

WAUKEE

DECEMBER 2025

Living

Subscribers
MAGAZINE

Handmade FOR THE holidays

Residents share the joy
of gifts from the heart.

Apple cinnamon muffins
RECIPE

Meet Katheelyn Montes
EDUCATION

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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.

Sheri Peters of Waukee holds up a CD cardholder — an item she enjoys making. She and her mother also sew many items for Christmas gifts. Photo by Jackie Wilson

FEATURE



Veryl Kroon became an expert at creating custom wine racks.

Woodworking gifts

When Veryl Kroon retired 11 years ago, he looked for ways to keep busy. While in Florida, he drove a Disney shuttle bus but quit after the hours didn't match his schedule.

Throughout the years, however, his

woodworking hobby remained a constant, and he created a variety of items in his basement workshop. Recently, he has ramped up his hobby, and his cabinet-making business took off. While he and his wife were wintering in Florida, he made custom wine racks, which were popular with their neighbors.



Veryl Kroon displays a handmade waffle-design trivet. He has given away dozens as gifts. Photo by Jackie Wilson

"I go in and measure the area. Then I design the cabinet and build it to their specifications," he explains.

Additionally, when he spent time in Minnesota where family members live, he crafted more cabinets and other items, including custom wood pieces for his condo's



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landscape committee.

In addition to furniture, he makes small items that he often gives as gifts. One of his more popular gifts is a waffle-design wood trivet. Kroon designed a template so he can make cuts more easily and quickly.

"All of my neighbors have a waffle trivet," he admits.

Kroon often scours online trends to find popular projects, such as a remote-control caddy. His latest creation is a wooden cell phone amplifier. It works when a cell phone user wants to make the sound louder but lacks another device. Typically, folks place a cell phone in a cup. He designed this so it has a slot in both the bottom and top to better amplify the speaker.

He has made birdfeeders for grandkids, wooden Christmas trees and dozens of other gift items. At his home in Waukee, he built a roll top desk, indoor shutters, clocks and more.

"I just can't stop," he admits, grinning about his obsession.

His basement studio has its own furnace so the wood dust doesn't circulate in the air ducts. He has owned more than a half a dozen table

saws, plus dozens of hand and specialty tools for nearly any project imaginable.

"It's not just having the tools; it's maintaining them to make sure that I can do precise work," he explains.

He is a stickler with measuring to ensure a perfect cut. He is always careful around sharp tools and hasn't suffered any injuries.

"I've never gotten my finger close to the saw," he says. "I always push the wood piece with a stick."

Kroon has written a woodworking newsletter and shares tips with fellow woodworkers. He is constantly searching for methods to better his craft. The impulse to keep buying more tools is tempting.

"I don't have the latest tools. I have what I need right now," he says.

He says the best part of making wood items is creating and sketching out a plan.

"I love the process of a design. It should be both functional and aesthetically pleasing. It's energizing for me," he says. "Time flies when I start a project. I'll go downstairs at 10 in the morning and won't come up until 3 p.m. I don't even stop for lunch, I'm having so much

fun."

People appreciate his talent for making handmade items.

"They say, 'Wow,' and are amazed. They'll ask me, how do I do that," he says. "People like having something that someone has put their heart and soul into it."

Sewn and gift items

Sheri Peters' hobby of crafting and making items is something she has done since she was young. When a friend of hers was participating in a craft show, Peters displayed a few sewn items in her friend's booth. The pair teamed up and attended craft shows together selling their wares.

She kept at it for many years. When her mom purchased an embroidery machine, she joined in with Peters as well.

"It took off after we got an embroidery machine," she recalls.

The pair offer many sewn items, including embroidered towels, towel hanger holders and more. One of the most popular items are bowl koozies.

"These are great for putting in the

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microwave and heating up food so the handles aren't hot," she explains.

Another item she came up with is a card holder made out of old CDs. Playing cards are put into the slots, making it easier to hold multiple cards.

They also make cornhole bags for the popular bag games. However, their bags are filled with rice.

"We figured out mice will eat through the corn hole bags, especially if they are kept outside or in the garage," she explains.

Peters looks at trends and makes things she would like as a gifts. They also make personalized embroidered items and towels with various dog breeds on them.

"People buy them because it looks like their dog, or they give a gift to their friends who have dogs."

