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JANUARY 2026

Living

MAGAZINE

Big game, **BIG PARTY**

Capping off the football season
with a watch party to remember

Meet Molly Buck
EDUCATION

The year reviewed
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A SUPER Sunday

What will you be doing on Sunday, Feb. 8? If you are like 127.7 million other people, you will be watching the Super Bowl on TV. That's a lot of people, many of whom don't know the difference between a touch-down and a home run. And, they don't care. Why? Because the Super Bowl is about much more than football. In fact, for many, it has become an entire Sunday tradition.

Some viewers don't catch a single football play, as they are watching only to be entertained by the advertisements. In most any other TV viewing situation, those watching TV will turn channels, lower the volume or run to the bathroom or to the refrigerator during breaks. But not during the Super Bowl. This viewing audience tunes in to the ads, and companies ante up \$8 million or more for just 30 seconds of promotion to reach them.

Yes, the Super Bowl is one of the most-watched television events in the United States. The record was set last year with the aforementioned 127.7 million, but the highest-rated Super Bowl remains Super Bowl XVI in 1982 with a 49.1 household rating. That means 49.1% of TV-owning households were tuned into the Super Bowl during its broadcast. Viewership of the Super Bowl has remained stable over the years, even as ratings for other events have declined.

My parents were in the half who didn't tune in to the Super Bowl. Football simply wasn't their thing. When I was in college, I began watching the games more seriously. And, when I made my way into the working world as a young man, I got into the Super Bowl scene even more. The food. The festivities. The fun. Oh, and the football, too.

The Super Bowl parties were aplenty, and my friends and I did our best to attend many, making Mondays a challenge. The problem continues today. "Super Sick Monday" is a real thing, as an estimated 22.6 million U.S. employees are expected to miss work due to post-game fatigue, hangovers, and the cultural significance of the event. Some have even suggested that the Monday following the Super Bowl should become a national holiday, possibly even moving Election Day to that date to help encourage more people to get to the polls. It is an interesting idea, although I am not sure it would help with voter turnout, especially for those mourning after their team lost.

I am now more comfortable lounging in my living room and watching the game with family or a few friends. But don't let me drag you down. Check out this month's cover story to see how others are celebrating Super Bowl Sunday — and be sure to get to work on Monday. ■

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Big game, **BIG PARTY**

Capping off the football season
with a watch party to remember

By Ashley Rullestad

It's time for the big game, and that's the perfect reason to gather with your fellow fans around the big screen to see which team finishes the year with a championship ring. And you won't be alone. Record-breaking viewership has been reported the last two years, with 127.7 million U.S. viewers last year, according to ESPN.

Nikki Mulbrook and her boyfriend, Conor, at a Vikings game.

Football fan for life

Kellee Briggs was not a football fan until she watched an Iowa-Michigan game in high school.

"I grew up in a family of all girls, and sports were never a big thing in our household. I sat down to watch an Iowa game since that is who everyone I knew cheered for. I ended up falling in love with Michigan that game instead."

Her husband, Nick, grew up an ISU fan and went to school there as well. When they started dating, they both adopted each other's teams. As a couple, they have enjoyed traveling to games. In their early married days, the pair drove to Michigan to watch a game on Saturday and came back through Chicago to hit Nick's favorite NFL team, the Bears. It was the ultimate football weekend.

In fact, Nick asked Kellee to marry him during an ISU game.

"I was so shocked looking up and seeing my name on the big board. It took me awhile to realize it was for me even though my first name is spelled uniquely."

Now, they watch more games on TV since they have 3-year-old triplets (Aiden, Isaac and



The Briggs kids are already football fans.

Addalyn) and a 5-year-old, Chase, but they are excited to have the kids develop a love of the game, too. In fact, two kids are named after Michigan players: Chase Winovich, who played for Michigan and then the Patriots, and Aidan Hutchinson, who also played for Michigan and now plays for the Lions.

Whatever the team, they enjoy cheering and watching the game. A special piece of memorabilia the kids have are jerseys they received from local Ankeny quarterback JJ Kohl when he played for ISU. He now plays for Appalachian State.

"Any football is good football for us."



Kellee and Nick Briggs at a Chicago Bears game.



Kellee and Nick Briggs became engaged at an ISU football game.

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Go Birds

Aaron Colyer was born and raised in Lancaster, Pennsylvania, about an hour and a half outside of Philadelphia.

"I have always loved sports and watching football, so, being in Philly, the Eagles were the team. In fifth grade, we moved to Iowa. Coming here and no NFL teams in Iowa, I kept my allegiance to the Eagles. I grew up watching the Andy Reid Eagles with Donovan McNabb, Brian Westbrook and Brian Dawkins. Dawkins is my favorite Eagle of all time."

Over the years of watching the Eagles, he has also become a fan of Jeremiah Trotter, LeSean McCoy, Desean Jackson, Brandon Graham and, of course, Jason Kelce. Current favorite players include Cooper DeJean, Saquon Barkley, Jalen Carter and Jalen Hurts.

Though he has been lucky enough to go to a few games, the prices of tickets, food, parking, drinks and more keep him watching from the comfort of the couch.

"My favorite memories include watching the Eagles' first and second Super Bowls, the snow game against Detroit, the Miracle at the Meadowlands, and watching the most



Aaron Colyer and his boys at the Cooper DeJean softball game in Des Moines.

recent Super Bowl with my two boys. If the Eagles are in the Super Bowl, I need to have no distractions and watch the game at home. If they are not playing, we usually get together with friends and eat apps. Hopefully, this year, I'll be watching the game by myself, making sliders and wings."

Born with it

When growing up, Nickki Mulbrook says football took precedence over a lot of things in her family. She is a fan of several teams: for college, it's the Hawkeyes, and, in the pros, she is a Vikings and Chiefs fan.

Going to a Chiefs game was her first NFL game, and she has enjoyed watching them play since. They are also one of her son's favorite teams. Now, she tries to go to at least three Iowa football games per year and at least one Vikings game. Otherwise, she is content to watch games at home or a local sports bar.

