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APRIL 2026

Living

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WELCOME

CELEBRATING my heritage — a wee bit

“My people” celebrated March 17. If you are Irish, chances are you did, too. If you are not Irish, there is still a good chance you celebrated anyway. That seems to be how St. Patrick’s Day works.

I say “my people” in the most affectionate way possible, mostly because I am reasonably confident I am Irish. I am also told I am German. And French. And possibly a little Native American. But, thanks to my mother’s side of the family, Irish is the one that tends to show up the loudest.

Mom and her siblings fit the Irish profile quite well: short in stature, red-haired, light-skinned, Catholic and full of vinegar. And by “full of vinegar,” I mean they had opinions.

Family history backs up my Irish claim. My grandmother’s maiden name was Leonard. Her father, Patrick Leonard, was born near Carlow, Ireland, in 1866. And, if that isn’t enough proof, my grandson — appropriately named Callahan — arrived in 2025 with a head full of red hair. Genetics doesn’t get much clearer than that. Somewhere in Ireland, an ancestor is nodding proudly and probably ordering another potato.

Speaking of potatoes, let’s address a few stereotypes. Do the Irish really love potatoes that much? Is everyone named Mary? Are they obsessed with the weather? Do they enjoy a good fight but still manage to remain friendly afterward? And do they really say “wee” all the time?

I can’t answer all of those questions with scientific certainty, but I can say this: If someone offers me a baked potato, I’m not going to turn it down.

Personally, I enjoy poking a little fun at my Irish roots while also celebrating them. Truth be told, most of us are a mix of several backgrounds anyway. Somewhere in the family tree, there is probably an Irishman, a German, a Frenchman and someone arguing loudly about the weather.

At the end of the day, we probably have more in common than we realize. That’s worth celebrating. Still, there’s nothing wrong with taking a little pride in where you came from — at least a wee bit.

Have a great month and thanks for reading. ■



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Celebrating HERITAGE

Residents reflect on the traditions that connect them to home

By Jackie Wilson

In a state often defined by its small towns and Midwest roots, Iowa's cultural fabric is far more diverse than it may first appear. From Costa Rica to the Philippines to Scotland, residents across central Iowa are preserving traditions, celebrating heritage and building community — all while making Iowa home.

Nela Blanco, a native of Costa Rica, moved to Iowa 32 years ago. She has numerous plants to remind her of her original home, which was sunny and full of greenery. Photo by Jackie Wilson

Cherished holidays

When Nela Blanco graduated from high school in Costa Rica, her mother's job at Pioneer's Costa Rica office ended. The company offered her a transfer to the United States.

Blanco planned to attend college in the U.S., learn English and eventually return to Costa Rica.

"It was a culture shock and not as diverse," she recalls. "I knew French, but not a lot of English."

Her plans changed when she met her future husband in college and decided to remain in Iowa. Today, she is a multilingual specialist with Des Moines Public Schools.

Since moving 32 years ago, Blanco has embraced Iowa as home while maintaining traditions that remain central to her daily life. One of the most important is gathering with family and friends with food at the center of activities.

"Cooking is at the heart of our culture. Celebrating with food is the simplest thing to do," Blanco says. "That brings me back to my culture and reminds me of home."

She recalls spending weekends with extended family.

"After church on Sunday, we'd visit our aunts and uncles. We went on vacations together," she says.

In Iowa, she experienced her first snowfall.

"The first snow was magical and serene," she says. "Then it wasn't anymore. The gray, non-sunny days are tough. I was used to sun all the time."

Holidays remain especially meaningful. Día de los Muertos on Nov. 1 is a cherished tradition. Her family celebrates a Latino Christmas on Dec. 24 and an American Christmas on Dec. 25. Mother's Day is observed Aug. 15 in Costa Rica, though she also celebrates the U.S. holiday.

Costa Rica, located in Central America, is known for its warm, lush, green climate year-round. Blanco brings a piece of home to Iowa with large tropical plants in her house and backyard.

"I miss the tropical plants from home," she says.

Coffee and fresh fruit are among her favorite reminders of Costa Rica. She often returns from visits with a suitcase full of coffee and enjoys tropical fruits whenever she can.

Another important tradition is soccer. Blanco looks forward to attending the World



Nela Blanco collects Mexican artist Frida Kahlo's art and memorabilia. Students and friends add to her collection at her home and office. Photo by Jackie Wilson

Cup in Kansas City this summer.

"We eat and breathe soccer," she says. "It really connects me with my Latino students."

Over the years, she has also collected artwork by Mexican painter Frida Kahlo, whose story inspires her.

"Her strength continues, and she stayed true to her roots," Blanco says. "My friends and students bring me Frida Kahlo items. It makes me proud they connect that with me."

Blanco volunteers with the Latino Heritage Festival and other local events. She says Des Moines has become a welcoming home.

"I appreciate Des Moines and its amazing melting pot," she says. "It's a welcoming community. We all want to make it a better place to live. Des Moines gave me a second home, and I've met so many people from all over the world."

For more information about the Latino Heritage Festival, visit latinoheritagefestival.org.

Honoring family roots

Meldie Barlaw, a first-generation Filipino American, is passionate about preserving her heritage and ensuring her three children understand their roots. She joined the Filipino American Society of Iowa when she moved to the state. She later served as president and now remains a board member.



Meldie Barlaw of West Des Moines joined the Filipino American Society of Iowa to help her family stay familiar with her Filipino roots.

Born and raised in the Philippines, she also lived in Japan and California before settling in Iowa 10 years ago. She says West Des Moines feels like home.

"This is familiar to how I was raised," she says.

In addition to her involvement with the organization, Barlaw is active in the community. She graduated from the West Des Moines Leadership Academy, works as a real estate agent and owns Knock Out Nails in West Des Moines.

The organization's mission is to help preserve Filipino heritage.

"I was raised to respect people and honor values," she says. "Being involved in the community and offering hospitality are important. My values guide me as a mother, an entrepreneur and a community member in Iowa."

Barlaw says more than 10,000 Filipinos live in Iowa, with more than 250 members in the organization. Each year, the group hosts a Filipino Fiesta celebrating culture and traditions.