Over the summer, the mother-daughter duo attended the weekly Ankeny Farmers Market. They show their wares at other holiday markets and seasonal craft shows, too.

"People really like handmade items. It's a lot more personal than buying things at the store," she says.

She likes making crafts, as it occupies her time.

"It's also bonding time with my mom," she reflects. "It's not to make money. But, it's a great way to meet people and have some fun."

She likes when people choose items that will be given as gifts.

"I like to see people's faces when they find just the right gift for someone, and I've helped them out," she says.

Waukee Library offers crafting programs

Some people might be thinking about making their own crafts. However, what if, after spending money on supplies, they find they don't enjoy it?

A good way to dip one's toes into creating handmade items is to take a class. The Waukee Public Library is just the spot to spend an afternoon cutting, glueing and creating.

The Waukee Public Library offers numerous hands-on programs for all ages, and most classes are free. Katherine White, Waukee Public Library's digital marketing specialist, says the crafting programs and Maker Packs are

popular with families.


"Our adult crafting programs draw strong interest," she says. "Crafty Saturdays, in particular, attract many families and a good number of seniors each month."

Maker Packs are take-home kits, which include most of the supplies needed for a fun, creative project. They are available for elementary students, teens and adults who pre-register. Pickup is the first week of each month.

Starting in January 2026, upcoming crafts include Early Out Bricks and Beads, where children can build with the Library's LEGO collection or make a Perler bead design. Other projects include marbled hearts and tweens assembling football mini bags. Adults can make incense clay art and moss art. Crafty Saturdays is for all ages, where everyone starts with the same materials but often ends up with unique creations.

Beyond the books, digital guides and in-person programs, the library also provides access to Creativebug, a free digital resource available 24/7 with a library card. Creativebug offers more than 1,000 award-winning video classes taught by expert artists and designers.

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Library patrons of all ages take advantage of crafting sessions at the Waukee Public Library. Photos submitted by the Waukee Library

Library card holders can learn sewing, knitting, paper crafting, jewelry making, painting and more, plus explore projects for home décor, holidays, cooking and family-friendly activities.

White says crafting can often be expensive.

“People really appreciate the chance to be creative at no cost. Providing a free space to make something unique and spend time together means a lot,” she reflects. “Our

community is remarkably talented and imaginative. It’s inspiring to watch patrons of all ages bring their ideas to life during these programs.”

The free creative programs allow community members to explore their artistic interests, express themselves and form meaningful connections without financial barriers.

“Libraries are fundamentally about

providing access to knowledge, resources and offering a welcoming space,” White explains. “Providing various opportunities allows us to serve our community in a meaningful way.”

Patrons don’t need a library card to participate, yet folks are encouraged to take advantage of the library’s vast resources. Pre-registration is required for most programs. For more information, visit www.waukeepubliclibrary.org. ■

RECIPE

By Jolene Goodman

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.

PLAN for the future



The year 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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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 confidence

Swartwood is shaping youth through dance.

Tammra Swartwood has made a real impact on Waukee — and the entire Des Moines metro.

As the founder of DSM Breakerz, a local nonprofit breakdance and hip hop dance company, Swartwood has given youth from various backgrounds a way to express themselves.

“I have a calling to give youth a platform to build confidence and provide a safe space to learn different dance styles,” she says. “I personally grew up dancing, and now I’m helping grow the skills of the next generation.”

Swartwood thrives on teaching energetic, creative and expressive dance styles to youth in the community. She often travels with her students to regional and national competitions and regularly brings in expert breakdancers to expose them to a wide range of learning experiences and opportunities. Creating a supportive environment where compassion, individuality and new ideas can flourish is what drives her to keep expanding DSM Breakerz.

One recent moment she is especially proud of is hosting a new dance competition, Midwest Mayhem, held this summer at Ballet Des Moines.



Travis Gaule with Trust Bridge Wealth Advisors presents Tammra Swartwood with the Neighbor Spotlight certificate.

The event drew dancers from across the country — including Wisconsin, Colorado, Missouri, Nevada, Illinois and Minnesota — as well as Mexico.

Swartwood is also proud of DSM Breakerz’ extensive community involvement at festivals ranging from CelebreAsian to the Dew Tour, Halloween on the Hill, Ingersoll Live, the Valley Junction Farmers Market, Illumifest and many others.