Mulbrook grew up going to Iowa games with her dad as a kid. He had season tickets for about six years when she was younger, and they went to every home game. She has also had season tickets a few times herself.

"Just being in that atmosphere as a young child has stuck with me. It's something I always remember, and I look forward to creating the same memories with my son, too."

The last few years for Super Bowl Sunday, she has hosted a get together at her place with her best friend and her kids.

"I usually put together a DIY balloon arch

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Nikki Mulbrook enjoys hosting Super Bowl gatherings with her son, Kinnick, and friends.

for photos and color-appropriate décor, and we have our own party. We plan to have a little get together this year, like years past, even if one of our teams aren't in it. When it comes to food, there are so many great choices, but buffalo chicken dip will always be my favorite football food."

Steelers forever

Zach Hiney can't remember a time when he wasn't a football fan. He grew up loving the game, just like the rest of his family.

"It's always been a part of my life, and it's something I look forward to every weekend in the fall and winter. I would say my family was instrumental in my love for the game. My grandpa was a big Steelers fan, and my dad grew up in western Pennsylvania, so the love of the team just got passed down to me. And it doesn't hurt that they have the same color scheme as Iowa."

Hiney is also an Iowa Hawkeyes football fan. Growing up in the state, he has always gravitated toward Iowa. Like his grandpa, he is also a Pittsburgh Steelers fan. He goes to games when he can but isn't able to get to as many as he would like. He usually ends up watching at home, which is still enjoyable.

"My favorite football memories are any Saturday I've gotten to spend at Kinnick Stadium watching the Hawks and a job shadow I did at a Kansas City Chiefs game a few years ago. I got to sit up in the press box for the game and then go to the postgame press conferences,

SUPER BOWL LX

Teams: TBD

When: Sunday, Feb. 8

Where: Levi's Stadium in Santa Clara, California, the home of the San Francisco 49ers

Ways to watch: NBC will broadcast the Super Bowl with Spanish-language coverage on Telemundo and streaming on Peacock

Halftime show: Bad Bunny

Super Bowl commercials: 30-second spots cost about \$8 million

too. I walked right by Patrick Mahomes and Travis Kelce down near the locker room, which was a surreal moment."

Hiney currently works as a freelance sportswriter for a few sites, including covering Iowa athletics for HawkeyesWire, which is a USA Today affiliate site, as well as covering the Brooklyn Nets of the NBA for OnSI, a Sports Illustrated affiliate site.

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Simple Salami Sliders

Recipe courtesy of "Cookin' Savvy"

Servings: 4-6

INGREDIENTS

- 1 package slider buns
- 8 slices Swiss cheese
- 8 slices salami
- 8 slices ham or other deli meat
- 1 stick butter, melted
- 1 tablespoon Worcestershire sauce
- 2 tablespoons brown sugar
- 1 tablespoon grated Parmesan cheese
- 1 teaspoon onion powder
- 1 teaspoon garlic powder
- everything bagel seasoning (optional)



DIRECTIONS

- Heat oven to 350 F.
- Halve slider buns, creating top and bottom portions. Set top portion aside, leaving bottom portion in original container. Place bottom portion and container in baking dish to prevent sticking.
- Layer Swiss cheese, salami and ham then cover with top buns.
- Mix melted butter, Worcestershire sauce, brown sugar, Parmesan cheese, onion powder and garlic powder. Pour over sliders.
- Cover with foil and bake 15 minutes then remove foil, sprinkle with everything bagel seasoning, if desired, and bake, uncovered, 10 minutes.



Zach Hiney enjoyed attending the postgame press conference after a Kansas City Chiefs game.

"Getting to write about Iowa football has helped me become a bigger fan because I'm even more in the know than ever before, and getting to write about some of the players doing really awesome things on and off the field gives me a bigger appreciation for the football program as a whole."

When it comes to the Super Bowl, Hiney will be celebrating at home with family, cooking up some food and watching the game together. They also enjoy watching the halftime show every year.

"Of course, I gotta have some of my favorite Super Bowl foods: mac and cheese and little smokies." ■

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MEET Molly Buck

Has a sense of purpose and of making a difference

Molly Buck graduated from the University of Nebraska in 1992 and taught in Liberty, Missouri, before moving to Iowa in 1999. She taught at Greenwood Elementary in Des Moines but moved to Ankeny in 2003 because she wanted to teach in the community where she lived. She taught at Terrace Elementary for many years and is currently a fourth-grade teacher at Heritage Elementary.

"I love working in the community I live in. It really keeps that small-town feeling when I run into kids and families even years later.

Seeing kids grow up in the community really gives me a sense of purpose, a sense that I am making a difference."

Buck loves teaching and says she absolutely could not imagine doing anything else with her life. Teaching is immensely fulfilling while also being challenging both professionally and personally, she says, adding she likes being able to move grades when she needs a change without having to completely switch jobs.

"One funny story was when I switched from fourth to fifth grade one year at Terrace. This was back in the days when they posted teacher assignments on the door of the school on Aug. 1. One of the kids who went burst into tears when his mom told him he had Mrs. Buck because he thought he had, 'failed fourth grade' when his mom said my name. We had a good laugh over that."

Her most challenging year was during COVID. In August, she was assigned to teach 100% online. She was finishing chemo and radiation for colon cancer and was stressed about how she was going to successfully teach online. With her students, they made it work, and she still has lasting relationships with some of those families.

When she's not at school, you will find Buck reading — modeling a love of literature and books she hopes to instill in her students. She also likes to quilt and garden.

Buck is also running for re-election to the Iowa House, after serving 2023-2025. She says she never thought she would get into politics, but she was first inspired to run for office because she knew students and teachers needed a voice in the Iowa legislature.

"I encourage my students to learn about government, but we never talk politics, and I never choose a side. I encourage them to share their own thoughts and ideas without sharing mine. I am proud of my life's work as an educator. I love Ankeny and will always do what I can to be a good servant to this town and its families. It is an amazing community." ■



Molly Buck enjoys teaching in the same community where she lives.



