

Living

MAGAZINE

'I Do!'

Residents share
their marriage
proposal stories.

Shrimp spaghetti
RECIPE

Meet Martha Larmon
EDUCATION

**Rippenkroeger reads
to kids in Norwalk**
NEIGHBOR SPOTLIGHT

A man with a mustache wearing a brown baseball cap and a green hoodie stands next to a smiling woman with blonde hair wearing a beige and white striped sweater. They are in a room with several framed photos on the wall behind them.



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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, bouncing the ring off the table and onto the floor. I, of course, quickly picked it up, dropped to one knee, and asked her to marry me. Fortunately, she said yes. And, fortunately, the ring was still intact.

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

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

Have a great month and thanks for reading. ■

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'I Do'

Residents share
their marriage
proposal stories.

By 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.

Alec Ely and Marissa Chapman
are planning a June 13 wedding.

A unique Disney proposal

Alec Ely and Marissa Chapman met each other on Bumble, an online platform for meeting people and finding dates.

“Originally, we had a date planned, but Marissa canceled. I went kayaking instead and had just got my kayak in the water when she texted me to just come over and meet her for just a movie. I loaded up my kayak and went over to her place. The next day, I said I enjoyed the time together, and the rest is history.”

The couple has been dating for two and a half years. About a year ago, Alec proposed to Marissa in a unique setting.

“We went on a family vacation with her family to Disney World,” he says. “I had been wanting to find a way to propose, but I wasn’t planning on proposing on that trip.”

“He had even told everyone in my family that he wasn’t going to propose,” Marissa adds. “We ended up separating from the family one day we were there and doing our own thing. It started downpouring. We found ourselves in the Pandora jewelry store at Disney World. On a whim, Alec told me to pick out a couple of rings. He said he wanted to propose to me right then and there. We went in the middle of the road in the pouring rain, and he got down on one knee and proposed to me.”

Because it was pouring rain, the streets were lined with people who were trying to get out of the rain. The couple had a lot of witnesses of their proposal along with lots of cheers and congratulations.

“One girl, Bethany Brown, who was a bystander from Tennessee, took a lot of good photos of Alec’s proposal to me. Another bystander, Meredith Brewer, ended up posting one picture on the Disney page.”

The posted picture received more than 30,000 likes, and Marissa’s sister ended up seeing it on the page and shared the link with them. The couple had no idea it had been posted but were thrilled.

“I enjoyed seeing it go viral because so many people got to see how much I love her,” Alec says, adding that they were even contacted to be on a podcast later.

Marissa says her family did not have time to be sad that they were not present for the proposal.

“They were just shocked, but they loved it,” she says. “My mom says that he must have been feeling the Disney magic.”

“Her stepdad called me later and gave us his approval, then my family called us,” Alec says.

Though they did not have a typical Disney World proposal, both Alec and Marissa are glad it happened the way it did.

“I love that I did a Disney proposal, and yet it wasn’t typical. We weren’t in front of the castle,” Alec says. “It was its own thing.”

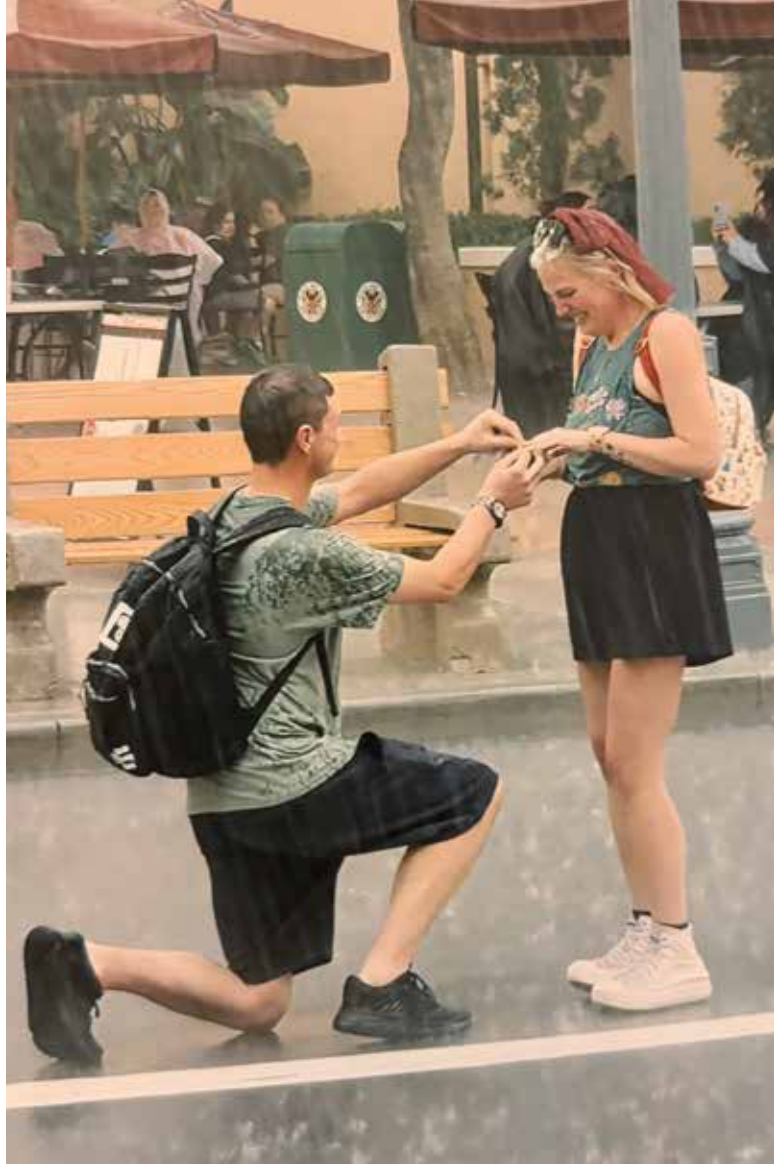
“It ended up being a really cool story,” Marissa adds. “I love the fact that it was in the moment, not planned out, and that it was rainy. It felt genuine and less stressful.”

The ring Alec gave her during the proposal served as a placeholder ring until he was able to give Marissa a “real” engagement ring eight months later in October. Their wedding is planned for June 13 this coming summer.

An Ozarks proposal

Stacey Brulz also met her husband-to-be, Eric, on Bumble, an online dating platform.

“We hit it off and dated for about two years,” she says. “Then, he began bugging me about planning a vacation together. I kept putting it off, which ruined his plans to propose to me when trees were blooming in



Alec Ely proposed to Marissa Chapman in the pouring rain at Disney World.



Stacey and Eric Brulz were engaged in the Ozarks after a long hike to a waterfall that turned out to be dry.

the spring.”

The couple ended up going on a vacation to the Ozarks in June.

Throughout the week in the Ozarks, they visited some beautiful locations.

“I kept thinking that each place we went while we were on the trip would be the proposal spot,” Stacey says. “I had given up by the end of the week.”

Stacey had picked out her own engagement ring many months prior, so she was expecting a proposal on a special trip. What she didn’t know was that Eric had spoken to her parents before they went on the trip to ask their blessing.

On the last day of the trip, Stacey accompanied Eric on a 6.5-mile hike to see a waterfall in the Mark Twain National Forest.

“It was a hot day,” she says. “I was over it and was hoping to lay low that day, but he really wanted to go on the hike.”

Stacey admits that she had a terrible attitude the whole day and, multiple times through the hike, asked how far they were along the trail and if they could just turn around. They finally arrived at a rock formation.

“It was supposed to be the waterfall, but it was dried up,” Stacey recalls.

Inside, Eric was panicking because it was not turning out the way he had planned.

While Stacey sat down to eat her lunch, Eric walked down the embankment. He attempted to find enough rocks to spell out the question, “Will you marry me?” There were not enough rocks, though. Eric began tossing rocks up toward Stacey to get her attention. Having seen signs warning of various wildlife like bears that could be seen along the trail, she was unsure if it was him or an animal making rocks come her way. She got up to find Eric, and she asked if he was ready to go.

