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FEBRUARY 2026

MAGAZINE

RESIDENTS' CHOICE AWARDS

Dallas County residents
share their favorites



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RECIPE

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of the Year
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WELCOME

VOTING made easy

Voting for elected officials, bond issues or related items can be a lot of work. Voters should research the candidates or issues in advance and make selections that match their views. They often need to take time off from work or home activities to be available in person to cast their ballots. And, sometimes, they need to stand in line for lengthy periods of time to even get inside the polling place.

Nobody said voting was easy — unless you are voting in the Residents' Choice polls in our Living magazines. We keep it simple, and you can vote in the comfort of your own home on your personal computer, tablet or phone. Easy peasy.

A few decades ago, when we were first conducting reader polls in CITYVIEW magazine, all the votes were submitted on the paper ballots we published. Choices were written in by hand, and all the votes were counted by hand, too. It was a tedious process, and, as a result, very few votes were cast compared to today.

Now, we subscribe to an online polling service so readers can cast their votes digitally. Voters still have to fill in the blanks, as we don't load the ballot with predetermined choices like some other polls do. It certainly would be easier to count the results if we loaded your options, but we think it is important to keep the choices for our readers' favorite people, businesses, places and events wide open. And, since our Living magazines are mailed to every household in the communities we serve, everyone is eligible to vote. You don't have to register. You don't have to be a certain age. You don't even have to vote in more than one category if you so choose.

There have always been, and always will be, cheaters in this world, including in this poll. It doesn't work, as we easily identify those and throw them out. What does work is being a great person, being involved in a great organization or running a great business — and that is what the winners in this year's readers' poll are.

I thank all of you who took the time to vote in this year's Residents' Choice poll. And, if you didn't vote, well, there is always next year.

Thanks for reading. ■

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RESIDENTS' CHOICE AWARDS

Dallas County residents share their favorites



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

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

make their best impressions on their customers.

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

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

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

Premiere Dance Project
co-owners Amanda Stickrod
and Aunica Krier.

Dallas County Residents' Choice for Favorite...

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

Restaurant

* Fiesta Mexican Restaurant

Runners up: Ambro's Roadhouse; Patrick's Restaurant

Restaurant for breakfast

* Patrick's Restaurant

Runners up: Early Bird; Ambro's Roadhouse

Restaurant for lunch

Ambro's Roadhouse

Runners up: 9th Street Tap and Smash; Patrick's Restaurant

Restaurant for dinner

* Fiesta Mexican Restaurant

Runners up: Ambro's Roadhouse; Great White Buffalo Public House

Restaurant for dessert

* Billy's Ice Cream Store

Runners up: Home Sweet Cone Ice Cream; Patrick's Restaurant

Place for ice cream

* Billy's Ice Cream Store

Runners up: Home Sweet Cone Ice Cream; Waukee Ice Cream Shoppe

Pizza establishment

Patrick's Restaurant

Runners up: 7 Stone Pizzeria; Casey's

Bar

Ambro's Roadhouse

Runners up: Corner Tap; Great White Buffalo Public House

Coffee shop

* The Morning Grind

Runners up: The Coffeesmith; Scooter's Coffee

Catering company

* Hy-Vee Catering

Runners up: Kue'd Smokehouse; Snappy's Stick Fire Barbecue

Server/bartender

Miranda Broeker, Ambro's Roadhouse

Runners up: MacKenzie Henning, Corner Tap; Phoebe Stewart, 9th Street Smash and Tap

Auto service

* Alley Auto Sales

Runners up: Adel Tire & Service; Willard Garage

Auto body shop

Olson's Body & Paint

Runners up: Graham Collision; Modern Motors



Taylor Seawel, meat market manager, and Austin Morton, assistant store manager, at Fareway on Mills Civic Parkway in West Des Moines.

