

Living

MAGAZINE

Celebrating HERITAGE

Residents reflect on the traditions that connect them to home

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EDUCATION

The comfort of a savory lasagna
RECIPE

Larsen shares her passion for volleyball
GOOD NEIGHBOR

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Spending 20–30 minutes in your garden can help lower stress, improve mood, and boost vitamin D from natural sunlight. It also puts fresh, homegrown food within reach, making it easier to eat healthier and save on groceries.

Start Your Spring Garden Right

A few simple steps can set your garden up for success this season.

Step 1: Decide what to grow

Choose between vegetables, herbs, or flowers based on your space and what you'll actually use or enjoy.

Step 2: Pick the right location

Look for a spot that gets 6 to 8 hours of sunlight each day for the best results.

Step 3: Prepare your soil

Loosen the soil in your planting beds so roots can grow easily and reach water and nutrients.

Step 4: Start planting

Plant your seeds or plants according to spacing and depth guidelines for healthy growth.

Step 5: Water consistently

Keep seedlings moist with daily watering, then taper off as plants mature and become established.

Spring Clean Up 2026

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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 Lindsey Giardino

For Giancarlo “John” Amato and Tracie Gregson, heritage isn’t just history — it is lived every day in the kitchen, at the dinner table and in the family rituals that have been passed down for generations. From homemade pasta sauce to backyard gardens, their Italian roots shape not only the food they eat but the way they connect, celebrate and carry their family stories forward.

Giancarlo “John” Amato and Betsy during a trip to Italy.



The Amato family

Preserving Italian connections

Giancarlo “John” Amato and his wife, Betsy, have built a family life deeply rooted in their Italian heritage — one shaped by tradition, food and a devotion to togetherness.

Their kitchen remains the heart of that legacy. They still make Italian dishes by hand, and the family pasta sauce recipe — passed down from Amato’s mother — has become a treasured heirloom. In 2022, Amato printed the recipe on notecards and tied them to small wooden spoons as thoughtful gifts for guests.

The holidays are when Amato’s family traditions especially come to life. Each Christmas Eve, the Amatos gather for an Italian dinner and wine, filling the house with aromas and rituals that have surrounded their family for generations. They also make a point to come together for major sporting events, including soccer matches, fall football games and golf tournaments, indulging in food and drink.

“This is remarkable because all of our kids are in their 40s and have kids of their own,” Amato says.

His pride in his heritage traces back to his childhood. Amato grew up with a father who

immigrated from Italy to the United States in the early 1950s. His mother, who was of French and Irish descent, was born in the United States, but the Italian influence in the household was unmistakable.

“My dad did instill a sense of pride in our Italian heritage, and we were able to spend a month there every summer growing up,” Amato says. “We loved the lifestyle, the food, the love for soccer and the bond of our family.”

Those summers in Italy became defining memories. Thanks to his father’s airline employee discount, the family spent every August abroad. As an adult, Amato has returned to Italy several times, but none more meaningful than a two-week trip in 2022 with all five immediate family members to celebrate his and Betsy’s 40th wedding anniversary and renew their vows.

Even as genetic testing introduced unexpected nuances to his mother’s lineage, his father’s side remained exactly as he had always known it. Through it all, Amato’s sense of identity has never wavered.

“Even though I am only half Italian, my Italian looks, dark skin and a name like

Giancarlo Amato make people believe I am full-blooded,” he says. “I am OK with that since it has been the primary family trait all of my life.”

For Amato, heritage is a living, breathing part of family life — found in the food, the gatherings, the stories and the Italian pride he continues to pass down to the next generation.

The influence of grandparents

Like Amato, Tracie Gregson’s heritage is less a history lesson and more a personal map. It is shaped by family, food and the influence of her Italian grandparents.

Her grandfather emigrated from Calabria to the United States, eventually meeting his American-born wife and building a life on the south side of Des Moines.

“That home became the heart of our family,” Gregson says.

Her most vivid memories are rooted in the soil of their backyard garden. They grew their own vegetables and fruit, ensuring almost everything that reached the dinner table began in the earth — a testament to the self-sufficient lifestyle they cultivated together.

“In addition, my grandmother made everything from scratch — bread, pasta sauce, meatballs and desserts,” Gregson recalls. “One dessert in particular always stood out to me: tea ring. It wasn’t just something she baked but something she made with care, tradition and love.”

To this day, the family’s holiday table remains a tribute to those recipes. Passed from her grandmother to her mother and now to Gregson, these dishes remain the centerpiece of every gathering.

“Cooking has always been how we gather, remember and honor where we come from,” Gregson says. “I’m fortunate to still use the homemade bread, tea ring and cinnamon roll recipes in my in-home bakery today. I also plan to incorporate more of her bread recipes, keeping those traditions alive in a meaningful way.”

