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DECEMBER 2025

MAGAZINE

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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 Jackie Wilson

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.

Stephanie Greedy began making "upcycled" mittens from used sweaters. Photo by Jackie Wilson



Stephanie Greedy of West Des Moines has made a variety of items to give away and sell at Christmas time. Photo by Jackie Wilson

Upcycled mittens

As people outgrow sweaters or grow tired of them, Stephanie Greedy is eager to snap them up.

Greedy, of West Des Moines, uses them to make something new: mittens. Her upcycled mittens, which she began making about seven years ago, are popular items.

With birthday money to spend, she purchased a gift at a craft show. Spying some mittens made out of sweaters, she bought a pair. When she got them home, she thought she could figure out how to make them herself.

"I liked them so much, I wanted more," she recalls. "It took off from there."

Greedy designed her own pattern, tweaking it as she went along. She cuts the sweater into distinct shapes and then sews the pieces together, adding fleece lining to the inside. After a pair is completed, she sews on a button and a small red fleece heart.

However, her signature heart was originally placed by accident.

"I had a tiny hole on a mitten, so I covered it up with a red fleece heart. Since then, I put a heart on all of my mittens," she says.

At family Christmas gatherings, Greedy gives mittens away.

"Our family likes getting them for our gifts. The mittens are a hot item," she says.

After the mittens became popular, she began selling them at craft shows and through an Etsy account. The mittens are also sold at the Iowa Made Market in Valley Junction.

Greedy has enjoyed creating crafts and handmade items her years. She used to own an arts and crafts boutique in Jefferson before she

moved to West Des Moines.

She also makes decorative Christmas items and metal jewelry. She says handcrafted items for gifts are special for both the giver and the receiver.

"When it's unique, it carries a different feel. It's something that you can't just pick up on Amazon," she reflects.

Greedy says her home basement studio is "bursting at the seams" with crafting items, especially at Christmas time.

Both giving handmade items, as well as the process of making them, are rewarding.

"I could make this stuff all day long if I could. That's what I'm always doing in my spare time," she reflects. "It's my passion."

Macramé and Chex mix

As a young woman in the 1970s, Terri Leedom made macramé plant holders and decorative owls. It was a trendy hobby, yet working and raising a family took away her free time.

A few years ago, while visiting friends in Tucson, she attended a craft show and saw a macramé wall hanging. She recalled her macramé skills and thought a wall hanging would complete her bedroom wall decor.

She bought a few supplies, and, when two snowstorms hit back-to-back, she took up the hobby once again.

"There wasn't anything else to do, so I started it back up," she recalls.

Leedom made some small Christmas ornaments and decorations for friends and family. After looking to see what was trending, she made plant holders and other items and began selling them at local craft shows.



Terri Leedom of West Des Moines has kept her mom's tradition of making Chex mix and giving it away at the holidays. Photo by Jackie Wilson



Terri Leedom used to macramé in the 1970s. She rediscovered the hobby during a snowstorm and now gives and sells a variety of macramé items. Photo by Jackie Wilson

A few years ago, one of her macramé plant holders won honorable mention at the Iowa State Fair.

She doesn't follow a set pattern, and no two items are alike.

"Luckily there is no wrong way to do it," she explains. "If I don't like it, I take it apart and redo it."

When she gives people macramé items as a gift, their response is positive.

"People say it's beautiful and like that it's unique. It makes me feel good when someone else feels good."

Gift-giving in Leedom's family is low-key. Her mom used to make Chex mix and bag it to give to their friends and family.

"I carried on the tradition. I give it to my friends, but my mom and stepdad put a spin on it: a secret ingredient."

Tabasco sauce is the secret, and she makes three different levels of heat for her friends.

"Everybody really looks forward to it," Leedom says.

Her family has refrained from buying too much at the holidays. Family members can only buy items that fit in one handmade stocking. One year, her family's gifts were all supposed to be handmade items.

"We made toys, and it was more personal," she says. "The kids remember that Christmas more than anything."

Today, family gatherings are focused on spending time with one another.

"Instead of presents with a 't,' we give presence with a 'c.' "

12 days of Christmas gifts

On the "first day of Christmas," Karen Hanson's friend did not give the family a partridge in a pear tree. Instead, the gift was intended to provide cheer for their family, which had just moved into a new home. Because of that gift — along with 11 others, Hanson has carried on the 12 Days of Christmas gift tradition.

Hanson recalls that it was a tough time more than 20 years ago when her family moved into a new home. The kids felt a loss without their old neighbors and cherished home. Hanson's friend, Cindy, surprised the family with a gift and a note on their doorstep 12 days from Christmas. Then, each day following, Cindy left gifts at the door. Hanson recalls how it cheered up the family.

