

ALTOONA

APRIL 2025

# Living

MAGAZINE

# Homes

## AWAY FROM HOME

Local families share experiences  
hosting foreign exchange students

**Meet Lexy Baldwin**

EDUCATION

**Pan fried catfish**

RECIPE

**Pote raising her family in her hometown**

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## WHY DO Norwegians have bumps on the backs of their heads?

Imagine being a teenager and spending the bulk of one of your teenage years in another country where you didn't know a single person, had never been to a single place, and could barely speak the language. For most teenagers — including me — that would have been unthinkable. Meanwhile, students from around the globe are foreign exchange students and are thankful for the memorable opportunities and lifelong friendships.



I have been fortunate to know one of them. His name is Jone Helgeson, and he is from Norway. He lived with a family in my hometown, and we spent our senior year of high school together.

I got to know Jone as we both ran on our high school cross country team. He took his running very seriously. I was there mostly to lose a few pounds before wrestling season. As such, he didn't fully appreciate the myriad of practical jokes I played on him during the season, most of which happened in the locker room, and I can't write about them here.

I did share many of my favorite Norwegian jokes with Jone, most of which were simply Pollock jokes I converted. My most favorite, and his least favorite, asked why Norwegians had bumps on the backs of their heads. The answer, of course, was because the toilet lid always hit them on the head when they would get a drink of water. "Stupid American jokes," he would tell me.

I thought Jone should feel what it was like to go 125 mph on a county blacktop. Looking back, this clearly wasn't a wise decision. Fortunately, we made our way through it safely. The look on his face? That was great. Jone having to change his underwear? Not so great.

When the winter season rolled around, Jone decided to join the wrestling team. He had never wrestled before, so this was entertaining in itself. The highlight of the season for him, though, was an exhibition match when he tied up with a foreign exchange student at a nearby school who was from France. It was a back and forth match, but Jone won, and he — and the crowd — went nuts. This was during a time when the "Rocky III" movie was in theaters, and Jone looked and acted the part of Rocky Balboa, at least a Norwegian version.

Jone became a good friend, albeit for a short time. I regret that we have not stayed in touch. I haven't thought about him in years, but writing this column inspired me to reach out. And, of course, I asked, "Do you know why Norwegians have bumps on the backs of their heads?"

I am eagerly awaiting his reply. ■

**SHANE GOODMAN**

President and Publisher  
Big Green Umbrella Media  
shane@dmcityview.com  
515-953-4822, ext. 305



**Tammy Pearson**  
Editor  
515-953-4822 ext. 302  
tammy@iowalivingmagazines.com

**Angela Ossian**  
Advertising Account Executive  
515-953-4822 x307  
angela@iowalivingmagazines.com



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Source: American Academy of Pediatrics 3/25

# Homes AWAY FROM HOME

Local families share experiences  
hosting foreign exchange students

By Sean Dengler

The decision to host a foreign exchange student can come with a myriad of worries. Will the student want to eat the food we make? Will everyone get along? How will we keep the student entertained? Will he or she get homesick? However, many of those who decide to give it a try find their fears to be unfounded as they gain an appreciation of the student's homeland and culture, see their own country from a new perspective and build bonds that endure. Local residents share their stories about the adventure of being a host family.

Catalina, a foreign exchange student hosted by Lori Slings, enjoyed all the trappings of the holidays.



## Traveling the world

Rodney Hilpibre started hosting foreign exchange students because his career melded well with the experience.

"I taught world cultures in the sixth grade for 32 years, and I thought, if I'm going to be teaching about cultures, I'd like to experience the people from those cultures," he says.

Rodney puts to bed a preconceived notion.

"People seem to think that I get paid for doing this, but there's absolutely no compensation for hosting a student."

Rodney has hosted several students over the years.

"I've had 20 foreign exchange students," he says. "I started in 2000. I took a little bit of time off. I thought I was getting too old to do it, and then I was approached again by another organization as to whether or not I would consider hosting students again."

This experience has had a significant impact on Rodney's life.

"The benefit of me doing this is I still have contact with kids I had 25 years ago, and I'm being invited to their weddings," Rodney says. "I'm being invited to their college graduations. To me, those are all pluses because I've been hosted by them in their homes for a couple weeks. You can see the world."

He has also been a pseudo ambassador for the United States when he visited the Namangan region of Uzbekistan.

"At the time, I was the first American to ever travel to that region of the country. When we got close to the home of one of the students, there were people lining the street to get a look at the American," Rodney says. "When I arrived at the home of the student, they had rolled out a red carpet leading from the street to the courtyard of their home and had hired someone to record the event. They immediately placed a traditional Uzbek coat with gold embroidery on me and took me into a part of the home where there were many tables set up with many kinds of fruits, pastries, meats and breads. For several hours, village people and school children came to meet me and speak with the American."

Rodney says the impact of hosting a foreign exchange student goes further than bringing them into your home.

"One of my former students lives a block away from me now," Rodney says. "I helped put him through university, and now he has a good job with MidAmerican Energy, so that's always a positive. He now has a little boy that calls me grandpa, which makes me pretty proud."



Rodney Hilpibre with foreign exchange students Nikola of Serbia, Georgie of Serbia, Bereqet of Kosovo, Andriy of Ukraine, Rauf of Uzbekistan and Dima of Ukraine.



Marla Carr, her mother, Mardyll Benson, and her brother, Gary Alberston, took foreign exchange student Julia on a visit to the Greater Des Moines Botanical Garden.

## A lifelong friendship

Hosting a foreign exchange student can lead to a lifelong story like it did for Marla Carr.

"Growing up in the 1970s, my family hosted two female exchange students," Marla says. "One was from Australia, and the other one from Brazil. Our family lost contact with Melanie from Australia, but we have kept in touch with Thelma from Brazil for over 50 years."

Her parents stayed connected by visiting Brazil in the 1980s. Unfortunately, this was

before computers and cell phones. Thelma married and changed her last name, and they lost contact. But Marla was determined to stay in touch with her old friend.

"In 2007, I decided to try and find her again using the computer," Marla said. "I knew her brothers originally ran hotels in Belo Horizonte. I had their first and last names, so I typed them into a computer, and I got a hit. I asked the person who reached out to me if he was her brother and if his sister Thelma went to Albia, Iowa, in 1974 as an exchange student. He said



yes and that she was now the CFO of their hotel. He put us in touch with each other, and we became sisters again.”

Despite this renewed connection, it took some time to physically reconnect due to exchange rates, Marla’s husband passing away and COVID. Eventually, the timing worked.

“Finally, in August of 2022, Thelma and John Lawton (Thelma’s husband) came to the U.S. and spent a week in California, stopped in Colorado, a week with me in August to visit the state fair, a week in New York City, and flew home after a week in Florida,” Marla says. “We had such a wonderful time and knew we couldn’t wait another 50 years to see each other again.”

They did not.