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• **Fraud Prevention - Presented by the Ankeny Police Department: Tuesday, Jan. 20, 2-3:30 p.m.** Join this important and informative event designed to help protect older adults from today's most common scams. The Ankeny Police Department will be onsite to share practical tips, real-life examples, and proactive strategies to keep you and your loved ones safe. Learn how to recognize red flags, avoid financial traps, and confidently navigate phone, mail and online interactions. There will be time for questions, conversation and helpful resources to take home. This is a wonderful opportunity to stay informed, stay empowered and stay protected.



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.



Square Dance Lessons

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

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

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



Des Moines Community Orchestra Concerts

• **Winter Concert: Sunday, Feb. 22, 2 p.m.**, Staplin Performing Arts Center, 3650 Woodland Ave., West Des Moines. Guest Conductor: Joshua Barlage, Featured Soloist: Curtis Barr, Cello

• **Spring Concert: Sunday, May 10, 2 p.m.**, Drake University Sheslow Auditorium, 2507 University Ave., Des Moines. Guest Conductor: Kara Mather Des Moines Community Orchestra, Featured Soloist: Dr. Kevin Allemagne, Clarinet

Iowa Bike Expo and Banquet

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

Iowa Events Center, 730 Third St., Des Moines

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

Acrylic Painting Fundraiser

Friday, Feb. 6, 5:30-8 p.m.

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Join the Ankeny Art Center at Uptown Garage for a Valentine's fundraiser. Paint along with us step-by-step, enjoy a fun evening out, and browse a selection of silent auction items. The cost of \$40 includes all materials and guided instruction on a 16-inch by 20-inch canvas. Recommended for ages 15 and older. No art experience needed. All proceeds go toward supplies for K-12 Summer Camp classes and providing scholarships to families in need. Register by following the QR code.



"Pride @ Prejudice"

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Des Moines Art Center

Museum Highlights Tour

Saturdays, 1-2 p.m.

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Discover the vast variety of the Des Moines Art Center's permanent collections during the Museum Highlights Tour. This tour offers a unique journey through the galleries, featuring a selection of timeless paintings, sculptures and more. Join knowledgeable guides to uncover the stories, techniques and inspirations behind the art on view, and experience the highlights of the Art Center in a fresh and engaging way. This guided tour is perfect for art enthusiasts of all ages. Free to all, no registration required. ■

A GENTLE reset

Pet wellness without the guilt

January has a way of making us think about fresh starts, healthier habits and maybe even losing a few holiday pounds. While many of us are pros at setting wellness goals for ourselves (and quietly abandoning some of them by February), the new year can also be a great time to check in on our pets' physical and mental wellbeing.



In our house, this year's focus is weight loss for our Cavalier, Pixel. Pixel loves food with his whole heart — and, over time, a few extra pounds snuck up on him (OK, more than a “few”). As his weight increased, his activity level has decreased, which means fewer zoomies, less enthusiasm for walks and more lounging. It has become clear that supporting his weight isn't about a number on the scale but about helping him enjoy life more.

If your pet has gained some weight or seems to be slowing down, you're not alone — and you're not doing anything “wrong.” Weight is just one piece of health, not a moral failing. Age, lifestyle changes, busy schedules, treat habits and, yes, winter weather, all play a role. And just like with us, pet wellness works best when we aim for consistency, not perfection.

So, what does “healthy weight” mean? One pet's ideal weight isn't the same as another's. Breed, body structure and overall build all matter. That's why veterinary teams look at body condition, not just the number on the scale. A healthy pet typically has ribs that can be felt but not seen, a visible waistline, and a gentle tuck to the belly (cats may have a little extra “pouch,” and that's perfectly normal). If you're not sure where your pet falls, your veterinary team is always happy to help.

If your pet could benefit from shedding a few pounds, small changes go a long way:

- Measure meals (with an actual measuring

cup)

- Swap some treats for play, training, or cuddles
- Use puzzle feeders or food toys to engage both brain and body
- Break treats into smaller pieces
- Get the whole family on the same page

Healthy weight loss should always be slow and individualized. Some pets need extra support due to arthritis, diabetes or other medical conditions — and that's where your veterinary team comes in. We're not here to judge (trust us, many of us are working on this, too).

Maintaining a healthy weight isn't about looks. It's about comfort, confidence, mental wellbeing and adding more happy, active years to your pet's life — one small step at a time. ■

Information provided by Dr. Amanda Gigler, Ankeny Animal & Avian Clinic, 742 S. Ankeny Blvd., Ankeny, 515-964-7387, amandagigler@ankenyanimal.com.



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INVESTMENT

By Brian Herbel

WHY REBALANCING your portfolio matters — and how to do it



In life, balance is everything — whether it's finding time between work and family or maintaining a healthy diet. The same goes for your investments. Keeping your financial portfolio balanced can help you stay on track toward your long-term goals.

That's where portfolio rebalancing comes in. Rebalancing is the process of adjusting your investments — like stocks, bonds and cash — so they stay in the right mix for your needs. This mix, known as your asset allocation, reflects your comfort with risk, your investment goals and how long until you'll need the money for a major life event like retirement or a new home.

For example, suppose your target portfolio includes 60% stocks, 30% bonds and 10% cash. Over time, as the value of each investment changes, your portfolio may become unbalanced. If stocks have a great year and rise in value, they could end up making 70% of your portfolio — involving more risk than you intended.

To get back to your 60/30/10 target, you would sell some stocks and possibly buy more bonds or cash investments. This helps bring your portfolio back in line with your goals.

As markets fluctuate, your portfolio can shift without even touching it. Without rebalancing regularly, you might be taking on too much (or too little) risk.

Rebalancing helps keep your investment plan on track, manages your exposure to risk and encourages disciplined decision-making, rather than chasing trends. However, rebalancing does not ensure a profit or protect against loss, in a declining market.

It might feel strange to sell investments that have done well and buy ones that haven't. But this strategy can help you “buy low and sell high” — a key idea behind successful investing.

You may wonder how often to rebalance your portfolio. There's no one-size-fits-all answer. Some people rebalance once a year. Others do it more frequently based on how far their investments drift from target percentages.

What's important is that you check your portfolio at least annually and adjust when needed. After big market movements, whether up or down, it's good to take a closer look.