"My girls loved it. Every morning, they were so excited to look outside the front door,"



Karen Hanson of West Des Moines chooses a family in need of cheer each year, giving them 12 different gifts. Photo by Jackie Wilson

she says.

Because of what her friend did for their family, Hanson carried on the tradition and delivers 12 gifts to those who are struggling through the holidays. She and her family sit down and discuss which family or individual might need cheer. Past recipients are those who have dealt with an illness, a loss of a job, a death or a new parent.

"There are a lot of reasons that people might need a pick-me-up," Hanson explains.

When she first started the tradition, she delivered a gift on each day to several families at a time. The approach meant making numerous deliveries, often in snowstorms. She decided to switch to a more practical approach and began bundling all the gifts into one big box with instructions to open one gift a day.

Hanson numbers the gifts, tucks in a note

with a poem, and instructs the recipient when to open each. Often the poem might hint at what the gift is. She wraps up small items, such as a pair of colorful socks, a book, Christmas mug, food items, etc., to include. Each daily item costs less than \$10. The last gift is always a candle and a poem about being a friend. The last day, she reveals her identity.

A great deal of effort goes into wrapping, labeling and customizing poems to go with the presents then shipping or dropping off a big box. Yet, Hanson is happy to provide a sense of cheer.

"I was grateful as a mom, and it brought joy to our family. My hope is that it brings them cheer, and they will do that for someone else," she reflects. "That's the meaning of Christmas — besides the birth of Christ — showing kindness and love to others. It's a small way to brighten the world for others." ■

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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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 Waukee, 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.

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KEEPING pets safe during the holiday season

The holiday season brings joy, decorations, gatherings and plenty of festive treats. It also introduces hidden hazards for our four-legged family members. From twinkling lights to rich foods and cold winter weather, December can be



a risky time for pets if we are not mindful. Here are some simple, practical tips to help keep your pets safe, healthy and stress-free this season.

1. Watch the decorations: Holiday décor can be irresistible to curious pets, especially cats and playful dogs. Avoid common hazards: Tinsel, ribbon, and garland can cause serious intestinal blockages if swallowed. Ornaments can shatter and injure paws or mouths. Holiday plants like poinsettias, mistletoe and holly can be toxic.

Safer options: Use pet-safe ornaments and place fragile items higher on the tree. Skip tinsel entirely. Choose artificial or pet-friendly greenery when possible.

2. Be careful with holiday foods: Those

extra goodies can be tempting to share, but many seasonal foods are dangerous for pets.

Foods to avoid: chocolate, grapes and raisins, onions and garlic, fatty scraps and cooked bones, alcohol and sugar substitutes like xylitol. Stick to a consistent diet and offer pet-safe treats in moderation. If guests are visiting, remind them not to feed your pets table scraps.

3. Secure the tree and cords: Pets love to explore, and a Christmas tree can look like the ultimate toy. Anchor the tree securely to prevent tipping. Cover or hide electrical cords to prevent chewing and potential burns. Unplug lights when you're not home.

4. Keep calm during gatherings: Busy holiday gatherings can overwhelm pets, especially those sensitive to noise or unfamiliar faces.

Helpful tips: Create a quiet escape space with their bed, toys and water. Keep doors closed to prevent escapes. Maintain routines as much as possible.

5. Winter weather awareness: Cold temperatures can pose real risks, especially for small, elderly or short-haired pets. Limit time

outdoors in extreme cold. Wipe paws after walks to remove ice melt and salt. Provide warm, dry shelter and avoid leaving pets in cars or garages.

6. Travel smart: If you're traveling or hosting visitors, ensure your pet's environment stays predictable. Use trusted boarding or pet-sitting options. Make sure ID tags and microchips are up to date. Keep emergency contact information readily available.

A safe season is a happy season

With a little preparation and awareness, you can eliminate many holiday hazards and enjoy the season alongside your beloved pets. By keeping their environment safe and maintaining routines, you ensure they remain healthy, calm and comfortable throughout the festivities.

This December, a little extra care goes a long way in protecting your furry companions and preserving the joy of the season for everyone. ■

Information provided by Sam Patterson, Operations Director, Iowa Veterinary Specialties, 24/7 emergency hospital for pets, 6110 Creston Ave., Des Moines, 515-280-3100.

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WINTER Reading Challenge starts Jan. 1



Do you have a stack of good books you've been meaning to dig into? Are you hoping to start the new year with a new book or a fresh reading goal?

We invite you to curl up with some good books this January. Readers of all ages may log their reading online during our Winter Reading Challenge that runs Jan. 1-31. You don't need to log books or minutes — just log if you read something. Readers who complete 10 days' worth of reading will be entered into a drawing for a gift certificate to Valley Junction that can be used at any business in the district. For information on registering groups (such as classes or daycares), send a message to youthservices@wdm.iowa.gov.