“So, my 83-year-old mother and I went to Brazil in March of 2023 for three weeks,” Marla says. “It was a trip within a trip. We stayed in her home in Belo Horizonte, visited Rio, stayed at a beautiful seaside resort town that was a cruise stop, flew to see the 250 waterfalls of Iguazu Falls from both the Brazil and Argentina sides, and walked the bridge to Paraguay. The best way to see a country is through the eyes of the locals, which we certainly did.”

The foreign exchange student experience did not end. After becoming close to Thelma and John’s daughter, Julia, during this trip, Julia came to the United States to improve her English skills.

“She unexpectedly called me in May of 2023 and wondered if it would work for me if she came that June,” Marla says. “So she came and stayed with me until the end of September. I found ELL classes for her to take at churches and libraries and with tutors. We had a ball. I showed her the sights of Des Moines and Iowa. We also went on a bus trip to Duluth, Minnesota.”

Marla is determined to never lose this connection again.

“I am planning on going to see them again next summer,” she says. “We will never again lose contact and will always be a part of each other’s families.”

## Subtle surprises

After Lori Slings became an empty nester, she decided she wanted to open her house.

“I always wanted to host. My youngest two kids graduated in 2013,” Lori says. “I live in this big house, and everyone’s gone but me. I knew I had space, and I had a spare room.”



Marla Carr, right, with Julia and Thelma in front of Iguazu Falls.



Lori Slings with foreign exchange students Oskar from Germany and Wasif Shitik from Bangladesh.

Lori enjoys giving students a breadth of experiences.

“You get the opportunity to take them and show them all kinds of things they’ve never seen,” she says. “It’s nice to have somebody to go along with you. All the kids that I’ve taken to Broadway musicals, none of them have ever been to a Broadway musical before. Depending

on the holiday or the season — I have a big family, four kids with their partners and their kids — I fill the house. Then, somebody who might’ve been an only child suddenly is surrounded at Christmas with about 15 other people that are all connected.”

After hosting multiple students, Lori and the students have gained a wealth of experience.

## FEATURE

“The kids all take something back home with them,” she says. “I always learn a ton of things about the world and different perspectives than my perspective. It helps you to always be humble and keep an open mind and awareness of what else is out there in the world — to explore and learn about different cultures. Every little bit, every day, every conversation is enlightenment.”

One of her favorite experiences is seeing how the students have preconceived notions about the U.S.

“There are things they think are just made-up things you see in movies, like the ice cream truck that goes around neighborhoods,” Lori says. “When they see one, they didn’t realize that was a real thing. There are things like that they come across, and they’re stunned that it’s a real thing. Every one of my kids has said, ‘I thought that was just something in movies.’ ”

For those interested in hosting, Lori has advice. She recommends contacting Susan Greenhorn, the area representative for Pan Atlantic Foundation, at 515-205-7689, [www.panatlanticfoundation.org](http://www.panatlanticfoundation.org) or [www.iwanttohost.org](http://www.iwanttohost.org).

“Don’t make it into ‘National Lampoon’s Christmas Vacation,’ ” Lori says. “Don’t make up your mind about how you want it to be. Don’t try so hard for everything to be perfect. Just make it be part of your normal life and see what happens.” ■



Farm life and farm animals were part of Catalina’s experience as a foreign exchange student hosted by Lori Slings.

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## CELEBRATE spring's arrival with a skillet fish fry

I am a fan of fish and seafood in general. Healthy and light, it satisfies my hunger every time. Grilling is typically my preparation method, as it is easy with little clean-up and no “fishy” smell.



This time of year, I look forward to the local fish fries. I must confess, “fried” foods do delight my taste buds. So, when I saw this recipe recently, I wanted to give it a try. The Pan-Fried Catfish recipe is perfect for enjoying flaky fillets without the mess. Because this catfish is pan-fried instead of deep-fried, I recommend using butter and olive oil. The mixture adds a delicious, creamy flavor, and it is easy to work with. ■

Information provided by Jolene Goodman, vice president of Big Green Umbrella Media.

### Pan-fried catfish

Recipe courtesy of “Cookin’ Savvy”  
Servings: 4-6

#### Ingredients

- 1/3 cup flour
- 2 tablespoons mesquite seasoning (or seasoning of choice, such as lemon pepper)
- 1 stick butter
- 1/4 cup avocado oil (or oil of choice)
- 1-2 pounds thawed catfish fillets (1/2 pound each)
- cooked rice, for serving

#### Directions

- In pie dish, mix flour and seasoning.
- In skillet over medium heat, melt butter and add oil. Coat fish fillets in flour mixture on both sides. Place fish in skillet and fry 5 minutes then flip and fry 5 minutes.
- Place fish on paper towel to drain excess oil then serve with rice.
- Tip: If skillet is large enough, fry two fillets at once. If frying more than four fillets, discard butter and avocado oil then start fresh before frying more.





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# GIVING back for community support

Altoona American Legion Post 682 to hold its first Memorial Day program.



A Korea/Vietnam Memorial recognizing military veterans is located in Altoona near the Enabling Gardens, where the Altoona American Legion Post 682 will hold its first Memorial Day program on May 26 at 10 a.m.

This Memorial Day will be an especially significant one for Altoona American Legion Post 682.

The Post will make history in conducting its first-ever Memorial Day program on May 26 at 10 a.m. at Enabling Gardens, 1050 First Ave. S., in Altoona. For long-time member Steven Michels, the event has been a long time coming.

"All veterans who have ever served and sacrificed for our country deserve to have recognition for their service in preserving and maintaining the freedoms we enjoy," he says. "Too many of them never had the opportunity to enjoy the results of their efforts."

The program will include a short presentation by the Post 682 chaplain; a laying of a wreath at the base of the memorial, which will include a rifle salute; the playing of Taps;

and the Honor and Color guards. Any veterans with a full military uniform are welcome to participate.

"Anyone who attends the ceremony there should be able to remember a family member, relative or friend who served the country and appreciate the fact they did their part to preserve the lifestyle we have today," Michels says. "Post 682 has a program that has memorial bricks of service members already in place in the memorial and will be adding more this summer. People who have been in the military share a common bond due to service to our country, no matter if drafted or volunteered enlistment."

The Altoona Post is currently in the midst of a rebuilding process within the community, Michels says. Doing so is an important way of

saying "thank you."

"We want to contribute back to the community that has supported us and our families while we served our country by participating in local events," he says. "Many of us are aging out of being capable to contribute to supporting community events, so we encourage younger veterans and active military members to join. There is the common bond of service to our country and community."

If any veteran is interested in joining the American Legion Post, he or she can get in touch with any Post member at any one of the many local events they participate in, including the welcoming table at Hy-Vee for their Veterans Day breakfast in November and at Prairie Meadows for their Veterans Day Program, Michels says. ■

## THE PERFECT celebration

We plan for everything: weddings, milestone birthday celebrations, that perfect trip, retirement. We even plan for those things that may not happen: the loss of a home, the loss of a vehicle or getting injured on the job.

