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I Do

Residents share their
marriage proposal stories.



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WELCOME

A PROPOSAL in letters

It was 32 years ago when I asked Jolene to marry me. We had been dating for a few years, and we both seemed ready to tie the knot. We were not ones to travel the world or take on outlandish activities, so a simple proposal seemed fitting, at least to me. What we did do was play a lot of board games, especially during the cold winter months. That gave me an idea.



One evening, I carefully placed the engagement ring I purchased for her in the bag of letters in a Scrabble game. I asked her if she wanted to play. She didn't react positively, but I eventually talked her into it. I nervously unfolded the board and set up the racks. Then I drew my letters. She did the same.

As the game proceeded, Jolene kept drawing her replacement letters, and I kept looking at her face, awaiting her reaction when she would pull out the ring.

More rounds of play. More letters drawn. We were getting down to the end, and she still had not found the ring. Was it not there? Did I lose it? Or did she know my plan and was messing with me the entire time?

With her last draw, she felt something different in the bag and remarked, "What is in here?" Then she turned the bag upside down and shook it, bounding the ring off the table and onto the floor. I, of course, quickly picked it up, dropped to one knee, and asked her to marry me. Fortunately, she said yes. And, fortunately, the ring was still intact.

Considering what we do in our jobs today with publishing and printing and journalism and words, maybe using the Scrabble game was a good fit. I would like to tell you I had that connection planned out, but I didn't. We simply liked playing Scrabble. And we like being married.

In this month's cover story, we share the engagement stories of local residents, telling how they gained the courage to ask for their partner's hand in marriage.

Have a great month and thanks for reading. ■

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I Do'

Residents share their
marriage proposal stories.

By Ashley Rullestad

Couples often celebrate the milestones of their relationships: the day they met, their wedding, anniversaries ... And the date of their engagement is often a highlight: an event often given much thought and planning. An occasion of romance, joy and anticipation of the journey ahead.

Erik and Gwendolyn Miner became engaged along the Des Moines River. Photo by Jason Thomas Crocker



Gwendolyn Miner, and her fiancé, Erik, are planning a July 25 wedding. Photo by Jason Thomas Crocker



Dutch and Maggie Mendenhall's romance began when they met online. Photo by Caylee Evans

A walk along the river

Gwendolyn Miner grew up in Johnston, and she met her now fiancé, Erik, on a party bus for the Iowa vs. Iowa State game in 2023.

"My roommates and I put together a party bus to take us to Ames, of course, to cheer on the Iowa Hawkeyes. Through mutual friends and a lot of luck, we met each other. Even though both of us grew up in the metro, we had never met before."

Erik says he knew that Gwendolyn was "the one" on their first date — then it was only a matter of waiting an appropriate amount of time before he popped the question. In early 2025, Gwendolyn went ring shopping with some of her girlfriends. Shortly after, Erik bought the ring. As for the proposal, it was not much of a surprise. Erik has a hard time keeping secrets.

"Although I didn't know any of the details and the exact date, I could feel it coming," Gwendolyn says. "The proposal happened along the Des Moines River. We were allegedly meeting Erik's family for dinner. They texted us that they were running late. Erik said, 'Let's go on a walk,' which he's never said before. At that moment, I knew what was going to happen. We parked the car and walked to the Simon Estes Amphitheatre along the river, and the rest was a

blur until he got off one knee."

Erik made the weekend special by thoughtfully planning everything out to make the moment memorable. He reached out to photographer Amanda Basteen to capture the special moment. After the proposal, the couple went to Malo to meet both their families. The restaurant is important to them, as they went to Malo for their first dinner date in 2023.

After dinner, friends were waiting at their townhouse with champagne and cake.

The next day, Erik rented the patio at Stuffed Olive to celebrate with more friends and family. The whole weekend felt like one giant fantasy filled with many surprises, Gwendolyn says.

The couple plans to marry on July 25 at St. Mary's Catholic Church, the church Gwendolyn grew up attending. They will have their reception at Stuart Alexander's The Loft in downtown Des Moines. Right now, they are busy with the usual planning with vendors. They are excited to host their rehearsal dinner at The Temple for Performing Arts and welcome out-of-town guests at Hotel Fort Des Moines. They've chosen Lidderdales as the caterer and Jason Thomas Crocker as their wedding photographer.

"We are so excited to take this next step together," Gwendolyn says.

Fairytales proposal

Dutch Mendenhall met his now wife, Maggie, on TikTok — as many couples now do. At the time, they were living in different states. He was in Florida, and she was in Georgia. They had been talking for a few months when Maggie invited Dutch to visit and attend a World War II-themed heritage dance with a live jazz band in an old airplane hangar in Peachtree City, Georgia.

"I was a photographer, so I drove seven-and-a-half hours up to meet her and do a photo shoot," Dutch says. "Then we went to the dance, and I drove seven-and-a-half hours home. We started dating a couple months later long distance and then a month after we started dating, I got a job up in Georgia and moved up there."

Maggie decided she wanted to audition for a Broadway-style production of "Into the Woods." Dutch wasn't interested in joining the cast, but peer pressure got the best of him, and he ended up in the role of one of the minor leads while Maggie played Cinderella. It was the first play Maggie had ever been in, and, although Dutch had been in high school plays, it was his first musical.

Dutch decided he was ready to propose after

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FEATURE



Dutch and Maggie Mendenhall have been married for three years now and have a daughter named Elsie.

four months, and during the play seemed the best time to do it.

"I knew she was the one because she is an amazing woman," he says. "The play had six shows, and there was only one night that her family could make it, so I planned to do it on the night of the fourth show when they were there. I played Cinderella's prince, and she played Cinderella. After the show, I proposed at the curtain call."

Dutch proposed with a vintage opal engagement ring because Maggie has an opal Claddagh ring, and she is fond of vintage items. The couple has been married for three-and-a-half years now and have a 2-year-old daughter, Elsie.

"We ended up in Iowa because I went to Faith Baptist Bible College, and I lived here from 2016 to 2021," Dutch says. "After we got married, we were trying to find a place where we could buy a place and raise our daughter, and we settled here. It's a great place to continue our story together."

A match made in Johnston

Buff and Greg Ross met at DMACC in September 1973. Buff had just graduated from Dowling and Greg from Johnston.

"I knew she was the one with our first kiss in November 1973 on a snowy night outside a popular Drake area watering hole," Greg says.

Though the proposal wasn't carefully planned, after four years of dating, the couple had ample time to explore shared interests and favorite places. Saylorville Lake was a special spot for them, particularly before it was filled. They could hike across areas now submerged underwater. Greg proposed beneath the Mile Long Bridge. They were married at St. Pius X Catholic Church in Urbandale on Oct. 16, 1976.