Car dealership

Stivers Ford Lincoln

Runners up: Deery Brothers Chrysler Dodge Jeep Ram Waukee; Shottenkirk Chevrolet

Preschool/daycare

Faith's Flock Preschool

Runners up: Kids Korner; Raccoon River Preschool

Nonprofit

* WayPoint Resources

Runners up: Adel Good Samaritan Food Pantry; AHeinz57 Pet Rescue and Transport

School

ADM High School

Runners up: Adel Elementary; Meadow View Elementary

Park

Evans Park

Runners up: Centennial Park; Triumph Park

Community festival

* Adel Sweet Corn Festival

Runners up: Dallas County Fair; Waukee Arts Festival

Church

* Lutheran Church of Hope

Runners up: New Hope Church; St. John's Catholic Church

Pastor

* Mike Housholder

Runners up: Eric Trout; Ryan Whitson

FEATURE

Chamber of commerce

* **Waukee Area Chamber of Commerce**

Runners up: Adel Partners Chamber of Commerce; Perry Chamber of Commerce

Library

* **Adel Public Library**

Runners up: Perry Public Library; Waukee Public Library

Camping spot

Timberline Campground

Runners up: Dallas County Fair Campgrounds; Island Park Campground

Grocery store

* **Fareway Meat & Grocery**

Runners up: Aldi; Hy-Vee

Boutique

* **Azalea Lane Boutique**

Runners up: Real Deals; Valtera Boutique

Retail store

Real Deals

Runners up: Adel HealthMart; Azalea Lane Boutique

Thrift and antique store

* **Goodwill of Central Iowa**

Runners up: Many Hands Thrift Market; Uptown Vintage Market

Home improvement retail store

Adel Hardware and Handyman

Runners up: Archer Home Center; Waukee Hardware & Rent-It Center

Liquor store

* **World Liquor & Tobacco + Vapors**

Runners up: Hy-Vee Wine & Spirits; Wall to Wall Wine and Spirits

Nursery or garden center

* **Harvey's Greenhouse**

Runners up: Bentley Ridge Tree Farm & Nursery; Earl May Garden Center

Place to purchase a gift for a man

Adel Hardware and Handyman

Runners up: Adel HealthMart; Old Station Craft Meats

Place to purchase a gift for a woman

* **Azalea Lane Boutique**

Runners up: Adel HealthMart; Real Deals

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FEATURE

Bakery

9th Street Bakery

Runners up: 5 Borough Bakery; Black Water Bakery

Florist

* Adel Flowers & Gifts

Runners up: Hazel Mae Floral Events; Hy-Vee

Dad/child date spot

* Adel Family Fun Center

Runners up: The Palms Theatre & IMAX; Warrior Lanes

Mom/child date spot

* Adel Family Fun Center

Runners up: Playgrounds Cafe; The Palms Theatre & IMAX

Place to take your mom and dad

Patrick's Restaurant

Runners up: Ambro's Roadhouse; Tin Pig Tavern

Place to take your kids or grandkids

Adel Family Fun Center

Runners up: The Brenton Arboretum; Evans Park

Children's birthday party spot

* Adel Family Fun Center

Runners up: Playgrounds Cafe; Warrior Lanes

Golf course

Hillcrest Country Club

Runners up: River Valley Golf Course; Sugar Creek Golf Course

Bowling alley

Adel Family Fun Center

Runners up: Spare Time; Warrior Lanes

Hair salon

Studio 10

Runners up: Hairs2You; Texture Salon

Physician's clinic

* The Iowa Clinic

Runners up: MercyOne; Waukeel Family Medicine UnityPoint

Dental office

* Adel Family Dentistry

Runners up: Adel Dental Group; Waukeel Dental

Orthodontics office

* Johnson Orthodontics

Runners up: Bernhardt and Smith Orthodontics; Central Iowa Orthodontics

Mental health services

Adel Mental Health

Runners up: Family Legacy Counseling; Lifetime Therapy Services PLLC

Chiropractic office

* Luellen Chiropractic

Runners up: Key Potential Chiropractic; Waukeel Wellness & Chiropractic

Vision care

* Elite Eye Care

Runners up: Adel Vision Clinic; EyeQ Eyecare and Eyewear

Health club or gym

SOULSHINE yoga + fitness

Runners up: Anytime Fitness; Waukeel Family YMCA

Pharmacy

Adel HealthMart

Runners up: Hy-Vee Pharmacy; Sumpter Pharmacy

Cosmetic services

4Ever Young Med Spa and Wellness Center

Runners up: Chelsis Skin Therapy; The Kissed Peach Integrative Aesthetics & Wellness

Physical therapy

* Core Physical Therapy

Runners up: Athletico Physical Therapy; The Iowa Clinic Physical Therapy

*Thank you for voting us Favorite
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Dance studio

Premiere Dance Project

Runners up: Dancin' with Roxie; Let's Dance

Gymnastics and/or tumbling studio

Jacobs Gymnastics

Runners up: Adel Tumbling & Dance Club; Chow's Gymnastics & Dance

Audiologist/hearing clinic

The Iowa Clinic Audiology

Runners up: Woodward Hearing Center; Merit Hearing

CBD Store

* CBD American Shaman

Runners up: CIV Plus; World Liquor & Tobacco + Vapors

Financial planner

Shahna Magee, Farm Bureau Financial Services

Runners up: Bob Grove, Edward Jones; Travis Gaule, Trust Bridge Wealth Advisors

Law firm

Bergkamp, Hemphill & McClure, P.C.

Runners up: Hopkins & Huebner, P.C.; Shindler, Anderson, Goplerud & Weese P.C.

Accounting firm

* Banwart Tax & Accounting

Runners up: Insight CPA; Vroman Group

Veterinarian

The Animal Hospital of Adel

Runners up: Adel Veterinary Clinic; Broderick Animal Clinic

Dog groomer

* Handsome Hounds Boarding and

Grooming

Runners up: Perry Paw Spa; Stylin' Paws

Pet care

* Handsome Hounds Boarding and

Grooming

Runners up: Dogtopia; Stylin' Paws

Lawn care business

Ripke Outdoor

Runners up: Grassy Knoll Lawn Care, LLC; Legacy Outdoors



Goodwill staff at Jordan Creek in West Des Moines.

Landscaping company

Ripke Outdoor

Runners up: CD's Lawn Care; Legacy Outdoors

Heating and cooling business

* Adel & Winterset TV & Appliance

Runners up: Dorrian Heating and Cooling; Tigges Comfort Services

Electrical business

* Elite Electric & Utility Contractors

Runners up: Extra Electric LLC; Webster Electric Inc.

