

Living

MAGAZIN

Handmade FOR THE holidays

Residents share the joy
of gifts from the heart.

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RECIPE

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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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Holiday Greetings

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Handmade FOR THE holidays

Residents share the joy
of gifts from the heart.

By Joe Baumgarten

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.

When Kathleen Riessen saw a Santa vest pattern in one of her mom's magazine, she joked about making it for her sisters. Years later, she actually did.

FEATURE

A stitch at a time

When the holiday season rolls in each year, many of us unwrap gifts that came from a store shelf. But, for Kathleen Riessen and her family, Christmas has been wrapped in yarn, fabric, memory and love. Their tradition of handmade holiday gifts stretches across generations — each stitch telling a story, each pattern carrying the legacy of the women who came before them.

Riessen grew up surrounded by creativity. Her mother, Marilyn Finnerty, came from a long line of what the family lovingly calls “handcrafters.” Crochet needles, quilt squares and holiday projects were not special events — they were simply part of everyday life. When the family traveled back to Marilyn’s home in Indiana for Christmas, they found some sort of craft waiting: homemade ornaments, needlepoint designs or quilts in progress.

“Handmade gifts always showed some thought — and that was a big thing at Christmas,” Riessen’s father, Pat Finnerty, says.

Over time, Riessen and her sisters inherited not just the skills but the spirit behind the tradition. After Marilyn passed away, her



This bunny is among Kathleen Riessen’s crocheted toys.

daughters gathered her pattern books — treasures passed down through generations. Hidden inside was one pattern that would spark one of the family’s best-loved Christmas stories: a crocheted Santa sweater vest.



Kathleen Riessen crocheted this adorable scarecrow outfit, complete with pumpkin and ear of corn.

Kathleen joked with her younger sister, Jessica Monu, “If I make this, will you wear it?” Jessica laughed — at the time, Riessen’s crochet skills were still developing — and agreed, assuming she would never see the finished



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Sisters Jennifer (Finnerty) Turnbull, Kathleen (Finnerty) Riessen and Jessica (Finnerty) Monu now have matching Santa vests thanks to Kathleen's crocheting.

product.

But, she underestimated her sister's determination.

Over three years, Riessen refined her crocheting abilities. When their father, Pat, was recovering in the hospital from surgery, she sat by his bedside quietly working stitch by stitch until she completed not one, but three, Santa vests — one for each sister and one for herself.

The reaction on Christmas morning was priceless.

Jessica opened the gift and froze, wide-eyed.

"Do you remember when you bet me I'd never make this?" Riessen asked.

She did — and the room burst into laughter. The vests have since become beloved holiday staples, even winning an ugly-sweater contest one year.

"They're classics now — we've worn them so many times," Riessen says.

The family's crafting tradition extends far beyond Riessen. Her sisters have taken up quilting. Her great-grandmother's, grandmother's and mother's handiwork still decorates Pat's home today in the form of a row of Christmas stockings hung by the chimney with care.

Handmade gifts, Riessen says, carry things store-bought items never can: Time. Care. Intention. A piece of the giver.

In Riessen's family, Christmas isn't just a day on the calendar. It's a reminder that the most meaningful gifts aren't just made by hand — they're made from the heart.

Tradition of wine

"Fruit of the vine and the work of human hands."

That is how Phil McGrath describes his yearly wine production, proudly bearing the "P & H Wines" label. Phil has been crafting his own wine for more than 40 years and often takes home a top three honor at the Iowa State Fair. His signature blend, "ConFron," features Iowa-grown Concord grapes mixed with Californian fontenac.



FEATURE

While McGrath and his wife, Juleen, definitely savor the fruits of their labor each year, they are generous enough to share it with others. McGrath gives it away. If he visits your home for a meal, you can bet he will greet you with one hand and offer you a bottle of P & H with the other.

“Wine is for celebrating and sharing,” he explains.

McGrath enjoys giving his wine as gifts throughout the year, but it takes on a special meaning when he gives it as Christmas gifts.

“When we first moved into this neighborhood, Juleen and I delivered a bottle to each home up and down the block as Christmas gifts,” he says.

McGrath says his neighbors appreciated the thoughtfulness of the gift. Sadly, his and Juleen’s limited mobility on icy December sidewalks eventually put an end to this tradition.

