale students in athletics and performing arts. To become a member, visit <https://tinyurl.com/U2024Membership> to view options and mail in form; call Adam Fraher at 515-457-6945 to purchase over-the-phone; or purchase online at <https://www.j-hawkshop.com/product/membership>. Interested in becoming a business partner or sponsor? Contact Adam Fraher at 515-457-6945 or [adam.fraher@j-hawks.com](mailto:adam.fraher@j-hawks.com).



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# EVENTS IN THE AREA

Check for cancellations

## Talk with Officials

Saturday, Jan. 25, 10:30 a.m. to noon  
Urbandale Chamber of Commerce office — limited in person, 2830 100th St., Suite 110, Urbandale, and available virtually

Talk with Officials is a forum for the community to connect with elected officials representing Urbandale at the state, county, city and school district. Space is limited. The Talk with Officials events are open to the general public and held on the last Saturday of each month. Registration is required for in-person attendance. Virtual attendance is unlimited; however, registration is still required to receive the link.

Questions will be accepted both from in-person and virtual attendees. Please submit questions in advance, preferably before Thursday, Jan. 23. We will only accept additional questions the day of if time allows.

Invited elected officials include: Mayor Bob Andrew, Sen. Matt Blake (D), Rep. Eddie Andrews (R), Rep. Dan Gehlbach (R), Rep. Larry McBurney (D), Polk County Supervisor Jill Altringer, School Board President Jason Menke.

Registration link available at <https://businesses.uniquelyurbandale.com/events/details/2025-talk-with-officials-january-15806?calendarMonth=2025-01-01>.



## Live productions

- Des Moines Performing Arts – Temple Theatre Comedy Series, through Dec. 21. **“Erma Bombeck: At Wit’s End”**
- Des Moines Community Playhouse, through Dec. 22. **“Beauty and the Beast”**
- Iowa Stage Theatre Company through Dec. 22. **“A Christmas Carol”**
- Des Moines Symphony, Dec. 21-22, at Westminster Presbyterian Church. **“Holiday Brass”**

## Holiday Hullabaloo

Through Dec. 29

Horizon Events Center, 10320 Hickman Road, Clive

The 2024 Holiday Hullabaloo is an immersive, family-friendly holiday experience that will surprise and delight guests this holiday season. Enjoy a variety of activities, entertainment and festivities that will allow you to create some fun holiday hullabaloo and memories. [www.holidayhullabaloo.com](http://www.holidayhullabaloo.com)

## CITYVIEW’s Fire and Ice

Saturday, Jan. 18, 1-4 p.m.

Historic Valley Junction Foundation, 137 Fifth St., West Des Moines

Join CITYVIEW’s Fire and Ice, an interactive winter pub crawl in Historic Valley Junction. Fire and Ice is a hockey-themed liquor sampling event that will be sure to warm up your winter blues. With your event ticket, you will receive 10 individual drink tickets to sample some of the best winter cocktails from establishments in the Valley Junction area. Tickets are \$25 in advance and \$35 at the door. For tickets, visit <https://fire-and-ice.dmcityview.com/>. ■



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## NEW OPTION for remaining independent at home as you age

Everett, 72, has lived in his home in Urbandale for 40 years. He and his late wife raised their children there; he knows his neighbors, and he's involved with the greater community.



Everett plans to remain in his home forever. But his daughters are concerned. Everett is healthy, but neither of them lives in town, and they're concerned about what will happen as their father grows older. If he needs help remaining independent in his house, they won't be able to provide that assistance. They want to hope for the best but plan for possible scenarios.

Everett's daughters' concerns are spot-on; staying in our homes independently as we age is not always possible. Chronic health challenges can make living independently ill-advised, and full-time care at home can be expensive.

So, you may be asking yourself, on your own behalf or on behalf of someone you love:

"If moving into a community is not a desired option and there are concerns about potential health issues later on, what can I do?"

One potential solution may lie in a Continuing Care at Home (CC@H) membership initiative, a program usually administered by an organization that serves older adults. CC@H programs are designed to help people proactively focus on their health at home while enabling them to financially plan for potential services and care down the road.

If you're interested in looking into a CC@H program, make sure to ask specifically what the program includes. A reputable CC@H program not only will offer services to enhance your well-being so you can remain independent longer; it will also help fund future long-term care needs.

**Here are some questions you'll want to consider asking:**

- **Does the program feature personal support, such as wellness coaching?** Studies show people who embark on a life-enriching program or activity will be more likely to succeed with encouragement from a trusted

adviser or advocate.

- **Does it include care costs and options?** A solid program will help fund your care, if it's needed, whether through home healthcare or services in a senior living community later on.

- **How long has the organization that's backing the program been in business, and what's its reputation in the senior-living industry?** Even if the program itself does offer all the services you're looking for, make sure you're comfortable with the organization itself. A reputable provider will have longevity and solid outcomes behind it.

Not all CC@H programs are created equal. If a program appeals to you, make sure it meets both your current and future needs and provides you with peace of mind. ■

Aaron Wheeler is Vice President of Home and Community-Based Services for WesleyLife, which provides health and well-being services, including WellAhead — A WesleyLife Well-Being Experience, a CC@H offering. To learn more, visit [wesleylife.org/wellahead](http://wesleylife.org/wellahead).

*Make a Difference This Holiday Season*


# BE A BLOOD DONOR

In the season of giving, there are many ways to make a difference—donating time, services, or gifts. But have you ever thought about giving the most precious gift of all—the gift of life? Every day, patients in Des Moines area hospitals rely on LifeServe Blood Center for essential blood products. Blood cannot be manufactured; it can only come from generous donors like you.