In addition to her work with DSM Breakerz, Swartwood serves on the development committee for the Salvation Army and is an ambassador for CultureAll, an organization that connects Iowans of all ages with interactive programs meant to broaden their understanding and appreciation of different cultures, religions, beliefs and preferences.

Ultimately, Swartwood hopes her efforts inspire even more people to give back and uplift the young people in their lives. She encourages others to get involved wherever they can.

“The opportunities to get involved with programs is a way to continue to grow, explore new ways and make the memories,” she says. ■

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A new year is the perfect time to set fresh goals and explore new possibilities, and the Waukee Public Library is here to help you make them a reality. Whether you want to grow your skills, pursue a new career, learn a language, spark your creativity, or support your children's literacy, our digital resources can guide you every step of the way.

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Waukee Public Library

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Friday, 9 a.m. to 5:30 p.m.; Saturday, 9 a.m. to 4 p.m.; Sunday, closed

Upcoming closures

- Sunday, Dec. 28
- Wednesday, Dec. 31, closed at 5 p.m.
- Thursday, Jan. 1

Helping children build strong literacy skills is easier than ever with our engaging online resources. Bookflix and TumbleBooks offer interactive stories, videos and learning activities that make reading fun and educational.

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Start the year with confidence, creativity and curiosity. Visit the Waukee Public Library and discover the resources that can help you achieve your goals in 2026.

Winter Bingo Challenge is running through Jan. 31. Have you joined the fun yet? This winter, turn chilly days into exciting adventures with the Library's Winter Bingo Challenge. The program invites kids, teens and adults to complete a variety of activities from reading and creative projects to library adventures while earning prizes along the way. Each age group has its own grand prize so the whole family can participate.

Register online at waukeepubliclibrary.org/winter or stop by the library to pick up your bingo card. Make this winter your most adventurous reading season yet.

Learn more about the library and sign up for a card at waukeepubliclibrary.org or contact them at askme@waukee.org or 515-978-7944. ■

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On the Street

Have a plan for an alternative parking place off public streets during snowstorms. When snow is in the forecast for Waukee, the Public Works Department may declare a Snow Emergency Parking Ban. Parking is not allowed on public streets when the ban is in effect, so plows can effectively and safely clear the streets. Leaving your car in the street can result in a \$25 fine and/or your vehicle being towed.

At Home

Property owners are responsible for clearing snow and ice from all sidewalks adjacent to private property within 24 hours after a snowfall to keep them safe for people to use. Be sure to keep the snow on your property. It is unlawful to place, throw or push snow onto City streets from private property. Pushing extra snow onto the road can make roads unsafe and more difficult to travel.

If you have a fire hydrant near your home, please dig out 3 feet around the hydrant down to the ground and out to the street to keep it accessible to emergency personnel. Fires can still happen in the winter, and every minute counts when firefighters are working to save lives and homes.

Keep garbage and recycling bins in your driveway. Do not put them in the street.

Stay Informed

Get emergency alerts via Alert Iowa and the Smart 911 app. Go to Waukee.org/Connect for the link to sign up for the types of notifications you want. You can also follow the City of Waukee on Facebook or Nextdoor to stay updated on snow emergency parking bans.

Heat Your Home Safely

If you smell gas, which has a rotten egg odor, call the MidAmerican Energy emergency number at 800-595-5325. If the smell is overpowering, leave the house right away and call 911. Early stages of carbon monoxide (CO) poisoning can include dizziness, flu-like symptoms, fatigue and severe headache. If you suspect CO poisoning or a detector alarm sounds, leave the house immediately. Seek medical attention if you feel ill. Installing carbon monoxide (CO) detectors in your home can help provide early warning of a leak.

Dates to Know

City Offices Closed

December 24-25 and January 1
Trash collection delays
Waukee.org/GarbageandRecycling

Curbside Christmas Tree Collection Days

January 5 and 12
Live trees only; no artificial trees
Waukee.org/YardWaste

Regular City Council Meetings

January 5 and 19 at 5:30 p.m.
Waukee City Hall and Zoom
Waukee.org/CityCouncil



Holiday Closures & Trash Pick-up

City of Waukee offices will be closed December 24, December 25 and January 1. Waukee Public Library will be closed Sunday, December 21; Wednesday, December 24; Thursday, December 25; Sunday, December 28; and Thursday, January 1.

