

# ALTOONA

JANUARY 2026

# ALTOONA *Living*

# RESIDENTS' CHOICE AWARDS

# Eastern Polk County residents share their favorites



## Meet Rachel Duray

### EDUCATION

# Loaded Philly cheesesteak baked potato

## RECIPE

# **Solo RPG Night, Palentine's Day Party and more**



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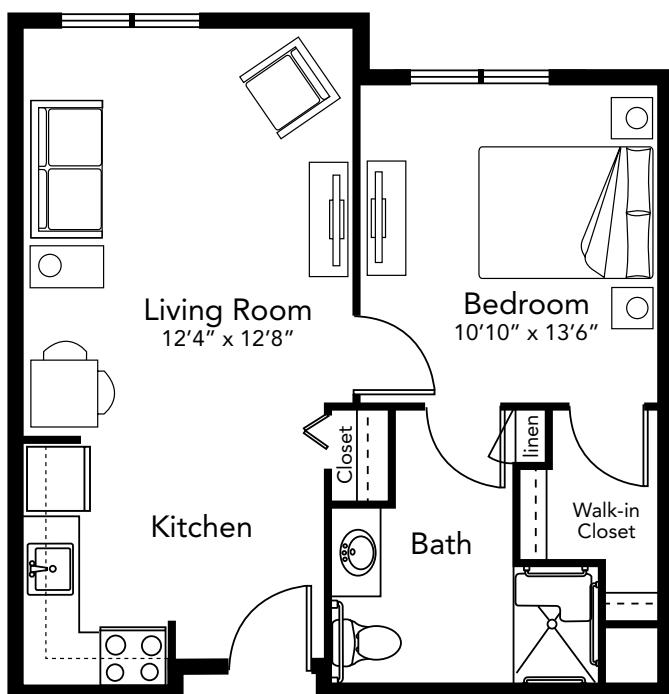
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# WELCOME

## A COMMERCE-creating machine

Residents' Choice. Those two simple words have a lot of meaning to those who are recognized and those who seek out the people, businesses, places and events that are honored.

Yes, we have once again compiled the results of our local Residents' Choice poll, the only one of its kind. It is truly unique in two significant ways.

First, our poll is mailed to every residential household in the pages of this magazine with a link to an open website. That makes the poll available to every single resident. No exclusions.

Second, our poll has open-ended questions, which means we don't load the ballots with pre-determined answers to try to sway it in a certain way. The results are what they are. You will likely agree with some of them, and you will disagree with others — kind of like political elections. But, in this poll, all who are recognized are winners, and the end result is a great positive for all involved.

Readers of this publication have proven to seek out the winners and spend their time, energy and money with them. The poll results have become a customized search engine of sorts, providing valuable information on the choices of local residents in a variety of categories that are important to them.

Those who have been chosen tell me how much of an impact this directly has on them, their businesses and their organizations. Being recognized for positive contributions is seemingly always great, but when it helps create commerce, it is even better — and this Residents' Choice poll is a commerce-creating machine.

I explain this next point each year, but it is worth noting again. Those recognized in this poll are the choices of our readers — local residents. Although we agree with many of you on your choices, we do not pick them, and we have no impact on the results. I wouldn't have it any other way.

Other organizations are continuing to try to implement polls like ours, but none have the reach and credibility that ours has. You can't blame others for trying to imitate what we do, but you can question how they implement their polls and how many people actually vote in them.

Meanwhile, I thank all of you who took the time to vote in this year's Residents' Choice poll. Your votes do make an incredible difference. And, if you didn't vote, well, there is always next year.

Thanks for reading. ■



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# RESIDENTS' CHOICE AWARDS

**Eastern Polk County residents  
share their favorites**

Each year, through our Residents' Choice poll, we ask those living in eastern Polk County to share their views about the area's businesses, places, events and more. After all, they are the ones who know. The businesses with excellent services and products, the ones that go the extra step for customers, develop a loyal following of customers who vote them as their "favorites" in our poll.

The Residents' Choice Poll recognizes these "favorites," giving them a well-deserved pat on the back. And, for those wanting to make it onto next year's list of winners, they have a year to make their best

impressions on their customers.

But, we don't stop with just the businesses in eastern Polk County. Residents have also recognized their favorite parks, events, schools, churches and more. When it comes to the amenities that add to the quality of life, eastern Polk County has much to appreciate and recognize.

With sometimes only a few votes making the difference between "favorite" and "runner up," we consider all to be "winners."

If you didn't vote this year, be sure to watch for the next poll to help recognize your favorites.



Ben and Angela Maksuti  
of Flip N' Jacks Pancake  
House and Eatery.

# Eastern Polk County residents share their favorites...

(Runners up in alphabetical order; \*indicates repeat winner.)

## Restaurant

### \* The Big Steer Restaurant and Lounge

**Runners up:** Guadalajara Mexican Restaurant; Fireside Grille

## Restaurant for breakfast

### \* Flip'N Jacks Pancake House & Eatery

**Runners up:** Perkins Restaurant and Bakery; Somewhere in the Middle Coffee Shop

## Restaurant for lunch

### \* Fireside Grille

**Runners up:** Somewhere in the Middle Coffee Shop; Sugar Shack Diner

## Restaurant for dinner

### \* The Big Steer Restaurant and Lounge

**Runners up:** Johnny's Italian Steakhouse; Texas Roadhouse

## Restaurant for dessert

### \* Over the Top

**Runners up:** The Big Steer Restaurant and Lounge; The creamery. bondurant

## Place for ice cream

### \* Over the Top

**Runners up:** The creamery.bondurant; Granny's Sweet Freeze Shoppe

## Pizza establishment

### Abbie's

**Runners up:** Casey's; Scornovacca's Altoona

## Bar

### Sam's Sports Bar and Grill

**Runners up:** Founders Irish Pub; Reclaimed Rails Brewing Company

## Coffee shop

### \* Best Day Coffee

**Runners up:** Somewhere in the Middle Coffee Shop; Starbucks

## Catering company

### \* Great Caterers of Iowa

**Runners up:** Fireside Grille; Hy-Vee

## Server/bartender

### \* Cole Heitman, The Big Steer Restaurant & Lounge

**Runners up:** Jolynn Schiermeister, Fireside Grille; Ted Blackwood, The Big Steer Restaurant & Lounge

## Auto service

### \* McManus Automotive

**Runners up:** Kanselaar Automotive; Woody's Auto Repair & Service

## Auto body shop

### \* Ted's Body Shop

**Runners up:** Altoona Auto Body; Bondurant Auto Body



Madison Goehey, Annie Jungjohan, Courtney Casper (owner), Kiley Zion and Brenna Antle of Tangled Tails

## Car dealership

### \* A3 Auto

**Runners up:** Deery Brothers Chevrolet, Inc.; Honda of Altoona

## Preschool/daycare

### The Bird's Nest

**Runners up:** Adventure Life Preschool; Altoona Campus Kids Klub

## Nonprofit

### \* Caring Hands

**Runners up:** Altoona Campus; Mary Bump Memorial Foundation

## School

### Morris Elementary

**Runners up:** Mitchellville Elementary; Southeast Polk High School

## Park

### Thomas Mitchell Park

**Runners up:** Bondurant City Park; Haines Park

## Community festival or event

### \* Bondurant Summerfest

**Runners up:** Altoona Chamber of Commerce Wine & Craft Beer Fest; Bondurant Battle of the Bands

## Church

### \* Lutheran Church of the Cross

**Runners up:** Ss. John & Paul Catholic Church; Trinity on Fifth

## Pastor

### \* Nathan Anenson

**Runners up:** Mark McGahey; Trevor Pinegar

# FEATURE

## Chamber of commerce

### \* Altoona Area Chamber of Commerce

**Runners up:** Bondurant Chamber of Commerce; Pleasant Hill Chamber of Commerce

## Library

### \* Altoona Public Library

**Runners up:** Bondurant Community Library; Pleasant Hill Public Library

## Camping spot

### \* Thomas Mitchell Park

**Runners up:** Griff's Valley View RV Park; Yellow Banks Park

## Grocery store

### \* Fareway Meat & Grocery

**Runners up:** Aldi; Hy-Vee

## Boutique

### \* Little House on Main

**Runners up:** Hidden Treasures Gifts; Patti Sue's Boutique

## Retail store

### Target

**Runners up:** Bass Pro Shops; Stems Flower Shop

## Thrift store

### \* Caring Hands

**Runners up:** DAV Thrift Store; Goodwill

## Home improvement retail store

### \* Menards

**Runners up:** Altoona Ace Hardware; Lowe's

## Nursery or garden center

### \* Lucille's Garden Center

**Runners up:** Goode Greenhouses; Menards

## Place to purchase a gift for a man

### Menards

**Runners up:** Bass Pro Shops; SkinFusion FX

## Place to purchase a gift for a woman

### \* SkinFusion FX

**Runners up:** Little House on Main; Target

## Consignment shop

### \* Caring Hands

**Runners up:** New 2U Treasures; Stuff Etc

## Dad/child date spot

### \* Cinemark Altoona and XD

**Runners up:** Altoona Aquatics Park; Over the Top

## Mom/child date spot

### \* Cinemark Altoona and XD

**Runners up:** Altoona Aquatics Park; Over the Top



Chelsea Phillips and Kimberly Caseley at Miracle-Ear. Not pictured is Robin Doan.

