

ALTOONA

DECEMBER 2024

Living

MAGAZINE

Holiday recipes

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

Meet Matt Darland

EDUCATION

Hot honey chicken and waffle

RECIPE

Ruepke steps up to provide foster care

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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 recipes

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

By Sean Dengler

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.

SUGAR COOKIES

INGREDIENTS

- 2/3 cup shortening (1/3 butter, 1/3 Crisco)
- 3/4 cup granulated sugar
- 1 teaspoon vanilla
- 1 egg
- 4 teaspoons milk
- 2 cups sifted all-purpose flour
- 1 1/2 teaspoons baking powder
- 1/4 teaspoon salt

DIRECTIONS

- Thoroughly cream shortening (soften the butter; leave out salt if using salted butter), sugar and vanilla. Add egg; beat till light and fluffy. Stir in milk.
- Sift together flour, baking powder, and salt; blend into creamed mixture. Divide dough in half. Chill 1 hour.
- On lightly floured surface, roll to 1/8-inch thickness. Roll only half of dough at a time; keep remainder chilled for easier rolling.
- Cut in desired shapes with cutters. Decorate as desired. Bake on greased cookie sheet in moderate oven (375 degrees) about 6 to 8 minutes.
- Cool slightly; remove from pan. Cool on rack.
- Makes about 2 dozen cookies.

A family tradition

For Jane Ferguson, making sugar cookies has been a family tradition since she married her husband, Larry, 49 years ago.

“I think it was shortly after that I started making the sugar cookies and cookies for the kids to decorate,” she says.

When her sons, Cory, Rob and Steve, were younger, they helped make the cookies. But the baking didn’t stop when they grew up. By then, the cookies were a tradition.

“I still do the Santa cookies, which I sit down and paint the face,” she says.

The help now comes from her husband. This way everyone, including their daughter, Sherry, enjoys these sweet treats.

“Every year, my family wants to have my Santa cookies. It’s just been a tradition to make them and have everyone enjoy them,” she says.

Her grandsons, Joe and Brian, have also helped with the decorating process. Jane is also excited for the newest generation, her great-



For Jane Ferguson, making sugar cookies has been a family tradition since she married her husband, Larry, 49 years ago.

granddaughter, to join in.

“Hopefully, I can get them here, and my great-granddaughter, Lily — she’s going to be 3 — I hope to get her here to decorate some cookies.”

A historic recipe

Mitchellville resident Maggie Stout grew up in Altoona when the population was around 800. It was the small-town atmosphere that led to her raising her children in Altoona, and she still attends an Altoona church founded in 1876.

“My husband and I were married at Centennial United Methodist Church at Ivy in 1961, becoming members at the same time,” she says.

During this time at the church, she helped make the church’s historic chili recipe. This recipe has been passed down for generations and used for the church’s annual chili oyster supper. While this annual event has changed dates in recent years, Maggie was still called upon to help make the chili.

“We always had it the first weekend in November,” she says. “When COVID came, our church was told we couldn’t do anything, and we got out of the habit.”

However, the event has returned the last two years.

“There’s been a younger group that picked it up. They needed some help from the older people that made the chili and the oyster stew,” she says.

Not only does the chili hold a place in the church’s lore, but it is also award winning.

“A friend of mine took the church chili to the Lions Club soup contest, and the soup won first place over 20 other soups,” she says.



CHILI

INGREDIENTS TO MAKE 4 GALLONS

- 8 pounds 85% ground beef
- 1 quart of onions, chopped up
- 4 46-ounce cans tomato juice
- 5 cans of Campbell’s tomato soup (specifically Campbell’s)
- 4 15-ounce cans of Mrs. Grimes chili beans
- 1 29-ounce cans of Mrs. Grimes chili beans
- 1 1/4 cup of shredded celery
- .75 ounce of chili powder
- 1 tablespoon of salt
- 2 tablespoons of sugar
- 1 teaspoon of pepper

DIRECTIONS

- Use large kettle, like a canning kettle
- Spray kettle with Pam, then sprinkle salt in it to keep from sticking
- Brown the hamburger and onions together
- After browning, use a colander and strain the juice/fat off of it
- In another big container (I use my electric roaster sprayed with Pam for ease of cleanup), put in all the wet ingredients (beans, soup) except for two cans of tomato juice. Add celery next. Put in the ground beef and keep stirring it to get it melded together and then add another can of tomato juice.
- The fourth can of tomato juice I just save in case it gets too dry. Then you can add that.

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FEATURE



Jeff Newell says his wife, JeanAnn's, bread pudding is delicious and easy to make.

A sweet delight

Jeff Newell says he loves his wife's bread pudding for multiple reasons. "It's delicious and very easy to make," he says.

His wife, JeanAnn, learned this recipe when she worked as a massage therapist at UnityPoint Hospice – Taylor House in Des Moines. The residents enjoyed the dessert.

"This famous red pudding with caramel sauce recipe is a dessert. It's real sweet," Jeff says. "It would satisfy the appetite of some of the people whose medicine upset their stomach.

"Anyone with or without teeth can enjoy it," he adds.



