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FEBRUARY 2026

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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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Kevin and Rachelle Cochran were engaged at Hogback Bridge, one of Madison County's famous covered bridges. Photo by Dani Phillips

'I Do'

Residents share
their marriage
proposal stories.

By Rachel Harrington

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.

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A beach proposal

Twenty-eight years ago, Allie and Jason Brooks began dating when they lived in southern California. Jason's family had a condo in Rosarita Beach, Mexico, and the couple took numerous trips there together. Approximately two years after they became an item, Jason told Allie he would like to take a trip to Mexico. He said he would travel down a day ahead of her to check on the condo, but, unbeknownst to her, he was planning an unforgettable proposal.

While Jason traveled toward Rosarita Beach, he called Allie's dad so he could ask his permission to marry Allie.

"He got my dad on the phone and asked if he could marry me," Allie says. "At first, my dad said no because he learned that Jason was on his way down to the condo as they spoke, and my dad thought Jason meant we were going to get married right then. He didn't want that to happen without him and my mom. Once he understood that Jason was just going to be asking me, my dad said he absolutely could ask me."

Jason spent the day he had traveled ahead of Allie planning and scouting out his proposal site and finalizing details. After Allie arrived, Jason asked her if she would go with him on a sunset horseback ride on the beach.

"It wasn't something we normally did, but I was excited to do it," Allie remembers. "He was acting strange, and he even missed a known off-ramp in what I later learned was his nervousness."

Jason had planned the exact rock along the beach where they would stop. When they arrived there, right at sunset, he asked Allie to dismount and helped her off her horse. Jason dropped to one knee and asked the big question.

"He asked slowly if I'd marry him," Allie says. "I think I first said 'What?' trying to register what he'd said. He asked a second time, and I quickly said yes. As soon as I did, a mariachi band came out of nowhere. They were dressed out in full uniform and were playing one of my favorite songs, 'Beseme Mucho,' which translates to 'kiss me much.' I soon learned that our friends were behind us the whole ride, filming the ride, dismount, proposal and music. We laughed with our friends, then we went to one of our favorite bars and told everyone about it."

Allie says the entire proposal was well thought out and romantic.

"He did a good job, and he couldn't have



Allie and Jason Brooks became engaged at Rosarita Beach, Mexico, where they enjoyed visiting.

timed it better," she remarks.

Jason came up with the entire plan by himself. Rosarita Beach was near and dear to him, and both he and Allie love mariachi music. The ring he had chosen for her a couple months prior was a complete surprise to her, but Allie was not in shock at the fact that he asked her to marry him.

"He just timed it well for a good surprise," she says. "I knew that he'd be the one I would marry, but he got me good and surprised me."

According to Allie, the proposal of marriage was much harder and more nerve-racking for Jason than the actual wedding, which took place about a year later.

"The thought and the planning that Jason put into the proposal was so meaningful to me," Allie says. "Though it didn't happen how I originally thought it would the Christmas before, it was just perfect."

This year, Allie and Jason will celebrate their 25th wedding anniversary.

A covered bridge proposal

In the fall of 2017, Rachelle Cochran was bartending at Buffalo Wild Wings in Ankeny when Kevin Cochran, a Winterset native, came in as a customer with a friend. Over several visits, the two became acquainted with one another, and, as Rachelle says, "That was it." The two began dating in January 2018.

In the beginning of their relationship, Rachelle and Kevin decided they wanted to uniquely tell each other they loved one another without directly using the words "I love you."



Kevin Cochran wrote a poem for Rachelle to find in Hogback Bridge where he proposed to her.

They creatively began to say the numbers "1-4-3" to each other, numbers representing the number of letters in each word of "I love you." The idea worked well both in private settings and in public.

Soon after Rachelle and Kevin began dating, Kevin started planning his proposal for marriage.

"We knew pretty early on that we'd probably get married," Rachelle says. "I had even told him what kind of ring I would like."

Kevin had Rachelle's ring custom made at a business in downtown Des Moines.

"Her mom and I would meet there and collaborate," he recalls. "I got Rachelle's ring size from her mom."

Kevin also hired a photographer to capture the proposal.

"I hired Dani Phillips as a photographer and asked her to check out several of the covered bridges in Madison County to see which one would work best for her to hide and get great photos," he says. "We chose Hogback Bridge."

Kevin decided that, since the number pattern 1-4-3 was special to him and Rachelle, he would propose to her on May 7, 2019, exactly one year, four months, and three days from when their relationship began.

"I was actually supposed to work that day," Rachelle recalls. "Kevin asked me to ask for that day off. I knew something was going on."

At Hogback Bridge, Kevin had Dani place a poem he wrote specially for the occasion on the inside bridge wall for Rachelle to read before she hid to take photos.



Josh Kappelman planned a day of kayaking with friends before stopping to propose to Paige at Holliwell Bridge.



Paige and Josh Kappelman were engaged at Holliwell Bridge, Paige's favorite of the covered bridges.

"Rachelle was reading it, and when she turned around, I was on my knee to propose," Kevin remembers.

"The poem was probably my favorite part," Rachelle says. "He is a very creative writer, and it was very well written. I liked the whole setup in general — in Winterset at a covered bridge — because it was beautiful as well as private."

"I was stressed, so I was glad it went off without a hitch," Kevin says. "The weather was nice. We got lucky. It was sunny and maybe in the 50s — nice weather for May."

"He was actually sick that day, but we think it was nerves," Rachelle says.

A wedding was planned for May 2020, but the COVID-19 pandemic shut down the venue.

"We talked to the venue and looked at fall dates, hoping that everything would be reopened by then," Rachelle says. "However, all the weekends were already full. So, we decided to look at dates that would be very meaningful to us. My dad's birthday was Sept. 30, which was a weekday that year. He passed away in October 2017, right around the time I met Kevin. We picked his birthday for our wedding."

Now, five years later, the couple has a son and have moved to Winterset to be close to family members.

A kayaking proposal

Not all romances begin in person. Paige and Josh Kappelman met each other online in 2017. They dated for two years. Josh was preparing to

deploy with the U.S. Army to Kuwait, but he wanted to propose to Paige before he left. So, he developed a plan for a memorable marriage proposal.

"We had friends in town — some of Josh's Army buddies from Maryland — at the end of May 2019," Paige recalls. "Josh had collaborated with them to be in on the proposal plan that day. Our friends had known what was going to happen ever since they planned the trip to come."

The plan was to show their friends around Winterset and the surrounding areas and go kayaking on the Middle River.

"We started kayaking at Rosemond Bridge and went down to Pammel State Park," she shares. "It was an all-day trip. We made lots of stops and had a picnic lunch. We loaded up the kayaks and planned to go out for Frosty's, go to Clark Tower, and show them one more bridge. We went back home to get ready, and our friend's wife got dressed all 'proper' for going out. She said it would be cute, but by that time I was pretty sure Josh was going to propose."

Josh had asked Paige's mom to take her to get her nails done, but that was an out-of-the-ordinary outing for both women, and it made Paige suspicious.

"I never do my nails because I am too outdoorsy," she says. "So, when my friend wanted to get dressed up to go out, I wasn't hard to convince to look cute."

The group of friends made their way to

Holliwell Bridge, Paige's favorite of the covered bridges. Paige and Josh entered the bridge while their friends remained on the outskirts.