"Last year, more than 2,000 people attended," she says. "We share traditions and what our culture is all about."

A yearly gala benefits orphans and provides scholarships for Filipino Americans.

Food plays a central role in her culture. She prepares traditional dishes such as lumpia, similar to an egg roll, and pancit, a rice noodle dish.

"It's a tradition for birthdays. It represents a long life," she says.

Roasted pig, or lechon, is a staple at family gatherings.

Barlaw speaks both Filipino and Japanese. Her husband is Vietnamese, and two of their children were born in Japan. All three now attend West Des Moines schools.

"The reason I joined the Filipino Society is so my kids don't forget my roots," she says. "We learn the Western way, but I want them to have that background."

At her nail salon, she emphasizes hospitality and care.

"We provide self-care," she says. "People come in after a hard day, and we want to be friendly and welcoming."

Christmas is a major celebration in the Philippines. The holiday season begins in September — known as the "ber" months — and continues through December.

"The kids make instruments from tin cans and bottles and go caroling," she says.

Barlaw says Filipino culture emphasizes inclusion and generosity.

"We are inclusive," she says. "I want to continue sharing our culture and traditions to keep our heritage alive."

For more information about the Filipino American Society of Iowa, visit fasiowa.org.

Kilts and bagpipes

Debbie Caldwell of West Des Moines has deep ties to the Scottish Heritage Society of Iowa — an organization her parents helped found 50 years ago.

After her grandmother died young, Caldwell's mother knew little about her heritage. When her parents responded to a newspaper ad seeking Scots in Iowa, they joined eight others to form the society.

The organization's mission is to honor Scottish heritage through traditional events and gatherings.

Each year on Nov. 30, members celebrate St. Andrew's Day, honoring Scotland's patron saint. Men wear tartan kilts, while women wear sashes

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FEATURE

representing their clan.

A clan is a community of families connected by region and tradition, not always by blood.

“There are hundreds of clans, each with its own tartan,” Caldwell says.

Caldwell has traced her ancestry to two clans. When she visited Scotland as a young adult, she felt an immediate connection.

“When I got to Scotland, there were all these people who looked like me,” she says. “It was a nice feeling to have that connection.”

Another key celebration is Tartan Day on April 6, which commemorates the Declaration of Arbroath, a document asserting Scotland’s independence.

Caldwell also started a Scottish book club eight years ago, focusing on works by Scottish authors or books set in Scotland.

The Highland Games are another popular tradition, featuring bagpipe competitions, dancing and clan gatherings. The group also receives requests for bagpipers for funerals and events.

“We have people who teach bagpipes and younger folks taking lessons,” she says.

One of the biggest celebrations is Hogmanay, the Scottish New Year, celebrated at 6 p.m. locally to match Scotland’s time zone. The event includes singing “Auld Lang Syne,” written by Robert Burns.

“It’s often a bigger occasion than Christmas,” Caldwell says.

She also attends local Celtic music concerts and whiskey tastings.

Caldwell says staying connected to her heritage is meaningful.

“It gives you a solid base of who you are,” she says. “You can see your ancestors and what they valued. It’s a sense of belonging.”

For more information about the Scottish Heritage Society of Iowa, visit iowascots.org. ■



Debbie Caldwell wears her tartan rosette from her Scottish clan. Her parents were part of a group that founded the Scottish Heritage Society of Iowa 50 years ago.

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The April 2011 West Des Moines Living magazine featured the story, “Celebrate West Des Moines: A-May-Zing Days returns with more events.” The month-long celebration of West Des Moines, which featured a variety of entertainment, business and school activities throughout the city, was the brainchild of Clyde Evans, who was director of community and economic development for the City of West Des Moines. The YESS Duck Derby was the featured photo on the cover. ■

AT-HOME CARE services can help individuals remain in their homes longer

For many people, home represents stability, comfort and a lifetime of memories. Surveys consistently show most older adults prefer to remain in their homes as they age rather than move to a new living environment.



Yet remaining at home can present challenges for individuals and their families. Caregiving responsibilities often fall to family members who must balance work, household duties and personal commitments. This can create stress, exhaustion and, sometimes, discord.

At-home care services are increasingly used to help address those challenges. By assisting with daily activities and companionship, these services can help individuals maintain independence while lightening the load for family caregivers.

Supporting independence. Families sometimes hesitate to seek outside help because they worry it may adversely impact a loved one’s independence. In many cases, the opposite can be true. When individuals receive assistance with everyday tasks, such as household chores, personal care, or transportation, they may be able to remain safely in their homes for a longer time. Professional caregivers can also provide support in a way that allows individuals to maintain privacy and autonomy while still receiving help when needed. Regular assistance also can add structure and predictability to daily life, helping both individuals and their families establish more manageable routines.

Reducing the risk of injuries. Health concerns such as mobility limitations, chronic pain, vision issues and osteoporosis can increase the risk of falls among aging adults. Falls remain one of the leading causes of injury and disability for older individuals. At-home care providers often help decrease that risk by assisting with activities that might otherwise be physically demanding, such as bathing, cleaning or navigating stairs. Some organizations also offer home safety assessments that identify potential hazards and recommend changes that can improve safety.

Encouraging physical and social activity. Remaining active both physically and socially is an important factor in overall well-being. Individuals who rely heavily on family members for transportation or care may become isolated over time. At-home support can help address this by providing companionship and helping individuals stay engaged in everyday activities. Caregivers may assist with outings, walks, hobbies, or other routines that encourage movement and social interaction. Even small activities such as walking a dog or spending time outdoors can help individuals maintain a sense of normalcy and independence.

Supporting family caregivers. Providing care for a loved one can be emotionally meaningful but also physically and mentally demanding. Introducing professional support can help restore balance. With some caregiving responsibilities shared, family members may experience less stress and have more time for work, personal health and meaningful time with their loved one. ■

Stacey Miller is executive director of WesleyLife at Home, which offers a broad network of services, including medical and non-medical at-home care. Visit wesleylife.org or call 515- 978-2777.