McGrath’s favorite recipients are his family, and he gifts more than a dozen bottles each holiday season. He especially enjoys giving one of his best bottles to his brother from Texas.

“He’s more of a beer drinker, but I’ve been slowly bringing him over to the wine side,” he chuckles.

Each year at this time, McGrath partners up with his good friend and fellow home-vinter, Gene Frankl, who is known for his cherry wine. Between the two of them, they donate multiple bottles to be auctioned off at the annual St. Pius X School gala, which raises funds for the school. They have done this at Christmas time for several years now. This is appreciated by the school because their wines bring top-dollar from their many friends in the parish who have come to appreciate and love their wine.



Gene Frankl and Phil McGrath enjoy giving wine for Christmas gifts.

“People enjoy hand-made gifts at Christmas time, no matter how small they might be,” McGrath says. ■

NEWS BRIEF

OFFICERS graduate from Iowa Law Enforcement Academy

Iowa Attorney General Brenna Bird congratulated Officer Mason Beckwith, Officer Benjamin Lavastida, Officer Manuel Miranda and Officer Jared Randall on their graduation from the Iowa Law Enforcement Academy in a ceremony held at Valley Church in West Des Moines on Friday, Aug. 22. The graduation ceremony was attended by family, friends and law enforcement officials from across the state.

Officers Beckwith, Lavastida, Miranda and Randall were part of the 322nd graduating class and completed the academy’s rigorous 16-week training program that consisted of coursework in policing communications, criminal law, physical fitness and emergency response. They also received training in patrol procedures, investigations and tactical and administrative skills. Attorney General Bird welcomed the graduates on stage as they were presented with their diplomas by ILEA Director Brady Carney.

Officer Jared Randall was recognized for achieving the 300-Point Club, a special club with higher fitness standards.

“I am so proud of our Iowa Law Enforcement Academy graduates for answering the call to serve,” said Attorney General Bird. “It is a challenging and demanding job, but it’s essential for the safety of our communities. Our state is grateful to them and their families for their selfless sacrifice. As Attorney General, I look forward to working with them in the line of duty and my office will always be here to offer unwavering support.”

Officers Beckwith, Lavastida, Miranda, and Randall will serve with the Urbandale Police Department. ■



Officer Benjamin Lavastida



Officer Jared Randall



Officer Manuel Miranda



Officer Mason Beckwith

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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OUT with 2025... in with 2026

As the year ends, many of us are reminded of how quickly time passes. Wrapping up 2025 offers a welcome chance to reset, refocus and prepare for a productive year ahead. Before officially welcoming 2026, it's important to pause and assess your financial picture. Addressing a few key planning items now can set the stage for a strong start to the new year.



Maximize your retirement contributions:

Year-end is an ideal time to evaluate your retirement savings strategy. If you participate in an employer-sponsored plan, confirm you are contributing enough to receive the full employer match. If you have already captured the match or don't have one available, consider increasing contributions to an IRA. Thanks to the SECURE Act, individuals may continue contributing to a traditional IRA beyond age 70½ if they have earned income, and contributions may be tax-deductible depending on income.

If you're required to take a Required Minimum Distribution (RMD), be sure it's completed before year-end. RMDs were waived in 2020 and 2021, but they are fully reinstated. Missing one can result in a substantial 25% penalty, making timely planning essential.

Consider a Roth conversion: A Roth IRA offers tax-free growth and flexibility in retirement. For those who don't qualify for direct Roth contributions, a "backdoor" Roth conversion — contributing to a traditional IRA and converting it — may be worth exploring. However, conversions increase taxable income for the year and aren't suitable for everyone. A financial advisor can help determine whether this strategy fits your overall goals and tax plan.

Review your FSA and HSA balances: Flexible Spending Accounts (FSAs) often follow a "use-it-or-lose-it" rule, so check your balance and use remaining funds on eligible expenses before year-end. Health Savings Accounts (HSAs) roll over annually and offer triple-tax advantages, making them strong long-term savings tools. This is a good time to review 2026 contribution plans and anticipate upcoming medical needs such as orthodontics, vision care, or scheduled procedures.

Update key estate planning documents: Recent years have encouraged many people to revisit their estate plans. Make sure your medical and financial powers of attorney are up to date and that those named still reflect your wishes. Review your Last Will and Testament as well. Beneficiary designations are important, but a will helps prevent gaps and ensures your intentions are carried out.