"He was so nervous," Paige says. "He got down on one knee, and I had no self-control. I said 'Yes' before he could even say anything, probably about six times before he could get the question out. I was just so excited. He had planned a lot of cute, sweet things to say and didn't get to say them, though he did eventually ask the question 'Will you marry me?'"

Josh proposed with a non-traditional ring, one with his birthstone, a purple amethyst, in it. He now wears a wedding ring with her birthstone in it. After the proposal, he surprised her with friends and loved ones gathered at her parents' house for a cookout to celebrate.

Paige says Josh concocted the proposal plan on his own, and she could not be happier with how it unfolded.

"He planned a perfect day, and it was more beautiful than I ever imagined his proposal being. Friends and family plus nature is my ideal day, especially on the river. My favorite part is how much thought he put into it and planned to try to surprise me. Josh is not typically a planner, so the fact that he put so much thought and effort into planning meant a lot to me. I also loved the setting. Holliwell is a place where my sister and I would go to hang out, and it is one of the takeout spots for kayakers. Now, that location is even more special." ■

COMMUNITY food pantries help meet needs

Residents with food insecurity have local options.

Seasonal weather can be hard on those who depend on the kindness of others for sufficient sustenance. In a tight economy, some struggle to simply put enough food on the table. Thankfully, the Winterset community has several food banks to assist those who need it.

New Bridge Church Food Pantry

Zelda Cole, a long-time attender of New Bridge Church, says the food pantry at their church is open every third Thursday from 4-6 p.m. and every third Friday from 9-10 a.m. Clients of their pantry need to be Madison County residents. There is minimum paperwork to fill out for newcomers. Entrance is at the east end of the church at the door with a canopy over it. "It is 'first come, first served,' and recipients can just show up," Cole shares.

First United Methodist Church Food Pantry

First United Methodist Church in Winterset offers a drive-thru food pantry that has been in operation since August 2016. Kathy Fay, bookkeeper for the pantry, says it is open the first Monday of each month from 4:30-6:30 p.m. and the first Tuesday of each month from 9-11 a.m. Susan Henry manages newsletters from the Iowa Food Bank, and Ann Hoadley and Jackie Turlson deliver the food to cars and keep track of statistics. Each food pantry recipient is asked to fill out a short form with name, address and number of individuals in the household. No income information is required to receive food.

"Our pantry provides food donated from our church as well as food we order from the Iowa Food Bank a week ahead of time," Fay shares. "Iowa Food Bank asks us to keep track of the number of households and numbers of individuals on SNAP. We have to break those numbers down to age groups for them as well."

Fay shares that their food pantry strives to provide produce (fruits and vegetables), meats, pasta, bread and many other items.

"Each household gets a box of food. We try to give food pantry recipients a variety of items, everything one would need on the food



pyramid," Fay states. "The Iowa Food Bank requires us to provide enough for three days, but we try to give way more than that. We have felt that, with the price of groceries, this pantry does a great deed and that it is important to help others. Anytime, if someone can't make it during our regular food pantry hours, he or she can call ahead to the church, and we can set up a time for them to come."

PAW Pantry

The PAW Pantry is available to all Winterset community members who may have need of it, regardless of whether they have children in the school district or not. Begun in 2014, the pantry is maintained by several volunteer community members. It is stocked with donations from individuals and businesses in the Madison County community and by the Food Bank of Iowa.

"We are lucky to have generous people in the community who help provide food items and/or monetary donations to help us out," Darla Millhollin shares. Access to the food pantry is through the playground doors on the front east side of Winterset Middle School. Pantry hours are every second Thursday from 4:30-6 p.m.

"If the pantry hours do not work for anyone who needs it, he/she can call the school office to set up an alternate time to come in," Millhollin says. ■

FEBRUARY'S Iowa Living Magazines Poll of the Month

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BEAUTY

By Annie Wiseman

FOUR seasons of hair

Just like your skin and wardrobe, your hair needs change with the seasons. Temperature shifts, humidity, sun exposure and indoor heating can all impact hair health, making seasonal care essential for strong, manageable strands year-round.

During the winter months, hair faces lots of challenges. Cold air outside combined with dry indoor heat often leads to static, frizz and breakage. Switching to a richer shampoo and conditioner, adding a weekly deep-conditioning treatment, and using a silk or satin pillowcase can help lock in moisture. Fall and winter are also ideal times to repair summer damage with trims and strengthening treatments.

In the warmer months, sun, saltwater and chlorine can leave hair dry and faded. UV rays break down the hair's protective layer, causing color to dull and strands to weaken. Using a lightweight leave-in conditioner, wearing a hat, and rinsing hair after swimming can help prevent damage. Summer is also a great time to embrace air-drying and reduce heat styling.

Seasonal changes are also a reminder to reassess your routine. Listening to your hair — whether it needs more moisture, less heat or extra protection — helps prevent long-term damage. By making small adjustments throughout the year, you can keep your hair healthy, shiny and resilient no matter the season. Consult with your hairdresser to create a hair care regimen conducive for the current season. ■

Information provided by Annie Wiseman, owner of Salon 107 and a licensed cosmetologist with 25 years of experience. 107 John Wayne Drive, Winterset, 515-462-4247, salon107style@gmail.com.



HEALTH

By Dr. Amanda Queck

RISE and shine — keep your spine aligned

Instead of setting a resolution that fades, focus on setting one that helps your body every day. Keep your posture proud and your spine in line all year long. Many of my patients come to me feeling tight in the shoulder blades or lower back, which are very common areas to carry your stress. It is true that stress can cause tension, but often that “shoulder stress” or “low back tension” is a sign of a deeper spinal issue we call nerve interference.

When your upper back or neck are out of alignment, your shoulder muscles must work overtime just to keep you upright. Over time, that leads to chronic tightness, reduced range of motion, and even numbness or tingling down your arms. And, it doesn't just stop there. Your heart and your lungs are major organ systems that also sit in the same region of your spine, protected by your ribcage. Think of how much less strain and stress you may be placing on your cardiovascular and respiratory systems by taking off the stress load being placed on our spine.

Proper posture is everything. If your spine is aligned properly, your body does not have to work so hard to survive. ■

Information provided by Dr. Amanda Queck, D.C. Flourish Chiropractic & Wellness, 108 W. Court Ave., Winterset, 515-384-0360, www.flourishchiro.life.



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THE RISKS of oral jewelry

Some people turn to oral jewelry to make a fashion statement, but piercings and tooth gems can damage your smile. Oral jewelry can damage your mouth and teeth in the following ways: Infections or other complications can occur. It can affect the way your teeth and mouth work together, for example, causing slurred speech or increased salivary flow. Hard objects can damage your gums, tongue or teeth.



Problems related to jewelry placement can affect not just your oral health but also your overall health. Piercings in particular carry the risk of developing infection, which can occur at the piercing site or spread to other parts of the body through the bloodstream. Use of nonsterile equipment or procedures to place the piercing or handling the piercing after placement can cause an infection.

It is also possible to swallow or inhale parts of the piercing if the jewelry comes undone or if gems placed on the teeth come loose.

Allergic reactions to the jewelry also can occur.

Oral piercings, especially tongue piercings, can affect the way you speak. Piercings can interfere with chewing and swallowing. Tongue

piercings can also result in nerve damage and may alter your sense of taste. Any oral piercing, including those involving the lips, cheeks or tongue, can increase salivary flow, which may cause you to drool.

