

JOHNSTON

DECEMBER 2025

Living

Handmade **FOR THE** *holidays*

Residents share the joy
of gifts from the heart.

Apple cinnamon muffins
RECIPE

Kramer finds peace in Johnston
WHERE WE LIVE

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WELCOME

MADE by hand

There was a time in my life when I may have viewed a homemade Christmas gift as a cheap way out for the giver. If I am being honest, I didn't truly appreciate the time and work that a person would put into creating such a gift. Today, I view it differently.

Now, don't get me wrong. I don't need another horse painting from Aunt Velma or a CD of self-recorded polka music from my neighbor Bill. In fact, I have a few to offer, if you are interested.

When my brother Steve and I were young, Mom made us each a homemade quilt, created with fabric from various pieces of clothing we no longer used. They were warm and fuzzy scrapbooks of sorts. We used them so much, we wore them out. Years later, to our surprise, Mom repaired and recrafted them. Decades later, mine is showing its age again, but it still warms me up on those cold winter evenings. In fact, I laugh because I sometimes find a needle tucked away in it. I guess that is Mom's way of still poking me from time to time. That quilt brings more smiles than any store-bought present ever could.

I also smile each year when we put the ornaments on our Christmas tree, as we recount the times when we bought or received each one. I have known our editor, Tammy Pearson, for many years, and she has been kind enough to give us handmade ornaments many times. Most are ones she created with her kids, and that makes them even more special. Some years, she didn't give any. I am not sure what that means.

Of course, some of the best homemade gifts are the edible ones. You simply can't go wrong with candies and cookies. My favorite is the chocolate fudge, and I can go through a tray of it faster than I want to admit. One year, my 16-year-old daughter, Sara, thought it would be nice to take a plate of cookies and candies out to some of the folks who were working on Christmas day. So, she loaded up several boxes and drove around to stores, dropping off the goodies and wishing them a merry Christmas. She said she got some strange looks, which was unfortunate. Even so, I bet — after a bit of testing — they eventually ate them. Especially the fudge.

In this issue of your Living magazine, we share the stories of homemade gifts and the smiles they put on the givers and the receivers. Merry Christmas to you all, and thanks for reading. ■



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Handmade FOR THE holidays

Residents share the joy
of gifts from the heart.

By Ashley Rullestad

The quilt from a beloved aunt. Knitted sweaters from Grandma. A child's table and chairs crafted in a relative's workshop. A personalized ornament. Handmade gifts are unique, but, more than that, they are gifts of time spent in the crafting, imagination in their design and love in their giving.

Melissa Jackovin creates custom craft sticks to add pizzazz to planters and pots.



Jamie Lashier made her mother-in-law a gift made out of her mother's jewelry.

Tree of life

When Jamie Lashier's mother-in-law's mom passed away, she knew she wanted to do something special for her to remember her by.

"I am a crafter at heart, but since I've had little children for the last seven years, it's hard to fit in time or craft when I want. When I get stolen moments of time, I like to craft, specifically gifts for other people because I know it will bring them joy."

Lashier remembered her mother-in-law had given her mother's costume jewelry to her kids to use for dress-up. She started arranging the pieces and thinking of ways she could use them to honor her memory. The project came to life as she worked. She designed the pieces into a tree that could be displayed during the holiday season — or even all year round.

Lashier cautions new crafters to get rid of expectations and just start doing. Nothing will be perfect. Especially in a world ruled by AI and air brushing, people may think they need to be perfect, but she reassures them they don't.

"People are craving human-made things and human interaction because AI made all creative endeavors feel like perfection was the standard. Homemade gifts are usually imperfect and have quirks to them, but I think that's what makes them beautiful and more loved."



Mae, Bo, Eve and Elle Christofferson show off their handmade items from Grandma Jo.

Special sticks

Melissa Jackovin had an idea to make crafted sticks with unique items to spruce up her outdoor planters. She made the first ones for her own pots about 12 years ago, and people often commented on them and asked where she got them. As a former elementary teacher and mom to two (now grown) girls, she has been the crafty type, and this was something she came across and knew she could make herself. She has since made the sticks for friends and family.

Jackovin attends the Santa's North Pole Village craft fair in Ankeny every year, and she had casually contemplated making them and having a booth at the fair for years. Then, two years ago, she did a presentation with the ornament sticks and another handmade Christmas decoration so people could make them for themselves. After attending the same craft fair in Ankeny last year, she went home and got to work.

"I did one post on Facebook a week later with pictures of the sticks I had created and was super surprised at the interest and orders I had," Jackovin says.

She was a busy bee after that, fulfilling as

many orders as she could, many of which were custom requests for specific color combinations. After catching her glove in her drill press, tearing her RCL ligament in her dominant thumb and having her hand casted for six weeks over Christmas, she made the decision to stop taking custom orders. Now, the sticks are just sold at a few fairs in the metro.

"I really just do this as a hobby," she says. "As my girls grew up and scrapbooking — a huge hobby of mine — became digital, I stopped doing almost all things crafty. I realized how much I love creating things with my hands, and I really missed having a creative outlet."

The part Jackovin enjoys most is creating the patterns and designs. She sometimes only makes six to 10 sticks of some designs, making her gifts one of a kind. She likes seeing what new materials she can find and create with, but she does stock some popular designs with easy to find materials, too.

"This year, I am really looking forward to a slower pace and making some sticks as gifts," she says. "Last year, I was trying hard to keep up on orders that I only had time to make them for my mom. There is something about using your hands to create something that is quite therapeutic."

Stitched with love

Megan and Matt Christofferson and their eight children have been receiving handmade quilts and blankets from Grandma Jo for more than 26 years.

"The first quilt she made to give us was for our wedding day, which was more than 26 years ago," Megan says. "Now the kids will commonly ask for quilts from her for Christmas or special events like graduations."

She makes everything from lap-size blankets to king-size quilts for the kids' beds. One of Megan's favorite quilts was the dragon quilt she created for one of her children's nursery.

On the year the family dressed up as Harry Potter characters for Halloween, she made each of them a Harry Potter quilt for their beds. When one of the kids graduated from high school, she made a quilt of his T-shirts from when he was a toddler.

"They are truly family heirlooms and treasures," Megan says.

Creative cards

Nancy Gardner began making homemade greeting cards after taking the free classes offered at the Johnston Public Library.