Heritage, however, often carries a few surprises. For years, Gregson assumed the beloved tea ring was a staple of the Italian countryside. She later discovered its origins are actually Swedish.

“Even so, in my family, it’s become part of



Tracie Gregson's Italian grandmother

our Italian American tradition — proof that recipes evolve along with the people who make them,” Gregson says.

While Gregson continues to keep the family’s culinary flame alive in Des Moines,



Tracie Gregson's Italian grandparents' wedding photo

she hopes to one day travel to her grandfather’s birthplace.

“I would love to visit Calabria, Italy, where my grandfather was born, and see firsthand the place where our family story began,” she says. ■

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LOOKING BACK



The April 2016 North Polk Living magazine featured the story, “A night to remember: A look at prom past and present.” The cover photo featured Sarina Johnston and her mom, Beth. Also interviewed were Susan Horness, who was looking forward to her first prom, and Kathleen McCombs, who recalled wearing long white gloves to prom during the 1960s. ■

TAKE OUR POLL

APRIL IS NATIONAL HOPE MONTH. Which do you hope for most?

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THE IMPORTANCE of routine care

Last winter, our 12-year-old basset mix, Glory, became ill — suddenly and without warning — with a severe case of liver disease. Because she had just had wellness bloodwork and a dental cleaning three months prior, we were able to quickly narrow down the likely causes to infection or toxin and treat accordingly. She rallied quickly and was back to her normal self within a few days.



Wellness care is one of the most overlooked aspects of veterinary medicine. Skipping a routine visit can feel harmless, especially when life gets busy, budgets get tight, or your pet is acting completely normal.

If that sounds familiar, you're not alone.

The tricky part? Our pets are very good at hiding early signs of illness. Most of the time, the problems we see aren't truly sudden, they have just been subtle. By the time something is

obvious, it has often been developing for weeks or even months.

While this wasn't the case with Glory, her recent bloodwork gave us a normal baseline, which allowed us to quickly determine that this was not a chronic issue and treat accordingly.

Routine visits help us establish what "normal" looks like for your pet and give us a chance to catch subtle changes you might not notice at home. Small shifts in weight, early dental disease, changes in mobility, or mild lab abnormalities can all be early indicators of bigger issues down the road.

When we catch these things early, they are often simple to manage. When we don't, they tend to become more involved, requiring more treatment, more time, and often more cost.

We see this every day. Dental disease that starts as mild tartar can progress to painful infections and extractions. Parasites picked up during the warmer months can lead to chronic or even life-threatening illness if left unchecked. Chronic conditions like kidney

disease or thyroid imbalances often begin with subtle changes that are much easier to manage when caught early.

Wellness care is more than updating vaccines or a yearly visit (or two for senior pets): It is about staying ahead of problems through routine exams, bloodwork and parasite prevention. It also gives us a chance to talk through nutrition, behavior, mobility and all those "I've been meaning to ask about this..." questions.

Investing in routine preventative care is one of the simplest ways to protect your pet's quality of life. We can catch problems earlier, reduce stress down the road, and help them stay healthier for longer.

It may not always feel urgent in the moment, but, over time, it makes all the difference. ■

Information provided by Dr. Amanda Gigler, Ankeny Animal & Avian Clinic, 742 S. Ankeny Blvd., Ankeny, 515-964-7387, amandagigler@ankenyanimal.com.

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**Dr. Amanda Gigler,
co-owner**

What is the most rewarding part of your job? The most rewarding part of my job is building meaningful relationships with clients and helping them care for their pets in ways that fit their lives. I love growing alongside families and supporting them through every stage of their pet's life.

What is a patient species that still surprises you? Birds! They have such varied personalities and are so very smart. They are always amazing to me with their resilience and their ability to heal, sometimes despite the odds.

How long have you been a veterinarian? I've been at Ankeny Animal and Avian Clinic since 2009, after graduating from Iowa State University. In 2017, my partner Katie and I purchased the clinic and have continued its legacy of personalized care while focusing on improving the lives of our patients, clients, and team.

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AT-HOME CARE helps people stay 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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WHAT ARE the benefits of having a will?

Nobody wants to think about how their loved ones will cope when they die, but it is important to plan effectively to ensure a smooth transition of your wealth. An estate plan is the legal documents that outline who you want to be in charge of settling your affairs and where you want your assets to pass. It can include a will, powers of attorney, trusts and more.



One of the most important documents is a last will and testament. A will nominates an executor who will be responsible for wrapping up your estate: paying final bills, selling assets and distributing your wealth to your beneficiaries.

Naming beneficiaries is one of the essential parts of a will. You might want to

leave everything equally to your children. Perhaps one of your siblings is estranged from you. Maybe a child with special needs cannot receive money directly. You may want to make a special bequest to a charity. A will contains instructions for making these final distributions.