Plumbing company

Lenhart Plumbing

Runners up: Central Iowa Mechanical; Home Run Plumbing

Senior living establishment

Edencrest Adel

Runners up: Attivo Trail - Waukee; Village Cooperative of West Des Moines

Insurance Agency

* Eric Schepers Insurance

Runners up: Shahna Magee, Farm Bureau Financial Services; Vibrant Insurance Group

Realtor

* Julianna Cullen, RE/MAX Precision

Runners up: Donna Stall, RE/MAX Concepts; Ingrid Williams Real Estate Team

Bank/credit union

* Lincoln Savings Bank

Runners up: Raccoon Valley Bank; Veridian Credit Union

Photographer

* DKay Photography - Danielle Hawkins

Runners up: Jujobe Photography; Peridot & Lace

Place for guests to stay

Timberline Campground cabins

Runners up: Aloft Waukee; Hotel Pattee

Home builder/remodeling contractor

* RCI Builders

Runners up: Behr Construction; NexGen Baths

Outdoor lawn equipment store

* Waukee Power Equipment

Runners up: Fleet Farm; Moss Bros.

Pest Control

* Paul's AAA Pest Control

Runners up: Aptive Pest Control; Bobcat Wildlife and Pest Control ■

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."

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 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.

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." ■

WDM CHAMBER announces Citizen, Emerging Citizen of the Year

For the 81st consecutive year, the West Des Moines Chamber of Commerce and the city of West Des Moines have announced the annual West Des Moines Citizen and Emerging Citizen of the Year, Dan Houston and Kara Matheson.

"Dan Houston and Kara Matheson represent the kind of leadership that moves a community forward," said Katherine Harrington, president and CEO of the West Des Moines Chamber of Commerce. "Through decades of service, Dan has helped shape both a global organization and our local community, while Kara's dedication and energy continue to strengthen West Des Moines in meaningful ways. Their impact extends far beyond their careers, and we are honored to recognize them as Citizen and Emerging Citizen of the Year for the difference they make every day."

Dan Houston is a retired business leader whose career spanned more than 40 years at Principal Financial Group, where he rose from early roles to serve as president, chief executive officer and executive chair. Based in Des Moines, Houston helped guide the company's growth across retirement, insurance and global asset management while steering the organization through periods of economic change and international expansion. Throughout his career, he was known for a steady, people-centered leadership style rooted in accountability, long-term thinking and service to others. In retirement, Houston remains engaged in civic and nonprofit efforts focused on economic development, workforce readiness and strengthening communities across Iowa.

"Joanie and I have been citizens of West Des Moines for more than 36 years. Our children and grandchildren have grown up here," said Houston. "I can't think of a better place to raise a family and to be included in such a vibrant community as we have right here in West Des Moines. It's both an honor and a privilege to receive this recognition."

Kara Matheson, SHRM-SCP, is a passionate community builder whose leadership has sparked lasting impact across West Des Moines and Central Iowa. Through initiatives like the Reignite COMMUNITY Awards, Day of Kindness, YURtern, West YP, and the West Des Moines Leadership Academy, Kara has championed inclusion, service and local talent development. Her work has connected thousands, elevated employee experiences, developed the next generation of leaders, and inspired civic engagement. After almost a decade of dedication and innovation in the chamber of commerce world, she continues her pursuit of making the world of work a better place for all at ITA Group, based in West Des Moines.

"I'm beyond honored to have even been recognized for this award," said Matheson. "To me, after my last seven years working at the West Des Moines Chamber, this recognition is truly a reflection of the Chamber itself and what kind of impact can happen when amazing leaders come together and really care about uplifting their community and the people in it."

Both award recipients will be honored at the WDM Chamber's Annual Dinner on Feb. 26 at the Val Air Ballroom. Registration for the event is \$100 per individual or \$1,000 for a VIP table of eight. Those interested in attending can learn more and register through <https://wdmchamber.org/events/annual-dinner/>. ■



West Des Moines Citizen and Emerging Citizen of the Year, Dan Houston and Kara Matheson.

MENTOR Iowa celebrated National Mentoring Month

In recognition of National Mentoring Month, which was January, Mentor Iowa is telling the story of a past match pair: Jennifer Bryant (mentor) and Kelly Meany (mentee). This match pair demonstrates the impact a mentor can bring to the life of a child referred to the Mentor Iowa program and how lasting the outcomes can truly be. Jennifer and Kelly met in 1994, and they are still incredibly close. Kelly was a 7-year-old girl when she and Jennifer met and have been in each other's lives for more than 30 years. Kelly has had several living situations from Iowa to New York, but the one constant presence she had in her life was Jennifer. One example of their bond is when Jennifer flew Kelly back to Iowa so she could be a bridesmaid in her wedding.

Kelly is a true success story for Mentor Iowa. She is currently a mentor for a 14-year-old girl in the program and also is a board member for Mentor Iowa. Kelly wants to give back to the program the same way Jennifer did for her. Besides her passion for giving back to Mentor Iowa, Kelly is the owner of Awaken Mind Wellness located in West Des Moines and also serves as a therapist.

Mentor Iowa is actively seeking mentors for the wonderful children who reside on their waiting list. Mentorship can truly make a difference in the life of a child with nothing but the gift of your time. If you have any questions about the Mentor Iowa program or how to become a mentor with Mentor Iowa, call 515-277-9797 or visit www.mentoriowa.org. ■



Jennifer Bryant (mentor) and Kelly Meany (mentee)

MEET Michelle Dirks

Hillside ESL teacher wins Pawsitive Impact Award.