"I sign up for many of the classes in Johnston. They're phenomenal and free. I can't even talk highly enough about the library," she says. "The presenter, Dreama, is so talented, and she sees something in everything. She inspires all of us to go out there and create, and I'm amazed at what I'm able to do."

In fact, some of the crafters are getting together to make their Christmas cards together this year. The year before last, Gardner made about 70 cards to send to family and friends, and if she is ambitious enough, she will do the same this year.

Part of the reason Gardner enjoys making cards is she loves to send them, but buying cards at the store has gotten expensive. She says she would also rather make something for someone than buy it.

"Gift cards are all about the amount and not about the heart it came from," she says. "Cards you read and throw away, but the cards people make for me, those are the ones I have framed and display because they're so darn pretty. It's like its own gift."

Gardner says many people think they can't make things, but, if they go to a class, there are directions and someone to help and give them confidence.



Nancy Gardner enjoys making cards to send to friends and family.

"Now I have an area at home set up, and I get to spend time doing fun things like that now. It makes the creative piece in my mind go nuts. It just makes you happy," she says. ■

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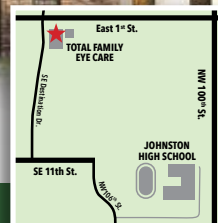
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QUIET streets, big plans

Kramer finds peace in Johnston.

For Joel Kramer, Johnston is the perfect fit.

He has been in town for four years and has found nothing but positive things to say about the community, even though life circumstances haven't been ideal.

"Unfortunately, I went through a divorce, and I wanted to make sure we lived close enough to my ex-wife to ensure our co-parenting was the best," he explains.

Today, Kramer lives in the Green Meadows West area.

"We fell in love with how the home was set up and how great the green area was around it," he says.

His favorite place to be is the back deck, which he is currently rebuilding, as it allows him to take full advantage of the outdoors and the greenery surrounding him.

There's also ample space in the home to cook for his family — something he especially enjoys.

As for the Green Meadows neighborhood

in general, Kramer appreciates how quiet it is and its quick access to everything.

That sentiment extends to Johnston as a whole, too.

"The community is peaceful," Kramer says, adding that there's still a lot to do in town.

As he continues to settle into the community, Kramer hopes to get more involved and build new connections.

"I've been focused on my general contractor business more than anything and would love to get out and be a part of the community more," he shares. "The community feels very welcoming. It's calm and feels like a small town but has access to so much."

Kramer sees Johnston not just as a place to live, but as a place to grow, both personally and professionally. Whether it is rebuilding his deck, cooking for loved ones or laying the foundation for deeper community ties, he's building something meaningful here. And he's just getting started. ■



Joel Kramer enjoys his Johnston home and the green space that comes with it. It provides space for him and his daughter to enjoy the outdoors.

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JOHNSTON

WINTER 2025-26

DR

VARSITY BOYS BASKETBALL

DATE	OPPONENT(S)	TIME	LOCATION
12/2/25	vs Southeast Polk	7:45 PM	Johnston HS
12/5/25	vs Waukee	7:45 PM	Johnston HS
12/9/25	vs Ankeny	7:45 PM	Johnston HS
12/12/25	@ Waukee Northwest	7:45 PM	Northwest HS
12/16/25	vs Dowling Catholic	7:45 PM	Johnston HS
12/19/25	vs Urbandale	7:45 PM	Johnston HS
1/2/26	vs Valley	7:45 PM	Johnston HS
1/3/26	Multiple Schools	10:00 AM	Alliant Energy PowerHouse
1/9/26	vs Ankeny Centennial	7:45 PM	Johnston HS
1/13/26	@ Waukee	7:45 PM	Waukee HS
1/16/26	@ Southeast Polk	7:45 PM	Southeast Polk HS
1/20/26	vs Waukee Northwest	7:45 PM	Johnston HS
1/23/26	@ Ankeny	7:45 PM	Ankeny HS
1/24/26	vs Papillion-La Vista South	5:20 PM	DJ Sokol Arena
1/30/26	@ Urbandale	7:30 PM	Urbandale HS
2/3/26	@ Dowling Catholic	7:45 PM	Dowling Catholic HS
2/6/26	@ Valley	7:45 PM	Valley HS
2/7/26	Multiple Schools	12:00 PM	
2/10/26	@ Ankeny Centennial	7:45 PM	Ankeny Centennial HS
2/17/26	vs Council Bluffs Jefferson	6:30 PM	Johnston HS
2/19/26	vs Council Bluffs Lincoln	7:00 PM	Johnston HS

VARSITY GIRLS BASKETBALL

DATE	OPPONENT(S)	TIME	LOCATION
11/25/25	vs Cedar Falls	6:15 PM	Johnston HS
12/2/25	vs Southeast Polk	6:15 PM	Johnston HS
12/5/25	vs Waukee	6:15 PM	Johnston HS
12/6/25	@ Anamosa	2:00 PM	Anamosa HS
12/9/25	vs Ankeny	6:15 PM	Johnston HS
12/12/25	@ Waukee Northwest	6:15 PM	Northwest HS
12/16/25	vs Dowling Catholic	6:15 PM	Johnston HS
12/19/25	vs Urbandale	6:15 PM	Johnston HS
12/20/25	Multiple Schools	8:00 AM	Johnston HS
1/2/26	vs Valley	6:15 PM	Johnston HS
1/9/26	vs Ankeny Centennial	6:15 PM	Johnston HS
1/13/26	@ Waukee	6:15 PM	Waukee HS
1/16/26	@ Southeast Polk	6:15 PM	Southeast Polk HS
1/20/26	vs Waukee Northwest	6:15 PM	Johnston HS
1/23/26	@ Ankeny	6:15 PM	Ankeny HS
1/24/26	vs Omaha Marian	1:00 PM	DJ Sokol Arena
1/30/26	@ Urbandale	6:15 PM	Urbandale HS
2/3/26	@ Dowling Catholic	6:15 PM	Dowling Catholic HS
2/6/26	@ Valley	6:15 PM	Valley HS
2/10/26	@ Ankeny Centennial	6:15 PM	Ankeny Centennial HS
2/12/26	@ Maquoketa	6:00 PM	Maquoketa HS
2/16/26	@ Iowa City West	7:00 PM	Iowa City West HS