Registration opens on Thursday, Jan. 1. You may sign up online (wdmlibrary.org/winter), the Beanstack app from the App store or Google Play, or by stopping by the children's or adult desks at the library.

The library will be closed on the following days in December and early January:

- Dec. 11 – All day – New Tech System Launch
- Dec. 23 – Closing at 5 p.m. – Christmas
- Dec. 24 and 25 – All day – Christmas
- Dec. 31 – Closing at noon – New Year's Eve
- Jan. 1 – All day – New Year's Day

UPCOMING EVENTS Register at wdmlibrary.org/events

Family Night at the Library: Holiday Cards

Monday, Dec. 15 - 6:30-7:30 p.m. (all ages)

With the holidays just around the corner, we'll make some cards to share with family and friends. Register each person attending.

Christmas Storytime

Monday Dec. 22 and Tuesday, Dec. 23, 10:30-11:15 a.m. (ages 0-6)

Join us for a special Christmas storytime including a puppet show, stories, rhymes and songs. No registration required.

Noon Year's Eve Party

Wednesday, Dec. 31, 11:30 a.m. to noon (ages 2-6)

Welcome in the new year with us at the library. We'll have a celebratory dance party starting at 11:30 a.m., and we'll finish with a countdown and a balloon drop right at noon. No registration required. ■

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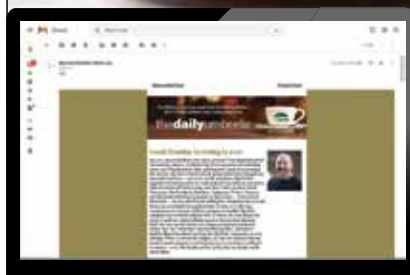
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MEET Sierra Coleman

Stilwell's drama director receives PAWSitive Impact award.

When Sierra Coleman was just 2 years old, she was onstage at her mom's Showtime Dance Studio in Perry — and she hasn't quit performing since.

Coleman is currently the director of drama and communications teacher at Stilwell Junior High. Her passion in theater led to a teaching degree and a master's degree in theater education.

"I couldn't just do theater," she says. "By teaching, I can share what I love with students who also love it."

She directs two musicals a year, plus teaches an afterschool summer music intensive, where students put on a play in just five days. It's her fourth year of doing the summer program. Earlier this year, 106 students performed in "Beauty and the Beast."

"It's a great time. Kids love it and are so excited to do it," she says.

Coleman says she likes all aspects being onstage — singing, telling stories and how it all comes together.

"It's me and my vocal director against the world. It's work. Middle schoolers are like herding cats," she laughs.

When she's not directing musicals, she teaches a 12-week communications rotation, required of all seventh graders. The goal is to "force" students to learn how to communicate.

"Lots of kids go through stressful situations, and they can't always choose who they get to work with. We're trying to replicate that and give them some communication challenges, which will set them up to succeed."

In the classes, she covers sections on public speaking, acting, puppetry theater and building vocabulary.

"It's not a normal class. Kids really enjoy the activities and challenges," she says.

Because of her dedication to her students, she was recognized with a PAWSitive Impact award. The award is for adults and teachers who make the school a better place. One of her students nominated her.

"I wasn't expecting that. It felt nice that she knew I made a difference and I was doing more than the average call of duty," she reflects.

Coleman explains that teaching junior high kids wasn't always on her radar.

"Middle school chose me," she explains. "I had a gap year as I was transferring my license from Missouri to Iowa. Everyone was looking for an English teacher, but that wasn't my background."

As she has taught in WDM schools for five years, she's witnessed her "kids" moving on to act in Valley High School plays.

"I get so excited. I'm jumping around when I see my babies at Valley. I saw two of my past students onstage, and I got choked up," she recalls. "It's so fulfilling to see them continuing their theatrical journey."

She says extracurricular activities in the school are desperately needed. She appreciates parents' support with assisting with costumes and more.

"It really takes a village that extends to students' activities. We need to continue having arts in the school." ■



Sierra Coleman is the director of drama and communications teacher at Stilwell Junior High.

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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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WELLNESS

By Viktor Vali and Amy Anderson-Vali

LOOK your best — feel your best

There are several self-care and anti-aging practices that can help you look and feel your best as you age. Here are a few to consider:

- **Hormone Replacement Therapy (HRT) / Testosterone Replacement Therapy (TRT).** HRT involves increasing hormonal levels in the body to counteract age-related declines. For women, HRT can alleviate menopausal symptoms, improve sleep, prevent osteoporosis and enhance skin hydration and elasticity by boosting estrogen and progesterone levels. For men, TRT can address symptoms of low testosterone, such as fatigue, reduced muscle mass and decreased libido by restoring testosterone levels. TRT can lead to increased muscle mass, improved bone density, enhanced cognitive function and potential skin health benefits.