“He asked me three questions in a row, calmer with each one: ‘Well, do you want this (showing me the ring)? Do you want me? Will you marry me?’”

Stacey’s attitude quickly changed to joy, and they could hardly wait to get off the remote trail to find a cellphone signal so they could call and tell everyone.

“My sister had been waiting all week to hear about a proposal,” she says. “The walk back was much shorter than the walk in. I made sure

we stopped by the sign to take a picture so we could remember where the proposal took place.”

Stacey and Eric had a short engagement and were married at The Cottage in Indianola with a small wedding a couple of months later in August 2021.

“The world was still opening up post-COVID, so we were able to plan everything quickly in a couple of months,” she says. “My husband’s philosophy is that, if you aren’t willing to marry someone on the day you propose, you shouldn’t propose yet.” In the January after their wedding, they moved to Norwalk.

A stop at the fairgrounds

Calyn Thompson and Quincy Griffith met while attending Wartburg College in Waverly and soon became friends. After they graduated, both focused on building and pursuing their careers. Calyn works in television news, and she moved to Rochester, Minnesota. Quincy began teaching in Carlisle, though, after a year, he left teaching to pursue his dream of coaching football.

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After the proposal, Calyn Thompson and Quincy Griffith met up with friends and family at Gerri's Bar and Grill to celebrate.

move back to the Des Moines metro area. After coaching at several schools around the Midwest, Quincy landed a coaching job at the University of Iowa in May 2023. Last fall, Griffith began coaching at Drake University in Des Moines, bringing them both back to the Des Moines metro area. The two occasionally met up for

lunch or coffee as friends, and the relationship bloomed into a romance. They began dating in June 2024.

After a year and a half of dating, the couple had plans to meet up with friends for happy hour on Friday, Dec. 19, 2025.

"Our friends had asked to meet us at Gerri's

Bar and Grill, a little hole-in-the-wall place near the State Fairgrounds," Calyn recalls. "I'm a huge Iowa State Fair fan, and it isn't uncommon for me to want to just pull through to take a random picture. I think Quincy was banking on that that evening. He asked if I wanted to swing through the fairgrounds, but

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FEATURE

that evening I said that we should just go to meet our friends. He insisted, and I think he later regretted how he pulled his truck in because I just rolled down my window, took a picture of the sign, then said we should go. He told me I should get out and be in a picture because my mom wanted one of me. I got out for the picture, and I noticed he had a box in his hand. Then, he got down on one knee. I don't remember a lot of what he said, but I do remember him saying, 'I wanted to take my favorite person to her favorite place and ask her an important question.' "

Prior to his proposal, Quincy and Calyn had discussed marriage and the future, but his proposal took her by pleasant surprise. She says Quincy had known for a while that the fairgrounds would be the location he proposed. A couple of weeks before asking her, he visited her parents to ask for their blessing for her hand in marriage without her knowing about it. He had bought a ring he was sure she would like based on information he got from Calyn's mom and sister-in-law.

After Calyn enthusiastically said "yes" to Quincy, the two proceeded to the next location.

"There didn't end up being a happy hour," Calyn shares, "but we met up with family and friends for a celebration. Everyone but me knew about the proposal plans."

Quincy planned it so his parents and grandparents who winter in Arizona and Texas would be in town.

"It was fun that it was a family effort to keep a secret," Calyn says. "My sister-in-law's co-worker came and took pictures to document the proposal at the fairgrounds. Since Quincy is a football coach, my mom got us a football personalized to read, 'Great catch.' "

The couple plans to wed July 18. ■



Calyn Thompson and Quincy Griffith were engaged at the Iowa State Fairgrounds.

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MAYOR'S MOMENT

As we move into the new year, I want to take a moment to share an update on two important topics that impact our community—how the City plans and approves its budget, and how we can continue supporting the local businesses that make Norwalk such a great place to live.



Tom Phillips,
Mayor

CITY BUDGET

The Norwalk City Council held their first budget session on January 15, which is available to watch on the City's YouTube channel, City of Norwalk, Iowa. This meeting marked the start of our annual budgeting process, where the Council and City staff review spending priorities and plan for the year ahead. We have several additional public meetings scheduled in February, March, and April, and residents are encouraged to attend or tune in (all of these will be held at City Hall):

- **February 5** - Council work session with final department head presentations
- **March 5** - Public Hearing and approval of our Capital Improvement Plan
- **April 2** - Public Hearing and approval of the Maximum Levy
- **April 16** - Public Hearing and approval of the full budget

These meetings are open to the public because transparency matters. They give residents a chance to see how decisions are made and how City resources are allocated to support services like public safety, streets, parks, and infrastructure. If you can't attend in person, all meetings will be available on the City's YouTube channel, and Council meeting packets are posted on the City's website. These packets include the same information that Council members review before discussing and voting on budget items.

As with last year, the City Council faces several difficult decisions due to recent state legislation that impacts both revenue, including property taxes, and spending. While these choices aren't easy, the goal remains the same: to responsibly manage City resources while continuing to provide quality services to our residents.

SHOP LOCAL THIS VALENTINE'S DAY

While we're planning for the future, it's also a great time to support the businesses that help make Norwalk such a vibrant community. With Valentine's Day just around the corner on February 14, there's still time to find the perfect gift close to home.

Norwalk's local businesses offer a wide variety of unique gifts, dining options, and services—and shopping locally helps support jobs, families, and our local economy. So before heading out of town, consider stopping by one of our hometown shops. They'll be more than happy to help you make Valentine's Day special.

Thank you for staying engaged, supporting your community, and helping make Norwalk a great place to live, work, and do business.

EMPLOYEE SPOTLIGHT!

Chance Markle, Building Inspector



Since joining the City of Norwalk in July 2024, Chance has been busy helping keep our community safe, compliant, and built to last. In his role, Chance performs inspections on new construction, reviews projects on existing homes, conducts rental inspections, and helps monitor compliance with the City's nuisance ordinances—all essential work that supports quality development across Norwalk.

What he enjoys most about the job is the responsibility that comes with protecting public safety. Knowing that homes and buildings are being constructed according to adopted codes—and that residents can feel confident in where they live—makes the work especially meaningful. Add in the fact that no two days (or even hours!) are ever the same, and the job stays interesting and fast-paced.

Chance's background brings valuable hands-on experience to the role. He is a Journeyman Electrician by trade and holds certifications as a Residential Building Inspector and Commercial Electrical Inspector—a strong combination of technical knowledge and practical expertise.

Outside of work, life is all about family and fun. Chance enjoys spending time with wife, Rilley, and daughter, Clara, along with fishing, attending country music concerts, and cheering on the Texas Longhorns in both football and baseball.

Here's a fun fact that might surprise coworkers: Chance has lived in six different states—Iowa, Nebraska, Texas, Louisiana, Colorado, and Utah—bringing a wide range of experiences (and perspectives) along the way.

The best advice he has ever received?

Replace a "have to" mentality with a "get to" mentality—a simple shift that helps foster gratitude and appreciation in everyday life.

Duty to Trim Trees

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The owner or agent of the abutting property shall keep the trees on, or overhanging the street, trimmed so that all branches will be at least fifteen (15) feet above the surface of the street and eight (8) feet above the sidewalks. If the abutting property owner fails to trim the trees, the City may serve notice on the abutting property owner requiring that such action be taken within five (5) days.

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MIRACLES

The Winter Olympic games are soon to begin, so it seems only fitting to take a moment and reflect on a little Olympics history. Forty-six years ago this month, on Feb. 22, amid the backdrop of the Cold War and the invasion of Afghanistan by the Soviets, the U.S. Men's Hockey team pulled off what became known as the "Miracle on Ice." To say that the team was a longshot is a gross understatement. The U.S. team consisted of college players and minor leaguers mostly from the Midwest and East Coast with an average age of just 21 years. Their fiercest competitors, the Soviet team, was made up of professional players who had played together for many years and won the gold medal in five of the previous six Olympic Games. That's what you call a dynasty.