There will be no garbage or recycling pick-up on December 25 or January 1. If your regular pick-up day is Thursday or Friday, it will be delayed by one day those weeks.

Curbside Christmas Tree Pick-up

Collection days for real Christmas trees are January 5 and January 12, 2026, for City of Waukee/ASI garbage customers. Artificial trees will not be picked up.

Clear off all decorations, including lights and tinsel, before putting your tree on the curb. Do not put the tree in a bag. You may put any remaining yard waste out with your tree.



Save the Date for Waukee FamilyFest!

Waukee Parks & Recreation will hold the annual FamilyFest celebration on Saturday, January 17 from 9 a.m. to 12 p.m. (noon) at Lutheran Church of Hope-Waukee, 305 NE Dartmoor Drive. This free, family event features inflatables, snacks and games supplied by local Waukee businesses and organizations. Find information on exhibiting or attending at Waukee.org/FamilyFest.



Spring & Summer Jobs

The City of Waukee will have more than 100 job openings for seasonal roles with Sugar Creek Golf Course, Triumph Park, Parks & Recreation and Public Works. Opportunities are available for ages 14 and up, varied hours and \$12-22 per hour. Create an account and set your alerts now at Waukee.org/Jobs to get notified when these roles open January 2.



Recycling Do's & Don'ts for the Holidays

Putting the wrong items in your recycling bin can cause the entire bin to be discarded or cause damage in the recycling center. Not all items with a recycle symbol on them are able to be recycled here, so follow the Recycling Guide at MWAtoday.com. Here are a few tips for the holidays:



Put in the recycle bin:

- Plain cardboard boxes (flattened)
- Plain paper gift wrap, cards and envelopes (no foil, glitter, etc.)
- Glass jars and aluminum/tin cans (clean)
- Heavier plastic containers, such as juice containers or yogurt cups (clean)

Put in the trash:

- Disposable plates, cups, straws and silverware (paper, plastic or bamboo)
- Aluminum foil or pans
- Any food containers that have food residue on them (pizza boxes, catering containers, etc.)
- Plastic berry/fruit containers
- Takeout coffee cups - even the paper ones
- Styrofoam packaging or containers
- Plastic wrap or packaging material that isn't plain paper
- Tissue paper, gift bags and fancy wrapping paper or cards (foil, glitter, etc.)

Reminders

- Take all the packaging out of your box, including Styrofoam from electronic or appliance boxes.
- Never put plastic bags in your recycling bin. They can clog machinery at the recycling center. Instead, recycle clean plastic bags in designated bins at grocery or big box stores.
- Before throwing out a battery, holiday lights or electronics, check the Recycling Guide at MWAtoday.com.

Snacks & Facts: Picking Priorities in the City Budget

January 2, 11:30 a.m.-12:30 p.m.
Waukee Public Library
No registration needed; FREE

AI and the Human Future

January 13, 6-7 p.m.
Waukee Public Library
Register at WaukeePublicLibrary.org/Events

Waukee Area Seniors & Police

Waukee Public Safety (NW 20th Street)
No registration needed; free
Waukee.org/WASP

MEET Katheelyn Montes

A deep love and respect for all languages

The daughter of Mexican immigrants, Katheelyn Montes saw firsthand how language connects people and opens doors.

"Spanish was not just a way to communicate but also a beautiful expression of culture, identity and pride. That experience inspired me to become a Spanish teacher. I've always had a deep love and respect for all languages and believe that our linguistic and cultural differences are what make the world so beautiful and diverse," Montes says.

After graduating from high school in Mason City, Montes attended the University of Iowa where she earned her degree in Spanish and education. Montes then began her teaching career with the Waukee Community School District after graduating college. Now, she has entered her third year with the district where she currently teaches Spanish at Waukee Northwest High School.

"What I love most about working in the Waukee Community School District is how many clubs and organizations there are for students to get involved in. It's wonderful to see so many opportunities for students to explore their interests and strengthen their sense of belonging. I also appreciate how beautiful and welcoming our schools are," Montes says.

Montes says she enjoys working with students at the high school level because they are at an important time in their lives where they are really starting to think about who they want to be. She enjoys seeing her students' growth, whether that happens within a single semester or over the course of a few years.