Reassess your financial goals: Revisit the goals you set at the start of 2025 and evaluate your progress. If adjustments are needed, your advisor can help refine your plan to reflect new priorities or changing circumstances.

Prepare for 2026: Lastly, review insurance coverage, benefits elections and any expected life events in 2026. Whether related to employment, family, housing or education, proactive planning brings clarity and confidence as you enter the new year.

From my family to yours, I wish you a blessed Christmas season and a prosperous New Year. ■

Information provided by Daniel Rundahl, Financial Advisor, Rundahl Financial Consultants, 8230 Hickman Road, Suite 300, Clive, 515-727-1701, drundahl@rundahlfinancial.com, www.rundahlfinancialconsultants.com.

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MEET Lauren Voss

Making positive impacts through music

Music is a universal language, and no one knows this better than Lauren Voss. Voss is in her third year as a music teacher at Karen Acres Elementary School, and, prior to that, she taught in the Waukee School District for 14 years.

"I moved to Karen Acres because Karen Acres is a year-round school, and I had always wanted to be a part of one of those."

Voss grew up in a musical family. She and her siblings took part in piano lessons, voice lessons and other arts while growing up.

"It seemed natural to go into a music-related career," she says. "Originally I thought I wanted to teach in high school, but, after student teaching, I realized that elementary was a better fit for me."

She received her music education degree from Simpson College.

One of the greatest challenges Voss encounters as a music teacher is helping students find their confidence.

"Sometimes it is a challenge to pull reluctant students into what we're doing, but it is such a joy to see them accomplish it and feel good about the music they are creating."

Voss enjoys getting to work with kids for six years as they grow from kindergarteners to fifth graders. "I get to know them a little better and get to watch them grow as both musicians and humans. It is magical to see that all along the way."

Voss shares that the concerts she and her students work on throughout the year are a lot of work to put together but, in the end, are rewarding.

"We work on each one about a quarter of the year," she explains. "Everyone has a common goal of creating music for the joy of others. I'm pumped for the upcoming concert in a couple of weeks and seeing it all come together. The students have worked so hard on it."

To expand her students' knowledge of music from around the world, Voss does what she calls Daily Listening. When students walk into the classroom, they come in to hear music from a different genre each day.

"It is fun to hear the conversations that come from the students about the music," she shares. "It is also neat to see the kids light up when they hear music from their home countries or in languages their families speak. Recently I played the K-pop genre and music from the K-pop Demon Hunters movie, which was fun for them."

Voss advises those who might be debating about becoming music teachers to consider both the reward of seeing students grow up musically and as human beings as well as the need for them to have positive role models.

"The arts seem a little less scary for kids, and they are essential to the well-being of all of us," Voss says. "Teaching the arts is also a little more flexible as opposed to a textbook-type classroom. Most students probably won't become music producers, but we are all music consumers, and teaching music is one way to make a positive impact in their lives and be a light to them in a world that seems increasingly uncertain and hard." ■



When students walk into Lauren Voss' classroom, they hear music from a different genre each day.

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HOME HEALTH

By Aaron Wheeler

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.

VETERANS salute correction

We sincerely apologize for the errors we made on the Veterans Salute feature in last month's Urbandale Living magazine. Following are the corrected salutes to Bill Dane and Phil McGrath.



Bill Dane

Rank: First Sergeant

Military branch: Iowa Army National Guard

Served: 1975-1999

How can Americans best honor veterans?

"When you know you are talking to a veteran, thank them."



Phil McGrath

Rank: First Lieutenant

Military branch: U.S. Army

Served: 1966-1969

How can Americans best honor veterans?

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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.

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.



URBANDALE Public Library news



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Monday – Thursday: 9 a.m. to 8:30 p.m.

Friday – Saturday: 9 a.m. to 6 p.m.

Sunday: noon to 6 p.m.

Check out the activities we have lined up in December for all ages, starting with a **Winter Wonderland craft drop-in** for ages 3-11 on Monday, Dec. 22 from 9 a.m. to 6:30 p.m. Create a book page Yeti, 3-D paper ski-slope scene and beaded snowflakes.