Without a will, however, state law decides who receives your assets. That can lead to a long, stressful court process. The law doesn't take personal preference or family dynamics into consideration when the intestate statute is applied. Instead, there are broad categories of people who receive your money.

In one case our firm handled, the decedent's wife predeceased him, and they didn't have any children. In fact, he didn't have any immediate relatives at all because both he and his wife were only children. We identified 26 different remote relatives, many of whom were second cousins once- or twice-removed.

Although we may be inadvertently responsible for a huge family reunion, this amateur genealogy could have been avoided by simply drafting a will.

Life events, like getting married, changing careers, or having your children leave home often mean it is time to review your plan. More serious events — the death of a loved one, inheriting a sum of money, or receiving a concerning medical diagnosis — are also good reasons to review and update.

Estate planning is easy to ignore, because it involves thinking about death and visiting a lawyer. Procrastinating is easy. Turn to a reputable attorney who practices in estate planning to help you craft the best plan for you. ■

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

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KIWANIS Seniors of the Month

Amelia Growdon, Lauren Croft and Reagan Petersen have been named Kiwanis Seniors of the Month.



Amelia Growdon

Amelia Growdon is the daughter of Scott Growdon and Jill Zwagerman and sibling of Hattie Growdon and Leo Growdon.

“As a highly driven student passionate about science and foreign languages, I have balanced a demanding schedule of varsity athletics, earning letters in volleyball, soccer, and state-contending basketball, with intense musical involvement, including All-State Choir, band, and musicals. My commitment to excellence extends to the classroom and community, where I serve through the Student Council, multiple National Honor Societies, and tutoring in STEM subjects. Following graduation, I plan to pursue a pre-med track majoring in biology to become an orthopedic surgeon, while also minoring in music and aiming to continue to play club sports at a collegiate level.”

Amelia’s honors include: All-State Choir, Varsity letter in all three sports, Soccer Academic All-state, Soccer Honorable Mention, best drum major award for marching band, State semifinalist Basketball 2024, State runner-up Basketball 2025, State Quarter-finalist Basketball 2026, State Runner-Up Soccer 2024, Conference Champions Basketball 2023-2024, and 2024-2025, Conference Champions Soccer 2024, and 2025.



Lauren Croft

Lauren Croft is the daughter of Mary Croft and Aaron Croft and sibling to Ava and Adam. She has been involved in Dance Team, Key Club, Spanish Honor Society, National Honor Society, Principal’s Council, Math Honor Society and Science Club. She has been on the Gold Honor Roll and President’s List. She is involved in Studio Dance and tutoring.

“I am heavily involved within my school and community. Through all my clubs I am actively involved in, I am able to further help out while gaining important life-long skills. While being involved in my community, I have also excelled academically, shown by my honors/awards and being able to earn an associates of science degree while still in high school. In the future, I will be attending the University of Iowa to major in biology on the pre-PA track in hopes of becoming a surgical PA.”



Reagan Petersen

Reagan Petersen is the daughter of Chris and Gina Petersen of Polk City and sister of Cale, Drew and Emery. Her favorite subject is anatomy.

“Some things that I enjoy doing in my free time are reading, exercising, staying busy and spending time with family and friends. I continue to stay involved in school through National Honor Society and the Gold Honor Roll. After this school volleyball season, I was awarded Second Team All-Conference and was leading the state in blocks at the start of the season. I’m so excited to attend Central after graduation, where I’ll get to play college volleyball while starting my journey toward a career in nursing. My goal after college is to become a travel nurse.”

Regan is also a member of the Spanish National Honor Society and on the Gold honor roll. She is active at church and works as a nanny, babysitter and at Ziggi’s. ■

Fresh Listings are Blooming!



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REAL ESTATE

By Jacquelyn Duke

NAVIGATING the transition

Selling your home is a major milestone but doing it with kids in tow adds a unique layer of complexity. In our vibrant central Iowa communities — from the bustling neighborhoods of Ankeny to the quiet lakeside streets of Polk City — the spring market moves fast. Transitioning smoothly requires a balance of strategic staging and family sanity. Here are three tips to help navigate the move:



1. The “stay-ready” kit: Keeping a home “show-ready” can feel like a full-time job. Create a “quick-clear” bin for each child. Ten minutes before a showing, have them do a “speed sweep” of toys. It gamifies the process and ensures your living room remains a pristine canvas for buyers.

2. Highlight local family perks: We aren't just selling four walls; we're selling a lifestyle. Mention your favorite spots, like proximity to the High Trestle Trail or the high-ranking North Polk Community School District. Highlighting neighborhood favorites, like the library's youth programs, can be a huge draw for young families.

3. The farewell tour: Moving is emotional for little ones. Before the boxes are packed, take a tour of your favorite haunts. Providing closure builds excitement for the next adventure.