Keep in mind that if you rebalance by selling investments in a taxable account, you might owe capital gains taxes. Also, some brokers charge fees for trades. But, if you own similar investments in a retirement account like an IRA or 401(k), you can often rebalance without triggering taxes. A financial advisor can help you choose the best approach — and may even be able to help you avoid or reduce costs.

Your ideal investment mix will probably change as your life changes. Younger investors might favor stocks for growth. Near retirement, you may want to focus more on income and stability. Rebalancing helps you adjust as your goals evolve.

Think of your portfolio like a car on a road trip — regular check-ins and small course corrections can help you stay on the right path. A financial advisor can help design a strategy that keeps your investments aligned with your goals each step of the way. ■

This article was written by Edward Jones for use by your local Edward Jones Financial Advisor. Member SIPC. Information provided by Brian D. Herbel, CFP®, AAMS®, CKA®, Financial Advisor, 3606 N.E. Otterview Circle, Suite 101, Ankeny, IA 50021, 515-964-1010. Edward Jones, its employees and financial advisors cannot provide tax or legal advice. You should consult your attorney or qualified tax advisor regarding your situation.

OLD and new

It's that time of year. My guess is that a number of articles in this month's Ankeny Living are about the new year, a new you, some new disciplines, a set of new goals, and maybe a new calendar to keep track of all of the new things you are thinking about trying in 2026. I think any time of year you decide to embrace spiritual health, wellness or new ways of living is probably the right time.



Over the years, one of the scriptures that pops up most frequently in my devotions around the new year is from 2 Corinthians 5:17: "So then, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; what is old has passed away — look, what is new has come!" As I reflect on the ways that scripture has shaped me, I am overjoyed and overwhelmed by the reminder that God is offering me a chance to embrace new life.

The context of the scripture is in part about reconciliation. As a part of my faith tradition, the resurrection of Jesus Christ reconciles us back to God who loves us and offers us the chance to become a new creation. We can embrace the reality that we are offered a gift of grace that allows us to no longer be what we once were.

Maybe it's just me, but the part of the scripture that I often focus on less is the segment that says, "What is old has passed away." My devotions, small group curriculum and God's Holy Spirit are reminding me that, to embrace what is new, I have to let what is old "pass away."

What is "old" are selfish ways of living, poor habits and sin. What is "old" are ways of being that don't lead to unity with God and loving others as I love myself. What is old is that feeling of not being good enough or trying harder than I should to "fit in." What is old is any thought or behavior that once separated me from God. Some other "old things" that often hold me back from embracing what is new are the reminders of my mistakes that leave me with guilt and shame. Even those feelings can be released and allowed to "pass away" thanks to the love of God.

Through the love of God made known in Jesus, I can not only embrace the gift of new life but let those things that hold me in any kind of darkness completely die. I can let them go. I can move forward. I can forgive others and forgive myself. This new year, as you challenge yourself with new goals and new ideas, spend a few moments in prayer asking that God would help you "let the old pass away" so that you can fully embrace all that God is offering you in 2026. ■

Information provided by John Wagner, campus pastor, Christian Life Center, Ankeny First United Methodist Church, john.wagner@ankenyfirst.org.

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ENCORE Dance Academy lends a hand

Dance studio hosted free “garage sale” event.

In December, Encore Dance Academy hosted an exceptionally successful “garage sale” — one in which all items were given away for free.

Evie McPherson, owner and director of the dance studio, says the inspiration for the event stemmed from her team’s desire to support families in need within the community.

“We wanted to create a warm space where individuals could access essential items like clothing, bedding, personal care items, food, toys and new gifts without any financial burden,” she explains. “I feel incredibly thankful and positive about the free giveaway event. It was heartwarming to see so many members of the community come together, and we were able to provide meaningful love and support to families who truly needed it.”

McPherson, who co-hosted and organized the event with Emily Brown, says one of the most memorable moments came when a single mother shared her gratitude after receiving clothing and toys for her children.

“Seeing the joy on her face as she selected items for her kids was a powerful reminder of why we organized this event — to make a real difference in people’s lives,” McPherson says.

The community showed up in many ways to support the event. Volunteers helped organize the garage sale, donated items and spread the word to ensure families knew about the resources available. Local businesses also contributed by donating new gifts, food, theater gift cards and monetary support, enhancing the overall impact of the initiative.

Ultimately, Encore Dance Academy was able to serve more than 75 families on the day of the event. The impact was significant, as many attendees left with items that would improve their daily lives.

“It was rewarding to see families leave with bags full of essential goods and smiles on their faces,” McPherson says. “The appreciation was amazing.”

She adds that offering the event at no cost was important because the studio wanted to eliminate barriers for families in need.

“Many individuals face financial hardships,” McPherson says. “We’ve all been there, and, by removing the cost, we ensured that everyone had the opportunity to benefit from the resources provided without added financial stress.”

Ultimately, McPherson hopes attendees walked away with a deeper understanding of the importance of community support and the power of coming together to help one another.

“I hope it inspires others to get involved in community initiatives, fostering a spirit of generosity and kindness that Encore Dance strives to impart on our dancers,” she says. ■



Evie McPherson and Emily Brown with some of the donations to the free “garage sale” organized for families in need.

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THE YEAR reviewed

If your year had a soundtrack, a highlight reel, and a few surprising obsessions, 2025 Wrapped showed you exactly what they were. At the Ankeny Kirkendall Public Library, the story of the year can be told in much the same way — through the books borrowed, the programs packed with neighbors, the quiet study hours, and the unexpected trends that captured our community’s attention. From moms bringing toddlers in to play in our nook in the mornings to students filling study rooms after school, the library remained a steady, welcoming presence in everyday life. This year’s statistics don’t just measure circulation numbers or door counts; they reflect curiosity, connection and the evolving ways people use shared public spaces.

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 Sunday: 1-5 p.m.

In 2025, more than 13,000 patrons checked out items from our physical collection, totaling 504,741 circulations at the time this article was written — an average of more than 38 items per borrower. While we are grateful for our many loyal, repeat visitors, we were also excited to welcome new users, issuing more than 4,000 new library cards this year. Residents in the 50023 zip code led the way with more than 2,000 new cards, followed by 50021 with approximately 1,200. Convenience remains key for our patrons, as evidenced by more than 80,000 holds placed on books and other materials, all carefully pulled by staff and ready for pickup at the front desk.

