

ALTOONA

MAY 2026

Living

MAGAZINE

Fresh FINDS

Local vendors bring flavor, passion
and community to farmers markets

Meet Jamie Logan

EDUCATION

Sausage and cheese breakfast bake

RECIPE

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WELCOME

A FRESH take on farmers markets

For years, I dismissed farmers markets as little more than roadside produce stands — tables of fruits and vegetables, nothing more. I didn't cook. I didn't grocery shop. I didn't care.

Then, a few years ago, I wandered into a local farmers market — and my view changed. There was honey, still sweet from the hive. Bread, warm and crusty. Homemade jelly. Even wine. But the real surprise wasn't what was for sale. It was the atmosphere.

Farmers markets aren't just about food. They are about people. Music drifts through the aisles. Vendors chat with regulars. Shoppers linger instead of rushing. It is part market, part gathering — and entirely its own experience.

At its heart, a farmers market is a place where producers sell directly to consumers. But "farmer" is a broad label, and that is the point. Alongside fresh produce, you will find plants, baked goods, prepared foods and more.

Some markets are small and unassuming. Others take over entire city blocks. They are not permanent. They don't last all year. And that's exactly why they matter. Much like the Shamrock Shake I seem to seek out each spring, their short season makes them something to look forward to.

Farmers markets have been around for centuries, long before modern grocery stores reshaped how we shop. But, in recent decades, demand for fresh, local food has brought them back.

And for the grammar-minded: It is "farmers market," not farmer's or farmers'. The Associated Press keeps it clean — no possessive — so we do, too.

In this month's cover story, we take you inside your local farmers market and introduce you to the people who make them worth the trip. ■



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James Romer arranges the flowers he and wife, Beth, sell at their farmers market booth.

Fresh FINDS

Local vendors bring flavor, passion and community to farmers markets

By Sean Dengler

Longer days and warmer nights can only mean one thing — farmers market season is back. With fresh-picked produce, handcrafted goods and sweet treats, these weekly gatherings provide a place for both vendors and visitors.



James and Beth Romer's Excelsior Farm booth features their prized flowers.

From flowers to vendor

For James and Beth Romer, selling a variety of products as Excelsior Farm is both a business and a passion.

"We grow specialty cut flowers and specialize in award-winning, show-quality dahlias and gladiolus. We cater to creative people who enjoy choosing their own stems from our bloom bar to curate arrangements or add statement blooms to market bouquets for a custom signature look," James says.

Becoming a farmers market vendor is rooted in family history.

"Our family has been growing dahlias for more than 60 years," Beth says. "We thought the best way to connect with people would be through the farmers market."

Participating in a farmers market is rewarding, they agree.

"We look forward to seeing loyal fans and establishing new relationships," James says. "We also enjoy the opportunity to connect with people, sell products we've worked hard to produce and see the joy on their faces. We've said numerous times, we sell bouquets of happiness."

Visiting a farmers market offers a unique experience.

"It's the best way to have that grower-buyer connection," Beth says. "The public can't get flowers or eggs any fresher or more local than at the market. Farmers markets are fun. It's a great way to shop local and support your neighbors."

The Romers also offer advice for those interested in becoming vendors.

"Visit the market ahead of time and find out what's missing. Then find a product you enjoy making or growing. Line up insurance earlier than you think you need it. Find weights heavy enough to hold your tent down. Practice setting up at home before your first market. Study the market rules to be a good vendor and neighbor, and be sure to meet all deadlines," James says.

The Romers will also be opening a farm stand this summer on the south side of Altoona.

"Get directions and the latest on local products, hours and more on Facebook at Excelsior Farm, LLC," Beth says.



The Brightside Market, hosted by Brightside Aleworks once a month, features fresh produce, eggs and more.

Running the market

For those looking to attend a farmers market close to home, Brightside Aleworks in Altoona offers a local option. This will be the fourth year of the Brightside Farmers Market held in the parking lot of the craft brewery.

"It will be held the third Thursday of each month," owner Andrew Frana says. "The first one is May 21. We're moving to a monthly schedule so people have something to look forward to."

Vendors include Lulu Lather, Sparkle & Stitch Studio, Otter Creek Farm, Coal Creek Farm, Shiver Farms, Design by KanyaMarie, MJ's Hometown Honey, Rockin' Pop Tarts and Claire's Cake Corner. The market takes place from 5-8 p.m. and will also feature themed events.

"There will be themed markets as well," Frana says. "We'll have a dog-friendly one in August and a Renaissance fair-themed market in July."

The market found a permanent home at Brightside Aleworks after relocating from other sites.

"At previous locations, there were a couple of things missing: parking, an indoor area to get out of the sun and consumables," Frana says.

Hosting the farmers market has been rewarding, he says.

"What I enjoy most about the Brightside Farmers Market is hearing vendors talk about something they're passionate about, whether it's making a craft or preparing food right in front of you," he says.

For those interested in becoming vendors, Frana recommends reaching out via email to taproom@brightsidealeworks.com. He has also witnessed success stories over the years.

"We saw a youth vendor grow up, graduate high school and then start her own small business," Frana says. "That was pretty cool."

Frana also offers tips for visitors.

"The best way to enjoy the market is to bring a friend, grab some food, walk around, say hello to the vendors and come back next time," he says.



Jeff Rotert takes his trailer to events to serve his gourmet popcorn and lemonade shakeups.



Popping into business

For Jeff Rotert, inspiration to start a business and become a farmers market vendor didn't come from a new idea but from something he had been doing for years. Encouragement from friends helped him see its potential.

"I make an old-school shake-and-bake popcorn on the stove using Orville Redenbacher," Rotert says. "About 13 years ago, my dad was nearing the end of his life. A couple of friends came over, and I didn't have any made. I always have it ready. They gave me a hard time about it. I said, 'What's the big deal?' and they said, 'It's the best we've ever had. We expect it to be here when we come.' That really stuck with me."

That moment led him to invest money he had set aside from basketball officiating into what became his business, JeffEPop Gourmet Popcorn.

"I bought a small kettle corn machine, a couple of cheap tents and started going to events," Rotert says. "People would ask, 'Can you do this? Can you do that?' and I'd always say yes — even if I wasn't sure how. Then I'd go home, research it, figure it out and save up to buy more equipment."

Thirteen years later, Rotert has expanded significantly. He now operates a larger trailer and participates in markets in Des Moines, Valley Junction, Pleasant Hill and Norwalk, along with community events across the metro. He also provides popcorn for weddings,

graduation parties, employee appreciation events and fundraisers.

His business is supported by family and friends, including his sons, his wife and a neighbor and her daughter.

Despite the growth, Rotert still values the farmers market experience.

"I'm a people person, and my boys are, too," he says. "We love talking with people and being outside, even when the weather isn't perfect."

Being a vendor comes with challenges.

"It's a big time investment," Rotert says. "It's not just showing up and making a lot of money. Some days are great, and some are not."

That investment is also why supporting local vendors matters.

"The most important thing is supporting local," Rotert says. "There are so many big-box stores, and small businesses are trying to make a living and support their families."