## Place to take your mom and dad

### Prairie Meadows Casino, Racetrack & Hotel

**Runners up:** Enabling Garden; The Big Steer Restaurant and Lounge

## Place to take your kids or grandkids

### Enabling Garden

**Runners up:** Adventureland Resort; Altoona Aquatics Park

## Children's birthday party spot

### \* Altoona Campus

**Runners up:** Adventureland Resort; BrickHouse Fitness

## Golf course

### Toad Valley Golf Course

**Runners up:** Copper Creek Golf Club; Terrace Hills Golf Course

## Hair salon

### \* Signatures Salon & Day Spa

**Runners up:** Haven Hair Co.; J & Company Salon

## Physician's clinic

### The Iowa Clinic

**Runners up:** MercyOne Pleasant Hill Family Medicine; UnityPoint Clinic Family Medicine

## Dental office

### Altoona Smiles Family & Cosmetic Dentistry

**Runners up:** Altoona Dental; Kimball and Beecher Family Dentistry

## Mental health services

### \* Connected Life Counseling

**Runners up:** Healing Rock Counseling; The Connection Lab

## Chiropractic office

### \* Dawson Chiropractic

**Runners up:** Inside Out Chiropractic; Swain Chiropractic

## Vision care

### \* Prairie Vision Center of Bondurant

**Runners up:** Eye Care of Iowa Pleasant Hill; Whylie Eye Care Center

## Health club or gym

### \* Altoona Campus

**Runners up:** BrickHouse Fitness; Pilates at Mend

## Alternative health care

### \* Wholistic Health Center

**Runners up:** Be Well Pediatrics; Mend Integrative Wellness

## Pharmacy

### \* Hy-Vee

**Runners up:** Medicap; Walgreens

## CBD Store

### CBD American Shaman

**Runners up:** Central Iowa Vapors; Wholistic Health Center

## Physical therapy

### \* 21st Century Rehab

**Runners up:** Anchor Physical Therapy; Select Physical Therapy

## Dance studio

### \* Pat Barton Dance Studio

**Runners up:** Becky's Dance & Tumbling Studio; Kasey Leigh Dance Studio

## Gymnastics/tumbling studio

### Becky's Dance & Tumbling Studio

**Runners up:** Kasey Leigh Dance Studio; Pat Barton Dance Studio

## Audiologist/hearing center

### Miracle-Ear Hearing Aid Center

**Runner up:** HearingLife; MercyOne Pleasant Hill ENT Care

## Financial planner

### Luke Sibley, Edward Jones

**Runners up:** Adam Kline, Edward Jones; Ryan Gerardy, Thrivent

## Law firm

### Skinner Law Offices

**Runners up:** Smith Law Firm; Susan Ugulini

## Accounting firm

### Welgaard CPAs & Advisors

**Runners up:** ATS Tax and Financial Services; TrustPoint

## Veterinarian

### Bondurant Animal Clinic

**Runner up:** Altoona Veterinary Hospital

## Dog groomer

### Tangled Tails

**Runners up:** Barks & Wags; Pampered Pooch Bakery & Salon

## Lawn care business

### \* Major Tom's Lawn Care

**Runners up:** Hawkeye/VanGinkel Lawn & Snow; Kelly George Turf & Irrigation

## Nursery or landscaping company

### Lucille's Garden Center

**Runners up:** Hawkeye/VanGinkel Lawn & Snow; Major Tom's Lawn Care

## Heating and cooling business

### Metro Heating and Cooling

**Runners up:** GEM Heating and Cooling; Wyckoff Heating and Cooling

## Electrical business

### Baker Electric

**Runner up:** Gumm Electric

## Plumbing company

### Advanced Problem Solutions

## Senior living establishment

### \* Prairie Vista Village

**Runners up:** Courtyard Estates; Edencrest at The Tuscany

## Insurance agency

### The Insurance Station

**Runners up:** Phillips Stafford Insurance Group; Tim Forbes, State Farm Insurance

## Realtor

### Sheena Cochran-Foster

**Runners up:** Jodie Hawley; Pennie Carroll

## Bank/credit union

### \* GreenState Credit Union

**Runners up:** Community Choice Credit Union; Community State Bank

## Photographer

### \* Photos by Ben

**Runners up:** Flaherty Photography – Altoona; Nahno-Kerchee Photography

## Place for guests to stay

### Hyatt Place Altoona

**Runners up:** Holiday Inn Express & Suites; Prairie Meadows Casino, Racetrack & Hotel

## Home builder/remodeling contractor

### Berkey Home Builders

**Runners up:** Eagle Homes; Parks Custom Homes

## Outdoor lawn equipment store

### Lowe's

**Runners up:** Altoona Ace Hardware; ITT Outdoor Products

## General contractor or remodeler

### \* Berkey Home Builders

**Runners up:** Lorey Construction; Terry's Quality Concrete ■

# FEBRUARY Altoona Public Library programs



## Adult programming – Ages 18 and older

- **Solo RPG Night**, Wednesday, Feb. 11, 6 p.m. Flying solo this Valentine's Day? Looking for a game night you don't need a group for? Spend the evening at the library exploring Solo Role-Playing Games. Solo RPGs are tabletop games you can play entirely on your own — no Game Master, no party, just you and the story. Whether you want a quiet, reflective experience or an imaginative adventure, there's something for everyone. We'll provide everything you need to get started, including a selection of solo games, atmospheric music and snacks to set the mood. Registration required.
- **Book Bedazzling**, Thursday, Feb. 12, 6 p.m. Add a little glam to your bookshelf by bedazzling the cover of a book you love. Whether you want subtle shine or full-on sparkle, this hands-on craft is a fun way to give a well-loved book a brand-new look. We'll provide all the supplies you need to decorate and personalize your book; you will just need to bring your own book. Registration required.
- **DIY Book Safes**, Wednesday, Feb. 18, 6 p.m. Turn an old book into a hidden treasure. Learn how to transform a book into a secret storage safe, perfect for keeping small valuables tucked discreetly on your shelf. All supplies will be provided. Registration required.

## Children's programming

- **Sewing 101**, Wednesday, Feb. 4, from 3:30-4:30 p.m. Join us for a fun and interactive sewing machine class where we will learn the basics and sew a pillow. Grades 4-6. Registration required.
- **After School BINGO**, Wednesday, Feb. 11, from 3:30-4:30 p.m. Stop by the library to play BINGO and win books and other cool prizes. Grades K-6. No registration required.

## **Pipsqueak Playdate**

Fridays from 10-11 a.m. Play is an important early literacy skill. Drop in to participate in art, sensory activities and free play at your own pace. Ages 5 and younger. No registration required.

## **Altoona Public Library**

700 Eighth St. S.W., Altoona  
515-967-3881  
[www.altoonalibrary.com](http://www.altoonalibrary.com)  
Monday - Thursday: 9 a.m. to 9 p.m.  
Friday - Saturday: 9 a.m. to 5 p.m.  
Sunday: 2-5 p.m.

## Teen programming – grades 6-12

- **Book Bedazzling**, Monday, Feb. 2, from 6-7 p.m. Bring your favorite book to life with some sparkle. We will have supplies available to add shimmer and shine to your beloved tome. No registration required.
- **Shrinky Dink Keychains**, Monday, Feb. 9, from 6-7 p.m. Drop in and create keychains out of Shrinky Dinks. All supplies provided. No registration required.
- **Palentine's Day Party**, Saturday, Feb. 14, from 1-2 p.m. Grab a friend and join us to celebrate non-romantic love. Create gifts for friends, family or even yourself, including paper flowers, buttons, friendship bracelets and cards. No registration required.
- **Teen Maker Lab**, Thursday, Feb. 26, from 6-7 p.m. The Maker Lab is a chance for you to learn how to use the equipment in our Maker Hub. This month, we'll decorate water bottles using the sublimation heat press. All supplies provided. Registration required.