Last year, Montes' students started a Día de los Muertos ofrenda project. For this project, the Latino Student Union, Los Latinos Unidos, built an altar in one of the display cases at Northwest. In addition, Montes' Spanish 1 students created their own ofrendas to honor loved ones no longer with them.

"It was a powerful way for students to learn about the traditions behind Día de los Muertos while also reflecting on their own families and cultures. The project brought a lot of meaning and connection to our classroom and school community," Montes says.

This year, Montes is looking forward to once again doing the Día de los Muertos ofrenda. She is also planning a trip to Peru for this upcoming June. Last year, Montes had the opportunity to take students abroad for the first time to Costa Rica and Panama. She is looking forward to offering similar experiences going forward along with helping students learn and grow in ways that go beyond the classroom.

"Teaching is incredibly rewarding for me, especially when I see students acquiring the language and starting to truly appreciate it for what it is. Watching them become more interested in the culture, wanting to celebrate it, and learning more about it brings me so much joy," Montes says. ■



Katheelyn Montes teaches Spanish at Northwest High School and incorporates lessons on the traditions behind Día de los Muertos.

FIRE & ICE

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fire-and-ice.dmcityview.com



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 Waukeez, 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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INSURANCE

By Chase VanWerden

THE VALUE of having a local insurance agent

We've all seen the persuasive insurance ads promising the perfect low-cost, hassle-free policy in 7.5 to 15 minutes. And while quick online options may have their place, it is worth considering what you might sacrifice for that convenience. Before locking yourself into a policy you found online or over the phone, it is important to understand the real advantages of working with a trusted local agent.



The most critical moment in insurance is not when you buy your policy — it is when you need to use it.

Accidents and emergencies never happen at a convenient time, and they often come with stress and uncertainty. In those moments, having an agent you know and trust can make all the difference. Instead of searching for a customer service number, repeating your story to multiple representatives or navigating an automated phone tree, you can call someone right here in the community — someone who recognizes your name, understands your situation, and will advocate for you during the claims process. That personal connection provides peace of mind that no online platform can match.

An agent's value also shows up at the time you purchase your policy. The outcome of any future claim is determined by the coverage you choose today. Many people buying insurance on their own unknowingly select limits that are too low or miss important coverage altogether. It is not uncommon for someone to choose the cheapest option, only to learn later that state-minimum liability limits won't fully protect their assets or that their health plan doesn't include local providers. A knowledgeable agent helps you avoid these pitfalls by explaining options, tailoring coverage to your needs and ensuring you're not surprised when a claim occurs. And if you have already purchased a policy online, most agents are happy to review it at no cost.

Price is another area where an agent can save you money long-term.

Bundling policies — such as home and auto — often provides meaningful discounts that outweigh any small savings from purchasing a single policy directly. You might save \$50 by handling your auto insurance online, but you could easily pay \$50 more on your homeowner's premium by not keeping your policies together. The "savings" advertised in quick quotes rarely tell the whole story.

Ads for direct-to-consumer insurance are entertaining, memorable and, often, quite funny. But insurance is ultimately about protecting our families, our assets and our financial future. Those decisions deserve more than a few minutes and a catchy slogan. Partnering with a local agent ensures you have the right coverage, the right support, and someone in your corner when it matters most. ■

Information provided by Chase VanWerden, IFG Insurance, 520 Walnut St., Waukee, 515-987-9598. Credit: Auto-Owners Blog



Science is fun.
until it gets messy,
then it is awesome.

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BARRETT'S 'cozy mysteries' entertain

Waukee writer has published 31 books.

When a retiree's husband is killed, four women who play Mahjongg together play detective to find out who the killer is.

A murder? In Waukee? Thankfully, no. But the murder took place in one of Waukee resident Barbara Barrett's books.

Barrett (whose real name is Barbara Kroon), is a self-published author who has written and published 31 books. Most of the books are romance and mystery books. Her mystery books are "cozy mysteries."

"I don't love all the blood and gore. It's a whodunit and a suspense story," she explains.

Barrett has written several series of books. Her latest is the Mahjongg mysteries, where a group of "silver sleuths" from a retirement community play the game Mahjongg and solve mysteries together. The book names in her Mahjongg series are based on various game pieces.