When kindergarten students first enter Michelle Dirks' ESL (English as a Second Language) class, some of her students struggle to say "Hello" in English.

By the end of the school year, kids speak full sentences in English, understand their teachers and engage with other students.

"It's amazing to see that growth in one year," she says.

Dirks began teaching special education classes 29 years ago and has taught ESL since 2004. She currently teaches kindergarten and first grade ESL at Hillside Elementary in West Des Moines.

At the beginning of the school year, multi-lingual kids are tested for language skills and identified as emerging, progressing or fluent in English. Approximately 18 different languages are spoken. Common languages include Spanish, Tigrinya and Arabic.

During school, she assembles four to six students in groups that work on English language development, including speaking, reading, listening and writing skills. She teaches various school words first then moves into other subjects, such as body parts, clothes, action words and more.

Pictures and visual cues are important, and she uses chants and poems, similar to the "ABC" song. Her main focus is not only to help students become fluent in the classroom, but in also communicating outside the classroom.

Because of her work with kids, Dirks was awarded a Pawsitive Impact award, which recognizes WDM teachers who make a positive impact on students.

"It was a huge surprise," she says of the award. "Someone nominated me anonymously. In the award they said, 'You can tell she cares deeply about the Hillside community.' It was nice, and I don't even know who to thank."

Dirks became interested in working with kids when she worked as a lifeguard and swimming instructor as a teenager.

"I always knew I wanted to work with kids. I have a love for the little ones. It's fun to see them grow, and they are always excited about learning," she explains.

As a teacher for nearly three decades, she has noticed changes in the classroom.

"The behaviors of what is accepted in schools has changed a lot over the years," she says. "In addition, because of the economy, children come into class hungry."

Some kids don't have items, such as snow boots, which are required to go outside for recess with the other kids.

"We, as teachers, buy them for kids. We spend a lot of money out of our pockets on materials. It's just what we do," she reflects. "You worry about kids getting fed. It's hard."

Despite her ongoing concerns for her students, she enjoys the profession. Her ESL families are grateful for her help.

"I love seeing their growth. Kids love school. You get hugs, and it melts your heart," she says. "You hope you're making a difference." ■



Michelle Dirks was recipient of the Pawsitive Impact Award.

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OFFICERS Houston, Paulson, Pedote and Warren graduate



Iowa Attorney General Brenna Bird and ILEA Director Brady Carney congratulate Officer Bryant Houston.



Iowa Attorney General Brenna Bird and ILEA Director Brady Carney congratulate Officer Justice Paulson



Iowa Attorney General Brenna Bird and ILEA Director Brady Carney congratulate Officer Matthew Warren.



Iowa Attorney General Brenna Bird and ILEA Director Brady Carney congratulate Officer Thomas Pedote.

Iowa Attorney General Brenna Bird congratulated officers Bryant Houston, Justice Paulson, Thomas Pedote and Matthew Warren 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."

The officers will serve with the West Des Moines Police Department. ■

LIBRARY

FIND your vibe at the WDM Library



West Des Moines Public Library

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Friday: 9 a.m. to 6 p.m.
Saturday: 9 a.m. to 5 p.m.
Sunday: 2-5 p.m.

Back by popular demand, we have a Blind Date with a Book display on the second floor near the new books. This year's theme, "Find Your Vibe," features books spanning a variety of moods and genres. Read the short description on the outside of a wrapped book, take a chance on one, and check it out. After you finish reading your book of choice, let us know how your "date" went by tagging us in your review on social media. We'll be keeping an eye on Facebook and Instagram throughout the month to see how these blind dates turn out.

Reminder: The library will be closed on Monday, Feb. 16, for a staff in-service day.

EVENTS

Iowa Blues Challenge Winners: The Weary Ramblers (Adults)
Saturday, Feb. 14, 1-2 p.m.

The Library is happy to welcome Kathryn Severing-Fox and Chad Elliott, the winners of the 2025 Iowa Blues Challenge in the solo/duo category. No registration required.

Valentine's Day Storytime (Ages 2-6 with adult)

Wednesday, Feb. 11, 6:30-7:15 p.m.

Thursday, Feb. 12, 10:30-11:15 a.m.

Friday, Feb. 13, 10:30-11:15 a.m.

Join us for a Valentine storytime including a puppet show, stories, rhymes and songs. All you need is love...and stories. No registration required. ■

FEBRUARY'S Iowa Living Magazines Poll of the Month

Vote now at www.facebook.com/iowalivingmagazines or by scanning this QR code

What do you buy most often for Valentine's Day?

- ☐ Chocolates
- ☐ Flowers
- ☐ Just a card
- ☐ Other gifts
- ☐ Nothing



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LIFE insurance is key in financial planning

Life insurance is a key part of a comprehensive financial plan. You can use life insurance to leave much-needed income to your survivors, provide for your children's education, pay off your mortgage and simplify the transfer of assets. It can also be used to replace wealth lost due to the expenses and taxes that may follow your death and to make gifts to charity at relatively little cost to you. There are two basic types of insurance: temporary and permanent, with many variations within each type.



mortgage or by parents of young children. Term insurance is also called pure insurance — it consists of a death benefit only. It is inexpensive compared to other types of life insurance products.