- **Skincare, hydrafacials, and microneedling.** Advanced skincare treatments aim to improve skin texture, tone and elasticity, promoting collagen production and reducing fine lines and wrinkles. Hydrafacials cleanse, exfoliate, extract, hydrate and infuse the skin with antioxidants and peptides, leading to improved skin texture, tone, elasticity and collagen production. Microneedling stimulates the body's healing process, increasing collagen and elastin production to minimize wrinkles, improve skin texture and tone, and reduce sun damage and scars.

- **Exercise and diet.** Regular exercise, including strength training and aerobic activity, is vital for maintaining muscle mass, bone density, balance and overall vitality as one ages. ■

Information provided by Viktor Vali and Amy Anderson-Vali, owners, 4 Ever Young, 1180 S.E. University Ave., Waukegan, 515-304-2324, www.4everyyoungantiaging.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.

BUILDING a Community of Care

Campaign raised more than \$70,000 for WDMHS.



A year-long campaign designed to promote a culture of care, belonging and compassion throughout the community wrapped up in September and raised more than \$70,000 for West Des Moines Human Services.

COMMUNITY OF CARE

The Community of Care campaign focused on a different topic each month. Audrey Kennis, WDMHS director, says the city initiative highlighted three ways for residents to demonstrate care for their neighbors, including advocating for those in need, donating or volunteering in the community.

"In West Des Moines, we believe in building a community that cares. The Community of Care campaign was created to inspire collective action by encouraging and supporting the residents and businesses of WDM in advocating for, volunteering and donating to causes that make our city a better place to live," she explains. "In a time when we seem so divided, we have the capacity to build a sustainable community that is rooted in mutual aid and shared prosperity."

The 2025 WDM Chamber Leadership Academy chose to raise funds for the Community of Care campaign initiative for their class project. A "race to 72,000," led by Mayor Russ Trimble, encouraged 72,000 residents (the current WDM population) to donate one can of food. Other activities throughout the year also brought residents together to show care for those in the community.

"The campaign asked residents to show up and help us build a healthy, inclusive and compassionate community," Kennis says. "Demonstrating care doesn't have to be expensive or time consuming. Help a neighbor in need, donate a bag of gently used clothes, host a food drive at your workplace, support a family for the holidays...no gesture is too big or too small."

Holiday giving opportunities

Over the past several months, WDMHS has witnessed an increase in people requiring assistance.

"The community has shown up during these tough times. We appreciate the community's support," Kennis says.



However, Kennis says assistance is still needed.

"With the upcoming holidays, times should be joyful, but, for many in the community, it brings stress, hardship and added challenges for those we serve," she reflects.

One way to help the community is through the WDMHS holiday assistance program, which supports income-eligible families. The public can offer support by collecting new items for children and teens. These items will be distributed at a festive event, where registered families "shop" for gifts for their loved ones.

"Let's keep the spirit of the Community of Care campaign alive year-round by continuing to care for one another, supporting local efforts and showing what it means to be a true Community of Care," Kennis says. "Let's actively foster an environment rooted in reciprocity and care."

Want to help? Drop off monetary donations or new, unwrapped kids toys or teen gifts to 139 Sixth St. in West Des Moines by Dec. 15. For more information, visit www.wdm.iowa.gov/government/human-services/holiday-giving-opportunities-2016. ■



IT'S BACK!

Who will be voted favorite in Dallas County?

We all have our favorite local people, places and things. And now it's time to share your choices and honor those who deserve the recognition.

Make your voice be heard and cast your votes in the 2025 Dallas County Residents' Choice Poll. This contest is being hosted by Iowa Living magazines, and the results will publish January in Waukee, and February in Adel and West Des Moines - Jordan Creek editions. You can vote in one or every category, or anywhere in between.

SCAN HERE TO
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HURRY! POLL CLOSES DEC. 19, 2025

See rules and vote at www.iowalivingmagazines.com/residentpoll.
One vote per resident, please.

FOOD AND DRINK

- Restaurant
- Restaurant for Breakfast
- Restaurant for Lunch
- Restaurant for Dinner
- Restaurant for Dessert
- Place for Ice Cream
- Pizza Establishment
- Bar
- Coffee Shop
- Catering Company
- Server/Bartender

AUTOMOTIVE

- Auto Service
- Auto Body Shop
- Car Dealership

COMMUNITY

- Preschool/Daycare
- Nonprofit
- School (name of building)
- Park
- Community Festival or Event
- Church
- Pastor
- Chamber of Commerce
- Library
- Camping Spot

SHOPPING

- Grocery Store
- Boutique
- Retail Store
- Thrift Store
- Home Improvement Retail Store
- Liquor Store
- Nursery or Garden Center
- Place to Purchase a Gift for a Man
- Place to Purchase a Gift for a Woman
- Bakery
- Florist