BREAD PUDDING WITH CARAMEL SAUCE

INGREDIENTS FOR BREAD PUDDING

- 8 cups cubed dry bread
- 9 eggs
- 2 1/4 cups milk
- 1 3/4 cups heavy whipping cream
- 1 cup sugar
- 3/4 cup butter, melted
- 3 tablespoon vanilla extract
- 1 1/2 tablespoon ground cinnamon

CARAMEL SAUCE

- 1 cup sugar
- 1/4 cup water
- 1 tablespoon lemon juice
- 2 tablespoon butter
- 1 cup heavy whipping cream

DIRECTIONS

- Place bread cubes in 13-inch by 9-inch greased baking pan.
- In a large bowl, whisk eggs, milk, cream, sugar, melted butter, vanilla and cinnamon. Pour evenly over bread cubes. Bake uncovered 350 degrees, 40-45 minutes or until knife comes out clean. Let stand 5 minutes before cutting.
- In a small pan, bring sugar, water, lemon juice to a boil. Reduce to medium heat; cook until amber color.
- Stir in butter until melted, add cream and remove from heat.
- Pour over bread and serve.

GRAM BRYANT'S CHOCOLATE PEANUT BUTTER FUDGE

- First, grease with butter or Pam spray an 8-inch by 8-inch pan
- Run extra cold water into the sink to use at the end, to cool the mixture down, see below.

IN A LARGE SAUCE PAN, COMBINE:

- 4 cups of sugar
- 4 heaping tablespoons cocoa
- 1 1/3 cups milk
- Mixture should be soupy. Bring to a high boil. When boiling, start to lower the heat until the boiling mixture gets down to small bubbles. To tell if it's ready, test drop a spoonful of mixture into a cup of very cold water.
- When you're able to pick it up and form a ball and can handle it without it breaking apart, it's ready. Take off the stove.

ADD:

- A dash of salt
- A dash of vanilla (cap full)
- 4 heaping teaspoons of peanut butter
- Beat the above ingredients into the mixture. Sit the pan into the cold water in the sink and beat the mixture. As the mixture is beaten, it will thicken. When it just starts to thicken, you'll notice it on the sides of the pan first. I take the pan in and out of water as I am beating it. The whole mixture will get thicker and then it's time to put it into the greased pan.

NOTE: When it starts to thicken, it can happen very quickly, so have your pan ready to pour the fudge in. There's no real science to this. Just lots of practice.

Nothing like Gram Bryant's

Iowa transplant Jennifer Jean Brown says her great-grandma Evelyn Bryant's chocolate peanut butter fudge recipe is amazing. While Gram Bryant did not make the fudge for Jennifer, it still came to her after moving halfway across the country from Maine.



Jennifer Jean Brown says her great-grandma Evelyn Bryant's chocolate peanut butter fudge recipe is amazing.

"My aunt, LuAnne, would make and send this dessert to us every Christmas since we moved to Iowa, like 35 years ago," she says.

Jennifer loved her aunt's fudge-making ability.

"LuAnne made it best.

Every Christmas, LuAnne would send two pounds or so of her amazing, melt-in-your-mouth fudge wrapped for freshness," she says.

Unfortunately, her mom could not replicate the fudge.

"My mom would try to make it during the year. It wasn't the same — but close," said Jennifer, who knew why. "The whole family knows that it was Gram's humming a song while baking that was the secret ingredient." ■

Start your morning off right with an update from

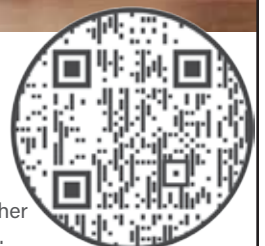
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PLANNING to pass on your legacy

Planning for the future is often something we put off. However, early planning is one of the most important steps you can take to ensure loved ones are taken care of and your wishes are honored in the future. Here are a few things you can start doing now:



Have conversations

If you haven't already, start having conversations with the people you want to involve in legacy planning. It's especially important to talk to the key person or people you designate to oversee your legacy so they can ask any clarifying questions now.

Be prepared

• **Consider a power of attorney (POA)** – A POA allows one or more people to manage money and property on your behalf. The person doesn't have to be an attorney or lawyer —

they can be a family member, trusted friend or professional. If you designate someone as a POA, you should communicate your wishes with them.

• **List and title accounts** – Clearly list every bank or financial institution where you have money or investments for your loved ones. Provide them with the documentation and instructions each bank or financial institution will require to have access granted to them. Also be sure any bank accounts you may want included in a trust are titled appropriately.

• **Review safe deposit box details** – Check your bank's procedures on how a loved one could recover items within your safe deposit box. This may require extra documentation, which you should explain and provide for any beneficiaries.

• **Designate titles** – To avoid confusion, clearly designate beneficiaries for titles of cars, property, etc.

• **Update trusts** – A successor trustee, or whoever takes over management of your trust, may need to provide third parties with specific

documentation that differs based on the terms of your trust proving their authority to act on behalf of the trust. Your successor trustee will need to provide your named beneficiaries a comprehensive inventory of all the trust's accounts and property.