Permanent insurance

If your insurance needs are longer than approximately 20 years, it is usually more cost effective to use a "permanent" life insurance policy. Whole life and universal life are common types of permanent life insurance. These types of products contain an investment component and can allow you to accumulate savings on a tax-deferred basis. Some allow you to borrow against cash value you have built up in the policy. There are many different types of life insurance to fit your own personal needs and situation. In addition, you may want to retain the services of a professional financial planner to help you determine your life insurance needs.

Temporary (term) insurance

Generally, people purchase term-insurance policies to insure their families for a given period of time, usually no longer than 15 to 20 years. For instance, term insurance is often purchased by homeowners carrying a

Five reasons to make life insurance part of your financial plan

Should something unexpected happen to you, consider that life insurance:

1. Replaces your income so your family can maintain the lifestyle you want for them.
2. Covers your mortgage balance.
3. Pays off other debt like car loans and credit card balances.
4. Funds future college expenses.
5. Gives you peace of mind from doing the right thing for your loved ones.

Don't wait for a major life event to act. Choosing the right life insurance policy serves as the cornerstone of a resilient 2026 financial plan. ■

Information provided by Travis Gaule, founding partner/financial advisor, Trust Bridge Wealth Advisors, 4090 Westown Parkway, Suite 108, West Des Moines, IA 50266, 515-207-4346.

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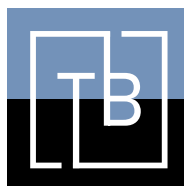
Travis Gaule

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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.

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. 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.

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. ■

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

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WITT helps build resilient community

Sees important role of community-based infrastructure.

Diane Witt has used West Des Moines services and businesses for much of her life. She grew up on a farm just south of town and has lived in the community proper for 18 years.



Because of this, she has looked for ways to get involved and give back.

One of those ways was serving on the Public Art and Community Service Art Selection Committee. The artwork was centered around water quality, which fit well with her professional career as a landscape architect and background in water quality projects, giving her unique expertise and insight into the selection process.

"It brings me great joy to see the selected work on display at Raccoon River Park and the environmental literacy and appreciation these art pieces help evoke," Witt says.

She has also served on the WDM Bicycle Advisory Commission for two three-year terms. This has allowed Witt to apply both her professional and personal knowledge of bicycle and trail infrastructure.

"More importantly, it has given me a chance to hear from the community and city staff concerning challenges they face, discuss

potential improvements and make recommendations to the city council," she says.

In addition, Witt is a founding member and current board member of Friends of WDM Parks and Recreation — a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization run by a volunteer board. The organization's core mission is to support the development and enhancement of public parks, facilities and recreation programs for the benefit of West Des Moines residents.

"This is probably the volunteering effort I'm most proud of so far," Witt says. "As our communities seek ways to fund basic services and balance budgets, looking to volunteer organizations like Friends groups becomes essential to keep the high-quality amenities we enjoy in West Des Moines going and accessible to all. Through this organization, we can really reach people from all walks of life and impact them in meaningful ways."

The group has helped fundraise for and support projects such as Legacy Woods, the Athene Pedestrian Bridge and a Mini-Forest for environmental education near Brookview Elementary. They are also actively raising funds for scholarships to help make Planet7 — a park and recreation-supported program that helps incoming seventh graders build leadership skills and connections with other youth in the community — more accessible to eligible students.

There is also the Float It Forward program, which helps provide funds for free life vests at Raccoon River Park, and the Shade Crusade program, which expands access to trees at an affordable price, helping grow the native tree canopy, cool neighborhoods and improve air quality. This initiative recently received a \$60,000 grant through Microsoft to help support it.

For Witt, volunteering comes naturally because she has a strong passion for building resilient communities.

"I see the important role community-based infrastructure, like parks and recreation, plays in supporting basic needs," she says. "This infrastructure and programming can have a critical impact on the livability of our community, including the opportunity for joyful and healthy living."

Witt notes that volunteering takes a conscious effort to set aside time and remain active and present.

"However, the rewards are immense," she says. "I have met many kindhearted people through volunteering and new friends. The greatest reward is watching the smiles and joy emitted from those who reap the benefits of something we helped foster." ■



Ryan Mehalovich, Edward Jones, presents the Neighbor Spotlight certificate to Diane Witt.

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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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WELLNESS

By Kyla Bowen

WHAT IS Sculptra?

Sculptra is an injectable dermal filler made from poly-L-lactic acid (PLLA), a biocompatible substance that stimulates the body's natural collagen production. Unlike traditional fillers that provide immediate volume, Sculptra works gradually to restore facial volume and improve skin texture over time. This gradual process results in subtle, natural-looking enhancements that develop over several weeks and can last for up to two years.

Why Sculptra? 1. Long-lasting results – The effects of Sculptra often last up to two years, reducing the need for frequent touch-ups. 2. Natural appearance – Sculptra promotes gradual changes in the skin, allowing for organic enhancement without an “overdone” look. 3. Versatility – Sculptra can be used in multiple areas of the face, including the cheeks, temples and jawline, as well as non-facial areas such as the neck, hands and buttocks. 4. Minimal downtime – As a non-surgical treatment, patients typically experience minimal downtime and can return to regular activities shortly after treatment. 5. Collagen stimulation – Sculptra improves overall skin health, elasticity, and structure over time.