Starting from scratch

While the original recipe took a while to replicate, the odds were in favor of Donny Wilson.

"Twenty years ago or so, I had concocted a barbecue sauce, and it was pretty awesome, and I didn't write anything down," Wilson says. "It took me seven to 10 years to actually get back to something that's close to that, and that's what I've landed on today."

Unfortunately, the timing wasn't right. After a change in state law a few years ago, Wilson &

Sons Sauce & Spice Co. was off to the races.

"My aim is to distribute in wholesale markets throughout the Midwest and then eventually, possibly regionally, if not nationally," Wilson says. "I'm using the farmers markets and other arts-and-crafts-type fairs for marketing purposes, just to get my brand out there."

Wilson's business plan also includes a variety of products.

"I currently have four lines. I have a barbecue sauce line. I have a glaze, or charcuterie sauce, line. I have fermented foods, which include a couple of different kimchis and some fermented pepper sauces — about 44 total products.

"I'm trying to do this all bootstrap, so it's really just a matter of word of mouth. I'm not pumping any money into the marketing side," Wilson says. "I'm using the markets to do that. It's really just a matter of time. I have figured out in this journey that you will invest a large amount of one of two things. You'll either invest a lot of money, or you'll invest a lot of time, so I'm going the time route and seeing what it takes."

Farmers markets allow Wilson to engage with customers.

"I really enjoy having my product in front of people and interacting with customers at the markets," he says. "Mostly because I love to see the reactions and get feedback when they taste the products that I have out there."



Donny Wilson has developed dozens of products for his Wilson & Sons Sauce & Spice Co., which is a regular at many farmers markets.

It's always fun to hear the varied interests and taste palettes of different people — what they're looking for and what they taste when they experience my product. I really just enjoy that face-to-face interaction."

Wilson encourages others to try starting their own business.

"I would encourage anyone who has even the slightest inkling of an idea, whether great or small," Wilson says. "We all tend to think — and society kind of preps us for that, maybe social media — that we have to have this groundbreaking, world-shattering idea that everybody's going to say, 'Wow, where'd he come up with that?' It's really that thing you're taking for granted in your life, that you appreciate so much. That really could be a business. I would encourage anybody to chase down that dream."

Traveling the metro

While Big Acai has brick-and-mortar locations selling acai sorbet as a healthy and delicious option, Griffin Landy — owner and general manager of Big Acai's Ankeny location and

Altoona food trailer — knows the importance of farmers markets.

"We do have two brick-and-mortar locations in the metro right now, and we also have a number of others throughout the state," Landy says. "Getting our mobile units to local farmers markets is just a great way to spread awareness in the local community and provide an offering that's healthy and fun for people to enjoy."

It is worth it for Big Acai to attend the Brightside Market in Altoona, Bondurant's farmers market and Waukee's farmers market, he says.

"It's a really cool experience because we get a lot of people who aren't quite familiar with our product, and just to see people try it for the first time and enjoy it — and see that smile on their face — is really satisfying," Landy says.

Attending a farmers market is also worth the trip.

"People should come to the farmers market to support the local community and to see the products, services and offerings from their friends and neighbors."

After restarting its mobile units in the metro three years ago, Big Acai has refined its farmers



Big Acai has brick-and-mortar locations selling acai sorbet, but it also has a mobile presence at farmers markets, Griffin Landy says.

market approach.

"Over time, we've really dialed in what makes sense to offer product-wise to give people the best value and a good opportunity to try our product," Landy says. "Obviously, as a business, you'd think we want to make as much money as possible, but we understand times are hard right now. We want to give customers the best value for their buck."

Landy also has advice for those interested in becoming a farmers market vendor.

"Be open-minded about the process. There are going to be times throughout the season when other events in the community and metro draw your crowd away. There will be ups and downs but persevere and continue to follow your passion and provide the service or product you've created."

Communication is also key.

"When it comes to working farmers markets and having a traveling business, try to communicate with your customers as best as possible — what's going on and where you're going to be," Landy says. "Not being in a brick-and-mortar, it's really important for people to know what's going on." ■



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VARSITY BASEBALL

DATE	TIME	OPPONENT	LOCATION
May 27	7:00 PM	Urbandale	Urbandale High School Barton Field
May 29	5:00 PM	North Polk	Southeast Polk
May 29	6:45 PM	North Polk	Southeast Polk
May 30	10:00 AM	Council Bluffs Lincoln	A. Lincoln High School
June 1	7:00 PM	Dowling Catholic	Southeast Polk
Jun 3	5:00 PM	A. Centennial	Southeast Polk
Jun 4	5:00 PM	Ankeny	Ankeny High School
Jun 8	5:00 PM	Valley	Valley High School
Jun 10	7:00 PM	Johnston	Southeast Polk
Jun 11	5:00 PM	Waukee	Southeast Polk
Jun 13	4:45 PM	Iowa City Liberty	Iowa Central CC
Jun 13	7:00 PM	Sioux City North	Harlan Rogers Sports Complex
Jun 15	7:00 PM	Waukee Northwest	Northwest High School
Jun 17	5:00 PM	Urbandale	Southeast Polk
Jun 19	5:00 PM	Ames	Ames High Baseball & Softball
Jun 22	7:00 PM	A. Centennial	A. Centennial High School
Jun 24	5:00 PM	Dowling Catholic	Dowling Catholic High School
Jun 25	7:00 PM	Ankeny	Southeast Polk
Jun 29	5:00 PM	Johnston	Johnston Middle School
Jul 1	7:00 PM	Valley	Southeast Polk
Jul 2	7:00 PM	Waukee	Waukee
July 3	12:00 PM	Indianola	Indianola High School
July 6	5:00 PM	Waukee Northwest	Southeast Polk



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VARSITY SOFTBALL

DATE	TIME	OPPONENT	LOCATION
May 26	7:15 PM	Carlisle	Southeast Polk
May 27	7:00 PM	Urbandale	Urbandale High School
May 29	7:00 PM	Indianola	Southeast Polk
Jun 1	7:00 PM	Dowling Catholic	Southeast Polk
Jun 3	5:00 PM	A. Centennial	Southeast Polk
Jun 4	5:00 PM	Ankeny	Ankeny High School
Jun 6	9:00 AM	Bakey Classic	George Davis Softball Park
Jun 6	11:00 AM	Pleasant Valley	George Davis
Jun 6	3:00 PM	Wahlert Catholic	George Davis
Jun 8	5:00 PM	Valley	Valley High School
Jun 10	7:00 PM	Johnston	Southeast Polk
Jun 11	5:00 PM	Waukee	Southeast Polk
Jun 12	9:00 AM	"The Cabin" Classic	Jefferson
Jun 15	7:00 PM	Waukee Northwest	Northwest High School
Jun 17	5:00 PM	Urbandale	Southeast Polk
Jun 19	1:00 PM	Jack North Tourn.	Northwest High School
Jun 19	4:45 PM	Bondurant-Farrar	Northwest High School

VARSITY SOFTBALL (CONT.)