Ask questions

Start asking your banks and financial institutions questions on what you need to do to be able to provide a smooth transition for your loved ones. You may need to change titles of your accounts, trusts, safe deposit boxes, etc.

Preparing your legacy plan early ensures your assets and wishes are handled with care and leaves a lasting, positive impact on those who matter most to you.

Speak with your banker about how you can start preparing your legacy today. ■

Information provided by Mary Simon, VP, Altoona Branch Manager, 3820 Eighth St. S.W., Altoona, 515-245-5480, MSimon@BankersTrust.com. Bankers Trust NMLS ID: 440379.



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Merry Christmas from

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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 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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TIPS to stay healthy for the holidays

The holidays are upon us. The holiday season is often associated with busyness and excess. Our to-do list gets longer and longer, our stress levels surge, and the availability of yummy, albeit unhealthy, treats increases significantly. Unfortunately, the holidays have health risks, and staying mentally and physically healthy can be especially challenging this time of year. Here are a few tips to help you stay happy and healthy this holiday season.



Stay hydrated. As we age, it is increasingly important that we stay hydrated. Keep a glass of water easily accessible in your home. Bring a bottle of water with you when you are out holiday shopping or running errands. Get into the habit of always having a drink of water close by.

Drink alcohol in moderation or enjoy alcohol-free drinks. The holiday season is a great time to celebrate and have fun. However, a lot of medications that seniors take can have adverse side effects when consuming alcohol. Before celebrating with an alcoholic beverage, check with your doctor to ensure alcohol will not interfere with your medications, or enjoy a mocktail.

Meet at an accessible home or location. If an older family member or friend is attending a holiday gathering, make sure the location is safe and accessible. If there are a lot of steps to navigate to enter the home, having someone with a more accessible home host would be an option. Also, look for potential hazards. For example, an area rug is a trip hazard to those walking with a walker or a cane.

Take breaks and rest. Many people travel during the holidays. Whether the trip is out of state or an hour away, it is important to make time to rest when you arrive. Plan on departing early so you arrive at your destination with enough time before the gathering or shopping trip to rest and recuperate. If you are planning a full day of shopping in the hustle and bustle of the season, set aside time to sit at a coffee shop or restaurant for some quiet time and relaxation midday.

The holidays come with health risks. Research has shown there are elevated rates of cardiovascular events and mortality over the December holiday. In the United States, 4.2% more people pass away from cardiac events between Dec. 25 and Jan. 7. One way to try to stay healthy and heart-conscious is to find balance in your diet. If you know you are going to have a large dinner, eat a healthy, but smaller lunch. Enjoy a few cookies, but keep your cookie intake to single digits.

With a few precautionary measures in place, you and your older loved ones can stay healthy and still have fun and enjoy holiday traditions with friends and families. ■

Information provided by Stephanie Proper, executive director, Valley View Village, 2571 Guthrie Ave., Des Moines, 515-265-2571.



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ANSWERING a call

Ruepke steps up to provide foster care



Amy Ruepke (second from left) of Altoona has been a foster parent for nearly four years. She is pictured with children Dakoda, Landon and Aaleah. Dakoda and Aaleah are both adopted.

Every year in Iowa, 4,000 children/youth are in need of a temporary, stable and caring home.

While that number is large, it's progress, actually, says Emily Easton, a recruitment and retention coordinator at Four Oaks Family Connections, which partners with the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) to recruit, license, train and provide ongoing support to foster, kinship and adoptive families throughout the state of Iowa.

"We are happy to report that, over the last several years, we have seen an increase in the number of relatives and suitable others who have become licensed in order to care for a specific child who they know already," she says. "This is often in the best interest of the child, and we are excited that we can provide these families with access to the same supports as foster parents."

Even so, about 35% more children are being referred than there are licensed foster families available for match in central Iowa and throughout the state.

One of those successful foster family stories is that of Amy Ruepke of Altoona, who has been a foster parent for nearly four years.

Ruepke successfully navigated the process to become a foster family, which included an orientation for prospective foster/adoptive parents, an 11-week series of training classes, a home study, additional training such as CPR/FA and Mandatory Reporter Training, and then a final approval.

"The early stages are the most challenging; it's life-altering for everyone involved," Ruepke says. "But being a foster family quickly becomes the new family dynamic. It's not always easy, and it's a demanding role, but

making a difference in the lives of our most vulnerable children is gratifying."

Easton said it is the company's goal to ensure that, when a child is removed from an unsafe home, there is a safe and stable place available to them for as long as they may need it.

"We also provide support and resources to families who have children placed with them to make sure these parents have what they need to successfully care for children who have experienced trauma," she says.

Anyone wanting to learn more about foster care can attend one of the organization's virtual orientations held each Sunday and Wednesday nights. Instructions to register for orientation and a step-by-step look at the licensing process can be found at <https://iowafosterandadoption.org/how-to-get-started/>. ■

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DECEMBER 2024

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HOLIDAY CLOSINGS

City Offices are closed on the following dates:

CHRISTMAS: Dec. 24 & 25

NEW YEARS: Jan. 1

The Altoona Public Library is closed on the following dates:

CHRISTMAS: Dec. 24 & 25

NEW YEARS: Jan. 1

Please note that because the holidays are mid-week, trash, recycling and holiday yard waste collection won't be delayed the weeks of the holidays in Altoona.