To find a complete list of events and to register, visit our website at [altoonalibrary.com](http://www.altoonalibrary.com). Click on the Upcoming Events tab. ■



## NEWS BRIEF

# OFFICERS Howard and Moore graduate from Iowa Law Enforcement Academy



Officer Aaliyah Moore is congratulated by Iowa Attorney General Brenna Bird and ILEA Director Brady Carney upon graduation of the academy.



Officer Trent Howard is congratulated by Iowa Attorney General Brenna Bird and ILEA Director Brady Carney upon graduation of the academy.

Iowa Attorney General Brenna Bird congratulated Officers Trent Howard and Aaliyah Moore on their graduation from the Iowa Law Enforcement Academy in a ceremony held at Rising Sun Church of Christ in Pleasant Hill on Friday, Dec. 19.

The officers were part of the 324th graduating class and completed the academy's rigorous 16-week training program that consisted of coursework in policing communications, criminal law, physical fitness and emergency response. They also received training in patrol procedures, investigations and tactical and administrative skills. Attorney General Bird welcomed the graduates on stage as they were presented with their diplomas by ILEA Director Brady Carney.

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

Officer Trent Howard received the Top Shot Award and was selected as class lieutenant. He and Officer Aaliyah Moore will serve with the Altoona Police Department. ■

# FIRE & ICE

WINTER BAR CRAWL

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!*

The logo for Valley Junction, featuring the words "VALLEY JUNCTION" in a stylized font with "WEST DES MOINES" at the bottom. The logo is set against a dark background with a small graphic of a train or bridge at the top.

Two photographs showing groups of people at the Valley Junction winter bar crawl. The left photo shows a group of women in winter hats holding drinks. The right photo shows a group of people, including men and women, holding drinks in a social setting.

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The logo for the Des Moines Buccaneers, featuring a pirate hat and the team name.

The logo for Fireball Cinnamon Whisky, featuring a red dragon.

The logo for Dr. McGillicuddy's, featuring a stylized doctor's cap and the team name.

The logo for the Iowa Wild, featuring a green and yellow design.

The logo for the Minnesota Wild, featuring a green and yellow design.

[www.iowalivingmagazines.com](http://www.iowalivingmagazines.com)

JANUARY | 2026

Altoona Living magazine 9

## MEET Rachel Duray

Values getting to know students individually

After completing her undergraduate degree at the University of Iowa in 2022, Rachel Duray taught K-6 ELL for three years at Grant Wood Elementary School in Iowa City. During that time, she was also the girls and boys assistant swim coach at Iowa City High.

When Duray began considering districts in the Des Moines Metro, she looked for schools that contained friends from the University of Iowa and solid athletic programs so she could continue coaching. This school year, Duray has entered her first year with the Southeast Polk Community School District and fourth year teaching overall. She currently teaches special education at the junior high.

“Something I love about working at Southeast Polk is the people I work with in my building,” Duray says. “I am so fortunate to have great coworkers, including the ELA teacher I co-teach with, the ELA team, the eighth and ninth grade special education teams, and my amazing associates. I am also very lucky to have experienced and knowledgeable instructional coaches and administrators who are willing to help me whenever I need it.”

Although Duray enjoys working with elementary school students, the majority of her student teaching was at the junior high level. She says she always knew she would eventually return to teaching junior high. At this level, Duray has the opportunity to see many of her students every day in a small group setting where she can really get to know them individually.

“I believe that the foundation of education is building positive relationships with my students. In order for students to buy into what I am teaching, they need to feel comfortable and valued in my classroom.”

As a special education teacher, Duray typically spends half of her day teaching applied ninth-grade English in her classroom with a small group of students who receive special education services. The other half of her day is typically spent co-teaching in the general education ninth-grade English classroom.

“Something I really enjoy about my job, and think is really important, is finding ways for students in my applied classes to still access grade-level curriculum, even if they are not grade-level readers,” Duray says. “I like being able to add and find new scaffolding/activities to help support my students with their reading and writing.”

During the remainder of the school year, Duray is looking forward to helping coach the junior high swim team in February. This spring, she is also finishing her master’s degree at Buena Vista University. ■



Rachel Duray joined the Southeast Polk Community School District this year.

# NOW HIRING

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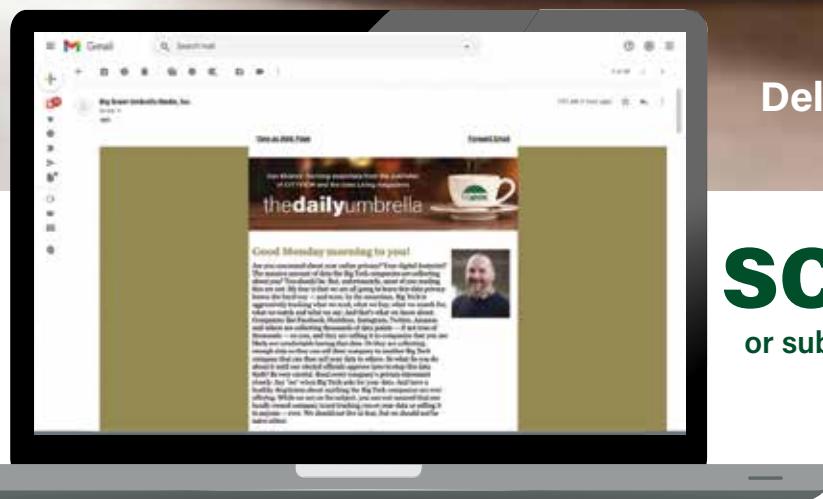


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# WHERE I find inspiration — and a new comfort-food favorite

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.

# 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, which a bank sets up and maintains for you.

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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 more quickly 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 more quickly than businesses can achieve independently.
4. Eliminates staff time spent processing checks and frees up your accounts receivable resources to complete other tasks. This 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 financial team for more information, costs and ROI estimates. ■

Information provided by Mary Simon, VP, Altoona Branch Manager, 3820 Eighth St. S.W., Altoona, 515-245-5480, [MSimon@BankersTrust.com](mailto:MSimon@BankersTrust.com).  
Bankers Trust NMLS ID: 440379.



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*Mary Simon*  
VP, Altoona Branch Manager



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# HAWTHORN Cottage House

Hawthorn Cottage is a thoughtfully designed two-bedroom, two-bath home with 1,560-square-feet of well-balanced living space. A large screened rear porch and an open kitchen-great room layout create the perfect blend of indoor and outdoor comfort, while the bedroom wing offers privacy from the main entertaining area. With classic lap siding, Southern charm and flexible foundation options, this one-story cottage is perfect for anyone seeking a small home with inviting features and a smart floor plan. ■



## 1,560 SQ FT, 2 BEDROOMS, 2 BATHS

### DIMENSIONS

**Floors:** 1

**Bedrooms:** 2

**Bathrooms:** 2.0

**Foundation(s):** Slab, Pier

### SQUARE FEET

**Main Floor:** 1,560

**Total Conditioned:** 1,560

**Front Porch:** 177

**Rear Porch:** 401

### DIMENSIONS

**Width:** 54'-9"

**Depth:** 46'-9"

**Height:** 26'-8"

### LEVEL NAME CEILING HEIGHTS

**Main Floor** 10'-0"

### CONSTRUCTION

**Wall Construction:** 2x6

**Exterior Finish:** Lap Siding, Board & Batten

**Roof Pitch:** 12:12

### FEATURES

**Kitchen:** Island, Snack

**Primary Bedroom:** Tub, Double Sink, Shower, Porch, Walk-in Closet

**Additional:** Fireplace, Porch

**Garage:** None

Photography and 3D images by Lake & Land Studios, LLC. Designed by Lake & Land Studios, LLC. Plan number SL-2004. [houseplans.southernliving.com](http://houseplans.southernliving.com)



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FAITH

By Nathan Anenson

# WHO are you becoming?

We're all becoming someone. Every day, whether we notice it or not, we are being shaped into a certain kind of person. This process is often called spiritual formation. It happens to everyone — religious or not.



Mother Teresa was a product of spiritual formation, and so was Hitler. Gandhi was spiritually formed, as was Chairman Mao. Same with Taylor Swift, Elon Musk and Brock Purdy. Their spirits have been formed over a long period of time through a complex combination of family patterns, childhood experiences, education, habits, decisions, relationships, entertainment, suffering, response to that suffering, and more.

The same is true for all of us.

You have been formed, and you are being formed. You are becoming someone. So, the real question is: Do you like who you are becoming?

Most of us would say we would like to become a more loving, patient and courageous person. But how do you get that way? Those qualities do not appear by accident. We don't drift into kindness or stumble into wisdom. Becoming a certain kind of person requires intention.