The two teams played an exhibition game shortly before the start of the Olympics, and the Russian team dominated team USA handily. No one expected the U.S. team to advance out of pool play and into the medal round. Their chances of winning a medal were virtually non-existent in the minds of most everyone, except those 20 players and their coaching staff. But on that cold night in Lake Placid, New York, Team USA defeated the Russians 4-3 in front of a raucous crowd and millions of Americans cheering them on from their living rooms as they watched the miracle on TV. I was one of those people.

As the seconds ticked away to end the game, sports announcer Al Michaels excitedly asked the world, "Do you believe in miracles?" Our boys went on to best Finland 4-2 to secure the gold medal, but it was the victory over the Soviet team that was, and still is, considered one of the single greatest upsets in all of sports history. Team USA was inducted into the U.S. Hockey Hall of Fame just three years later and, in 2004, the story was memorialized in the Hollywood movie, "Miracle." Keep that 1980 team in your thoughts as you cheer on our athletes this time around.

So, do you believe in miracles? A miracle is generally considered to be "an unusual manifestation of God's power in which he intervenes in human affairs." Did God intervene on behalf of Team USA back in 1980? That is above my paygrade, so I'll let you decide that, but this I know for sure, the Bible is chockfull of miracles displaying the power of Almighty God.

So, which of these is the greatest miracle of all? I'm not sure I should be the final judge of this, but, in my humble opinion, the resurrection of Jesus Christ should be at the top of the list. Jesus' resurrection confirms his deity, fulfills his predictions to rise again, and seals his place as the only divine Savior of the world. No one has ever matched that, and no one ever will. From a personal perspective, I would add one more miracle to the top of that list: the miracle that occurs when a person realizes their need for Jesus and humbles themselves and asks him to forgive them of their sin, granting them forgiveness and eternal life in heaven. This miracle, which the Bible calls "salvation," results in God lavishing his grace on such a person as well as adoption as a child God — forever. And this is all because of Christ's death on the cross and his resurrection. I have witnessed this spiritual transaction in the lives of hundreds of people and have experienced it personally and can attest that the miracle of salvation is truly God intervening in human affairs for our good and for His glory. I hope it is a miracle you have experienced as well. Go Team USA! ■

Pastor Rob Jones is the senior pastor of Fellowship Community Church in Norwalk. The church was founded under his leadership in 1995.

A LOOK back at 2025

2025 was a year full of economic change, market uncertainty, shifting policies and periods of volatility. Some major headlines included new tariffs, slowing job growth, higher inflation and a prolonged federal government shutdown. Regardless of these headlines and challenges, the year highlighted the importance of maintaining a long-term perspective.



Despite concerns of a possible recession, the U.S. economy continued to grow. Consumer spending remained strong, helping support economic activity. Inflation stayed elevated for most of the year, while the labor market gradually declined.

In response, the Federal Reserve eased monetary policy, cutting the federal funds rate three times for a total reduction of 75 basis points.

Job growth slowed throughout 2025, with the unemployment rate rising to its highest level in four years. Average monthly job gains fell to 124,000, down from 168,000 in 2024.

Markets experienced sharp swings during the year. In April, the largest U.S. tariff increase since the 1930s triggered a sharp global market sell-off, followed by a recovery in May. Additionally, President Trump signed a major tax-cut and spending bill called the One Big Beautiful Bill Act.

Despite periods of volatility and uncertainty, 2025 was a strong year for the markets overall.

For the full year, all major stock market indexes delivered double-digit returns, led by the Global Dow (26.9%), followed by the Nasdaq (20.4%), the S&P 500 (16.4%), the Dow (13%), and the Russell 2000 (11.3%).

After years of historic volatility, 2025 was also a solid year for bonds. Fixed income did not match the double-digit rallies like we saw in equities; however, bonds fulfilled their traditional role of providing income and stability with most of the core indices finishing in the green.

As we enter 2026, many questions around the market naturally arise. While short-term performance in 2025 included periods of volatility, the broader picture reinforces the values of staying invested during an eventful year. ■

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SMART thermostat: Why GO PRO?

Smart thermostats leverage technology and sensors to control the heating and cooling systems in a home. Over time, these handy devices learn your living habits and self-adjust to achieve maximum heating and cooling efficiency. In addition, smart thermostats integrate with other automation tools and equipment, including your smartphone. They even have voice control features that are compatible with virtual assistants, like Google Assistant, Siri and Alexa, and can be programmed even when you're not in the house. Smart thermostats can also be accessed and adjusted remotely using your smartphone, iPad or computer. Even maintenance becomes easier. Smart thermostats can even remind you when the HVAC system needs a new filter or repairs.



The modern technology with a smart thermostat is impressive, however, getting the installation and operation right can be a little challenging. When it comes to setting up a new smart thermostat, opting for professional installation has several advantages that can make your experience smoother and more effective. Here are the top benefits to having a licensed and experienced HVAC technician install your smart thermostat.

- **Expertise and precision:** Professional installers are trained experts who have the expertise to set up your smart thermostat correctly. They understand the complexities of different systems and can ensure that the installation is done with precision. This expertise minimizes the risk of errors that could affect the functionality of your thermostat.
- **Seamless integration:** Professional installers can seamlessly integrate your smart thermostat with your existing HVAC system. They know how to configure the thermostat settings to work efficiently with your specific setup, ensuring optimal performance. This seamless integration can result in improved energy efficiency and overall comfort in your home.
- **Warranty validation:** Most smart thermostat manufacturers require professional installation to validate the product warranty. By opting for professional installation, you ensure that your device is installed according to the manufacturer's specifications. This validates the warranty, giving you peace of mind knowing you are covered in case of any malfunction or issues with the thermostat.
- **Enhanced performance:** Overall, professional installation can lead to enhanced performance of your smart thermostat. Proper installation by experts can optimize the functionality of the device, ensuring that it operates efficiently and effectively. This can result in better heating and cooling control, energy savings and a more comfortable indoor environment.

Professional installation guarantees that your smart thermostat is set up correctly, compatible with your HVAC system, and compliant with warranties. By investing in professional installation, you're not only saving time but also maximizing the efficiency and longevity of your smart thermostat. ■

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MEET Martha Larmon

Instructional strategist enjoys working with students and teachers.

Martha Larmon grew up in the Des Moines area and graduated from Lincoln High School before earning a teaching degree from Iowa State University. She later completed a master's degree at Morningside College, and she has been working as an educator since 2010. Larmon has mostly worked in the Des Moines Public School District, where she was a special education teacher for grades K-5 and worked as a building behavior strategist.

Before coming to Norwalk, Larmon worked as a special education consultant for the AEA. This school year, she entered her first year teaching with the Norwalk Community School District, where she currently works as an instructional strategist at Lakewood Elementary School.

"I love working in the district because it's also my home. With three kids in the schools, I feel really connected to the community, and I genuinely believe in Norwalk's mission and the work we do for our students and families," Larmon says.

Larmon likes working with students at the elementary level because of their curiosity and excitement for learning. She says her students are eager to share their ideas and are proud of the progress they make.

For Larmon, a typical day includes teaching and modeling concepts in small groups based on students' needs and goals. She also looks over student data, collaborates with teachers, and meets with teams to figure out what is working and where they can improve.

Larmon says one of the bigger challenges she has faced as an educator is ensuring that the unique needs of every learner are met, but it is also what inspires her to keep learning, reflecting and improving as an educator.

"One of the biggest rewards is seeing students gain confidence in themselves and their ability to solve problems both socially and academically," Larmon says.

During the remainder of the school year, Larmon is looking forward to continuing to help her students grow, working with her colleagues, and working with the school community. With this being her first year with the district, Larmon has enjoyed exploring the reading program and seeing how it makes learning clear and systematic for all students. ■



Martha Larmon began teaching in Norwalk this school year and says she is glad to be teaching in the district where her family lives and her kids attend school.