By involving the whole family and highlighting the community perks that made you fall in love with the area, you turn a stressful transition into a shared success. ■

Information provided by Jacquelyn Duke REALTOR®, CRS, e-PRO, Realty One Group Impact, 617 S.W. Third St., Ankeny, IA 50023, 515-240-7483, jacquelyn@sellingcentraliowa.com, www.SellingCentralIowa.com.

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INVESTMENT

By Kyle Matzen

EMERGENCY funds offer breathing room when it matters

Life has a way of surprising us, whether it's a blown tire, a broken appliance or an unexpected medical bill. With no savings to fall back on, even a small emergency can become a big one.

That's why an emergency savings fund matters.

You don't need thousands of dollars on day one. Just begin with a simple goal, like saving \$500 by a certain date. Even that small cushion can help you weather sudden expenses and keep you from relying on credit cards or high interest loans you will need to pay off later.

Instead, look for money you can redirect without major sacrifice. Set up a small automatic transfer each payday or cancel a subscription you never use. Or save part of your annual tax refund if you receive one. Put the money in a separate savings account that's easy to access and earns a little interest.

Progress is what counts. Start small, keep going and give yourself a safety net for when you need it. ■



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MEET Aaron Dose

Inspiring curiosity through science



Aaron Dose pursued a career as a science teacher after encouraged to do so by a professor.

Aaron Dose and his family are deeply connected to the North Polk Community School District. This is Dose's 14th year teaching, seven of which have been at North Polk.

He teaches earth science, zoology and DMACC environmental science at the high school. His wife, Lyndsey Dose, started as an English teacher in the district and is now moving into the high school assistant principal role. Their daughter, Aspen, is in first grade at Central Elementary, and their son, Leo, is in preschool and will soon be a Comet as well.

Dose never expected to pursue education. As a communications major at UNI, however, a biology professor encouraged him to explore science and science teaching.

"I switched my major that semester and haven't looked back," Dose says.

He earned his bachelor's degree in 2012 and later a master's degree in science education from Montana State University in 2020.

Dose says he and his wife were initially drawn to central Iowa and the North Polk community because it served as a midpoint between his family in western Iowa and Lyndsey's family in southeast Iowa. Both have found fulfillment working in the district.

For Dose, teaching science is an extension of his love for the subject and the outdoors.

"I love to build curiosity in my students and



give them hands-on experiences in science that spark their interest," he says. "I have also greatly enjoyed working with the North Polk staff. My wife and I have made many lifelong friends while teaching here."

One of the most challenging — yet rewarding — aspects of teaching, Dose says, is the constant evolution of curriculum.

"Our high school science department strives to keep our lessons up to date with both real-world applications and the current best practices in science teaching," he says.

The effort pays off, especially when students pursue science careers.

"It is very fulfilling when they come back and tell us their journey to a science career started at North Polk High School," Dose says. "Most of my favorite teaching memories have happened during outdoor lessons, especially near our Fourmile Creek location west of the high school. It is great seeing students step out of their comfort zones, get muddy and do real science."

For aspiring teachers and coaches, Dose offers this advice: "Don't be afraid to try new things and challenge yourself by stepping out of your comfort zone. Show humility and always be open to learning." ■

LARSEN shares her passion for the game

Volunteers power Comet Volleyball Club.

For Brittany Larsen, being part of the Comet Volleyball Club is an opportunity to coach both of her daughters while sharing her lifelong passion for the sport.



“It has been very memorable teaching them volleyball skills and seeing their excitement and skill level develop over the years,” she says.

The club is a youth volleyball program for North Polk athletes in fourth through eighth grade. It offers skill sessions in the fall for fourth-through sixth-grade athletes, focusing on fundamental techniques. Athletes can also choose to play competitively with their grade level during the winter season.

The Comet Volleyball Club partners with North Polk High School staff, giving athletes opportunities to attend camps and open gyms in the summer.

Coaching for the club allows Larsen to share her experience and love of the game.

“I grew up watching my mom coach, and then I played competitively



Natalie St. John presents Brittany Larsen with the Good Neighbor certificate.

for years, so being actively involved in the sport in some capacity brings me a lot of joy,” Larsen says. “I hope to use my knowledge to help develop skills and excitement for the North Polk volleyball program.”

One of Larsen’s favorite moments as a volunteer coach comes in the fall, when the Comet Volleyball Club hosts Youth Night during a home high school match.

Attendees collect posters, create locker room signs, form a tunnel for the team and cheer on the high school players.

“It is a great way for young athletes to gain excitement and envision their future in volleyball,” Larsen says. “We have seen many athletes attend events over the years, and it has been rewarding to watch their growth. Volleyball is a challenging sport to learn, so seeing athletes work hard and improve year to year is exciting.”