CHRISTMAS TREE PICK-UP

The Compost It! program's winter collection will occur on your regular collection day **Dec. 30 and 31, 2024 and Jan. 6 and 7, 2025**. Live Christmas tree pick-up is included during this time. Just set your tree out before 6 AM on your regular collection day with one Compost It! sticker attached. When you set it at the curb, the sticker is the only decoration your tree can have. All ornaments, lights, and wires need to be removed. Wreaths and garlands are not accepted.

WINTER TRASH & RECYCLING CART PLACEMENT

Please remember that your garbage and recycling carts must be accessible 18 inches from the curb. Your clean driveway approach may be the best option during heavy snow times.

Please do NOT place your cart on city streets. City snowplows cannot clear snow properly when carts are placed on city streets. This is especially true in cul-de-sacs which are impossible to plow when carts are placed in the road.

CITY TRAILS IN WINTER

The City of Altoona does clear the snow off of the trails during winter. However, we do not treat the trails with salt or sand. The trails are cleared last, following the city facilities' sidewalks and parking lots. Please enjoy the trails but be cautious of the weather conditions.

POND SAFETY

Please limit your winter recreation at city ponds to fishing from the shore. Ice skating is permitted at the rink the Iowa Wild sponsors and sets up at Ironwood Park. Please see the city's website or social media accounts for the latest skating season announcement and rink information.

WE NEED YOUR EYES!

The City of Altoona relies on our residents to let staff know of safety concerns created by weather conditions, snow removal operations, water main breaks, potholes, etc. If you have a concern, please visit our website to fill out a concern form or contact City Hall at 967-5136 (Monday–Friday; 8am–4:30pm) or 515-710-7449 (during off hours and weekends).



*Wishing you a happy holiday season
from the City of Altoona!*



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VITAL RECORDS
515-286-3624

PASSPORTS, REALESTATE

515-286-3160

ATV /BOATS/SNOWMOBILE

515-286-3160

SHERIFF

POLK COUNTY JAIL
515-323-5400

LAW ENFORCEMENT
(NON EMERGENCY)

515-286-3306

VETERAN AFFAIRS
515-286-3670



POLK COUNTY

HIGHLIGHTS



Polk County
Life Services
Center

Contact Information

BMC Behavioral Health Urgent Care (BHUC) - 515.282.5742
BMC Crisis Observation Center (COC) - 515.282.5742
SVdP 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!

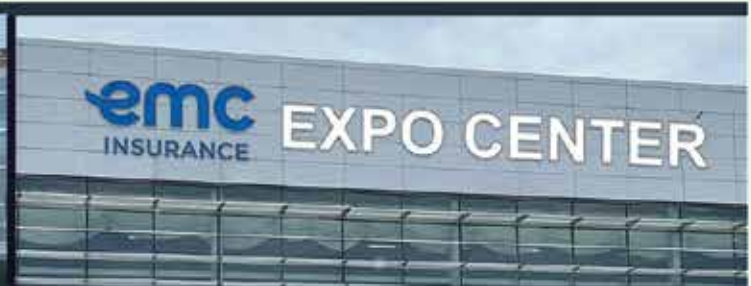


Polk County Helps Fund New Youth Mentoring Center

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.

Be sure to check for cancelations.



Upcoming in Altoona Living magazine:

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 by Feb. 1 to be included in the February issue.

Playhouse classes offered

Various dates

The Des Moines Playhouse, 831 42nd St., Des Moines

The Des Moines Playhouse offers classes year-round for ages 4 through adult. New this winter is an audition workshop for teens and adults. Registration is now open for winter, winter break, spring break and spring classes with summer camps posting in mid-January. Scholarships are available through the Jeanne Hopson Angel Fund. For class descriptions, registrations and more information, visit dmplayhouse.com/education/classes-and-camps.

The Audition Workshop Series for ages 14 through adult will be led by Playhouse artistic director Katy Merriman. Held each Saturday in February, sessions will focus on song selection, cold reads, dance auditions with "Waitress" choreographer Kent Zimmerman, and a master class with area directors. Students can sign up for one, two, three or all four sessions.

Winter break features a play in four days for students in grades 2-7 while younger students will bring folk tales from around the world to life. Teens can work alongside Playhouse professionals to learn basic stage carpentry, painting, sewing, lighting design and sound design. Winter break sessions are Dec. 23, 27, 30 and 31.

Winter classes start Jan. 4 with creative drama, creative characters, and more for pre-K through grade 9. Spring classes, starting March 29 are focused on musical theatre for pre-K through grade 7.

Spring break finds students in grades 5-8 learning "Seussical Kids," a 35-minute version of the popular Broadway musical, with performances at the end of the week. Students in grades 3-4 will rehearse and perform a play while younger students will use favorite books to create scenes to share.