Oral piercings bring your teeth and soft tissues into contact with a hard object, which can cause damage. Biting down on, rolling, or sucking on oral jewelry can cause cracks or chips in the teeth.

Placement of gems on the surface of the teeth requires removal of enamel, the hard outer part of the tooth that helps protect against cavities. This places the area around the gem at risk of developing caries.

Constant rubbing of oral jewelry against oral soft tissues can damage cheeks, lips or gums. Such contact can cause the gums to pull away from the teeth, resulting in tooth sensitivity or even tooth loss. Ulcers also may develop if the jewelry rubs against soft tissues.

Many people are drawn to oral piercings or gems but be aware they may come with a variety of health risks. Talk to your dentist about ways to reduce the risk of developing complications caused by mouth jewelry. ■

Information provided by Dr. Jason Phelps, Winterset Dental, 225 Wambold Drive, Winterset, 515-462-5755, Instagram: dr_jason_phelps. Source: Journal of the American Dental Association.

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INSURANCE

By Eric Johnson

TEEN drivers, UTVs, and e-bikes

New risks families should think about

Families today are managing more transportation options than ever before. In addition to teen drivers, many households now own utility terrain vehicles (UTVs), golf carts and electric bikes. While these vehicles offer convenience and recreation, they also introduce insurance exposures that are often misunderstood — or not considered at all — until a loss occurs.



Teen drivers remain one of the largest risk changes for any family. Beyond the obvious increase in auto premiums, parents should pay close attention to liability limits. Accidents involving young drivers can quickly exceed minimum coverage amounts, especially when injuries are involved. What felt like “plenty of coverage” a decade ago may no longer be adequate in today’s legal and medical environment.

UTVs are another common source of confusion. Many owners assume their homeowners policy automatically provides coverage. In reality, coverage depends on how the UTV is used, whether it is driven on or off public roads, and how it is insured. In some cases, on-road use may be excluded unless the UTV is specifically added to an auto policy or insured separately. Injuries to passengers or damage to other vehicles can result in significant liability exposure if the coverage classification is incorrect.

Electric bikes add yet another wrinkle. While e-bikes typically do not require insurance or registration, accidents can still lead to serious injuries or property damage. Homeowners policies may provide some liability protection, but limitations often apply based on speed capability or motor size. Parents are often surprised to learn that a high-speed e-bike accident involving a pedestrian or vehicle may not be fully covered under a standard policy.

A common thread across all of these scenarios is liability. As families add new drivers and recreational vehicles, the potential for larger claims increases. This is where a personal umbrella policy often becomes an important consideration. Umbrella coverage provides an extra layer of protection above auto and homeowners limits and is designed to respond when those limits are exhausted.

As transportation options continue to evolve, insurance policies have not always kept pace. Taking time to review coverage when adding a teen driver, purchasing a UTV, or allowing e-bike use can help avoid unexpected gaps. A brief conversation now can go a long way toward protecting both family finances and peace of mind. ■

Information provided by Eric Johnson, IFG Insurance, 224 E. Highway 92, Suite B, Winterset, 515-462-4553.

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MEET Sara St. John

Sharing the magic of reading with her students

Sara St. John and her family moved to Winterset 10 years ago, just as she began teaching at Winterset High School.

Shortly after their move, St. John taught talented and gifted classes at Madrid High School part time. After a year, she grew tired of the commute and

was ready to return to the classroom teaching English full time — and what better place to do that than in her new hometown?

“It’s been a wonderful way to connect to the community, and I love our WHS staff,” she says.

St. John initially went into teaching because she comes from a family of educators. It comes naturally.

“We’ve joked at family gatherings that, if we decided to open the Blythe family school, we’d have every subject and grade level covered from kindergarten to college,” she says.

Both of her parents were teachers until they retired from Indianola in 2011, and St. John enjoys reading and writing.

“‘Read’ was actually one of my first words when I used to toddle around our house with a book in my hands, asking any adult to read to me,” St. John shares. “The magic of reading is something that I love getting to share with my students.”

St. John especially enjoys working with high school students.

“They’re at an age when they’re developing critical thinking and complex writing skills, so it’s fun to see them question the world around them and begin to make decisions about the adults that they’ll become,” she says. “Our high school kids are creative and funny, passionate about the things they believe, and honest in their desire to make the world a better place. It’s a joy to be able to be a part of their lives and help them gain skills to reach their goals.”

One of St. John’s proudest moments in her career came recently.

This fall, she was honored to be named the Iowa Council of Teachers of English High School Teacher of Excellence. Her principal, Mr. Smith, nominated her.

“It was a huge honor,” she says.

Outside of work, St. John spends time with her husband, Corey, and their two daughters. Lucie is a freshman this year, and Kennedy is in sixth grade.

While their move to Winterset is relatively recent, St. John has been visiting the community since she was a child. Her aunt and uncle, Paul and Lori Blythe, live in Winterset, and her family often drove over from Indianola to visit.

Now, working in Winterset, you could say her journey has come full circle. ■



Sara St. John enjoys teaching at the high school level.



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By Jennifer Stover

SOCIAL media and real estate

If you have ever scrolled through Instagram and suddenly felt inspired to reorganize your pantry or carve out a cozy reading nook, you're not alone — and today's homebuyers are feeling it.

Nearly half of buyers say social media influences what they want in a home at least somewhat, and one in five says it shapes their preferences a "great deal."

"The features that earn millions of saves online, like organized pantries, cozy nooks and handcrafted kitchens, are now showing up on buyers' wish lists and influencing what they expect to see in person," the report says.

Here's how social media is influencing home staging today:

Curated pantries: Buyers want storage that not only functions well but looks good. Think clear containers, labeled bins and an overall sense of calm order. Agents are leaning into this by staging walk-in pantries as mini showpieces — even shelving can go viral. Fifty-eight percent of buyers say they want walk-in pantries with organized storage.

Coffee bars: Styled vignettes like coffee bars photograph well and can help buyers envision what their daily rituals would be like in a home.

Reading nooks: These are areas that are styled where you can imagine yourself sitting there with a book. A simple corner becomes aspirational with built-in seating, soft lighting, layered textiles and a comfy throw. Buyers want places where they can imagine themselves unwinding. ■

Information provided by Jennifer Stover, 515-480-3389, Madison County Realty, 65 W. Jefferson St., Winterset, jenniferstover@madisoncountyrealty.com. Licensed in Iowa.




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AUTOMOTIVE

By Dawn Lauer

WINTER driving woes

As temperatures drop below freezing, you can expect that to have an impact on your vehicle. No one wants to head out on a cold winter morning only to find the tire pressure light is on or, worse yet, the vehicle won't start. Here are a few things to look out for.

• **Low tire pressure:** Did you know your tire pressure can decrease 1-2 pounds of pressure for every 10 degrees the temperature drops? It is important to keep your tires within the recommended PSI to maintain traction, handling and durability. Check pressure often during the winter months.

• **Dead battery:** Winter is especially hard on batteries. If your car won't start in the extreme cold, one of the most likely problems is that the battery is dead. Luckily, the fix is sometimes just getting a jump. But, to avoid a dead battery altogether, the Car Care Council suggests keeping its connections clean, tight and free of corrosion. It also recommends replacing batteries that are more than three years old.