DATE	TIME	OPPONENT	LOCATION
Jun 20	9:00 AM	Jack North Tourn.	Northwest High School
Jun 20	2:15 PM	North Polk	Northwest High School
Jun 20	4:00 PM	St. Edmond	Northwest High School
Jun 22	7:00 PM	A. Centennial	A. Centennial High School
Jun 24	5:00 PM	Dowling Catholic	Dowling Catholic High School
Jun 25	7:00 PM	Ankeny	Southeast Polk
Jun 29	5:00 PM	Johnston	Johnston Middle School
Jun 30	7:00 PM	DCG	Southeast Polk
Jul 1	7:00 PM	Valley	Southeast Polk
Jul 2	7:00 PM	Waukee	Waukee
Jul 6	5:00 PM	Waukee Northwest	Southeast Polk
Jul 7	7:00 PM	Ames	Ames High
Jul 8	7:00 PM	ADM	ADM High School



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The May 2011 *Altoona Living* magazine featured the story, “Love thy neighbor: Local churches serve the community.” The cover photo was of Cindy Meyerdirk, Hank Ford and Autumn McGrean at Adventure-Life Church’s Monday night supper. Also pictured were Susan Burris and Lyn Bradwell of Adventure-Life Church preparing brownies for a Monday night supper and a family celebrating the youngest child’s first birthday at Saints John and Paul Parish’s Faith Development Center as part of the Interfaith Hospitality Network. ■



MEET Jamie Logan

Teaching through song while building connection and creativity

Jamie Logan grew up on a farm in Stuart before studying music at Simpson College. Starting around age 8, Logan’s parents made significant sacrifices to keep her and her sisters in piano lessons.

“My piano teacher, Ruth Sellers, was a deeply caring, encouraging and honest educator — even when that honesty was hard to hear — and I think I always wanted to grow up to be like her,” Logan says.



Jamie Logan is the vocal director at Southeast Polk High School and has been with the district for 21 years.

After college, Logan began her teaching career at the Nodaway Valley Community School District. When she and her husband began considering where to build a life and raise a family, she says the Southeast Polk Community School District felt like the perfect fit.

“What stands out most about Southeast Polk is its unique blend of community and opportunity. While the district is rooted in smaller communities — each with its own character and story — it comes together in a way that creates something much bigger,” Logan says.

Logan taught at Southeast Polk Junior High for seven years before transitioning to the high school. She is currently the vocal director at Southeast Polk High School and has been with the district for 21 years.

Each fall, the vocal music department leads the high school musical, a program Logan says has earned top honors from the Iowa High School Musical Theater Awards nine times. This distinction has given students the opportunity to perform at the Des Moines Civic Center for sold-out audiences.

Logan also highlights the evolution of the Southeast Polk show choir program. Each season begins with the question, “What story do we want to tell?” From there, students and staff build a performance that blends classical and contemporary music into something entirely new. Songs that may seem unrelated at first take on new meaning when woven together through choreography, costumes and staging.

“Watching students bring those stories to life — discovering connection, purpose and expression along the way — is one of the most rewarding parts of what we do,” Logan says.

Logan says students and families are at the heart of it all, and a shared commitment to excellence can be felt every day in rehearsals, performances and quiet moments of growth along the way. As the school year wraps up, Logan is energized by the promise of what lies ahead.

“There’s something exciting about stepping into a new season full of unknowns and possibilities. I don’t yet know what next year’s musical will be, but I look forward to the process of discovering it and watching it come to life with our students,” Logan says. ■

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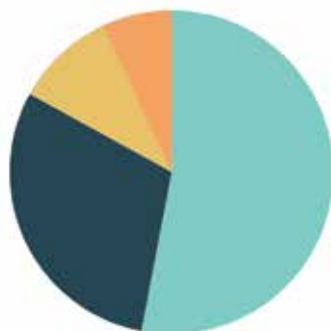
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Adult programming – ages 18 and older

• **Craft Lab: Sublimation**, Wednesday, June 3 at 5:30 p.m. We're opening the Maker Hub for a hands-on drop-in session where you can create a quick, custom craft. Try out our sublimation printer and heat press to design and make your own personalized creation to take home. No registration required.

• **Plant Swap**, Saturday, June 6 at 1 p.m. Is it time for some new house plants? For each item you bring between May 19 and June 3, receive a voucher to choose a plant during the swap. Plants must be established and potted in soil (not water). No cuttings will be accepted. A limit of five vouchers will be distributed per person, but feel free to donate more if you'd like to make room for your new plants. No registration required.

• **Nookly: Making Storybooks with AI**, Thursday, June 11 at 5:30 p.m. Learn to make your own illustrated stories using Nookly, an easy-to-use digital tool for creating personalized children's books. We will explore storytelling basics, design characters and scenes, and everyone will leave with a completed minibook they can proudly share. Registration required.

Children's programming

• **Shimmie Shake**, Mondays at 10 a.m. Come dance, groove and learn at this interactive storytime filled with songs, movement, and fun stories! Ages 0-5. No registration required.

• **Make & Take: Clay Creations**, Friday, June 26 from 1-2 p.m. Drop in for a quick and awesome craft. We will be making air-dry clay creations. Grades K-6. No registration required.

• **Slime Time**, Monday, June 29 from 1-2 p.m. Drop in to mix up some slime. We will have lots of add-ins to choose from to make your creation one of a kind. Available while supplies last. Grades K-6. No registration required.

Teen programming – grades 6-12

• **Stenciled Book Edges**, Thursday, June 4 from 6-7 p.m. Bring a copy of your favorite book — or your Summer Reading registration book — and create your own beautiful book edges. We'll provide the paint and stencils. No registration required.

• **Teen-y Gardening**, Monday, June 8 from 3-4 p.m. The ISU Extension Office will be here to help you learn the best way to start and take care of your garden. You'll also get to plant and take home your very own sunflower. No registration required.

• **Teen After Hours**: Glow in the Dark, Saturday, June 27 from 6-8 p.m. We'll play some glow-in-the-dark games and use the Cricut to create glow-in-the-dark designs on tote bags. All materials provided. Registration and permission form required.

To find a complete list of events and to register, visit altoonalibrary.com. Click on the Upcoming Events tab. ■

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SAUSAGE and cheese breakfast bake is easy, filling and practical

Mornings get busy, which is why I love having a breakfast recipe I can rely on. This one checks every box for me. It is incredibly easy to make — just mix, pour and bake — with simple ingredients I usually already have in the fridge. No complicated steps. No mess. No standing over the stove while trying to get ready for the day. I love the idea of cooking once and enjoying for days.



What I appreciate most is how protein-packed this recipe is. Between the eggs, sausage and cheeses, it is the kind of breakfast that actually keeps you full and focused all morning. I am not reaching for a snack an hour later, which makes a big difference on busy days.