For more information on Playhouse educational offerings, contact Robin Spahr, Playhouse education director, at rspahr@dmplayhouse.com, 515-974-5365.

New Years Eve With the Shriners

Dec. 31, 6:30 p.m. - Jan. 1, 1 a.m.
1100 Shriners Parkway, Altoona

Enjoy two live bands. Gilded Cage will start the night off and the Mojitos will play the last part of the evening. Cost is \$40 per person or \$70 per couple. Admission includes free keg beer, pop, well drinks and coffee, as well as party favors and a full breakfast buffet after midnight.



Rams Swim Club meet

Jan. 4 and 5
Southeast Polk

The public is invited to the Rams Swim Club meet, and volunteers are needed for the event and set up on Friday, Jan. 3. Silver cord hours are available for students who need them. People can find Rams Swim Club on Facebook or they can email secretary@ramsswimmingia.com or Info@ramsswimmingia.com for more information. Their website is gomotionapp.com/team/iarsc/page/home

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



Des Moines Community Orchestra concerts

The Des Moines Community Orchestra has announced its concert dates for the 2024/2025 concert season. Admission is free. Concerts start at 2 p.m. with pre-concert talks at 1 p.m. For more information, visit desmoinescommunityorchestra.org. Concerts are:

- Sunday, Feb. 23, Winter Concert and Past Audience Favorites, Sheslow Auditorium.
- Sunday, May 11, Spring Concert, Carl's Favorite Finales, Sheslow Auditorium.

Square Dance Lessons

Sunday nights starting
Jan. 19, 6:30 p.m.
Douglas Avenue
Presbyterian Church, 4601
Douglas Ave., Des Moines

Ankeny Square Dance Club

is sponsoring Square Dance Lessons. Cost is \$20 per person for the entire session accepted at the third lesson. Attend with or without a dance partner. You'll learn the calls,



one at a time, taught by a caller (instructor) and volunteers. For more information call Sandy Townsend, 515-294-2624, or visit www.ankenysquares.com.

EVENTS IN THE AREA

Be sure to check for cancellations.

Polk County Heritage Gallery exhibit

Dec. 5 to Jan. 24

Polk County Administration Building,
111 Court Ave., Des Moines
polkcountyheritagegallery.org

DSM Exhibited 2024 - Annual Juried Show is on display.



Live music at Wooly's

504 E. Locust St., Des Moines

firstfleetconcerts.com/first-fleet-venues/woolys

- Jan. 17: Tyler Richton & The High Bank Boys at 7 p.m.
- Jan. 18: The Prince Experience at 8:30 p.m.
- Jan. 24: Smells Like Nirvana: A Tribute to Nirvana at 8 p.m.
- Jan. 26: Beach Bunny at 8 p.m.
- Jan. 30: Aaron Watson at 8 p.m.



Indoor Garage Sale Extravaganza

Jan. 11

Iowa Events Center, 730 Third St., Des Moines

www.iowaeventscenter.com

Need a mid-winter fix for your garage sale habit? This is the place to be.

Iowa Diecast Toy Show

Jan. 4-5

Iowa State Fairgrounds, 3000 E. Grand Ave., Des Moines
www.agfarmtoys.com

Explore an extensive selection of toys of all sizes and memorabilia from reputable dealers. Discover rare and limited-edition pieces to add to your collection. Find that missing piece for your display that you have been searching for. Find a great piece that you didn't know you needed.

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/>. ■



LIBRARY

ALTOONA Public Library events

ADULT PROGRAMMING — AGES 18 AND OLDER

Social Security &

Retirement Planning Basics,

Wednesday, Jan. 22 or Jan.

29, 6:30 p.m. Join special

guest speaker Ryan Biniak

with the Society of Financial

Awareness for a seminar

covering Social Security and retirement planning basics. Plan on

attending only one date as the same information will be covered at both.

Registration required.

CookBook Swap, Saturday, Jan. 25, 1 p.m. Looking for some

new recipes to start the new year? Trade in your old cookbooks and

start fresh. For each item you bring to swap between Jan. 17-24 during

regular library hours, receive a voucher to choose one new-to-you item

during the swap. No registration required.

Adult Coloring at Brightside Aleworks, Thursdays, Jan. 30 and

Feb. 27, from 6:30-8:30 p.m. Join us at Brightside Aleworks (480

Center Place in Altoona) for a fun night of coloring. We'll bring the art

supplies, you bring your friends and money for drinks. No registration

required.

CHILDREN'S PROGRAMMING

Sewing 101, Sunday, Jan. 12, 2:30-3:30 p.m. Learn basic sewing

machine skills and safety, then use those skills to sew a pillow. Grades

K-6. Registration required.

Dragon Eyes, Wednesday, Jan. 22, 3:30-4:30 p.m. Design and

sculpt a dragon eye using air dry clay. Grades K-6. Registration required.

Messy Masterpieces, Tuesday, Jan. 28, 4-5 p.m. Explore your

creative side through process art with cloud paint, salt drawing and

more. Grades preK-6. Registration required.