"When we were dating, Buff would ride her bike from Urbandale where she lived by Merle Hay Mall, down the two-lane road to Johnston when I was still living with my folks," Greg says. "We began our marriage buying a small house in Des Moines, but we would spend many of our weekends relaxing in Johnston at my parents' place. In the 1970s, Johnston felt like living in the country."

In 1980, an opportunity came up to buy a house just one house away from Greg's mom and dad, and they seized it. They lived there for 24 years and raised three daughters in that house located in one of the first subdivisions in Johnston on Northwest 66th Avenue.

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FEATURE

The girls could ride their bikes to Hy-Vee or to get a treat at what is now Van Dees. When it was time for supper, Greg would give one of his famous whistles, loud enough to be heard wherever they were. They would come home in minutes, and the other neighborhood children were also instructed to come home when they heard the whistle. Today, the girls and their 13 grandchildren all live within 20 minutes of the Rosses' current Johnston home.

"We chose to stay in Johnston because we had great neighbors, and my parents were nearby," Greg says. "Later, my sister and her husband moved into the neighborhood as well, making it feel like our own subdivision. Our current home is about 1,500 feet from where I proposed to my wife. It's always been home." ■



Buff and Greg Ross have always called Johnston home.



Buff and Greg Ross became engaged under the Mile Long Bridge at Saylorville Lake.

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MARTINS choose remodel over move

Neighborhood sways couple to stay put.

In May 2010, Julie and Greg Martin found the perfect home for their needs, complete with a primary bedroom on the main level and a private backyard, both high on their wish list.

More than 15 years later, they decided it was time to make some major updates.

"We initially thought about moving to get the open, larger kitchen we desired," Martin shares. "We looked but couldn't find anything we liked that also had a private backyard and smaller neighborhood. Our neighbors are special. We decided we didn't want to leave them or the setting, so we decided to look into remodeling."

The Martins received a quote for the project, which helped them realize just how many decisions would be involved in the process.

"We continued to look at open houses for ideas and liked one so well that we asked if the builder ever did remodels," Martin says. "They did, so we started meeting with them and going through what the process would entail, getting pricing, etc."

They ultimately decided to move forward with Brenner Built after connecting with owner Cody Brenner and project manager Jordan Ross — both Johnston graduates — whose approach stood out.

"Decorating is not my thing, but they promised they would help us along the way, and they certainly did," Martin says.

What Martin enjoys most about the new kitchen is how open the space feels. She can now see straight through to the windows in the back, the island is larger, and the refrigerator was relocated to make the layout more efficient and less crowded. With walls removed, the Martins were also able to add a longer table that easily accommodates the entire family.

"It feels like a new home," Martin says. "It's updated and exactly what we wanted. We use it more."

Encouraged by the experience, the Martins are already discussing additional updates to other areas of their home.

AFTER



The old island was replaced with a modern one.

BEFORE



The Martins' kitchen remodel opened up the kitchen, providing a view to the new windows that brighten the area.

AFTER



"The builder you choose makes a huge difference," Martin adds. "They made the entire process seamless and easy. They gave me suggestions and took me to meet experts in each area that helped me make decisions on flooring, cabinets, countertops, appliances, lighting, etc."

With plans for future updates already taking shape, the Martins are excited to continue updating a home they never wanted to leave. ■



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PAIR simplicity and flavor with seafood pasta

(Family Features) Some recipes come from a well-worn family card, and others are born on a busy weeknight when you need dinner to feel special without being complicated. Shrimp spaghetti falls squarely into that second category for me. It's the kind of meal that looks impressive on the plate but comes together quickly

— perfect for those evenings when you want something comforting, a little indulgent, and absolutely reliable.

I love shrimp because it cooks fast and pairs beautifully with simple ingredients. Toss it with garlic, olive oil, a hint of heat, and a squeeze of lemon, and suddenly an ordinary box of spaghetti feels elevated. This is the dish I reach for when I want a break from heavy sauces but still crave big flavor. It's light enough for warmer months, yet cozy enough to enjoy year-round.

Simple, satisfying, and full of flavor. This shrimp spaghetti is proof that a good meal doesn't have to be complicated to feel special. Find more quick dinner solutions by visiting Culinary.net. ■

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



Shrimp Spaghetti

Recipe courtesy of "Cookin' Savvy"
Servings: 4-6

- 1 pound spaghetti noodles
- 2 tablespoons butter
- 1/4 cup avocado oil
- 1 package (12 ounces) raw shrimp
- 2 tablespoons garlic powder, divided
- 1 teaspoon smoked paprika
- 1 cup chicken broth
- 1/2 cup grated Parmesan cheese
- 1/4 cup heavy cream
- 1 teaspoon onion powder
- 1 cup frozen or fresh spinach
- bread, for serving

• Cook spaghetti noodles according to package instructions. In skillet over medium heat, add butter, avocado oil and shrimp. Mix in 1 tablespoon garlic powder and paprika. Remove shrimp after they begin to turn pink; set aside.

• Add chicken broth, Parmesan cheese, heavy cream, remaining garlic powder, onion powder and spinach to skillet; mix well. Add shrimp back to skillet to finish cooking. Mix in noodles and serve with bread.



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NEWS BRIEF

BANK IOWA announces key leadership changes

Bank Iowa today announced a key leadership change in Johnston. Erik Moen, formerly a commercial relationship manager for the bank, will now serve as community bank president with responsibility for the \$2 billion family-owned bank's Johnston location.

With nearly 20 years of experience in private and business banking in the Des Moines area, Moen has led teams across a range of community banking institutions. Throughout, his focus has been on building trusting relationships that ultimately help people reach their financial goals.

An Iowa native, Moen is a long-time financial services professional with an added passion for volunteering. This makes him a good fit for Bank Iowa, which aspires to be a center of influence in its communities.

Moen contributes leadership, coaching and financial expertise as a board member for the Central Iowa Fellowship of Christian Athletes, a volunteer at The Mission Church and a youth softball coach. ■



Erik Moen

MEET Chris Danner

Made impact as student and, now, as an educator

Chris Danner's career path took shape while he was a college student at Fort Hays State University in Hays, Kansas, where he attended on a basketball scholarship. He was originally enrolled in accounting and communications before shifting his focus to education.

"The only reason for the change is because I was going into my senior year and was looking for something else that I was close to completing, since I was no longer interested in the previous two degrees," Danner explains. "Elementary ed was the closest."

On a last-minute whim, I joined the education department and completed the degree."

Since then, Danner has spent his entire 25-year teaching career in the Johnston Community School District. He completed his first year teaching fourth grade at Lawson Elementary before moving to fifth grade for five years. Danner has been teaching at Summit Middle School as the sixth-grade math and science teacher ever since.

What Danner enjoys most about his work as an educator is the relationships he is able to build.