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VARSITY GIRLS WRESTLING

DATE	OPPONENT(S)	TIME	LOCATION
11/18/25	vs Raccoon River	6:30 PM	Johnston HS
11/22/25	Multiple Schools	9:30 AM	Urbandale HS
12/2/25	Multiple Schools	6:30 PM	Ankeny Centennial HS
12/6/25	Multiple Schools	10:00 AM	Ames HS
12/11/25	@ Southeast Polk	6:00 PM	Southeast Polk HS
12/12/25	Multiple Schools	10:00 AM	Saydel HS
12/13/25	Multiple Schools	10:00 AM	Valley HS
12/20/25	Multiple Schools	10:00 AM	ADM HS
1/3/26	Multiple Schools	10:00 AM	Clarinda HS
1/6/26	vs Fort Dodge	6:30 PM	Valley HS Fieldhouse
1/6/26	@ Valley	7:30 PM	Valley HS Fieldhouse
1/9/26	Multiple Schools	4:30 PM	Benton Community HS
1/10/26	Multiple Schools	10:00 AM	Cedar Falls HS
1/16/26	Multiple Schools	4:30 PM	Ankeny HS
1/17/26	Multiple Schools	10:00 AM	Northwest HS
1/20/26	Multiple Schools	5:30 PM	Northwest HS

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VARSITY BOYS WRESTLING

DATE	OPPONENT(S)	TIME	LOCATION
12/4/25	@ Southeast Polk	7:30 PM	Southeast Polk HS
12/6/25	Multiple Schools	10:00 AM	Dallas Center-Grimes HS
12/9/25	@ Waukee Northwest	7:30 PM	Northwest HS
12/11/25	vs Waukee	7:30 PM	Johnston HS
12/13/25	Multiple Schools	10:00 AM	Johnston HS
12/18/25	vs Ankeny	7:30 PM	Johnston HS
12/20/25	Multiple Schools	9:00 AM	Lynnville-Sully HS
12/20/25	Multiple Schools	10:00 AM	Northwest HS
1/6/26	@ Urbandale	7:30 PM	Urbandale HS
1/8/26	vs Dowling Catholic	7:30 PM	Johnston HS
1/10/26	Multiple Schools	10:00 AM	Marshalltown HS
1/15/26	@ Valley	7:30 PM	Valley HS
1/16/26	Multiple Schools	4:00 PM	Bettendorf HS
1/17/26	Multiple Schools	9:00 AM	Bettendorf HS
1/22/26	vs Ankeny Centennial	7:30 PM	Johnston HS
1/24/26	Multiple Schools	9:00 AM	Urbandale HS

VARSITY BOYS SWIMMING

DATE	OPPONENT(S)	TIME	LOCATION
11/25/25	Multiple Schools	5:30 PM	DMACC Ankeny Campus
12/6/25	Multiple Schools	10:00 AM	Kennedy High School
12/9/25	vs Waukee	5:30 PM	Summit Middle School
12/11/25	@ Waukee Northwest	5:30 PM	Northwest High School
12/18/25	@ Ankeny	5:30 PM	Trail Point Aquatics
12/20/25	Multiple Schools	11:00 AM	Ames High School
1/6/26	vs Valley	5:30 PM	Summit Middle School
1/8/26	vs Dowling Catholic	5:30 PM	Summit Middle School
1/10/26	Multiple Schools	11:00 AM	Summit Middle School
1/15/26	@ Southeast Polk	5:30 PM	Southeast Polk High School

VARSITY BOYS BOWLING

DATE	OPPONENT(S)	TIME	LOCATION
12/8/25	@ Des Moines Lincoln	3:00 PM	Bowlerama Lanes
12/11/25	@ Valley	3:30 PM	Warrior Lanes
12/15/25	vs Southeast Polk	3:30 PM	Game Day Lanes
12/18/25	@ Ankeny	3:30 PM	B-Roll Bowling
1/5/26	vs ADM	3:00 PM	Game Day Lanes
1/6/26	vs Davis County	3:00 PM	Game Day Lanes
1/12/26	@ Des Moines East	3:00 PM	Bowlerama Lanes
1/15/26	@ Dowling Catholic	2:00 PM	Val Lanes Recreation Center
1/19/26	@ Clarke Community	4:00 PM	Alley Bowl
1/22/26	vs Waukee	3:00 PM	Game Day Lanes
1/29/26	vs Urbandale	3:00 PM	Game Day Lanes

VARSITY GIRLS BOWLING

DATE	OPPONENT(S)	TIME	LOCATION
11/20/25	@ Urbandale	3:00 PM	Game Day Lanes
12/8/25	@ Des Moines Lincoln	3:00 PM	Bowlerama Lanes
12/11/25	@ Valley	3:30 PM	Warrior Lanes
12/15/25	vs Southeast Polk	3:30 PM	Game Day Lanes
12/18/25	@ Ankeny	3:30 PM	B-Roll Bowling
1/5/26	vs ADM	3:00 PM	Game Day Lanes
1/6/26	vs Davis County	3:00 PM	Game Day Lanes
1/12/26	@ Des Moines East	3:00 PM	Bowlerama Lanes
1/15/26	@ Dowling Catholic	2:00 PM	Val Lanes
1/19/26	@ Clarke Community	4:00 PM	Alley Bowl
1/22/26	vs Waukee	3:00 PM	Game Day Lanes

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FRIEND'S apples create a perfect fall treat

When Cheryl Castile shared a bag of freshly picked apples with me, I knew exactly what to do — turn them into something warm, comforting and perfect for sharing. I love to bake, and these apple cinnamon muffins are the result: soft, fragrant and filled with cozy autumn flavor in every bite. There is something special about baking with fruit that comes straight from someone's tree.



As they bake, the kitchen fills with the irresistible scent of cinnamon and caramelizing apples, promising a treat that is both nostalgic and homemade. These muffins strike the right balance — tender on the inside with just a hint of golden crispness on top. They are wonderful for breakfast, a mid-morning snack or an afternoon pick-me-up with coffee or tea.