TEEN PROGRAMMING (GRADES 6-12)

Self-Care Stressbusters, Monday, Jan. 6, 6-7 p.m. Start the new year

right with a mental health boost. We'll have serotonin-boosting stuff to

do like making lip balm, color-changing calming jars, and water bead

stress balls. No registration required.

DIY Bead Bracelets, Monday, Jan. 13, 6-7 p.m. Learn how to

make different kinds of bead bracelets. We have regular pony beads

along with heishi and seed beads to learn how to make different designs.

No registration required.

Teen Laser Tag Lock-in, Friday, Jan. 17, 5:30-8 p.m. Join us

for our winter lock-in. We'll munch on pizza, and then the whole

library will be our battlefield for laser tag. Dark, comfortable clothing

recommended. Registration and signed waiver required.

Mug Cakes, Monday, Jan. 27, 6-7 p.m. Need a quick snack fix for

your sweet tooth? We'll learn how to make a few different kinds of mug

cakes for those late-night cravings. No registration required.

To find a complete list of events and to register, visit our website at

altoonalibrary.com. Click on the Upcoming Events tab. ■

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WELLNESS By Teresa Sieck

NON-ABLATIVE laser

What is it, and what does it do?

Fractionated non-ablative lasers use light at certain wavelengths to create microscopic holes in the skin, triggering our body's natural wound-healing process to stimulate collagen production in the treated area(s). Collagen is a vital element within the body that aids in elasticity of the skin. The laser works by heating the deeper layers of skin without damaging the surface. These treatments promote much needed new cell growth and give you glowing soft skin.



Non-ablative laser treatment can improve skin tone and texture, reduce the appearance of fine lines and wrinkles, decrease pore size and treat sun damage as well as treat other skin conditions such as melasma.

Non-ablative laser treatments are ideal for patients who want to delay the appearance of aging or those looking to maintain beautiful skin or get their skin back to a more youthful state.

No need to take off work. There is little to no downtime for these treatments. The only thing your co-workers will start to notice is your beautiful skin.

Non-ablative lasers can be used year-round and are suitable for all skin types including melanin-rich skin. Check with a licensed medical provider to see if they have a laser that is suitable for you. ■

Information provided by Teresa Sieck MPAS, PA-C, PhD, Luxe Medical Spa and Aesthetics, 88 Paine Circle S.E., Suite 7, Bondurant, 515-630-8637, www.luxemedicalspa.net.

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HEALTH By Dr. Kari Swain and Dr. Elizabeth Ellrich

BUILDING intentional habits

Long-term health changes start with building intentional habits. Fancy diet plans, expensive workout programs, and that product your favorite Instagram influencer is selling are not the key to achieving optimal health. Getting back to the basics is where you create lasting health. The beginning of a new year calls people to cultivate change and set health goals. Let this be the year that you build healthy habits to transform your life and maintain it for life.

Hydrate. Drink half your body weight in ounces of water daily. Water aids the body in bringing nutrients to cells, getting rid of waste, protecting joints and organs, and optimizing brain performance.

Sleep. Sleep is how your body and brain repair and restore. Eight hours of quality sleep is essential for maintaining long-term health.

Move. Health declines with lack of movement. If you are not currently exercising, start with walking. While it sounds simple, walking packs massive health benefits.

Eat to live. Food is fuel. Prioritize protein along with a rainbow of vegetables and fruit. Limit grains, sugar and dairy. Eliminate inflammatory seed oils and processed foods. Focus on whole foods and real ingredients.

Reduce stress. Releasing stress is essential for the body to achieve a state of rest, to restore, and to heal. Making time to intentionally rest is critical. Find stress relief activities like exercise, yoga, deep breathing and meditation techniques that suit you, and make them part of your routine to help you stick with it long term.

Support your nervous system. Chiropractic adjustments help the nervous system reduce sympathetic dominance, fight or flight, and return to a parasympathetic, rest and restore, state of ease and healing. Adjustments remove interference to the nervous system and enhance your body's ability to self-regulate and self-heal. ■

Information provided by Dr. Kari Swain and Dr. Elizabeth Ellrich, Swain Chiropractic, 410 Center Place S.W., Altoona, 515-967-9300.

HEALTH

By Nikki Morgan

SEMAGLUTIDE benefits

Semaglutide, originally developed as a treatment for type 2 diabetes, has gained widespread attention for its remarkable benefits in weight loss and overall metabolic health. As a GLP-1 receptor agonist, semaglutide works by mimicking the action of a natural hormone called glucagon-like peptide-1, which helps regulate blood sugar levels, suppress appetite and improve insulin sensitivity.



One of the primary advantages of semaglutide is its effectiveness in promoting weight loss. Studies have shown that patients using semaglutide as part of a comprehensive weight management plan can experience significant reductions in body weight — often around 15% or more. This makes it one of the most effective medications for weight loss available today. It achieves this by reducing appetite and slowing gastric emptying, helping people feel fuller for longer.

In addition to its weight-loss benefits, semaglutide helps manage blood glucose levels, making it an essential therapy for individuals with type 2 diabetes. By improving insulin secretion and reducing liver glucose production, semaglutide helps stabilize blood sugar, leading to better long-term diabetes control.