It is also perfectly sized for real life. The recipe makes enough for two people to enjoy breakfast for a couple of days, which means less cooking and more convenience. Or, double the batch and freeze some for future quick meals. I can warm up a slice and have a hot, satisfying meal in minutes. Easy, filling and practical — exactly how breakfast should be. ■

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

Savory sausage and cheese breakfast bake

INGREDIENTS:

- 8 large eggs
- 1/4 cup water
- 2/3 cup cottage cheese
- 1/2 cup shredded mozzarella cheese
- 1/2 package of Jimmy Dean breakfast sausage cooked, crumbled
- 1 teaspoon Nature's Seasoning

DIRECTIONS:

- Preheat oven to 350 F. Lightly grease a small baking dish (8-inch by 8-inch works well).
- Blend eggs, water and cottage cheese for 10-15 seconds in a blender.
- Combine with mozzarella and sausage and pour into the prepared baking dish. Spread evenly.
- Bake for 30-35 minutes or until the center is set and the top is lightly golden. Rest for 5 minutes, then slice and serve.
- Vary this recipe by adding sauteed onions, peppers or mushrooms. Pictured is the original recipe plus a version with peppers and mushrooms. ■



Petals AND Pistons

June 24, 2026 • 6 PM

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End at Captain Roy's for an Evening Event

For Any Questions or to RSVP Contact:
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mfritz@lutherparkcommunity.org

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WHAT TO expect as a first-time homebuyer

If you plan to purchase a home for the first time, you may feel overwhelmed about not knowing where to start. We have summarized the key steps so you can approach the homebuying process with confidence.



Set up a prequalification meeting: The first step is to meet with your mortgage lender to get pre-qualified for a loan. This meeting should give you a better idea about what you can afford, which is important to keep in mind as you search for a home.

Find the right home: Work with a Realtor to compare the homes on the market to identify the options that fit your interests, needs and budget. Once you narrow your choices, take a closer look.

Obtain a sale agreement: After you find the right home, your Realtor will help you

negotiate the terms of the sale. Your Realtor will then present your offer to the sellers. If the seller signs the offer, you have a binding contract.

Submit your loan application: Your lender will recommend the mortgage loans that best fit your financial situation and help you finish your application. Common types of documentation required to verify the source of funds being used to purchase the home are: pay stubs, two years' tax returns and account statements.

Complete a property inspection: Not long after your offer is accepted, you should hire a licensed home inspector to check the structural safety of the property. If the inspection shows major problems, you have a few options on how to proceed:

- Cancel the sale, and your deposit will be returned to you.
- Continue with the sale and ask the seller to make repairs or give you a credit for the

amount it would cost to make the repairs.

Receive final loan approval: First, a loan processor will package all relevant information to be sent to the underwriter. The underwriter will then review the information and make the final decision whether the loan is approved.

Purchase homeowner's insurance: You should obtain a homeowner's insurance policy to protect your home against liability. If your down payment is less than 20% of the home's sale price, you may be required by your lender to carry Private Mortgage Insurance (PMI).

Close on your home: The closing date is when your down payment and closing costs are due and the title of the property is transferred to your name. Generally, this is the day the seller turns the keys over to you, and the home is yours. ■

Information provided by Lori Slings, Bankers Trust, NMLS ID: 406021, 3820 Eighth St. S.W., Altoona, 515-245-5624, lslings@bankerstrust.com, BankersTrust.com/LSlings, Bankers Trust NMLS ID: 440379.



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VP, Mortgage Loan Originator
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APR = Annual Percentage Rate. Repayment example: A loan amount of \$150,000 with a fixed interest rate of 5.50% and an APR of 5.568% would result in 360 monthly principal and interest payments of \$851.68. Payments will be higher to account for taxes and insurance. All loans subject to credit approval and other underwriting conditions. Additional program guidelines apply. Limited time offer. Rates and terms subject to change. NMLS ID#: 440379



ALTOONA

MAY 2026

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Altoona, IA 50009

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FAX: 515-967-0842

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Mayor Dean O'Connor

515-967-5136

City Council Members

Jeremy Boka 515-965-0951

Scott Duer 515-418-2227

Josh Dunwoody 515-720-8891

Jerry Evans 515-967-5136

Julie Stewart 515-967-5136

City Administrator

515-967-5136

City Clerk

515-967-5136

Police Chief

515-967-5132

Fire Chief

515-967-2216

Library Director

515-967-3881

Fax: 515-967-6934

Water Billing

515-967-5136

Building Department/
Code Enforcement

515-967-5138

Building Official

515-967-5138

Planning & Zoning
Department

515-967-5136

Public Works Director

515-967-5136

YARD IMPROVEMENTS? CALL BEFORE DIGGING

If your spring yard work includes any digging, please call Iowa One Call 1-800-292-8989. Iowa One Call will mark your utility lines on your property. This service is provided for free and can help you avoid planting or digging where utilities are located.



MUSIC IN THE PARK

Music in the Park with the CAP Theatre returns this month and runs through the summer! Join us at Haines Park (613 3rd Ave SE) for the following concerts!

May 31st – 6-7pm – West Connection

June 28th – 6-7pm – Altoona Flute

July 26th – 6-7pm – Band SPAM

August 30th – 6-7pm – Haywire

BATTERY DROP-OFF

Batteries can't go in your garbage or recycling cart, but that doesn't mean disposal is tricky.

If it buzzes, hums, flashes, or charges, it's got a battery. That includes laptops, tablets, cell phones, children's toys, watches, power tools, wireless headphones, and even electric toothbrushes!

Loose batteries or electronics that can be charged, even if broken or no longer holding a charge, contain hazardous material and can't go in your garbage or recycling.

While batteries aren't regular garbage or recycling, there are many convenient options for you to dispose of them in a safe, smart way!

OPTION 1: FIND A BATTERY DROP-OFF CONTAINER NEAR YOU

To make battery disposal convenient for you, we've partnered with communities around the metro to offer battery drop-off containers. All residents are welcome to use these free drop-offs!

The drop-off containers accept electronics like laptops and tablets as well as loose household batteries, including alkaline batteries (AA, AAA, etc.), button batteries, and batteries from power tools.

All you have to do is bag each household battery using the bags provided at the container, then drop them in the labeled slot!

OPTION 2: COLLECTION AT YOUR DOORSTEP

Batteries, electronics, and a variety of other household hazardous waste can be picked up just outside your door with our Houseside Collection service. This service is available on-demand, and you only pay when you choose to use it. Once signed up, you'll receive two 12-gallon plastic bins to fill with materials and a large plastic bag for items that are too large for bins. Check out our Houseside Collection page to get started.

OPTION 3: VISIT A HAZARDOUS WASTE DROP-OFF FACILITY

Have a battery that won't fit in one of our drop-off containers? Have a large quantity of batteries or electronics? You can take them to our Metro Northwest Transfer Station in Grimes (by appointment only) or the Metro Hazardous Waste Drop-Off in Bondurant. Batteries are accepted free of charge (up to 75 lbs.)

These locations also accept vehicle batteries, and batteries that are leaking, cracked, swollen, or defective.