ENTERTAINMENT

- Dad/Child Date Spot
- Mom/Child Date Spot
- Place to Take Your Mom and Dad
- Place to Take Your Kids or Grandkids
- Place for Child's Birthday Party
- Golf Course
- Bowling Alley

HEALTH/BEAUTY

- Hair Salon
- Physicians Clinic
- Dental Office
- Orthodontist Office
- Mental Health Service
- Chiropractic Office
- Audiologist/Hearing Clinic
- Vision Care

HEALTH/BEAUTY

- Health Club or Gym
- CBD Store
- Pharmacy
- Cosmetic Service
- Physical Therapy
- Dance Studio
- Gymnastics/Tumbling Studio

OTHER PROFESSIONAL SERVICES

- Financial Planner
- Law Firm
- Accounting Firm
- Veterinarian
- Dog Groomer
- Pet Care
- Lawn Care Business
- Landscaping Company
- Heating and Cooling Business
- Electrical Business
- Plumbing Company
- Senior Living Establishment
- Insurance Agency
- Realtor
- Bank/Credit Union
- Photographer
- Place for Guests to Stay
- Home Builder/Remodeling
- Outdoor Lawn Equipment Store
- Pest Control

Upcoming in the West Des Moines / Jordan Creek 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!

WDM Chamber Presents: 2026 Annual Dinner – Mission: Impossible

Thursday, Feb. 26, 5-9 p.m.
Val Air Ballroom, 301 Ashworth Road, West Des Moines

Your mission, should you choose to accept it: Prepare for an unforgettable evening at the 2026 West Des Moines Chamber Annual Dinner – Mission: Possible. This year's operation will test your stealth, style and savvy as we embark on our most daring mission yet. Join fellow agents for a night of high-stakes networking, covert surprises and sophisticated fun where the business community comes together for a mission that's anything but impossible, strengthening relationships, recognizing excellence and celebrating another successful year.

Dress to impress, and prepare for an evening full of intrigue and excitement. From secret agent-inspired décor to top-secret entertainment, this gala promises to be one you won't want to miss. Top-Secret Access: Those seeking to elevate their evening can unlock the VIP Lounge, a classified experience featuring exclusive access, premium cocktails and connections with fellow high-level operatives.

Tickets sell out year after year, so secure your spot before this mission vanishes from your radar. Register at <https://wdmchamber.org/events/annual-dinner>.

The Christkindlmarket

Dec. 11-14
Principal Park, 1 Line Drive, Des Moines

Experience a German-inspired Christmas Market. Enjoy the sights, sounds, smells and flavors of the holidays as you participate in a 750-year-old tradition. Shop regional vendors selling old-world, hand-crafted products from wooden vendor stalls; enjoy lively performances of polka music, traditional dance and choirs in Yuletide Hall; participate in children's activities; sip Glühwein (warm, mulled wine); and savor European beer. More information available at www.christkindlmarketdsm.com.

Jordan House Tours

Fridays and Sundays, 11 a.m. and 1:30 p.m.

Jordan House Museum, 2001 Fuller Road, West Des Moines

Weekly guided tours are offered at the Jordan House. The cut off for purchasing tickets is noon Thursday for Friday tours and noon Friday for Sunday tours. If you have missed that cutoff, call 515-225-1286 to find out if walk-up tickets are available. To reserve a ticket, see the schedule and links at www.wdmhs.org/openhousevisit/. All tours will be guided by a docent. Arrive at the Jordan House Museum at least 10 minutes before the tour begins. The tour will involve taking stairs to the basement and the second floor, as well as walking and standing for at least one hour. If you have a group of eight or more, call to schedule a private tour.

Jingle in the Junction

Thursday, Dec. 18, 5-8 p.m.
Fifth Street Main Street District, West Des Moines

Shop for one-of-a-kind gifts at locally owned small businesses. Dine and drink at local restaurants and bars. Enjoy free horse-drawn trolley rides, visit with Santa and Mrs. Claus in Old City Hall, and watch live ice carving demonstrations. Food and treat vendors will be available. Free admission and family-friendly programming on all dates. Free parking is available in the 886 spaces located off Fourth and Sixth streets. Weekly rotating features include live reindeer and specialty performers. See the full event schedule at <https://valleyjunction.com/upcoming-events/>.

Holiday Promenade

Various dates, 5-8 p.m.
Historic East Village

Enjoy extended hours at local shops and restaurants, special promotions and pop-up experiences, live music and entertainment, visits from Santa and other holiday characters and free trolley rides throughout the neighborhood.

- Dec. 12: Ugly Sweater Contest across East Village businesses.
 - Dec. 19: Drone Show with Santa Claus.
- Visit eastvillagedesmoines.com/promenade for the latest event updates and details.