• **Poor windshield wipers:** Sub-freezing temperatures can cause the rubber on windshield wiper blades to become brittle, which means it could tear or crack. The Car Care Council says to consider buying winter wiper blades made for harsher climates, but you could also just make sure the ones you have are not too old and worn. ■

Information provided by Dawn Lauer, marketing specialist, Quality Car Care, 1012 N. 10th St., Winterset, 515-462-1035. Source: www.caranddriver.com/news/a14762411/how-severe-cold-affects-your-car-and-what-to-do-about-it/e.



NEW catch-up contribution rule began Jan. 1

A key provision of the SECURE 2.0 Act was set to take effect on Jan. 1, 2026, and it will change how some employees age 50 and older make catch-up contributions to their employer retirement plans.



What's changing?

Beginning in 2026, if you turn age 50 or older that year and your 2025 FICA wages (Box 3 on your W-2) from your current employer exceed \$150,000*, any catch-up contributions you make must be made on a Roth basis.

This means the contributions are made after taxes, allowing qualified withdrawals in retirement to be tax-free.

Employees with 2025 FICA wages of \$150,000 or below* will continue to choose between pre-tax or Roth catch-up contributions, depending on what their plan allows.

What this means for you

If your income places you above the \$150,000* threshold, any catch-up contributions in 2026 or later must follow Roth rules:

Review your current contribution elections. If you plan to make catch-up contributions, you may need to add or adjust your Roth contribution election before the rule takes effect.

Pre-tax catch-up contributions will no longer be permitted for employees who exceed the 2025 wage threshold.

If your wages are \$150,000 or less*, you may continue using pre-tax or Roth for catch-up contributions, depending on your plan options.

This change only applies to catch-up contributions, not your standard deferral amounts. It also applies per employer, meaning the wage test only uses your 2025 earnings with your current employer—not combined earnings across multiple jobs.

The goal of this SECURE 2.0 provision is to encourage more after-tax retirement saving and simplify the long-term tax treatment of catch-up contributions for higher-earning employees.

As 2026 approaches, it's a good time to check your projected wages, understand your plan's Roth options, and make sure your contribution elections align with the new rules. ■

Information provided by Jason Kleemeier, Financial Advisor, 224 E. Highway 92, Suite B, Winterset, IA 50273, 515-462-4608. *Registered representatives offering securities through Cetera Wealth Services LLC, member FINRA/SIPC. Advisory Services offered through Cetera Investment Advisors LLC, a registered investment advisor. Cetera is under separate ownership from any other named entity. For a comprehensive review of your personal situation, always consult with a tax or legal advisor. Neither Cetera Wealth Services LLC, nor any of its representatives may give legal or tax advice. This information is from sources believed to be reliable, but Cetera Wealth Services, LLC cannot guarantee or represent that it is accurate or complete.

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HOW TO CHOOSE THE RIGHT HOME BUILDER

Choosing the right new home building contractor is one of the most important decisions you will make when building a house. The contractor you choose will directly affect the quality, cost and timeline of your new home, so taking the time to research and evaluate your options is essential.

Start by doing thorough research. Ask friends, family, or coworkers for recommendations, and look up local contractors online. Read reviews on trusted websites and pay attention to patterns, not just one or two negative comments. Consistent praise for communication, craftsmanship and reliability is a good sign, while repeated complaints are a red flag.

Next, verify credentials and experience. A reputable contractor should be properly licensed, insured and bonded according to your state and local requirements. Ask how long they have been in business and how many homes similar to yours they have built.

It's also important to review past work.

Ask for a portfolio of completed homes and, if possible, visit a few in person. This allows you to see the quality of materials, finishes and overall craftsmanship firsthand. You can also ask for references and speak directly with past clients about their experience.

When looking for a good builder, it is beneficial to choose one that uses a centralized project-management app throughout the build process. A reliable builder should have a system in place to track allowances, schedules, progress photos, invoices and all communication in one organized location.

Using a single platform keeps everyone on the same page and gives homeowners one consistent place to reference throughout the project. This level of organization helps clients follow along with their build, stay informed on decisions and timelines, and feel confident and comfortable with the overall process from start to finish.

Communication is another key factor. A

good contractor should be easy to reach, willing to answer questions and clear about expectations. During initial meetings, notice whether they listen carefully to your ideas and explain the building process in a way you understand. Poor communication early on often leads to frustration later.

Before making a final decision, get detailed written estimates from multiple contractors. These should clearly outline costs, materials, timelines and what is included or excluded. Be cautious of bids that are significantly lower than others, as they may involve cutting corners or lead to surprise costs down the road.

Finally, review the contract carefully. Make sure it includes a clear scope of work, payment schedule, timeline and warranty information. Never feel rushed to sign. Taking the time to choose the best new home building contractor will give you confidence, peace of mind and a better chance of ending up with a home you truly love. ■

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HOW TO CHOOSE GARAGE DOORS

Garage doors are often an afterthought to homeowners — but they shouldn't be. Garage doors are the first thing most notice about a home, so when it comes to choosing them for a new home or replacing them, significant thought and research should take place. If your garage faces the front of the house, a new door could dramatically improve your curb appeal and change the overall look of your home. If you're selling, worn, dated doors tend to say a lot about the condition of the rest of the home. A garage door is also an excellent security asset for your home, allowing you to secure your vehicle inside. If you're thinking about installing a new garage door, you may be surprised at just how many options are on the market — and how affordably they can be installed.

THE LOOK

Garage doors have seen an explosion in styles, materials and colors that are designed to match the architecture of any home, from rural barns to craftsman bungalows or sleek

urban getaways. So if you thought your choices were limited to simple sheet metal styles, think again. You should also pay close attention to the materials. Today's garage doors can be made from expensive hardwoods, textured vinyl, fiberglass or basic aluminum, all of which will have a big impact on the look and longevity of your doors. Pay close attention to the maintenance needs of whatever material you choose. Some will hold their color longer than others, and real wood doors can require regular staining and sealing every few years to keep them looking spectacular.

INSULATION

Depending on climate, the insulation of your garage door can be an important factor to help reduce your energy bills. This is especially important in heated garages. But even an insulated door on unheated garages can make a positive impact on your energy usage if it can keep the hot and cold weather away from the interior of your house. ■

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HOW TO CHOOSE THE RIGHT DENTIST

We are taught from a very young age that caring for our teeth will save us a lifetime of pain and costly procedures. That's true, so choosing a dental professional you can trust, along with scheduling regular care and cleaning can result in just that — a lifetime of beautiful, healthy teeth.

If you don't already have a regular dentist, choosing the right dental health professional is essential to helping you maintain your health and appearance in addition to helping you avoid nasty dental problems down the road. Find a dentist who makes you feel comfortable and explains every procedure in an understandable way, and you'll be in good hands. Finding a dentist near your home or workplace will help you make your appointments on time. When searching for a dentist, make sure the office hours work for your schedule.

Whether you're moving to a new area or haven't made time find a regular dentist, here are a few tips on how to start your search.

ASK AROUND

First, ask your social network for recommendations. Friends, family and colleagues can be a great resource. Searching on the internet will also help. Professionals often have their own websites, which include the backgrounds of those working there. The website may also tell you about how they handle procedures and appointments, as well as specialized services they offer.