2025 WATER QUALITY REPORT FOR ALTOONA WATER SUPPLY

This report contains important information regarding the water quality in our water system. The source of our water is groundwater. Our water quality testing shows the following results:

CONTAMINANT	MCL - (MCLG)	Compliance		Date	Violation	Source
		Type	Value & (Range)			
Total Trihalomethanes (ppb) [TTHM]	80 (N/A)	LRAA	35.00 (35 - 35)	09/30/2025	No	By-products of drinking water chlorination
Lead (ppb)	AL=15 (0)	90th	5.60 (ND - 18) 1 sample(s) exceeded AL	2025	No	Corrosion of household plumbing systems; erosion of natural deposits
Copper (ppm)	AL=1.3 (1.3)	90th	0.539 (0.0646 - 0.649)	2025	No	Corrosion of household plumbing systems; Erosion of natural deposits; Leaching from wood preservatives
950 - DISTRIBUTION SYSTEM						
Chlorine (ppm)	MRDL=4.0 (MRDLG=4.0)	RAA	1.2 (0.51 - 1.81)	12/31/2025	No	Water additive used to control microbes
Total Coliform	TT (TT)	RTCR	1 samples(s) positive	3/31/2025	No	Coliforms are bacteria that are naturally present in the environment and are used as an indicator that other waterborne pathogens may be present, or that a potential pathway exists through which contamination may enter the drinking water.
01 - FINISHED WATER AT PLANT #1 (WELL #2)						
Gross Alpha, inc (pCi/L)	15 (0)	SGL	4.6	07/23/2025	No	Erosion of natural deposits
Combined Radium (pCi/L)	5 (0)	RAA	2.9 (2.3 - 4.0)	09/30/2025	No	Erosion of natural deposits
Sodium (ppm)	N/A (N/A)	SGL	145	05/20/2025	No	Erosion of natural deposits; Added to water during treatment process
Nitrate [as N] (ppm)	10 (10)	SGL	0.800	2025	No	Runoff from fertilizer use; Leaching from septic tanks, sewage; Erosion of natural deposits
02 - FINISHED WATER AT PLANT #2 (WELL #3)						
Gross Alpha, inc (pCi/L)	15 (0)	SGL	8.7	05/20/2025	No	Erosion of natural deposits
Combined Radium (pCi/L)	5 (0)	RAA	2.5 (2.0 - 2.5)	06/30/2025	No	Erosion of natural deposits
Sodium (ppm)	N/A (N/A)	SGL	124	05/20/2025	No	Erosion of natural deposits; Added to water during treatment process
Nitrate [as N] (ppm)	10 (10)	SGL	0.700	2025	No	Runoff from fertilizer use; Leaching from septic tanks, sewage; Erosion of natural deposits
03 - FINISHED WATER AT PLANT #3 (WELL #4)						
Gross Alpha, inc (pCi/L)	15 (0)	SGL	9.4	07/23/2025	No	Erosion of natural deposits
Combined Radium (pCi/L)	5 (0)	RAA	2.7 (1.9 - 4.5)	06/30/2025	No	Erosion of natural deposits
Chromium (ppb)	100 (100)	SGL	1.30	07/23/2025	No	Discharge from steel and pulp mills; Erosion of natural deposits
Barium (ppm)	2 (2)	SGL	0.0142	07/23/2025	No	Discharge of drilling wastes; Discharge from metal refineries; Erosion of natural deposits
Fluoride (ppm)	4 (4)	SGL	1.7	07/23/2025	No	Water additive which promotes strong teeth; Erosion of natural deposits; Discharge from fertilizer and aluminum factories
Sodium (ppm)	N/A (N/A)	SGL	133	07/23/2025	No	Erosion of natural deposits; Added to water during treatment process
Nitrate [as N] (ppm)	10 (10)	SGL	0.700	2025	No	Runoff from fertilizer use; Leaching from septic tanks, sewage; Erosion of natural deposits

Note: Contaminants with dates indicate results from the most recent testing done in accordance with regulations.

DEFINITIONS

- Maximum Contaminant Level (MCL) - The highest level of a contaminant that is allowed in drinking water. MCLs are set as close to the MCLGs as feasible using the best available treatment technology.
- Maximum Contaminant Level Goal (MCLG) - The level of a contaminant in drinking water below which there is no known or expected risk to health. MCLGs allow for a margin of safety.
- ppb - parts per billion.
- ppm - parts per million.
- pCi/L - picocuries per liter
- N/A - Not applicable
- ND - Not detected
- RAA - Running Annual Average
- Treatment Technique (TT) - A required process intended to reduce the level of a contaminant in drinking water.
- Action Level (AL) - The concentration of a contaminant which, if exceeded, triggers treatment or other requirements which a water system must follow.
- Maximum Residual Disinfectant Level Goal (MRDLG) - The level of a drinking water disinfectant below which there is no known or expected risk to health. MRDLGs do not reflect the benefits of the use of disinfectants to control microbial contaminants.
- Maximum Residual Disinfectant Level (MRDL) - The highest level of a disinfectant allowed in drinking water. There is convincing evidence that addition of a disinfectant is necessary for control of microbial contaminants.
- SGL - Single Sample Result
- RTCR - Revised Total Coliform Rule
- NTU - Nephelometric Turbidity Units

GENERAL INFORMATION

Drinking water, including bottled water, may reasonably be expected to contain at least small amounts of some contaminants. The presence of contaminants does not necessarily indicate that water posed a health risk. More information about contaminants or potential health effects can be obtained by calling the Environmental Protection Agency's Safe Drinking Water Hotline (800-426-4791).

Some people may be more vulnerable to contaminants in drinking water than the general population. Immuno-compromised persons such as persons with cancer undergoing chemotherapy, persons who have undergone organ transplants, people with HIV/AIDS or other immune system disorders, some elderly, and infants can be particularly at risk from infections. These people should seek advice about drinking water from their health care providers. EPA/CDC guidelines on appropriate means to lessen the risk of infection by *Cryptosporidium* and other microbial contaminants are available from the Safe Drinking Water Hotline (800-426-4791).

Lead can cause serious health effects in people of all ages, especially pregnant people, infants (both formula-fed and breastfed), and young children. Lead in drinking water is primarily from materials and parts used in services lines and in home plumbing. Our water supply is responsible for providing high quality drinking water and removing lead pipes but cannot control the variety of materials used in the plumbing in your home. Because lead levels may vary over time, lead exposure is possible even when your tap sampling results do not detect lead at one point in time. You can help protect yourself and

your family by identifying and removing lead materials within your home plumbing and taking steps to reduce your family's risk. Using a filter, certified by an American National Standards Institute accredited certifier to reduce lead, is effective in reducing lead exposures. Follow the instructions provided with the filter to ensure the filter is used properly. Use only cold water for drinking, cooking, and making baby formula. Boiling water does not remove lead from water. Before using tap water for drinking, cooking, or making baby formulas, flush your pipes for several minutes. You can do this by running your tap, taking a shower, doing laundry or a load of dishes. If you have a lead service line or galvanized requiring replacement service line, you may need to flush your pipes for a longer period. If you are concerned about lead in your water and wish to have your water tested, contact ALTOONA WATER SUPPLY at 515-967-4464. Information on lead in drinking water, testing methods, and steps you can take to minimize exposure is available at <https://www.epa.gov/safewater/lead>.