For followers of Jesus, the goal is to become a certain kind of person, specifically, a person like Jesus, a person of love. Jesus embodied love, and one of his earliest followers summed it up simply: God is love. To follow Jesus, then, is to grow in our capacity to love well. The key question is: Am I becoming a more loving person?

But love isn't just a feeling. Love is patient. Love is kind. Love shows up in how we treat our spouse when we're tired, how we speak to strangers online, how we respond when we're misunderstood or inconvenienced.

A surprising place to begin this journey is honesty — what some traditions call confession. It's the humble admission that we don't always love well. That we are impatient. Defensive. Self-focused. Naming that truth isn't about shame; it's about freedom.

Next, be intentional about your habits. The practices we repeat shape the people we become. Jesus himself practiced rhythms like prayer, silence, worship and rest. These practices create space for God's grace to do its quiet work, slowly burning away things like pride, greed, fear and control — anything that keeps us from loving well.

Finally, find a church community and take this journey together. Real growth doesn't happen in isolation.

Whether we realize it or not, we are being formed every day — by the people we spend time with, the stories we consume, the habits we keep, and the algorithms we scroll through. The invitation is simple, but challenging: Become intentional about who you are becoming. ■

Information provided by Pastor Nathan Anenson, Lutheran Church of the Cross, 1701 Eighth St. S.W., Altoona, 515-967-4818.

# STRATEGIES to thrive as you age

Aging is not a decline; it is evolving into a new chapter filled with opportunities for growth, connection and joy. Empowering yourself to live well means creating environments, habits and mindsets that support independence, dignity and purpose. Here are a few key strategies to help you thrive as you age.

**Cultivate a positive mindset.** The way we think about aging shapes how we experience it. Seniors who view aging as a time for learning and contribution tend to stay more active and engaged. Reframing aging from “loss” to “possibility” encourages confidence and resilience. Simple practices like gratitude journaling or setting small, meaningful goals can boost emotional well-being and create a sense of purpose.

**Prioritize physical health.** Movement is medicine. Regular exercise, whether walking, yoga or light strength training, improves balance, reduces fall risk and supports heart health. Pair this with a balanced diet and adequate hydration to maintain energy. Preventive care, including routine screenings and vaccinations, is also essential for catching issues early and staying healthy longer.

**Support cognitive wellness.** Brain health matters as much as physical health. Activities like puzzles, reading or learning a new skill stimulate the mind and help maintain memory. Social interaction also



plays a critical role in cognitive resilience, so staying connected with friends, family and community is vital.

**Create safe and comfortable living spaces.** A supportive environment promotes independence. Simple home modifications, such as grab bars, good lighting and clutter-free walkways, reduce risks and make daily life easier.

**Encourage lifelong learning and purpose.** Purpose fuels vitality. You can explore hobbies, take classes, mentor younger generations or volunteer in your communities. These activities provide meaning, stimulate the mind and strengthen social bonds. Even small acts of contribution can make a big difference in overall happiness.

**Address financial and emotional security.** To feel empowered, you need peace of mind. Financial planning, fraud prevention and clear communication about healthcare and legal decisions can help you feel secure. Emotional support, through family, friends, community groups or spiritual practices, also nurtures resilience during life transitions.

**Living well can be a choice.** The empowerment of seniors is about more than meeting basic needs; it's about enabling autonomy, fostering joy and creating opportunities for growth. With the right mindset, resources and community, aging can be a vibrant, fulfilling stage of life. Every step toward empowerment is a step toward living well. ■

Information provided by Stephanie Proper, executive director, Valley View Village, 2571 Guthrie Ave., Des Moines, 515-265-2571.

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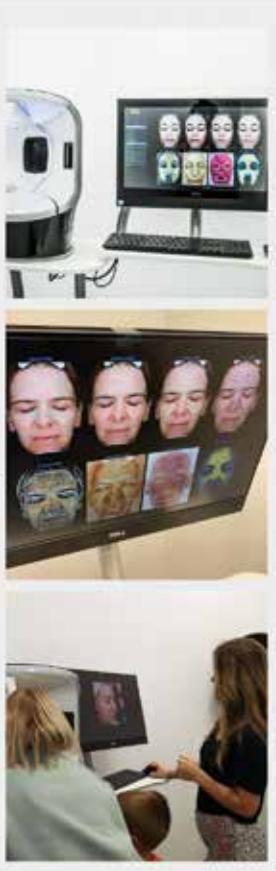
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## WELLNESS

By Nikki Morgan

### MICRONEEDLING: art and science of skin renewal

In today's beauty landscape, where results and refinement go hand in hand, microneedling has emerged as a sophisticated approach to skin rejuvenation. Celebrated for its ability to work with the skin's natural biology, this treatment offers a way to restore luminosity, texture and resilience.



Microneedling uses precision-controlled, ultra-fine needles to create microscopic channels in the skin. These controlled micro-injuries activate the body's innate healing response, signaling the production of collagen and elastin — two essential proteins responsible for skin's firmness, elasticity and youthful structure. As fresh collagen forms, the skin appears smoother, more even and visibly refreshed.

One of microneedling's most compelling benefits lies in its ability to address multiple concerns at once. Fine lines soften, acne scars appear refined, pores look less pronounced, and overall tone becomes more balanced. Over time, the skin develops a strengthened foundation, revealing a natural radiance that feels effortless rather than overcorrected.

As technology continues to advance, microneedling has evolved into a highly refined experience. Modern devices, including the latest SkinPen® technology, offer precise depth control and enhanced safety, allowing treatments to be tailored to individual skin needs while maintaining exceptional consistency and comfort. ■

Information provided by Nikki Morgan, DNP, ARNP, SkinFusion, 200 Second St. S.E., Altoona, 515-967-0587, [www.skinfusionfx.com](http://www.skinfusionfx.com), [nikki.skinfusionfx@gmail.com](mailto:nikki.skinfusionfx@gmail.com)



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## HEALTH

By Ashley Powell

### THE QUIET move away from alcohol

Alcohol has long been the default way to unwind, celebrate or socialize. Lately, that default has been quietly changing. Today, more people are paying closer attention to how alcohol affects the body and are questioning whether it still fits into a healthy lifestyle.



Alcohol is, by definition, toxic to the body. It can disrupt sleep, increase inflammation, impact mood and place strain on the liver and nervous system. Even moderate drinking can leave people feeling depleted the next day. As wellness becomes a bigger priority, many are choosing to step away from something that works against the body rather than supporting it.

Hemp-derived products have become part of that shift. Hemp contains naturally occurring cannabinoids that interact with the body's endocannabinoid system, which plays a role in balance, stress response, sleep and overall regulation. Rather than taxing the body, hemp is often used as a wellness tool to help people relax, unwind and recover.

What surprises many first-time shoppers is the variety available. Local CBD stores commonly offer beverages such as sodas, seltzers, teas and flavored drinks. These options can vary in THC, CBD and other minor cannabinoid content, allowing people to choose products that align with their comfort level and wellness goals.

The move away from alcohol is not just about feeling better. It is about choosing something that is better for the body. ■

Information provided by Ashley Powell, CBD American Shaman, 800 S. 50th St., No. 106, West Des Moines, 515-380-5251, and 3418 Eighth St. S.W., No. 3, Altoona, 515-967-4036.

## 4 WAYS to prioritize your health

A new year provides the opportunity to shift your priorities. Making your health a top priority will bring both immediate and long-term benefits to your physical, mental and emotional well-being. Bridging the gap between wanting to live a healthy lifestyle and actually living the lifestyle can be done with commitment and preparation.

**1. Have a plan.** Planning helps create a clear idea, a visualization, of how to reach your goals. Don't be afraid to ask for help.

**2. Become goal-oriented.** Set goals, write them down and place them in a highly visible spot. Stay committed to your goals.

**3. Take action.** Repetition breeds habits, and habits turn into character traits. Our value systems are the foundations upon which we build our future. It is one thing to say you want to be healthy, but to be healthy, you must act. Start by choosing one healthy habit and being consistent and persistent with that habit before adding another one.

**4. Tune up your engine.** It is impossible to function at your highest level when you are not supporting your body.

- Support your nervous system with regular chiropractic adjustments. A healthy nervous system is essential for optimal function and expression of health.

- Aim for adequate hydration and optimal nutrition.
- Consider a well-balanced, whole-foods-based purification/detoxification. This can help to eliminate toxins and improve immune and metabolic functions.
- Plan for daily movement, including walking and stretching.
- Prioritize sleep and manage stress levels. ■

Information provided by Dr. Kari Swain and Dr. Elizabeth Ellrich, Swain Chiropractic, 410 Center Place S.W., Altoona, 515-967-9300.