Beyond these core benefits, semaglutide has shown promise in reducing the risk of cardiovascular events, such as heart attacks and strokes, in people with type 2 diabetes. The medication's impact on weight loss, blood sugar regulation, and heart health offers a multifaceted approach to improving overall wellbeing and quality of life for individuals struggling with obesity and diabetes. ■

Information provided by Nikki Morgan, DNP, ARNP, SkinFusion FX, 410 Eighth St. S.W., Altoona, 515-967-0587, www.skinfusionfx.com, nikki.skinfusionfx@gmail.com



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HEALTH

By Ashley Powell

START the new year with wellness

As the new year begins, it's the perfect time to focus on self-care and achieving your wellness goals. CBD and other cannabinoids are natural tools that can help you feel your best, whether you're looking to relax, recover or make healthier lifestyle choices.



CBD is a non-intoxicating compound that interacts with the body's endocannabinoid system, helping to maintain balance and promote overall wellness. For those committing to fitness resolutions, CBD topicals like creams and roll-ons are excellent for soothing sore muscles and aiding recovery after workouts.

Low-dose THC products are gaining popularity as a healthier alternative to alcohol. They provide mild relaxation without the hangover, making them a great choice for anyone looking to cut back on drinking while still enjoying a social or relaxing experience.

CBD candles are another unique option, combining the calming effects of CBD with the soothing ambiance of candlelight. They're perfect for creating a peaceful environment to recharge, reflect and stay focused on your goals.

With blends of cannabinoids like CBG (cannabigerol) and CBN (cannabinol) offering additional benefits such as improved sleep and enhanced focus, these products can support a range of wellness objectives.

Whether you're striving for better health, stress relief or new fitness milestones, CBD and cannabinoids are excellent companions on your journey to a healthier, happier 2025. ■

Information provided by Ashley Powell, CBD American Shaman, 800 S. 50th St., No. 106, West Des Moines, 515-380-5251, and 3418 Eighth St. S.W., No. 3, Altoona, 515-967-4036.



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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.



MEET Matt Darland

Helping students grow their leadership skills

After graduating from Johnston High School in 2011, Matt Darland received a degree in finance from Iowa State University in 2015. Although he worked in the financial industry for a while, he decided to return to school to pursue a degree in elementary education and graduated from the University of Northern Iowa in 2019.

Now, Darland is in his first year teaching with the Southeast Polk Community School District. Prior to joining the district, Darland taught at Harris-Lake Park School District in northwest Iowa and Collins-Maxwell School District just northeast of Des Moines. He currently teaches fifth grade at Altoona Elementary School.



Matt Darland teaches fifth grade at Altoona Elementary.

"I really love and appreciate the consistent support from my grade-level team, building staff, administration and parents I work with. I have enjoyed getting to know this group of fifth graders and love seeing their growth on a daily basis," Darland says.

One project Darland's students participate in is Readers Theater. They put on a show or play with a script. During this unit, students rehearse lines and perform in front of their classmates. In science, his students dissect owl pellets and identify bones of various animals. Then, in the spring, Darland's students will participate in a robotics unit that is connected to the coding they learned in computer science.

"My favorite part of working with fifth-grade students is seeing their leadership skills grow throughout the year. Watching them be great role models for the younger students in the building is wonderful to experience," Darland says.

During the remainder of the school year, Darland is looking forward to seeing his students gain more independence and leadership skills as they prepare for sixth grade. He is also looking forward to seeing their confidence grow as they learn new things and gain new skills.

"One of my favorite things about working in education is how each day brings something new and unexpected. No two days are ever the same. I also find it rewarding when students show excitement and eagerness to share in their learning and growth in areas both inside and outside of the classroom," Darland says. ■

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MISSING peace



It's one of the most frustrating experiences in life: you finish a puzzle... almost... and you realize you are missing a piece. A more serious frustration, however, is the missing PEACE we so often experience. We long for peace, but the stress, disappointments and struggles of life find us all. Is there a way to find and hold onto peace?

Some Christians will tell you that you shouldn't feel anxious. It says it right there in Philippians 4:6: "Do not be anxious about anything..."

Unfortunately, this can lead us to feel guilty about our anxiety, and, thus, we don't feel like we have a safe place in church to be real about our struggles, which then only increases the anxiety.

When the Apostle Paul wrote this letter to the Philippians, he used a Greek verb that indicates continuing action or an ongoing state. So, a better translation might be, "Do not ruminate," or "Stop perpetually worrying." We all will face anxiety; the key is to see it as a warning light.

When a warning light pops up on your car's dashboard, it's a signal something is wrong and needs to be addressed. Anxiety isn't a sin; it's a signal. Anxiety is a signal to do something, and that something is to pray. Paul goes on to say, "Do not ruminate on your worries, but, in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God" (Philippians 4:6).

Prayer can change our brains. Dr. Caroline Leaf, a well-respected cognitive neuroscientist, wrote: "It has been found that 12 minutes of daily focused prayer over an eight-week period can change the brain to such an extent that it can be measured on a brain scan."

