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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 touchdown 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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January 18: Baptismal Prep Class for new parents at 1pm

January 20: Adoration/Benediction at 6pm in the Church followed with Rosary at 7:30pm for the sick of our Parish

January 24: Assumption Appreciation Dinner after 6pm Mass in the gym

January 31: WG Foundation (Adult Prom Fundraiser) from 7-11pm

February 18: Ash Wednesday Masses (Lent begins) at 8am & 7pm

February 20: Stations of the Cross at 5pm followed with Mass every Friday during Lent

February 22: Lenten Evening Prayer at 4:30pm (all Sundays during Lent)

February 22: Happy Hours after 5pm Mass (all Sundays during Lent)

March 4: Parish Reconciliation starting at 6:30pm

March 11: RE Reconciliation starting at 7pm

March 15-21: Spring Break

March 29: Palm Sunday

April 2: Holy Thursday Mass at 7pm

April 3: Good Friday Service at 7pm

April 3: Divine Mercy Chaplet at 7:30am daily for 10 days

April 4: Easter Vigil at sundown

April 5: Easter Sunday Masses at 8am & 10am (NO 5pm Mass this evening)

1st Saturday of the Month morning Mass at 8am

MASS TIMES: Mon-Fri: 8am | Sat: 5pm | Sun: 9am & 5pm **LENT MASS:** Fridays at 5:30pm

RECONCILIATION: Saturdays at 4pm


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FEATURE

The Blairs are devoted Minnesota Vikings fans.



Big game, **BIG PARTY**

Capping off the football
season with a watch
party to remember

By Lindsey Giardino

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.



The Blair kids were able to meet Viking players during a visit to the stadium.

Fans through thick and thin

The Blair family members are devoted Minnesota Vikings fans. Brittany Blair became a fan because her dad had followed the team since he was young, and that passion naturally became part of her own life — and now her family's, too. Today, that fandom includes her husband, Mitchell, and their two kids.

In recent years, the Blairs have started taking their children to a preseason game each year. They also make time for an adults-only game annually, attending with a group of about 10 friends.

“It is so much fun,” Blair says. “Last year, we all rode in an RV together and went to Nashville for a long weekend and watched them play the Tennessee Titans. We always have a lot of fun attending games.”

This year brought an especially meaningful moment when the Blairs’ daughter participated in a Minnesota Vikings cheer camp and was able to cheer on the field during a preseason game — an unforgettable experience for the whole family.

Most game days are spent watching from home, though there are times when the Blairs



Tamra DeRee and her husband, Mark, are divided when it comes to football loyalties. Tamra is a Green Bay Packers fan, while Mark cheers for the Kansas City Chiefs.

travel back to their hometown to watch with the same group of adults they attend games with, along with their kids.

When they do make it to the stadium, the Blairs stick to their pregame traditions.

“We always tailgate before each of the games and have so much fun,” Blair says. “We also love being in the stadium and doing the Skol chant with everyone there. There is just something about doing that in U.S. Bank Stadium.”

Each family member has their own favorite player. Blair liked Moe Williams when he played, then Adrian Peterson, and now counts C.J. Ham among her favorites.

“There are also many players on the team who do so much for their communities, which also is great to have on the team,” she says.

Her husband’s favorite player is Harrison Smith. He bought Smith’s jersey as his first jersey purchase and appreciates that Smith has spent his entire career with the Vikings. Both kids, unsurprisingly, are big fans of Justin Jefferson and like doing the Griddy.

Blair jokes, while the family enjoys cheering for the Vikings when they’re playing well, it can be tough when the team lets them down.

“We have always been Vikings fan and cheer for them win or lose,” she says. “They upset us at times, but we always have fun when we are watching and cheering with our friends and family. Skol!”



Tamra DeRee hopes her kids will grow up Packers fans.

Packers fan from Minnesota

Tamra DeRee and her husband, Mark, are divided when it comes to football loyalties. DeRee is a Green Bay Packers fan, while Mark cheers for the Kansas City Chiefs.

Despite their rivalry, the couple doesn’t play favorites. Over the years, they’ve attended games at both Lambeau Field and Arrowhead Stadium — and even crossed paths with a few notable names. They’ve met Patrick Mahomes and Mason Crosby’s dad at a Packers tailgate party.

“My dog’s name is Mason (named after Mason Crosby), and I proceeded to show him pictures of my dog and told him I named him after his son,” DeRee recalls. “I’m sure he loved chatting — full sarcasm.”

When the Super Bowl was hosted in Minnesota — where DeRee is from and where she and Mark met — they also had the chance to meet Greg Jennings.

Before having kids, football played an even bigger role in the DeRees’ lives. They regularly went out to watch games, often at Buffalo Wild Wings. These days, football Sundays look a little different, with games on at home while chasing kids around, all while wearing their favorite team gear and cheering loudly.

“Now, with our kids, we are each trying to get them to like our team better than the other, with fun banter,” DeRee jokes. “They will probably end up as Vikings fans.”

Although DeRee grew up in Minnesota, most of her extended family lives in the Milwaukee area. She enjoyed being a Packers fan in Vikings territory, where friendly rivalry led to plenty of banter and large Packers-Vikings parties.

Today, DeRee can claim official Packers territory of her own.

"I love that it is fan-owned," she says. "I bought in when it opened in 2021, so it's fun to say I am an owner."

Some of her favorite memories come from attending games at Lambeau Field, including a January playoff game against the Cowboys that the Packers won.

"It was a wild experience," she says. "We have been there a few times for preseason games as well and wander around Titletown."