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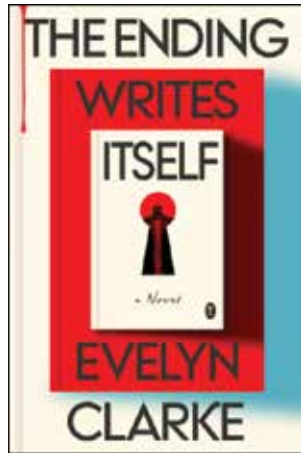
'The Ending Writes Itself'

As a lifelong reader and word collector, I love a bit of metafiction. A story about stories will always perk my ears. The skilled pair of authors writing under the name of Evelyn Clarke has given me that in spades. This one has a ton of buzz for a reason. Clever, emotional, perceptive, addictive — this is a storyteller's story if I ever read one.

The synopsis reads like a "Knives Out" movie. Six struggling authors are brought together to a private island to finish the final book of a famous, now dead, bestselling author. They have 72 hours to write their way into fame and fortune. Naturally, schemes arise and danger creeps. This is a locked room mystery with a devastatingly flawed set of characters and biting satire of the publishing industry — all at the same time.

Observations about writing, character arcs, endings and the ever-present human desire for closure make this a perfect mix of thoughtful and playful. Charming and satirical in equal measure, this is the kind of book you finish at 2 a.m. and immediately want to press into a friend's hands. Or write a gushing review of. ■

— Review by Julie Goodrich



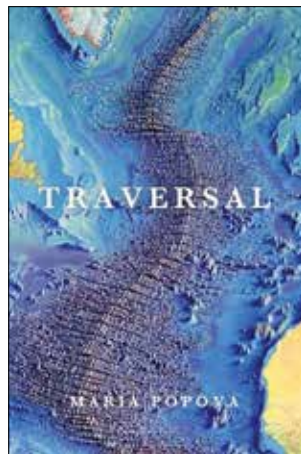
By Evelyn Clarke
4/7/26
352 pages
\$30
Harper

'Traversal'

Reading this book feels a bit like wandering into the world's most enchanting dinner party. Pull up a chair and suddenly you're listening to Mary Shelley discuss creation while Walt Whitman waxes poetic about the soul of the universe, and then Frederick Douglass is reminding us all that moral courage is a form of genius. One minute you're contemplating continental drift with Alfred Wegener; the next you're pondering the nature of consciousness, love and the color blue.

Popova writes with the curiosity of someone so in love with the world that she sees connections that feel so hidden, yet so obvious. She understands that science and poetry are all just different dialects of the same cosmic language.

Sometimes the writing feels so dense, but then a sentence lands like a small miracle, and you can't remember why you were struggling at all. This is one of the most powerful books I've ever read. It feels less like reading and more like uncovering a secret you forgot you knew. It's part intellectual history, part philosophical mixtape, and wholly satisfying for anyone who likes their nonfiction a little star-dusted and gloriously alive. ■ — Review by Julie Goodrich



By Maria Popova
2/17/26
608 pages
\$36
Farrar, Straus and Giroux

MEET Eddy Cisneros

Creating connection across cultures

Eddy Cisneros began his education career teaching adult English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) classes. He currently teaches adult beginner classes for the West Des Moines School District, with students ranging in age from their 20s to their 50s.

In addition, he works with WDM Schools as a multilingual family engagement specialist. In this role, he assists with all forms of communication with the Hispanic community.

"Whether it be through email, phone, texts or in person, I am that bridge between our families, teachers and administrators," he explains. "I wear many hats throughout the day. I'm an interpreter, mentor, cultural broker, emotional support and mental health advocate — just to name a few. I also provide a safe space, along with community outreach and resources."

He recently obtained his Teaching English as a Foreign Language (TEFL) certification, an internationally recognized standard for teaching English classes either online or in person, offered by the International TEFL Academy.

"It was the first certification I have ever earned," he says. "After working in education for more than 15 years, I finally have the opportunity to experience what it's like to be on this side of the room."

He also serves as a R.I.S.E. co-sponsor at Valley High School. The Refugee and Immigrant Student Embassy is a place for refugee and immigrant students to build community, and he helps mentor newly arrived students.

During his practicum, he worked with classes of all ages.

"One of my colleagues mentioned that our school district was opening a new adult ESOL class and suggested I apply. I reluctantly did and was offered the position immediately. I'm glad I did," he says.

Last year, he received a WDM Schools Pawsitive award, which recognizes staff members who are making a positive impact. He says the award came as a surprise.

"Although I am grateful for the recognition, I do not see myself as anyone special or unique. I am simply doing what I feel I should be doing to make this world a better place. Even if it's only for one student, I firmly believe the hardships and sacrifices are worth it," he says.

Cisneros appreciates the opportunities life has given him and hopes his teaching makes a difference.

"I help them see their potential and give them what I so desperately needed growing up: someone who believes in them. It gives me the opportunity to help other immigrant children who are going through a similar experience to what I did during my childhood," he says. "Seeing my students succeed is one of the biggest reasons I enjoy what I do." ■



Eddy Cisneros teaches an adult ESOL class and is a multilingual family engagement specialist, among other roles.

THE COMFORT of a savory lasagna

There are few things in life more comforting than a warm kitchen filled with the savory aroma of lasagna baking in the oven — any time of the year. It is the kind of smell that draws everyone in, pulling family members from each corner of the house to ask, “Is it ready yet?”

This hearty lasagna has become a true family favorite in our home. With rich layers of seasoned meat, creamy ricotta, tender pasta and plenty of melted cheese (I suggest adding more than what this recipe calls for), it is the ultimate comfort food. Lasagna is more than just dinner — it is a tradition. This dish has even been selected as our dinner for Christmas and Thanksgiving many years, as it truly is a treasured recipe — and the leftovers taste even better the next day. This recipe represents the simple joy in sharing something homemade and delicious with the people you love. I need to warn you, though, the sauce takes some time to cook, but it is well worth the wait. Enjoy! ■



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

Lasagna

INGREDIENTS:

- 1 pound ground hamburger
- 1 cup chopped onion
- 3 garlic cloves, minced
- 1/4 cup chopped fresh parsley, divided
- 1 28-ounce can whole tomatoes, undrained and chopped
- 1 14.5-ounce can Italian-styled stewed tomatoes, undrained and chopped
- 1 six-ounce tomato paste
- 1 eight-ounce can tomato sauce
- 2 teaspoons dried oregano
- 1 teaspoon dried basil
- 1/2 teaspoon black pepper
- Water to boil noodles
- 12 uncooked lasagna noodles
- 1 large egg white, beaten
- 2 cups cottage cheese
- 1/2 cup shredded parmesan cheese
- 1 15-ounce carton fat-free ricotta
- 2 cups shredded mozzarella cheese



DIRECTIONS:

- Brown hamburger and drain grease. Set aside. In the same pan, coat with cooking spray, sauté onion and garlic for 5 minutes. Add beef back in. Add 2 tablespoons parsley, chopped whole tomatoes and next six ingredients. Bring to a boil. Reduce heat, cover and simmer for 20 minutes. Uncover and simmer for 15 minutes. Set aside.
- Boil water and cook noodles for 12 minutes or until “al dente.” Drain and set aside.
- Preheat oven to 350 F. In another bowl, combine 2 tablespoons parsley, egg white, cottage cheese, parmesan cheese and ricotta cheese.
- Spray a 9-inch by 13-inch pan with cooking spray and spread 1 cup tomato/beef mixture on the bottom of the pan. Place 3 noodles on tomato/beef mixture, top with half of cottage cheese mix, then 2 cups of tomato/beef mixture, and 2/3 cup of mozzarella. Repeat. Place another layer of noodles on top, then spread with remaining tomato/beef mixture.
- Cover with aluminum foil and bake for 1 hour. Then, sprinkle with 2/3 cup of provolone and bake uncovered for another 10 minutes. Take out of oven and let rest for 10 minutes. ■

'SWEET SOULS' worth saving

Ressler's rescued friend, Bodie, is along for the milestones.

He came into her life with a past already written in courage.

Bodie — a rescued dog from Texas — is also Julie Ressler's best friend.

Bodie and his two canine brothers were "three sweet souls" pulled from uncertainty by the compassion and determination of AHeinz57 Pet Rescue and Transport in De Soto, Ressler says.

"I will be forever grateful to Amy Heinz, the owner, and the entire staff for seeing what mattered most — that these boys were worth saving, worth loving and worth a chance at a real life," Ressler says.

The brothers — Tristan (who would later be renamed Bodie), Alfred and Samuel — were given names based on characters in the movie "Legends of the Fall." Bodie was originally known as Tristan Ludlow, played by Brad Pitt. And, just like his namesake, Bodie was free-spirited — untamable in the best way and deeply passionate.

Since joining Ressler, Bodie has been her constant companion through every chapter of her life, she says. He moved with her into a new home. He was there when her son left Iowa to join the Army in Georgia. During long nights and early mornings as she pursued her doctorate at Drake University, Bodie stayed close — curled at her feet or watching from the couch, loyal and patient — a silent reminder to keep going.

Bodie, an Australian shepherd/pit bull mix, is living his best life these days, going to "doggy daycare" at Raccoon River Kennels twice a week, where he gets just enough adventure to satisfy his wild heart.

At home, he's Ressler's favorite walking partner, the unofficial security system and an unapologetic counter surfer.

He has also somehow survived eating one of the most toxic foods for dogs — chocolate — thanks to what can only be described as a stomach of steel.

"Bodie has never met a snack he didn't like," Ressler jokes. "He can eat just about anything and has earned a bit of a reputation as a legendary counter surfer."

Food is an instant motivator.

"He's always on the lookout for his next opportunity, whether it's a crumb, a carrot or something that wasn't meant for him," she says.

But eating isn't all that Bodie excels at. He's also good at keeping his



Julie Ressler and Bodie on Ressler's graduation day from Drake University in May 2024.

owner safe.

"He faithfully protects me from delivery drivers and keeps a watchful eye on the two small dogs across the street — ever vigilant, ever devoted," Ressler says.

In other words, Bodie isn't just a dog — far from it.

"He is my best friend, my protector, my shadow and my heart," Ressler says. "Of all the dogs I've ever known, he is truly the best I've ever been blessed to love." ■



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By Dale Adams

THE PRACTICAL advantages of mini-split systems



Ductless mini-split systems have become a practical and efficient solution for residential heating and cooling. Homeowners are turning to these systems because they solve problems that conventional ducted systems cannot. A mini-split system uses an outdoor compressor connected to one or more indoor air handlers by a narrow conduit. This small connection replaces bulky ductwork, reducing the energy loss that often occurs in forced-air systems.

Because air does not have to travel through long ducts, the system delivers conditioned air directly to each zone. This enables faster and more precise temperature control. Each indoor unit can operate independently, allowing different rooms to maintain their own distinct temperatures. This type of zoning is especially valuable in homes with uneven sunlight, irregular use, or areas added later, such as enclosed porches, finished basements or garage conversions.

Traditional HVAC systems often heat or cool an entire home to the same temperature, even when some rooms are empty. With mini-splits, only occupied spaces need to be conditioned. This targeted approach reduces energy waste while improving comfort for the people who are actually in the room. Over time, this can lead to noticeable energy savings.

Installation of a ductless system is also far less invasive than installing a central air system. Conventional ductwork typically requires large openings and often necessitates structural modifications in older homes. In contrast, a mini-split typically needs only a small hole through the wall to connect the indoor and outdoor components. That makes it an ideal option for spaces where extending ductwork would be impractical.

The simplicity of installation also means shorter project timelines. Homeowners can often have a system running in a single day, depending on the number of indoor units. For homes with multiple zones, additional air handlers can be added gradually, allowing flexible upgrades as needs change.

Another strength of ductless systems is their efficiency rating. Mini-splits use inverter-driven compressors that adjust speed automatically to meet current demand. Rather than switching completely on and off like conventional systems, the compressor runs steadily at variable speeds. This reduces temperature fluctuations and avoids the surge of energy that comes with frequent cycling.

In addition to energy savings, ductless mini-splits can improve indoor air quality. Since there are no ducts to collect dust, pollen or mold, fewer particles circulate throughout the home. Some models include multi-stage filtration that removes allergens and small airborne contaminants. For households with respiratory concerns, this can significantly improve comfort.