God made our brains to change. It's called neuroplasticity. The more we think a thought, the easier it becomes to think that thought again. By ruminating on our worries, we can train our brains to be anxious. Or, by praying and meditating on God's faithfulness, we can train our brains to trust God and be at peace.

When we pray, God leads us. God leads us to let go of the things we can't control and trust Him. And God leads us to act on what we can control. We can control how much time we spend on social media, if we find healthy people to hang out with, if we worship and read God's Word, and if we exercise and eat well.

Finding that missing peace is not always a quick process, but God provides people and resources to help us experience more of His peace. As you see anxiety as a signal to pray, take action as God leads you, and trust His timing, "The peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus" (Philippians 4:7). ■

Information provided by Pastor Nathan Anenson, Lutheran Church of the Cross, 1701 Eighth St. S.W., Altoona, 515-967-4818.

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Innovate My Weight and Wellness

Innovate My Weight and Wellness opened in September 2023 by Christine O'Hern, ARNP. Christine has been in the medical field for over 15 years and 20 years in the weight loss industry. Christine saw how difficult it was for her patients to get weight loss medications through their health insurance. She took matters into her own hands and opened her clinic to address obesity, one of the nation's most significant healthcare problems. She offers her patients solutions for weight loss and overall well-being. She has also expanded her services into hormone optimization, vitamin injections, allergy testing, and teeth whitening. Christine's passion is helping her patients live their best lives.



Christine O'Hern,
ARNP



Christine O'Hern, ARNP

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2025 chamber outlook

In an era when local businesses face unprecedented challenges and opportunities, effective leadership is more crucial than ever. The Altoona Chamber of Commerce stands as a vital pillar of support for entrepreneurs and our local small businesses, advocating for their needs and fostering a thriving economic environment. Our mission is to help member businesses grow through advocacy, education and marketing by offering incredible resources and training with our Business 101 classes, brand exposure through new marketing from our Behind the Business and Member Monday Spotlights. Our Women of Vision was a huge success in 2024; the luncheons were created to inspire, educate and empower local business owners/managers to make a difference in their community while building relationships and supporting each other through networking and partnerships. There were four luncheons throughout the year with featured topics, speakers and/or panels.

I would like to take a moment to introduce myself as the new 2025 president of the Board of Directors. I am a leader who is committed to our chamber, community and volunteering. I'm looking forward to continuing to shape the future of our local economy, community involvement, and leading one of the most amazing board of directors. I have served on the board the past four years as secretary and am currently finishing out 2024 as president elect. My time with the board has given me the opportunity to help navigate the complexities of today's business landscape, the revitalization of Olde Town, welcomed new businesses to town and worked to improve the involvement of our current members. I want to continue to enhance networking opportunities, provide educational resources, and help advocate for policies that benefit small businesses.

I am deeply rooted in the community and have lived here all of my life. My husband and I are both graduates from Southeast Polk along with our three children. I believe that a strong chamber is built on relationships and collaboration, and I want to continue with our efforts in fostering partnerships between local businesses and community organizations, which will create a more interconnected and resilient local economy. ■

Information provided by Amy Ferguson, incoming 2025 President of the Altoona Area Chamber of Commerce Board of Directors.



RIBBON Cutting

The Altoona Chamber of Commerce celebrated a ribbon cutting for Legacy Realty of Iowa on Dec. 13.



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Sarah Alex and Steve Hermann



Tiffany Luing and Tara Cox



Kyle Clarkson and Tracey Carr



Josh Dunwoody, Scott Duer, Chad Quick and Cindy Metge



Tracy Adams and Mallory Chabak



Ashley Rogers, Kathi Dellaca, Betsy Haas-Reineck and Jim Hibbs



Joni Hutchison and Kennedy Wilson



Kyle Clarkson and Rod Clarkson



Mary Simon, Steve Simon and Jennifer Staley

OUT & ABOUT



The Altoona Chamber of Commerce celebrated a ribbon cutting for Patti Sue's Boutique on Dec. 6.



Ben and Crystal Smith at the ribbon cutting for Patti Sue's Boutique on Dec. 6.



Kyle Lee and Mark Poulos at the ribbon cutting for Patti Sue's Boutique on Dec. 6.



Kym Curl and Elizabeth Ellrich at the ribbon cutting for Patti Sue's Boutique on Dec. 6.



Mackenzie Moser and Jenny Miller at the ribbon cutting for Patti Sue's Boutique on Dec. 6.



Katie Shafer and Leticia Belcher at Perk Before Work on Dec. 3 at STEMS Flower Shop.



Dr. Kari Swain, Melissa Horton and Kennedy Wilson at Perk Before Work on Dec. 3 at STEMS Flower Shop.



Tim Guiter, Rick Kroeger and Kyle Lee at Perk Before Work on Dec. 3 at STEMS Flower Shop.



The Altoona Chamber of Commerce celebrated a ribbon cutting and grand re-opening for Planet Smoothie on Nov. 22



Karan Dhawan and Joe Gillie at the Planet Smoothie ribbon cutting and grand re-opening on Nov. 22

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