December’s **Tween/Teen DIY** will feature a **Gift Tag and Greeting Card Workshop** on Monday, Dec. 22 at 2 p.m. (ages 10-14) and 3:30 p.m. (ages 12-17). We’ll supply scrapbook paper, holiday stamps and ink, tags and twine, colored pencils, markers and more to add a personalized touch to your holiday gifts.

Join us for a super **Stuffie Sleepover Storytime** on Monday, Dec. 29 at 9:30 or 10:30 a.m. Enjoy a special storytime with stories, songs and games with your favorite stuffed friend. Bonus: Your stuffed animal can stay overnight at the library, and you can check out all the fun your stuffed friends had at the sleepover on our social media. Pick your friend up on Tuesday, Dec. 30 between 2 and 5 p.m. or on Wednesday, Dec. 31 between 11 a.m. and noon at the **Noon Year’s Eve Dance Party**.

NASA Solar System Ambassador Dan Hoy returns on Monday, Dec. 29 at 3 p.m. to teach us about asteroids, meteors, meteorites and craters. Participants can make their own crater to take home as well as see, touch and hold real rocks from space.

Family Escape Room: The Explorer is a chance for families to work as a team to reach the top of Mount Everest by solving puzzles and revealing a secret code sent by a Sherpa guide. Learn fun facts about Nepal and the Himalayan Mountains along the way. Choose from five sessions, starting at 2:30 p.m., 3 p.m., 3:30 p.m., 4 p.m. and 4:30 p.m. Sessions should take approximately 20 to 40 minutes, depending on ages and number of team members.

Help us close out 2025 at our **Noon Year’s Eve Dance Party** with crafts, dancing, bubbles, balloons and a ball drop on Wednesday, Dec. 31 at 11 a.m.

Volunteer Fair

Interested in meeting new people and supporting your community? Drop in between 4:30-6:30 p.m. on Monday, Jan. 5 to visit with local organizations about their volunteer opportunities. Visit with each vendor to be entered in a prize drawing.

Please visit our website and click on the calendar to view more details on events and to reserve your spot. ■

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RIESSEN has a heart for service

A leader, organizer and mentor

For some people, volunteering is a thing to do when time allows. For Urbandale resident Kathleen Riessen, service is simply woven into the rhythm of her life.

Whether she is supporting local students, strengthening community organizations, or helping guide the next generation of Scouts, Riessen's presence is felt across the city in big and small ways.

Her service journey began, as many do, through her kids. As her three boys became involved in different school and community programs, Riessen stepped forward — not only as a parent, but as a leader, organizer and mentor.

Today, she serves in a remarkable range of roles. She is the past president and current grant chair for Endow Urbandale, the city's community foundation committed to improving the quality of life for residents. She also sits on the City of Urbandale Economic Development Advisory Board, helping guide priorities that support local businesses and growth.

For years, Riessen has volunteered with Boy Scouts of America, currently serving on the executive board and executive council for Mid-Iowa Scouting America. All three of her boys have been active in



Ryan Mehalovich of Edward Jones presents the Neighbor Spotlight certificate to Kathleen Riessen.

scouting, with her two oldest on the cusp of earning their Eagle rank. What began as a parent helping gradually grew into years of leadership and service — with Riessen helping to shape an organization that has impacted countless Iowa families.

But her involvement does not end there. Riessen is also the vice president of the Dowling Catholic Band Boosters, a role that recently put her in charge of helping coordinate the band's upcoming performance trip.

Her enjoyment of mentoring young people shines especially bright in her role as the speech and debate coach for St. Francis of Assisi School, where her youngest child attends. For years before that, she served as the school's mock trial coach, helping students discover confidence, communication and critical thinking.

When asked which volunteer role is her favorite, Riessen does not choose just one. Instead, she talks about the students she gets to work with, the programs her kids enjoy and the community that has given her family so much.

"I enjoy being around all of the kids, especially the things that my kids are involved in. That's how I got involved in most of this."

She is also a local business owner, running Canoan Strategy, a business advisory company located in Urbandale. Her experience as a small-business owner is part of what drew her into service on the city's economic development board and why she first connected with Endow Urbandale years ago.

Her path through community service hasn't been about checking boxes; it has been about showing up for the people and organizations she believes in. Whether leading from the front or supporting quietly behind the scenes, Riessen models what it means to strengthen a community — not with grand gestures, but with steady, heartfelt commitment.