She also fondly remembers tailgating at a house across from the stadium, complete with a giant Lombardi Trophy in the yard.

These days, DeRee especially enjoys watching Donald Driver and Jordy Nelson, along with head coach Matt LaFleur. For her, the Packers represent everything that makes cheering for an NFL team so special.

Tips for a great watch party

(Family Features) Get ready to host this season's most memorable watch party with these tips:

- **Show your colors:** Get your house game ready and show your team spirit by decorating in the colors of the team you'll be cheering to victory. You don't need to go all out; just grab some simple decorations like streamers, balloons and disposable tablecloths to add some energy. If you'll have guests cheering on both sides, mix and match your decor and let guests pick their plate and cup color to root for their favorite team.

- **Take a seat:** When the game is underway, gathering everyone around the screen can get crowded. Make sure everyone is comfortable by offering additional seating. You can use stools, chairs from other rooms and even folding chairs or camping chairs if you need to create more space. If you need to resort to floor space for seating, make it extra comfy with some pillows or blankets for padding.

- **Multiply the screen time:** Chances are high your guests will scatter throughout your home, spilling out of the living room into

your kitchen and dining spaces. Set up extra screens to show the game in multiple rooms, whether that's extra TVs, monitors or laptops. That way, even if someone steps away from the main screen, he or she won't miss any of the excitement.

- **Make snacks that score with the crowd:**

Every party needs a menu, but you can keep it simple for a watch party. Guests typically want quick bites they can grab during timeouts and commercial breaks, so stick to finger foods and apps guests can self-serve quickly. Wings are a party staple, and chips and dip are always a hit. Be sure to offer some indulgent options, as well as foods for those who have special dietary needs. You can also make your food game easier by asking everyone to bring a dish to share instead of taking it all on yourself.

Find more entertaining tips and advice at eLivingtoday.com.

Enjoy the commercials

While commercials used to be the perfect time for a quick break and filling your plate, not so with the Super Bowl. Commercials are as big a part of the experience as the kick off. How many of these do you remember?

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Best Super Bowl commercials of all time (including 2025) <https://filestage.io/blog/best-superbowl-commercials/>

1. Bud Light – Big Men on Cul-de-Sac (2025)
2. Hellmann's – When Harry Met Sally Recreation (2025)
3. Stella Artois – The Other David (2025)
4. Hellmann's – May-ow (2024)
5. Budweiser – Old School Delivery (2024)
6. Kawasaki – Business in the front, party in the back (2024)
7. Uber Eats – The Beckhams (2024)
8. Pluto TV – Couch Potato Farms (2024)
9. Oikos – "Hold my Oikos" (2024)
10. Booking.com – Book whoever you want to be (2024)
11. Apple – 1984 (1984)
12. Snickers – Betty White (2010)
13. Amazon – Alexa Loses Her Voice (2018)
14. Always – #LikeaGirl (2015)
15. Wendy's – Where's The Beef (1984)
16. Pepsi – Cindy Crawford (1992)
17. Coca-Cola – Hey Kid, Catch (1980)
18. Tide – It's A Tide Ad (2018)
19. Nike – Hare Jordan (1993)
20. Budweiser – Puppy Love (2014)

Super Bowl trivia

Enjoy getting your guests in the game day spirit with some trivia.

- The highest combined point total in a Super Bowl is 75 points, in Super Bowl XXIX (49ers 49, Chargers 26).
- The lowest combined point total in a Super Bowl is 16 points, in SB LIII (Patriots 13, Rams 3).
- The Patriots scored the fewest points to win a Super Bowl in SB LIII, with 13.
- The Eagles scored the most points in losing a Super Bowl in SB LVII, with 35.
- Only two Super Bowls have gone into overtime. The Patriots beat the Falcons in Super Bowl LI (2017), famously coming back from being down 28-3 in the third quarter, and the Chiefs beat the 49ers in Super Bowl LVIII (2024).

- According to "The Simpsons," Homer grew up rooting for the Denver Broncos.
- The longest national anthem performance was by Alicia Keys, whose rendition clocked in at 2 minutes and 35 seconds during Super Bowl XLVII (2013).
- The Baltimore Ravens and the Tampa Bay Buccaneers are the only teams undefeated in multiple Super Bowl appearances, at 2-0 each.
- The other unbeaten teams in the Super Bowl are the Jets and Saints, both 1-0.
- The current longest period between one team's multiple Super Bowl victories is 50 years, by the Chiefs (wins in SB IV and then LIV).

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

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.

• The tallest player to play in the Super Bowl was Ed Jones, whose nickname was, appropriately, "Too Tall." The 6'9" defensive end won Super Bowl XII with the Dallas Cowboys.

- How much does the Lombardi Trophy weigh? Seven pounds
- Carol Channing (1970) was the first singer to perform at a Super Bowl Halftime Show.
- The Jets have gone the longest since their last Super Bowl appearance, at 56 years and counting (last appearance, SB III).
- Super Bowl XLI (Indianapolis Colts versus Chicago Bears) featured the matchup whose two cities were closest together.
- Only the Dolphins (SB VI), Rams (SB LIII), and Chiefs (SB LV) have failed to score a touchdown in the Super Bowl.
- There has never been a shutout in the Super Bowl. ■



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CAMPBELL invests time in building community

Giving back in order to pay it forward

Kyle Campbell is a longtime member of the North Polk community. He and his wife, Stephanie, have called it home for nearly 13 years, raising their four children in town along the way.

"This community and the district mean a great deal to me and my family, and it was such a great decision to move here in 2013," Campbell says.