Death is the one thing that we are guaranteed will happen to all of us. When you think of all that goes into planning life's special events, don't you think it would only make sense that we give the same consideration and preparedness to one's final celebration of life?

There are so many things that can contribute to making a service personal and memorable. What are the things I would want displayed that reflect who I am? What special songs do I want played for my service? Is there a special scripture or reading I would want shared? Are there special loved ones I would want involved?

Rather than leave these important and significant decisions to be made by your loved ones at a very emotional — and possibly stressful — time, why not give your family the gift of making some of these decisions now so that things will be easier for them?

It truly is the difference between the question, "What do you think Dad would have wanted?" and the statement, "This is what Dad wanted."

It is a gift...one that we encourage you to give to your family. ■

Information provided by Sarah Masteller, Advanced Planning Counselor, Hamilton's Southtown Funeral Home, 5400 S.W. Ninth St., Des Moines, 515-697-3679.



## MEET Lexy Baldwin

Incorporating choices into lesson plans

Lexy Baldwin graduated from East High School in 2017 before pursuing a career in education. She began teaching at the Des Moines Public School District where she taught seventh-grade ELA for three years. This fall, Baldwin began her first year with the Southeast Polk Community School District and her fourth year teaching overall. She teaches Language Arts at the Middle School.

"My favorite part of being a teacher at Southeast Polk is the supportive culture of the district and collaborative leadership in the buildings. I have the freedom to be creative, but the guidance to be successful," Baldwin says.

Baldwin says she likes teaching students in the seventh grade because it is a unique time in their lives and development. She enjoys working with students as they transition from kids to teenagers and says there is never a dull moment in middle school. Baldwin also personally enjoys the subject of language arts. She says the books and lessons they read and learn during the school year are fun.

One thing that Baldwin values in her classroom is choice. She works to provide her students choices in her lessons as often as she can. For example, students have the opportunity to choose between four or five different book clubs to join. Each book club is grouped based on students who share similar interests.

"Middle school is a pivotal time in a student's life, and teachers can have a significant influence on their development, both academically and personally. Helping students through challenges and seeing them grow into more confident learners is very rewarding," Baldwin says.

Baldwin is married and recently welcomed her first baby in January. While she is sad to leave her child to return to work, she is also excited to get back into the classroom and finish the school year with her students. When she returns to the classroom, Baldwin will help run the yearbook club, which takes all the in-school photos the yearbook will use. The club also gathers all sports and leadership groups to take photos for the yearbook.

"I am so lucky to have a job and students that makes being away from them so difficult," Baldwin says. ■



Lexy Baldwin teaches middle school language arts and helps lead the yearbook club.

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### **BRUSH DROP-OFF EVENTS**

The City of Altoona will have four dates for Brush Drop-Off happening from 8:00am-Noon on April 5th, May 3rd, September 6th and October 4th. You can access the drop-off site using the Utilities service road from 8th Street SW. Continue south on the road, past the Utilities Department buildings, and continue up the hill. The brush drop-off will be on your left. Only branches and small diameter (12" or less) trunks are allowed. No bundles of leaves or bushes allowed. Branches with leaves attached will be accepted. Residents should bring proof of address in the city to utilize this service.



For additional questions, contact City Hall at (515) 967-5136.

Over the next several months, crews with the City of Altoona will be flushing water hydrants in the northwestern quadrant of the community (as shown in the map above). Flushing will typically take place on weekdays between 8 a.m. and 3 p.m. and is expected to happen over the next several months.

### **RESIDENT TIPS FOLLOWING HYDRANT FLUSHING**

Following this flushing, residents or property owners may notice some rust-colored water in their home or property. When hydrant flushing happens nearby, we ask residents to:

- Run cold water in your faucets first to check for rust. This avoids drawing any potentially discolored water into your water heater.
- If your water looks rusty, run the tap for 1-2 minutes until the water runs clear.

### **WHY DOES THE CITY FLUSH THE HYDRANTS?**

Altoona flushes its hydrants to be good stewards of the city's water system for those who rely on it, including residents, businesses, visitors and the city's first responders. Flushing the hydrants helps to:

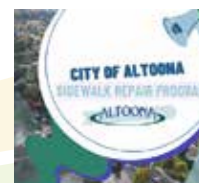
- Identify any flow weaknesses in the water system,
- Verify that fire hydrants and their valves are working properly, and
- Clears out any mineral deposits or sediments from the city's water mains.

Altoona's Public Utilities Department is consistently testing its water to ensure it is safe to drink and use, this process won't impact that testing or change the city's testing schedules.

### **SIDEWALK INSPECTION PROGRAM**

The City of Altoona performs yearly sidewalk inspections to preserve the quality and accessibility of our public sidewalk system. In the coming weeks, you will see employees of the city walking and marking defective panels with pink spray paint. More information will be mailed to affected properties later this summer. Full Information Guide Map of Inspection Areas.

For more questions or more information, contact:  
Amy Baldus or [abaldus@altoona-iowa.com](mailto:abaldus@altoona-iowa.com)



# POTE raises her family in her hometown

## Enjoys community connections

Cally Pote has lived in Altoona her entire life, and she wouldn't have it any other way. A proud graduate of Southeast Polk High School's Class of 2008, she first walked the halls of Altoona Elementary as a kindergartener, never knowing she'd one day raise her own children a short distance away.

Now, Pote and her husband, Zach, are doing exactly that. They've chosen to put down roots in Altoona, raising their three daughters in the same close-knit community that shaped Pote.

Today, the family lives directly across from Willowbrook Elementary, a spot that's become a hub of daily joy.

"One of my favorite things is having the crosswalk in our driveway," Pote says. "We get to see so many beautiful people every day."

It's a kind of front-row seat to community connection. Whether it's chatting with other parents at drop-off, waving to familiar faces, or simply soaking in the energy of a new school day, the Potes are in the heart of it all.

With three active kids, the family also makes the most of Altoona's parks and green spaces. They especially enjoy the parks in their own neighborhood.

Even as Altoona has grown and welcomed many new families, Pote says it's never lost the friendly charm that makes it feel like home.

"I love being able to run into the store or grab a coffee at Best Day and seeing so many people I know," she says.



Cally and Zach Pote decided to raise their family in Cally's hometown of Altoona.

Pote also gets to build relationships with fellow parents in town through her service as PTA president at Willowbrook Elementary. She's in the thick of planning some of the school's beloved events, from fan-favorites like Monster Mash and Bingo Night to the summer kickoff celebration that's become a community staple: WillowFest.

"We would love for the entire community to join us for WillowFest 2025 on July 3 at Willowbrook," Pote says.

She and her fellow PTA board members pour a lot of time and energy into making these events meaningful and memorable.

Outside of school, the Potes are also a softball family. Their oldest daughter, Campbell, plays on the 8U club team through the Greater Altoona Girls Softball Association.

"I love all of the opportunities they get and how involved the high school softball team is with the young girls," Pote shares.