Mini-splits are especially well-suited for homes that lack existing ductwork or where additions and remodels have created uneven heating and cooling. They also suit multi-family buildings and accessory dwelling units that require separate temperature control. Their quiet operation, compact design, and flexible installation make them appealing in both new construction and retrofits.

As energy standards and expectations to shift, ductless mini-split systems represent a modern response to traditional HVAC challenges. They deliver precise control, reliable performance, and energy efficiency. ■

Do you still have questions? Visit www.tripleahomeservices.com for additional information. Dale and Natasha love to answer questions. Give them a call at 515-868-2779.

WELLNESS

By Viktor Vali and Amy Anderson-Vali

BENEFITS of bioidentical hormones for couples

Bioidentical hormone replacement therapy can offer significant benefits for couples, extending beyond individual health improvements to positively impact their relationship dynamics. When both partners engage in hormone replacement therapy, they are three times more likely to achieve their health goals. This shared journey fosters a deeper connection and improved communication within the relationship.



Bioidentical hormone replacement therapy involves using hormones chemically identical to those naturally produced by the human body, often derived from plant sources. These hormones, including estrogen, progesterone and testosterone, are used to address symptoms of low or unbalanced hormone levels, commonly experienced during perimenopause, menopause or andropause. For couples, the benefits can be multifaceted. As individuals experience relief from symptoms such as fatigue, mood swings and decreased libido, their overall well-being improves, which, in turn, sparks renewed interest and satisfaction in the relationship. Sharing the experience of hormone replacement therapy can lead to increased desire for intimacy, more frequent date nights, and a general feeling of being “physically and emotionally awake” together. This mutual support and understanding during the treatment process can reinforce belief in each other and even save relationships that have been strained by hormone imbalances. ■

Information provided by Viktor Vali and Amy Anderson-Vali, owners, 4 Ever Young, 1180 S.E. University Ave., Waukee, 515-304-2324, www.4everyyoungantiaging.com

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HEALTH

By Mary Doherty, LISW

WELCOME to the Space Jam

You get the best of both worlds.

As a typical '90s child, I am in love with the reunions of both Space Jam and Hannah Montana. I can remember watching these growing up as a kid and wanting to watch them as I got older for nostalgic purposes. What is that for you? Music has an amazing ability to pull us into a previous situation, place or mindset. I can listen to Justin Bieber’s “Baby,” and I can remember being in the car with my best friend Kara singing our hearts out in the summer with the windows down. I can listen to “Bring ’Em Out” by T.I., and my heart starts to race a little as I feel like I am preparing for a track meet. Music can remind us of the great times, sad moments or silly times.



Music has the power to help your mindset no matter what mood you are in. I challenge you to put together a playlist of music for specific moods. Maybe, when you are feeling sad, you want to listen to slower music; maybe to get ready for work you listen to your favorite music that is more upbeat. Create a playlist to create the mood you want or the mood you are needing to feel. As the weather gets nicer and warmer, many start to feel better overall. Remember to lean into this feeling. As we know, weather can greatly affect our mood, as can music. For those of you who have records, I challenge you to bring those out and listen to music you used to listen to. Does this song transport you somewhere? ■

Information provide by Mary Doherty, LISW, Renewed Strength Counseling, 2910 Westown Parkway, Suite 314, West Des Moines, IA 50266, 515-809-2419.

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TURNING loss into lessons

Leedom helps families navigate dementia.

Terri Leedom turned the adversity she faced into a mission to help others — children and adults — understand the help their loved ones with dementia.



As Leedom watched her mother struggle with Lewy body dementia, she felt frustrated. Her mom told unusual stories and often didn't recognize Leedom during visits to her care facility.

As the disease progressed, Leedom realized other families might face similar situations and feelings of loss. Inspired by her experiences and a desire to help caregivers, she wrote two books: "My Silly Granny" and "Play the Game."

"My Silly Granny" is a picture book geared toward children. Its colorful illustrations and simple language help young readers understand why an older loved one may not act like themselves.

The book explains how "sometimes Granny's lights in her brain go out," comparing it to a thunderstorm. "It helps kids understand and not be afraid," Leedom says. "Sometimes kids feel uncomfortable with older people. Instead of thinking Grandpa is crazy, they can be compassionate."

The story reassures children that memory loss is not their fault. It encourages them to engage with their loved one through simple,



Ryan Mehalovich, Edward Jones, presents the Neighbor Spotlight certificate to Terri Leedom.

meaningful activities such as playing games, listening to music or asking about childhood memories. The final page emphasizes that, even when memories fade, love remains.

As Leedom promoted the book, adults began asking for resources for themselves. In response, she wrote "Play the Game," released in March.

The title reflects the book's central message.

"My mom used to share stories that weren't true, and I found myself arguing with her," Leedom says. "Obviously she wasn't thinking clearly."

Over time, she learned a different approach. By "playing the game," she would go along with whatever her mother said.

"If someone says their parent went on a train ride that morning, you take that trip with them," she says. "You step into their world instead of arguing about what isn't true. When caregivers play the game, it gives them peace."

The book also includes a checklist of early warning signs for dementia and Alzheimer's disease, along with caregiver tips and personal reflections.

"The last chapter is encouragement," Leedom says. "I felt so alone. It's hard to watch someone you love go down that road. Every day is unpredictable, and it's frustrating. The hope I want to give is that you're not alone. You're doing the best you can."

Through her writing, Leedom hopes others will feel less isolated.

"I've always been a helper," she says. "By writing these books, I'm fulfilling a purpose."

Leedom will read at Storytime! Des Moines April 18 at the DMACC West Campus and April 25 at Books and Brews at Confluence Brewing Company. More information about her books and events is available at www.terrileedom.com. ■

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WEST DES MOINES

Public Library news

Refresh your craft supplies at the library's craft swap.



Looking for a way to breathe new life into your craft projects — or hoping to share some of your gently used supplies? Our Craft Swap is the perfect opportunity.

Bring up to two grocery bags or boxes of clean, gently used craft materials to the library on Thursday, April 30, 4-8 p.m., or Friday, May 1, 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. When you drop off your items, staff will give you a “Golden Ticket” for early access to the swap on Saturday, May 2. Golden Ticket holders can shop from 10-11 a.m., with the full swap running 11 a.m. to 3 p.m.