Over the years, Campbell has made it a priority to give back in any way he can, extending a lifelong commitment to volunteering. Service has played a meaningful role in his life for as long as he can remember.

Campbell first became involved with the Summer Special Olympics in Ames, volunteering alongside a group of high school friends. Around the same time, his family also volunteered at Jolly Holiday Lights, an event supporting the Make-A-Wish Foundation.

"This foundation was especially meaningful to our family because it helped make a 'wish' come true for my sister," he shares. "That experience has always held a special place in my heart. Being part of those events and seeing the dedication of so many other volunteers is why I continue giving my time in any way I can."



Natalie St. John of The Down Home Co. - RE/MAX Precision presents the Good Neighbor certificate to Kyle Campbell.

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Since then, Campbell has taken on a wide range of volunteer roles. He has served on the Celebrate North Polk committee for the past five years, been a board member of the Woodward Golf Club for four years, and coached baseball, basketball and soccer for more than 17 years.

Professionally, Campbell has also served on numerous committees and boards. In 2023, he decided to run for a seat on the North Polk School Board. He was elected and has proudly served the district for more than two years.

For Campbell, making time to volunteer is important because of the many people who invested their time in him while he was growing up.

"Giving back and being involved feels like a great way to pay that forward," he says. "Coaching is what I enjoy the most, though, in my volunteering. Coaching sports offers an amazing opportunity to help young people navigate adversity, work as a team, build character and discipline, and develop confidence that extends far beyond a game that they play."

Serving on the school board has been equally impactful.

"It's challenging work and difficult at times," he admits. "But it has also been the most rewarding thing I've ever done. Being part of decisions that directly affect students, families and the future of our district/community is something I don't take lightly, and I am very proud of."

Ultimately, Campbell sees volunteering as one of the simplest and most meaningful ways to invest in the community he calls home — something he knows many others feel as well.

"I want to recognize all the other amazing volunteers in our community," he says. "There are so many that make a difference for our community." ■

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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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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PARADISE finds own slice of paradise

Neighborhood and community feel like home.

Austin Paradise has lived in Polk City for nearly 15 years — and says he has enjoyed every minute of it.

He originally chose the area because it offered a small-town feel while still being close enough to nearly anywhere in the metro. Over the years, Paradise has rented the same home, which he hopes to eventually purchase. He likes the large lot, the ample garage space and the separate fenced area that provides plenty of room for a sizable garden.

“The neighborhood has truly just been amazing since we moved in,” Paradise adds. “It’s very neighborly and few people have moved. We luckily just got another set of great neighbors right behind when people did move.”

One of the most meaningful parts of living in Polk City, he says, is the close bond he and his wife, Amanda, have formed with their neighbors — especially those who live directly south of them, who have become some of their closest friends.

“The greatest feeling to me is that we all look after each other,” he says. “Whether it’s me that helps with snow blowing, bringing up trash cans or just keeping an eye out if they go out of town or helping with pets. And that’s vice versa and would do it again for us as well.”

Paradise believes Polk City is an exceptional community overall, one where people genuinely look out for one another. He notes that neighbors who recognize one of his vehicles will often wave and recalls a moment last year when he and his wife had trouble with traction on their Camaro. Even people they didn’t know stepped in to help push the car onto clear pavement.

“The whole community is amazing; however, our neighborhood just feels extra special because we know we can count on each other,” Paradise says. “When weather cooperates, I am always outside, and we love to have people stop over, have a drink if you want and watch some baseball or listen to music. And, if I have things planned, I try to cook out for us.”

For Paradise, the sense of connection goes beyond friendly neighbors — it feels like family.

“We truly love it here,” Paradise says. “It’s definitely more of a family.” ■



Austin and Amanda Paradise say they are happy to live in Polk City, where neighbors are friendly and help each other.



Austin and Amanda Paradise with friends Ryan and Jennifer Ballard.

POLK CITY Community Library news

Announcements: The library will be closed Monday, Feb. 16, in observance of Presidents' Day. Watch our calendar and social media for extra activities on Feb. 23, 26 and 27.

ACTIVITIES

• **STEAM Storytime**, Mondays, 10:15 a.m. Attend Miss Nicole's STEAM-themed story session, followed by an engaging STEAM activity or experiment. Designed for ages 3-5.

• **Tiny Tots Storytime**, Tuesdays at 10:15 a.m. Join Miss Nicole at the library for stories, songs and activity stations. Every story can be logged in our 1,000 Books Before Kindergarten program, too. Designed for ages 3 and younger.

• **Ladies' Wednesday Coffee**, Wednesdays, 10 a.m. to noon.

• **Sit N' Stitch**, Thursdays, 6-8 p.m. Bring your current project and join us for stitching and conversation.

• **Zumba/Low-Impact Dance**, Fridays, 9 a.m., tailored to age 50 and older.

• **Men's Friday Coffee**, 10 a.m. to noon.

• **Not-A-School-Day**, Monday, Feb. 2, 1 p.m. Join us each month for a special activity on Monday teacher in-service days when North Polk Schools are out.

• **Adult Crafternoon - Paper Heart Garland**, Tuesday, Feb. 3, 2 p.m. Ages 17 and older. Registration required.

• **Adult Coloring**, Wednesday, Feb. 4, 1-3 p.m. and Tuesday, Feb. 17, 5-7 p.m. Colored pencils and gel pens will be provided. Ages 17 and older.

• **Wednesday Book Club, "Shout" by Laurie Halse Anderson**, Wednesday Feb. 4, 7 p.m. In free verse, Anderson shares reflections, rants, and calls to action woven between deeply personal stories from her life that she's never written about before. Searing and soul-searching, this important memoir is a denunciation of our society's failures and a love letter to all the people with the courage to say #MeToo and #TimesUp, whether aloud, online, or only in their own hearts.