Whether they're cheering from the sidelines or waving to a neighbor across the crosswalk, the Potes are fully immersed in Altoona life — just the way they like it. ■

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# SUMMER learning loss

## How to keep your child's mind sharp

As the school year winds down and summer break begins, many students relish the chance to take a break from homework and tests. However, as the weeks pass, many children experience summer learning loss, also known as the "summer slide." This refers to the decline in academic skills that often happens over the summer when students are not actively engaging with learning materials. Research shows that students can lose up to one to three months of academic progress during this time, especially in subjects like reading and math.

The main reason for summer learning loss is the lack of structure and routine that school provides. During the academic year, students are engaged in daily lessons, homework and learning activities, which help reinforce important skills. In the summer, without these activities, students may forget key concepts, or their academic growth may stagnate.

The impact of this learning loss can extend beyond the summer break. Students who return to school may find themselves struggling to catch up, affecting their confidence and motivation. Summer learning loss can widen the achievement gap, as students may not have access to enriching programs or resources during the break.



It is important to make learning a fun, engaging part of the summer. Personalized summer programs are designed to help prevent summer learning loss while keeping students excited about learning. Through one-on-one or small group instruction, it's important to focus on each child's unique needs, whether it's improving reading, math or study skills. Flexible scheduling allows families to choose tutoring sessions that fit around summer vacations and activities.

Additionally, there are simple, effective ways to keep learning alive at home. Encourage your child to read daily or start a summer reading challenge. Help them practice math through everyday activities like measuring ingredients for a recipe or keeping track of family expenses. Visiting museums or cultural sites is also a great way to spark curiosity and engage with new subjects.

By keeping your child engaged in learning during the summer, you can prevent the summer slide and set them up for success in the upcoming school year. Summer tutoring is the perfect way to help make sure your child's academic growth doesn't take a break this summer. ■

Information provided by Angela Jones, Owner and Center Director of Sylvan Learning of Altoona, 301 Center Place, Suite C-1, Altoona, 515-957-2923, [Angela.Jones@sylvanlearning.com](mailto:Angela.Jones@sylvanlearning.com).



# MAKE THE MOST OF YOUR SUMMER

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## SENIORS

By Stephanie Proper

# TIPS for a better night's sleep

Getting a good night's sleep can become more challenging as we age, but it's still essential for maintaining physical health, emotional well-being, and overall quality of life. If counting sheep is no longer cutting it, don't worry, here are some tried-and-true tips to help you rest easier and wake up feeling refreshed.



- **Soak in natural light during the day:** Spending time outdoors or near a window during the day helps regulate your circadian rhythm, the internal clock that controls your sleep-wake cycle. Even 20–30 minutes of morning sunlight can make a big difference.
  - **Limit daytime naps:** Short naps can be refreshing, but long or late-afternoon naps might make it harder to fall asleep at night. If you enjoy napping, aim for no more than 20–30 minutes earlier in the day.
  - **Stick to a schedule:** Your body loves routine. Aim to go to bed and wake up at the same time each day, even on weekends. This helps regulate your internal clock, making it easier to fall asleep and stay asleep.
  - **Create a cozy sleep space:** Make your bedroom a sleep sanctuary. Keep it cool, quiet and dark. If noise is a problem, consider a white noise machine or earplugs. Comfortable bedding also makes a huge difference.
  - **Watch what you eat (and drink):** Avoid large meals, caffeine and alcohol in the evening. While a glass of wine might seem relaxing, alcohol can disrupt your sleep patterns later in the night.
  - **Stay active:** Regular exercise is a great way to improve sleep quality. Even a short walk during the day can help. Just try not to exercise too close to bedtime, as it can be invigorating rather than relaxing.
  - **Power down early:** Electronic devices emit blue light, which can interfere with your body's production of melatonin, the sleep hormone. Try to avoid screens for at least an hour before bed.
  - **Address stress and anxiety:** If worries keep you awake, consider relaxation techniques like deep breathing, meditation or journaling. Talking to a trusted friend can also be beneficial.
  - **Consult a professional:** If sleep issues persist, don't hesitate to talk to your doctor. Sleep disorders like sleep apnea or insomnia are treatable, and getting help could lead to major improvements.
- Remember, quality sleep is the foundation for feeling your best every day. With a few adjustments to your routine, peaceful nights can once again become a regular part of your life. Sweet dreams. ■

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



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## Nutrition beyond the label

What you don't see matters

When it comes to health, nutrition is more than calories and macros — it's about quality and what's hidden in your food. Many packaged items contain additives, preservatives, and chemicals like BPA, phthalates, and pesticides that can disrupt your hormones, contributing to fatigue, weight gain, mood swings, and reproductive issues. When the body encounters substances it can't recognize or use as nutrition, it often stores them as fat. This concept has given rise to a new term in the holistic health space: obesogens — chemicals that may disrupt metabolism and contribute to weight gain.



Nikki Barkhaus,  
RN, FDN-P

We understand that weight gain isn't just about food — stress, trauma, and emotional health all play a role. But one factor that often gets overlooked is chemical exposure, which has dramatically increased in today's fast-paced, convenience-driven world. Shockingly, studies have shown that newborn infants already carry over 280 chemicals in their bodies — detected through umbilical cord blood — before they've even taken their first breath. [www.ewg.org/research/body-burden-pollution-newborns](http://www.ewg.org/research/body-burden-pollution-newborns).

Women especially need to be aware of hidden toxins and support their bodies with clean, whole foods. One powerful way is by increasing high-quality protein, which supports muscle, hormone production, blood sugar balance, and metabolism — key for energy, mood, and healthy aging.

Choosing organic when possible, avoiding plastic, and reading ingredient labels are small but meaningful ways to nourish your body beyond the label. Your body is always communicating — fuel it with what supports balance, not what disrupts it.

Functional lab testing can help identify which chemicals may be affecting your health. Contact Wholistic Health Center to learn more — we're here to guide you toward clarity, healing, and lasting wellness.



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Be sure to check for cancelations.

## Coming up in the Altoona Living magazine:

**Pampered Pets:** Do you enjoy pampering your pet(s)? We are looking to interview people whose cats, dogs and other animals live a life of luxury. If you are one of those spoiling their critters rotten and proud of it, reach out to be included in our May issue. We want to hear your story! Email [tammy@iowalivingmagazines.com](mailto:tammy@iowalivingmagazines.com).

**Cancer Survivors:** In June, we will be sharing the stories of cancer survivors. If you would be willing to share your experiences about how overcoming cancer has impacted your life, please email [tammy@iowalivingmagazines.com](mailto:tammy@iowalivingmagazines.com).

## Cheers to 4 Years of Edencrest at Tuscany

Wednesday, May 28, 4-7 p.m.  
1600 Eighth St. S.E., Altoona

The public is invited to a celebration to commemorate four years of growth and community at Edencrest at Tuscany. Farm Boys BBQ food truck will be on site. Kids can enjoy a bounce house, and live music by Tom Hofer begins at 5:30 p.m. Raffle prizes will be awarded.