Another highlight of volunteering has been the friendships formed along the way. Larsen enjoys watching athletes connect with new teammates and bond over a shared interest.

“As an adult volunteer, we have developed friendships as well through coaching with other volunteers and working with a variety of teams and families,” she adds.

Larsen is one of many parent volunteers who make the Comet Volleyball Club possible. This past season, 160 athletes participated, forming 16 teams. In total, 32 volunteer coaches dedicated time to planning practices, attending clinics and coaching weekend tournaments.

The club also hosted a two-day home tournament where parent volunteers coached, set up and tore down equipment, and operated the concession stand.

“The Comet Volleyball Club would not be successful without the support and commitment of these parent volunteers,” Larsen says. “We are very fortunate to be part of a community with volunteers dedicated to providing positive experiences for young athletes.” ■



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– Jerad & Anna,
Johnston, IA

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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:

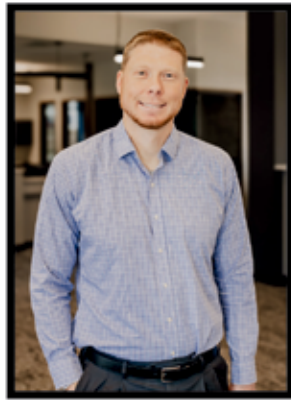
- Brown hamburger and drain grease. Set aside. In the same pan, coat with cooking spray, sauté onion and garlic for 5 minutes. Add beef back in. Add 2 tablespoons parsley, chopped whole tomatoes and next six ingredients. Bring to a boil. Reduce heat, cover and simmer for 20 minutes. Uncover and simmer 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. ■

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FINANCE

By Jason Kerndt

SMART ways to reinvest your tax return

It's always exciting to see a return on your taxes. You may even feel like you won the lottery, depending on how much you receive. While it may be tempting to go and spend it on a shopping spree, there are some more financially responsible ways to use those returning dollars in your account.



Pay off debts

If you are carrying debt, this is the first item you will want to spend your return on. Lowering or eliminating debt not only reduces or removes the interest you are paying but will also keep more money in your account because you won't be paying on these debts.

Create or replenish emergency funds

The one thing you can count on in life is change. Sometimes change comes with a cost. From an unexpected car repair to a medical bill or something else, big expenses can be lurking around the corner. Emergency funds are a way to safeguard you from unnecessary debt and financial strain. If you don't have an emergency fund, use some of your return to create one. If you already have one, add a little extra to it to build it up.

Extra mortgage payment

If you have a mortgage, paying an extra month or two is a great way to save money down the road since it reduces the interest you pay.

Add to savings

Are you saving up for a home, a car, or maybe a family vacation? Putting your return into a good savings account can help you build your savings faster. Many financial institutions offer vacation and Christmas accounts to help you save faster. Consider putting a percentage of your return in one of these accounts.

Invest

Investments are great ways to save for all of life's milestones. Whether you have a 529 Plan for your children, are looking to create a retirement fund, or want to just have your money work harder for you, there are investment strategies that can support your short-term and long-term goals.

There are plenty of ways to make your tax refund work harder for you. One of the smartest first steps is to schedule a conversation with your banker, who can help you explore strategies to maximize your return's impact, whether you are looking to strengthen your finances now or plan for the future. ■

Home State Bank is dedicated to keeping our customers and communities safe through fraud education and best practices. Contact your banker to learn more about common frauds, safety tips, and how to ensure peace of mind during tax season. Information provided by Jason Kerndt, Market President, 515-329-8812, HomeState Bank, 101 E. Bridge Road, Polk City.

EVENTS IN THE AREA

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

Be sure to check for cancellations.

Note about calendar events: This magazine is delivered the third Thursday of each month. Calendar items included are events happening after the delivery date and extend into the following month. If you receive and read your magazine upon delivery, you will not miss out on any calendar items.

Kiwanis Not So New Newlywed Game

Thursday, April 16 at 6 p.m.

Miller Park Community Room

Join your neighbors for a night of laughs and snacks. This event is open to everyone, not just Kiwanis members.

Ankeny Art Center Arts Festival

Saturday, May 16, 10 a.m. to 4 p.m.

1520 S.W. Ordnance Road, Ankeny

The festival will transform several streets of Ankeny's Historic Uptown into a vibrant celebration of creativity and artistic expression. More than 50 artist booths, live music, artist demonstrations, food trucks, and entertainment for adults and children will keep attendees engaged all day.

Everything You Wanted To Know About AI in Your Life

Thursday, May 21 at 6 p.m.

Luana Bank Community Room

Alex Current, IT Security professional, will discuss how AI may affect our future, how to use it to enhance our lives, and steps for safeguarding ourselves. Open to the public.

Des Moines Art Center Museum Highlights Tour

Saturdays, 1-2 p.m.

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.