"Whether it is teachers, parents or students, I love the people and the relationships," he says.

At the same time, Danner notes that one of the more difficult shifts he has seen in education today is navigating changes in student accountability and engagement, as well as fewer students seeking close connections with their teachers.

"Students used to share all about their lives and want you to come and see their activities," he says. "Too often now, students just want to put up their hoodies, plug in their earbuds and be left alone."

Even so, Danner remains committed to showing up for every student, meeting them where they are and being a consistent presence in their lives.

Outside the classroom, Danner coached basketball and football in the district for more than 20 years. He was part of the only two basketball state championships in Johnston's history.

Danner also has deep personal ties to the district. He is a member of the Iowa High School Basketball Hall of Fame for his time playing at Johnston — one of only two individuals in the district's history to earn that honor — and was a two-time All-State basketball player at Johnston High School. He also served on the founding board of the Johnston Basketball Club. In addition, both of his sons spent the majority of their school years in Johnston schools: Weston, a junior, and Jordan, a sophomore.

After 25 years in the classroom and on the court, Danner's impact continues to be felt not just through lessons taught, but through the lasting relationships he has built across the Johnston community. ■



Chris Danner has been with Johnston schools for 25 years, teaching at Summit Middle School for many of those years.

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ELKS LODGE helps veterans and many others

Donations benefit Easterseals, food pantries and more.

Those who have never visited or heard about a local Elks Lodge may think it is simply a social club. But the Elks Lodge in Clive (West Des Moines Lodge No. 2752), like all Elks Lodges, does much for the community. Lodge Secretary Toby Charloe and Trustee and Chair of the Board of Directors Greg Weinschenk provide insight into what their lodge does.

Although the lodge building is in Clive (2060 N.W. 94th St.) the lodge serves a much larger area.

"There are 29 Elks lodges around Iowa," Weinschenk says. "Our building is in Clive, but Urbandale falls under our jurisdiction, and Johnston, West Des Moines, Waukee, Windsor Heights and Grimes. Lodge 2752 has been in existence since 1990, and we've been in our building in Clive for the past 12 years."

The Elks is a fraternal order promoting the four cardinal virtues of charity, justice, brotherly love and fidelity," Weinschenk says.

Those virtues are easily seen in the actions of the local lodge.

"Our big focus is on veterans," Weinschenk

says. "We collect deer hides during the hunting season. We send them to a place that tans them, and then part of the leather goes to a company that makes gloves for veterans that use wheelchairs. And then some of the leather goes to Marshalltown to the veterans home there for crafts and projects."

The lodge has many partnerships in the community.

"Another thing we've been doing for the past five or six years is working with the CRRC (Community Resource and Referral Center). They help homeless veterans find apartments, and we help supply them with beds, kitchen utensils and household items," Weinschenk says.

Besides veterans' issues, the lodge does much for others, as well.

"We're a big contributor to the food pantry and Crestview Elementary School, so the teachers don't have to go out and buy school supplies for kids that don't have them. And we sponsored an infrared drone that the fire department can use to see hotspots in a fire," Weinschenk says. "They also use that to help find a person who may be

lost. We're very focused on our community."

Throughout the year, the lodge has fundraisers to help fund their giving. This year's golf tournament raised more than \$17,000. Charloe notes that, in the past year, the lodge gave \$6,000 in local scholarships, \$6,000 to special needs, \$43,000 in non-cash donations to veterans issues and \$6,000 in actual cash for veterans.

Weinschenk and Charloe note that, because the lodge encompasses many suburbs, membership has grown steadily and currently sits at 557. Anyone, male or female, is welcome to apply for membership. There is no membership requirement to be a military member or veteran.

The lodge aims to be responsive to needs in the area. Charloe points to a few recent donations to help those struggling with hunger or other needs.

"We give to local food banks in Urbandale, Grimes and Clive," Charloe says. "And we just took a \$5,000 check out to Easterseals for their respite care and Camp Sunnyside." ■

NEIGHBORS

SPECIAL OLYMPICS Iowa inducts 12 individuals into Hall of Fame

Special Olympics Iowa inducted the 2025 class, 12 individuals, into the Special Olympics Iowa Hall of Fame on December 11th.

The Hall of Fame class includes four Special Olympics Iowa athletes – Rob Beard (Marshalltown), Corey Leonhard (Muscatine), Laura Lea Smith (Eldridge), and Britt Sandahl (Urbandale); and eight volunteers – Brad and Julie Benge (Fort Madison), John "Spider" Christiansen (Clinton), John and Jeanne MacDonald (Johnston), Ann Vandehaar (Spencer), Scott Bryant (Donnellson), and Chris McCormick (Montrose). The induction ceremony took place at West48 Conference Center in West Des Moines.

The mission of Special Olympics is to help persons with intellectual disabilities to participate as productive and respected members of the community, using sports as a catalyst. Hall of Fame inductees are individuals who have been involved with Special Olympics Iowa for more than 10 years,



From left: Chris McCormick, Micki Bryant-Holterhaus, Britt Sandahl, John MacDonald, Jeanne MacDonald, Laura Lea Smith, Brad Benge, Julie Benge, John "Spider" Christiansen, Corey Leonhard. Not pictured: Rob Beard and Ann Vandehaar.

and continually strive to reach this goal by being leaders and innovators in the Special Olympics movement.

John and Jeanne MacDonald have been involved with Special Olympics Iowa since the organization was only a couple years old, first volunteering at a SOIA event in 1971. They

have served the organization as volunteers, event organizers, medical staff, fundraisers and parents, and John as a board member and past president of the SOIA board of directors. Due in part to their involvement, SOIA has grown from approximately 50 athletes in 1971 to more than 10,000 today. ■

UNDERSTANDING underwriting for Medicare Supplement Insurance

As individuals approach Medicare eligibility or are reviewing their existing coverage, the term “underwriting” often comes up, sometimes causing confusion or concern. Underwriting is a common part of the insurance process, especially for Medicare Supplement Insurance, also known as Medigap.

Understanding how it works can help you make informed decisions and avoid unnecessary stress.



What is underwriting?

Underwriting is the process insurance companies use to evaluate an applicant's medical history when deciding whether to approve a Medicare Supplement policy. If underwriting is required, carriers may review current and past health conditions, medications, hospitalizations, or recent procedures to determine eligibility.

It is important to know that underwriting does not always apply. When you first enroll in Medicare Part B at age 65 or later, you enter a six-month Medicare Supplement Open Enrollment Period. During this time, you have guaranteed issue rights, meaning you can enroll in any Medicare Supplement plan available in Iowa without answering health questions. Approval and cost are not affected by your medical history.

Once this enrollment window has passed, underwriting typically applies if you want to switch or add a Medicare Supplement plan. At that point, insurance carriers may ask a series of health questions. These often relate to conditions such as heart disease, diabetes requiring insulin, chronic lung disease, recent cancer diagnoses, or recent hospitalizations or surgeries.