## PLAN AHEAD

By Scott Eriksen

## 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](http://www.HamiltonsFuneralHome.com).

# Thrive in 2026!

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# EVENTS IN THE AREA

Be sure to check for cancellations.

**Note about calendar events:** This magazine is delivered the fourth Thursday of each month. Calendar items included are events happening after the delivery date and extend into the following month. If you receive and read your magazine upon delivery, you will not miss out on any calendar items.

## Coming up in Altoona Living magazine:

**"I do!"** Stories about marriage proposals: Share the story of how your courtship culminated in a proposal to remember. Email [tammy@iowalivingmagazines.com](mailto:tammy@iowalivingmagazines.com) 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](mailto:tammy@iowalivingmagazines.com).

## Live Music at Prairie Meadows

1 Prairie Meadows Drive, Altoona

- Friday, Jan. 23, 8-11 p.m., Simple Company
- Tuesday, Jan. 27, 11 a.m. to 3 p.m., Clarksville Station
- Friday, Jan. 30, 8-11 p.m., Orphan Annie & the Hot Mess
- Saturday, Jan. 31, 8-11 p.m., Jake McVey
- Tuesday, Feb. 3, 11 a.m. to 3 p.m., Kowboy Kid
- Thursday, Feb. 5, 7 p.m., Big Country Showdown
- Friday, Feb. 6, 8-11 p.m., The Weasels
- Saturday, Feb. 7, 8-11 p.m., Gut Feeling
- Tuesday, Feb. 10, 11 a.m. to 3 p.m., Craig Swalwell Band
- Thursday, Feb. 12, 7 p.m., Big Country Showdown
- Friday, Feb. 13, 8-11 p.m., Grind
- Saturday, Feb. 14, 7 p.m., Everly Brothers Experience
- Tuesday, Feb. 17, 11 a.m. to 3 p.m., Tommy Browder & The Country River Band
- Thursday, Feb. 19, 7 p.m., Big Country Showdown
- Friday, Feb. 20, 8-11 p.m., Mark Doty & The Cause
- Saturday, Feb. 21, 8-11 p.m., Monkey, Monkey, Monkey
- Tuesday, Feb. 24, 11 a.m. to 3 p.m., Richie Lee & the Fabulous 50s
- Thursday, Feb. 26, 7 p.m., Big Country Showdown

To submit calendar items for consideration, send to [tammy@iowalivingmagazines.com](mailto:tammy@iowalivingmagazines.com)

## Programs at Edencrest at The Tuscany

1600 Eighth St. S.E., Altoona

• **Home Instead, Thursday, Feb. 12, 1-2 p.m.** Join Home Instead for an informative, hour-long presentation about in-home care services. Topics include personalized support options, caregiver assistance and resources available to help seniors maintain independence and quality of life.

• **Telecommunications Access Iowa, Thursday, March 12, 1-2 p.m.** TAI officials will share details about their statewide program that helps individuals access specialized telecommunications equipment, including amplified phones, captioned phones and other adaptive devices that support easier communication.

• **EveryStep, Thursday, April 16, 1-2 p.m.** EveryStep and Dr. Mouser will present an informative, one-hour overview of their compassionate care and support services, including hospice, home care, grief support and community health programs designed to help individuals and families navigate life's transitions. Light snacks and refreshments will be provided.

For more information on programs, call Mallory Wentland, 515-850-6119.



## 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 and 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. Ayesha McGowan and Connor Fields are 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](http://www.iowabikeexpo.com).

## Botanical Blues is Back

Every Sunday now through March 29, brunch at 10 a.m., concerts at 1 p.m. and 3 p.m.

Greater Des Moines Botanical Garden, 909 Robert D. Ray Drive, Des Moines

Botanical Blues has long been the go-to Sunday afternoon escape for warm vibes, local talent and a laid-back atmosphere. Each set lasts one hour, with a one-hour intermission in between. Concerts are held live in the conservatory, and guests are welcome to wander the indoor gardens during the show. This year's lineup blends favorite performers from the past two decades with exciting new voices. Follow the QR code for the full lineup.



## Comedian Charlie Berens

Jan. 24

Des Moines Civic Center,  
221 Walnut St., Des Moines

Charlie Berens brings his Midwest-style comedy to Des Moines, much to the delight of comedy fans in central Iowa. More information available at [www.desmoinesperformingarts.org](http://www.desmoinesperformingarts.org).



## CITYVIEW's Fire and Ice

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

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



# EVENTS IN THE AREA

Be sure to check for cancelations.

## 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](http://www.dmpa.org)

- 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.

### Des Moines Community Playhouse

831 42nd St., Des Moines  
[www.dmplayhouse.com](http://www.dmplayhouse.com)

- Feb. 6 to March 1: "The Mousetrap"
- March 6-22: "The Lightning Thief"

### Actors, Inc. - Ames Community Theater

120 Abraham Drive, Ames, [www.actorsinc.org](http://www.actorsinc.org)

- Jan. 29-31, Feb. 6-8: "Making God Laugh"

### Class Act Productions

201 First Ave. S., Altoona, [www.captheatre.org](http://www.captheatre.org)

- Feb. 20-22, 27-28, March 1, 6-8: "Oliver! Jr."

### DMACC Ankeny Campus Theatre

2006 S. Ankeny Boulevard., Ankeny  
[www.dmacc.edu/theatre/ankeny/Pages/welcome.aspx](http://www.dmacc.edu/theatre/ankeny/Pages/welcome.aspx)

- March 6-8, 26-29: "Macbeth"

### Iowa Stage Theatre Company

Stoner Theatre, 221 Walnut St., Des Moines  
[www.iowastage.org](http://www.iowastage.org)

- March 13-22: "The Seagull"

### Tallgrass Theatre Company

2019 Grand Ave., Suite 100, West Des Moines  
[www.tallgrasstheatre.org](http://www.tallgrasstheatre.org)

- Feb. 13 to March 1: "Disenchanted!"

### Des Moines Young Artists' Theatre

Munro Building, Des Moines University Campus, 3380 Grand Ave., Des Moines  
[www.dmyat.org](http://www.dmyat.org)

- Feb. 20 to March 1: "Winnie the Pooh"

### Ankeny Community Theatre

1932 S.W. Third St., Ankeny  
[https://www.ankenycommunitytheatre.com/](http://www.ankenycommunitytheatre.com/)

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

To submit calendar items for consideration, send to [tammy@iowalivingmagazines.com](mailto:tammy@iowalivingmagazines.com)

## Made In The Midwest Returns to Highland Regional Musicals

Temple Theater, 1011 Locust St., Des Moines

Des Moines Performing Arts (DMPA) proudly announces the return of Made in the Midwest at the Temple Theater for an exciting new season. The upcoming season features five dynamic artists representing a diverse mix of genres, from classic country and folk to indie rock and blues. Each performance will also include an opener, giving audiences even more opportunities to discover rising stars from across the Midwest. The 2026 season includes:

- **The Cactus Blossoms:** Classic Country/Folk/Americana, Tuesday, Jan. 27. Opener: Angela Autumn
- **Weary Ramblers:** Folk/Americana/Bluegrass/Country, Thursday, Feb. 19. Opener: Brian Johannessen
- **Carver Jones:** Alternative/Indie Rock/Indie Pop, Saturday, Feb. 28. Opener: Dirty Blonde
- **Other Brothers:** Rock/Blues/Classic Rock, Saturday, March 7. Opener: Cedar County Cobras
- **The Lubben Brothers:** Traditional/Contemporary Folk, Saturday, April 25. Opener: Courtney Krause

For information and to purchase tickets, visit [DMPA.org](http://DMPA.org).

## Splurge: West End Salvage's Annual Wine, Cheese and Chocolate event

Friday, Jan. 23 and Saturday, Jan. 24, 6-9 p.m.

West End Architectural Salvage, 22 Ninth St., Des Moines

What's better than a decadent night of wine, cheese and chocolate from local wineries, artisans and chocolatiers? Break up the winter monotony and SPLURGE with all your favorite people. Buy tickets on Eventbrite.