Digital borrowing also continued to grow. Through Libby, patrons checked out 63,504 ebooks, 96,870 audiobooks and 20,562 digital magazines. When combined with physical circulation, total checkouts for the year through Dec. 19 reached an impressive 685,677 items.

So, what were readers loving most? The year's most-circulated titles featured popular contemporary authors, led by "The Women" by Kristin Hannah, which topped the list with 335 circulations. Emily Henry's "Great Big Beautiful Life" followed closely, while Freida McFadden claimed two spots in the top five, alongside Abby Jimenez's "Just for the Summer."

Of course, the library is about more than books. In 2025, more than 364,537 people walked through our doors — nearly 1,000 visitors per day. July proved to be our busiest month, thanks in large part to robust summer programming. A record 5,122 participants of all ages took part in the Summer Reading Program, keeping learning and creativity alive during the school break.

Our study rooms and meeting spaces were also in high demand, with more than 6,400 study room and conference room uses throughout the year. From tutoring sessions and virtual meetings to Scout gatherings, celebrations, seminars, and even a wedding, these spaces supported connection in all its forms.

As the final pages of 2025 turn, this Wrapped offers more than a year-in-review — it captures a community in motion. Every checkout, visit and library card issued represents a choice to learn, imagine and connect. As we look ahead, the story continues — one borrowed book, one shared space and one curious reader at a time. ■

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FRESH year, fresh approach

Staying independent at home as you age

Michael, 69, has lived in his Clive home for more than four decades and intends to stay put for the long haul, but his daughter and son-in-law are uneasy. Michael is doing well today, yet, if he ever needs support, his family will not be nearby, as they live several states away.

Their worry makes sense. Aging at home with independence is a goal many of us share, but it is not guaranteed. Ongoing health conditions can make living alone risky, and around-the-clock help at home can come with a steep price tag.

That reality can trigger an important question for you or for someone close to you: If moving into a community for older adults is not the preferred path and future health changes are a concern, what options exist now?

One approach to explore is a Continuing Care at Home (CC@H) membership model. Often offered through an organization that serves older adults, a CC@H program helps people stay focused on their health and well-being while remaining at home, and it can support financial planning for potential services and care later.

If you are considering a CC@H program, ask for clear details about what is included. A strong program should do more than promote healthy



habits so you can remain independent longer; it also should provide a practical way to help cover future long-term care needs, should they arise.

Before enrolling, consider asking questions such as these:


- **Does the program provide personalized support, such as wellness coaching?** Research shows people are more likely to follow through with meaningful changes when they have encouragement from a trusted guide or advocate.

- **Are care options and costs addressed?** A well-designed program can help support care if it becomes necessary — whether that is in-home services or care in a senior living community later.

- **What is the track record of the organization behind the program, and how is it regarded in the senior living field?** Even with strong benefits on paper, you should feel confident in the provider's stability, experience, and results.

CC@H programs vary widely. If one seems like a fit, take the time to confirm it aligns with your needs today and the possibilities tomorrow, and that it delivers real peace of mind. ■

Aaron Wheeler is Vice President of Home and Community-Based Services for WesleyLife, which provides health and well-being services, including WellAhead — A WesleyLife Well-Being Experience, a CC@H offering. To learn more, visit wesleylife.org/wellahead.





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WHY Omega-3s matter

In the world of proactive health, few nutrients have garnered as much scientific acclaim as Omega-3 fatty acids. These essential fats, primarily EPA (eicosapentaenoic acid) and DHA (docosahexaenoic acid) are critical for heart, brain, joint and immune function. Yet despite their importance, most Americans fall short of optimal Omega-3 levels, often unknowingly putting their long-term health at risk.

That's where OmegaQuant testing — a simple, evidence-based tool that measures your Omega-3 Index and empowers you to take control of your health with precision — comes in. OmegaQuant testing is a quick, in-office finger-prick blood test that provides a personalized Omega-3 Index score. This score reflects the percentage of EPA and DHA in your red blood cell, a reliable marker of long-term Omega-3 status. Unlike generic supplement advice, this test allows for targeted, data-driven decisions about your nutrition and supplementation.

Omega-3 fatty acids, especially EPA and DHA, are essential for heart, brain, joint and immune health. They are not produced efficiently by the body, which means we must obtain them through diet or supplementation. Fatty fish such as salmon, sardines and mackerel are rich sources, but even regular fish eaters may not reach optimal levels. Most Americans are deficient, with average Omega-3 Index scores hovering around 4-5%, well below the optimal 8% threshold. The benefits of having an Omega-3 Index of 8% or higher include:

- **Heart protection:** Omega-3s can lower triglyceride levels by 20-50%, reduce blood pressure, and improve arterial function. It has also been shown to lower your risk of dying from a cardiovascular event by 35%.
- **Cognitive function:** Higher Omega-3 levels are associated with a 20% reduced risk of Alzheimer's disease and improved memory and focus.
- **Mood regulation:** Supplementation with Omega-3 has been linked to a 20-30% reduction in symptoms of depression and anxiety.
- **Inflammation control:** Omega-3s help reduce joint pain and stiffness, particularly in inflammatory conditions like arthritis. They also help with tissue elasticity.
- **Bone strength:** Omega-3s can improve bone strength by boosting calcium levels, potentially reducing osteoporosis risk.
- **Skin health:** Omega-3s help manage oil production, reduce acne and protect against sun damage.
- **Sleep quality:** Omega-3s are linked to better duration and quality of sleep, especially in children.
- **Autoimmune disease:** May reduce the risk of diabetes, lupus, and multiple sclerosis.
- **Prenatal development:** Adequate DHA intake during pregnancy supports fetal brain and eye development and may reduce the risk of pre-term birth.
- **Eye and vision support:** Adequate intake of DHA may reduce the risk of age-related macular degeneration and improve tear production.