INTERVIEW DENTISTS

Once you have gathered a list, begin calling each prospective dentist. You can talk to a receptionist or other staff person if the dentist is unavailable. Check to make sure the dentist earned the necessary degree from a reputable school and is current on all licensing and continuing educational requirements. Ideally, he will be familiar with the latest dental technologies and trends.

Ask if the dental office provides emergency services. If you break a tooth or

need to have a root canal done right away, you will want to use your chosen dentist. You don't want to have to search for a dentist when you are in pain.

Lead time for appointments is another consideration. Some offices might be able to see you right away, while others may have a three-week wait time.

Your prospective dentist should accept your dental insurance. If you don't have dental insurance, inquire about payment plans. The office should give you an estimate before performing any work.

OFFICE VISIT

When someone meets all of your requirements, visit the office. The staff should be professional and friendly.

The best dentists offer friendly, non-threatening dental experiences. Teeth are extremely important to your overall health. They can also help or hinder your appearance. Finding a good dentist is like finding a friend who consistently brings out your best smile. ■



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HOW TO CHOOSE AN AUTO BODY SHOP

From dents and scrapes to fender-benders and more intense damage resulting from an accident or weather-related incidents, repairing your vehicle requires the services of expert professionals from an experienced, reputable auto body shop.

Not surprisingly, shops specializing in this service can vary in quality, reliability and cost. It is not unusual for auto body repair estimates to differ by hundreds if not thousands of dollars. To get the best work at the fairest price requires an investment in time and asking the right questions.

Start your search by asking your friends, family and colleagues. Most of us have worked with an auto body shop at one time in our lives, and it is easier to ask those close to us for referrals of who they have used before.

CHECK OUT REVIEWS. Many auto body shops will promote testimonials from prior customers on their websites. Reading valuable reviews and testimonials from people who have used their service before

can help with the process.

LOOK FOR LOCAL SHOPS. When you take your vehicle to a local body shop, you are much more likely to be met by friendly faces, better service, top-quality parts, high standards, honest prices and a shop that can maintain low overhead costs and provide friendly customer service.

CHECK FOR CERTIFIED TECHNICIANS. Most auto body shops will display signage of the certification they have acquired, such as those from the National Institute for Automotive Service Excellence. ASE is an independent non-profit organization that has worked to improve the quality of vehicle repair and service by testing and certifying automotive professionals.

I-CAR recognizes both individuals and auto body repair shops who have demonstrated mastery of their rigorous standards. Individual technicians who have completed the I-CAR training earn a Platinum designation, signifying the highest level of training in the industry.

American Automobile Association (AAA — commonly referred to as “Triple A”) is a federation of motor clubs throughout North America.

Also, check to see if the shop is rated by the Better Business Bureau.

Create a list of shops, contact them on the phone and ask some questions. How long have they been in business? Do they provide free estimates? What is their turnaround time? Do they offer warranties? Do they work directly with insurance companies? What are their specialties? How soon can you bring your vehicle in for an inspection?

CONSIDER PRICES. Are they comparable to other body shops? While you want to find a great deal, cheaper is not always better. Low prices may be tempting, but they typically mean sub-par work, used parts and paint that is incorrectly applied.

Finding the right auto body shop will make the experience much more pleasant, and you will be happy with the repairs. ■

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HOW TO CHOOSE A ROOFER

Notice a leak when it rains? Or perhaps you have seen a stray shingle on the ground near your home. Stepping back to inspect your roof, you might notice even more damage or erosion. If even just one of these issues is true — or maybe you just want to update and improve the look of your home — it is time to hire a professional roofer for your home's first line of defense against the elements. Putting a new roof on your home can significantly increase its value. So, it is essential that you pick the right contractor to do this job.

Your first step in finding a reliable roofer is to ask your family, friends and neighbors if they have recommendations or referrals from work they have had done. You can also look on the internet for roofing contractors in your area. Some websites offer lists of professionals, along with reviews of their work. Personal recommendations will give you the best information. Be sure to focus on the quality of work as well as the cleanup

process. You do not want scraps of shingles and nails left over after the contractors have gone home. Don't hire professionals who leave debris after they are gone.

Pick someone you connect with and trust. Some contractors travel the country looking for work. If you hire one of them, they may not be able to provide realistic guarantees for their work. After all, they may be on the other side of the country if you begin to experience problems with their work.

Once you have contact information for several roofing contractors, call them. Inquire about the company's background and how long they have been in business. Generally, a good roofer should offer a material and workmanship warranty. Be sure to ask questions about time frames and estimates. You should always get a written estimate before proceeding with any work.

Communicating with the contractor will let them know that you will be taking a

hands-on approach to your project. Find out if the roofer's product recommends what they will do if they find damaged decking and when they might be available to start. You should also ask about the warranty and whether you can have it confirmed in writing.

Every professional who works on your property should be licensed and insured. Insurance is particularly important for roofing contractors. They should be able to cover any damages they might cause to your property. It is also essential that workers are covered under their insurance as well, in the event someone is injured during the job.

Before work commences, you should receive a written contract from the roofer. Read it over carefully. It will state the type of materials to be used, what the work will entail and the final cost. Following these tips will help you find the best roofing contractor in your community. ■



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HOW TO ACCESS PREVENTIVE HEALTH SERVICES

Preventive health services are crucial for maintaining good health and catching potential issues early. Here is a comprehensive guide on how to access and make the most of these services:

UNDERSTAND YOUR COVERAGE

Most health insurance plans, including private insurance, Medicaid and Medicare, cover a wide range of preventive services at no additional cost to you. These typically include:

- Annual wellness visits
- Blood pressure, diabetes and cholesterol screenings
- Cancer screenings (e.g., mammograms, colonoscopies)
- Vaccinations
- Counseling for issues like smoking cessation and weight management

Review your insurance policy or contact your provider to understand your specific coverage.

ACCESSING PREVENTIVE CARE

- Schedule an appointment: Contact your primary care physician to discuss which preventive services are right for you based on your age, gender and health history.
 - Use your insurance network: To avoid unexpected costs, be sure to visit in-network providers. Your insurance company's website usually has a provider directory.
 - Explore community resources: If you are uninsured or underinsured, local health departments and community health centers often provide free or low-cost preventive services.
 - Check for specific programs: Look for free screening programs for diseases like breast and cervical cancer, often offered by state health departments or non-profit organizations.

MAKING THE MOST OF PREVENTIVE SERVICES

- Be proactive: Don't wait for symptoms to appear. Regular check-ups can detect issues before they become serious.

- Prepare for your visit: Make a list of questions or concerns to discuss with your healthcare provider. Bring your medical history and any medications you are taking.
- Take advantage of workplace wellness programs: Many employers offer wellness programs that include preventive services like health screenings or flu shot clinics.
- Follow through on recommendations: If your provider recommends lifestyle changes or follow-up tests, be sure to act on this advice.

FOR THOSE WITHOUT INSURANCE

If you are uninsured, explore these options:

- Check your eligibility for Medicaid or Medicare
 - Enroll children in the Children's Health Insurance Program (CHIP)
 - Consider plans through the Health Insurance Marketplace
 - Look into sliding-scale fee clinics
- Remember, preventive care is a crucial investment in your long-term health. By taking advantage of these services, you can work toward a healthier future. ■

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HOW TO CHOOSE THE BEST INSURANCE AGENT

Selecting the right insurance agent is a crucial step in ensuring that you get the best coverage at the right price. An insurance agent is not just someone who sells you a policy; they are your guide through the complex world of insurance. Here's how to choose the best one for your needs.