## Iowa AG Expo

Feb. 3-5

Iowa Events Center, 730 Third St., Des Moines

No need to travel far to see the latest farm equipment when the Iowa Ag Expo brings the biggest names and newest innovations to Des Moines each winter. Spanning 7.25 acres, the Iowa Ag Expo is the third-largest indoor ag show in the United States, hosting nearly 700 exhibitors across three buildings of the Iowa Events Center in Des Moines. These companies come from around the world to display the best ag has to offer, from big iron, precision ag and livestock production to autonomous equipment, electric vehicles, robotics, artificial intelligence solutions and more. To view the full Iowa Ag Expo program and list of exhibitors, visit <https://iowaagexpo.com/show-program/>. Buy tickets at [www.iowaeventscenter.com/events/detail/iowa-ag-expo-5](http://www.iowaeventscenter.com/events/detail/iowa-ag-expo-5)

## Harlem Globetrotters, the 100th Year Tour

Thursday, Feb. 12, 7 p.m.

Casey's Center, 223 Center St., Des Moines

The Harlem Globetrotters are coming to Des Moines with their most legendary tour ever. From gravity-defying dunks to game-changing tricks, experience the team that redefined basketball. This is history you can feel and a celebration of 100 years of over-the-top fun with all-new surprises like the Golden Basketball by Spalding. This is a fan celebration from the moment you arrive with epic new pre-game magic, unforgettable post-game interactions, and the most fan-fueled experience in sports. More information and tickets: [www.iowaeventscenter.com/events/detail/the-harlem-globetrotters-100-year-tour](http://www.iowaeventscenter.com/events/detail/the-harlem-globetrotters-100-year-tour).

## Winterfest Market

Saturday, Jan. 24, 8 a.m.

EMC Expo Center, Iowa Events Center, 730 Third St., Des Moines

Escape the post-holiday blues and treat yourself to something special at Winterfest Market — a cozy indoor shopping event featuring your favorite local makers, artisans and small businesses. Unique handmade goods and one-of-a-kind finds. Winter deals and new year treasures. More information: [www.iowaeventscenter.com/events/detail/winterfest-market](http://www.iowaeventscenter.com/events/detail/winterfest-market)



## EVENTS IN THE AREA

Be sure to check for cancellations.

### A Celebration in Song

Saturday, Feb. 7, 7:30 p.m.

St. Ambrose Cathedral, 607 High St., Des Moines

Enjoy the fifth annual collegiate invitational concert, with the Iowa State Singers and the Wartburg College Choir. Buy tickets at <https://app.arts-people.com/?show=290262>.



### Des Moines Home and Garden Show

Feb. 12-15

Iowa Events Center, 730 Third St., Des Moines

The largest home show in Des Moines, this show features landscaping companies, remodeling contractors, interior design companies and more. See Craig Conover of Bravo's "Southern Charm" and learn about his Sewing Down South home and lifestyle brand Feb. 13 and 14. Spring is in full bloom with blossoming trees and flowers at the Feature Gardens, created by top Des Moines area landscapers. Shop local at the Made in IOWA Market. Don't miss the Rose Farm Inspiration Stage for show stopping presentations ranging from Sourdough Pizza Making to All Things Floral and more. Tickets and event times at [www.iowaeventscenter.com/events/detail/des-moines-home-garden-show-7](http://www.iowaeventscenter.com/events/detail/des-moines-home-garden-show-7).



### Winter Blues Fest 2026

Friday, Feb. 13, and Saturday, Feb. 14

Downtown Des Moines Marriott,  
700 Grand Ave., Des Moines

Two nights, 20 acts, all under one roof and out of the cold. Lineup information and tickets available at <https://cibs.org/2025/10/2026-winter-blues-fest/>.



### 2026 MS Moments Orange Gala

Saturday, Feb. 28, 4:45 p.m.

Vibrant Music Hall, 2938 Grand Prairie Parkway, Waukee

The Orange Gala is MS Moment's premier event dedicated to raising awareness and vital funds for MS Moments, a 100% volunteer-led organization committed to supporting Iowa families affected by multiple sclerosis. This impactful evening brings together influencers, philanthropists and advocates for an unforgettable experience. The evening will feature speakers, inspiring stories, delicious food and exclusive entertainment, creating a memorable and meaningful celebration of community and support. More information: [www.catchdesmoines.com/event/2026-ms-moments-orange-gala/54873/](http://www.catchdesmoines.com/event/2026-ms-moments-orange-gala/54873/) ■

## BOOK REVIEWS

Courtesy of Beaverdale Books

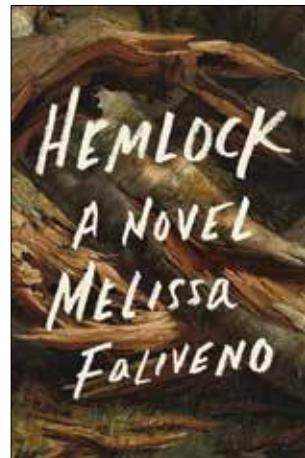
### 'Hemlock'

Melissa Faliveno's "Hemlock" is a story about addiction, isolation and a creepy deer. This is a haunting novel that balances psychological tension with an intimate exploration of identity and that indefinable sense of place that roots so many people. Set in a small Wisconsin town, the story follows a woman named Sam who is returning home after years away. She will finally have to wrestle with both her past and her present in a thousand ways as she is tossed about in a sea of alcohol, memories and her own inner demons.

The tension builds less through plot twists than through the simmering emotional undercurrents that Sam is flailing through. While there are secrets here, what actually happened to Sam's mother? This is less a mystery and more a slow-burn character study that treats the location as a main character in the best way.

Faliveno's background as an essayist is evident in her almost documentary-style descriptions and her ability to capture the nuances inherent in any place. Yet, the novel never feels overwritten; instead, it offers a sharp, immersive experience that lingers long after the final page.

— Review by Julie Goodrich



By Jennifer Eli Bowen

10/21/25

264 pages

\$29

Little, Brown and Company

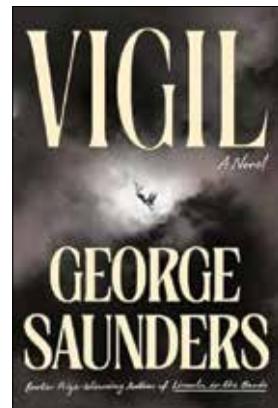
### 'Vigil'

George Saunders' skill at breaking my heart in surprising ways is unparalleled. His newest offering, "Vigil," is yet another testament to his ability to fuse morality and emotion into a close-fitting narrative that feels bigger than it should. There are questions of humanity, honor, selfishness and how everything we do affects others, intentionally or not.

A stereotypical oil baron is about to die. In that death, he will come to face the myriad ways his actions have changed others' lives for better or worse. His justifications and very grey morals seem obvious on the face of things, but, like so many things in this world, there are layers and layers to dig through. What is one human life, really?

When the world outside feels so broken, a story of connection between even the most flawed of people feels revolutionary. Saunders invites readers to consider what it truly means to show up for others — quietly, imperfectly but wholeheartedly. The result is a story that manages to be uplifting in the saddest of ways. Short but full of rhythm and just surreal enough to shine, this feels like an instinct classic to me. ■

— Review by Julie Goodrich



By George Saunders

01/27/26

192 pages

\$25

Random House

# LOOKING ahead in 2026

As much as the holiday season is a favorite of many, it sometimes feels like the craziest, fastest-paced, most energy-draining four to six weeks of life. As we end one year with all of its ups and downs, we look forward to welcoming a new year, looking for a fresh start.



Fresh starts for the new year usually include goals such as getting healthy/losing weight or maybe becoming more active with a new or reinvigorated exercise program. For some, it's setting new financial goals such as sticking to a budget, getting out of debt or saving money. Then, for those wanting to de-clutter, it's getting organized and having order not only in our homes, but maybe also in our lives.

Just as many of you have set goals for your personal lives, your local chamber board has set goals for 2026 as well, with a strong focus on supporting our small businesses, improving community engagement and committing ourselves to doing things that will have a positive impact now and into the future. We want to take what we have done well and make it even better. We want to try new things, see new faces at our events, as well as add more volunteers and participation in the events and activities that are offered.

Not only would we like to see you involved with the many events during the year, but we would also like you to continue to support the many great locally owned businesses in Altoona. From one edge of town to the other, there are restaurants, coffee shops, retail gift stores, pet stores, flower shops, salons, Realtors, chiropractors, banks and health and wellness businesses with owners and managers who are focused not only on servicing the community well, but building long-lasting relationships with those they serve. If you want to know more about a business, the Altoona Chamber does an excellent job of offering various ways to connect you, whether through social media, their website or the annual Business & Community Guide.

So, as you are setting your personal goals for 2026, maybe you can add "support my local community" to your list? We are planning some great things for this year, and it just won't be the same without you.

**Mark your calendars:** Nominations for Community Awards are due on Friday, Jan. 30 — get online and make your voices heard.