She created the series, loosely based on her time spent after retirement in both Minnesota and Florida. She is also a big fan of Mahjongg, which she plays twice a week.

Barrett has enjoyed writing since she was in fourth grade, when a teacher praised her writing skills. Her mom worked for a newspaper in Burlington and Barrett was a "Teen Talk" reporter. She chose the pen name Barrett after the street she used to live on.

As she worked and raised kids, she pondered her next life goal. She began writing romance novels in her late 30s, while still working. She published her first book in 2012.

She admires Agatha Christie and Ellery Queen books.

"I thought, someday, I'll go back and write that style," she recalls.

She watches British detective shows, along with the "Golden Girls," "Murder She Wrote," soap operas and other shows. She's gained inspiration from various television characters.

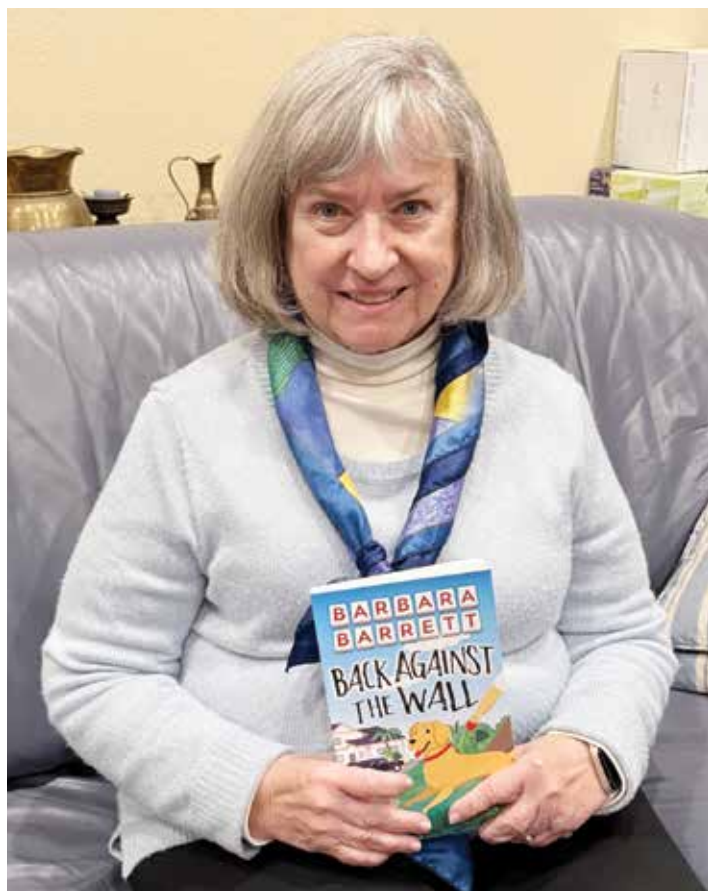
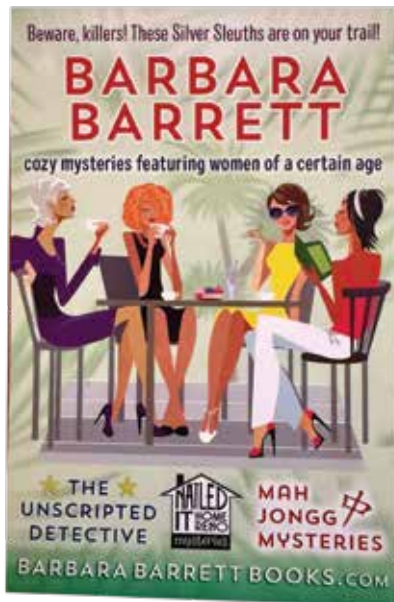
"I'm a cultural junkie. I watch TV to get culture. I like having a TV on when I'm writing. Silence bothers me," she reflects.

Barrett employs an editor, designer and proofreader. She also belongs to the Sisters in Crime group in both Iowa and Florida (an organization that supports women mystery writers). She attends writers conferences to gain inspiration and meet her fans.

"At one conference, a clinical pathologist spoke about poisons and how to incorporate it into my writing," she explains.

Her husband, Veryl, who is an expert in both woodworking and home remodeling, assists with various details and stories in her "Nailed It — Home Reno Mysteries."