This holiday season, you have the power to make a difference beyond measure. By rolling up your sleeve and donating blood, you can give a gift that truly embodies the spirit of the season—hope, life, and love.

Let this be the year you start a new holiday tradition—a family tradition. Invite your loved ones to join you in giving the gift that truly matters, and together, you can help save lives. Because there's no greater gift than the one that allows someone else to enjoy another holiday with those they love.

**Make this holiday season a time for life, love, and lifesaving generosity. Be a blood donor.**



**LifeServe** BLOOD CENTER [lifeserve.info/tradition](http://lifeserve.info/tradition)



Wishing your family a

# happy & healthy

holiday season!

*Happy Holidays from all of us at Waggoner Pediatrics!*

We're so grateful for the opportunity to care for your family and for the trust you place in us. Supporting you and your kids is at the heart of everything we do, and we're honored to be part of your journey.

Wishing you a joyful holiday season and a happy, healthy New Year!

-Dr. Waggoner & the Waggoner Pediatrics Team



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# QUICK, comforting ways to warm up winter in minutes

*(Family Features)* After a day battling the cold and fighting the wind, a comforting meal made at home is often just what you crave. Turn those blustery winter conditions into warm, cozy evenings with favorite recipes that offer not only convenience but provide a little kick of spice.

For a quick and delightful meal that's equal parts comforting and unique, try this hot honey chicken and waffle that's sure to please with a crispy rice waffle loaded with sweet and spicy flavor, topped with chicken and drizzled with honey. It's a treat that truly satisfies from the inside out in just seven minutes.

The crispness of the gluten-free rice waffle is made possible by Minute Rice's Hot Honey Chicken Seasoned Rice Cup that entices taste buds with a sweet and mildly spicy contrast and playful presentation. Ready in as little as 60 seconds, the rice cup ensures convenience and distinct seasoning, making each waffle perfectly flavored and offering a satisfying crunch with every bite.

Whether you're shaking up your breakfast routine or enjoying a fun and easy dinner, it can be taken to new heights with the combination of honey and a sprinkle of powdered sugar for delicious decadence.

Visit [MinuteRice.com](http://MinuteRice.com) to find more family-friendly ways to warm up mealtimes all winter long. ■

## Hot honey chicken and waffle

Prep time: 2 minutes

Cook time: 5 minutes

Servings: 1

- 1 Minute Hot Honey Chicken Seasoned Rice Cup
- 1 egg
- nonstick cooking spray
- 2 chicken tenders, cooked
- 2 tablespoons honey, for garnish
- 1 tablespoon powdered sugar, for garnish

### DIRECTIONS

- Preheat mini waffle maker. Heat rice according to package directions.
- In medium mixing bowl, combine rice and egg. Mix well.
- Spoon rice mixture into waffle maker. Cook until light goes off.
- Place waffle on plate with cooked chicken tenders on top.
- Drizzle with honey, sprinkle powdered sugar on top and serve.



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# CHAMBER AM Exchange

The Urbandale Chamber AM Exchange was held Nov. 26 at Bank Iowa, West Des Moines.



Jenni Buchanan and Dale DeJong



Kathryn Sandie and Amy Frost



Jay Mathes and Bill Fry



Sandee Cook, David Russell and Kelli Close



Lanna Finch and Karen Hall



Ashley Rottinghus and Melanie Lane



Kristin Coggeshall and Meagan Cowden



Susan Skeries and Craig Johansen



Amanda Mulcahy and Gina Wright

# LEGISLATIVE Luncheon

The Joint Legislative Luncheon with Urbandale, Johnston, Grimes and Ankeny chambers was held Nov. 20 at the Holiday Inn NW, Des Moines.



Tiffany Menke and Andrea Hodapp



Karen Goldsworth and Haley Moon



Matt Shaw, Clint Dudley and Katie Wold



Legislative Panel: Larry McBurney, Dan Gehlbach, Eddie Andrews, Jill Altringer, Ryan Weldon and Heather Matson



Brenda Ballard and Sharm Sisler



Makayla Gallentine and Joseph Herst



Jenae Sikkink and Jolene Goodman



Tim Gootee and Aaron Colyer



Taylor Carey and Ben Buenzow



Brad Boustead and Sheila Twaroski

# A Guide to Des Moines' Top Drive-Thru Christmas Lights in 2024!

From sparkling drive-thru displays to festive neighborhood light shows, here's your ultimate guide to the best Christmas lights in our local communities of Grimes, Urbandale, and Ankeny this year!



## Grimes, Iowa

**Argo Christmas Lights**  
1801 N.W. Morningside Drive



## Urbandale, Iowa

**Miracle on 86th Street**  
Charles Gabus Memorial  
Tree Park

**Santa's Rock N Lights**  
Living History Farms



## Ankeny, Iowa

**Gingerbread Lane**  
SE Richland Court

**Buxton Family Lights**  
1832 SE Hillside Drive

**Frosty Lane**  
Directly across from Gingerbread Lane



## Schedule Your Next Service With Us Today!

Visit us at one of our three convenient locations in Grimes, Urbandale, or Ankeny to schedule your next service and drive through the holiday season with confidence!

## Key Winter Services



### AC & Heating

Keep your cabin warm with a complete inspection of your heating system.

### BRAKES & TRANSMISSION



Ensure your brakes are in top condition for slippery roads.



### BATTERY CHECKS

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515.986.5241

**URBANDALE**  
3831 70th St.  
515.512.1095

**ANKENY**  
1329 SW Ordinance Rd.  
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