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SHARING the joy of reading

Rippenkroeger reads to kids in Norwalk.



Tom Rippenkroeger is grateful to work for a company that encourages him and other employees to volunteer throughout the year. Because of Windsor Windows and Doors, which has a factory in Norwalk, he began volunteering with Everybody Wins Iowa! in 2019.

The mission of the organization is to increase children's success in school and life through reading and mentoring experiences with caring volunteers — volunteers like Rippenkroeger.

As a mentor, he is paired one-on-one with students in the school district to read with them over their lunch break. This year, Rippenkroeger has two students he reads to, and he has a great deal of fun doing so.

"It's great getting to know the kids, helping them improve their reading abilities and watching them get more confident as the year goes on," he says. "If the child and mentor both stay with the program, you can continue reading with them each year, which is even more rewarding as you get to see even more growth in their reading abilities and confidence."

Rippenkroeger feels fortunate to be able to take a short break from his workday every other week and make time to read with the kids.

"I enjoy being able to help, and it's a privilege to have a small role in the development of children," he says. "It's really fun when I show up for reading, and the kids are excited about it and are happy that it is reading day. That and seeing the growth of their reading abilities and confidence throughout the year is really neat to experience."

Rippenkroeger encourages others to volunteer because of how rewarding it is.

"You also get to meet a bunch of new people that you wouldn't otherwise," he says. "It's a welcome break from the usual routine and can get you to do something you don't normally do."

He adds that Everybody Wins Iowa! is a great program and says he is glad it has continued to receive support.

"The more volunteers they have, the more kids that can be in the program, so if there are folks out there that want to give back to the community and help out the kids, get involved," Rippenkroeger says. ■



Jason Siemens of Edward Jones presents the Neighbor Spotlight certificate to Tom Rippenkroeger.

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INVESTMENT

By Daniel Rundahl

A FEBRUARY message to our loved ones



February is often associated with love — cards, flowers and gestures meant to remind the people in our lives that they matter. For many of us, love is expressed more in preparation. As a financial advisor, I see every day that one of the ways we care for others is by planning well on their behalf.

As January transitions into February, most households are focused on financial housekeeping. W-2s and 1099s begin to arrive, tax documents are organized and attention turns to what the past year looked like on paper. While this process is necessary, February also presents a valuable opportunity to look forward. It's a time to evaluate how our financial decisions reflect what — and who — we love.

One area to review is giving. Many churches and charitable organizations send annual contribution summaries early in the year. Changes to tax law have reduced the number of people who benefit from charitable deductions, but generosity was never meant to be transactional. February is a good time to reassess the causes you support and consider whether there are new organizations you would like to include in your giving plan.

Next is saving, which often feels overwhelming because it touches so many parts of life. Short-term goals might include upcoming travel, celebrations or home projects. Long-term goals could involve retirement, education funding or future care for loved ones. The key is clarity. When you understand what you are saving for — and when you'll need it — you can build a plan that balances today's needs with tomorrow's priorities. February is an ideal time to review current savings habits and make adjustments before the year gets away from you.

Then comes planning, where structure turns intention into progress. Think through your goals by answering a few simple questions: Who is this for? What does success look like? When does it need to happen? Where does it take place? And, most importantly, why does it matter now? That "why" is the emotional driver. It is what keeps a plan moving when discipline is required or tradeoffs need to be made.

Finally, there is the how — and this is where working with a financial advisor can make a meaningful difference. A good advisor doesn't just manage numbers and boast gains when the stock market is up; they help connect financial strategies to real life. They walk alongside you through decisions, help identify risks and adjust plans as life changes. They advise about potential roadblocks and assist with variables that may deter your long-term course.

As Valentine's Day approaches, I encourage you to ask one question: Are you in love with your financial plan? If not, February is a perfect time to revisit it, refine it and ensure it reflects the people and priorities you care about most. ■

Information provided by Daniel Rundahl, Financial Advisor, Rundahl Financial Consultants, 8230 Hickman Road, Suite 300, Clive, 515-727-1701, drundahl@rundahlfinancial.com, www.rundahlfinancialconsultants.com.



Norwalk United Methodist Church



WHAT: Easter Egg Scavenger Hunt
WHEN: Saturday, March 28th, 2026
TIME: 9:00-12:00
WHERE: Starts at the Norwalk United Methodist Church

Find Candy/Prize Filled Eggs & Other Prizes Around All Of Norwalk.

Come to the **Norwalk United Methodist Church** between 9–11:30 (prizes available until 12) to **receive a set of clues** for where to find your eggs and prizes. Work together with your family to solve the clues then drive to each location to retrieve your prizes.

Free fun for the whole family!
Prizes are meant for toddlers-5th grade. (While supplies lasts)

Registration is not required but greatly appreciated to help with planning of supplies. Use the QR code to register or visit **NORWALKUMC.COM**



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MEDICAL treatment for injuries

When a party is injured, a question arises concerning whether one should seek medical care (or the extent of such care). Although there is no direct relationship between the amount of medical bills incurred and the ultimate value of a case, medical treatment can make a major difference in how a case is evaluated. Some examples that insurance adjusters may use to reduce the value of a case are:



• **No reported injury at scene.** If the police officer does not report an injury at the scene, an adjuster is more likely to conclude the claimed injury was minor.

• **Lag time before treatment.** If a party waits six months hoping the pain will "go away," the adjuster may question whether the claimed injury is actually from the accident or some other intervening cause.

• **Lapse in treatment.** If a party discontinues treatment after a few days or weeks then returns five months later, the adjuster may determine that this lapse indicates a minor injury or that the later treatment is unrelated.

• **Failure to follow medical advice.** This includes failure to show up for appointments, failure to attend referral appointments or otherwise failing to follow the protocol designed to aid in recovery.

Obtaining the appropriate medical treatment is important for at least two reasons. First, it will help the injured party learn the extent of the injuries and will provide the best road to an ultimate recovery. Second, treatment provides documentation of the injuries experienced by the injured party. Often, the medical notes will discuss the complaints of pain and discomfort of the patient as well as the diagnosis, prognosis and plan of the provider.

As indicated above, the amount of the bills (or extent of the treatment) do not necessarily correlate with the value of a given case. For example, a party may lose a limb but have very little medical treatment. It is clear that such an injury may be valued at a much higher number than a neck strain involving months of treatment.

In Iowa, personal injury damages include claims for the reasonable and necessary cost or value of medical care rendered. Recently, the Iowa legislature passed Iowa Code 668.14A. This section provides that such damages shall not exceed the sum of the amounts actually paid by or on behalf of the injured person. In other words, if the billed amount was \$10,000 and health insurance satisfied the bill for \$3,000, the amount submitted is limited to \$3,000. It is also notable that, when health insurance pays, it has a right of recovery out of any settlement or judgment.

Conclusion: One who is injured in an accident should get the appropriate treatment in a timely manner. ■

Information provided by Ken Winjum, The Winjum Law Firm, P.L.C., 1220 Sunset Drive., Suite 103, Norwalk, 515-981-5220, www.winjumlaw.com.

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Upcoming in Norwalk 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.

Warren County Master Gardeners Think Spring Garden Seminar

March 7, 9 a.m. to 3 p.m.

Simpson College, 701 N. C St., Indianola

The Warren County Master Gardeners will be hosting their annual Think Spring Garden

Seminar on the campus of Simpson College in the Hubbell Hall of the Kent Campus Center. Garden enthusiasts can learn from horticulture experts, shop with local vendors, win door prizes and enjoy a delicious catered lunch. You do not need to be a Master Gardener to enjoy this event. Register at: <https://go.iastate.edu/HSILYW> or by scanning the QR code.



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 chocolatwalk.dmcityview.com.