"It's really been driven by my interests and what my kids are involved in. I'm a very active parent," she says.

Urbandale is full of good neighbors, but Riessen stands out — not for the number of her roles, but for the joy and generosity she brings to each one. ■

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PRINCE of Peace

While traveling in another country, my wife and I saw heavily armed police and military personnel. Their presence was an admission of conflict and an attempt to correct it.

Peace is the absence of conflict and presence of lasting harmony grounded in God's presence. This precious but particularly elusive commodity is something mankind has struggled throughout history to experience consistently on several levels. Therefore, when the Prophet Isaiah announced a child would be born whose name would be "the Prince of Peace" (Isaiah 9:6) this news should catch our attention.

The angelic proclamation to the shepherds, "Glory to God in the highest and on earth, peace among men" announced the birth of "a Savior, who is Christ the Lord" (Luke 2:11-14). Jesus is the Prince of Peace of whom Isaiah spoke. He embodies peace and enables peace, which is why we celebrate Christmas.

The Prince of Peace enables us to experience peace in three realms.

Peace with God is only possible through personal faith in Jesus, the Prince of Peace (Romans 3:22). Christ came to earth to save us from the just wrath of a holy God (Romans 6:23). Unrighteous humans deserving condemnation are declared righteous when we trust that in Christ's death our guilt was placed upon Him, and His righteousness became our own (2 Corinthians 5:21). Therefore, having been declared righteous by faith, we have peace with God (Romans 5:1) and are reconciled to Him through the blood of the cross (Colossians 1:20).

The peace of God experienced in our daily lives is impossible apart from being at peace with God through faith in Christ. In the face of physical, spiritual, financial or relational headaches, heartaches and hardships, Christ followers rest in the promise and presence of internal peace. Jesus said, "Peace I leave with you; My peace I give to you; not as the world gives, do I give to you. Let not your heart be troubled, nor let it be fearful" (John 14:27).

Peace among men that endures requires that all parties be at peace with God, because peace experienced and expressed is a fruit of the Spirit who only indwells God's children (Romans 8:9-11). Permanent peace among men will only be fully realized in Christ's eternal kingdom. Presently, God's children under the Spirit's control submit to the command, "If possible, so far as it depends on you, be at peace with all men" (Romans 12:18).

This Christmas, I invite you to enter into peace with God, enjoy the peace of God, and express peace to men through personal faith in Jesus, the Prince of Peace. ■



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

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"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!

Parade of Trees

Through December
Edencrest at Timberline, 14001
Douglas Parkway, Urbandale

You are cordially invited to the second annual Parade of Trees at Edencrest at Timberline. The community will be transformed into a winter wonderland, filled with beautifully themed and decorated Christmas trees. Each tree is provided by families, organizations or local businesses, and many are dedicated to loved ones, uniquely designed to capture the joy, sparkle and spirit of the holidays.



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.



Urbandale Public Library Events

3520 86th St., Urbandale

Weekday Storytime Schedule: The regular Monday-Thursday story times are on break until Jan. 5. However, during these weeks, we will have a lot of fun special events for the whole family, so make sure to check the calendar carefully.

• **Celebrate the New Year! Scavenger Hunt:** Ongoing until Thursday, Jan. 4. Drop into the library and hunt down nine images hidden throughout the Youth Area. Don't forget to sign the champion's log after you've found them all.

• **Storytime Explorers:** Friday, Dec. 19, 10-11 a.m.

• **Baby Bounce:** Saturday, Dec. 20, 9-9:45 a.m.

• **Family Storytime:** Saturday, Dec. 20, 10:30-11 a.m.

• **Adult Recreational Chess:** Saturdays, Dec. 20 and 27, 1-4 p.m.



Uptown Ankeny Wonderlights

Through Wednesday, Dec. 31
Ankeny Market and Pavilion park,
715 W. First St.

During the holiday season, through Dec. 31, Uptown Ankeny, in partnership with the city of Ankeny, puts up more than 50 animated light displays in and around six blocks of S.W. Third Street and throughout the Ankeny Market and Pavilion park. This magical holiday light experience is free and open to the public and can be enjoyed on foot, by bicycle and by car each evening.