The Love Local Campaign begins Friday, Jan. 30. Watch our social media channels for your chance to win our Couples, Bromance, Galentine's & Love Bug (littles) baskets. Winners announced Feb. 11. ■

Information provided by Twila Shreves, 2026 Altoona Chamber President, Owner, Hidden Treasures Gifts and Book-Tea-Que.

*It's Time to  
NOMINATE!*

*Annual Dinner  
Award  
Nominations*

*Click on the link found  
on our social media bios  
to vote!*



@altoona\_chamber



# RESIDENTS' Choice

Eastern Polk County Resident's Choice certificates were presented to winners.



Favorite Pastor and Favorite Church: Nathan Anenson, Lutheran Church of the Cross. From left: Chris Vorrie, Nathan Anenson, Eli Suddarth, Loral Swanson and Brad Hallberg.



Favorite Health Club or Gym and Place for Children's Birthday Parties and runner-up for Favorite Place to Take Your Kids or Grandkids was Altoona Campus. From left: Anna Kingery, Donnel Vance and Paul Hartwell.



Favorite Senior Living Establishment was Prairie Vista Village. From left: Shirley McClelland, Dorothy Deitch and Rose Carter-Petus.



Favorite Home Builder and General Contractor was Berkey Home Builders. From left: Abby Olson, Sheena Cochran-Foster, Eric Berkey, Liv Wendt and Kenny Bargloff.



Runner-up for Favorite Chiropractic Office was Swain Chiropractic. From left: Dr. Kari Swain and Dr. Elizabeth Ellrich.



Favorite Public Library was Altoona Public Library. From left: Kris Arendt, Sandy Olson, Amy Turgasen, Anne Downs and Lynn Voss.



Favorite Place to Take Kids or Grandkids and runner-up for Favorite Place to Take Mom and Dad is Enabling Garden. From left: Linda Brown, Audrey Dunn and Jim Satre.

## OUT & ABOUT



Linda Lawson at Altoona Chamber Perk Before Work at Innovate My Health on Jan. 6.



Dan Douglas at Altoona Chamber Perk Before Work at Innovate My Health on Jan. 6.



Christine O'Hern and Joel Morrow at Altoona Chamber Perk Before Work at Innovate My Health on Jan. 6.



Melissa Horton and Heather Sievers at Altoona Chamber Perk Before Work at Innovate My Health on Jan. 6.



Bob Preas, Reed Stewart and Karen Preas at Fun Size Kitchen story and activity hour at the Altoona Public Library on Jan. 5.



Preston Airhart and Emily Airhart at Fun Size Kitchen story and activity hour at the Altoona Public Library on Jan. 5.



Garrett Banta and Hayden Banta at Fun Size Kitchen story and activity hour at the Altoona Public Library on Jan. 5.



Cindy Metge and Marley Oakes at Fun Size Kitchen story and activity hour at the Altoona Public Library on Jan. 5.



Roxie Devine and Alex Wheaton at Fun Size Kitchen story and activity hour at the Altoona Public Library on Jan. 5.



Brooklyn Chesley and Amanda Chesley at Fun Size Kitchen story and activity hour at the Altoona Public Library on Jan. 5.



Freya Followill and Bergen Andrew at the Shimmie Shake Storytime at Altoona Public Library on Jan. 5.



Lois Doyle and Liam Doyle at the Shimmie Shake Storytime at Altoona Public Library on Jan. 5.



Angi Wilson and Rozella Kramer at the Shimmie Shake Storytime at Altoona Public Library on Jan. 5.



Brooklyn Hoyt, Amanda Hoyt and Madilyn Hoyt at the Shimmie Shake Storytime at Altoona Public Library on Jan. 5.



Autumn Ellis, Ally Ellis and Wilder Ellis at the Shimmie Shake Storytime at Altoona Public Library on Jan. 5.

# CLASSIFIEDS

**DISCLAIMER:** This publication does not knowingly accept advertising that is deceptive, fraudulent, or which might otherwise violate the law or accepted standards of taste. However, this publication does not warrant or guarantee the accuracy of any advertisement, or the quality of the goods or services advertised. Readers are cautioned to thoroughly investigate all claims made in any advertisement and to use good judgment and reasonable care, particularly when dealing with persons unknown to you who ask for money in advance of delivery of the goods or services advertised.

## WANT TO BUY

WANT TO BUY your manufactured or mobile home 1990 and newer CENTURY HOMES of OSKALOOSA 641-672-2344 (mcn)

## AUTOMOBILES

GOT AN UNWANTED CAR??? DONATE IT TO PATRIOTIC HEARTS. Fast free pick up. Patriotic Hearts' programs help veterans find work or start their own business. Call 24/7: 1-833-485-1046. (mcn)

Get a break on your taxes! Donate your car, truck, or SUV to assist the blind and visually impaired. Arrange a swift, no-cost vehicle pickup and secure a generous tax credit for 2025. Call Heritage for the Blind Today at 1-855 977-7030 today! (mcn)

Donate your car, truck, boat, RV and more to support our veterans! Schedule a FAST, FREE vehicle pickup and receive a top tax deduction! Call Veteran Car Donations at 1-888-429-2331 today! (mcn)

## CABLE/INTERNET

AFFORDABLE TV & INTERNET. If you are overpaying for your service, call now for a free quote and see how much you can save!

1-833-472-7954. (mcn)

DIRECTV- All your entertainment. Nothing on your roof! Sign up for Directv and get your first three months of Max, Paramount +, Showtime, Starz, MGM+ and Cinemax included. Choice package \$84.99/mo. Some restrictions apply. Call DIRECTV 1-866-296-1409. (mcn)

## FINANCIAL

Inflation is at 40-year highs. Interest rates are way up. Credit Cards. Medical Bills. Car Loans. Do you have \$10K or more in debt? Call NATIONAL DEBT RELIEF and find out how to pay off your debt for significantly less than what you owe! FREE quote: Call 1-866-552-0649. (mcn)

## HEALTH & MEDICAL

DENTAL INSURANCE from Physicians Mutual Insurance Company. Coverage for 400 plus procedures. Real dental insurance -NOT just a discount plan. Do not wait! Call now! Get your FREE Dental Information Kit with all the details! 1-855-973-9175 www.dental50plus.com/midwest #6258 (mcn)

PORTABLE OXYGEN CONCENTRATOR May Be Covered by Medicare! Reclaim independence and mobility with the compact design and long-lasting battery of Inogen One. Free information kit! Call 844-716-2411. (mcn)

STOP OVERPAYING FOR HEALTH INSURANCE! A recent study shows that a majority of people struggle to pay for health coverage. Let us show you how much you can save. Call Now for a no-obligation quote: 1-888-772-8454. You will need to have your zip code to connect to the right provider. (mcn)

ATTENTION OXYGEN THERAPY USERS! Discover Oxygen Therapy That Moves

with You with Inogen Portable Oxygen Concentrators. FREE information kit. Call 1-833-650-5916. (mcn)

## HOME SERVICES

Don't Pay for Covered Home Repairs Again! Our home warranty covers ALL MAJOR SYSTEMS AND APPLIANCES. We stand by our service and if we can't fix it, we'll replace it! Pick the plan that fits your budget! Call: 1-833-816-2128. (mcn)

WATER & FIRE DAMAGE RESTORATION. Our trusted professionals will restore your home to protect your family and your home's value! Call 24/7: 1-833-879-1480. Mold Remediation services are also available! (mcn)

## MISCELLANEOUS

Reach over 1.4 million homes for just \$249! Advertise your business or item with a classified ad in the Midwest Free Community Papers. Simple, cost-effective, and powerful. One call, and you're done! Boost your visibility now! 888-899-6327. (mcn)

NEED NEW FLOORING? Call today to schedule a FREE in-home estimate on Carpeting & Flooring. Call Today! 1-833-641-6323. (mcn)

INJURED IN AN ACCIDENT? Don't Accept the insurance company's first offer. Many injured parties are entitled to cash settlements in the \$1000's. Get a free evaluation to see what your case is really worth. 100% Free Evaluation. Call Now: 1-833-879-1534. (mcn)

Prepare for power outages today with a Generac Home Standby Generator. Act now to receive a FREE 5-Year warranty with qualifying purchase. Call 1-877-228-5789 today to schedule a free quote. It's not just a generator. It's a power move. (mcn)

THE BATHROOM OF YOUR DREAMS in as little as 1 day. Limited Time Offer - \$1000 (mcn)

off or No Payments and No Interest for 18 months for customers who qualify. BCI Bath & Shower. Many options available. Quality materials & professional installation. Senior & Military Discounts Available. Call Today! 1-833-618-1178. (mcn)