Middlebrook Mercantile Events

4125 Cumming Ave., Cumming

- Friday, Feb. 13, 6-9 p.m. Live music: Ron Burchett
- Saturday, Feb. 14, 6-9 p.m. Live music: Beggars' Bargain
- Sunday, Feb. 15, 2-5 p.m. Live music: Loose Gravel
- Thursday, Feb. 19, 6 p.m. Trivia
- Friday, Feb. 20, 6-9 p.m. Live music: Brother Trucker
- Saturday, Feb. 21, 6-9 p.m. Live music: Steve Grismore Trio
- Sunday, Feb. 22, 2-5 p.m. Live music: Sons of Gladys Kravitz Lite
- Wednesday, Feb. 25, 6-8 p.m. Music Bingo
- Friday, Feb. 27, 6-9 p.m. Live music: Joshua Sinclair
- Saturday, Feb. 28, 6-9 p.m. Open Mic Night
- Sunday, March 1, 2-5 p.m. Live music: Matt Woods Band

Coffee and Camaraderie

First Tuesdays of the month, 10 a.m. to noon

Norwalk United Methodist Church, 1100 Gordon Ave.

All veterans and service members are invited for a morning of coffee and camaraderie, a morning of connection and community.

Whether you're a veteran, active-duty member, spouse or caregiver, everyone is welcome. Enjoy coffee and come together to form new friendships and share stories and experiences.



Ports of Call, Music of The Mediterranean

Sunday, Feb. 22, 2 p.m.

Valley High School Staplin Auditorium, 3650 Woodland Ave., West Des Moines

The Des Moines Community Orchestra presents the 2026 50th Anniversary Season Winter Concert, Ports of Call, Music of The Mediterranean. With Guest Conductor Joshua Barlage, and cello soloist Curtis Barr. Admission is free but donations are always welcome.

Norwalk Easter Public Library Events

1051 North Ave., Norwalk

Registration required for all of these events. Register at <https://norwalklibrary.org/calendar>.

KIDS

- Tinker Club: Monday, Feb. 23, 4:30 p.m.
- Storybook Studio: Saturday, Feb. 28, 10:30 a.m.
- Graphic Novel Book Club: Tuesday, Feb. 10, 4:30 p.m.

TWEENS

- Tween Special, Needle Felted Patches: Monday, Feb. 16, 3:45 p.m.
- Tween Boba & Books: Tuesday, Feb. 24, 3:45 p.m.

TEENS

- TLC Anti-Valentine's Party: Friday, Feb. 13, 6:30 p.m.
- Teen After Hours Dungeons and Dragons: Friday, Feb. 20, 5:30 p.m.
- Books, Bites and Boba: Tuesday, Feb. 24, 6-7 p.m.
- Teen Takeover Hangout: Thursday, Feb. 26, 3:30 p.m.

ADULTS

- From Page to Plate Cookbook Club, Italian Snacking: Tuesday, Feb. 17, 6:30 p.m.
- Booked for the Night: Saturday, Feb. 21, 6:30 p.m.

ALL AGES

- Caturday with Whiskers TNR: Saturday, Feb. 14, 10 a.m.



Wine, Food, and Beer Showcase

Friday, March 6, 6-9 p.m.

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

Sample the night away. The Wine, Food & Beer Showcase is one of the oldest food and beverage events in the area and has become a yearly favorite for foodies, wine lovers and beer enthusiasts alike. Featuring 30-40 of the finest restaurants, caterers, wineries, breweries and distilleries in the area, the event is the Des Moines Metro Opera's signature fundraiser. All proceeds raised throughout the evening support Des Moines Metro Opera's award-winning education and community engagement programs. Learn more at <https://desmoinesmetroopera.org/showcase/>.

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.



The Iowa Files: A History Series

West Des Moines Public Library, 4000 Mills Civic Parkway

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.

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. ■

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PURSuing art with purpose

Sperry embraces color in her paintings.



While her painting has sometimes taken a back seat to her employment, Lucinda Sperry says her mission is to create and encourage others to do so.

For Lucinda Sperry, art has been both a calling and a compass. What began as an early fascination with design techniques during her time at Iowa Lakes Community College evolved into a lifelong journey of creativity, color and rediscovery.

"When I first started learning design, everything was still being done by hand," she recalls. "By the time I transferred to Grand View University, the industry had shifted — suddenly everything was digital."

After college, she honed her skills working at The Altoona Herald-Mitchellville Index and Business Publications Corporation, gaining real-world experience in design and production. Only then did she take the leap into entrepreneurship and launch her own graphic design agency — Designgoddess.com. But life had other plans.

While expecting her first child, a friend's request to paint an abstract piece opened an unexpected path.

"I painted an abstract jazz band in blue and gold, and when my friend had it framed, the gallery asked if the artist had more work they could show," she recalls. "She laughed and said, 'No, this is her first one!'"

That moment rekindled her deep connection to painting, and soon she was showing her work around the Des Moines metro in various art festivals.

In the mid-2000s, she worked out of the Fitch building downtown and regularly participated in art shows that coincided with the Des

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Free Event in Norwalk: "Building Brain-Healthy Habits"

Erica Eikren, Program Manager with the Alzheimer's Association – Iowa Chapter, will share research-backed guidance on brain health and highlights why it's never too early – or too late – to take action. Attendees will learn how simple, everyday habits can help support memory and thinking as we age, potentially reducing the risk of cognitive decline and even dementia. Light refreshments will be served.

March 12, 2026
3:00-4:00 p.m.

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Moines Arts Festival. About 10 years ago, however, she shifted away from painting as she pursued what she calls a more “real” job outside of entrepreneurship. When her position was recently eliminated due to budget cuts, the unexpected change opened the door for her to return to the studio and revisit her love for painting with fresh perspective.

Sperry had already been attending North River Arts Council meetings to stay connected with other creatives and had studied under Des Moines master painter Mary Muller, taking a drawing class from her. Soon after, she began painting daily. By October, she participated in an art show, surprising many locals who had not realized she was a painter. During that show, she sold four paintings.

“It is nice to see people open to color,” she says. “For a long time, people were more interested in neutral colors like tan. My work has always been full of color, though, regardless of what the trends were.”

These days, Sperry often paints for herself, finding the practice calming, a way for her to return to center and stay grounded. She has also created many pieces for others using a range of mediums including wax, chalk and acrylic paint, always returning to bold color and expressive energy. “I used to do a series I called ‘Glam Girls,’ personifying strong, glamorous women with attitude. When painting recently, I have been influenced by two artists I have been following from France and Germany, and the work had become about color meeting intuition. I don’t do it for the product, but for the journey of creating.”

Currently, Sperry is not painting as much as she moves into a new role as general manager with a new business coming to Norwalk. Even so, she remains committed to painting with the goal of consistency and keeping creativity at the center of her life.

“Painting is probably the one thing I could do every day if I didn’t have to pay the bills,” she says. “Today, it is hard for artists to figure out how to move forward in the current culture and climate. My mission in life is to create and encourage everyone to discover their outlet of creativity.” ■

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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SIGNS your brakes need repair or replacement

When your car brakes, you are initializing a complex system of mechanical components that will work together to bring your vehicle to a stop. The average car weighs about 3-5 tons, and the fact that your brakes help stop this heavy machine within a few meters, countless times per year, is a testament to their reliability. You need your brakes to always be there for you at a moment's notice. However, everything mechanical will have problems from time to time. Periodically, you will need to have your brakes serviced, repaired or replaced. Consider six of the warning signs that usually indicate it is time for a brake check:

You hear a high-pitched squeal: Brake pads contain a metal component known as an indicator. Over time, the pads will wear down and expose the indicator. At this time, the exposed indicator will rub against your rotor, causing a loud, high-pitched and unmistakable squealing sound. This is a clear indicator that you need to change your brake pads.

The brake warning light turns on: Your brake warning light is designed to turn on when problems within the braking system are detected. Sometimes, the light will come on and turn off sporadically,



which can make drivers feel tempted to ignore the signal. However, even one light-up of the warning light is an indicator that you need to make an appointment with the mechanic.