1. ASSESS EXPERIENCE AND EXPERTISE. Insurance policies can be complex, so it's important to choose an agent who has a solid understanding of the industry and the specific type of insurance you need. Look for agents who have years of experience, preferably with a history of working with clients in your area. They should be able to explain policy details clearly and provide guidance on how different policies work together.

2. CHECK FOR LICENSING AND CERTIFICATIONS. Make sure the agent is properly licensed in your state. Insurance agents must hold a valid license to sell policies, and you can easily verify this

information online through your state's department of insurance. Additionally, look for agents with certifications like the Certified Insurance Counselor (CIC) or Chartered Life Underwriter (CLU), which demonstrate a higher level of professionalism and commitment to the field.

3. EVALUATE COMMUNICATION AND RESPONSIVENESS. An insurance agent should be easy to reach and quick to respond to your questions or concerns. If they are difficult to get in touch with or fail to follow up on inquiries, that could be a red flag. During your initial interaction, assess their ability to listen to your needs and explain things in a way you can understand. Clear, transparent communication is key to building a trusting relationship.

4. COMPARE MULTIPLE AGENTS. Don't settle for the first agent you meet. It is worth speaking with a few different professionals to get a sense of their

knowledge, service style and pricing. Ask for quotes from each and compare not just the prices but the coverage options and customer service promises. A good agent will make you feel comfortable with your choices and provide insight into how to save on premiums without compromising coverage.

5. READ REVIEWS AND ASK FOR REFERRALS. Online reviews can give you an idea of how other clients feel about the agent. Additionally, ask friends, family or colleagues for referrals. A trusted recommendation can go a long way in finding an agent who is reliable and effective.

6. TRUST YOUR INSTINCTS. Finally, trust your gut. If you feel like an agent is not a good fit, whether due to their attitude, level of professionalism, or approach to selling, it's OK to move on. You want an agent who works in your best interest and helps you feel secure about your insurance choices. ■

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HOW TO CHOOSE THE RIGHT TOWING COMPANY

When your vehicle breaks down or you are involved in an accident, choosing the right towing company matters more than most people realize. A tow truck is not just about moving your vehicle — it's often the first step in a much bigger process. Knowing what to look for can save you time, stress and unnecessary delays.

Start by choosing a local towing company with a proven track record. A business that has been serving the community for many years understands local roads, weather and accident procedures and has the experience to handle your vehicle safely and professionally.

Next, consider what happens after the tow. If your vehicle needs collision repair, calling a towing company that also operates a full-service body shop can streamline the entire process. It eliminates extra phone calls,

additional tows and wasted time moving your vehicle from place to place.

Another major factor is mobility. If your car is out of commission, having access to a rental car right away can make all the difference. Some towing companies offer on-site rental car delivery. If a rental is available, they can bring it directly on the tow truck to the scene of the accident or breakdown. You can transfer into the rental right there on the side of the road and continue on to work or home, while they transport your vehicle back to the shop for repairs.

That's the value of one-call convenience. Find a shop that focuses on making a stressful situation as easy as possible — handling your tow, your rental and your collision repairs all in one place. ■

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NEW TAX LAWS FOR 2026 THAT YOU SHOULD KNOW

The new year brings more than resolutions and fresh starts; it also ushers in several tax changes that could affect your wallet. Whether you're saving for retirement, funding your child's education or supporting your favorite charity, here are a few things you need to know about the tax landscape in 2026.

MORE ROOM TO SAVE FOR RETIREMENT AND HEALTHCARE. There's good news for savers: Contribution limits for retirement accounts are going up. If you're under 50, you can now contribute up to \$7,500 to an IRA, which is up from \$7,000 in 2025. Those 50 and older can contribute an additional \$1,100, for a total of \$8,600.

The limits for 401(k), 403(b) and governmental 457(b) plans are also increasing, with workers younger than 50 able to defer up to \$24,500. Visit [IRS.gov](https://www.irs.gov) and search "401k limit increases" for an article outlining the details.

Health savings account limits are rising, too. In 2026, individual coverage increased to \$4,400 and family coverage to \$8,750. If you are age 55 or older and are not enrolled in Medicare, you can contribute an additional

\$1,000 as a catch-up contribution.

The start of the year is an ideal time to review your contributions and consider increasing them, even by small amounts which can add up over time.

A CATCH-UP RULE FOR HIGH EARNERS.

If you're 50 or older and earned more than \$150,000 last year, there's a new wrinkle in your retirement planning. You can still make catch-up contributions to your workplace retirement plan, but they must now be Roth contributions rather than traditional pre-tax contributions. This includes 401(k), 403(b) and 457(b) plans.

While you won't get an immediate tax break, Roth contributions offer tax-free income in retirement and can provide a tax-free legacy for your heirs.

EXPANDED BENEFITS FOR 529

EDUCATION PLANS. Families using 529 plans to cover K-12 expenses will see the annual federal distribution limit double from \$10,000 to \$20,000 per student. The definition of qualifying expenses has also expanded to include curriculum, books, certain tutoring expenses and testing fees.

This change provides more flexibility for families with overfunded plans and increases options for managing education costs across multiple children or beneficiaries.

NEW CHARITABLE GIVING PROVISIONS.

The rules around charitable deductions are shifting in two directions. Taxpayers who take the standard deduction can now deduct up to \$1,000 in cash donations (\$2,000 for joint filers) to qualified organizations.

However, those who itemize deductions face a new threshold: only charitable contributions exceeding 0.5% of adjusted gross income are now deductible. Donors may want to consider bunching strategies or using donor-advised funds to maximize their tax benefits.

GETTING HELP. Navigating these tax changes can be challenging, but you don't have to go it them alone. A qualified financial advisor and tax professional can help you understand how these and other changes affect your specific situation. Together, you can develop strategies to make the most of new opportunities while minimizing your tax burden. ■

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'Honeyeater'

This is not an easy book to read. Just throwing that out there if you're not the kind of person who likes a challenging read. This is a slow-burn, convoluted, stream of consciousness style story that performs literary acrobatics while it breaks your heart.

If you are up for a complicated, foggy whirl of beautiful prose and haunted characters, then get ready; this is a doozy.

Charlie wants out of the flooded mess of Bellworth, a town full of childhood ghosts and regret. However, before he can break free, a woman with roses piercing her skin turns his world inside out. Grace drags Charlie into the depths of the secrets and mysteries of this creepy town, and terrifying choices await the pair when the muck comes loose.

Dizzy, unsettling, twisted and experimental, this is a whirlwind of a book I read twice, just to catch the things I missed the first time. I may tackle it a third time, to revel in the beauty of the writing. Be prepared for this one to seep into your bones in the best way.