Why underwriting matters

Underwriting helps insurance companies manage risk, but, for consumers, it can determine which Medicare Supplement options are available later in life. A declined application does not affect your Medicare coverage — Medicare Parts A and B remain intact — but it may limit your ability to purchase certain supplemental plans.

This is where working with a knowledgeable, local Medicare advisor can be especially beneficial. An experienced advisor understands the underwriting guidelines of different insurance carriers and can help identify options that are more likely to accept your application. In some situations, such as losing employer coverage or moving out of a service area, individuals may also qualify for special guaranteed issue of rights that waive underwriting requirements.

Preparation makes a difference

If underwriting is required, accuracy is critical. Providing complete and honest information helps prevent delays or complications later. Having guidance throughout the process ensures applications are submitted correctly and strategically.

Medicare decisions can feel overwhelming, but understanding how underwriting works brings clarity and confidence. With the right information and local support, you can navigate Medicare Supplement options more comfortably. ■

Information provided by Janis Van Ahn, Health Insurance Advisor LLC, 5870 Merle Hay Road, Suite A, Johnston, 515-225-9994, jvanahn@health-insadvisor.com.

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Presidents Day closures in Johnston

The Johnston city offices, including the library, will be closed on Monday, February 16, in observance of Presidents Day. Trash and recycling pickup days will remain unchanged. The Johnston City Council's work session will take place at 5:30 p.m. and the Council meeting at 7:00 p.m. on Tuesday, February 17, in the City Hall Council Chambers.

Phone lines at the Public Safety Building on Monday, February 16

On Monday, February 16, the phone lines at the Public Safety Building (Police and Fire) will be down for approximately one hour, starting around 10:00 a.m. This day is Presidents' Day, and the offices will be closed. If you try to call the building and receive a "fast busy" signal, please attempt to call again later. In the event of an emergency, please call 911, or for non-emergency calls, call 515-286-3333 during this time.

Contribute to your community by serving on a board or commission

It's a new year, and a great opportunity to serve your community! The city is offering several positions on boards and commissions, with terms expiring on June 30. This is your chance to make a difference and have a say in important decisions.

Here are the available openings:

- **Board of Adjustment:** Two positions
- **Park Advisory Board:** One position
- **Planning & Zoning Commission:** Two positions
- **Library Board:** Two positions

Take this opportunity to get involved! Visit www.cityofjohnston.com/boardsandcommissions to apply today.



SCAN HERE

Stay connected and updated with news

As a resident, we want you to stay informed about community events. Sign up for Johnston Ready www.cityofjohnston.com/JohnstonReady to receive emergency notifications and Johnston Loop www.cityofjohnston.com/JohnstonLoop for updates on events and meetings.



Johnston Ready



SCAN HERE



For more information about the city, please visit www.cityofjohnston.com



CITY NEWSLETTER FEBRUARY 2026

Upcoming community events to participate in

The City of Johnston and the Johnston Town Center are hosting family-friendly events throughout the year. We recommend marking your calendars to ensure you don't miss out on these exciting events. For more information about the City of Johnston events, please visit www.cityofjohnston.com and view the calendar. For information about the events at Johnston Town Center, please visit johnstontowncenter.com.

Kite Building Workshop

Saturday, April 11

2:00 – 4:00 p.m.

Spring Cleanup up

Monday, April 20 through Thursday, April 23

Residents West of NW 86th on April 20-21, and residents East of NW 86th on April 22-23

Tree Branch Cleanup

Thursday, April 23 through Saturday, April 25

Johnston Public Works. Times vary based on the day.

Farmers Market

June 2 – September 29

4:00 – 7:00 p.m.

Kites on the Green

Saturday, May 2

10:00 a.m. – 5:00 p.m.

Family Fest at the Yard

Saturday, June 6

11:00 a.m. to 2:00 p.m.

Summer Concert Series at the Yard

Saturdays, June 27, July 25, August 29, October 3

7:00 to 10:00 p.m.



Sign up to take part in recreation programs at Crown Point

The Johnston Parks & Recreation Department has a variety of programming available for you to take part in. Whether it be trips, workshops, or fitness classes, learn more about how these could help improve your wellness and connect with other residents.

Yoga (16+), Mondays 6:00–6:45 p.m., Wednesdays 5:00–5:45 p.m.

An all-levels yoga class focused on strength, flexibility, and mindful movement. Modifications and alternative options are offered to support a range of abilities.

Zumba (16+), Mondays 5:00–5:45 p.m., Wednesdays 6:00–6:45 p.m.

A dance-based fitness class set to upbeat music. Participants are encouraged to move at their own pace. No prior experience required.

Zumba Gold (55+) on Wednesdays, 9:15–10:00 a.m.

A lower-impact, dance-based fitness class designed with simplified movements. Participants may adjust movements as needed in a supportive environment.

Visit www.cityofjohnston.com/1571 to learn more about each of these.

Utility rate adjustments began on January 1

The City of Johnston is raising its water, sewer and service availability fees, effective with your February bill. For more information about the new rates, please visit www.cityofjohnston.com/utilityrates.

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INVESTMENT

By Tim Hanstad

LOVE languages can help you enjoy Valentine's Day on a budget



Valentine's Day does not have to break the bank. In fact, the most meaningful expressions of love often cost little to nothing. The key is understanding your partner's love language and tailoring your approach accordingly. When you know what makes your partner feel truly valued, you can create memorable experiences without the financial pressure that often accompanies this holiday.

The five love languages — words of affirmation, acts of service, receiving gifts, quality time and physical touch — offer a roadmap for showing affection without overspending. Here is how to express your love while staying financially smart this Valentine's Day.

Words of affirmation: For partners who value verbal expressions of love, heartfelt words matter far more than expensive gifts. Write a letter expressing what you appreciate about them, create a personalized playlist with songs that remind you of your relationship or record a video message. All are free but carry immense emotional value. For this love language, thoughtful expression surpasses financial investment every time.

Acts of service: If your partner feels loved through helpful actions, Valentine's Day is about sweat equity, not spending. Cook their favorite meal, tackle chores they've been dreading or, for those who have expressed frustration with budgeting, create a simple budget tracker or spreadsheet tucked into a decorative folder. Your time and effort demonstrate your love. The beauty of acts of service is that they cost little to nothing but demonstrate care and attention.

Receiving gifts: Even gift-oriented partners don't need expensive presents to feel valued. Focus on thoughtfulness and personalization over price tags. Try DIY crafts that show you put time into creating something. Explore thrift stores for vintage treasures or consider giving stock in a company your partner loves — a retail store, a tech brand or a coffee chain. Many platforms offer fractional shares, so you don't need a huge budget. Remember: A \$10 item chosen with care can mean more than a \$100 generic gift.