The brake pedal goes to the floor: Sometimes, you might be depressing your brake pedal only to feel the pressure give way and the pedal go to the floor. This could mean you have a bad master cylinder. You need the master cylinder to work appropriately to have appropriate brake pressure.

Your brakes pulsate: Brake rotors sometimes become warped or corroded, which can lead to your feeling a pulsating vibration when you try to stop the car. You might need to replace the brake rotors or to have them turned. Turning involves smoothing the rotor by shaving metal off.

Your brake fluid looks milky: At times, condensation in the line can make your brake fluid have a milky color. At this time, you should change the fluid because letting it stagnate could do damage to the master cylinder and wheel cylinders. Your owner's manual will include directions to help you locate the fluid container under your hood. ■

Lane Insurance would be happy to help examine your risks and suggest the best coverages for you and your family. Feel free to request a quote online at laneinsurance.com or give us a call at 515-981-4614. Information provided by Mike Lane, Lane Insurance Agency Inc., 1225 Sunset Drive, Norwalk.

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THE TRUE cost of senior living in the Des Moines area

How much does senior living really cost? It is one of the first and most important questions families ask when planning care for an aging loved one. While pricing varies by location, services and housing type, understanding what contributes to the cost helps families make informed decisions.



According to LongTermCare.gov, nearly 70% of adults older than 65 will require some form of long-term care, and 20% will need it for five years or more. Whether you're planning ahead or responding to a recent health change, knowing what to expect financially is essential.

In the Des Moines area, the most common senior living options include:

- **Independent living:** Designed for active seniors who don't need daily care. Monthly fees typically cover housing, some meals, housekeeping and activities.

- **Assisted living:** Includes help with activities of daily living (ADLs) such as

bathing, dressing and medication management. Costs increase with the level of care.

- **Memory care:** Offers specialized support for individuals with Alzheimer's or other cognitive conditions. Higher staffing ratios and secured environments result in higher rates.

What influences cost? Several factors affect pricing: apartment size and layout (studio vs. one-bedroom); included services (meals, housekeeping, laundry); level of care required; community amenities (fitness, wellness programs, outings); and location.

Many communities charge a base monthly rate and add care costs based on a needs assessment. It is important to ask if services are bundled or tiered, and if fees increase as care needs change.

Financial planning options: Families in Des Moines often use a mix of resources to cover costs: private savings and retirement income; long-term care insurance (helps cover assisted living or memory care); VA Aid and Attendance benefits (for eligible veterans and spouses); home sale proceeds or reverse mortgages; and Medicaid (for those who

qualify, usually applies to nursing homes or specific waiver programs).

Key takeaway: The cost of senior living reflects more than rent — it reflects access to care, peace of mind and quality of life. Before choosing a community, request a breakdown of all fees and understand what is included.

For Des Moines families navigating this decision, comparing options, visiting communities, and speaking with financial advisors can help make the process less overwhelming.

Senior living isn't one-size-fits-all. Understanding the true cost helps you find the right fit — one that supports health, safety and meaningful living at every stage. The sooner you explore your options, the more prepared you will be when needs arise — and the more control you'll have over care, cost and comfort. ■

Information provided by Ashley Bergman, Addington Place of Des Moines, addingtonplaceofdesmoines.com. Written by Discovery Senior Living, 3461 Bonita Bay Blvd., Suite 100, Bonita Springs, FL 34134.





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- ☐ Other gifts
- ☐ Nothing



COMMUNITY

By Lindsey Giardino

CONNECTING women, supporting community

Women of Norwalk makes an impact.

Women of Norwalk began with a simple but powerful idea more than a decade ago: When women come together with



intention, amazing things can happen. What started as a small group of women wanting to connect, support one another and give back has grown into a 501(c)(3) organization of more than 40 women committed to strengthening the community.

Today, the group's mission is to connect women in Norwalk to support kids of all ages. They do this by uplifting others, supporting local children and families, and investing directly back into Norwalk through service, fundraising and meaningful connection.

Andrea Stevenson, who leads the group, shares that one program that truly captures the spirit of Women of Norwalk is the Student Leadership Grant Program. For the third year in a row, they have been able to support student leadership groups through monetary grants. Each spring, students present how the funding has helped shape them as individuals and supported their programs.

"We are focused on building strong future leaders today, and that is something we are very proud of," Stevenson says.

Women of Norwalk is active in other ways as well, including the Ladies Night Out Bunco Game Night each fall and the Kentucky Derby Gala held annually in early May, as well as service projects like the School Request Program, which provides snacks and other donations to teachers, nurses and administrators to support students.

The group also works closely with school counselors to help fill gaps where students need extra support and hosts a free clothing swap each October, encouraging families to shop at no cost while promoting a sustainable lifestyle. Its flagship Backpack Program supports more than 60 families facing food insecurity throughout the year by providing Fareway gift cards to help meet those needs.

Women of Norwalk hosts quarterly meetings and social events as well that build genuine relationships among women in the community. All are welcome.

"We support women by providing opportunities to connect and contribute in ways that fit their season of life," Stevenson notes. "Women of Norwalk is welcoming, inclusive and grounded in the belief that every woman has something valuable to offer."

In the short term, Stevenson hopes Women of Norwalk continues to be a trusted, positive force in the community — supporting local causes and strengthening connections among women.

"Long term, our goal is sustainability," she says. "A group that continues to grow, adapt and serve future generations while remaining rooted in compassion, generosity and local impact. We want Norwalk to feel stronger because Women of Norwalk exists." ■

THE NEW gold standard

Why the best import service isn't at the dealer

If you follow automotive headlines, the outlook for independent repair can seem grim. Between technician shortages and manufacturers fighting to gatekeep repair data, the challenges are real. However, for the discerning import owner, this isn't a time of decline — it is a golden age. While the industry is changing, those shifts have allowed specialized independent shops to offer a level of service that modern dealerships simply cannot match.

The shift in the service landscape: Thirty years ago, dealerships held the monopoly on “premium service.” They were the only destination for specialized tools and high-end customer care. Today, the tide has turned. Modern dealerships are burdened by massive overhead, skyrocketing HR costs, and the cold efficiency of corporate consolidation. In these high-volume environments, the “customer experience” often becomes a secondary priority to managing the sheer scale of the operation.

The specialist's edge: Specialized independent shops have stepped into the spotlight by remaining lean, agile and focused. Here is how they outmaneuver the giants:

- **Targeted expertise:** Today's independent specialists invest heavily in brand-specific training. Your vehicle is handled by a technician who understands its specific engineering DNA, rather than a generalist.



- **Technological parity:** The diagnostic world is more competitive than ever. Independent shops now utilize high-tech tooling and software that rivals factory equipment, ensuring precision without the dealership markup.

- **Superior sourcing:** Unlike dealers restricted to a single supply chain, independents can source premium parts from multiple high-quality venues, often identifying more durable alternatives to factory components.

- **Personalized care:** Without corporate mandates, independent owners can craft service journeys and warranties tailored specifically to the needs of the client and their vehicle.

Protecting your right to repair: The strength of the aftermarket is bolstered by organizations like the Auto Care Alliance (ACA). These groups are the consumer's frontline, fighting to keep repair information open and accessible. As vehicles become increasingly sophisticated, these advocates ensure that you — the owner — retain the freedom to choose a specialist you trust.

The future is local: The “doom and gloom” headlines ignore a simple truth: Specialized service is thriving. By embracing technological advances and prioritizing the human element, independent import specialists are doing more than just maintaining cars — they are providing a superior alternative. ■

Information provided by Chris Werner, owner and lead technician, Werner's Elite Auto, 506 1/2 E. Euclid Ave., Indianola, 515-259-0122, www.wernerseliteauto.com.



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HOME HEALTH

By Aaron Wheeler

AGING at home

Why a broad care network matters.