— Review by Julie Goodrich



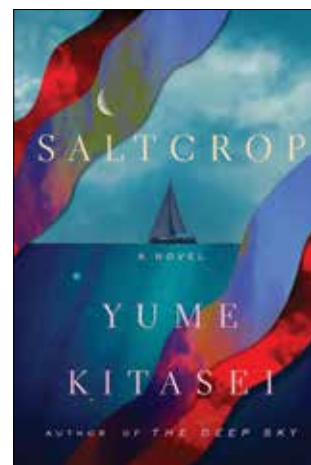
By Kathleen Jennings
9/2/25
272 pages
\$27.99
Tor Books

'Saltcrop'

Sisterhood is one of those things that is endlessly fascinating to me. I didn't grow up with a sister, and like many people who are always seeking the unfamiliar, stories about the complexities of sisters draw me in. "Saltcrop" delivers a powerful jolt of a story about sisters searching a crumbling world for answers, for themselves and, ultimately, for hope.

Skipper and Carmen are as unlike as two people can be, but they are sisters, nonetheless. Brought together by a strange plea from their eldest, accomplished sister Nora, they will have to travel through a world in the throes of ecological collapse and a society that may be imploding even faster.

Full of richly realized characters, strange vistas and threaded through with a strange sense of unease, this is a wildly beautiful story told with immense skill and pitch-perfect pacing. Kitasei is a powerful writer, and she absolutely shines in this one. I flew through it and have been recommending it to anyone who likes a good family drama, an ecological horror story or just a good heroine's journey. ■ — Review by Julie Goodrich



By Yume Kitasei
9/25/25
384 pages
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HAYNES is rooted in Winterset

Appreciates community's many assets



Josh Haynes and his daughter participated in a truck pull this past summer with one of his shop's off-road recovery trucks.

For more than a decade, Josh Haynes has called Winterset home.

He moved to town 12 years ago for a variety of reasons — from family history and school quality to cost of living and safety. Over time, those initial reasons have only been reinforced as he's become more rooted in the community.

The property he currently owns reflects two long-held priorities: living in the country with some land, while still being close to town. Haynes is in the process of building a home, so while there isn't much of a "home" there just yet, he's excited about the size of the lot and the future memories that will be made on it, especially because the neighborhood feels quiet and friendly.

As for Winterset more broadly, Haynes appreciates how active the community is and how many things there are to do in and around town.

"The schools are great, and we have good athletic facilities," he adds.

He sees those assets as an important part of what makes Winterset an appealing place for families and long-term residents alike.

In town, Haynes is involved in the Madison County Chamber of Commerce, which he says has been a valuable way to network and explore local businesses. He also enjoys Winterset's festivals and the community's commitment to preserving its history, from the downtown district and courthouse to the continued care of the covered bridges.

Haynes has a great time at the county fair, too, and would like to see the fairgrounds grow and dirt track racing be brought back to Madison County — ideas that show his appreciation for both tradition and community gathering spaces.

After 12 years in Winterset and with a new home underway, Haynes sees the community not as a place he landed, but one he chose and continues to choose. ■

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

INGREDIENTS

- 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

DIRECTIONS

- 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.

EVENTS IN THE AREA

Be sure to check for cancellations

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

Upcoming in Winterset 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.

Women's Giving Circle meeting

March 24, 6 p.m.

Union State Bank Community Room, 611 W. Highway 92, Winterset

The Madison County Women's Giving Circle first quarter meeting will be held March 24 starting at 6 p.m. You may come at 5:30 p.m. if you wish to socialize before the meeting. Anyone interested in joining or learning more about the organization is welcome to attend.

Local charitable 501(C)(3) tax-exempt organizations wishing to present information about their projects for supporting women and children in Madison County should arrive by 5:30 p.m. to register. They should provide a brief description of their project, their tax-exempt status, email address and telephone number where they may be reached.

Three organizations will be selected (by a drawing) to present at the meeting. Each will be given four minutes to present and four minutes to answer questions. One of the three non-profits will be elected by vote to receive this quarter's donations. If more than three non-profits wish to present, the rest will each have two minutes to speak about their project.

Wednesday Winterset Wellness Support

Second and fourth Wednesdays, 5:30 p.m.

Winterset Public Library, 23 N. Second St.

A healthy lifestyle is easier to achieve when you have support. This group meets every two weeks, which gives each person enough time to work on their goals in between meetings and discover what obstacles or achievements they encounter. Participants can share what has worked for them and find ways to get active and eat healthy together.

Winter Play Dates

Every Tuesday through February, 10-11:30 a.m.

Redeemer Church, 200 N. 16th Ave., Winterset

Looking for a warm place for your little ones to burn energy this winter? Redeemer Church is hosting Winter Play Dates for the community every Tuesday from 10-11:30 a.m., through February. Bring the kiddos to play inside while you enjoy fellowship and connection with other adults. Let the kids run, laugh and play while you stay warm and cozy together. Everyone is welcome.

Indoor Walking

Mondays, Tuesdays, and Fridays through February, 8-10 a.m.

Redeemer Church, 200 N. 16th Ave., Winterset

Looking to get your steps in and keep warm this winter? The church is open for community walking Mondays, Tuesdays and Fridays from 8-10 a.m. through February. Everyone is welcome. Bring a friend, get your steps in, and enjoy a cozy space to move.

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EVENTS IN THE AREA

Be sure to check for cancellations

Winterset Public Library programs

123 N. Second St.

www.wintersetlibrary.org

- Friday Flicks, March 27 and May 29, 1:30 p.m., free popcorn, family-friendly movie.
- Mah Jongg, every Saturday, 9:30 a.m. Learn to play this ancient, intriguing and challenging tile game. All necessary items will be provided free; all you need is a desire to learn. Registration required.
- Story Time, Wednesdays 10-10:30 a.m. During this 30-minute program, children will discover books, songs, rhymes and movement activities while building language and literacy skills. Ages 3 and older.
- Let's Play Cribbage, Wednesdays, 2-4 p.m.
- Adult Game Day, Tuesdays at 1:30 p.m. Many games to choose from or bring your own. Snacks are welcome. Free and no registration required.
- Messy Munchkins, Thursdays, 10:15 a.m. to noon. Children 0-5 with an adult. No registration required.
- Lego Club, ages 8-12, third Thursday of the month, 3:30-4:30 p.m.. Dates are Feb. 19, March 19, April 16 and May 21. Legos provided. Do not bring your own. No registration required.
- Get Fit with Geri-Fit, Tuesdays and Fridays, no registration required. A strength-training class for older adults.
- Acoustic Jam, first Friday of the month, 1-4 p.m.
- Game On! Mondays, 3-5 p.m., ages 10 and older. No registration required. Behavior policies must be followed.
- Chess Club, Tuesdays, 5-7 p.m. All ages welcome. No experience necessary. Boards and sets available.
- Morning Tai Chi, Tuesdays, Wednesdays and Thursdays, 9 a.m. Follow Dr. Paul Lam's DVDs with stretching followed by the 12 forms and cool down exercises. Sessions are 30-45 minutes.

Madison County Conservation Center events

First Tuesdays of the month, 6-7 p.m.

Madison County Conservation Center, 2508 Pammel Park Road, Winterset

Enjoy these exciting events at the new Madison County Conservation Center in Pammel Park for a free-will donation. Proceeds will be equally shared between Madison County Foundation for Environmental Education and an organization of the speaker's choice.