Historical Society Programs coming up

Big Creek Historical Society,
116 S. Third St., Polk City

• Home Away From Home:

May 12, 6 p.m. Presented by Camp Dodge Museum Curator Mike Vogt. Camp Dodge was one of 16 training camps for WWI draftees. Period images, maps and letters will detail the first time many of these young men had left home. This is a program from the Humanities Iowa Speakers Bureau.

• The Dragoon Trail as Hiked by Kevin Mason: June 4, 6 p.m.

Presented by Assistant Professor of History at UNI Kevin Mason. The story begins with the 1835 expedition of the First U.S. Dragoons. With archival records, maps, indigenous histories and ecological data, Mason will explore how Iowa's prairies and wetlands gave way to farms, towns and transportation networks.



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Be sure to check for cancellations.

Polk County Conservation events

Visit www.polkcountyiowa.gov/conservation/events for information about upcoming programs offered by Polk County Conservation and for registration links.

- Sandhill Crane Count. Saturday, April 18, 6-8:30 a.m. Chichaqua Bottoms Greenbelt, 8700 N.E. 126 Ave., Maxwell. Experience the comeback of midwestern cranes by participating in this exciting wildlife monitoring event as part of the International Crane Foundation's Annual Midwest Crane Count. In partnership with the International Crane Foundation, Polk County Conservation is calling all bird lovers, newcomers and avid hobbyists to assist in our annual Sandhill Crane count. Driving and walking routes will be available at Chichaqua Bottoms Greenbelt to encourage encounters for all types of accessibilities. Participants will need to be familiar with using GPS to record locations of sightings on their phones or other devices. This event is appropriate for all ages. Younger than 16 require adult supervision. No experience necessary, and all training is provided. Registration required by noon the day prior.

- Wake Up with Spring. Wednesdays in April, 2-3:30 p.m. Jester Park Wetland Shelter, 12130 N.W. 128th St., Granger. Join ISU Polk County Extension and Polk County Conservation for this walking series. Polk County Conservation naturalists will lead participants on a walk through the park while discussing a new nature theme each week. Themes are: April 22: Critters; April 29: Trees. Free, ages 16 and older, no registration required, but RSVP appreciated at https://iastate.qualtrics.com/jfe/form/SV_b9Onxnuc7QSqVVk.

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.

Made In The Midwest: The Lubben Brothers

Saturday, April 25, 7 p.m.

Temple Theater, 1011 Locust St., Des Moines

Des Moines Performing Arts announces the return of Made in the Midwest at the Temple Theater for an exciting new season. The Lubben Brothers perform traditional/contemporary folk music. Opener is Courtney Krause. To purchase tickets, visit DMPA.org, call 515-246-2300, or stop by the Civic Center Ticket Office at 221 Walnut Street. Night-of tickets will be available for purchase at the Temple Theater Ticket Office two hours before the performance.

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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>.

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

Middle River Arts Festival

Saturday, May 2

Madison County Conservation Center, 2508 Pammel Park Trail, Winterset

The Middle River Arts Festival will take place at the Madison County Conservation Center in Pammel Park, hosted by the Winterset Art Center. This event is scheduled for one day, is free of charge and open to the public.

The Evening African Violet Club Sale and Show

Friday and Saturday, April 24-25

Plumbers & Steamfitters Local Union 33, 2501 Bell Ave., Des Moines

The Evening African Violet Club of Des Moines invites the public to its 2026 African Violet Show and Sale, "Music in Bloom." Members of area garden clubs and plant societies are especially welcome as club members share so many interests in indoor and outdoor gardening with them. This is a nationally sanctioned show and sale that will have judges from the African Violet Society of America. Hours are Friday, April 24, noon to 6 p.m., and Saturday, April 25, 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. The Judging of Violets, Gesneriads and Floral Design will take place on Saturday, April 25 from 10 a.m. to noon. Hours follow from noon to 5 p.m. for Sales. Only members of EAVC are eligible to enter plants and designs in the show. ■



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LIBRARY

POLK CITY Community Library news

ANNOUNCEMENTS:

• The library will be closed May 25 in observance of Memorial Day.

• The Board of Trustees will meet May 4 at 6:30 p.m. in the library meeting room. There are no youth activities in May as we prepare for summer reading.

Polk City Community Library

1500 W. Broadway St., Polk City
515-984-6119
www.polkcitylibrary.org
Monday - Wednesday: 9 a.m. to 7 p.m.
Thursday: 9 a.m. to 8 p.m.
Friday: 9 a.m. to 5 p.m.
Saturday: 9 a.m. to 3 p.m.
Sunday: closed

Geri-Fit® Strength Training Workouts, Mondays, 9 a.m.

Strength-training workouts for all ages and fitness levels. The program requires a set of light dumbbells, a sturdy chair and water. Ages 50 and older. Stretch bands and a Zoom link are available upon request. No class May 25.