Quality time: For those who value undivided attention, experiences often cost less than gifts. Check for free museum days, plan a scenic hike, go stargazing or create a cozy home movie night with homemade popcorn. The key is being fully present without distractions. For a longer-term outlook, consider a future fund jar for shared goals, like a couple's massage or a trip. Make the first deposit and pair it with a handwritten note about building dreams together.

Physical touch: Intimacy and affection are inherently free, but small comfort investments can enhance closeness. Create an at-home spa experience with inexpensive bath products, invest in cozy blankets for cuddling, or clear space in your living room for dancing together. These minimal purchases amplify connection without requiring significant spending.

There is no wrong way to celebrate Valentine's Day, and overspending isn't necessary. If you are diligent about budgeting, you will know what you can afford to spend. Understanding your partner's love language empowers you to express affection in ways that resonate deeply — without the financial stress. The best Valentine's celebrations come from the heart, not the wallet. ■

This article was written by Edward Jones for use by Tim Hanstad, your local Edward Jones Financial Advisor. Edward Jones, Member SIPC

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Medicare, & Retirement

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SSI and SNAP benefits

Social Security provides benefits for eligible individuals who cannot work due to a physical or mental disability. Other programs are linked to Social Security benefits. Make sure you know which programs can benefit you.

Supplemental Security Income (SSI) is a program intended for those who have not worked long enough to qualify for Social Security Disability Insurance. In addition, an individual who has never worked may be eligible for Supplemental Security Income. Individuals applying for this program must have limited income and resources. These guidelines generally match the eligibility criteria for Medicaid (Title XIX).

If you receive SSI, you may also be eligible for Supplemental Nutritional Assistance Program (SNAP) benefits. To make it even easier, when you apply for SSI, the Social Security Administration (SSA) also allows you to apply for your state's SNAP to save time.

SNAP provides food-purchasing assistance to low-income households. Benefits are deposited monthly into SNAP accounts linked to EBT cards, which work just like credit or debit cards. Most major grocery store chains and retailers — like Target or Walmart, for example — accept EBT cards to purchase SNAP-eligible items.



Eligible items are typically food items that can be prepared at home (or seeds to plant and later provide food), excluding food that is hot when sold or other prepared meals.

SSI provides benefits to those with limited income and resources. SSI is also for certain people who are 65 or older, and those who are blind or have disabilities.

While your SNAP benefit amount depends on your household income and size, the basic monthly SSI payment for 2026 is the same nationwide — \$994 for one person or \$1,491 for a couple.

If your household is applying for SSI or already receiving SSI, the SSA will help you complete your SNAP application over the phone, in person, or through the state's benefit portal.

If you believe that you qualify for Supplemental Security Income (SSI), but have not applied — or if you've been denied — then you need an experienced attorney to assist you. Applying for disability can be a long and complicated process. An expert attorney is able to analyze an individual's eligibility and assist with the application and appeal processes, so that you can receive all the benefits you are entitled to. ■

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

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FAITH

By Deacon Greg Lievens

A VALENTINE for my enemy



When we think of our enemies, do four-lettered words come to mind? Just a heartbeat past Valentine's Day comes Lent, a time to focus on repentance. The Gospel reminds us love is not a reward, but a gift for the undeserving. It is easy to join the world and reserve our affection for only the "lovable," but Christ commands more. Jesus reshapes our hearts in his Sermon on the Mount. While acknowledging the tradition of loving our neighbors, he challenges us to go further, not to hate, but "... love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you." This is the "Valentine" of God's Kingdom — a call for our sincere benevolence rather than some fleeting sentiment. Offering a valentine to our enemy, we mirror our merciful and compassionate God, who "causes his sun to rise on the bad and the good" (Matthew 5:44-45). We can transform our hearts by replacing our frustration and anger with devotion instead to Lent's three tools to fast, pray and give. Christian love, agape love, does not mean we endorse the actions of our enemies, but we acknowledge they still have inherent value as being created in the image of God. It's a refusal to be silent and choosing instead to speak God's truth to overcome evil with good. Utilizing Lent's three positive tools to reach those who wrong us, we may break the cycle of vengeance. Offering a cross-shaped valentine is our commitment to be kind, even when we receive only hostility in return. ■

Information provided by Deacon Greg Lievens, Saint Mary of Nazareth Catholic Church, 4600 Meredith Drive, Des Moines, 515-650-2738.

PLAN AHEAD

By Sarah Masteller

WHY would I prepay funeral expenses?

Preplanning one's final arrangements is something everyone should do. While it is not necessarily an easy topic to address, having arrangements in place can provide a great deal of peace of mind, both for the person making the arrangements and for those loved ones who will be left behind.



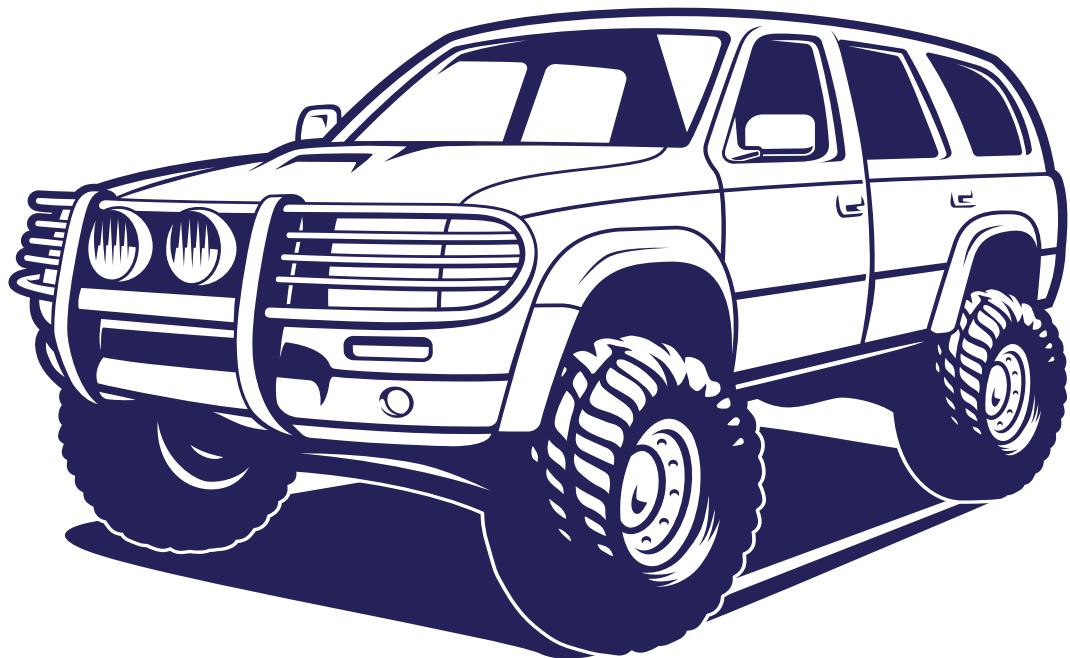
No one comes through the doors of the funeral home on the day that their loved one has died and regrets that the plans have already been made. In fact, it is quite the opposite. Families experience great relief knowing that plans are in place, decisions have been made and, perhaps, the expenses have already been handled.