## Altoona City Wide Garage Sales

Thursday, May 22 - Saturday, May 24

Thursday, June 12 - Saturday, June 14

Thursday, July 10 - Saturday, July 12



## Memorial Day Event

Monday, May 26, 10 a.m.

Enabling Garden Memorial, 1050 First Ave. S., Altoona

Most Memorial Day ceremonies are held at cemeteries where the fallen veterans are interred. Neither of Altoona's cemeteries have a dedicated military memorial for the "unknown" soldier. The Altoona American Legion Post 682 approved holding a memorial service on Memorial Day at the Enabling Garden Memorial as a more respectful place for a ceremony. Post 682 has a program that has memorial bricks of service members already in place in the memorial and will be adding more this summer.

The program will include a color guard, honor/firing squad, a short presentation by the Post 682 chaplain, a laying of a wreath at the base of a memorial which will include a rifle salute, playing of Taps, and the Honor and Color guards. There is consideration of reading the names of the fallen veterans in Altoona cemeteries (that are known) prior to the salute and possible instrumental accompaniment.

Any veterans with a full military uniform are also welcome to participate with Post 682. A prior notification is appreciated or just show up in uniform prior to the program.

## Spaghetti Dinner Fundraiser

April 25, 5-7 p.m.,  
803 Third Ave., S.W.,  
Altoona

The public is invited to the Altoona Police Department's Spaghetti dinner.

## Hawk Heaven Tavern events

805 17th Ave. S.W., Altoona

• **Arm Wrestling Tournament:**  
Saturday, April 26, 1 p.m.

• **Adult Prom:** Saturday, April 26, 8 p.m.

• **Blind Draw Dart Tournament:** Friday, May 2, 6 p.m.

• **Trivia Night:** Every Tuesday from May 6-27, 8 p.m.

• **Karaoke Nights:** Every Wednesday and Thursday night from May 7-29, 8 p.m. to midnight.

## Healing Hearts Grief Support

Meets every second and fourth Tuesday of each month  
Edencrest at Tuscany, 1600 Eighth St. S.E., Altoona, lower east entrance

A supportive gathering for residents and community members to share their experiences, connect with others, and find comfort during their grief journey. Light snacks and beverages are offered. This event will create a safe space for healing and connection within the community.

## Prairie Meadows Events

1 Prairie Meadows Drive, Altoona

• **Acoustic Rock Party:** Saturday, April 26, 8-11 p.m.

• **Tom Hofer and the Iowa Playboys:**

Tuesday, April 29, 11 a.m. to 3 p.m.

• **Derby Days Celebration:** Friday, May 2, 9 a.m. through Sunday, May 4, midnight

• **Adam Whitehead:** Saturday, May 3, 8 p.m.

• **Jerry Beauchamp Band:** Tuesday, May 6, 11 a.m.

• **Jake McVey:** Friday, May 9, 10 p.m.

• **The Infamous Fuzzy Goldwater Band:** Saturday, May 10, 10 p.m.



## Music in the Park

Sundays, May 25, June 29,  
July 27, Aug. 24, 6-8 p.m.  
Haines Park, 700 block of  
Third Ave. S.E., Altoona

Bring the entire family and enjoy Music in the Park.



Be sure to check for cancellations.

## Tai Chi Class at The Tuscany

Every Thursday from 9:45-10:30 a.m. until June 5  
Edencrest at Tuscany, 1600 Eighth St. S.E., Altoona, lower east entrance

Tai chi is an ancient Chinese exercise program to promote strength, flexibility and balance. Individuals will learn warm-up, cool-down, six basic forms and six advanced forms, with modifications available for those who need to remain seated for all or most of the class. Classes offered on a contribution basis for those age 60 and older. For those younger than 60, there is a \$4 charge. All donations go to Aging Resources of Central Iowa, a non-profit agency serving older adults in central Iowa.

## Des Moines Performing Arts

Des Moines Civic Center, Cowles Commons, Stoner Theater, Temple Theatre, 221 Walnut St., Des Moines  
[desmoinesperformingarts.org](http://desmoinesperformingarts.org)

- **April 26:** Des Moines Symphony, "Music From Final Fantasy"
- **April 27:** 360 ALLSTARS
- **April 30:** The Rock Orchestra by Candlelight

## Iowa Cubs home games

Principal Park, 1 Line Drive, Des Moines

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

- **April 29** at 6:38 p.m. vs. Buffalo
- **April 30** at 12:08 p.m. vs. Buffalo



## WDM Elks Spring Style Show Fundraiser

Saturday, April 26, 10 a.m. to 3 p.m.  
West Des Moines Elks Lodge No. 2752, 2060 N.W. 94th St., Clive

Tickets are \$15 each or reserve a table for eight for \$130 or a table for four for \$70. The Style Show starts at 11 a.m. with a salad luncheon at 12:30 p.m. and door prize drawing at 2 p.m. Many fantastic vendors including K.A.B.E. & Co clothes and accessories will be available. Funds raised will benefit Veterans Children's Christmas and other Elks approved charities and outreach.



## DMPA Free Outdoor Family Events

Various dates and parks

Des Moines Performing Arts announced its 2025 Free Outdoor Family Events series. These free presentations are designed to engage new audiences and performing arts enthusiasts alike, while also removing the barrier of cost.

- **May 2-26:** OPTIK, Cowles Commons
  - **June 14-17:** Bindlestiff Family Circus, parks across the metro
  - **July 21-22:** Dupont Brass, parks across the metro
  - **June 11, July 9, Aug. 13:** Storytime Under the Green Umbrella, Cowles Commons
  - **June 21, July 12, Aug. 23:** Dancing on Cowles Commons
- For more information including times and park locations, visit [www.desmoinesperformingarts.org/whats-on/series/free-outdoor-family-events](http://www.desmoinesperformingarts.org/whats-on/series/free-outdoor-family-events).

## DMPA Concert Series

Various dates, 7 p.m.  
Temple Theater, 1011 Locust St., Des Moines

Des Moines Performing Arts' concert series, "Made in the Midwest," highlights the artistry of local musicians in the intimate Temple Theater. Celebrating the talents of independent artists from across our region, guests will enjoy a unique experience where the musicians take center stage in a venue known for its unparalleled acoustic quality.

- **April 25:** Allegra Hernandez, rock.
- **May 9:** Abbie Sawyer, folk/Americana.

Tickets start at \$20/show. You can purchase tickets by visiting [DMPA.org](http://DMPA.org), calling 515-246-2300, or stopping by the Civic Center Ticket Office at 221 Walnut St. You can also purchase tickets night of at the Temple Theater Ticket Office starting two hours before a performance.



## Iowa Barnstormers home game

Wells Fargo Arena, 730 Third St., Des Moines

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

- **April 26** at 7:05 p.m. vs. Fishers Freight

## Emerald City Make A Wish Gala

Saturday, May 17, 5:30 p.m.  
Iowa Events Center, 730 Third St., Des Moines

Experience the magic of a wish. Currently more than 300 wishes are waiting to be granted — and you can help ensure these children receive their wish when they need it most. Bring hope and joy to Iowa kids waiting for their wish. Guests will enjoy dinner, live and silent auctions, after party, plus wish stories that will touch your heart and inspire you. Tickets are available at <https://wish.org/iowa/32nd-annual-des-moines-gala>.