Replace your roof with the best looking and longest lasting material steel from Erie Metal Roofs! Three styles and multiple colors available. Guaranteed to last a lifetime! Limited Time Offer- up to 50% off installation + Additional 10% off install (for military, health workers & 1st responders.) Call Erie Metal Roofs: 1-844-907-2386. (mcn)

NO MORE CLEANING out gutters. Guaranteed! Leaffilter is backed by a no-clog guarantee and lifetime transferrable warranty. Call today 1-855-577-1268 to schedule a FREE inspection and no obligation estimate. Get 15% off your entire order. Plus, Military & Seniors get an additional 10% off. Limited time only. Restrictions apply, see representative for warranty and offer details. (mcn)

## REAL ESTATE

WE BUY HOUSES for Cash AS-IS! No repairs. No fuss. Any condition. Easy process: Call, get cash offer and get paid. Call today for your fair cash offer: 1-888-715-0513. (mcn)

## WANT TO BUY

CASH PAID FOR HIGH-END MEN'S SPORT WATCHES! Rolex, Breitling, Omega, Patek Philippe, Heuer, Daytona, GMT, Submariner and Speedmaster. Call 1-833-641-6646. (mcn)

WE BUY VINTAGE GUITARS! Looking for 1920-1980 Gibson, Martin, Fender, Gretsch, Epiphone, Guild, Mosrite, Rickenbacker, Prairie State, D'Angelico, Stromberg. And Gibson Mandolins / Banjos. 1-833-641-7028. (mcn)

**Transform Your Bathroom and Change Your Life.**

**FREE TOILET + \$1,500 OFF\***

For your FREE information kit and our Senior Discounts, Call Today Toll-Free  
**1-855-417-1306**

**safeStep**

\*Free toilet with purchase and installation of a walk-in tub or walk-in shower only. Offer available while supplies last. No cash value. Must present offer at time of purchase. Cannot be combined with any other offer. Market restrictions may apply. Offer available in select markets only. ©2024 1002182. NSCA 1002090 1002445. 1002100202

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The Power of Prevention

## Peace of Mind or Early Detection

Now, More than ever, it's important to get screened for Stroke and Cardiovascular Disease Risk

It's simple and painless.

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Award-Winning Roofing and Customer Service  
Erie Roofing Since 1976

**LIMITED TIME OFFER**  
**50% OFF**  
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Call 1.833.370.1234

**CALL TODAY! 1.833.370.1234**

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**LeafFilter GUTTER PROTECTION**

**EXPIRES SOON**

**15% OFF + 10% Discount For Seniors + Military**

**Get a FREE full gutter inspection and estimate: 1-855-595-2102** Promo: 285

+See Representative for full warranty details. \*Promotional offer includes 15% off plus an additional 10% off for qualified veterans and/or seniors. No obligation estimate valid for 1 year. Subject to credit approval. Call for details. AR 366920923, AZ 344027, CA 1035795, CT HIC.06/1520, FL CIC.056678, IA C127230, ID RCE.51604, LA 559544, MA 176447, MD MHIC.111225, MI 262300173, 262300318, 262300328, 262300330, 262300331, MN IR731804, MT 226192, ND 47304, NE 50145-22, 50145-23, NJ 13VH0953900, NM 408693, NV 88990, NY H-19114, H-52229, OR 218294, PA 179643, 069383, RI GC-41354, TN 10981, UT 10783658-5501, VA 270516945, WA LEAFFN822J, WV W056912.

**City of Altoona • 900 Venbury Drive • Altoona, IA 50009 • 515-967-5136**

### CITY HALL

**900 Venbury Drive**

**Altoona, IA 50009**  
**Phone: 515-967-5136**  
**FAX: 515-967-0842**  
**Open 8 a.m. – 4:30 p.m.**  
**Monday – Friday**

**Mayor Dean O'Connor**  
**515-967-5136**

### City Council Members

**Jayme McFadden 515-967-5136**  
**Scott Duer 515-418-2227**  
**Kyle Mertz 515-954-8470**  
**Jerry Evans 515-967-5136**  
**Julie Stewart 515-967-5136**

**City Administrator**  
**515-967-5136**

**City Clerk**  
**515-967-5136**

**Police Chief**  
**515-967-5132**

**Fire Chief**  
**515-967-2216**

**Library Director**  
**515-967-3881**  
**Fax: 515-967-6934**

**Water Billing**  
**515-967-5136**

**Building Department/  
 Code Enforcement**  
**515-967-5138**

**Building Official**  
**515-967-5138**

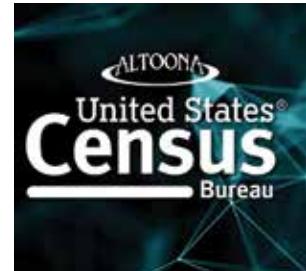
**Planning & Zoning  
 Department**  
**515-967-5136**

**Public Works Director**  
**515-967-5136**

**Human Resources**  
**515-967-5136**

### ALTOONA SPECIAL CENSUS

Now that online registration for the Special Census has concluded, Field Representatives from the U.S. Census Bureau will visit addresses that did not complete the online form. Representatives will carry official U.S. Census Bureau identification and will only visit during daylight hours, on any day of the week. For questions regarding the Special Census, please contact City Hall.



### EMERGENCY ACCESS

Maintain your sidewalks and driveway of snow and ice. If you do require an emergency response, a clear approach to your door is the safest route for the emergency responders and you. Maintain your outdoor lights to illuminate your numerical house numbers. If you call "911" for an emergency response, turn on your lights to make it easier and faster for responders to find your home.



### CITY TRAILS IN WINTER

The City of Altoona does clear the snow from the trails during winter. However, we do not treat the trails with salt or sand. The trails are cleared last, following the city facilities' sidewalks and parking lots. Please enjoy the trails but be cautious of the weather conditions.



### WINTER TRASH & RECYCLING CART PLACEMENT

Please remember that your garbage and recycling toters must be accessible 18 inches from the curb, even after a snow fall. Please do NOT place your carts on city streets. City snowplows cannot clear snow properly when these are placed on streets. This is especially true in cul-de-sacs which are impossible to plow if carts are placed in the road. In times of heavy snow, your driveway approach is likely the best spot to place your carts.



### FLOOD INSURANCE

Floods are the most frequent and costliest disaster in the United States, but the number of homeowners opting to have a National Flood Insurance Policy continues to decline. Learn more about these types of policies and find links to evaluate if your property is a good candidate for this type of insurance at [www.altoona-iowa.com](http://www.altoona-iowa.com).



**ALTOONA**  
1429 25<sup>th</sup> AVE SW  
5 Bed  
3 Bath

**\$695,000**

**ALTOONA**  
3338 9<sup>th</sup> AVE SW  
5 Bed  
4 Bath

**\$460,000**

**ALTOONA**  
705 35<sup>th</sup> ST SW  
4 Bed  
3 Bath

**\$470,000**

**ALTOONA**  
3217 LAKEVIEW DR SE  
3 Bed  
3 Bath

**\$445,000**

**ALTOONA**  
713 17<sup>th</sup> Ave SW  
3 Bed  
3 Bath

**\$420,000**

**ALTOONA**  
1110 SANDALWOOD CT SW  
5 Bed  
4 Bath

**\$425,000**

**ALTOONA**  
1005 6<sup>th</sup> ST NW  
3 Bed  
2 Bath

**\$259,000**

**PLEASANT HILL**  
6019 ROBIN RD  
3 Bed  
2 Bath

**\$362,500**

**PLEASANT HILL**  
5025 COPPER CREEK DR  
4 Bed  
4 Bath

**\$499,500**

**PLEASANT HILL**  
625 NE 72<sup>nd</sup> ST  
5 Bed  
5 Bath

**\$1,050,000**

**PLEASANT HILL**  
5917 6<sup>th</sup> AVE  
68 ACRES  
RANCH HOME  
POND

**\$1.775M**

**DES MOINES**  
525 SE 9<sup>th</sup> ST  
4 Bed  
2 Bath

**\$279,900**

**CARLISLE**  
710 JOHN CLINTON DR  
5 Bed  
3 Bath

**\$258,000**

**DES MOINES**  
1729 10<sup>th</sup> ST  
4 Bed  
2 Bath

**\$249,900**

**RUNNELLS**  
12028 SE 64<sup>th</sup> AVE  
37 ACRES  
4 Bed  
2 Bath

**\$865,000**

**ALTOONA**  
4175 NE 64<sup>th</sup> ST  
**SOLD**

**18 STALL HORSE BARN  
4,300 SQFT RANCH HOME  
4 BED 4 BATH**



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are what place your home best in the market.