Treatment process: 1. Consultation – A thorough consultation is necessary to assess individual needs and determine the number of vials required for optimal results. 2. Injection – Most first-time patients require multiple sessions, spaced a few weeks apart, to achieve the best outcome. 3. Aftercare – Post-treatment care includes massaging the treated areas for five minutes, five times a day, for five days to ensure even distribution. ■

Information provided by Kyla Bowen, RN Injector, 4 Ever Young, 1180 S.E., University Ave., Wauke, 515-304-2324, www.4everyoungantiaging.com.



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Upcoming in the West Des Moines / Jordan Creek 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.

WDM Chamber Presents: 2026 Annual Dinner, Mission: Impossible

Thursday, Feb. 26, 5-9 p.m.
Val Air Ballroom, 301 Ashworth Road, West Des Moines

Your mission, should you choose to accept it: Prepare for an unforgettable evening at the 2026 West Des Moines Chamber Annual Dinner – Mission: Possible. This year's operation will test your stealth, style, and savvy as we embark on our most daring mission yet. Join fellow agents for a night of high-stakes networking, covert surprises, and sophisticated fun where the business community comes together for a mission that's anything but impossible, strengthening relationships, recognizing excellence, and celebrating another successful year.

Dress to impress, and prepare for an evening full of intrigue and excitement. From secret agent-inspired décor to top-secret entertainment, this gala promises to be one you won't want to miss.

Top-Secret Access: Those seeking to elevate their evening can unlock our VIP Lounge, a classified experience featuring exclusive access, premium cocktails, and connections with fellow high-level operatives.

Tickets sell out year after year, so secure your spot before this mission vanishes from your radar. Register: <https://wdmchamber.org/events/annual-dinner/>.

Give Life 5K

Saturday, May 2, 8:30 a.m.
Raccoon River Park, West Des Moines

Iowa Donor Network honors those who have given the gift of life, celebrates the lives of organ and tissue recipients, and recognizes those who continue to wait for a life-saving transplant at the annual Give Life 5K. This is a family-friendly event so, no matter your skill level, the event is open to everyone. Join us to honor and support those who have been impacted by organ and tissue donation and celebrate the gift of life by registering for the Give Life 5K today. GiveLife5K.com

Jordan House Tours

Fridays and Sundays, 11 a.m. and 1:30 p.m.
Jordan House Museum, 2001 Fuller Road, West Des Moines

Weekly guided tours are offered at the Jordan House. The cut off for purchasing tickets is noon Thursday for Friday tours and noon Friday for Sunday tours. If you have missed that cutoff, call 515-225-1286 to find out if walk-up tickets are available. To reserve a ticket, see the schedule and links at www.wdmhs.org/openhousevisit/. All tours will be guided by a docent. Arrive at the Jordan House Museum at least 10 minutes before the tour begins. The tour will involve taking stairs to the basement and the second floor, as well as walking and standing for at least one hour. If you have a group of eight or more, call to schedule a private tour.

Gary's Ride

Saturday, May 16, 10 a.m. to 2 p.m.

Gary's Ride will start at the Waukee Raccoon River Valley Trailhead and end at Dallas Center downtown Main Street. The event aims to increase awareness of glioblastoma and support Richard Deming Cancer Center's terminal brain cancer patients through their integrative medicine program, Iowa Oncology Research Association for Glioblastoma Clinical Trials, MercyOne Des Moines Foundation for gift cards for terminal brain cancer patients and their families, and Gary's Compassion Fund for financial assistance for terminal brain cancer patients and their families. Help to "pedal" forward in reaching the funding goal and be the difference for these loved ones and their families afflicted by terminal brain cancer/glioblastoma. Registration and information is available at garysrideiowa.org.

The Iowa Files: A History Series

Various dates, 3 p.m.
Community Room of the West Des Moines Public Library, 4000 Mills Civic Parkway

The Iowa Files, an educational history lecture series, returns for its seventh year in 2025/2026. This joint West Des Moines Historical Society and West Des Moines Public Library program is free and open to the public, thanks to the generosity of West Des Moines Historical Society members, Bravo Greater Des Moines and the Friends Foundation of the West Des Moines Library. All programs are streamed on the WDMHS Facebook page and YouTube channel.

• **Feb. 15: Ako Abdul-Samad; A Life Working for Justice.** Ako Abdul-Samad has served the community in numerous capacities as an elected official, mediator and community organizer. Ako will share his thoughts on the state of equality and the fight against systemic poverty and racial injustice and his life-long commitment to the power of dialog to make positive change.

• **March 15: The Monuments Men and the Saving of Culture.** The Monuments Men (and Women) had a seemingly impossible job: save some of the world's most precious cultural artifacts and art from the Nazis, who treated Europe as their private looting grounds. Presenter Ruth Ehler's grandfather, Ralph Hammett, was one of the men. Ruth will recount stories of the amazing and frantic work that saved and returned treasures to their rightful owners and institutions.

• **April 12: Colfax, the Spring City.** In the 1870s, underground mineral water, which was a cure-all health craze at the time, was discovered in Colfax. The water sparked health resort and bottling industries which made Colfax a world famous destination at the turn of the 20th Century. Kevin Williams, Cofax Historical Society's board president, will share information and pictures about this little-known boom in Colfax.