Simple to make and even better to share, these muffins are a sweet way to say thank you or to celebrate the small gestures of kindness that brighten an ordinary day. So, if you have a handful of apples and a little time, this recipe transforms them into something truly special — a batch of warm, cinnamon-kissed gratitude. ■

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

Apple cinnamon muffins

Ingredients:

- 1 1/2 teaspoons cinnamon
- 1/2 cup brown sugar, packed
- 1 large apple, Granny Smith works well
- 2/3 cup sugar
- 1/2 cup butter
- 2 eggs
- 2 teaspoons vanilla
- 1 1/2 cups flour
- 1 1/2 teaspoons baking powder
- 1 pinch salt
- 1/2 cup milk (can use soy, almond or other varieties)

Directions

- Combine cinnamon and brown sugar and set aside. Peel apple, dice into small pieces and set aside.
- Mix flour, baking powder and salt and set aside. Cream together sugar and butter using a mixer.
- Add eggs and vanilla and mix well. Stir in flour mixture. Slowly stir in



milk until combined.

- Grease a 12-muffin pan. Divide dough, diced apples and cinnamon/brown sugar mixture in half. Place one half of the dough among the 12 muffin cups. Follow with one half of the apples and then the cinnamon/brown sugar mixture. Repeat.
- Bake at 350 degrees for 25-30 minutes. These can be frozen up to three months or enjoy warm.

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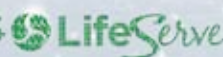
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COOKING up success

Anderson serves up excellence at JHS.

Johnston High School family and consumer science teacher Claire Anderson says many moments in her teaching career have made her proud. But one recent recognition stands out. This year, she was named the 2025 Iowa ProStart Educator of Excellence by the Iowa Restaurant Association Education Foundation.

"This is a huge honor," she shares. "I could not be selected without the hard work and dedication displayed by my students."

Since 2018, Anderson has taught culinary arts at JHS in a classroom equipped with modern industrial kitchen equipment — a dream job of sorts for her. She became passionate about culinary classes during her student teaching experience at Iowa State University. Before attending Iowa State, Anderson studied at Marshalltown Community College for two years, which proved to be especially valuable as a career and technical education (CTE) teacher.

"It helped me already be familiar with different apprenticeships and two-year programs available to my students," she says.

At JHS, Anderson's favorite part of her role is teaching the ProStart Program.

"I love giving students the opportunity to graduate high school with a credential to help them in the workforce," she shares. "Besides taking the ProStart courses, this also offers students the opportunity to get real hands-on experience in the culinary industry. Many students work in the industry furthering their skills."

Students in the program also benefit from a classroom mentor, Chef Anthony Nace, executive chef at Hilton Des Moines Downtown — and the Iowa Restaurant Association's 2024 Chef of the Year.

When students complete the ProStart program, they can earn their ProStart Certificate of Achievement (COA). In addition to classwork, students work more than 400 hours in the restaurant industry and must meet 52 out of 75 skills on the workplace competency checklist.

"This is not an easy feat," Anderson says. "It takes hard work, dedication and a desire to learn. The ProStart COA results in college credit, scholarship opportunities, higher wages in the industry and a plethora of skills to use throughout their lives."

For Anderson, the joy of teaching runs in the family. Her dad believed that a good education is essential for success, and he's proud of her career path in family and consumer science. Her mom, Vicki Anderson, is a first-grade teacher in Claire's hometown and will retire this spring after 32 years of teaching.

"I may be biased, but she is one of the best," Anderson says. "Growing up, I was always in her classroom, and, in high school, I was a student tutor in her classroom. I knew I wanted to go into teaching, but I wasn't sure what area."

After working at a bank in her small hometown, Anderson realized how critical life skills are and decided to pursue a degree in FCS education.

And that decision was the right one for her, she says. ■



Claire Anderson's students can earn the ProStart National Certificate of Achievement, which helps get them off to a good start in a culinary arts career.

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FAITH

By Jill Alonzo

THE PURPOSE of Advent

Have you had your Christmas tree up since Thanksgiving? Did you also hang outdoor lights? Are your Christmas cards mailed yet? How much time have you spent shopping for holiday outfits, special food and gifts? Have you finished wrapping all those presents? How many more parties and events are on your calendar? There is so much hustle and bustle.



The weeks between Thanksgiving and Christmas are some of the busiest of the year, which is unfortunate because that is not how they are supposed to be. Advent, the four weeks before Christmas, is meant to be a time of waiting and reflection. It's meant to be preparation for the coming of Jesus.

During this season, we remember Jesus' humble human birth, anticipate his second coming and examine our own hearts and souls to ensure they are open to him. Instead of filling ourselves with more — more activities, more stuff, more noise and busyness — Advent calls us to slow down and take a step back. We are encouraged to be silent and still, for it is in the quiet we find Jesus waiting for us. He's there, inviting us to draw closer to him through prayer and penance.

Are you ready to embrace what Advent offers? Let go. Give yourself space. Empty your life of what doesn't matter and isn't necessary. Watch and listen for Jesus. Let his light extinguish the darkness in your life. This is the true purpose of Advent.

May God bless you with hope, peace, joy and love this Advent season. ■

Information provided by Jill Alonzo, Director of Family Faith Formation, Saint Mary of Nazareth Catholic Church, 4600 Meredith Drive, Des Moines, 515-276-7589, jilla@stmarysdsdm.org.

PLAN AHEAD

By Buffy Peters

GRIEF and the holidays

When grief comes along for the holidays, the absence of someone special can feel even more amplified. Holiday traditions can bring up memories from the past, which perhaps now feel painful and in direct opposition to the holiday cheer that seems inescapable this time of year.



What about the proverbial "elephant in the room"? Someone is missing this year, but if we talk about it that might make people sad, or worse, cry, reminding them of the loss. It might feel like it is better to not say anything and pretend it isn't there.

What I have learned from grief is that, when you acknowledge the elephant, it allows us to walk alongside one another together instead of being left alone in our grief. Yes, tears may come, and that's OK. But you know what else might come? When the elephant has a seat at the table, it is no longer fighting for our attention, using all of our energy to pretend we aren't grieving. That acknowledgement makes room for grief, love and joy to coexist. It's not an either/or; it certainly can be a both/and.

You can be grieving and find glimmers of joy this season. Allow yourself to feel however you are feeling (with no judgement) and make room for the things that bring you joy. It is not dishonoring your loved one, and it won't make your grief disappear, but it might just make this time of year a bit more bearable. ■

Information provided by Buffy Peters, Director of Hamilton's Academy of Grief & Loss, 3601 Westown Parkway, West Des Moines, IA 50266, 515-697-3666, www.HamiltonsFuneralHome.com/academy-of-grief-and-loss.