Ho-Ho-Ho-liday Luncheon

Saturday, Dec. 20, 10 a.m. to noon
Edencrest at Siena Hills,
455 S.W. Ankeny Road, Ankeny

You're invited to a festive luncheon with Santa and Mrs. Claus. Enjoy a photo op with our favorite jolly holiday duo, craft your perfect cup at the hot chocolate bar, and take part in cheerful seasonal activities. Cost is \$10 per person.

Urbandale Historical Society Programs

Urbandale Public Library,
3520 86th St., Urbandale

- Jan. 11, 2 p.m. Living History Farm and The Flynns by Elizabeth Keest Sedrel
- Feb. 8, 2 p.m. History of the Urbandale Golf and Country Club by Todd Carberry
- March 8, 2 p.m. Fraud and Courage with Urbandale's Terry Rich
- April 12, 2 p.m. The Story of Merle Hay Mall with Liz Holland

Holiday Horse-Drawn Rides

Dec. 20-23, 26-31, every half hour,
10 a.m. to 3:30 p.m.

Jester Park Equestrian Center,
11171 N.W. 103rd Court, Granger

Staff will hitch up their draft horse team to take your group for a 30-minute horse-drawn ride through Jester Park. If there's no snow, plan for a wagon on wheels instead of a sleigh!

Sleigh Rides require a minimum of 6 inches of packed snow as a proper base for the sleigh. A wagon will be used when there is no snow or not enough snow to pull a sleigh. Registration is required. Private holiday rides, which cost \$200, can hold a maximum of 12 guests. Small children who can sit on an adult's lap for the duration of the ride do not need to be included in the count. To register, follow the QR code.



Ankeny Gingerbread Lane

Through Wednesday, Dec. 31
S.E. Richland Court, Ankeny

Gingerbread Lane consists of 31 decorated houses on S.E. Richland Court, and the holiday tradition goes back more than 30 years. Richland homeowner Brooke McHose says the cul-de-sac members enjoy working together and giving back to the Ankeny community. Gingerbread Lane requests food donations for the Food Bank of Iowa. ■



URBANDALE COUNCIL RECAP

December 2, 2025 - Council Meeting

At the December 2 meeting, Mayor Andeweg began by proclaiming December 10 as Human Rights Day, and reaffirming the city's commitment to fairness, inclusion, and opportunity for all residents. The proclamation recognized the importance of protecting and advancing human rights at the local level, and celebrated the individuals and organizations in Urbandale who work to uphold these values. Later in the meeting, the Council approved an agreement for design plans of a new Urbandale Police Department Headquarters. The new facility, tentatively planned for the southwest corner of Douglas Avenue and 100th Street, is expected to be approximately 70,000 square feet and is anticipated to be completed in late 2028, pending a bond referendum in 2026.

November 18, 2025 - Council Meeting

The City Council meeting opened with several special recognitions, beginning with a celebration of Urbandale's own Gannon Buhr, who was honored for becoming the 2025 PDGA Pro World Champion. The Mayor then proclaimed November 29, 2025, as Small Business Saturday, underscoring the essential role locally owned businesses play in Urbandale's economy. Four new police officers — Benjamin Lavastida, Mason Beckwith, Manuel Miranda, and Jared Randall — were formally sworn in. Their oaths of office marked an important investment in public safety and continued implementation of the City's goals around quality of life.

The Mayor and City Council spent a large portion of the meeting discussing the redevelopment of 10841 Douglas Avenue (formerly known as the Econ Lodge), where the City approved moving forward with a Letter of Intent with Volker Development and authorized the application for rezoning of the City-owned property. This step continues ongoing work to encourage thoughtful redevelopment along the Douglas Avenue corridor—efforts that strongly align with both the Comprehensive Plan and the Downtown Master Plan's emphasis on revitalizing key corridors and supporting mixed-use reinvestment.

The Council also approved a \$750,000 purchase agreement for 7031 Douglas Avenue. This acquisition supports future redevelopment potential along Douglas Avenue and fits within the City's broader planning and revitalization goals for Urbandale's downtown area and the overall corridor.

Finally, the Council accepted the Walker Johnston Park Master Plan, reaffirming Urbandale's long-term commitment to park improvements, environmental stewardship, and expanded recreational opportunities.

November 3, 2025 - City Council Meeting

The Mayor and City Council met on Monday, November 3, and the meeting began with a proclamation recognizing National Native American and Alaska Native Heritage Month in Urbandale.