You don't need to drop off materials to participate; everyone is welcome to browse and swap, whether you're sharing supplies or just hunting for new craft treasures.

Guidelines: Limit of two bags or boxes per person. Items should be clean and in good condition. Please, no glitter (it gets everywhere).

This is a fun way to refresh your supplies, discover unexpected materials, and connect with fellow makers in our community. Stop by, swap, and spark your creativity.

UPCOMING EVENT HIGHLIGHTS

• **Complimentary, My Dear - Watercolor Workshop, Tuesday, April 21, 7-8 p.m. (adults).**

Join us for a watercolor workshop to review the basics of watercolor and explore the various techniques to fix mistakes and enjoy the patient process of painting. Registration required.

• **Discover the Night Flyers of Iowa, Thursday, April 23, 4:15-5 p.m. (ages 13 and older).**

Join us for a fascinating journey into the world of bats. Learn about these mysterious and misunderstood creatures — their unique adaptations, vital role in ecosystems, and the myths that surround them. No registration needed. ■

West Des Moines Public Library

www.wdmlibrary.org
515-222-3400
4000 Mills Civic Parkway,
West Des Moines
Monday - Thursday: 9
a.m. to 9 p.m.
Friday: 9 a.m. to 6 p.m.
Saturday: 9 a.m. to 5 p.m.
Sunday: 2-5 p.m.

WHY SHOULD I write my obituary?

We all look at them. They help honor the memory of the person who died, and they serve as a notice of the death itself. Writing an obituary is essentially writing a life narrative. You have lived a lot of life, and there is no better way to get a zoomed-out view of yourself and your life than to write your own obituary. It is a life review.



It is an opportunity to identify details that make you proud, and you may even uncover areas of your life that you realize are unfinished. This can offer you an opportunity to reroute paths that may have led you astray from those accomplishments.

Some questions that can help you as you get started with this activity include:

- Are there specific things I want my family and friends to remember about me?
- What are the most important roles I have played in life?
- Is there any advice or guidance I want to pass along to others?
- What are my most important accomplishments, and what am I most proud of?

Advanced funeral planning is ultimately about making things easier for those you love. Writing your own obituary is a simple, but meaningful way to help accomplish this. ■

Information provided by Robert Christensen, Advanced Planning Counselor, Hamilton's Funeral Home, 515-697-3671

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

Upcoming in the West Des Moines / Jordan Creek Living magazine:

Farmers market vendors: Do you enjoy selling your products at local farmers markets? Tell us how you benefit from farmers markets and what tips you can share with others wanting to get involved. Email tammy@iowalivingmagazines.com.

Fishing: Share your stories about the enjoyment of fishing. Perhaps you fished with your father as a child, fished in an interesting place, participated in fishing competitions. If it is related to fishing, drop us a note! Email tammy@iowalivingmagazines.com.

West Des Moines Rotary Club 100th Anniversary Celebration

Tuesday, April 14, 5 p.m.
Des Moines Golf & Country Club,
1600 Jordan Creek Parkway,
West Des Moines

The West Des Moines Rotary Club will celebrate its 100th anniversary, marking a century of service and community impact in West Des Moines and central Iowa. The public celebration will include a dinner and a brief program recognizing the club's history and its contributions to local initiatives such as student bicycle programs, Valley High School scholarships, and the Valley Southwoods food pantry. More information including full details about the event and ticket information, as well as ways to support the Rotary Foundation's ongoing service projects, can be found at <https://givebutter.com/WDMRotary100>.



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.

WDM Elks Spring Style Show Fundraiser

Saturday, April 11,
10 a.m. to 3 p.m.
West Des Moines Elks Lodge No.
2752, 2060 N.W. 94th St., Clive

Tickets for the Spring Style Show are \$15 each or reserve a table for eight for \$140 or a table for four for \$70. Doors open at 10 a.m., with the style show starting at 11 a.m. and a salad luncheon to follow. Many vendors will be present, including Purple Poppy, Salon Classic and others. Funds raised will benefit Veterans Children's Christmas and other Elks charities and outreach.

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.

• 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.

Community Breakfast

April 24, 7-8 a.m.
Waukee Public Safety Building,
815 N.W. 20th St.

The public is invited to a community breakfast on April 24 at the new Waukee Public Safety Building. Enjoy a free breakfast while learning how you can support Scouting in the community. Breakfast will be served starting at 7 a.m., followed by a brief program at 7:15 a.m. The event will conclude by 8 a.m. For those interested, attendees will have the opportunity to stay afterward for a behind-the-scenes tour of the Public Safety Building. For more information or to register, contact Mark Haddinger, mark.haddinger@scouting.org or 515-587-8057.

Tori's Angels 2026

Thursday, April 26,
5:30-8:30 p.m.
Glen Oaks Country Club,
1401 Glen Oaks Drive, West
Des Moines

Celebrate 15 years of hope, helping Iowa children with life threatening illnesses by funding vital medical and travel expenses that are not covered by insurance, allowing them to pursue life-saving treatments and cures. For more information contact Patty Reeve at 515-238-3829 or patty@torisangels.org. www.TorisAngels.org

Hands On History Camps

June 15-19, July 6-10 and Aug. 10-14

Registration is now open for the 2026 Hands On History Camps for ages 9 to 13. Campers will experience history in a unique way with the West Des Moines Historical Society. Get hands-on with pioneer skills at the Jordan House and Bennett School: start a fire with flint, learn from Paleo Iowa, churn butter, and more. Don't just read about the past, live it. Register at www.wdm.iowa.gov/government/parks-recreation/program-registration.

EVENTS IN THE AREA

Check for cancellations

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



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. Visit GiveLife5K.com.

Des Moines Art Center Museum Highlights Tour

Saturdays, 1-2 p.m.

Des Moines Art Center, 4700 Grand Ave., Des Moines

Discover the vast variety of the Des Moines Art Center's permanent collections during the Museum Highlights Tour. This tour offers a unique journey through the galleries, featuring a selection of timeless paintings, sculptures and more. Join knowledgeable guides to uncover the stories, techniques and inspirations behind the art on view, and experience the highlights of the Art Center in a fresh and engaging way. This guided tour is perfect for art enthusiasts of all ages. Free to all, no registration required.