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DON'T forget to \$pend your F\$A dollars

As the year winds down, many people focus on holiday plans, travel and wrapping up work projects — but there's another important task that often gets overlooked: using your Flexible Spending Account (FSA) dollars before they expire. FSAs can be incredibly valuable, helping you save money on eligible medical, dental, vision and dependent-care expenses. However, unlike Health Savings Accounts (HSAs), most FSAs operate on a "use-it-or-lose-it" basis. Forgetting to spend those funds means leaving your own money on the table.



Most employers set a Dec. 31 deadline for using FSA dollars, though some offer a short grace period — typically up to March 15 of the following year — or allow a small rollover amount. Even with these options, a large portion of unused funds still goes to waste every year simply because people forget to check their balances. As busy as the end of the year can be, it's worth taking a few minutes now to confirm how much you have left and what your specific plan rules allow.

Once you know your balance, you can start planning how to use it. A wide range of items and services qualify for FSA spending. In addition to expected medical expenses — like doctor visits, prescriptions and lab work — many everyday health needs also qualify. Over-the-counter medications, menstrual products, sunscreen, allergy relief, first-aid supplies, thermometers, heating pads and even some acne treatments and foot care items can often be purchased with FSA funds. If you've been meaning to stock your medicine cabinet, now is the perfect time.

Don't forget about appointments you may have postponed. Year-end is ideal for scheduling routine checkups, dental cleanings, vision exams or physical therapy sessions. If you have been putting off getting new glasses or contact lenses, these are typically eligible as well. Planning ahead is important — clinics book up quickly in December — so scheduling early helps ensure you can make use of your funds before it's too late.

Dependent-care FSAs also deserve attention. Childcare, preschool tuition, after-school programs and day camps may all be eligible expenses. Reviewing receipts and prepaying for upcoming care (if permitted) can help you avoid losing unused money.

Finally, remember to keep good records. Save receipts and confirm that purchases meet FSA eligibility criteria. Many FSA administrators offer mobile apps that make tracking purchases, submitting claims and checking balances quick and simple.

The end of the year can feel overwhelming, but taking a small amount of time to review and spend your FSA funds can translate into meaningful savings. Think of it as maximizing money you have already earned. Before the calendar flips, make sure those dollars work for you rather than disappearing unused. ■

Information provided by Janis Van Ahn, Health Insurance Advisor LLC, 5870 Merle Hay Road, Suite A, Johnston, 515-225-9994, jvanahn@health-insadvisor.com.

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Emergency: 9-1-1

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6400 NW Beaver Drive
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6300 Pioneer Parkway
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CROWN POINT COMMUNITY CENTER AND SENIOR DINING CENTER

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City offices and library closed for holidays

City Hall and the library will be closed on December 24, 25, and January 1 for Christmas and New Year's holidays. Trash and recycling pickup days will not be delayed.

Holidays at the Town Center on December 6

Join us for the Holidays at the Town Center on Saturday, December 6, from 4:00 to 6:00 p.m. This annual event will feature free synthetic skating, a carriage ride, a live ice sculptor, a visit with Santa and his reindeer, crafts and games from local businesses, and a community tree lighting!

Schedule of events:

- **4:00 p.m.** – Santa arrives in a police car
- **5:00 p.m.** – Tree lighting
- **5:30-5:50 p.m.** – Unaccompanied Minors performance

For a list of activities and businesses participating, please visit
<https://towncenterholidays.my.canva.site>.



Holiday tree and yard waste collection

For a limited two-week period, from December 29-30 and January 5-6, we are offering curbside pickup for your holiday tree and extra yard waste. To take advantage of this service, simply attach a Compost It! sticker, and we will handle the rest.



Please remember that your Compost It! sticker is the only decoration your tree should have. Be sure to remove all other decorations, lights, and wires. Note that wreaths and garlands will not be collected.



CITY NEWSLETTER DECEMBER 2025

Recycle those holiday lights that do not work, or you no longer need

This holiday season, the Johnston Public Library is teaming up with Metro Waste Authority to help you recycle your old or broken holiday lights. As you get ready to deck the halls, keep in mind that you can drop off any unwanted lights at the library.

From now through January 30, you can bring your holiday lights to the library and place them in a special collection box. After we collect the lights, they will be taken to Metro Waste Authority's Metro Hazardous Waste Drop-Off, where they will be recycled safely.

We accept a variety of lights. Whether you have LED lights, classic strings, plastic and glass bulbs, net lights, icicle lights, or even battery-powered lights, you can drop them off with us. Just remember to keep the lights loose in the collection box, no bags or boxes, please.

This is a wonderful opportunity to help the environment while clearing out your old decorations. Happy decorating, and thank you for helping us keep the community green.



Synthetic rink at the Johnston Town Center

The ice rink at the Johnston Town Center offers skate rental from Friday to Sunday. If you own your own skates, you can skate for free seven days a week. Rental is \$5 during the designated hours.

Skate rental hours (times/days shown below are weather-dependent):

- Friday: 5:00 to 8:00 p.m.
- Saturday: 12:00 to 8:00 p.m.
- Sunday: 12:00 to 5:00 p.m.

Enjoy the rink during the holidays from December 6, 2025, through February 28, 2026. Expanded weekday hours will be offered in the weeks of Christmas/NYE. The skate rental and concession stand for the season is managed by The Cork 50131.



Sign up to receive snow emergency alerts this winter

Stay informed about when the snow emergency parking ban goes into effect by signing up to receive alerts via email or text. Visit www.cityofjohnston.com/JohnstonReady to register. You can also choose to receive alerts for emergencies. Make sure to include your address, as emergency responders can send notifications specific to your area during an emergency. Providing your address will help ensure you receive timely notifications.



Sign up for the Parks & Recreation newsletter

Stay informed about the programs happening within our Parks & Recreation Department, by signing up for our monthly newsletter. This newsletter provides information on upcoming activities and programs to ensure you sign up before the deadline. Visit www.cityofjohnston.com/ParksRecNewsletter.