The City Council approved a site plan for a new gurdwara located at 11000 Douglas Avenue. A gurdwara is a Sikh place of worship and community center, meaning "the door that leads to the Guru" or "home of the Guru".

The Urbandale City Council approved an agreement with the City of Grimes to improve 142nd Street. Urbandale will rebuild 142nd Street from Meredith Drive to Waterford Road into a four-lane road with curbs, gutters, drainage, and some trail upgrades. Both cities will also resurface 142nd Street from Waterford Road to Meadow Drive and Meadow Drive from about a half-mile west of 156th Street to 142nd Street. The total project is expected to cost about \$9 million, with Urbandale's share at about \$6 million.

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

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

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WELLNESS

By Dr. Jody England

WHY choose wellness: food sensitivities

Many people experience food sensitivities that can make the holidays a frustrating time. Your goal should be to eat fresh-made foods that rot, mold and bruise. Nutritional biofeedback is a process that helps identify stressors like immune challenges, chemicals or metals that are stuck in the body and affect the digestive system. By strengthening the immune system, you give the body the potential to eliminate these stressors so nutritious foods do not bother you. Prior to nutritional biofeedback, I was unable to eat strawberries, kiwi, pineapple and walnuts without getting sores on my tongue. Another patient experienced diarrhea every time she ate cantaloupe. Now those foods do not bother me, and she can eat cantaloupe without worrying. ■



Information provided by Dr. Jody England, DC, Urbandale Chiropractic, 10437 Hickman Road, 515-278-4594, www.urbandalechiro.com.



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HEALTH

By Annette Smith

PROACTIVE strengthening lowers risk of falls

Icy sidewalks, snow-covered driveways and unpredictable winter conditions make the colder months one of the riskiest times of year for slips and falls. Even simple daily activities — walking to the mailbox, carrying groceries, getting in and out of the car — can become dangerous when surfaces are slick or visibility is low. Cold temperatures also naturally stiffen muscles and joints, reducing reaction time and making it harder for your body to catch itself when you lose balance.



Because of this, preparing your body before winter fully arrives is one of the most important steps you can take to stay safe. Building strength, improving balance and practicing stability now can significantly lower your risk of injury later. Targeted exercises help train your muscles to react quickly, support your joints and keep you steady on uneven surfaces.

If you've noticed that your balance feels off, or if you are unsure of your stability during day-to-day activities, this is the ideal time to address it — well before the ice and snow set in. Proactive strengthening not only helps prevent falls but can also improve confidence in your movements, reduce stiffness and keep you more active all season long. ■

Information provided by Annette Smith, Mountain Laurel Physical Therapy, 10888 Hickman Road, Suite 2B, Clive, Iowa, 50325, 515-520-8037, www.mountainlaurelpt.com.

FRIEND'S apples create a perfect cozy 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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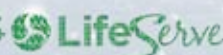
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GLONINGER continues climate-change research, creates podcast

Backlash leads to changes.



Climate activist and former Iowan David Thoreson, who gained international recognition for sailing through the Arctic's Northwest Passage in 2007, joined the Three Degrees Podcast.

Chris Gloninger believed he had secured an ideal position as the chief meteorologist for KCCI TV of Des Moines in 2021. The station encouraged him to engage with climate change topics related to local weather. Being closer to his wife's family in Wisconsin was an added benefit. However, a year later, this initially promising situation spiraled into turmoil as he faced threats to his personal safety.

Gloninger's passion for weather started young, sparked by the devastation of Hurricane Bob along the East Coast in 1991. He soon earned his meteorology degree in New Hampshire and built his career at various local TV stations in the Northeast before seeking a new challenge in Iowa.

"I felt I could make a difference in Iowa and break the mold of a traditional weather forecaster," Gloninger said.

He aimed to change perceptions of traditional weather forecasting while raising awareness of climate change. Gloninger found hope in Iowa's leadership in wind power and in a 2020 study showing that more than 70% of residents wanted to hear more about climate change. For many Iowans, severe temperature fluctuations, droughts and recurrent flooding



Former Iowa meteorologist Chris Gloninger helped create the Three Degrees Podcast, which addresses climate change issues.

highlighted the urgency of climate issues.