• **Babble and Brew**, Thursday, Feb. 5, 10 a.m. Coffee for you and exciting, age-appropriate toys for the kiddos.

• **National Take Your Child to the Library Day**, Saturday, Feb. 7, 10 a.m. to 2 p.m. Stop by the library for lots of extra activities. Check our calendar and social media for details.

• **Lego Club**, Monday, Feb. 9, 4 p.m. Registration is required.

Register online at polkcitylibrary.org.

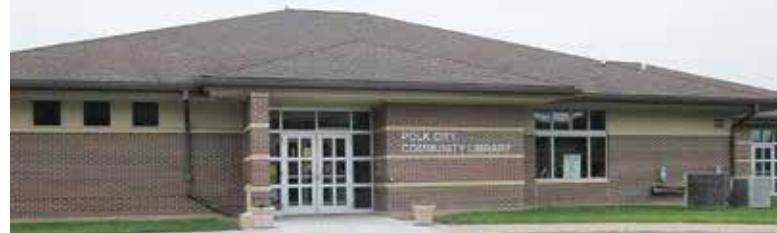
• **Comets Kids Club**, Tuesday, Feb. 10, 4-4:45 p.m. Join us for a Valentine's activity. Register online at polkcitylibrary.org.

• **NEW: Tiny Tot Art**, Thursday, Feb. 12, 10 a.m. Let your little ones explore creativity through process art designed just for toddlers. This hands-on program focuses on fun, sensory-friendly activities where messiness is encouraged and imagination leads the way.

• **Puzzle Swap**, Saturday, Feb. 14, 10 a.m. to noon. Donate puzzles

Polk City Community Library

1500 W. Broadway St., Polk City
515-984-6119
www.polkcitylibrary.org
Monday - Wednesday: 9 a.m. to 7 p.m.
Thursday: 9 a.m. to 8 p.m.
Friday: 9 a.m. to 5 p.m.
Saturday: 9 a.m. to 3 p.m.
Sunday: closed



Feb. 1-13 and receive credit for each puzzle you donate. Redeem your credits on Feb. 14.

• **Messy Munchkins**, Thursday, Feb. 19, 10-11 a.m. This fun-filled program invites little ones to dive into sensory play with squishy, splattery activities. Dress them in old clothes and watch as they explore, create, and get delightfully messy in a safe environment.

• **Monday Book Club, "Small Things Like These," by Claire Keegan**, Monday, Feb. 23, 2 p.m. It is 1985 in a small Irish town. During the weeks leading up to Christmas, Bill Furlong, a coal merchant and family man, faces his busiest season. Early one morning, while delivering an order to the local convent, Bill makes a discovery which forces him to confront both his past and the complicit silences of a town controlled by the church.

• **Adult Bingo**, Wednesday, Feb. 25, 1-2:30 p.m. Exciting prizes, delicious popcorn, great company, and endless fun await! No sign-up necessary.

• **NEW: Toddler and Preschool LEGO DUPLO Free Play**, Thursday, Feb. 26, 10 a.m. Drop in for open-ended play that encourages creativity, problem-solving and fun

• **Adult DIY - Floral Watercolor Painting**, Thursday, Feb. 26, 6 p.m. Ages 17 and older. Registration required and opens one month prior to the event date.

• **Pre-K Playday**, Friday, Feb. 27, 9-11 a.m., at City Hall. In partnership with the Polk City Community Library, we are offering an open play time for children up to age 5. Full of sensory toys, fun structures and musical instruments. Drop in for the fun. Parent/caregiver attendance is required.

THE LIT BAG

A free monthly subscription for PCCL teens in grades 7-12. Each themed bag includes two handpicked YA library books plus fun treats, crafts, or swag — personalized to your reading interests. Register online each month and complete the form to secure your spot. Bags are ready the first Thursday of the month. Keep the goodies, return the rest. February registration is Jan. 22

February pick-up is Feb. 5.

THE LIT BAG: JF

Same concept but now open to our younger patrons. A free monthly subscription for PCCL kids in grades 2-7. Each themed bag includes two handpicked JF library books plus fun treats, crafts or swag. Register online each month and complete the form to secure your spot. Bags are ready the first Thursday of the month. Keep the goodies, return the rest. February registration is Jan. 22

February pick-up is Feb. 5. ■

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REAL ESTATE

By Jacquelyn Duke

WINTER wonderland market



For sellers, the logic is simple: Low supply equals high visibility. Because many homeowners wait until spring to list, your property will face far less competition for the spotlight. Also, the colder months often filter out "window shoppers," leaving behind a pool of serious, highly motivated individuals.

To maximize your home's appeal during a showing, focus on "sensory staging."

- **The warmth factor:** Ensure the home is at a comfortable temperature; a drafty house is a hard sell.

- **Cozy ambience:** Simple touches like the scent of cinnamon, freshly baked cookies or the soft glow of a fireplace create an emotional "sanctuary" feeling.

- **Curb appeal:** Keep walkways clear of snow and use warm exterior lighting to make the home look inviting during those early sunsets.

For buyers, the primary benefit is the significant reduction in competition. In winter, you are more likely to find:

- **Negotiating power:** With fewer people touring homes, sellers may be more open to concessions or flexible closing dates.

- **A thoughtful pace:** You have the luxury of time to make a deliberate decision without the pressure of a same-day "highest and best" offer deadline.

- **Real-world testing:** You get to see how a home's heating system, windows and insulation perform in the actual cold.