Live Wild 2026 Speaker Series

- Tuesday, March 3: Honeybees with Andrew Joseph
- Tuesday, April 14: Wildlife Rescue with Jenni Boonjakaukul
- Tuesday, May 5: Taxidermy with Remington Hutton
- Tuesday, June 2: Rattlesnakes with Paul Frese
- Tuesday, July 7: Barn Owls with Tanner Donovan and Jessie Lowry
- Tuesday, Aug. 4: Dog Training with Angela Tague
- Tuesday, Sept. 1: Lead-Free Hunt with Adam Janke
- Tuesday, Oct. 6: Madison County Hunt with Catherine Cummings

Cummings

- Tuesday, Nov. 3: Basket Weaving with Amy Warnke
- Tuesday, Dec. 1: Northern Lights with Jess Lancial

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EVENTS IN THE AREA

Be sure to check for cancelations



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 chocolatwalk.dmcityview.com.



Friendly Sons of St. Patrick Pre-Party and Parade

March 14 and March 17

The Friendly Sons of St. Patrick is back with its St. Patrick's Day celebrations. Join them on Saturday, March 14, from 2-6 p.m. at The Shop DSM, 901 Cherry St., Des Moines, for a Pre-Paddy Party, featuring live music from Fat Tuesday, a live auction, food trucks and cash bar for an at-will donation. The parade is on Tuesday, March 17, and begins at noon. Participants will proceed from E. First Street, west on Grand Avenue to Eighth Street, with the parade officially ending at Eighth and Grand Avenue. The after party will be in the Des Moines Marriott Downtown Hotel. Visit www.friendlysonsiowa.com for more information.

Cold Hands, Warm Heart Walk

Friday, Feb. 6

Winterset Courthouse Square

Everyone is invited to the 30-minute Cold Hands, Warm Heart Walk in honor of National Wear Red Day and American Heart Month, bringing awareness to heart disease and stroke. Wear your brightest red and walk for someone you love. There will be music, and coffee and hot cocoa will be served at the Chamber to warm up after your walk. All ages and fitness levels welcome. Follow the Facebook event page for updates: www.facebook.com/events/winterset-square/cold-hands-warm-heart-walk/1201355075318424.

Blood Drive

Friday, Feb. 27, 11 a.m. to 3 p.m.

Summerset Realty, 122 S. John Wayne Drive

A LifeServe blood drive is being held in honor of Jim Eller. Walk-ins are welcome or make an appointment by calling 800-287-4903 or visit lifeservebloodcenter.org. ■

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BREAKING cup alerts teen of mom's emergency

Winterset student saves his mother's life.

It was a day like any other really, as Max Booton, a 17-year-old Winterset High School student, sat down in his room after school, getting ready to hop online and play some video games with some friends.

Little did he know, but that November day was going to be anything but normal.

Max donned his headset, one ear on and the other off in case someone — particularly mom — called for him. Mom being Winterset teacher Jessica Gibbons.

But then he heard something out of the ordinary.

"She was coming in from school, and I heard the sound of something break," Max recalls.

The sound was Jessica dropping a coffee cup. What Max saw next nearly shattered him.

"I came downstairs and noticed her face was drooping, her speech was slurred, and some other signs that she was having a stroke," he says.

A lifeguard at the local swimming pool and having been trained to recognize these very symptoms, Max sprung into action.

"I called my dad and told him there was something wrong with mom and that I was going to call 911," he says. "I just wanted him to know first what was going on."

His mother wanted to lay down and take a rest, he says, but Max knew better than to let her.

"I knew that if she went to sleep we could potentially have bigger concerns later," he says.

So Max helped her get comfortable, sat down and asked her how her day was. Anything to keep her awake. It worked.

Keeping his own wits about him during the stressful few minutes wasn't an easy task. This was his mother, the loving person who had taken care of him all these years. But he managed. There was no other option.

"I just knew that if I lost it, there would be no one to help her because I would be of no use, too," he says.

The ambulance arrived quickly and transported Jessica to Mercy Hospital in Des Moines. A couple of CT scans were taken, and medication was given to help break the blood clot that had caused this terrifying episode. If that didn't work, the next option was brain surgery.

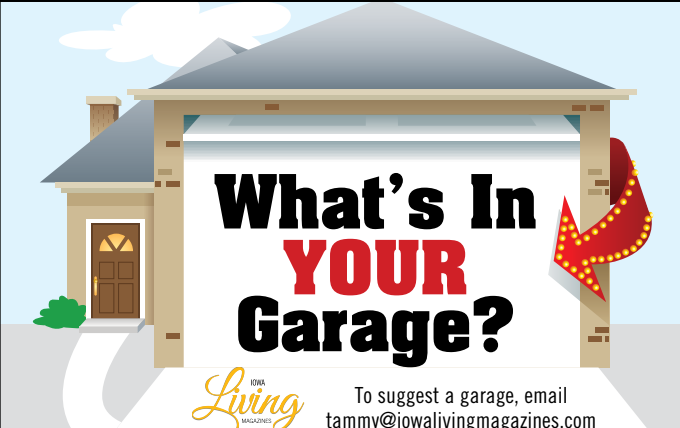
Thankfully, the medication did its job, and no surgery was needed. Relief. And then recovery.

Jessica took a few weeks off to mend but is back to nearly full speed now, her son says. The community's help has been wonderful. A number of people have stepped up and filled the gap, he says, providing food and other means of support during this strenuous period.

Max has been on the receiving end of some kudos for doing what he did, he says. And while it's been appreciated, his focus hasn't been on the glory of saving a life, it's been right where it always was and will be. Mom. ■



Max Booton stands beside his mother, Jessica Gibbons, while she recovered in the hospital after suffering a stroke recently.



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CHAMBER Banquet

The Madison County Chamber Banquet was held at the Jackson building on Jan. 22.



Paul Welch and Tim Collins



Christine and Trent Doonan



Kelli Eshelman and Stacy McDonald



Justin and Kylee Henderson



Jason Wieck, Nate Fehl and Jordan Ball



RaeJean Merritt and Amanda Solum



Erik Backstrom and Dakota Ernst



Scott Meier and Allissa Johnson



Liz Hansen and Kara Ellingrod



Lynn Breakenridge and Roger and Cris Queck



Jen Dieter and Jane Dawson

OUT & ABOUT



Bob Kuhns and Annette Wildin at the Madison County Chamber banquet held at the Jackson building on Jan. 22.



Katharine Haverland and Jeff Hefler at the Madison County Chamber banquet held at the Jackson building on Jan. 22.



Abigail and Michael Hanson at the Madison County Chamber banquet held at the Jackson building on Jan. 22.



Maria Forgy and Jon Stetzel at the Madison County Chamber banquet held at the Jackson building on Jan. 22.



Dave and Judy Trask at the Madison County Chamber banquet held at the Jackson building on Jan. 22.



Jayci and Evan Kuhns at the Madison County Chamber banquet held at the Jackson building on Jan. 22.



Allissa Johnson and Laure Furstenau at the Chamber Coffee held at Earlham Family Dentistry on Jan. 16.



Dr. Carter Coppinger and Danielle Moore at the Chamber Coffee held at Earlham Family Dentistry on Jan. 16.



Nick Leerhoff and Parker Crispin at the Chamber Coffee held at Earlham Family Dentistry on Jan. 16.



Erin Harman, Leslie Allen, Josh Carman and Lance Queck at the Chamber Coffee held at Earlham Family Dentistry on Jan. 16.



A ribbon cutting was held at Earlham Family Dentistry on Jan. 16.

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