Integrate OmegaQuant testing into your holistic wellness approach. By identifying your baseline and retesting every three to six months, you provider can fine-tune your Omega-3 intake and track measurable improvements in your health. ■

Information provided by Christopher M. Renze, D.C., D.I.B.C.N., of Renze Chiropractic Clinic, P.C. For more information, visit www.renzechiro.com or call the office at 965-3844.

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CITY of Ankeny names new city manager

The Ankeny City Council announced Mike Schrock is the new city manager for Ankeny. Schrock has served as the interim city manager since January and, prior to that, was the assistant city manager since 2021.

As assistant city manager, Schrock has played a key role in advancing major city projects, overseeing daily operations and supporting Ankeny's continued growth. With more than 20 years of public administration experience, including 12 years as a city manager in Iowa, he brings a strong background in leadership, strategic planning and community development.

"Mike Schrock has been a steady, trusted leader for our city. During the past year as interim city manager, he demonstrated clear understanding of the council's priorities, strong leadership with our staff, and a thoughtful approach to management. I am confident Mike's experience, integrity and commitment to this community will serve Ankeny well into the future," Mayor Bobbi Bentz said.

"I am excited to continue serving the Ankeny community as city manager. Together, with the leadership of the city council, this past year has allowed our team to refocus and reprioritize our goals to continue to position Ankeny as an attractive place for residents, businesses and visitors," Schrock said. "I look forward to leading our team of dedicated employees through the complex challenges of providing services to a rapidly growing and dynamic community."

Schrock was selected after a nationwide search. The city of Ankeny will begin recruiting for an assistant city manager to fill his former position. ■



PLAN ahead in 2026

Will 2026 be the year? It might be cleaning out the basement. Perhaps it is getting a will in place...or updated. Or maybe it is finally getting your funeral prearrangements addressed. We hear it all the time: "I am so glad to have this taken care of."

Planning your final arrangements begins with a simple conversation and can be a pleasant process. Planning ahead also allows you time to give thoughtful consideration to these important decisions. There are many options to think about when addressing your final arrangements, and there are even prepayment options available to those who wish to have their final financial obligations handled in advance.

An advanced planning consultant can walk you through these choices and options.

Start the year by crossing something off your "to-do" list. Reach out to your funeral home of choice and schedule a meeting to get your prearrangements in place.

You will be glad you did...and so will your family. ■



Information provided by Scott Eriksen, Director of Hamilton's Advanced Planning, Hamilton's Funeral Home, 605 Lyon St., Des Moines, 515-697-3670, www.HamiltonsFuneralHome.com.

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SENIOR LIVING

By Erik Ofloy

WAITING for ready

What if wisdom comes first?

At the start of a new year, many of us feel a quiet nudge to ask: "What am I doing with the time I've been given?" For older adults especially, that question can carry weight. I often hear people say, "I want to make the most of the time I have left."

Usually, what they mean is, "I want to live independently as long as I can."

For many people, readiness becomes something we wait for, rather than something we choose.

There is nothing wrong with valuing independence. It is a gift. But, if we are not careful, we begin to treat independence as the goal, rather than as one season within a larger story. Scripture invites a different posture. Psalm 90 asks God to teach us to number our days, not so we can control them, but so we might gain wisdom. Ecclesiastes carries that honesty further, reminding us that striving, securing and preserving life on our own terms ultimately fall short.

Wisdom, then, is not about comfort or certainty. It is about clarity. Ecclesiastes teaches that meaning is not found in what we accumulate or how long we maintain control, but in lives ordered by humility, reverence and faithfulness. When we hold Psalm 90 and Ecclesiastes together, we are reminded that time is not something to master, but something to steward.

This matters when we talk about readiness. For some, wisdom may look like staying in their home a bit longer. For others, it may mean choosing community earlier than expected, not because crisis demands it, but because clarity allows it. Waiting for a breaking point often means decisions are shaped by urgency rather than discernment, and independence is defined by circumstance instead of intention. Choosing earlier does not promise ease, but it does preserve agency.

I have seen older adults step into community and rediscover purpose. Not because life became simpler, but because it became more rightly ordered. They show up for others. They receive care without shame. They participate in rhythms that remind them they are still part of something larger than themselves.

This question extends beyond later life. For those caring for aging parents, or quietly thinking ahead for themselves, Ecclesiastes offers permission to stop postponing wisdom. Encouraging someone to explore a new season is not giving up on them. It may be an act of faithfulness, honoring both who they have been and who they still are.

Ecclesiastes does not promise fulfillment. It offers clarity. It teaches us that peace does not come from preserving every familiar thing but from accepting our limits and living rightly within them.

So, perhaps the question is not, "How long can I remain as I am?" A better question may be, "What does faithfulness look like in this season?" And, in the end, the lives that endure are not those that held onto control the longest, but those that practiced faithfulness with what they were given and were willing to release the rest. ■



Information provided by Erik Ofloy, Sales and Marketing Director at CopperWood at Prairie Trail, 2855 S.W. Vintage Parkway, Ankeny, IA 50023, 515-425-3262, eofloy@copperwoodsl.com.

HELPING someone with diminished financial capacity

You may have a parent or other loved one with diminished financial capacity, or who you worry may face that issue in the future. “Diminished financial capacity” is the decline in a person’s ability to manage money. When people of any age lose the capability to manage their finances, they may also become more vulnerable to fraud and other forms of financial abuse.



Taking the steps listed below will help avoid or minimize problems for you and your family:

First, have an open conversation about financial matters sooner rather than later. Ask your relative to consider how they want to maintain control of finances in the future. Explain that advance planning is a way to make sure that a trusted person makes decisions if the individual no longer can.

Second, make sure your family member has current estate planning documents. Your loved one may have named you as an agent under a power of attorney or a trustee under a revocable living trust. If these documents don’t exist, explore how to get advance planning in place to ensure that you will be a legal substitute decision-maker in the future.

Third, if your family member or friend has named you to manage money, understand your responsibilities. You may need to take a more active role in helping manage assets. You may have to take on immediate tasks, such as helping to pay bills, preparing tax returns, or helping with investment decisions.