She says writing and self-publishing books is both rewarding and



Barbara Barrett is the author of the "Mahjongg Mysteries" series and other books.

fulfilling.

"I like that it's an escape, and I can use my imagination to express myself," she explains. "I can explore whatever I want through my writing."

To learn more or to obtain a first free series of one of her books, visit www.barbarabarrettbooks.com. ■



Settle in before the Snowfall!

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SENIOR

By Jay Heaton

THE IMPORTANCE of regular checkups

As the seasons change, it is a great time to focus on what matters most: your health and well-being. Regular checkups with your healthcare provider are one of the best ways to stay healthy, active and confident throughout the year.

Routine visits can help detect potential health concerns early, often before symptoms appear. Early detection means more treatment options, quicker recovery and greater peace of mind. These visits also allow your doctor to monitor important factors such as blood pressure, cholesterol and bone health, helping you make small adjustments that keep you feeling your best.

Regular checkups aren't just about prevention; they're also a chance to discuss any changes you've noticed, ask questions and get personalized guidance. Staying proactive supports your independence, mobility and overall quality of life. Don't forget about dental cleanings, eye exams and other recommended screenings. They all play a key role in maintaining your overall wellness.

By making your health a priority today, you're investing in more energy, confidence and enjoyment for the months ahead. Do not hesitate to schedule that checkup, encourage a friend to do the same, and take an active step toward a healthier tomorrow. ■

Information provided by Jay Heaton, leasing counselor, Attivo Trail Waukee, 835 N.E. Boston Parkway, Waukee, www.attivotrail.com.



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WELLNESS

By Ashley Powell

SLEEP better, live better

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

Low doses of THC can help regulate the sleep-wake cycle, particularly for those struggling with insomnia or anxiety. THC enhances REM sleep, the restorative phase, and may promote deeper sleep with fewer awakenings. Additionally, functional mushrooms like Reishi help balance cortisol levels and calm the nervous system, encouraging natural, restful sleep.

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

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

Visit your locally owned CBD store to discover the best natural sleep aids for you. Certified hemp consultants are available to guide you to products that support peaceful nights and energized mornings. ■

Information provided by Ashley Powell, CBD American Shaman, 800 S. 50th St., No. 106, West Des Moines, 515-380-5251, and 3418 Eighth St. S.W., No. 3, Altoona, 515-967-4036. Sources: Shannon, S., Lewis, N., Lee, H., & Hughes, S. (2019). "Cannabidiol in Anxiety and Sleep: A Large Case Series." The Permanente Journal. Wasser, S. P. (2017). "Medicinal Mushrooms in Human Clinical Studies." International Journal of Medicinal Mushrooms.



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.

PLAN AHEAD FOR PEACE of MIND

Plan & Protect before the need arises.

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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., Waukee, 515-304-2324, www.4everyoungantiaging.com

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INVESTMENT

By Daniel Rundahl

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.



NEW! * NEW! * NEW! * NEW!



THE HOTTEST HOLIDAY ITEMS *for 2025*

NEW FOR 2025, this Digital Holiday Gift Guide is packed full of the hottest gifts and services offered by your **local small businesses!**
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www.iowalivingmagazines.com/holiday-gift-guide-2025

Be sure to check for cancellations.

Coming up in the Waukee Living magazine:

"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!



FamilyFest 2026

Saturday, Jan. 17, 9 a.m. to noon
Lutheran Church of Hope-Waukee,
305 N.E. Dartmoor Drive

Join Waukee Parks & Recreation for the annual FamilyFest. This family-friendly event will help kids burn off some winter energy. Check out Waukee area businesses, play games and jump on inflatables. Everything is free.



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.



Kindergarten Signing Day

Saturday, Jan. 10, 9-11 a.m.
Maple Grove Elementary,
1455 98th St., West Des Moines

Waukee Community School District is hosting its first-ever Kindergarten Signing Day on Saturday, Jan. 10, from 9-11 a.m., at Maple Grove Elementary. This free event is for all families considering transitional kindergarten or kindergarten in 2026-27 at Waukee CSD, no matter which school they will attend in the district. Students can enjoy fun activities like bounce houses and face painting, meet the high school mascots, participate in a "signing" ceremony and more. While kids play, their adults can ask questions and enroll in transitional kindergarten/kindergarten with in-person support from the enrollment team. The goal is to make the transition to kindergarten feel fun and reassuring — whether Waukee CSD is already your choice or you're simply exploring what's right for your child.