While prepaying funeral expenses is never a requirement for someone to place their arrangements on file with a funeral home, it is an option available and one that you should know about. There are many benefits to prepaying funeral expenses. Most importantly, it allows a person the opportunity to purchase funeral arrangements at current prices, with the guarantee that those services and merchandise selections will be provided, at no additional expense to the family, at the time the funeral home's services are needed.

Keep in mind, funeral arrangements will never be less expensive than they are today. Whatever your funeral home of choice is, make sure you understand your options, and then make the decision that is right for you. ■

Information provided by Sarah Masteller, Advanced Planning Counselor, Hamilton's Southtown Funeral Home, 5400 S.W. Ninth St., Des Moines, 515-697-3679.

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AGING at home

Why a broad care network matters.

Ellen, 72, has every intention of staying in her Des Moines-area home for as long as she can. She is active, social and generally healthy. Still, she is realistic. Aging well at home is not just about what you need today; it's about having the right support if change occurs.

For many older adults and families, home-based services begin with a single need: help after a hospital stay, assistance with medications, or support with daily tasks. What often gets overlooked is what comes next. Needs can evolve and health conditions can change. Care can become more complex, sometimes quickly.

That reality raises an important question: When you choose a home health provider, are you choosing a service ... or a network?

Home-based care works best when it is connected. A provider that operates within a broad network of services can help ensure continuity, coordination and confidence over time. Rather than start over each time a new need arises, a network allows care to adjust and expand while keeping the individual at the center.

A comprehensive home health network typically includes a range of services that address physical health, personal support and overall well-being. Skilled clinical care, such as nursing or therapy, may be needed for a season. Personal assistance can help with daily routines that support independence. Wellness-focused services can play a role in prevention, safety and long-term planning.

The advantage of a connected network is not just convenience; it's communication. When providers share information, align goals and understand one another's roles, care tends to be more responsive and less fragmented. That can mean fewer gaps, clearer expectations, and better outcomes for the person receiving care.

It also offers peace of mind for families. Adult children and caregivers often are balancing work, family responsibilities and concern for a loved one's well-being. Knowing that services are coordinated (and that additional support is available if needed) can reduce stress and uncertainty.

When evaluating home health options, it helps to look beyond the immediate need and ask a few key questions:

- Does this provider offer access to multiple types of services, or will I need to find new support if I need it later?
- How are services coordinated if needs change?
- Is there a focus on long-term independence, not just short-term care?
- Does the provider have experience supporting people across different stages of aging?

Aging at home is rarely a straight line; it's a series of adjustments, decisions and transitions. Choosing a home health provider that is part of a broad, well-integrated network can make those transitions smoother and more manageable.

The goal is not to anticipate every possible scenario, but to partner with a provider that is equipped to adapt alongside you. When care is connected, flexible and comprehensive, home can remain not just a place to live, but a place to thrive. ■

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.



FIND something to love at JPL



Johnston Public Library

6700 Merle Hay Road

515-278-5233

www.johnstonlibrary.com

Monday - Thursday, 9 a.m. to 8 p.m.

Friday - Saturday, 9 a.m. to 5:30 p.m.

Sunday, 1-5 p.m.

Whether you love books, puzzles, crafts, information or volunteering, the Johnston Public Library has something for you this February. Read on for more details.

Do you have young chocolate lovers in your house? Make a no-school day even sweeter by bringing them to our Kids Chocolate Factory to make their own candy bars on Feb. 2 anytime between 11:30 a.m. and 12:30 p.m.

If puzzles are your passion, register your team to race against the clock (and other teams) to piece together a jigsaw puzzle at one of our puzzle competitions. The Family Puzzle Competition will take place on Saturday, Feb. 7 from 10:30 a.m. to noon followed by the Adult Puzzle Competition from 2-3:30 p.m.

Teens who love making a difference in their community can join JPL's Teen Advisory Board and/or VolunTEENS. Our Senior Teen Advisory Board is for students in grades 8-12, while Junior TAB is for students in grades 6-7. Members meet on the third Tuesday of the month (Feb. 17) to help shape teen programs and events at the library. Applications are available on our website and at the library. VolunTEENS meets on the first and third Saturdays of each month (Feb. 7 and 21) from 2-5 p.m. Volunteers help with a variety of tasks throughout the library. Those who register to attend VolunTEENS receive email reminders about upcoming volunteer opportunities.

Adults devoted to crafting will enjoy Make It: Paper Quilling Artwork on Wednesday, Feb. 11 from 6-8 p.m. LeAnn Ludwig will demonstrate the art of paper quilling and provide tips and techniques for the creation of your own intricate design. All supplies will be provided for registrants.

If you or a loved one is interested in senior care options, join us for Retirement University: In-Home Care, Hospice & Palliative Support on Thursday, Feb. 12 at 1 p.m. Presented by staff from WesleyLife, the session will explore in-home, hospice and palliative care. Registration is required.

Show your heartfelt support for local authors at our fourth annual Read Local Author Fair on Saturday, Feb. 21, from 2-4 p.m. Mix and mingle with authors, check out their books, and register for prizes at this open-house event.

More information about all events and resources at Johnston Public Library can be found online at www.johnstonlibrary.com or by calling the library at 515-278-5233. ■

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EVENTS IN THE AREA

Be sure to check for cancellations

Upcoming in Johnston Living magazine

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.

Celebrating heritage: What have you learned about your family or community's heritage? How do you celebrate or honor your heritage? Let us know by emailing tammy@iowalivingmagazines.com.

Gold Star Military Museum events

Camp Dodge, 7105 N.W. 70th Ave., Johnston

Free Museum Tours: Saturdays, 11:30 a.m. the museum offers free docent-led tours.

Crazy 8 Pickleball Tournament

Saturday, Feb. 7, 9 a.m.

Dinks Pickleball, 3800 Merle Hay Road, Suite 1000, Des Moines

Kiwanis Club of Johnston and Kiwanis Club of West Des Moines are holding a Crazy 8 Pickleball Tournament on Feb. 7 starting at 9 a.m. Play for fun or at a competitive level. All are guaranteed seven games of play. Cost is \$30 per player with proceeds going toward the Kiwanis Scholarship Fund. There will be prizes from Dinks and Fareway. For information, contact wdmkiwanis@gmail.com or 515-321-6607. Register by scanning the QR code.