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



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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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WELLNESS

By Jen Penisten-Clark

SKIN resurfacing

Skin resurfacing is a popular aesthetic treatment designed to improve skin texture, tone and overall appearance by removing damaged outer layers of skin and stimulating natural cell renewal. It is commonly used to address concerns such as fine lines and wrinkles, acne scars, sun damage, enlarged pores, uneven pigmentation and dull or rough skin.

One of the key benefits of skin resurfacing is its ability to promote collagen and elastin production. As the skin heals, it becomes firmer, smoother and more radiant. Resurfacing treatments can also enhance the effectiveness of skincare products by allowing them to penetrate more deeply, leading to improved and longer-lasting results. Many patients notice brighter, clearer skin after just one session.

Medical spas offer a variety of professional skin resurfacing treatments. Chemical peels use carefully formulated acids to exfoliate the skin and improve tone and clarity. Laser skin resurfacing targets deeper layers to reduce wrinkles, scars and pigmentation while encouraging collagen renewal. Microneedling, including radiofrequency microneedling, creates controlled micro-injuries to boost collagen production and refine texture. Dermaplaning and advanced exfoliation treatments provide immediate smoothness and glow.

With customizable options and expert guidance, medical spa skin resurfacing treatments offer safe, effective solutions for achieving healthier, more youthful-looking skin at any stage of life. ■

Information provided by Jen Penisten-Clark, MSN, RN, NP-C, CEO/owner, Vivid Life Spa, 1951 E. 18th St., Suite 105, Norwalk, 515-850-7848, vividlifespa.com.



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HEALTH

By Dr. Donna Grant

WHY YOU may not see a lead apron during your next dental X-rays

For your local dentist, patient safety has always been a top priority. That is why some patients may be surprised when they notice a change during dental X-rays. Many offices no longer routinely use lead aprons or thyroid collars during dental X-rays. This isn't cutting corners — it's following the latest science and national guidelines.

Modern dental X-rays use extremely low levels of radiation. With today's advanced equipment, exposure is dramatically lower than it was years ago — often comparable to the background radiation you experience in everyday life.

Because of these advances, leading professional organizations such as the American Dental Association and the American Academy of Oral and Maxillofacial Radiology now recommend moving away from routine lead aprons and thyroid collars. Studies show they provide little to no added protection and can sometimes interfere with images, requiring retakes — ironically increasing radiation exposure.

We continue to follow the ALARA (As Low As Reasonably Achievable) principle: taking X-rays only when necessary, tailoring them to each patient, and using the safest technology available. If a patient has specific medical needs, shielding can still be used. ■

Information provided by Dr. Donna Grant, Norwalk Family Dentistry, 1101 Chatham Ave., Suite A, Norwalk, 515-256-9000, www.norwalkfamilydentistry.com.



NONSURGICAL spinal decompression

Help for neck and low back pain that shoots down arms or legs

Nonsurgical spinal decompression is a safe, gentle treatment. It uses a machine to slowly stretch your spine. This takes pressure off pinched nerves and bulging discs. These problems often cause radicular pain — sharp pain that shoots from your neck into your arms or from your low back into your legs (like sciatica).

The treatment creates space in your spine. This helps discs get more nutrients and water. It can reduce swelling and help the disc heal a bit without cutting.

Studies show it works well for many people. One study found pain dropped a lot — from about 6 out of 10 to around 2 out of 10 after 13 to 15 sessions. Another showed good pain relief and less disability in people with disc problems. For neck issues, scans sometimes showed discs improving by 32–55%. Many reports say 70–90% of people feel better with this method.

Why choose this before surgery? Surgery has bigger risks, like infection, problems from anesthesia, or long recovery time. Decompression is non-invasive — no cuts, no drugs, and you can go back to normal life faster. It costs less and often helps avoid surgery. ■

Information provided by Dr. Jesse Stumbaugh, Norwalk Chiropractic, 1300 Sunset Drive, 515-981-9208, www.norwalk-chiropractic.com. Norwalk Chiropractic is a provider with most major insurance companies.



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Q: Do GLP-1s affect the eyes?

A: Glucagon-like peptide-1 (GLP-1) is a hormone produced in the gut that plays a key role in regulating blood sugar, appetite and metabolism. It is released after eating and stimulates insulin secretion, suppresses glucagon release, slows gastric emptying, and promotes feelings of fullness. Because of these effects, GLP-1 receptor agonists are widely used to treat type 2 diabetes and obesity.

GLP-1 can affect the eyes both indirectly and directly. Indirectly, its most important impact comes from improving blood glucose control. Chronic high blood sugar damages small blood vessels in the retina, leading to diabetic retinopathy, a major cause of vision loss. GLP-1 therapies may help slow the progression of diabetic eye disease over time.

Experimental studies indicate that GLP-1 may reduce inflammation, oxidative stress, and cell death in retinal cells, which could help protect against retinal degeneration.

However, rapid improvements in blood sugar — particularly with potent GLP-1 drugs — have been associated in some patients with a temporary worsening of diabetic retinopathy, especially in those with advanced disease. Overall, GLP-1 appears to have more protective than harmful effects on eye health, but careful monitoring is recommended for high-risk patients. ■



Information provided by Jonathan Anderson, O.D. of Optometric Associates of Warren County, P.C., 1228 Sunset Drive, Norwalk, 515-981-0224.

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PAIR simplicity and flavor with seafood pasta

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

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

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

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

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



Shrimp Spaghetti

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

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

- Cook spaghetti noodles according to package instructions. In skillet over medium heat, add butter, avocado oil and shrimp. Mix in 1 tablespoon garlic powder and paprika. Remove shrimp after they begin to turn pink; set aside.
- Add chicken broth, Parmesan cheese, heavy cream, remaining garlic powder, onion powder and spinach to skillet; mix well. Add shrimp back to skillet to finish cooking. Mix in noodles and serve with bread.



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DON'T LET hearing loss stop you from dining out

Individuals with hearing loss have particular difficulty communicating in environments with excessive background noise, such as busy restaurants. Rather than face the prospect of trying to enjoy a good meal while dealing with competing conversations, clanging silverware and dishes and distracting music, many choose to skip the experience altogether. But you don't have to consign yourself to a lifetime of Happy Meals; there are strategies you can employ to help you enjoy dining out at your favorite restaurant on occasion.

The following tips will help ensure a positive restaurant experience for those with hearing loss:

- **Choose a booth over a table.** Tables are



typically situated in the middle of the room and offer little respite from noise. Try calling ahead and requesting a booth if available.

- **Don't sit near the kitchen.** Regardless of whether you end up with a booth or table, try to avoid being seated near the kitchen or bar. These high-traffic areas tend to be the noisiest.

- **Avoid sitting near the loudspeaker or air conditioner.** A comfortable temperature and ambient music are essential to the dining experience, but sitting too close is sure to prove distracting. If you are being steered in this direction, ask your host or hostess if they can seat you elsewhere.

- **When dining with a group, position yourself in the center of the table.** This ensures you can hear all parts of the conversation without straining to hear somebody at the opposite end.

- **Maintain eye contact with the person**

who is speaking. Paying close attention to visual cues can help improve your understanding in noisy environments.

- **Check out the menu before you go.**

Preparing in advance by previewing the menu on the restaurant's website will ensure you know the different types of food available and how it is prepared, so you won't misunderstand or have to ask the server to repeat him- or herself. If the restaurant has daily specials available, these are usually posted in the waiting area or on a menu supplement; if not, ask for a written copy.

By following these tips, you are likely to have a positive dining experience. You might even be tempted to hang around for dessert. ■

Information provided by Dr. Kelly Cook, Audiologist, Iowa Hearing Center, 1228 Sunset Drive, Suite B, Norwalk, 515-416-5990, www.iowahearingcenter.com.