The winter real estate market is far from frozen; it is a season of opportunity for those who know how to navigate it. ■

Information provided by Jacquelyn Duke REALTOR®, CRS, e-PRO, Realty One Group Impact, 617 S.W. Third St., Ankeny, IA 50023, 515-240-7483, jacquelyn@sellingcentraliowa.com, www.SellingCentralIowa.com.

INVESTMENT

By Kyle Matzen

MAKING New Year's financial resolutions stick



Millions of Americans set money-related resolutions each January, such as saving more or reducing debt.

But too many resolutions fade quickly.

A 2023 Forbes Health poll found that over half of people give up on their resolutions by April.

The issue isn't necessarily motivation. It could be execution.

Here are some things to consider.

- Vague goals like "save more" often fail.

Instead, set specific, measurable targets like, "Save \$100 a month."

- You might also focus on just one or two priorities: building an emergency fund, increasing retirement plan contributions, or paying down debt.

- Then, track your progress regularly and break big goals into small steps. Each win builds momentum to reach the next goal.

- Finally, find an accountability partner or work with a financial advisor to stay on track.

The new year offers a fresh start. With clear goals, a realistic plan, and the support you need, 2026 could be the year your financial resolutions finally stick. ■

This content was provided by Edward Jones for use by Kyle Matzen, your Edward Jones financial advisor, 407 W. Bridge Road, Suite 7, Polk City. Edward Jones, Member SIPC. 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.

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Happy NEW Year 2026!

May you have a happy, prosperous and healthy new year!



Kyle Matzen, AAMS®
Financial Advisor

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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.

PRE-ORDER TREES & PLANTS FOR SPRING!

Prepare and reserve your first picks of spring trees and plants! When planting season is here, your plants will already be on the way to you, including:

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KLOCKE teaches and coaches the next generation

Making an impact in and out of the classroom

Natalie Klocke has a strong passion for helping others, especially children. Growing up, she spent much of her time babysitting, coaching camps and volunteering whenever she had the opportunity.

“These early experiences allowed me to see how meaningful it can be to support, guide and positively influence young people,” Klocke says.

Along the way, she was fortunate to learn from several exceptional teachers and coaches who inspired her through their encouragement and belief in their students.

“They showed me the lasting impact an educator can have, both inside and outside the classroom,” she shares.

Because of these experiences, Klocke knew at an early age she wanted to be a difference maker. Becoming a teacher was her way of doing just that.

Klocke graduated from Loras College in 2008 with a degree in elementary education and a math endorsement. A couple years later, she earned her master’s degree in special education and went on to spend a decade teaching in West Des Moines.

Today, she is a fourth-grade teacher at Big Creek Elementary, where she has been since the school first opened.

Beyond the classroom, Klocke has remained deeply involved in the community. She has coached her sons’ Little League teams, soccer teams and basketball teams, as well as seventh-grade volleyball and eighth-grade basketball.

“I’ve gotten to know so many kids through extra-curricular activities and have been able to build relationships and connect with these kids,” she says. “I thought, what could be better than being able to carry these connections into the classroom and impact them with academic learning. It’s a great community to be a part of, and the schools are filled with people who love what they do.”

For Klocke, the most rewarding part of being a teacher is the opportunity to build meaningful relationships with her students.

“Taking the time to get to know each student — their strengths, challenges, interests and goals — allows me to create a supportive and inclusive classroom environment where every student feels valued and respected,” she says. “I also find it incredibly rewarding to witness the growth students make over the course of the school year. Whether that growth is academic, social or personal, seeing students gain confidence, develop new skills and overcome challenges reminds me why teaching is such a meaningful profession.”

While teaching can make it difficult to leave work at school, Klocke knows every moment is worth it.

“Teaching is deeply personal, and I care strongly about my students’ success and well-being,” she says. “Because of this, I often find myself thinking about my students long after the school day has ended.” ■



Natalie Klocke enjoys getting to know her students’ strengths, challenges, interests and goals.



SATURDAY, JAN. 24

1-4 P.M. IN VALLEY JUNCTION

Break the winter blues, get out and have fun on a Saturday afternoon in Valley Junction!



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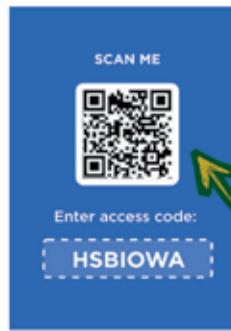
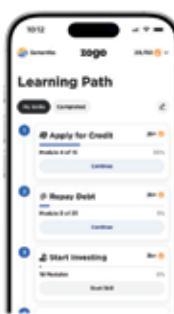
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2. Adjust spending categories to reflect current priorities.
3. Use digital tools to track spending in real time.



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SUPPORTING OUR COMMUNITY

Polk City staff recently donated their "Jean Friday" money to the Polk City Library.



CLOSURES

Monday, January 19 - MLK Jr. Day

Monday, February 16 - President's Day

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FINANCE By Jeremy Arends

COMMON scams and how to avoid them

As we begin our new year, it's important to remain alert to scams and fraud attempts. While the holidays are always a busy time for scammers, unfortunately, fraud can happen at any time. Anyone can become a victim of fraud. Staying informed and taking preventative steps can help protect your financial security now and in the future. Below are some common scams and warnings to watch out for.



Check washing

Check washing is a growing type of fraud. In these cases, criminals steal checks from the mail, use a special chemical to remove the payee's name and amount, then change them to a larger sum and deposit them into their account.