For more information about the city, please call 515.278.2344

MANAGING risk at different stages of life

As an investor, you will always need to deal with risk of some kind. How can you manage the risk that accompanies the volatility of the financial markets? The answer depends somewhat on where you are in life.

When you're starting out ... If you're early in your career, with perhaps four or five decades until you retire, you can likely afford to invest primarily for growth, which also means you'll be taking on a higher level of risk — because risk and reward are positively correlated. But, given your age, you will have time to overcome the market downturns that are both inevitable and a normal part of investing. Still, even at this stage, being over-aggressive can be costly.

When you're in the "middle stages" ... At this time of your life, you're possibly well along in your career and working on at least a couple of financial goals, such as saving for retirement and your children's college education. You will want to begin adjusting the balance in your portfolio between assets with higher growth and those with lower growth since there will be progressively less time to rebuild losses. You will need to decide on the balance between risk and growth that's right for you.

When you're a few years from retirement ... You may have already achieved some key goals — perhaps your children have finished college and you've paid off your mortgage. As a result, you may have more money available to put away for retirement. Growth still matters because your retirement could be 25 or 30 years long, and you will need investments that can keep up with inflation. But you will also need investments designed to help provide for your income needs in retirement and provide more stability. Also consider reducing your exposure to higher-risk investments and instead consider investing more in stable dividend-paying stocks, government and investment-grade bonds, and cash.

When you're retired ... Once you're retired, you might think you should take no risks at all with substantial assets held in cash. However, you could spend two or three decades in retirement, so you may need some growth potential in your portfolio to stay ahead of inflation. A more balanced mix between equities and fixed income is generally appropriate. Establishing a withdrawal rate that's appropriate for your lifestyle and projected longevity can help reduce the risk of outliving your money. Of course, if there's an extended market downturn during any time of your retirement, you may want to temporarily lower your withdrawal rate.

Managing investment risk is a lifelong process that evolves with your goals, responsibilities and time horizon. While you will look for balance among your investments based on your life stage, having a balanced and diversified portfolio doesn't fully protect against a loss. Still, aligning your strategy with your stage of life can help navigate market volatility and stay on track toward long-term success while avoiding emotional investment decisions. The key is staying informed and making intelligent choices that reflect your current income needs and future aspirations. ■

This article was written by Edward Jones for use by Tim Hanstad, your local Edward Jones Financial Advisor. Edward Jones, Member SIPC

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Merry Christmas

Enjoy the Holiday season with friends and family!



Tim Hanstad, AAMS®
Financial Advisor

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7 PM & 10 PM

Thursday, December 25
9 AM Mass

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THE SUPPORT you need

How adult day services make caregiving sustainable.

Caregiving sits at the intersection of devotion and endurance. The work is meaningful, yet the constant coordination — appointments, safety concerns, daily routines — can leave even the most organized families stretched thin. During the colder months, when days feel shorter and schedules feel fuller, many caregivers turn to adult day services to help their loved ones stay engaged while preserving their own energy and balance.



• **How adult day services work.** Adult day services offer daytime support for people who benefit from supervised activity, structured engagement, or the chance to spend time with others. Participation can follow a once-a-week routine or a full weekday schedule, based on what fits each family's needs. Many participants live with dementia, but a diagnosis isn't required; the emphasis is on safety, connection, and consistency.

• **A reliable source of stability.** Adult day settings are designed to feel warm, dependable, and secure. Participants follow a familiar rhythm of conversation, activities, and meals. Families know their loved ones are in good hands. As one caregiver, Joni J. of Waukeg, explained, "Before my dad started attending, our days could swing in any direction. The consistency he has now gives me room to be a better daughter."

That reassurance is common. Karen T. of Ankeny, whose mother visits an adult day program, said, "Mom comes home more relaxed — and that makes me feel relaxed as well. I didn't realize how thinly I was stretched until I saw how much calmer she was at the end of the day."

• **What a strong program offers.** Well-designed adult day services support whole-person well-being through:

- Social interaction that encourages meaningful connection
- Nutritious meals and snacks
- Activities that promote cognitive and physical health

• A safe, familiar environment supported by caring professionals

• **Why families turn to these services.**

Many people explore adult day services only after they're overwhelmed, yet engaging earlier can prevent fatigue and strengthen family relationships. Participants enjoy routine and companionship. Caregivers regain time, steadiness, and the reassurance that their loved one is thriving.

• **If you're considering next steps.** Adult day services can become a dependable part of your caregiving plan, offering structure, safety, and engagement for your loved one while helping you maintain balance. Why not take a few minutes to browse services in your area? You'll be glad you did. ■

Aaron Wheeler is Vice President of Home and Community-Based Services for WesleyLife, which provides health and well-being services for older adults — including adult day services in Des Moines and Newton. To learn more, visit wesleylife.org.



Peace on earth — and peace of mind for your family.

Holiday gatherings often reveal changes in a loved one's needs. WesleyLife at Home is here to help. From everyday tasks to specialized care, we're here to make life easier for you and your loved ones.

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PLAN for the future

2025 is coming to a close. The end of the year is a good time to take stock of your personal situation and proactively plan for the future.

Update your estate plan

Putting your legal affairs in order is important. It reduces the burden on loved ones in the event of poor health or death. It can save time and expense. And it allows you to have control over how your assets pass. Every person should have three basic estate planning documents: a Last Will and Testament, a Durable Financial Power of Attorney, and a Living Will / Health Care Power of Attorney.

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

Make a list of key contacts

When you update your estate planning documents, you should also



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

Review the title to your home

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

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

These are three simple yet very effective steps that can save time and expense in the future. Contact an experienced attorney to help you get 2026 off to a good start. ■

Information provided Abendroth Russell Barnett Law Firm, 2560 73rd St., Urbandale, 515-278-0623, www.ARPCLaw.com.

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POLK COUNTY'S HUMAN SERVICES OUTREACH & INVESTMENTS



CENTRAL IOWA SHELTER & SERVICES

Polk County approved more than **\$817K** in funding to support critical infrastructure repairs including HVAC, plumbing, electrical, kitchen repairs, and security upgrades. In addition, the county approved an enhanced annual financial agreement. The County's annual support increased from **\$149k to \$319k** to specifically help cover first-night shelter and meal expenses, costs related to increased staffing, higher costs of materials, and other essentials during weather amnesty.