## Spring Wildflower Photography Walk

Saturday, April 26, 9 a.m.

Neal Smith National Wildlife Refuge, 9981 Pacific St., Prairie City

Join photographer Mike Cox for a free, guided photo walk. Stroll the half-mile Oak Savanna trail and discover spring ephemerals. These are the first wildflowers that bloom in the oak savanna. Discover how to take stunning photos as you enjoy the spring weather. Any type of camera is fine for this program, including cell phone cameras. The program will start at the Oak Savanna Trailhead. This trail is a half-mile loop with a gravel surface. The trail has several gradual inclines. The parking lot has a restroom. Wear pants and sturdy walking shoes. Bring a refillable water bottle and insect repellent as well. Contact [nancy\\_corona@fws.gov](mailto:nancy_corona@fws.gov) or call 515-994-3400 to register and for information. ■

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## WELLNESS

By Tricia Heberer

## WHY sunscreen matters

Sunscreen is the most essential step in any skincare routine. It helps protect the skin from harmful UV rays, which contribute to premature aging, sunburn, and even skin cancer. Rain or shine, UV radiation is always present, making daily sunscreen application a necessity. Key benefits of sunscreen are:

**Prevents premature aging** - UV exposure accelerates the breakdown of collagen and elastin, leading to wrinkles, fine lines and sagging skin. Sunscreen helps prevent photoaging.

**Reduces risk of skin cancer** - Prolonged sun exposure is a leading cause of skin cancer, including melanoma. Using sunscreen regularly can significantly lower this risk.

**Prevents hyperpigmentation and sunspots** - UV rays can trigger an overproduction of melanin, leading to dark spots, uneven skin tone and conditions like melasma.

**Protects against sunburn and skin damage** - Sunburns not only cause immediate discomfort but also weaken the skin's natural barrier, increasing sensitivity and risk of further damage.

**Maintains skin health and hydration** - Sunscreen helps prevent moisture loss and protects the skin's natural barrier, keeping it healthy.

Consistent sunscreen use is one of the most effective ways to maintain healthy, youthful skin while reducing the risk of damage and cancer. ■

Information provided by Tricia Heberer, Owner/LE, Luxe Medical Spa and Aesthetics, 88 Paine Circle, Suite 7, Bondurant, IA 50035, [theberer@luxemedicalspa.net](mailto:theberer@luxemedicalspa.net), 515-630-8637.



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## HEALTH

By Dr. Kari Swain and Dr. Elizabeth Ellrich

## BUILD movement into your routine

Sedentary jobs take a toll on the body physically and emotionally. Small, intentional changes can lead to big improvements in how you feel, move and function. Movement is essential for your spine, joints, circulation and brain health. The more you move, the less likely your body is to settle into unhealthy patterns that lead to discomfort and fatigue. Find creative ways to build movement into your routine at work.

**Walking meetings:** Get outside or get a walking pad at your desk.

**Standing desks:** Alternating between sitting and standing keeps your muscles engaged and your posture in check.

**Stretch breaks:** Set a timer for at least once per hour to stand and stretch. Even short bursts of movement help prevent stiffness and improve circulation.

The stress of work and life reaches beyond just physical symptoms. Physical and emotional stress interfere with your nervous system function, manifesting as anxiety, feeling on high alert, irritability, moodiness, difficulty sleeping, brain fog, digestive issues, hormonal imbalances and more. Support whole body and brain wellness with these habits:

**Chiropractic care:** Regular adjustments help regulate the nervous system, reduce tension, maintain joint mobility and support proper movement patterns. Chiropractic isn't just about pain relief but about improving how your body functions overall.

**Drink water:** Staying hydrated reduces inflammation.

**Manage stress:** Chronic stress contributes to muscle tension, poor sleep and burnout. Short walks, breathing exercises or stepping away for a mental reset can go a long way. ■

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



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## SLEEP better, live better

Good sleep is essential for overall wellness, but many people struggle to get the rest they need. Both CBD and THC have been shown to improve sleep quality by reducing stress, easing pain, and promoting relaxation. CBD can help manage chronic pain, which often disrupts sleep patterns.

Low doses of THC can help regulate the sleep-wake cycle, particularly for those struggling with insomnia or anxiety. THC enhances REM sleep, the restorative phase, and may promote deeper sleep with fewer awakenings. Additionally, functional mushrooms like reishi are known for their calming, sleep-promoting properties. Reishi helps balance cortisol levels and calm the nervous system.

Another cannabinoid, CBN (cannabinol), is also gaining attention for its sleep-promoting benefits. CBN has sedative effects, helping users fall asleep faster and enjoy deeper rest. When combined with CBD and THC, CBN can provide an enhanced, natural sleep solution.

Our customers find success pairing CBD, CBN and low-dose THC products for a more restful sleep. Together, these natural remedies work in harmony to reduce stress, alleviate discomfort and promote relaxation.

Sleep better and feel refreshed so you can live better each day. Visit our locally owned CBD store to discover the best natural sleep aids for you. Our certified hemp consultants are available to guide you to products that support peaceful nights and energized mornings. ■

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. Sources: Shannon, S., Lewis, N., Lee, H., & Hughes, S. (2019). "Cannabidiol in Anxiety and Sleep: A Large Case Series." The Permanente Journal. Wasser, S. P. (2017). "Medicinal Mushrooms in Human Clinical Studies." International Journal of Medicinal Mushrooms.





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## MINERAL vs. chemical sunscreen

As we recognize Skin Cancer Awareness Month this May, it's essential to understand how sunscreen plays a critical role in prevention. Two main types of sunscreen — mineral and chemical — offer protection, but in different ways.

Mineral sunscreens, also known as physical sunscreens, use active ingredients like zinc oxide or titanium dioxide. These minerals sit on the skin's surface and reflect harmful UV rays. Mineral formulas are ideal for sensitive skin, work immediately upon application, and are often recommended for those with skin conditions or undergoing aesthetic treatments.

Chemical sunscreens, on the other hand, absorb UV rays and convert them into heat, which is then released from the skin. They tend to be lighter in texture and blend easily into the skin without a white cast. However, they may cause irritation in those with sensitive skin or allergies.

Both types can be effective when used correctly, offering broad-spectrum protection against UVA and UVB rays. The best sunscreen is ultimately the one you'll wear daily and reapply regularly.