Be alert to mistakes that your loved one may make in managing finances and to any signs of elder financial abuse. It can be hard to tell whether actions are the result of confusion or of financial exploitation. For example, if you find that a loved one has paid the same bill twice by mistake, you should help fix the error. But beware that multiple or unusual payments could also be a sign of financial exploitation.

Finally, keep complete records of everything you do. If there are questions about the use of assets in the future, you want documentation. Be sure that if something changes, you keep your information as current as possible.

An experienced estate-planning attorney can help answer questions about powers of attorney, substitute decision-making, and how to best help your family. ■

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

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7 BENEFITS of using lockbox for your business

Checks are still one of the most widely used payment methods, and a modern lockbox provides a complete check processing service to support your business.

With lockbox, check payments received and processed by your accounts receivable specialist today are instead sent by the payor directly to a P.O. box a bank sets up and maintains for you.

But, a lockbox is not just a mailbox or P.O. box. Every day, by a deadline of your choice, the bank will retrieve, digitize, process and deposit payments received. You are provided images, daily reporting and customized files that can then be integrated into your accounting platform.

A lockbox payment processing service can deliver a surprisingly high return on investment (ROI) for businesses of all sizes. This is because it streamlines the collection and processing of payments, reducing manual work, accelerating



cash flow and improving overall efficiency. It can be offered standalone or as part of complete Treasury Management services offered by a bank. Understanding these advantages sets the stage for exploring the specific benefits that make lockbox services a smart choice.

What are the benefits of lockbox?

1. Reduced payment processing expenses.
2. Expenses scale up or down in step with receivables volume. If receivables are down, so are expenses.
3. Reduced float and days of sales outstanding (DSO). Checks are generally deposited quicker with lockbox services. Mail float is typically decreased when using a P.O. box versus items shipped directly to your physical address. The scale of lockbox operations allows specialized functions, bulk processing and deposits to be made quicker than businesses can achieve independently.
4. Eliminates staff time spent processing checks and frees up your accounts receivable resources to complete other tasks. Allows

accounts receivable staff more working flexibility due to not being dependent on where and when paper payments are delivered.

5. Cloud-based access to remittance data, customized reporting options and integration with ERP software.

6. AI-based technology combined with a staff of experienced specialists means low error rates and excellent customer service.

7. Lockbox service can be customizable to fit your needs. Whether your receivables are wholesale low-volume and large amounts, or retail high-volume and small amounts, your business can be accommodated.

Lockbox could be a powerful service to support your business, and the threshold of payment quantities that make this service a good fit for you varies by business. Contact your Treasury Management representative for more information, costs and ROI estimates. ■

Information provided by Tracy Gibson, VP, Ankeny Branch Manager, 515-965-2497, tgibson@bankerstrust.com, 1925 N. Ankeny Blvd., Ankeny, IA 50023.



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WHERE I find inspiration — and a new comfort-food favorite

Today's home cooks have no shortage of inspiration. With a quick search online, we can access thousands of recipes from trusted test kitchens, community-driven platforms and individual food bloggers. While I appreciate that convenience, I still find myself reaching for cookbooks, browsing new releases at the bookstore and checking out titles from the library — a perfect way to “test drive” a recipe before committing to it.

Another favorite source of inspiration is Family Features, a free recipe site filled with reliable dishes and beautiful photography that never fails to spark my creativity in the kitchen. This month's recipe, loaded Philly cheesesteak baked potatoes, brings together two of my favorite comfort foods: steak and potatoes — both of which also happen to be Shane's favorites. It takes the familiar flavors of a classic Philly cheesesteak sandwich and transforms them into a warm, satisfying baked potato meal. It's hearty, comforting and perfect to enjoy for dinner, with plenty left over for lunches throughout the week. ■

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



Loaded Philly cheesesteak baked potato

Recipe courtesy of Real California Milk

Prep time: 10 minutes

Cook time: 1 hour, 11 minutes

Servings: 4

Ingredients

- 4 large russet potatoes, washed
- 1 cup Real California sour cream
- 1-2 tablespoons Real California whole milk
- 1/4 cup Real California unsalted butter, divided
- 1 small green bell pepper, thinly sliced
- 1/2 small yellow onion, thinly sliced
- kosher salt, to taste
- freshly ground black pepper, to taste
- 1 pound fresh shaved sirloin steak
- 2 cups shredded Real California provolone cheese

Directions

- Preheat oven to 425 degrees F and line baking sheet with aluminum foil.
- Prick potatoes all over with fork. Bake until potatoes are tender and fork

inserted easily comes out, 45 minutes to 1 hour. Split tops of potatoes open with knife and fluff potato flesh with fork. Set aside.

- In small bowl, combine sour cream and milk, adding more milk as needed, until sour cream is pourable. Set aside.
- In large skillet or on griddle over medium-high heat, heat 1 tablespoon butter. Add peppers and onions; cook until tender, 3-4 minutes. Season with salt and pepper, to taste. Transfer to plate and set aside.
- Clean skillet then melt remaining butter. Add steak and cook until fully cooked and lightly browned, 3-4 minutes. Season with salt and pepper, to taste. Return vegetables to skillet and toss to combine.
- Evenly top each potato with 1 tablespoon butter, steak mixture and cheese. Transfer to oven and bake until cheese is melted, 2-3 minutes. Drizzle with sour cream and serve.

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A VISION forward

Building Ankeny's future together in 2026

I am honored to step into the role of chair of the board of directors for the Ankeny Area Chamber of Commerce. Building on the strong momentum established throughout 2025, our business community enters the year ahead positioned for continued growth, collaboration and success. I am grateful to serve alongside an exceptional group of leaders who are deeply committed to advancing our chamber and strengthening Ankeny's future.



First, I would like to extend my sincere appreciation to our outgoing chair and board members for their leadership, dedication and service. Their vision and commitment have helped elevate the chamber, expand opportunities for our members, and establish a strong foundation that will guide us well into the years ahead.

I am excited to welcome our new board members, each bringing experience, insight and perspective that will help shape the Chamber's direction. Together with our returning board members, we represent a diverse and engaged group of leaders united by a common goal: fostering a strong, innovative and connected local economy.