IOWA HOMELESS YOUTH CENTER (YSS)

The Iowa Homeless Youth Center (IHYC) is the only emergency shelter bed program in Polk County exclusively serving homeless young adults between the ages of 18 and 24 years. In August, Polk County approved a 3-year agreement to provide **\$150K** annually in funding to ensure the program remains viable and the beds available at the youth emergency shelter in downtown DSM.



JOPPA

Polk County invested more than **\$1.28 million** in federal funding designated for affordable housing towards JOPPA's tiny village project. In October, JOPPA received approval by the City of Des Moines for their site at 2501 Maury Street in Des Moines. The tiny village will provide permanent homes to 50 men and women who would otherwise be chronically homeless. The Village will offer supportive services, work opportunities, and access to public transportation for off-site employment opportunities.



ANAWIM HOUSING

Polk County utilized **\$1 million** in federal American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) dollars in support of Anawim Housing's Monarch Apartments located at 4845 Merle Hay Road in Des Moines. This 40 unit project converted a former Days Inn Hotel into permanent supportive housing. Monarch Apartments opened it's doors in Spring 2025



FOOD PANTRY ASSISTANCE

When the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) benefits were temporarily suspended on November 1, 2025, due to the federal government shutdown, the Polk County Board of Supervisors held a special meeting to provide **\$1 million** to the Food Bank of Iowa, Des Moines Religious Council, and Caring Hands to help fill their pantries. Shortly after SNAP benefits were suspended, pantries saw more than a 50% increase in demand and Polk County's special investment allowed for immediate distribution to organizations at the forefront of the food crisis during this time.

Upcoming in Johnston Living magazine

Super Bowl parties: Do you have a tradition of holding a Super Bowl party? Share your party plans, recipes and other ideas. Email tammy@iowalivingmagazines.com to share your story!

"I do!" Stories about marriage proposals: Share the story of how your courtship culminated in a proposal to remember. Email tammy@iowalivingmagazines.com to share your story!

Coffee With a Cop and Breakfast with Santa

Saturday, Dec. 13, 8-10 a.m.
Hy-Vee, 5750 Merle Hay Road,
Johnston

Join the Johnston Police officers for Breakfast with Santa and Coffee With a Cop at your Johnston Hy-Vee. Enjoy complimentary donuts, coffee and juice. If you prefer a warm breakfast, you can purchase one from the Hy-Vee café. Learn more at <https://www.cityofjohnston.com/calendar.aspx?EID=4009>.



Gold Star Military Museum events

Camp Dodge, 7105 N.W. 70th Ave.,
Johnston

• **Discussion of War Correspondent Jack Shelley, WWII Journalist for WHO Radio and WHO-TV, Presented by Jay Olson:** Jack Shelley of WHO Radio was an accredited war correspondent with the First Army in Belgium just as the Battle of the Bulge began on Dec. 16, 1944. He reported on the battle but could not reveal his location to listeners. Jay Olson has researched his reports and unit journals to determine which units he visited and where he traveled in December 1944 and January 1945. Presentation is Saturday, Dec. 13, 1 p.m.

• **Gold Star Mothers - Christmas Trees:** These beautiful trees will be featured at the Iowa Gold Star Military Museum throughout the holiday season. The purpose of these trees is to honor those who paid the ultimate sacrifice in the line of duty. They also honor those who served and are no longer with us. If you are interested in submitting a request for an ornament to represent your loved one, forms will be available at the museum.

Saint James Lutheran Church events

5665 Merle Hay Road, Johnston

- Giving Tree will be up until Dec. 16: This year's gift will be donated to Trinity Center at Luther Park, ChildServe and Johnston Partnership.
- Advent Holden Evening Prayer: Wednesdays, Dec. 10 and 17. Soup Supper, 5:45 p.m., worship 6:30 p.m.
- Christmas Eve Services: Monday, Dec. 24, 4:30 p.m. and 6:30 p.m.

Pathway Church celebrates Christmas

6523 Merle Hay Road

Join worshippers at Pathway Church for the Christmas sermon series entitled "Our Christmas Playlist: Celebrating the Birth of King Jesus" as they look at the Bible verses that inspired some of our favorite classic Christmas songs. The sermon series includes: Dec. 7 – "O Come, O Come, Emmanuel"; Dec. 14 – "It Came Upon a Midnight Clear"; Dec. 21 – "Joy to the World"; Christmas Eve – "O Holy Night." Other holiday events include: Dec. 7: Christmas Caroling (traveling around the area); Dec. 13: Homeless Christmas Party – bring food, sing carols, give gifts and have all the fun of a Christmas party at a homeless camp; Dec. 14: Christmas Feast (invite seniors from around the area to share a feast); Dec. 24: Christmas Eve services 5 p.m. and 7 p.m.

Alternative Giving Market

Saturday, Dec. 6, from 10 a.m. to 2 p.m.
St. Paul Presbyterian Church,
6426 Merle Hay Road

Shop from 25 or so nonprofits with their home bases in the greater Des Moines area. The AGM is filled with unique gift ideas designed to delight the recipient and help those less fortunate in the community experience better lives. Each year they raise more than \$10,000 for worthy organizations doing amazing things locally and throughout the world. To shop online, visit www.stpaul-johnston.com/agm.html and go to the shopping list that will be linked there to shop. All of the proceeds from this event go to the charities.

Abominable Snowman Fundraiser

Dec. 14, noon to 3 p.m.
Woof Pack Resort & Spa,
5700 West Parkway, Johnston

This is a photoshoot fundraiser for Forever Home Dog Rescue.

Holidays at the Town Center

Saturday, Dec. 6 from 4-6 p.m.
6245 Merle Hay Road

Watch Santa's arrival in a police car at 4 p.m., followed by the tree lighting at 5 p.m. A multitude of activities will entertain the entire family, including free carriage rides around the Town Center (for a bag of non-perishable food donations for the food pantry), the Mayor's Run for Food, a visit with reindeer, chatting with Santa in The Yard, and free ice skating. Johnston Public Library will provide a special craft for children, and local businesses will offer children's activities. Bill Gordish will be demonstrating his famous ice-sculpting skills, and, for a sweet treat, you can participate in free cookie decorating with Northpoint Church. Several food trucks will offer tasty options during the event, or visit the concession stand for chips, candy, popcorn, pretzels and beverages.