Shake Rattle and Roll 50s Party

Friday, Jan. 16, 3 p.m.
Edencrest at Kettlestone,
805 S.E. Tallgrass Lane, Waukee

Enjoy a 50s style party with live music, nostalgic snack favorites, delicious shakes and great company.

New Year's Eve Pops: Cirque

Dec. 31, 8 p.m.
Des Moines Civic Center,
221 Walnut St.
www.dmsymphony.org

Ring in the New Year among the stars. The Des Moines Symphony and world-renowned Cirque performers from Troupe Vertigo take you on a cosmic journey of music and motion, blending breathtaking aerial feats with space-inspired symphonic masterpieces for an unforgettable night of celebration. Space-themed music from "Star Wars," "Harry Potter," "The Planets" and more comes to life with breathtaking choreography. Experience the thrill, the artistry and the unexpected — all in one unforgettable evening.

Library programs and events

Waukee Public Library, 950 Warrior Lane, Waukee

Most events require advanced registration and can be viewed at waukee.librarycalendar.com/events.

• **Art Gallery Exhibit: "Sunflower Children's Art Show"** by Tingting Beck from Jan. 2 – Feb. 28.

• **Instrument Petting Zoo**, Friday, Jan. 16, 10 a.m. and 11 a.m. Get ready for this fun and interactive introduction to stringed instruments from the Des Moines Symphony Academy. Children will learn about different parts of the violin and cello and different instrument sounds. After a short presentation, children will have a chance to hold an instrument. The 10 a.m. session is for children in preschool through second grade, and the 11 a.m. session is for children in third grade and older. Registration is required.

• **Tweens Craft**, Friday, Jan. 23, 3:30 p.m. Middle-grade students are invited to discover a different fun craft project each month. Get game-day ready by creating your own football-themed desktop mini beanbags. Tweens will decorate a small mini beanbag set with fun and creative designs for your own game. For students in grades 4-6. Registration is required.

• **Snacks & Facts: Picking Priorities in the City Budget**, Friday, Jan. 2, 11:30 a.m. How would you spend city funds?

City Administrator Brad Deets will share where the city gets funding, and you can try allocating a budget based on your understanding of priorities and needs for Waukee. Then he will show you how the current budget is divided to cover the many services and programs the city delivers for our community and talk about some important projects and priorities for the coming years. Come ready to learn, and we will provide the snacks. Stick around afterward for Waukee Parks & Recreation's bingo at 1 p.m. for \$1 per play. For adults ages 18 and older. Registration is not required.

• **Cookies and CultureALL**, Sunday, Jan. 18, 2 p.m. Bring your friends and family and join us to listen and learn about world cultures. A different cultural ambassador will present each month. Cookies will be served. This month learn about games of India presented by Mamta Israni. All ages welcome. Registration is requested. ■

HOLIDAY Happy Hour

4Ever Young hosted Holiday
Happy Hour on Dec. 4.



Shanana Schweers, Molly Boatwright and Trisha McClure



Jordana Sanders and Ryan Honkomp



Adam Barnes



Dr. Brooke Johnson, Amy Anderson-Vali and
Viktor Vali



Bailey Gaugert and Lexi Faith



Lance and Liz Farrell



Chrissy and Brett Draper and Sandy Phillips



Jill Comes and Jason Welch



Kelly Casey and Sherry Johnson-Murray



Don Frazer and Terry Snyder



Amanda Hancock

RIBBON Cutting

Waukee Chamber of Commerce hosted a ribbon cutting for Fox Ship on Nov. 13.



Dan and Tiffany Wilson-Lillard



Steve Rogers and Rob Grove



Wendy Marsh and Lynn Harder



Jamie Thompson and Michele Spencer



Rob Grove, Craig Butterfield and Happy Gill



Steve Rogers and Rhett Oselette



Reese Lillard and Mona Miller



Jamie Thompson, Michele Spencer, Micheal Bartos, Wendy Marsh and Linda Harder



Rob Grove, Melissa Stimple and Brad Deets



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IN MEMORY OF TAMMY HOWE.



Merry Christmas to All!

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