Chair Yoga, Tuesdays, 9 a.m.

Join Rachel via Zoom. The class will be broadcast on the library's big screen, or you can join from home. Yoga is for everyone and every body — not just flexible people, but those who want to become more flexible. This practice includes breathwork, mindfulness and simple movements to release tension, reduce pain and restore mobility. Props: an armless chair (such as a kitchen chair) and a small towel. Join the Zoom meeting at polkcitylibrary.org.

Qigong/Tai Chi, Wednesdays, 9 a.m.

Qigong/Tai Chi is a Chinese martial art emphasizing slow, deliberate movements that are gentle on the joints, making it accessible to all ages and fitness levels. It integrates physical postures, breathing techniques and mental focus to promote relaxation and mindfulness. Regular practice can improve balance, flexibility, muscle strength and cardiovascular health. Follow along as we explore online workouts tailored to ages 50 and older.

Zumba/Low-Impact Dance, Fridays, 9 a.m.

Zumba is a dance-based fitness program combining Latin styles with aerobic exercise. Follow along with online Zumba and other low-impact dance workouts tailored to ages 50 and older.

Fareway Round-Up Week: Friends of the Library, May 4-9

When shopping at Fareway, choose to round up your total to the nearest dollar to support library programs. The Friends of the Library fund programs and the Adventure Pass, which allows patrons to visit area attractions free of charge.

Not-a-School Day, Monday, May 4, 1 p.m.

Join us for the final Not-a-School Day of the school year. We're wrapping up with a May the Fourth-themed celebration, including a "Star Wars" movie, activities and a few surprises inspired by the Force.



Crafternoon, Tuesday, May 5, 2 p.m.

Enjoy a relaxing afternoon of crafting as we make air-dry clay botanical ornaments and trinket trays. Supplies provided. Ages 17 and older. Registration required.

Wednesday Book Club, Wednesday, May 6, 7 p.m.

“Hidden Valley Road” by Robert Kolker. An exploration of the Galvin family’s experience with schizophrenia.

Card Crafting with Jane and Kim, Monday, May 11, 6 p.m.

Create handmade cards with Jane and Kim. Cost is \$5, payable that night. Beginners welcome. Bring scissors and adhesive if you have them. Ages 17 and older. Register at polkcitylibrary.org one month in advance.

Mah Jongg (with The Dealt Hand), Thursday, May 14, 5 p.m.

Back by popular demand, The Dealt Hand returns to teach and host Mah Jongg. Whether you’re learning or playing, supplies and guidance are provided. Registration required. Ages 17 and older.

Monday Book Club, Monday, May 18, 2 p.m.

“The Island of Sea Women” by Lisa See. Set on a Korean island, this novel follows two women whose friendship is shaped by war, colonialism and cultural change across decades.

Apron Adventures, Thursday, May 21, 4 p.m.

Calling all pastry enthusiasts. Learn to make French macarons — including taste-testing. Prepare batter and filling at the library, then take home materials for baking and assembly. Supplies provided. Registration required. Ages 17 and older.

Pre-K Playday, Friday, May 22, 9-11 a.m.

Location: City Hall. In partnership with the Polk City Community Library, enjoy open play for children up to age 5. Activities include sensory toys, play structures and musical instruments. Parent or caregiver required.

Men’s Book Club, Wednesday, May 27, 6 p.m.

Location: Fenders Brewing. “Catch-22” by Joseph Heller. A darkly comic World War II novel following bombardier John Yossarian as he navigates the absurdities of war.

Summer Reading Registration at the Farmer’s Market, Thursday, May 28, 4-8 p.m.

Sign up for the 2026 Summer Reading Program and enjoy family-friendly activities. Registration also begins at the library May 29.

Unearth a Story, Summer Reading Program for All Ages, June 1 to July 31

Visit our website and Facebook page for details. ■

DERMAL filler that looks natural

People are often hesitant about dermal filler because the most visible examples in the media tend to be celebrities or influencers with obvious, overfilled results. When filler is done poorly, placed incorrectly, or overused over time, it can create an unnatural appearance that makes people fearful of all filler treatments. The truth is that good filler should not look obvious at all.



Dermal filler is actually one of the best non-surgical tools available for restoring lost volume, enhancing facial balance, softening lines, and creating subtle improvements in a relatively short amount of time. It can enhance the lips, cheeks, chin, jawline, temples, under eyes, and many other areas of the face with little downtime and immediate results. For many people, filler offers a way to look more refreshed, youthful and balanced without surgery.

The key to beautiful filler is choosing the right provider. Filler should always be performed by a highly trained medical professional with the proper credentials, advanced anatomy knowledge, and extensive experience. The face contains many important blood vessels and structures, making injector skill incredibly important for both safety and cosmetic outcomes.