Holiday Open House

Sunday, Dec. 14, 2-4 p.m.
Johnston Historical Society,
6161 Northglenn Drive,
Johnston

The Simpson House will be decked out for the holidays. Coffee, cocoa and holiday treats will be available to visitors as they tour the museum in the 1902 house.

Merry Market

Saturday, Dec. 13, 9 a.m.
Edencrest at Green
Meadows, 6750 Corporate
Drive, Johnston

Join staff and residents for a holly jolly morning at Edencrest Green Meadows. Enjoy breakfast with Santa for just \$10 per person, then browse the Merry Market featuring local vendors, holiday gifts and festive treats. Bring your family, shop local and get in the Christmas spirit. RSVP to Danielle at 515-204-7467. ■

O CHRISTMAS Book Tree, O Christmas Book Tree...

It's the most wonderful time of the year at JPL. Celebrate the season with programs for all ages, family photos, parties and, of course, our festive book tree. Then ring in the new year with us on Dec. 31. Read on for further details.

Thinking about decking the halls of your first home? Mortgage Loan Officer Matt Nolan and Realtor Pete Jones will walk you through the process of buying a home and answer questions during their First-Time Homebuyer Class. Registration is appreciated but not required for this no-pressure event on Wednesday, Dec. 3 at 6 p.m.

If you want to protect yourself against scams during the holiday season and all year round, let Fraud Fighters help. On Wednesday, Dec. 10 from 1-2 p.m., volunteers with United Way of Central Iowa's AmeriCorps Seniors program will present information that will help you identify and avoid common types of fraud.

Get your holiday photos taken at JPL. Local photographer Leah Heagy will be at the library from 10 a.m. to noon on Saturday, Dec. 13, to take pictures with holiday/winter-themed backdrops. Registration for Family Picture Day will be in person beginning at 9:30 a.m. the day of the event and will be limited to the first 30 families. Each family will receive free digital copies of their photos for printing.

Winter break begins on Monday, Dec. 22. Teens in grades six and up can hang out during the library's Extended Teen Space Hours from

1-6 p.m. that day. The fun will begin with the movie "Elf" and Shrinky Dinks ornaments followed by Jingle Bingo and Random Reasons to Party Kahoot! Trivia.

For teens looking to party into the new year, we have two exciting events. On Tuesday, Dec. 30 at 5 p.m., kids in sixth grade and above can attend The Last Party of the Year: Multiverse Villains Murder Mystery where they'll swap secrets, interrogate guests and use their wits to solve the crime of the year. Then, on Wednesday, Dec. 31, teens can celebrate the end of the year at our Disney New Year's Eve Spectacular event, featuring the movie "Lilo and Stitch," a Disney puzzle race, Disney Music Bingo, and Disney Kahoot! Trivia.

Have kids who can't make it to midnight on New Year's Eve? We'll be dropping the ball at noon at JPL. At 11 a.m. on Wednesday, Dec. 31, kids in preschool through fifth grade can join us for Noon Year's Eve fun as we welcome in the new year at the library.

More information about all events and resources at Johnston Public Library can be found online at www.johnstonlibrary.com or by calling the library at 515-278-5233. ■

Johnston Public Library

6700 Merle Hay Road

515-278-5233

www.johnstonlibrary.com

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OUT & ABOUT



Eshanjali Dance Academy was a runner-up for Residents' Choice for Favorite Dance Studio. Pictured is owner Pragnya Yogesh.



Veridian Credit Union is the winner for Residents' Choice for Favorite Bank/Credit Union. Pictured are, front row: Briteny Leydens, Rachel Meyer, Holly Harward, Zoey Vo; and, back row: Harley Wiederin, Matthew Young, Brad O'Hollearn, DJ Kern and Peter Montag.



Johnston Chamber is the winner for Residents' Choice for Favorite Chamber of Commerce, and Johnston Green Days is the winner for Favorite Community Festival or Event. Pictured is Johnston Chamber CEO Samantha Howell.



Van Dee's is the winner for Residents' Choice for Favorite Place to Get Ice Cream and runner-up for Favorite Restaurant for Dessert. Pictured is owner Emma Blind.



Mavis and Larry Miller at the Veterans Day Celebration Nov. 10 at Brio of Johnston.



Mary Ann and John Scarpino at the Veterans Day Celebration Nov. 10 at Brio of Johnston.



Music was by Robert Sobiech at the Veterans Day Celebration Nov. 10 at Brio of Johnston.



April Conway and Margaret Severino at the Veterans Day Celebration Nov. 10 at Brio of Johnston.



Sue and Dick Griffith at the Veterans Day Celebration Nov. 10 at Brio of Johnston.



Col. Michael Harris and Command Sgt. Major David Bailey at the Veterans Day Celebration Nov. 10 at Brio of Johnston.



Reva and Clete Herold at the Veterans Day Celebration Nov. 10 at Brio of Johnston.



Judy and Tim West at the Veterans Day Celebration Nov. 10 at Brio of Johnston.



Grinnell State Bank held a 100-Year Celebration Oct. 23. Front row: Mollie Ehlert, Caitlyn Fisher, Erika Van Sickle; second row: Brianna Christianson, Reyna Myott; and, back row: Matthew Formanek, John Smith, Carson Jones, Rusty Jones, Kyle Wilcox and Adam Rinehart.



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TRICK or Treat

Trick or Treat with
First Responders
was held Oct. 22.



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Everly Alexander and Oaklyn
Schrage



Ryland and Huxley Deutmeyer



Simon and Luca Burhenn



Whitney, Daniel and Jason Weiser



Rob Ruisch and Andy Vis, grilled cheese extraordinaries



Elmin Mustafic



June and Jackson Long



Jesse, Josie, Gabriel and Angelica
Becerra



Berklee Schrage



Amarzah Clayton, Alexis Porter, Amira Washington and Zamir
Washington



Representing The Bridge Preschool are Jill Boom, Meggan Boyle,
Tara Hartman, Sarah Schall, Morgan Mescher and Lisa Neppel.



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TRIVIA

with Joleen Roskamp!

WHAT YEAR WAS THE FIRST "BALL DROP" IN TIMES SQUARE?

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Joleen Roskamp

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Congrats to last month's winner, Ray!

October Answer:
Thanksgiving became a holiday in 1863.



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