How to prevent: When writing checks, use gel pens in black or blue ink because the ink is harder to remove. Instead of mailing from your home, mail from a post office. Whenever possible, consider using bill pay or digital payment options to reduce your risk of check fraud.

Imposter scams

These scams typically use fear or urgency to get your attention. Scammers may say they are from the IRS, your bank or even a shipping company to get you to share your personal information.

How to prevent: Don't act immediately. They want to use fear and urgency, so it is important to take time to verify the situation on your own. Call the institution using a trusted phone number to confirm if someone is trying to get a hold of you. Never give out any personal information unless you are sure of who you are dealing with.

ACH Fraud

We've noticed an uptick in ACH fraud affecting businesses. In these cases, personal data has been compromised either through phishing, malware or email compromise. Scammers will then use the information to divert payments or payroll.

How to prevent: Using multifactor authentication (MFA) can add an extra layer of security for your employees. Training employees to identify phishing emails and ensuring only authorized users have access to necessary accounts can help prevent fraud.

Criminals are also utilizing artificial intelligence (AI) to carry out more sophisticated fraud schemes. AI can be used to create convincing phishing messages, fake voices and realistic communications that appear to come from trusted sources. This makes it even more important to slow down, question unexpected requests, and verify information before taking action.

Scammers are constantly developing new tactics to steal your personal and financial information. The best way to protect yourself is to pause before responding to calls, texts or emails and verify the information directly with the institution involved. Calling your financial institution is a good place to begin because they actively monitor for fraud and are available to help. ■

Call or stop by to learn more, Jeremy Arends, Cash Management Officer, 515-329-7267, HomeState Bank, 101 E. Bridge Road, Polk City.

WHAT DOES an executor do?

The executor is the person named in a last will and testament who bears the responsibility of finalizing a deceased person's estate. If you have been nominated as an executor, there are certain critical things you need to do.



Know your role

The executor's job is to carry out the decedent's wishes outlined in the will. There is a reason the will writer named you. Your job is to ensure the estate is distributed correctly and that the decedent's affairs are wrapped up. You want to do it efficiently and correctly, but you also want to honor the decedent's wishes.

Get ready to rumble

You will need to communicate with many people: heirs, beneficiaries, family members

who may think they are entitled to money, creditors and more. Brace yourself for potential conflict. You have to manage the emotions and expectations of heirs. Some may resent your authority. Some may question why you were named as executor. Some may just be desperate for money and not understand that the process takes time.

Get organized

You should take immediate steps to safeguard property. Secure the residence and take valuables to a safe place. Get all of the information you can on assets: bank records, investment information, life insurance policies, etc. Because being an executor is such an involved job, you should keep records of all of your work. Make a spreadsheet of assets and liabilities, keep meticulous records, and make a checklist of action items.

File the paperwork

Merely being named as the executor in a last

will and testament isn't enough. You have to file the will with the probate court and obtain a court order and letters of appointment (letters testamentary) to be vested with the authority to act on behalf of the estate. Make sure you go through the proper legal channels to guarantee you have the power to carry out your role.

Hire an attorney

The process of probate is not one that can be navigated alone. You need to have legal representation and advice to ensure that you follow the law. There are statutes regarding notification of heirs, timelines for disposing of property and tax matters to handle. You don't have to do this job alone. Partner with an experienced probate attorney to help you. ■

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

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Upcoming in North Polk Living magazine:

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

Rescue animals: Do you have a beloved rescue animal in your family? Share your story of how you came to find your pet — or it came to find you! Email tammy@iowalivingmagazines.com.

Polk City Arbor League Tree ID and Pruning Workshop

• **Sunday, Jan. 25, 1-3 p.m. Miller Park, 401 Booth St., Polk City.** We will start with a pruning demonstration followed by a short hike around the park with winter tree ID tips and tricks. Participants are encouraged to RSVP to the Facebook event and bring their own pruners to have an opportunity for some hands-on practice.

• **Saturday, Jan. 31, 1-3 p.m. Leonard Park, 413 Parker Boulevard, Polk City.** We will start with a pruning demonstration followed by a short hike around the park with winter tree ID tips and tricks. Participants are encouraged to RSVP to the Facebook event and bring their own pruners to have an opportunity for some hands-on practice.

The event will be cancelled if temperatures are below zero.



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.



Polk City Public Library Happenings

1500 W. Broadway

• **Beat the Winter Blues Eight-Week Challenge (adults), Jan. 4 – Feb. 27:** Join library staff for an exciting Health and Wellness Challenge throughout January and February. Each week will feature a different theme, along with a list of enjoyable activities for you to choose from. You can participate from the comfort of your home or while you're on the go. To participate, pick up a paper copy of the challenge at the front desk, then complete at least one of the themed challenges each week. If you complete all eight weeks, celebrate your accomplishment by turning in your challenge sheet at the front desk to enter a prize drawing.

• **Backyard Bird Watching,**

Wednesday, Feb. 11 at 2 p.m. Thousands of people enjoy birdwatching from the comfort of their homes. Learn more about common backyard birds in our area and how to attract certain species. Afterward, make a simple pinecone bird feeder to take home. No sign-up required.

• **Lunch & Learn: Brain & Mood-Boosting Foods with Polk County's Area Agency on Aging, Thursday, Feb. 19 at noon.**

Enjoy a light, complimentary lunch while learning about brain and mood-boosting foods. Registration required no later than Feb. 17 if you plan to join for lunch.



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

Fitness programs for seniors

Polk City Public Library, 1500 W. Broadway

• **Gerifit Strength Training Workouts, Mondays, 9 a.m.** Strength training workouts that work for all ages and fitness levels, Geri-Fit is challenging, effective and safe to do. The Geri-Fit program requires a set of light dumbbell weights, a sturdy chair and water to drink during the workout. Tailored to age 50 and older. Stretch bands and a Zoom link are available upon request.