CITYVIEW Chocolate Walk at West Glen

Friday, Feb. 27, 5-9 p.m.

The Breakfast Club, 5525 Mills Civic Parkway, Suite 100, West Des Moines

Like chocolate? Like chocolate drinks? Then you'll love this event. CITYVIEW and West Glen Town Center again bring the Chocolate Walk to West Glen Town Center. For a ticket price of \$25 (\$35 at the door), attendees will receive 10 drink tickets that can be redeemed for sample cocktails at participating venues and will receive chocolate treat samples. Make it a date night or a night out with friends. Look for more details at chocolatewalk.dmcityview.com.

To submit calendar items for consideration, send to tammy@iowalivingmagazines.com

Dragon Scholarship Fund Online Auction

Feb. 22-28

Get ready to support Johnston High School seniors and your community during the Dragon Scholarship Fund Auction. Kicking off at 9 a.m. Feb. 22 and closing at 9 p.m. on Feb. 28, the Dragon Scholarship Fund Online Auction returns bigger and better than ever with hundreds of packages available to bid on. The auction raises funds for scholarships awarded to graduating Johnston High School seniors. Every bid helps support students as they take their next step beyond high school. Shop, bid and make an impact.

In 2025, the Dragon Scholarship Fund awarded more than 250 scholarships totaling \$99,000.

Auction items will continue to be added until Feb. 22.

Sign up through the QR code, dragonsf2026.ggo.bid.



Edencrest at Green Meadows events

Edencrest at Green Meadows, 6750 Corporate Drive, Johnston

- **Sweetheart Social Desserts + Donation Drive:** Wednesday, Feb. 11, 5-7 p.m. Celebrate Valentine's season with sweet treats and even sweeter company at our Sweetheart Social. Enjoy delicious desserts, festive fun, and an opportunity to give back. Winter clothing donations will be collected for the local homeless shelter. Help spread warmth and kindness throughout the community.

- **Dementia Awareness and Education**

Session with Kailee Bonebrake: Wednesday, Feb. 18, 1-2:30 p.m. Join an educational and supportive session led by Kailee Bonebrake, Regional Director of Memory Care. Learn about dementia, early signs, care approaches and resources available for families and caregivers. This informative event is open to anyone seeking guidance or understanding.

- **Rooted in Care Social Workers**

Luncheon: Tuesday, March 10, 11 a.m. to 1 p.m. Local social workers are invited to a special appreciation lunch to connect, collaborate and honor the vital role they play in the community. Enjoy a delicious meal, network with peers, and learn more about the support and services offered at our community.

Family Puzzle Competition

Saturday, Feb. 7, 10:30 a.m. to noon
Johnston Public Library, 6700 Merle Hay Road

Register your team of family and friends to race against the clock (and other teams) to put together a 400-piece jigsaw puzzle in just 90 minutes. Registration required at www.johnstonlibrary.com/kids-events.



Make It: Paper Quilling Artwork

Wednesday, Feb. 11, 6-8 p.m.
Johnston Public Library, 6700 Merle Hay Road

Paper quilling is an art form in which strips of paper are rolled, shaped and glued together to create intricate designs. Presenter LeAnn Ludwig will share techniques and tips to guide you through the quilling process. No experience is necessary, and all supplies will be provided for you to make your own masterpiece. Registration required at www.johnstonlibrary.com/events.

Retirement University: In-Home Care, Hospice and Palliative Support

Thursday, Feb. 12, 1-2 p.m.
Johnston Public Library, 6700 Merle Hay Road

Join the second of three programs designed to help you navigate senior care options so you or your loved ones can age with confidence. Moderated by staff from WesleyLife, this session will explore in-home, hospice and palliative care. Registration required at www.johnstonlibrary.com/events.

Read Local Author Fair

Saturday, Feb. 21, 2-4 p.m.
Johnston Public Library, 6700 Merle Hay Road

Enjoy supporting local authors? Then you won't want to miss the fourth annual JPL Read Local Author Fair. Stop by this open-house event to mix and mingle with authors, check out their books and register for prizes. Books will be available for purchase and author signing. No registration required. ■

SPOSETO appointed assistant chief of EMS and training

The Johnston-Grimes Metropolitan Fire District announced the appointment of Tony Sposeto as the assistant chief of EMS and training. With three decades of dedicated service to enhancing fire services and emergency medical care, he brings a wealth of experience to this pivotal role.

"Tony Sposeto's appointment as assistant chief of EMS and training marks a significant milestone for the Johnston-Grimes Metropolitan Fire District," said Fire Chief Percy Coleman. "We are gaining not only a leader but also a visionary committed to improving our service and saving lives. His extensive experience and proven track record in emergency medical services will greatly enhance our team and transform our approach to emergency care."

Sposeto's leadership has been instrumental in developing nationally recognized initiatives, including: the neuroprotective heads-up CPR program, which has significantly improved cardiac arrest survival rates; a Mobile Integrated Healthcare Program; and a prehospital blood initiation program.

Over the past 14 years, Sposeto has overseen EMS operations for one of Iowa's busiest metropolitan departments, serving in various capacities such as firefighter, fire medic, senior fire medic, lieutenant and captain. Additionally, he has experience as an operating room nurse on the open heart, lung and vascular team at Iowa Methodist Hospital.

Sposeto holds a bachelor's degree in nursing from Grand View University and a master's degree in public administration from Columbia Southern University.

In addition to his operational leadership, Sposeto has remained committed to education and advocacy. He has served for more than 20 years as an American Heart Association instructor and Training Center Faculty member in BLS and ACLS. From 2018 to 2022, he represented Iowa as the NAEMT legislative advocacy coordinator. In recognition of his leadership, he was inducted into the National Society of Leadership and Success in 2015.

"Taking on the role of assistant chief of EMS and training is an incredible opportunity for me, and I am truly excited to contribute to the Johnston-Grimes Metropolitan Fire District," Sposeto said. "I am dedicated to advancing our emergency medical services and enhancing the care we provide to our community. Together, we will build on our existing programs and introduce innovative strategies that will improve patient outcomes and better equip our team to respond effectively in critical situations." ■

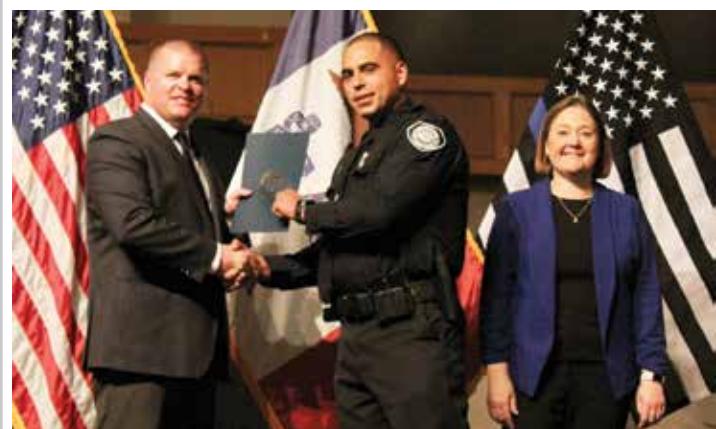


Tony Sposeto

OFFICERS Marquez and Toaddy graduate



Iowa Attorney General Brenna and ILEA Director Brady Carney congratulate Officer Andrew Toaddy on his graduation.