Bill Owens: Work and Leisure

Through April 19

John Brady Print Gallery, Des Moines Art Center, 4700 Grand Ave., Des Moines

Bill Owens documented the suburbs in the 1970s, capturing the lives of prosperous, predominantly white Americans at a moment after the cultural shifts of the 1960s but before the dawn of the digital age of computers and video games in the 1980s. His photographs were compiled in the best-selling coffee table books "Leisure" (1972), "Our Kind of People" (1975), and "Working: I Do It For the Money" (1977). The images in this exhibition, taken from all three of these series and shot mainly in California and the Midwest, reveal Owens' unique comedic eye as he seems to lightly poke fun at his subjects while clearly enjoying their company, finding both the genuine and the absurd in everyday life. ■

Gary's Ride

Saturday, May 16, 10 a.m. to 2 p.m.
Starting at Waukee Raccoon River Valley Trailhead, Waukee

This ride is a fundraiser 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 us to "pedal" forward in reaching the funding goal of \$65,000 and be the difference for these loved ones and their families afflicted by terminal brain cancer/Glioblastoma. The ride ends at Dallas Center downtown Main Street. Registration and Information available at garysrideiowa.org.



Des Moines Community Orchestra Spring Concert

Sunday, May 10, 2 p.m.

NOTE: Change in venue:
Valley High School's Staplin Auditorium, 3650 Woodland Ave., West Des Moines

Enjoy the Des Moines Community Orchestra in concert with guest conductor Kara Mather and featured soloist Dr. Kevin Allemagne on the clarinet.

Can Play Fore All Golf Outing

Friday, April 24, 3-7 p.m.

RecPlex 6500 Grand Ave., West Des Moines

Join Can Play and the 2026 West Des Moines Leadership Academy for a fun, small-format golf outing supporting accessible outdoor recreation and youth programming. Golfers will play through a creative course designed by community members and local businesses, built entirely from non-perishable food items to benefit Can Play's programming. All proceeds will benefit Can Play, whose mission is to bring adapted and no cost recreational programs to our communities by removing barriers to play. Register and donate online at <https://givebutter.com/WDMLA>.



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ESTATE planning and power of attorney

One important component of any comprehensive estate plan is a durable financial power of attorney. While a last will and testament or a revocable living trust directs the distribution of your assets after you die, a power of attorney addresses your financial matters during your lifetime.

A power of attorney (POA) is a legal document that authorizes another person, known as your “agent” or “attorney-in-fact,” to act on your behalf with respect to your financial decisions. The agent will have the authority to do everything you can, which ensures a seamless continuation of financial control. When the document is designated as “durable,” it remains effective even if you become incompetent, which is particularly important for long-term planning.

Creating a POA allows you to hand-pick a trusted individual to handle your assets if you cannot. Most people choose a spouse, adult child, or another reliable family member or friend. It is also prudent to name a successor agent in case your primary choice is unable or unwilling to serve. Some individuals even appoint co-agents and specify whether they may act independently or must act jointly, depending on the level of oversight and collaboration you desire.

Importantly, establishing a POA does not mean giving up control



over your finances. Your agent has no authority unless and until the conditions you specify are met. You can require written confirmation from medical providers stating that you can no longer manage your affairs. Such safeguards ensure your agent steps in only when truly necessary.

You retain the ability to revoke or amend your power of attorney at any time as long as you remain competent. This flexibility allows your estate plan to evolve as your circumstances change.

By contrast, if you do not have a POA in place and you become unable to manage your affairs, someone will have to petition the court to establish a conservatorship. Conservatorships can be a time-consuming, contentious and expensive legal process. The court has to review evidence of medical records, psychiatric examinations, and other evidence to prove that you are incompetent. The conservator appointed by the court may not be who you would choose; it could even be a neutral third party who doesn't know you at all.

A properly prepared power of attorney is a straightforward yet powerful tool to ensure your finances remain in trusted hands and out of the court system. Consult an experienced attorney to review or update your POA and the rest of your estate planning documents. ■

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

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HUBBELL Realty Company names Gamble president and CEO



Kyle Gamble, president and CEO, Hubbell Realty Company

Hubbell Realty Company has named Kyle Gamble president and CEO, as longtime past CEO Rick Tollakson officially retires.

Gamble, formerly president and chief operating officer, is a lifelong Iowan who has spent 32 years at Hubbell in various key leadership roles across brokerage, operations, management and strategic development. Gamble joined Hubbell in 1994 and spent 18 years as the managing director for CBRE | Hubbell Commercial, leading office, retail, industrial and multifamily teams. Following his time with CBRE, Gamble continued to be promoted to expanded leadership roles at Hubbell, ultimately being promoted to executive vice president. In this role, Gamble has provided strategic oversight for 16 business units spanning commercial and residential real estate, including property management, development, construction, homebuilding and asset management. Over the past several years, he has been responsible for setting companywide strategy, aligning operational performance with long-term growth goals, and ensuring consistency in culture, financial discipline and customer experience across Hubbell's diverse portfolio.

"Hubbell, our associates, and the community are in good hands with Kyle. His extensive market experience, balanced leadership, and deep understanding of the Iowa and Midwest real estate markets position him well to guide the company's next chapter," Tollakson said in a recent interview.

"I'm honored to step into this role for one of the longest-standing real estate companies in the state. As Hubbell celebrates 170 years of business, our commitment remains firm to our customers, shareholders and associates to deliver the best-in-class real estate services possible," said Gamble. ■

MEET Piet Van der Meer

Helping to build the "foundation" for society

Piet Van der Meer followed a unique path to his current position as a Spanish teacher at Valley High School. Born in Spain, he remembers the education system was a "little more strict" and more focused on grades than the American system he is now a part of. Interestingly, teaching wasn't his original plan: He initially intended to become an electrician. However, he eventually decided to move to the United States to pursue a college education and become a teacher.



Piet Van der Meer, who was born in Spain, teaches Spanish at Valley High School.

After graduating, he began his career at St. Edmond's Catholic in Fort Dodge before moving to Panorama High. He eventually transitioned to Valley High School, where he has taught in the world language department ever since.