• **Chair Yoga, Tuesdays, 9 a.m.** Join Rachel via Zoom. We will be broadcasting the class on the big screen in the library, or you can join us from home. Yoga is for everyone and everybody. Yoga is not for flexible people but for people who want to become more flexible. This chair yoga practice will include breathwork, mindfulness and simple, easy movements to release tension, reduce pain and restore your body to optimum movement. Props needed are an armless chair, like a kitchen chair, and a small hand towel or kitchen dish towel. Join the Zoom meeting on our website at polkcitylibrary.org.

• **Qigong/Tai Chi, Wednesdays, 9 a.m.** Qigong/Tai Chi is a Chinese martial art that emphasizes slow, deliberate movements that are gentle on the joints, making it accessible to people of all ages and fitness levels. It integrates physical postures, breathing techniques, and mental focus to promote relaxation and mindfulness. Regular practice can improve balance, flexibility, muscle strength and cardiovascular health. Follow along with us as we explore a series of online Qigong/Tai Chi workouts tailored to ages 50 and older.

“Pride @ Prejudice”

Feb. 13-22. Thursdays, Fridays and Saturdays at 7:30 p.m., Sundays at 2 p.m.

Ankeny Community Theatre, 1932 S.W. Third St., Ankeny

Watch Elizabeth Bennet and Mr. Darcy fall in love all over again — this time filtered through the world of the internet. Modern voices interject and build on this classic love story in the form of blog posts, chat room discussions, quotes from film adaptations, and even letters from Ms. Austen herself, to create a delightfully postmodern view of 19th century England. “Pride @ Prejudice” is a hilarious and moving homage to Jane Austen’s most beloved novel, as well as our love affair with reading. Order tickets online at <https://tickets.midwestix.com/events/22086/tag/website>.

EVENTS IN THE AREA

Be sure to check for cancellations.

Winter Arts Exhibits

Olson-Larsen Galleries

542 Fifth St., West Des Moines

- Through Jan. 31: The Animal Show 2025

The Des Moines Art Center

4700 Grand Ave., Des Moines

www.desmoinesartcenter.org

- Through Jan. 18: Manuel Álvarez Bravo – “Collaborations”
- Through March 29: Camille Henrot – “Tuesday”
- Through April 19: Bill Owens – “Work and Leisure”
- Jan. 17 to June 17: Iowa Artists 2026: Henry Payer - Aagakinak Haciwi: “We Live Opposite Each Other”
- Feb. 14 to May 17: “Honey, You’re a Wonderful Model” - Maria Lassnig’s Animated Films

Anderson Gallery

Harmon Fine Arts Center, 1310 25th St., Des Moines

www.andersongallery.wp.drake.edu

- Feb. 5 to March 13: “Transformative Expressions: Richard Black International Juried Print Exhibition”

Mainframe Studios

900 Keosauqua Way, Des Moines

www.mainframestudios.org

Mainframe Studios hosts “First Fridays” every first Friday of the month, featuring a changing theme, with the artist’s works on display alongside live music and food.

- Feb. 6: Embodied
- March 6: Des Moines Public Schools

Moberg Gallery

2411 Grand Ave., Des Moines

www.moberggallery.com

- Feb. 6: Edgard Camacho curated by Steven Vail
- March 6: Chris Vance

Stage and Theater

Des Moines Performing Arts

Des Moines Civic Center, Cowles Commons, Stoner Theater, Temple Theatre, 221 Walnut St., Des Moines, www.dmpa.org

- Jan. 13-18: “SIX”
- Feb. 3-8: “Kimberly Akimbo.”
- Feb. 24 to March 1: “The Outsiders.”
- March 20-22: Meredith Willson’s “The Music Man.”
- March 28: “The Wizard of Oz in Concert” with the Des Moines Symphony.
- April 28 to May 3: “Suffs.”

Des Moines Community Playhouse

831 42nd St., Des Moines, www.dmplayhouse.com

- Jan 9-25: “Red Riding Hood, Both Sides of the Story”
- Feb. 6 to March 1: “The Mousetrap”
- March 6-22: “The Lightning Thief” ■

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CITYVIEW

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.

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GOAL SETTING that sticks for you and the community you call home

Like many, I set goals with good intentions, only to see them fade as life gets busy. I recently read "Atomic Habits" by James Clear, and learned that lasting change relies less on motivation and more on the small actions we repeat daily, even when no one is watching.

A key takeaway from Atomic Habits is to focus on systems rather than goals. Goals provide direction; systems drive action. Instead of only measuring goal achievement, the book advises us to assess our daily habits. When routines support our goals, progress feels natural and manageable.

This way of thinking applies to personal, business and community-focused goals. Whether you want to grow your business, improve your health or better manage your time, the key is to start small. Habits that are realistic and easy to maintain are the ones that stick. Over time, those small habits compound into meaningful results.

I also realized how easily these concepts apply to supporting the community we live in. Choosing to shop local is a perfect example of a habit that creates long-term impact. It is not about one big purchase or a grand gesture. It is about making intentional choices again and again. Local businesses create jobs, support community events and reinvest in the places we call home. When we support them, we help our entire community grow stronger.

Another idea from the book that really resonated with me is the concept of identity-based habits. When we shift from saying, "I should support local businesses" to, "I am someone who supports my community," our behavior naturally changes. Supporting local businesses becomes part of who we are, not just something we try to remember to do.