Lead tap sampling data can be found in the Iowa Drinking Water Data Portal: <https://programs.iowadnr.gov/iowadrinkingwater>

Our water supply has completed a service line inventory. Please contact us for information regarding the inventory and how you can access the results.

OTHER VIOLATIONS

In September 2025 we failed to monitor for Gross Alpha. Adverse health effects, if any, are not known. Monitoring procedures have been corrected to avoid future violations.

In December 2025 we failed to monitor for Gross Alpha. Adverse

health effects, if any, are not known. Monitoring procedures have been corrected to avoid future violations.

In December 2025 we failed to monitor for Combined Radium. Adverse health effects, if any, are not known. Monitoring procedures have been corrected to avoid future violations.

In December 2025 we failed to monitor for Gross Alpha. Adverse health effects, if any, are not known. Monitoring procedures have been corrected to avoid future violations.

SOURCE WATER ASSESSMENT INFORMATION

This water supply obtains its water from the sandstone and dolomite of the Cambrian-Ordovician aquifer. The Cambrian-Ordovician aquifer was determined to have low susceptibility to contamination because the characteristics of the aquifer and overlying materials provide natural protection from contaminants at the land surface. The Cambrian-Ordovician wells will have low susceptibility to surface contaminants such as leaking underground storage tanks, contaminant spills, and excess fertilizer application. A detailed evaluation of your source water was completed by the Iowa Department of Natural Resources, and is available from the Water Operator at 515-967-4464.

CONTACT INFORMATION

For questions regarding this information or how you can get involved in decisions regarding the water system, please contact ALTOONA WATER SUPPLY at 515-967-4464.

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YOUR God is too small



If your biggest stress right now had a physical size, what would it be? A pebble? A boulder? A mountain?

For many of us, life can feel like we're carrying mountains. A difficult diagnosis. Financial uncertainty. Anxiety. Grief. Loneliness. Sometimes our problems grow so large in our minds that they seem bigger than anything else.

Including God.

That's exactly what happened to the people of Israel in the sixth century BC. After Jerusalem was conquered by Babylon, many of them were forced into exile hundreds of miles from home. They began to wonder if God had abandoned them — or if, perhaps, the Babylonian gods were simply stronger.

Their circumstances made God seem small.

And honestly, ours often do, too.

When life hurts, our vision narrows. We focus on what is directly in front of us: the fear, the uncertainty, the bad news. We begin interpreting God through our pain instead of interpreting our pain through the reality of God.

Into that fear, the prophet Isaiah speaks a reminder the people desperately needed: God is both transcendent and immanent. Big and close. Powerful and personal.

Isaiah paints this breathtaking picture of God's greatness: "He sits enthroned above the circle of the earth, and its people are like grasshoppers" (Isaiah 40:22).

At first, that sounds insulting. Grasshoppers?

But Isaiah's point isn't that people are worthless. It's perspective.

Have you ever looked out the window of an airplane? The skyscrapers look like Legos. Cars become tiny toy models. People disappear from sight entirely. From a higher perspective, everything changes.

Isaiah says God's perspective is infinitely higher still.

And then Isaiah points upward: "Lift up your eyes and look to the heavens: Who created all these? He who brings out the starry host one by one and calls forth each of them by name" (Isaiah 40:26).

Scientists estimate there may be around one septillion stars in the observable universe. That is 1,000,000,000,000,000,000,000,000. That is a number so large most of us can't comprehend it. Isaiah says God not only created them but calls each one by name.

The God who formed galaxies is not intimidated by your future, your fears or your mountain.

But here's the remarkable part: This enormous God is also deeply close.

Isaiah goes on to say, "He gives strength to the weary and increases the power of the weak" (Isaiah 40:29).

The God who creates the stars also cares for exhausted people. For anxious people. For grieving people. For you.

That is why we need both truths. A God big enough to hold the universe — and close enough to hold us.

Because when your problems feel like mountains, it helps to remember: Even mountains look small next to the One who made the stars. ■

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Information provided by Pastor Nathan Anenson, Lutheran Church of the Cross, 1701 Eighth St. S.W., Altoona, 515-967-4818.

THE FUTURE of senior care is personalized care

As we look to the future, the senior living landscape is undergoing an exciting transformation. These communities, once primarily designed as peaceful retreats for active retirees, are now evolving into vibrant hubs of innovation, health and connection. The future of senior care in these communities is focused on empowering residents to live independently and maintain social connections, all while having access to the healthcare they need.



The 55+ community model is moving away from the traditional “retirement village” stereotype and embracing a new vision where aging is seen as an opportunity for growth and self-fulfillment. As the Baby Boomer generation continues to age, the demand for housing options that cater to both independence and care is driving this exciting change.

The future of senior care in 55+ communities is also shifting toward personalized care. Gone are the days of one-size-fits-all solutions. As people live longer, their care needs and preferences can vary greatly. The senior population is diverse, with different levels of independence, health challenges and lifestyle preferences. To meet these varied needs, 55+ communities are offering flexible care models that cater to the individual.

From specialized wellness programs to chronic disease management and mental health support, personalized care plans are designed to address not only physical health but also mental, emotional and social well-being. For example, fitness programs are tailored to seniors’ abilities

and health conditions, ensuring that every resident can participate at their own level. Additionally, memory care and cognitive support are becoming increasingly important as more communities focus on providing services for those with dementia or Alzheimer’s disease.

This shift toward personalized care means that seniors are not treated as a homogeneous group but as individuals with unique needs, preferences and goals. It is a model that encourages aging with purpose and allows seniors to maintain as much independence as possible while receiving the support they require.

One of the most significant factors affecting senior health is social isolation, which can lead to depression, cognitive decline and other negative health outcomes. As such, senior communities are placing a strong emphasis on fostering social connection.

Rather than being isolated, seniors in these communities have more opportunities to engage with their peers, form new friendships, and build supportive networks. Community events, ranging from fitness classes and art workshops to volunteer opportunities and intergenerational programs, are designed to keep seniors active and socially engaged.

The future of senior care in 55+ communities is not just about aging, it is about thriving. It is about fostering independence, embracing technology, nurturing social connections and providing personalized care that enhances the quality of life. ■

Information provided by Dave Zahn, Sales Director, Valley View Village, 2571 Guthrie Ave., Des Moines, 515-265-2571.

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Feel Good with Every Sip



HEALTH By Ashley Powell

WELLNESS in a can

The beverage world is starting to look very different. More people are moving away from drinks that leave them feeling sluggish, overstimulated or hungover and looking for options that better support how they want to feel.



That shift has helped fuel the rise of functional beverages. Instead of drinking just for taste or habit, many people are now choosing drinks designed with a purpose, whether that is relaxation, mood support, focus, sleep, stress relief, or even a social buzz.

Some functional drinks contain CBD or low dose THC for relaxation or socializing. Others may include kava, kanna, functional mushrooms, caffeine, adaptogens or other plant-based ingredients aimed at supporting energy, calm or mental clarity. Some people are looking for non-intoxicating wellness support, or a lighter, more manageable alternative to alcohol.