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BOOK REVIEWS

Courtesy of Beaverdale Books

'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



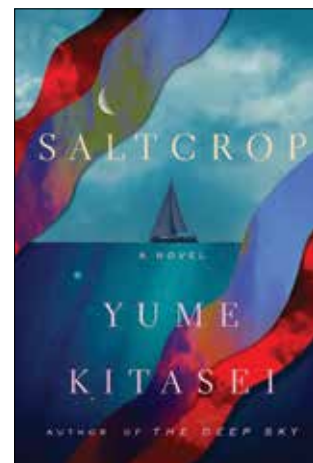
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'Saltcrop'

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



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ANNUAL Dinner

Norwalk Area Chamber of Commerce held its Annual Dinner on Jan. 30 at Wilson's Orchard & Farm.

Photos courtesy of Lucinda Sperry



Norwalk Area Chamber of Commerce Board



Angie Cooper and Lucinda Sperry



Jessie and Chad Leeper



Dan Obley



Chamber Business of the Year - Fareway: Todd Hanson and Craig Choate, presented by Lorie Williamson



Gail Hecht, LizAnne Eggers, Steph Bintner, Nikki Huetter and Mel Guanci



Community Footprint Award - Mark Miller, presented by Luke Nelson



Student of the year - Carson Menke, presented by Chris Basinger



Teacher of the Year - Sarah Frey, presented by Clint Driftmier

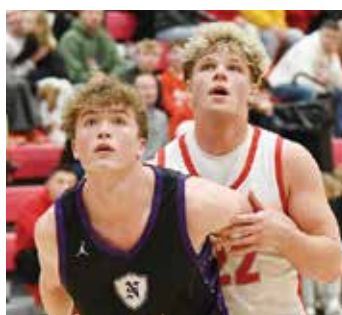
OUT & ABOUT



Tillman Papcun at the Jan. 6 Norwalk boys basketball vs. Dallas Center/Grimes game.



Henry Smith at the Jan. 6 Norwalk boys basketball vs. Dallas Center/Grimes game.



Andrew Abbott at the Jan. 6 Norwalk boys basketball vs. Dallas Center/Grimes game.



Makenna Roeder at the Norwalk girls basketball game against Dallas Center/Grimes on Jan. 6.



Hannah Overholser at the Norwalk girls basketball game against Dallas Center/Grimes on Jan. 6.



Grace Bordenaro at the Norwalk girls basketball game against Dallas Center/Grimes on Jan. 6.



Braylon Birmingham at the Norwalk girls basketball game against Dallas Center/Grimes on Jan. 6.



Chamber Member of the Year - Nikki Huetter, Bellflower Florist & Gifts, presented by Mel Guanci at the Norwalk Area Chamber of Commerce Annual Dinner Jan. 30 at Wilson's Orchard & Farm. Photo by Lucinda Sperry



Citizen of the Year - Nichole Swisher, presented by Travis Stanley at the Norwalk Area Chamber of Commerce Annual Dinner Jan. 30 at Wilson's Orchard & Farm. Photo by Lucinda Sperry



Trailblazer Award - Norwalk High School STEM Program, presented by Jean Strable at the Norwalk Area Chamber of Commerce Annual Dinner Jan. 30 at Wilson's Orchard & Farm. Photo by Lucinda Sperry



Mel Guanci and Amanda Reid-Raper at the Norwalk Area Chamber of Commerce Annual Dinner Jan. 30 at Wilson's Orchard & Farm. Photo by Lucinda Sperry



Benjamin Pearson, Mel Guanci and Amanda Reid-Raper at the Norwalk Area Chamber of Commerce Annual Dinner Jan. 30 at Wilson's Orchard & Farm. Photo by Lucinda Sperry



Police Chief Greg Staples and Amanda Reid-Raper at the Norwalk Area Chamber of Commerce Annual Dinner Jan. 30 at Wilson's Orchard & Farm. Photo by Lucinda Sperry

CLASSIFIEDS

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NEW! Transitional Kindergarten

NORWALK COMMUNITY SCHOOL DISTRICT NEWSLETTER

FEBRUARY 2026

NORWALK CSD INTRODUCES TRANSITIONAL KINDERGARTEN (TK) FOR THE 2026-27 SCHOOL YEAR

Norwalk is excited to announce the addition of Transitional Kindergarten for the 2026-2027 school year, designed to provide a supportive, developmentally appropriate bridge for children who meet the age requirement for kindergarten but would benefit from an additional year of growth. This five-day-a-week program will offer an adjusted pace with a strong focus on early literacy, numeracy, executive functioning, and social-emotional development—building a confident foundation for future academic success.

- **Enrollment for Preschool, TK and Kindergarten will open March 1st.**
- Enrollment in TK will prioritize age and developmental indicators. After May 1st, all enrollment decisions will be based on space and at the discretion of the district.
- **Oviatt Elementary will host a parent meeting at the Norwalk Performing Arts Center on Thursday, February 5th at 6:00 pm.**

We look forward to offering TK next school year! For more information, please scan the QR code to visit our website.



NORWALK SCHOOLS RECOGNIZED FOR STRONG DISTRICT PERFORMANCE

Last spring, the Iowa Department of Education introduced district-level ratings as part of a new, unified accountability system. For the first time, families and community members can see how entire school districts are performing across a range of measures that reflect both academic outcomes and student readiness for life after graduation. We are proud to share that Norwalk Community School District has been designated High Performing for the 2024-2025 reporting year.

This recognition reflects much more than a single data point or test result. The district's overall score exceeded the state average and was driven by strong graduation rates, solid academic performance, consistent attendance, and meaningful postsecondary opportunities, including college credit and work-based learning experiences. All Norwalk schools met state expectations, with Norwalk Senior High School earning a High Performing rating and our elementary schools and middle school earning Commendable ratings.

What is most encouraging about this designation is the consistency it reflects across our system. From early learning through graduation, our schools are aligned around high expectations, quality instruction, and steady progress for students. While the new accountability model also highlights achievement gaps that exist across Iowa and reinforces the importance of continued focus on student groups, Norwalk's overall results demonstrate strong system level outcomes and a commitment to ongoing improvement.

This recognition belongs to our students, staff, and families. It reflects the daily work happening in classrooms, the partnerships built with families and community organizations, and the shared commitment to preparing students for what comes next. As a district, we remain focused on our mission of Growing Learners and Leaders, and we will continue to use data, feedback, and community input to strengthen our schools even further.

Thank you to our Norwalk community for your continued support of our schools and the work we do together on behalf of students.

SAVE THE DATE!

APRIL 22, 2026

Norwalk High School

EVENT DETAILS:

Please consider the opportunity to share passion for your career field at Norwalk High School Career Day! We are looking to fill every classroom on our 9-12 campus with our most valuable resources, **YOU**.

- 9:30 am to 1 pm
- Small classroom setting
- Only 2-3 sessions, 35 minutes each
- Flexible schedule available

Please use the QR code or link below to sign up.
<https://bit.ly/NorwalkCareerDay2026>

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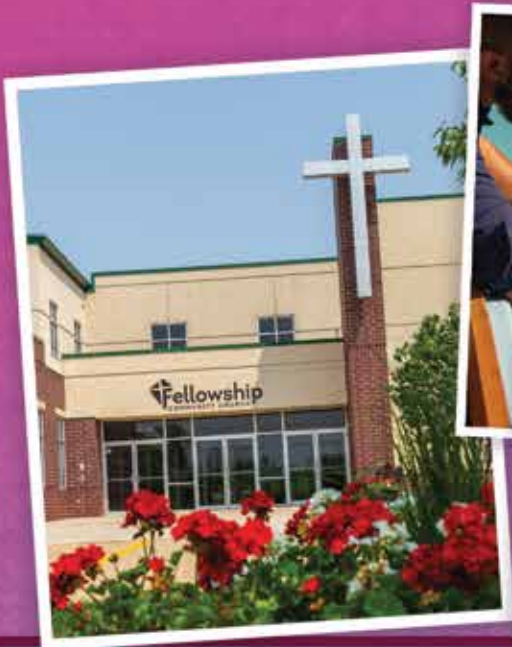
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Jesus Christ laid down his life for us."*

1 John 3:16

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