Iowa Attorney General Brenna and ILEA Director Brady Carney congratulate Officer Jose Marquez on his graduation.

Iowa Attorney General Brenna Bird congratulated officers Jose Marquez and Andrew Toaddy 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 Marquez and Officer Toaddy will serve with the Johnston Police Department. ■

OUT & ABOUT



Carson Jones and Chris Long at the Johnston Chamber After Hours at McDivot's Indoor Sports Pub on Jan. 7.



Chad Fye and Glenn Waterhouse at the Johnston Chamber After Hours at McDivot's Indoor Sports Pub on Jan. 7.



Samantha Howell and Kris Howard at the Johnston Chamber After Hours at McDivot's Indoor Sports Pub on Jan. 7.



Paula Bierle and Julia Bradshaw at the Johnston Chamber After Hours at McDivot's Indoor Sports Pub on Jan. 7.



Dan Fitzgerald and John Mortimer at the Johnston Chamber After Hours at McDivot's Indoor Sports Pub on Jan. 7.



Andrea Hodapp and Annie Mielke at the Johnston Chamber After Hours at McDivot's Indoor Sports Pub on Jan. 7.



Emma Silzer, Mary Lou Silzer, Olivia Silzer and Henry Morton at the Bouncing Babies program at the Johnston Public Library Jan. 15.



Ty Brodka, Ella Brodka and Tillie Brodka at the Bouncing Babies program at the Johnston Public Library Jan. 15.



Donovan Peña and Sarah Frantz at the Bouncing Babies program at the Johnston Public Library Jan. 15.



Vaelin Plunkett and Klarisa Burgess at the Bouncing Babies program at the Johnston Public Library Jan. 15.



Aylah Heidesch, Kaitlyn Heidesch and Savannah Heidesch at the Bouncing Babies program at the Johnston Public Library Jan. 15.



River Eller and McKenna Eller at the Bouncing Babies program at the Johnston Public Library Jan. 15.

COACHES vs. Cancer

The JHS Girls Basketball vs. Waukee Northwest Coaches vs. Cancer game was Jan. 20.



Braedi Kinman, Nancy Brown and Rita Holter



Jaylyn Jackson, Henry Butterworth and Katie Gray



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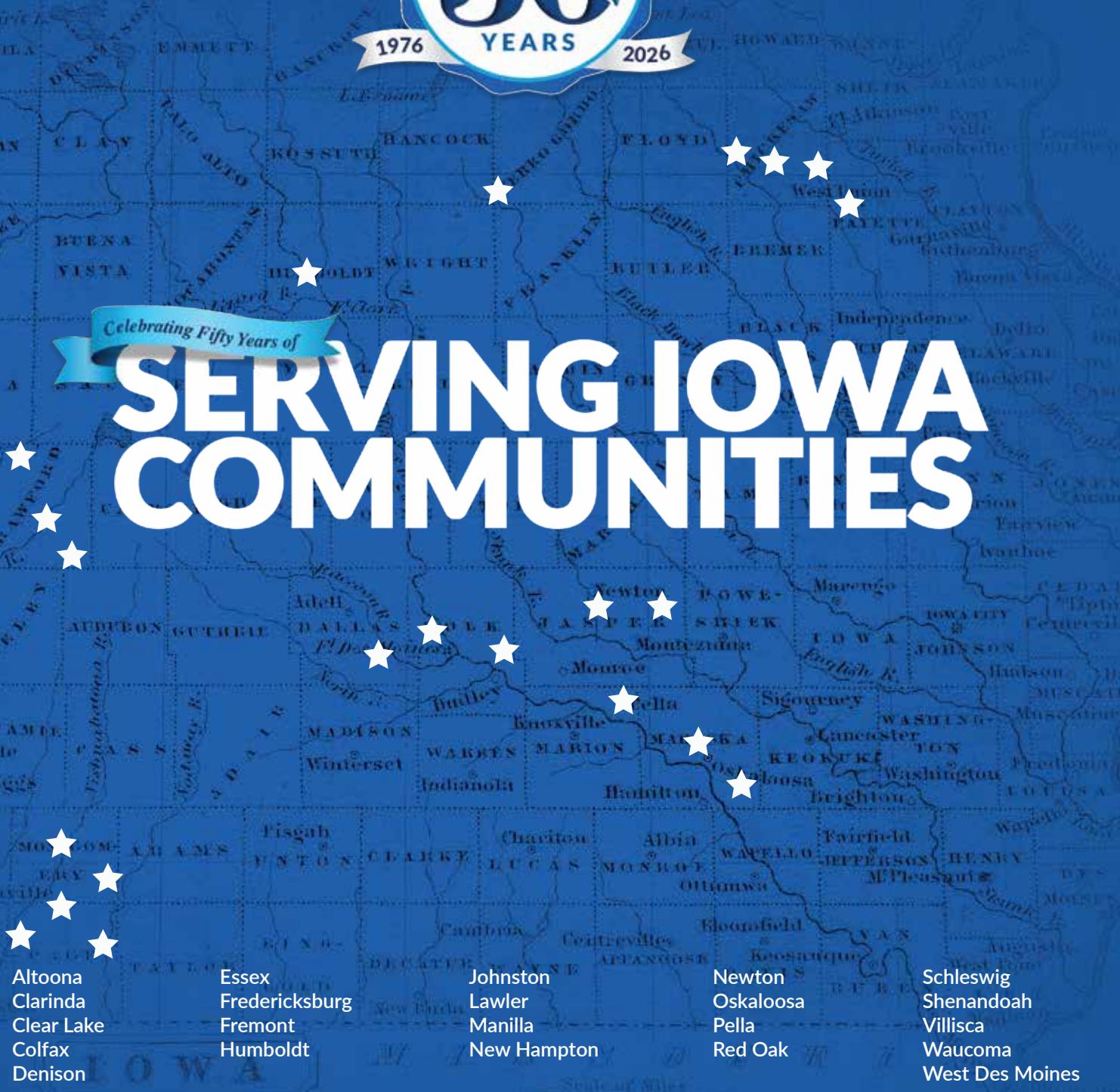
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