Start with what you can: choose a local restaurant, buy gifts nearby or hire local services. Small decisions accumulate and lead to real change over time.

Goal setting is most powerful when it aligns your daily habits with both your personal values and a commitment to your community. Every small, intentional action reinforces the community you want to create.

As you set goals this year, commit to one habit that benefits you and your community: shop local. These small, regular choices strengthen the businesses and people who help your community thrive. ■

Information provided by Staci Allen, Executive Director, Polk City Area Chamber of Commerce, P.O. Box 226, Polk City IA 50226, 515-984-3098, admin@polkcitychamber.com. Source: James Clear, "Atomic Habits: An Easy and Proven Way to Build Good Habits and Break Bad Ones," Avery Publishing, 2018.



POLK CITY AREA

CHAMBER OF COMMERCE

Networking Events Schedule

2nd Wednesday of each month
Luncheons - TCI

Last Thursday of each month
Coffee and Connections - Rising Sun Cafe

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BOYS Basketball

North Polk Freshman boys basketball vs. ADM at Adel on Dec. 4



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Brayden Dreckman



Colton Ringus



Connor Nelson



Tyson Arp



Warren Van Loon



Archer Happ



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Burk Selmeczi



Ethan Amenson

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North Polk High School Drama performed the musical "Guys and Dolls" Nov. 14-16.





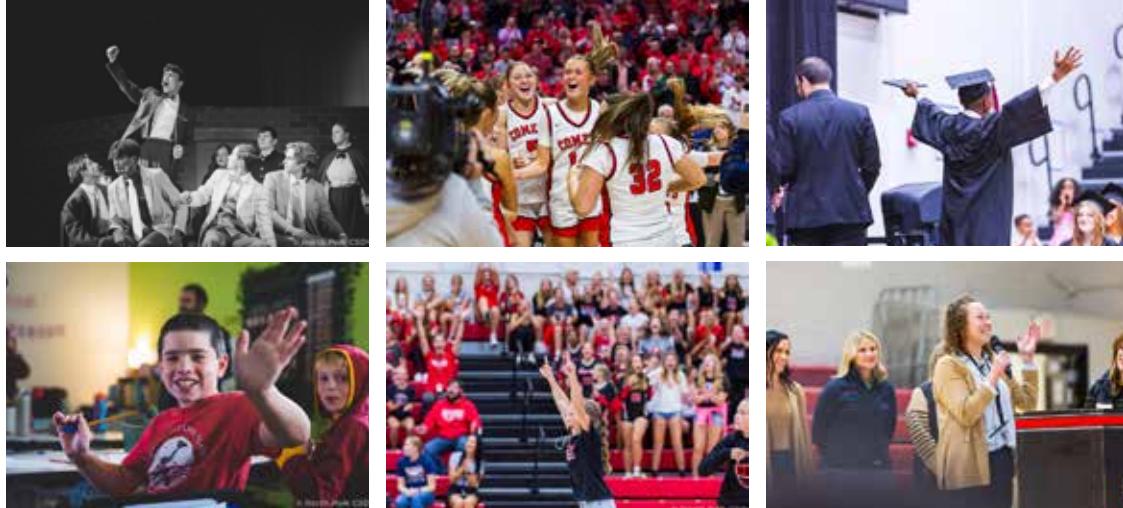
THE COMETS CORNER

NEWS FROM NORTH POLK CSD

JANUARY 2026

A LOOK BACK AT 2025

As we step into the New Year, we reflect on the past year with immense gratitude for our students, staff, and community. From memorable classroom lessons and arts performances to athletic achievements, ribbon cuttings, the opening of new facilities, and community events, 2025 was full of memorable moments. Here are just a few highlights:



GET READY FOR PRE-K!

Big learning starts with little steps. We're excited to welcome your child to the North Polk preschool program and begin their educational journey!



Preschool Registration 2026-27

If your child will be 4 years old on or before September 15, they are eligible for our 4-year-old preschool program. Registration for the 2026-2027 year can be completed online during the windows below at northpolk.org/enroll.

Registration Periods:

- In-District Residents: January 15 - March 27
- Out-of-District Residents: February 1 - March 27

Priority Registration Goes To:

- In-district residents
- Children of current North Polk employees
- Households with K-12 siblings already enrolled in North Polk

Important: Proof of residency is required. If spots are limited, placement is determined by lottery, not first-come, first-served.

For more information, contact the District Office at (515) 984-3400.

ACADEMIC EXCELLENCE YOU CAN SEE

Each year, the Iowa Department of Education publishes a statewide report showing how schools and districts are performing. For the first time, this year's report was updated to include district-level ratings in addition to individual school scores, making it easier to see how North Polk performs as a whole.



North Polk continues to rank among the top districts in the Des Moines metro area and is recognized as High Performing, placing in the top 8% of 329 districts statewide.

Key Highlights from the report:

- Chronic Absenteeism:** 7% of students missed school vs. 16% statewide
- Graduation**
- 4 Yr. Graduation Rate:** 97% vs. 88% statewide
- 5 Yr. Graduation Rate:** 99% vs. 90% statewide
- Math Proficiency:** 86% vs. 70% statewide
- Science Proficiency:** 80% vs. 67% statewide
- English Language Arts Proficiency:** 87% vs. 74% statewide

While these numbers highlight attendance and academic achievement, they are only part of North Polk's approach. The district also focuses on and tracks additional markers, such as extracurricular involvement, student engagement, work habits, and behavior, to support the development of well-rounded learners.

We remain committed to providing the best educational experience for all students and will continue to pursue improvement in every area. Thank you for your ongoing support of North Polk schools!

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