While his teaching style always carries a "Spanish touch," Van der Meer says he continually adapts and improves his lessons because he believes it's crucial "to be self-aware" as an educator. He primarily teaches Spanish IV, which is typically content-heavy and fast-paced. This year, he cut down on content in order to help students learn the material more comprehensively. He also introduced dedicated reading time each Friday to expose his students to Spanish literature.

When asked what his thoughts are on AI in the education field, Van der Meer says he "just started using [AI] this year." While he doesn't use the technology daily, he finds that, when he needs it, "it's really helpful."

For Van der Meer, the personal aspect of his career is the most rewarding. He makes an intentional effort to help students enjoy their time in class because "there's always a part" of the class who "don't want to be here," he says. He likes "making students smile... and it's free."

One of the ways he consistently makes students smile is through what he calls his "undercover jokes" or "micro-jokes," which usually involve him saying something unexpected or giving an unserious answer to a question.

He concedes that a massive amount of work "goes on behind the scenes" of his job: "lots of prep, lots of paperwork or electronic work, and lots of meetings." Overall, he feels that teachers are "sometimes overloaded." Despite this, his job is "really rewarding."

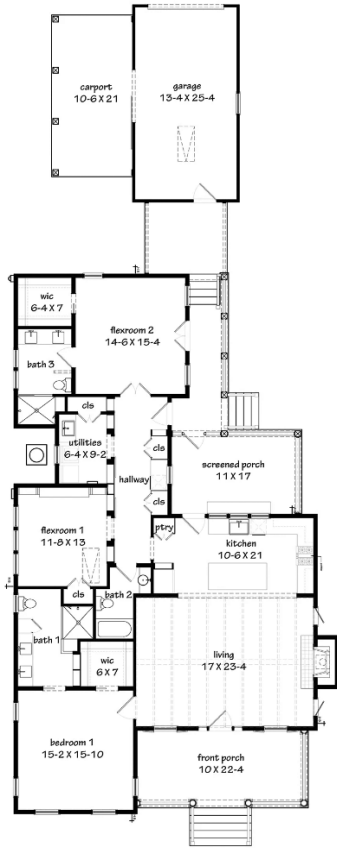
"We are building the foundation for our society," Van der Meer says. "We are forming good citizens." ■

Bethany Asper is a student at Valley High School.

ADAPTIVE cottage house plan

This house was designed as an adaptive home in conjunction with the Parkinson's Foundation. With three bedrooms and three baths across a single-level layout, the Adaptive Cottage offers accessible living features ideal for aging in place. A rear-entry garage connected by breezeway, spacious bedrooms, and open living spaces provides both comfort and flexibility for long-term living. The traditional Southern exterior is thoughtfully crafted to blend into existing neighborhoods while supporting independence and ease of use inside.

The traditional but comfortable nature of the architecture is designed to blend seamlessly into a traditional neighborhood or existing community. ■



SPECIFICATIONS

Floors: 1
Bedrooms: 3
Bathrooms: 3.0
Foundation(s): Slab
SQUARE FEET
Main Floor: 1,966
Total Conditioned: 1,966

Rear Porch: 113
Garage: 585

DIMENSIONS

Width: 42'-8"
Depth: 71'-2"
Height: 24'-4"

HOUSE LEVELS

Level Name Ceiling

Heights

Main Floor 10'-0"

CONSTRUCTION

Wall Construction: 2x6
Exterior Finish: Lap Siding
Roof Pitch: 10:12

FEATURES

Kitchen: Island, Pantry

Primary Bedroom: Double Sink, Shower, Walk-in Closet
Additional: Fireplace, Porch, Screened Porch

GARAGE

Type	Size
Carport	1 - Stall
Attached	1 - Stall

RUSH Hour

West Des Moines Chamber of Commerce March Rush Hour was held at Gilbert & Cook Inc. on March 26.



Rosa Vargas Brito, Terry Ebke and Ruth Ebke



Frank Accurson, Nick Haselhuhn and Kathy Uthe



Frank Hanson and Janet Hanson



Gil Coosner and Rudy Pineda



Kathy Uthe and Keesha Ward



Everett Mullican and Lauren Watson



Connie Blodgett and Tom Florian



Brandon Carlson and Gilmara Mitchell



Mikael Nobles, Katie Gross and Faiza Omar



Catherine Schut, Kailey Beebe and Kayli Mernka



Cara Shindler and Jared Galligan

OUT & ABOUT



Evan Owen and Randy Walz



Brittney Strader, Matthew Tate and Lauren Wilgenbusch



Zach Ripka and Ben Geiger



Jerit Tripp and Austin Peterson



Sheryl Bennett, Jeff Schauer and Lauren Bellis



Sean Lee and Ruth Ebke



Catherine Schut, Rudy Pineda and Keesha Ward



Cristi Setchell and Anne Wheeler



Cristi Setchell, Ryan Lamoureux and Nick Waller



Jay Mathes and Chris Cook



Edgar Ortiz and Al Ryerson



Reonna Snyder and Melanie Lane

CLASSIFIEDS

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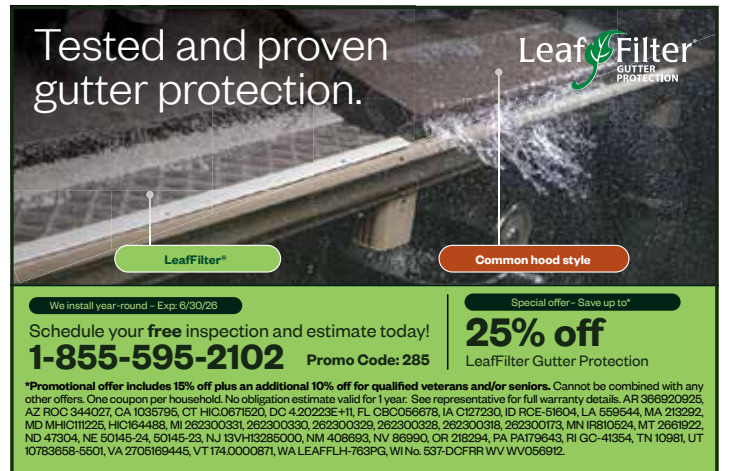
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