Life Line Screening Event

Saturday, Dec. 13
Valley United Methodist Church, 4201 Ashworth Road, West Des Moines

Life Line Screening is the nation's leader in stroke and cardiovascular disease risk screenings, including Carotid Artery Disease Screening, Atrial Fibrillation Screening, Abdominal Aortic Aneurysm Screening and Peripheral Artery Disease Screening. Book an appointment by calling 800-324-9458 and use promo code HABC001 or text the word "circle" to 216-279-1607



Tinseltown in the Park

Through Dec. 20
Water Works Park, 2201 George Flagg Parkway, Des Moines

Mark your calendars for Tinseltown in the Park, featuring live Christmas tree sales, biergarten specials, food trucks, entertainers, unique visits from holiday A-listers, photo opportunities and more to celebrate the holiday season in the park. Visit www.waterworkspark.org/tinseltown-in-water-works-park/ for schedule of events.



CITYVIEW's Fire and Ice

Saturday, Jan. 24, 1-4 p.m.
Valley Junction

CITYVIEW brings back its legendary Valley Junction area pub crawl. Fire and Ice is a hockey-themed liquor sampling event that will be sure to warm up your winter blues. With your event ticket, you will receive 10 individual drink tickets to sample some of the best winter cocktails from establishments in the Valley Junction area. Tickets are \$25 in advance and \$35 at the door. Follow the QR code for tickets.



EVENTS IN THE AREA

Check for cancellations

The Iowa Files: A History Series

Various dates, 3 p.m.

Community Room of the West Des Moines Public Library, 4000 Mills Civic Parkway

The Iowa Files, an educational history lecture series, returns for its seventh year in 2025/2026. This joint West Des Moines Historical Society and West Des Moines Public Library program is free and open to the public, thanks to the generosity of West Des Moines Historical Society members, Bravo Greater Des Moines and the Friends Foundation of the West Des Moines Library. All programs are streamed on the WDMHS Facebook page and YouTube channel.

• **Jan. 11: Iowans in Andersonville Prison.**

Andersonville Prison (also known as Camp Sumter), was a Confederate prisoner-of-war camp during the final 14 months of the American Civil War. The prison was overcrowded to four times its capacity and had an inadequate water supply, inadequate food and unsanitary conditions. Historian, teacher and all around fascinating storyteller Kent Halstad will share the stories of the Iowans who experienced Andersonville.

• **Feb. 15: Ako Abdul-Samad; A Life Working for Justice.** Ako Abdul-Samad has served the community in numerous capacities as an elected official, mediator and community organizer. Ako will share his thoughts on the state of equality and the fight against systemic poverty and racial injustice and his life-long commitment to the power of dialog to make positive change.

• **March 15: The Monuments Men and the Saving of Culture.** The Monuments Men (and Women) had a seemingly impossible job: save some of the world's most precious cultural artifacts and art from the Nazis, who treated Europe as their private looting grounds. Presenter Ruth Ehler's grandfather, Ralph Hammett, was one of the men. Ruth will recount stories of the amazing and frantic work that saved and returned treasures to their rightful owners and institutions.

• **April 12: Colfax, the Spring City.** In the 1870s, underground mineral water, which was a cure-all health craze at the time, was discovered in Colfax. The water sparked health resort and bottling industries which made Colfax a world famous destination at the turn of the 20th Century. Kevin Williams, Colfax, Historical Society's board president, will share information and pictures about this little-known boom in Colfax.

• **May 17: Villisca; Living With a Mystery.** On the morning of June 10, 1912, Josiah and Sarah Moore, along with their four children and two young overnight guests, were found brutally murdered in their home. Dr. Edgar V. Epperly has written dozens of articles and blog entries and appeared on CourtTV and other radio and television programs. He will be joined by filmmakers Kelly and Tammy Rundle, whose 2004 documentary explores the crime's aftermath in a small town.

Shop and Dine Along The Peppermint Trail

Saturday, Dec. 13

The Avenues of Ingersoll and Grand

Celebrate the season with your favorite local businesses on The Avenues of Ingersoll & Grand and the Roosevelt Cultural District. The Peppermint Trail, presented by Veridian Credit Union, returns with shopping and dining specials happening all day at local shops and restaurants, plus a line-up of holiday festivities, including trolley rides, ice carving, photos with Santa, carolers and more. The "Bee-Merry-Line" trolley will travel on a loop from noon to 4 p.m. with multiple stops along Ingersoll Avenue and at the Shops At Roosevelt. See a route map on the event website, as well as list of businesses' specials and times for special activities. www.theavenuesdsm.com/peppermint-trail

Stories With St. Nicholas

Sunday, Dec. 14, 4-8 p.m.