However, by mid-2022, due to pressure from some of viewers, station management encouraged Gloninger to limit his climate change commentary. Although the backlash was modest, one violent threat prompted the installation of security cameras at his home. The emotional toll drove him to seek counseling for post-traumatic stress disorder. The individual was eventually arrested, but, in the end, Gloninger decided to leave Iowa for the safety of his family and accept a position as a senior scientist focused on climate change at the Woods Hole Group in Massachusetts.

Despite relocating, Gloninger remains connected to Iowa. Shortly after leaving Iowa, he partnered with attorney and climate advocate Channing Dutton to create the Three Degrees Podcast (www.youtube.com/@ThreeDegreesPodcast), addressing crucial climate issues.

Climate activist and former Iowan David Thoreson joined the podcast, gaining international recognition for sailing through the Arctic's Northwest Passage in 2007... now accessible due to melting icebergs caused by climate change. Thoreson praised Gloninger's professionalism, stating, "I never thought he said anything controversial as a meteorologist."

Dutton echoed Thoreson's sentiment, describing Gloninger as "fearless" in his climate change reporting, always supported by scientific evidence. Gloninger champions the "7 to 1" model, in which every dollar invested in climate action yields a seven-fold return for businesses and government.

Despite the threats, Gloninger found strength in the overwhelming support from Iowans, receiving more than 300 encouraging emails after announcing his departure from local television. ■

Wayne Bruns is a resident of Urbandale and a volunteer with www.sustainableurbandale.org.

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The Urbandale Chamber ribbon cutting for Elevation Golf Club, Urbandale, was Nov. 14.



Meg Knapper and Matthew, Cassidy, Carter, Jaxson and Maddox Small at the Urbandale Chamber ribbon cutting for Elevation Golf Club Nov. 14.



Fletcher Barry, Randi Gustason, and Caroline Williams at the Urbandale Chamber ribbon cutting for Elevation Golf Club Nov. 14.



Jack Buscher, Pat Boddy and Rob Davis at the Urbandale Chamber ribbon cutting for Elevation Golf Club Nov. 14.



Jason Kane, Gina Boakye-Danquah and Eric Williams at the Urbandale Chamber ribbon cutting for Elevation Golf Club Nov. 14.



Polk County Supervisor Jill Altringer, Rep. Larry McBurney, Rep. Brian Lohse, Rep. Eddie Andrews, Rep. Heather Matson. Not pictured is Sen. Matt Blake, who was present via Zoom at the Joint Legislative Luncheon hosted by the Johnston, Ankeny, Grimes, Urbandale and Polk City chambers at the Hilton Garden Inn on Nov. 19.



Chamber representatives from Polk City, Urbandale, Grimes, Ankeny and Johnston. at the Joint Legislative Luncheon at the Hilton Garden Inn on Nov. 19.



Tiffany Menke and Jamie Anderson at the Joint Legislative Luncheon at the Hilton Garden Inn on Nov. 19.



Malora Montag and Colin Priest at the Joint Legislative Luncheon at the Hilton Garden Inn on Nov. 19.



Brian Lohse and Larry McBurney at the Joint Legislative Luncheon at the Hilton Garden Inn on Nov. 19.

OUT & ABOUT



Anne Triplett and Kelly Troxel at the Joint Legislative Luncheon at the Hilton Garden Inn on Nov. 19.



Brian Buehne and Joseph Johnson at the Joint Legislative Luncheon at the Hilton Garden Inn on Nov. 19.



Deb McGhee and Brian Moon at the Urbandale Chamber BASH Dec. 9 at Ducktail Lounge, Clive.



Hannah Schau and Lexi Zika at the Urbandale Chamber BASH Dec. 9 at Ducktail Lounge, Clive.



Amy Lane and Kurt Mumm at the Urbandale Chamber BASH Dec. 9 at Ducktail Lounge, Clive.



Ben Geiger and Jay Mathes at the Urbandale Chamber BASH Dec. 9 at Ducktail Lounge, Clive.



Rhonda Mock and Eric Meints at the Urbandale Chamber BASH Dec. 9 at Ducktail Lounge, Clive.



Joel Hartzler and Joleen Mahaffey at the Urbandale Chamber BASH Dec. 9 at Ducktail Lounge, Clive.



Lisa Hanrahan and Brian Speers at the Urbandale Chamber BASH Dec. 9 at Ducktail Lounge, Clive.



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