• **May 17: Villisca; Living With a Mystery.** On the morning of June 10, 1912, Josiah and Sarah Moore, along with their four children and two young overnight guests, were found brutally murdered in their home. Dr. Edgar V. Epperly has written dozens of articles and blog entries and appeared on CourtTV and other radio and television programs. He will be joined by filmmakers Kelly and Tammy Rundle, whose 2004 documentary explores the crime's aftermath in a small town.

EVENTS IN THE AREA

Check for cancellations

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.



Des Moines Home and Garden Show

Thursday, Feb. 12 to Sunday, Feb. 15
Iowa Events Center, 730 Third St.,
Des Moines

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



CITYVIEW's Chocolate Walk

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 a chocolate treat. Look for more details at chocolatewalk.dmcityview.com. ■

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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

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.

GUARDIANSHIP allows parents to advocate for adult child with a disability

If you are a parent of a child with a disability and your child is about to turn 18, this can be a scary time. You may be aware that once a child turns 18, they are a legal adult and are presumed to be capable of making decisions and exercising rights on their own. This means that you, as the parent, will no longer be able to make decisions for your child regarding their finances, healthcare or education.



In order to remain an active advocate for your child and to be included in conversations regarding their finances, healthcare and education, you should file for a guardianship over your child. A guardianship is a legal proceeding where a person, typically a family member, asks the court to find that the adult child is unable to effectively manage their affairs due to their disability.

To obtain a guardianship, you must petition the court. The petition must include all basic facts, including the petitioner's relationship to the person who will be under the guardianship as well as a brief description of the ward's disability. The description should include how the disability affects the person's ability to make decisions. Following the petition, there will be a hearing before a judge. At this hearing, you must present

sufficient evidence of the need for a guardianship.

A guardianship doesn't completely eliminate your child's ability to make decisions for themselves; rather, it provides you the opportunity to continue to support their self-sufficiency.

Having a guardianship over your adult child allows you to continue to support them and assist them in their everyday lives. You will, with a guardianship, be able to assist them in maximizing their independence. Without a guardianship over your 18-year-old, you lose the ability to speak with their doctors and care providers, communicate with insurance companies on their behalf, coordinate benefits, and assist in managing their finances and assets.

In order to ensure that your petition is done correctly and that you are maximizing your chances of continuing to be an advocate for your child, you should speak to a reputable attorney with experience in guardianships. Your attorney will be able to assist you in the petition and in any court hearings that follow. ■

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

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JORDAN CREEK Pediatric Dentistry welcomes Dr. Kubovich

Jordan Creek Pediatric Dentistry announces the addition of Dr. Matt Kubovich, D.D.S., to its pediatric dental team. Dr. Kubovich joined the practice late last summer and provides dental services for pediatric patients.

Dr. Kubovich provides care alongside practice owners, Dr. Hans Leonard, D.D.S., and Dr. Danielle Leonard, D.D.S., and colleague Dr. Beth Nelsen, D.D.S., helping meet the growing demand for pediatric dental care across West Des Moines and the surrounding metro area.

“Dr. Matt has already made a wonderful impact on our patients and our team,” said Dr. Hans Leonard, D.D.S. “Since joining us last summer, families have responded so positively to his calm approach and genuine care. We’re excited to officially welcome him and recognize the great work he’s already doing.”

Dr. Kubovich brings more than 20 years of experience caring for children and families in the West Des Moines area. He earned his bachelor’s degree from Iowa State University before completing dental school at the University of Iowa College of Dentistry. While in dental school, he received the Certificate of Merit from the American Society of Dentistry for Children, which sparked his passion for pediatric dentistry. He then completed two additional years of pediatric specialty training at the University of Iowa, where he also served as chief resident.

Board-certified since 2007, Dr. Kubovich has a special interest in caring for children of all ages, including those with special healthcare needs.

“I’ve truly enjoyed getting to know the families and team at Jordan Creek Pediatric Dentistry over the past several months,” said Kubovich. “This is a practice that genuinely cares about kids, and I’m grateful to be part of a team that makes every visit a positive experience.” ■



Dr. Matt Kubovich, D.D.S.

WDM CHAMBER announces 2026 board

The West Des Moines Chamber of Commerce has announced its 2026 Board of Directors, a group of local and regional leaders who will help guide the chamber and support the continued growth of the West Des Moines community. Board members will work closely with chamber staff to support members, set priorities and strengthen the business community.

“Our 2026 Board of Directors includes leaders from a wide range of industries and businesses, small, medium and large,” said Katherine Harrington, president and CEO of the WDM Chamber. “Their experience and commitment will help move our mission forward, and we’re grateful for their willingness to serve our chamber and community.”

“It is an honor to serve as board chair for the largest chamber in the region,” said Maria Davis, senior vice president, Commercial Real Estate at R&R Realty Group. “We have built a stellar reputation over the 102 years we have served our city and region, and we have exciting growth plans ahead.”