One reason these beverages are growing so quickly is convenience. They fit naturally into social settings in a way that feels approachable for people who may not be interested in traditional supplements.

Different ingredients and cannabinoid levels can create very different experiences, which is why many people find it helpful to ask questions and learn what products may fit their goals best.

What started as a niche category is quickly becoming part of the broader wellness conversation, and many people are realizing there are now more ways than ever to drink with intention. ■

Information provided by Ashley Powell, CBD American Shaman, 800 S. 50th St., No. 106, West Des Moines, 515-380-5251, and 3418 Eighth St. S.W., No. 3, Altoona, 515-967-4036.

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HEALTH By Dr. Kari Swain and Dr. Elizabeth Ellrich

NERVOUS system dysfunction in children

Summer break gives families the opportunity to focus on their health without the pressures of school stress and schedules. Summer is a popular time for health and wellness check-ups and appointments and the ideal time to schedule a comprehensive chiropractic exam to evaluate children's nervous systems and spinal health.

Many parents assume chiropractic care is only necessary when their child complains of pain, but chiropractic care is much more than that. Neurologically focused chiropractors address nervous system dysfunction as well as structural issues. Children encounter physical, environmental and emotional stressors just as adults do. Leaving this stress unaddressed can create lasting effects on health and development. Nervous system dysfunction can manifest as digestive, immune system, behavioral, attention, emotional and sleep issues or be present with no apparent symptoms at all. Board-certified pediatric chiropractors are specially trained to identify nervous system dysfunction and provide gentle, age-appropriate adjustments.

Summer break provides the perfect environment for your child's body to adapt and heal. Without daily classroom stresses and busy schedules, the nervous system can respond more effectively to chiropractic care.

Chiropractic adjustments facilitate healing and nervous system regulation. Start the school year stronger, healthier and more adaptable by creating a strong foundation this summer. Proper spinal alignment and nervous system function sets children up for success through improved attention span, better focus, decreased behavioral issues, enhanced emotional processing, strengthened immune system function, better sleep quality, support for optimal growth and development, and postural correction to counteract screen time effects. Healthy families incorporate chiropractic care as part of their comprehensive healthcare team. ■

Information provided by Dr. Kari Swain and Dr. Elizabeth Ellrich, Swain Chiropractic, 410 Center Place S.W., Altoona, 515-967-9300.

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THE BEAUTY of smarter makeup choices

Today's consumers are becoming more mindful about what they put on their skin — and for good reason. Makeup is something many of us wear daily, yet not all products are created with skin health in mind. Choosing skincare-focused makeup can make a significant difference in both the appearance and condition of your skin over time.



Traditional cosmetics often contain ingredients that may clog pores, trigger irritation or contribute to dryness and inflammation. For individuals with acne-prone, sensitive or aging skin, these formulas can create a cycle of covering up skin concerns while simultaneously worsening them.

That's why I encourage clients to seek out makeup that supports skin health rather than works against it. Clean, mineral-based formulas are often gentler on the skin and can provide breathable coverage while allowing the skin to function naturally. High-quality skincare makeup products may also include nourishing ingredients such as antioxidants, botanical extracts and physical SPF protection to help defend against environmental stressors.

One brand that has consistently stood out in the professional skincare world is Jane Iredale. Known for combining makeup with skin-friendly ingredients, these products are designed to enhance natural beauty while supporting overall skin wellness. Many clients appreciate the lightweight feel, buildable coverage and reduced irritation compared to traditional cosmetics. ■

Information provided by Nikki Morgan, DNP, ARNP, SkinFusion, 200 Second St. S.E., Altoona, 515-967-0587, www.skinfusionfx.com, nikki.skinfusionfx@gmail.com.

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ADVANCE planning offers peace of mind

Planning ahead is one of the kindest gifts you can give the people you love. Many families tell us that the greatest benefit of advance planning is the sense of calm it brings during an otherwise overwhelming time. When important decisions have already been made, your family is free to focus on what truly matters: being together, supporting one another and honoring a life well-lived without added stress or uncertainty.



There can also be meaningful financial benefits to planning and paying in advance. Designed to give families confidence and clarity about future expenses, you can have your selected services and merchandise guaranteed — protecting your family from the impact of rising costs over time.

Whether you are just beginning to think about your wishes or you are ready to put a full plan in place, starting the conversation can be simple and should be completely pressure-free. Advanced planning counselors are here to listen, answer questions, and help you explore your options at your own pace. They will meet you where you are and make sure your preferences are thoughtfully recorded.

Every family deserves compassionate care and affordable options, regardless of budget or preferences. Advance planning is simply about creating peace of mind — for yourself and for those who mean the most to you. ■

Information provided by Scott Eriksen, Director of Hamilton's Advanced Planning, Hamilton's Funeral Home, 605 Lyon St., Des Moines, 515-697-3670, www.HamiltonsFuneralHome.com.

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Fishing: Share your fishing stories. 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.

Play sets, play houses and tree houses: Share the stories of your memorable play sets, play houses and tree houses. Perhaps your family has play structures that entertain your kids for hours. Or maybe you have memories of the play house you enjoyed as a child. Big or small, if it creates happy times, let us know. Email tammy@iowalivingmagazines.com.

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.



CITYVIEW Midday Mixer

Saturday, May 30, 1-4 p.m.
The District at Prairie Trail, S.W.
District Drive, Ankeny

Enjoy summer cocktails to kick off the season. Check in is at El Presidente. Cost is \$25 for advance tickets, \$35 at the door. For more information, or to buy tickets, scan the QR code.



Music in the Park

Sundays, May 31, June 28, July 26 and Aug. 30
Haines Park, 613 Third Ave. S.E., Altoona

The city and CAP Theatre present an evening of musical talents and popcorn at Haines Park in Altoona. Events start at 6 p.m. and feature: May 31 - West Connection; June 28 - Altoona Flute; July 26 - Band SPAM; Aug. 30 - Haywire.

Celebrate Spring in the Park

Monday, June 15, 6 p.m.
Water Works Park, 2201 George Flagg Parkway, Des Moines

The Kerry and Linda Killinger Foundation Community Series features live performances on the Killinger Family Stage throughout the summer. The Des Moines Performing Arts takes the stage in June, featuring a national touring act in the park. Stay tuned for the performance announcement. Learn more at www.waterworkspark.org/events-in-the-park/community-series.



Des Moines Downtown Farmers Market

Saturday, May 2 to Oct. 31, 7 a.m. to noon, 8 a.m. to noon in October
Historic Court District, Downtown Des Moines

The 2026 season will feature 305 vendors, including 43 new participants, with 75 produce and agriculture vendors highlighting the region's strong farming community. Vendors represent 74 cities across 42 Iowa counties, spanning 12 city blocks from Water Street to Fifth Street. For more information visit www.dsmpartnership.com/desmoinesfarmersmarket.