Natural-looking filler comes down to proper placement, conservative amounts, and understanding the anatomy of the face. Filler placed in the correct plane of the face and in the right quantity can restore support, create balance, and enhance features without looking fake or overdone. ■

Provided by Dr. Stephanie Koos, RenuYou MedSpa, 1705 N. Ankeny Blvd., Suite B, Ankeny, www.renuyouaestheticsandbotox.com, 515-330-8900.

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CHAMBER

By Polk City Area Chamber of Commerce

Chamber member spotlight: SNAADT Media Group

Ryan Snaadt (it rhymes with “odd”) is the owner of Snaadt Media Group, a corporate video production company based in Polk City. With a passion for storytelling and a strong background in marketing, Ryan has built a business focused on helping organizations communicate more effectively through high-quality visual content.



Snaadt Media Group (SMG) connects brands with their audiences through video production, podcasting and strategic social media content. Over the past decade, their team has partnered with a wide range of clients, including local businesses, school districts, nonprofit organizations and large corporations. Their work spans across North America, supporting companies in telling compelling stories that resonate with their target audiences. By combining thoughtful marketing strategy with professional production, SMG creates content that not only looks great but also delivers measurable results.

What began as a small operation in Ryan’s college dorm room has grown steadily over the years. Through dedication, creativity and a commitment to client success, the company expanded into a space in Granger, where it operated for the past three years. As demand for their services increased, the team quickly outgrew that location, prompting the search for a larger and more versatile space.

Their recent move to a new studio in Polk City marks an exciting new chapter for the company. The upgraded space allows for continued team growth and offers a fully equipped, turnkey studio where clients can easily create professional content. Whether recording podcasts, filming long-form training videos, or producing social media content, clients can now complete an entire month’s worth of material in a single, efficient shoot day. From concept development and scripting to filming, editing and final distribution, the SMG team manages every step of the process to maximize visibility and impact.

Ryan shared that the decision to move the company to Polk City was both personal and strategic. He and his wife have established their home there, and their children will be attending school in the community. Originally from a small town in southeast Iowa, Ryan says Polk City immediately felt familiar when they relocated to central Iowa. He was eager to bring his business into the same community where his family is growing roots.

“We love the area, the people and the growth happening here,” Ryan said. “It’s exciting to be part of a community that’s expanding and to contribute by creating new opportunities for local businesses and organizations.” ■

Information provided by Polk City Area Chamber of Commerce, P.O. Box 226, Polk City IA 50226, 515-984-3098, admin@polkcitychamber.com.



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DAN JUFFER Senior Advertising Account Executive 515-371-2290 dan.juffer@dmcityview.com www.iowalivingmagazines.com

NPHS Drama

NPHS Drama Department Presents, "The Musical Comedy Murders of 1940" on April 10-12.





THE COMETS CORNER

NEWS FROM NORTH POLK CSD

APRIL 2026

NEXT YEAR STARTS NOW. BE PART OF WHAT'S HAPPENING HERE.



From academic highlights to athletic achievements to fine arts performances, North Polk students are finding success every day. That momentum continues into next school year—be sure to complete your online registration at northpolk.org/enroll. To guarantee your student has transportation on the first day of school, please submit your bus request by June 1. Don't wait—missing the deadline means your child's route may not be ready when the first bell rings.

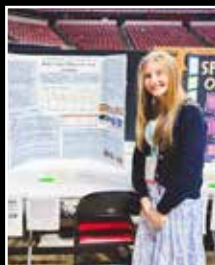
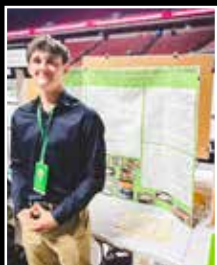
COMPETING AT THE STATE LEVEL

\$9,000+ in scholarships. 30+ students. One state stage.

More than 30 North Polk students represented our district at this year's State Science & Technology Fair of Iowa, held at Hilton Coliseum in Ames. Their work earned over \$9,000 in scholarships and awards, competing alongside students from across the state and coming home with results that speak for themselves.

Real research. Real questions. Real results.

SCAN THE QR HERE TO SEE OUR FULL LIST OF AWARD WINNERS.



EARNING COLLEGE CREDIT BEFORE GRADUATION



North Polk families saved \$749,033 in college tuition last year.

355 students. 3,881 college credits. An average of \$2,109 saved per family. Some earned those credits right here in our building. Others went online or to a Career Academy. All made possible through our partnership with DMACC.

Fourteen graduated with an actual college degree, diploma, or certificate already in hand. All of them arrived at graduation with a head start.

\$749,033 Total DMACC Tuition Saved

\$2,109.95 Average DMACC Tuition Saved Per Student

14 Students Earning a DMACC Degree, Diploma, or Certificate while in High School

Based on 2024-25 school year data.

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