Water Works Park, 2201 George Flagg Parkway, Des Moines

Immerse yourself in a special presentation from St. Nicholas and his reindeer, along with the Top Hat Carolers. St Nicholas will read "Twas the Night Before Christmas" along with a reading of "How the Grinch Stole Christmas" from none other than the Grinch himself, making his Des Moines appearance.

Tour de Lights

Sunday, Dec. 14, 6-8 p.m.

Water Works Park, 2201 George Flagg Parkway, Des Moines

It's back, Tour de Lights presented by Scheels returns to Water Works Park, offering a bike, run, or stroll with festive cheer, hot cocoa, and a self-guided tour of holiday lights in the park. SWAG included with registration fee. Proceeds provide funding for even more holiday lights and displays in 2026

Square Dance Lessons

Sunday nights starting Jan. 18, 6:30 p.m.

Douglas Avenue Presbyterian Church, 4601 Douglas Ave., Des Moines

Ankeny Square Dance Club is sponsoring Square Dance Lessons. Cost is \$20 per person for the entire session accepted at the third lesson. Attend with or without a dance partner. You'll learn the calls, one at a time, taught by a caller (instructor) and volunteers. For more information, call Sandy Townsend, 515-294-2624, or visit www.ankenysquares.com.

Iowa Bike Expo and Banquet

Saturday, Jan. 24, 9 a.m. to 6 p.m.

Iowa Events Center, 730 Third St., Des Moines

The Iowa Bike Expo & Banquet serves as the annual celebration for the Iowa Bicycle Coalition, bringing together cyclists and trail lovers, advocates, vendors, donors, supporters and partner organizations to advance the Iowa Bicycle Coalition's mission to promote safe, accessible and enjoyable cycling for everyone in Iowa. The Iowa Bicycle Coalition is excited to announce both Ayesha McGowan and Connor Fields as the dynamic dual keynote speakers for the event. The Iowa Bike Expo is free and open to the public, featuring 120-plus vendors. For information, visit www.iowabikeexpo.com.

Individual tickets for Bike Banquet early bird rate are \$45 and tables of 10 for \$450 until Dec. 15. Tickets are available at www.eventbrite.com/e/iowa-bike-expo-and-banquet-tickets-1925662862459. ■

AVOID a scam

Many Americans have taken steps in recent years to protect their identity. According to a recent report, total dollars lost due to identity theft in 2023 was nearly \$23 billion. If you haven't taken measures to protect yourself, it may be a good idea to consider your options.¹



Identity theft is a crime in which an individual illegally obtains and wrongfully uses another person's personal information, such as a Social Security number, bank account number, or credit card number, generally for financial gain. Once a thief has possession of your personal information, it may be used to obtain a loan, run up credit card debt, or commit other crimes.

Individuals can take four steps to help protect themselves against identity theft. These steps are represented by the acronym **S.C.A.M.**

S - Be STINGY when it comes to giving out your personal information. Make sure the person requesting the information is on a "need-to-know" basis. For example, someone who claims to be calling from your bank does not need to know your mother's maiden name if it's already on file with the bank.

C - CHECK your financial information periodically. If you get a hard copy of your credit card and bank statements mailed to you, consider keeping these documents in a safe, secure location. Be skeptical if it appears the financial institution missed a month. Identity thieves may try to change the address on your accounts to keep their actions hidden from you for as long as possible.

A - From time to time, ASK for a copy of your credit report. This report shows bank and financial accounts in your name and may help provide evidence if someone has used your name to open another account. To obtain a report, contact any of the three major credit bureaus: Equifax, Experian, or Transunion.

M - MAINTAIN good records of your financial accounts and obligations. Experts recommend keeping hard copies or electronic versions of monthly bank and credit card statements. Easy access to this information may make it easier to dispute a transaction, especially if your signature has been forged.

Government agencies, credit card companies and individuals have become smarter about protecting data and identifying perpetrators. But identity thieves consistently devise new strategies to obtain personal information.

Having your identity stolen may result in out-of-pocket financial loss, plus the additional cost of trying to restore your good name. Help protect yourself by using caution when sharing your personal information and keeping an eye out for warning signs. ■

Information provided by Travis Gaule, founding partner/financial advisor, Trust Bridge Wealth Advisors, 4090 Westown Parkway, Suite 108, West Des Moines, IA 50266, 515-207-4346.

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~ HAPPY HOLIDAYS FROM TRAVIS, ROB AND MADDIE! ~



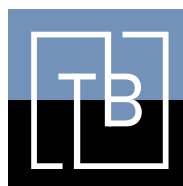
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PLAN for the future

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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SHARING the music

Kundel spreads love of music through volunteer wind ensemble.

Rose Kundel has a knack for sharing her love of music with others, both personally and professionally.