Executive board members are: Chair: Maria Davis, Senior Vice President, Commercial Real Estate / R&R Realty Group; Chair Elect: Marcia Treichel, Vice President, Community Manager / JPMorgan Chase; Treasurer: Robert Palmer, Attorney / Nyemaster Goode, P.C.; Secretary: Anne Cooper, PhD, Fractional Executive, CHRO / Altus CXO; Past Board Chair: Dave Baccile, Chief Investment Officer / NCMIC

Board members with two-year terms: Casey Decker, President & Chief Operating Officer / Sammons Financial Group; Nate Hardisty, VP Director of Public Infrastructure / Shive-Hattery; Jim Dunaway, Division Vice President / Casey’s General Store; Sanita Dzafic, West Des Moines Branch Manager / Wells Fargo; Harrison Kruse, Vice President / CBRE | Advisory and Transaction Services; Mark Peiffer, Senior VP and Chief Financial Officer / Des Moines University; Kourtney Perry, CEO / Privacy, LLC & Ladie Lex Scented Candles; Sailu Timbo, Business Advisory / Creative Planning Business Services

One-year appointees to board: Sarah Borchers, Global Marketing Leader - Enterprise / ITA Group; Kristi Edwards, Director / Eide Bailly LLP; Tom Florian, Free Agent / Community Leader; Dan Jackson, Senior Vice President / Athene

City, community and chamber representatives: City of West Des Moines: Doug Loots, Global Chief Revenue Officer / Coherent & West Des Moines City Council Member; Ward 3; WDM Community School District: Dr. Matt Adams, Superintendent; Waukee Community School District: Dr. Bradley Buck, Superintendent; DMACC West Campus: Abby Zegers, Executive Campus Dean, Regional Operations; WDM Leadership Academy: Pat Desenberg, Vice President IT Architecture & Development / NCMIC; West YP: Evan Guest, Founder & CEO / Guest Strategies; WDM Ambassadors: Mady Arndt, Mortgage Loan Officer / BANK; WDM Leads/Latino Trade Network: Yeymi Tobar, Talent Acquisition Manager / Krause Group

To learn more about the West Des Moines Chamber of Commerce and the 2026 Board of Directors, visit wdmchamber.org. ■

An advertisement for Iowa Living Magazines. It features a dark background with a globe in the center. To the left of the globe, the text reads "Suggest a teacher" in large white letters, followed by "for an Iowa Living education column!" in orange. At the bottom left, it says "Send an email to tammy@iowalivingmagazines.com". The "Iowa Living MAGAZINES" logo is in the top right corner. A small image of a pencil holder with colored pencils is at the bottom center.

YOUTH champion honored with award

Hahn was 2025 WDM Citizen of the Year.

When at-risk high school kids needed homework help, Jennifer Hahn and her husband invited students into their home for tutoring sessions 17 years ago.

Since then, those sessions have evolved into a program with the Youth Justice Initiative, which helps to empower under-resourced youth.

The study table sessions have moved from the Hahn's kitchen table to two different churches with about 60 students attending weekly sessions. Approximately 50 caring adult volunteers assist with study tables.

Hahn welcomes teens, because she was once in the same position. When she was in sixth grade, she dropped out of school. She says by helping other at-risk students, it's her gift to others.

"I had a bad childhood," she reflects. "I don't want other kids to go through that same experience. Why wouldn't I help?"

With the initial study sessions, Hahn offered a bowl of candy for the kids. Now, after moving sessions to the churches, it turned into a community space. The churches began donating food and serving meals for the students.

"We had to meet kids where they were at," she explains.

Some of the students are diversion from the court services, Section 8 housing recipients and under-resourced youth.

"If they are with a responsible adult, they aren't doing something wrong," she explains.

Hahn has served as director of WDM's Youth Justice Initiative since 2018 and recently shifted into a different role as a consultant and champion, as it's difficult to step away from dedicated years of service.

Because of her work, she was awarded the WDM Chamber's Citizen of the Year award in 2025. She says she was honored because she shows up for kids.

"I answer my phone all the time. When kids need help, they need it now. We don't turn kids away," Hahn says.

The work is often challenging, yet essential.

"It's not great pay. It has to be a passion — you're not getting rich," she says.

During a two-hour session, kids may not study the whole time, but that's not the point.

"It makes a huge difference. All those kids showed up. It helps them stay out of trouble. It's incredible. I never dreamed we could create a space that expanded over the years."

The rewarding part is when she attended Valley's High School graduation, and 39 of the students had attended the study table.

"Three of them wouldn't have walked across the stage without our support," she reflects. "I think I'm doing the work I should be doing."

She encourages others to help.

"Anybody can do something," she suggests. "It doesn't take a lot of time. It's a small commitment to many."

To learn how to help, visit: www.yjifriends.com. ■



Jennifer Hahn has seen her home tutoring sessions grow into a Youth Justice Initiative that now served about 60 youth.

CHAMBER Luncheon

West Des Moines Chamber of Commerce hosted its New Member Luncheon on Jan. 15 at Glen Oaks Country Club.



John Finn



Anthony Paustian



LeRoy Mains



Bud & Mary's - Matthew Welter



Diamond Heart Therapy - Amy Davis



Discover Strength - Keyan Mayginnes



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EarthWise Pet - Jessica Moore



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FE Studios - Fred Ebong



Hallmark Homecare - Amanda Marean

OUT & ABOUT



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Iowa State Bar Association - Hayley Bohlmann



NEAT Method - Emily Peters



Night Shift Commercial Cleaning - Ryan Cooley



Peel Business Design - Jason Peel



Project Lean Nation - James Eaton



Respire Wealth Management - Nathan Nicolaisen



Schemmer - Jayme Robbins



Top Job Services - Joel Hartzler



Vazquez Law Office PLLC - Gabrielle Vazquez



Kidwell - Cooper Hatten



LaValle Hospitality Group - Michael LaValle



Mindspring - Alex Rohn

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