As Ankeny grows, the chamber's role becomes increasingly important. The chamber serves as more than a business resource; it is a catalyst for connection, collaboration and community impact. Through local marketing opportunities, networking, advocacy and business-to-business relationships, the chamber helps businesses build trust, visibility and meaningful connections. When businesses invest in one another locally, they help create a community that is resilient, welcoming and forward-thinking.

There is a simple but powerful idea that, when like-minded people come together with a shared focus, the "cream rises to the top." This principle defines the strength of our chamber and business community. By working collaboratively, sharing knowledge and supporting one another, we elevate not just individual businesses but the entire Ankeny economy. Growth is strongest when it is shared, and success is most impactful when it benefits the whole community.

Our focus remains on delivering meaningful value to our members while positioning the chamber for the future. We will continue to prioritize advocacy, professional development, strategic networking and initiatives that help businesses adapt, innovate and thrive. Listening to our members and responding to the evolving needs of our community will remain central to our mission.

We will be launching our Total Resource Campaign, supported by more than 20 dedicated volunteers. Sponsorships secured through this effort are critical to funding the programs, events, advocacy and professional development opportunities that allow the chamber to serve both our members and the community.

Thank you for your continued engagement and belief in the Ankeny Area Chamber of Commerce. Together, we look forward to shaping a future defined by collaboration, opportunity and shared success. ■

Information provided by Dr. Aaron Rickelman owner of Designed 2 Move Spine & Sport and 2026 Chair of the Board of Directors for the Ankeny Area Chamber of Commerce.



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MONDAY JANUARY 19, 2026
GET INVOLVED & GIVE BACK IN THE ANKENY COMMUNITY

Join us as Council Member Jeff Perry reads the Martin Luther King Jr. Day of Service Proclamation
9 A.M. @ THE CHAMBER OFFICE



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Do you have questions for our Legislative Updates?
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Email questions to janderson@ankeny.org

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Polk County, City of Ankeny, & School Board Updates 11:15-11:30 | Legislative Updates 11:30-12:30

Thursday 12 February 2026
4:00-5:30pm
BUSINESS
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Visit ankeny.org for updates on location

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OUT & ABOUT



Kwik Star made a \$1,000 donation to the Ankeny Service Center at its ribbon cutting.



A ribbon cutting was held for Kwik Star No. 1707, 6155 S.E. Delaware Ave., Ankeny, on Dec 18.



Greg Olson, Chelle Powers and Scott Zietlow at the Kwik Star ribbon cutting.



Tony PeterSmith, Shevaughn Moore, Andy Robinson, Heather Phillips and Joe Bethel at the Kwik Star ribbon cutting.



Riley Parsley and Bob Jarvis at the Ankeny Area Chamber of Commerce ribbon cutting for Wee's Tees at its new location on Dec. 5.



Crystal Wright, Makayla Gallentine and Sara Schweitzer at the Ankeny Area Chamber of Commerce ribbon cutting for Wee's Tees at its new location on Dec. 5.



The Ankeny Area Chamber of Commerce held a ribbon cutting for Wee's Tees at its new location at 518 S.W. Third St. on Dec. 5.



Shannon Sandvig and Dean Smith at the Ankeny Area Chamber of Commerce ribbon cutting for Wee's Tees at its new location on Dec. 5.



Randy Wee, Roger Rohwedder and Bob Fontana at the Ankeny Area Chamber of Commerce ribbon cutting for Wee's Tees at its new location on Dec. 5.



Destiny Nelson and Andy Erickson at the Ankeny Area Chamber of Commerce ribbon cutting for Wee's Tees at its new location on Dec. 5.

OUT & ABOUT



Mindy Selix, Yvonne Silvers, Peyton Husmann, Shaylen Jones, Danielle Jones, Tracy Gibson, Nick Zimmer, Jordan Niewoehner and Kevin Kisker at the Ankeny Area Chamber of Commerce Lattes & Leads hosted by Bankers Trust, Ankeny, on Dec. 16.



Jeff Perry, Andy Schnurr and Grace Watson at the Ankeny Area Chamber of Commerce Lattes & Leads hosted by Bankers Trust, Ankeny, on Dec. 16.



Josh Craighead and Makayla Winecke at the Ankeny Area Chamber of Commerce Lattes & Leads hosted by Bankers Trust, Ankeny, on Dec. 16.



Brett Haun, Mackenzie Cowden and Sharlyn Estrem at Foot & Ankle Center of Iowa, which hosted the Ankeny Area Chamber of Commerce's Business After Hours Ugly Sweater Party on Dec. 11.



Brittni Broughton, Ashlee Bassi and Amber Milliken at Foot & Ankle Center of Iowa, which hosted the Ankeny Area Chamber of Commerce's Business After Hours Ugly Sweater Party on Dec. 11.



Jesseka Kaldenberg-Leppert and Tony Mills at Foot & Ankle Center of Iowa, which hosted the Ankeny Area Chamber of Commerce's Business After Hours Ugly Sweater Party on Dec. 11.



Lindsay Drake, Tom Friedman and Madison Rollefson at Foot & Ankle Center of Iowa, which hosted the Ankeny Area Chamber of Commerce's Business After Hours Ugly Sweater Party on Dec. 11.



Paul and Mindi Dayton at Foot & Ankle Center of Iowa, which hosted the Ankeny Area Chamber of Commerce's Business After Hours Ugly Sweater Party on Dec. 11.



Jamie Anderson, Mackenzie Cowden, Tony PeterSmith, Sharlyn Estrem and Diane Weber at Foot & Ankle Center of Iowa, which hosted the Ankeny Area Chamber of Commerce's Business After Hours Ugly Sweater Party on Dec. 11.



Sue Hudson and Heather Phillips at Foot & Ankle Center of Iowa, which hosted the Ankeny Area Chamber of Commerce's Business After Hours Ugly Sweater Party on Dec. 11.



Joan Moore, Shevaughn Moore and Greg Moore at Foot & Ankle Center of Iowa, which hosted the Ankeny Area Chamber of Commerce's Business After Hours Ugly Sweater Party on Dec. 11.



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