Kundel, who has been part of the West Des Moines community since 2005,

became involved locally while completing her student teaching in the West Des Moines Community School District, where she taught band at Westridge Elementary, Jordan Creek Elementary and Southwoods.

More recently, she has been active with the Central Iowa Wind Ensemble — an organization with a mission to build lifelong engagement in the arts by providing meaningful and challenging concert band experiences. Kundel serves in dual roles as a flute player and a member of the board of directors.

“As a band director myself, I volunteer to live out this mission personally, keeping my own musical skills sharp and ensuring my ‘musical cup’ remains full,” she says. “My passion for music drives this work.”

The Central Iowa Wind Ensemble frequently partners with other local organizations, going beyond concert performances to arrange supply drives and provide music outreach. For example, playing for children at a



Ryan Mahalovich of Edward Jones presents the Neighbor Spotlight certificate to Rose Kundel.

daycare for Music Monday or performing for residents at a local facility.

“Our central goal at the Central Iowa Wind Ensemble is to ensure our high-quality concerts are accessible to all,” Kundel explains. “This mission relies completely on volunteers who not only provide the musical talent but also handle the essential leg work of managing the organization. Knowing my effort supports that mission is what I enjoy most.”

In 2024, the organization moved its home to the Staplin Performing Arts Center at Valley High School, where they now regularly hold rehearsals and concerts — a full-circle moment of sorts for Kundel, who got her professional start in the school district.

Because Kundel started volunteering with the ensemble before she was married or had a family, she never imagined she would one day be sharing so many magical memories with them.

“My favorite memories are centered on the opportunity to share the concert experience with my family,” she says. “It’s a special tradition we share.”

One particular highlight occurred when Kundel’s twin daughters were younger and the ensemble invited a princess performer dressed as Elsa to sing “Let It Go” with them.

“To see my daughters so absolutely starstruck by a real musical princess that day was a memory I never even imagined I would be having,” Kundel says.

The Central Iowa Wind Ensemble’s holiday concerts in December are also a favorite for her, as they fill her with a sense of community spirit.

“Seeing my children’s love of music grow and develop through these experiences is a profound reward,” Kundel says. “It’s my hope that, by seeing me give back, they will be inspired one day to use their own gifts to support arts and community organizations.”

Ultimately, Kundel makes time to volunteer because it’s a direct and impactful way to use her skills to make a difference in the community. Plus, she simply enjoys contributing something meaningful.

“I am proud to be a volunteer in the West Des Moines community, blending my professional passion for music with my commitment to community service through the Central Iowa Wind Ensemble,” she says. “I look forward to continuing to contribute to the cultural vibrancy and accessibility of the arts in our area for many years to come.”

Learn more about the Central Iowa Wind Ensemble at ciwe.org. ■

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West Des Moines Chamber of Commerce hosted a ribbon cutting for J.H. and Sons Nov. 14.



Brandon Roman, Katherine Harrington and Josh Lester at the West Des Moines Chamber of Commerce ribbon cutting for J.H. and Sons Nov. 14.



Abdullah Musharafa and Mike Torres at the West Des Moines Chamber of Commerce ribbon cutting for J.H. and Sons Nov. 14.



Connie Blodgett and Josh Lester at the West Des Moines Chamber of Commerce ribbon cutting for J.H. and Sons Nov. 14.



Harrison Vicker at the West Des Moines Chamber of Commerce ribbon cutting for J.H. and Sons Nov. 14.



West Des Moines Chamber of Commerce hosted a ribbon cutting for Optimize Wellness and Aesthetics on Nov. 6.



Kaley Kruse and Landra McClellan at the West Des Moines Chamber of Commerce ribbon cutting for Optimize Wellness and Aesthetics on Nov. 6.



Madison Taiber, Brian Buehe and Scott Carpenter at the West Des Moines Chamber of Commerce ribbon cutting for Optimize Wellness and Aesthetics on Nov. 6.



Brent and Jasmin Stepanek at the West Des Moines Chamber of Commerce ribbon cutting for Optimize Wellness and Aesthetics on Nov. 6.



Chris Jones and LuAnne Gafford at the West Des Moines Chamber of Commerce ribbon cutting for Optimize Wellness and Aesthetics on Nov. 6.

OUT & ABOUT

RIBBON

cutting

West Des Moines Chamber of Commerce hosted a ribbon cutting for Desla Wealth Management Nov. 14.



Sean Lee and Aaron Burns



Mady Arndt and Ruth Ebke



Jared Galligan and Alex Scharansky



Kailey Beebe and Everett Mullican



Dennis Wright and Andrew Wright



Dean Khatib and Shadi Mubaidin



Brendon Shaw and Rob Reinard



Allison Barnes and Kayli Mernka



Maria Davis and Rachel Less

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