This Skin Cancer Awareness Month, take a moment to choose the right sunscreen for your skin and make it a habit. Remember, the best sunscreen is the one you will wear. Consistent sun protection is one of the simplest and most effective ways to prevent skin cancer. ■



Information provided by Nikki Morgan, DNP, ARNP, SkinFusion, 200 Second St. S.E., Altoona, 515-967-0587, [www.skinfusionfx.com](http://www.skinfusionfx.com), [nikki.skinfusionfx@gmail.com](mailto:nikki.skinfusionfx@gmail.com)

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# FINANCIAL documents: save, toss or shred

Whether it's monthly bank statements, receipts, quarterly retirement statements, annual tax returns or other financial documents you receive, it's easy to accumulate an unmanageable amount of paper over time. You might find yourself asking if you really need to save all of these records and, if not, when it may be safe to dispose of them.



document if it is not handed over to the new owner in the case the document is duplicated. Home and auto insurance policies should also only be discarded after you receive a renewed policy. Consider purchasing a safe or using a safety deposit box at a bank to store these documents and other important paperwork.

## Financial documents to toss

Some documents do not need to be saved for any period, and you do not necessarily need to shred them either.

Your bank, insurance company or other organizations may send promotional booklets and flyers that do not contain any personal information. While you should shred the envelope or small slip of paper within — whichever contains your name and address — you do not necessarily need to shred the promotional content.

## Financial documents to shred

You should shred documents you no longer need to verify a payment, deposit or purchase

that contain your personal information, including name, address, phone number, credit card number, signatures, Social Security number and account number.

Examples of documents to shred include: utility and credit card bills after you confirm payment, bank statements once you determine there is no suspicious activity, receipts once you match the purchase up against account statements, expired credit and debit cards, and quarterly retirement plan statements once you receive your annual statement.

Occasionally, banks will designate a "shred day" at their branches so customers can bring in documents to shred. This can be helpful for those who have accumulated many documents and do not have a powerful shredder at home. Keep an eye out for the next shred day at your bank. ■

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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HSA CD Requirements: 1) You must maintain a Health Advantage account at Bankers Trust in conjunction with the HSA CD. 2) The HSA CD must be funded from the Health Advantage account. 3) If you request HSA CD interest be paid to you (as an alternative to adding the interest back to the HSA CD), it must be transferred to your Health Advantage account. 4) If you redeem (cash out) the HSA CD, the money must be transferred back to your Health Advantage account. 5) The Bankers Trust Wellness Option — which permits penalty-free early withdrawals from CDs if the funds are used for medical expenses — does not apply to the HSA CD. Early withdrawals of principal made for any reason, including medical expenses, are subject to penalty.

\*\*Visit BankersTrust.com for more information on Benefits Banking Loyalty Program terms.



# ALTOONA Public Library events

## Altoona Public Library

700 Eighth St. S.W., Altoona

515-967-3881

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

Monday - Thursday: 9 a.m. to 9 p.m.

Friday - Saturday: 9 a.m. to 5 p.m.

Sunday: 2-5 p.m.

**Summer Reading Rainbow Run – All ages, Saturday, May 31 at 10 a.m. or 10:30 a.m.** Run or walk your way along the trail by the library; come wearing white and see how colorful you can get. We'll be handing out library swag to participants completing the mile-long route. Registration is required.

### ADULT PROGRAMMING – ages 18 and older

• **Mindful Painting, Monday, May 5 at 6:30 p.m.** Feeling stressed? Join us for a unique, calming drawing/painting session where the focus is on the process and not the end product. All materials provided. Registration required.

• **Understanding Healthcare.gov, Wednesday, May 7 at 6 p.m.** Would you like some guidance on how to use HealthCare.gov to your advantage? Become better informed on how plans work so you can access preventive health services, reduce costly medical hardships, and secure health coverage in case of sickness or an emergency. Registration required.

• **Laser Tag at The Library, Friday, May 16 at 6 p.m.** Join us for a laser tag battle. Once the library has closed for the day, we'll spread out for an after-hours battle in the stacks. All supplies will be provided. Be sure to wear comfortable clothes and shoes. Registration required.

• **Learn to Draw Digitally: Intro to Procreate, Wednesdays, May 21 and May 28 at 6 p.m.** Learn how to launch the Procreate app, how the app works, and the basics like best file size, document setup and how to use layers. You'll leave with a finished composition that can be shared online or printed. Registration required.

### CHILDREN'S PROGRAMMING

• **May the Fourth, Sunday, May 4, 2:30-4 p.m.** Drop in for Star Wars themed crafts, games and activities. Available while supplies last. Grades K-6. No registration required.

• **Baby and Me, Mondays, May 5 and May 12, from 10-11 a.m.** Join us for this interactive storytime designed for parents/caregivers and their infants and toddlers and their stuffies. Ages 5 and younger. No registration required.

• **LEGO Club, Tuesday, May 13, 5:30-6:30 p.m.** Join us to build a LEGO masterpiece. We will supply the LEGOs; you bring the creativity. Grades K-6. Registration required.

### TEEN PROGRAMMING (grades 6-12)

• **Cheesy Movie Night: May the 4th, Friday, May 2, 5-7 p.m.** Join us for a cheesy movie with cheesy snacks. This month, in honor of May the 4th, we'll watch the 1980s Star Wars spoof "Spaceballs." Registration required.

• **Teen Try-It: Procreate Digital Drawing, Thursday, May 8, 6-7 p.m.** Curious about digital drawing? Join our special guest instructor, Sadagat Aliyeva, as she guides you through how to use Procreate on the iPad. By the end of the program, you'll have a beautiful, finished composition to display in our digital gallery, or print to keep. Registration required.

• **VR Night, Monday, May 12, 6-7 p.m.** Virtual reality, actual awesomeness. Try painting in VR, solve puzzles in The Room, relax with Power Wash Simulator, or try games like Job Simulator and Beat Saber. No registration required.

To find a complete list of events and to register, visit our website at [altoonapubliclibrary.com](http://altoonapubliclibrary.com). Click on the Upcoming Events tab. ■

# BALANCE AUTISM acquires Metro West

Balance Autism, a provider of comprehensive autism services, announces the acquisition of Metro West, a local autism provider known for its dedication to enhancing the lives of individuals and families impacted by autism and other developmental disabilities. This strategic partnership aims to expand the reach and effectiveness of support services available to the autism community.

Metro West has built a reputation for its personalized approach to autism treatment and education over the years. With this acquisition, Balance Autism will integrate Metro West's methodologies and staff, ensuring that children served continue to receive support while benefiting from an array of resources and services.

"Balancing individual needs and community support is at the core of what we do at Balance Autism," Steve Muller, CEO of Balance Autism, said. "The acquisition of Metro West allows us to broaden our impact, bringing our comprehensive approach to more families and individuals in central Iowa. We are excited to welcome Metro West's talented team into the Balance Autism family and work together to further enhance our services."

As part of this integration, Balance Autism is committed to maintaining the quality of care that Metro West's clients have come to expect. All existing services provided by the Metro West team will continue uninterrupted, ensuring a seamless transition for clients and their families.

The union of these two organizations signifies a shared commitment to improving outcomes for individuals with autism across the region. With enhanced resources, innovative programming, and a broader network of support, Balance Autism is intentionally positioned to make a significant impact in the lives of the families they serve.

For more information about the acquisition and the expanded services available through Balance Autism, visit [www.balanceautism.org](http://www.balanceautism.org) or contact the outreach team at [admissions@balanceautism.org](mailto:admissions@balanceautism.org). ■

# THE END is near?

Have you heard perplexing things about the end of time? Many of us have. There are confusing ideas about raptures and antichrists, mundane ideas about never-ending church services, and scary ideas about being left behind. While there are good intentions in these teachings, they can distract us from the central teachings of the Bible and leave us without a compelling hope for the future. Here are three important truths about the future of the world to give you powerful hope today.



There will be a new earth. In Isaiah 65:17, God declares, “See, I will create new heavens and a new earth.” The Bible describes a future full of meaningful work, joyful relationships, delicious food, and even new bodies. Far from endless days in the clouds, God’s future for us means the renewal of all things here. God plans to do for us and all creation what He did for Jesus on the first Easter — resurrection to new life. What a glorious future it will be.

It’s important to be ready. This glorious future will be realized when Jesus returns to earth. The Bible is very clear that we do not, and will not, know when that will be. So be suspicious of anyone claiming to know the timeline. Jesus taught, “So you also must be ready, because the Son of Man will come at an hour when you do not expect him” (Matthew 24:44). Jesus goes on to explain that being ready means using every day to know Him more, serve others and make this world a better place.

You can have peace and confidence. God is not interested in you being afraid of what is to come; rather, He would love to give you confidence about your future. Jesus, in John 6:40, declares, “For my Father’s will is that everyone who looks to the Son and believes in him shall have eternal life, and I will raise them up at the last day.” This is the promise: If you look to Jesus and trust that He died and rose again for you, Jesus will give you new life and a new body when He returns, and you will inherit the glorious new earth as your home forever. You can be confident in that today.

Life can be full of heartbreak and uncertainty, so it is critical to have a hope that is real and a hope that is alive. That hope is Jesus. He’s alive, so your hope can be alive. Let Jesus bring you peace and confidence, no matter what this world throws your way. ■

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



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## THE POWER of volunteering: why it's so important

Volunteering is more than just an act of charity. It's about creating connections, empowering communities and fostering a spirit of collective action. When we volunteer, we not only help others, we also help ourselves. Volunteering provides opportunities to learn new skills, build meaningful relationships and gain a sense of purpose. It can offer a powerful sense of fulfillment and motivation, allowing us to step outside our daily lives and experience the world from a new perspective.

In a time when many people are struggling with mental health challenges, economic hardships or feelings of social disconnect, volunteering serves as a lifeline. It is a way for individuals to feel connected to something larger than themselves, to feel empowered by the act of giving, and to find solace in knowing that their contributions matter. But, perhaps most importantly, volunteering is essential because it addresses immediate needs within communities. Volunteers are the heartbeat of communities everywhere. They make the world a more compassionate and connected place, often when it's needed most.

### How to get involved: simple ways to volunteer

- **Start small:** If you're new to volunteering or feeling unsure where to begin, start small. Volunteering doesn't have to mean committing large amounts of time.
- **Lend a hand:** Volunteering doesn't always require a specific skill set. Sometimes, a willingness to help and show up is all that is needed. Acts of service, no matter how small they may seem, can have a big impact.
- **Be a listening ear:** Sometimes the greatest gift we can offer isn't physical — it's emotional. Many people struggle with feelings of isolation, loneliness or stress. By volunteering as a listener — whether through helplines, mentoring or simply offering your time to someone who needs to talk — you can provide an immense sense of comfort and support.
- **Offer a hug or a smile:** In a world where many feel disconnected, a simple hug or a smile can brighten someone's day. Volunteering in senior centers, children's hospitals or mental health organizations can be incredibly impactful.
- **Get your family and friends involved:** Volunteering can also be a fun and meaningful activity to share with others. Encourage friends or family to join you in your efforts. Together, it strengthens bonds and can create lasting memories while making a tangible difference in the community.
- **Additionally, volunteerism plays a critical role in promoting empathy and understanding.** When we volunteer, we step into someone else's shoes. Whether it's helping a family in need or supporting a cause we care about, we develop a deeper understanding of the challenges others face. This not only helps create stronger communities but also nurtures a culture of kindness and empathy. ■

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



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A ribbon cutting was held for Meyer Chiropractic Clinic, PLC, 705 Second Ave. S.W., Suite A in Altoona on Friday, March 21.



Courtney and Dr. Anthony Meyer, Hayden and Holland at the ribbon cutting for Meyer Chiropractic Clinic on March 21.



Dr. Elizabeth Ellrich and Stockton Harter at the ribbon cutting for Meyer Chiropractic Clinic on March 21.



Christy Kellis and Dr. Michael Wulfekuhle at the ribbon cutting for Meyer Chiropractic Clinic on March 21.



Dr. Craig Vernon and Karla Vernon at the ribbon cutting for Meyer Chiropractic Clinic on March 21.



Carley Potter and Miranda Nebel at the ribbon cutting for Meyer Chiropractic Clinic on March 21.



Joyce Christianson, Jill Simbro and Jan Chamberlain at the ribbon cutting for Meyer Chiropractic Clinic on March 21.



Tasha Tucker and Maria Pimentel at Altoona Chamber's Noon Networking Luncheon March 18 at Guadalajara in Altoona.



Hollie and Matt Imming at Altoona Chamber's Noon Networking Luncheon March 18 at Guadalajara in Altoona.



Joel Morrow and Christine Clark at Altoona Chamber's Noon Networking Luncheon March 18 at Guadalajara in Altoona.



Carson Odle and Jon Yesulis at Altoona Chamber's Noon Networking Luncheon March 18 at Guadalajara in Altoona.





A ribbon cutting was held for Northbridge Event Center, 4530 E. 46th St., Des Moines, on March 28.



Rob Cramer, Lori Cramer and Lylan Christiansen at the ribbon cutting for Northbridge Event Center March 28.



Nikki Barkhaus and Malorie Vandelune at the ribbon cutting for Northbridge Event Center March 28.



Matt Keller and Matt Imming at the ribbon cutting for Northbridge Event Center March 28.



Hollie Imming and Aprel Landon at the ribbon cutting for Northbridge Event Center March 28.



Brit Wallen, Dawn McKenzie and Dave Zahn at the Valley View Village Dine and Dash along with a tour March 25.



Sadie Orr and Linda Foster at the Valley View Village Dine and Dash along with a tour March 25.



Kyle Lee and Phyllis Murphy at the ribbon cutting for Northbridge Event Center March 28.



Kevin Hyberger at Altoona Chamber's Noon Networking Luncheon March 18 at Guadalajara in Altoona.



Melissa Horton and Twila Shrives at Altoona Chamber's Noon Networking Luncheon March 18 at Guadalajara in Altoona.



Lori and Riley Duerson at Altoona Chamber's Noon Networking Luncheon March 18 at Guadalajara in Altoona.

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