Live Music at Prairie Meadows

1 Prairie Meadows Drive, Altoona

- May 29, 10 p.m. to midnight, Anthony Koester Band
- May 30, 10 p.m. to midnight, Zachary Freedom
- June 2, 11 a.m. to 3 p.m., Tom Hofer and the Iowa Playboys
- June 5, 10 p.m. to midnight, Recoil
- June 6, 10 p.m. to midnight, The Savage Freds
- June 9, 11 a.m. to 3 p.m., Gaylin Sudik and Friends
- June 12, 10 p.m. to midnight, Monkey4
- June 13, 10 p.m. to midnight, 80 Grit
- June 16, 11 a.m. to 3 p.m., Richie Lee and the Fabulous '50s
- June 19, 10 p.m. to midnight, Encore Legends
- June 20, 10 p.m. to midnight, Mike Walsh Band
- June 23, 11 a.m. to 3 p.m., Ken Frette and the Country Classics
- June 25, 7 p.m., Paperback Writer - The Beatles Experience
- June 26, 10 p.m. to midnight, Lola Blu
- June 27, 10 p.m. to midnight, Beggar's Bargain
- June 30, 11 a.m. to 3 p.m., Chantilly Lace

Greater Des Moines Botanical Garden Spring Programs

Greater Des Moines Botanical Garden, 909 Robert D. Ray Drive, Des Moines

- Summer Camp Registration: Give your child a summer of discovery, creativity and outdoor adventure. These nature-based camps combine science, art, exploration and play in a safe, inspiring environment led by experienced educators. Perfect for students entering grades 1-5. Register at <https://dmbotanicalgarden.com>. ■

HOW ACT prep programs help students succeed

Preparing for the ACT can be challenging for many high school students. With academic responsibilities, extracurricular activities and college planning all happening at once, students often benefit from additional academic



support. ACT prep programs offered by tutoring centers provide structured guidance, personalized instruction and proven strategies that help students improve their performance and feel more confident on test day.

One of the greatest benefits of a tutoring center is personalized learning. Every student has different academic strengths and areas that need improvement. Most tutoring centers begin with an assessment to determine a student's current skill level in subjects such as math, English, reading and science. Based on those results, instructors create a customized study plan designed to focus on the student's individual needs. This targeted approach allows students to spend more time improving weaker areas while continuing to strengthen their

existing skills.

Experienced instructors are another important part of successful ACT preparation. Tutors are trained to explain difficult concepts clearly and help students understand the format of the exam. In addition to reviewing academic material, they teach valuable test-taking strategies that can improve performance. Techniques such as pacing, eliminating incorrect answers and recognizing common question patterns help students work more efficiently during the exam.

Practice testing also plays a major role in ACT prep programs. Many students struggle with test anxiety or feel pressured by the timed nature of the ACT. Tutoring centers often provide practice exams that closely mirror the real test experience. These sessions help students become familiar with timing, instructions and question types while giving them an opportunity to monitor their progress over time. Repeated practice can help reduce stress and increase confidence before the official exam.

Flexibility is another advantage of tutoring center programs. Many centers are

able to schedule around other activities and commitments. Parents also benefit from regular progress updates that provide insight into their child's improvement and overall readiness for the ACT.

Beyond raising test scores, ACT prep programs help students build important academic habits that extend into college and future careers. Skills such as organization, critical thinking, time management and disciplined study routines can support long-term success. For many students, ACT preparation is not only about achieving a competitive score but also about developing confidence in their academic abilities.

Overall, tutoring center ACT prep programs provide students with personalized support, expert instruction and practical strategies that help them feel prepared and capable when approaching one of the most important exams of their high school years. ■

Information provided by Angela Jones, Owner and Center Director of Sylvan Learning of Altoona, 301 Center Place, Suite C-1, Altoona, 515-957-2923, Angela.Jones@sylvanlearning.com.



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NIELSEN-BANDA'S heritage combines 'two worlds'

Black mother and Mexican father instill pride.

Vinny Nielsen-Banda has a unique background.

"I'm actually half black and half Mexican," he says. "When it comes to the heritage side of things, I feel like it's some of everything going on."

Nielsen-Banda experienced both sides of his heritage as his mom, Lyna, lived in Houston, and his dad, Raynaldo, lived close to the border of Mexico in Texas.

"Summers were spent with dad," he says. "The rest of it was spent with mom. I felt like growing up it was these two different worlds that I then was left to combine myself."

This led to an interesting life.

"While both of them are extremely family oriented, I feel like it's a day and night sort of a situation growing up. Living with my mom, the black side of me was just very strict. I still make my bed like military style every morning. I feel



Vinny Nielsen-Banda is proud of his Black and Mexican heritages.

like my mom is looking over my shoulder for some reason versus being a little more relaxed with Dad. Dad was just kind of a 'spread the love' sort of a situation. Everybody needs to tell everyone we love them every time we get off the phone and everything like that."

Certain sides of his heritage come out in different ways.

"When it comes to anything food related, I do feel like that side connects me much more to the Black side of my family," Nielsen-Banda says, adding he likes to serve food family style. "Soul food is a big thing in my home still to this day. Even living in Iowa, Sunday big dinners are always going to be a huge thing."

With his distinct background, both sides instilled a common trait, Nielsen-Banda says.

"Both sides of my family had constant reminders to be happy of who you are, proud of who you are," he says. "Remembering the people that had to suffer to get you where you were. A big part of me is history. When you're little, you don't really want to hear it. Then you grow up, and it was important to hear. While I don't look Mexican, my dad just 100% was, 'OK you're going to remember this. You're going to see exactly where Grandma grew up.'"

His heritage creates interesting dynamics.

"I'm seen as African-American in the community. When you look at me, you would just see a Black person. That's just kind of the way it is. I think that's big with a lot of mixed-race people, whether you're half black and half white, half white and have something, you look a certain way. People connect you with a certain thing. And I think that I constantly have to remember that this is a part of me." ■

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A PLETHORA of summer fun ahead

As the school year wraps up in Altoona, families, students and neighbors are trading textbooks for sunglasses and lining up a summer of community events that bring the city to life. From graduation ceremonies and school-packed traditions to outdoor concerts, farmers markets and family-friendly festivals, Altoona's summer calendar offers something for every age and interest.



The first event that the chamber has planned is just a few short days away. This is the 15th anniversary of our **Wine & Craft Beer Fest**, and this year we are celebrating in a big way. Not only will we have the best in sampling, but we will also have music to rock out with from Mike Moody and the Outlaws. We would love for you to join us, so grab a few friends, bring your lawn chairs and be prepared to kick off your summer in the best way possible. We have just a few days left to grab your tickets.

When: Friday, June 5, 5-8 p.m. at the Civic Plaza (next to Hy-Vee). **Admission:** \$20 per person (booklet of six is \$110; \$30 at the door). Tickets available online and at HyVee Altoona (ticket sales close at noon on event day).

Whew! And that's just the beginning of summer. There is so much more going on in Altoona. Here are a few things to mark on your summer calendar:

- If you love hunting for deals, then our **City-Wide Garage Sales** are for you. They begin in late May and end in early September, and the chamber's website has the details and registration form: www.altoonachamber.org.

- **Farmer's Market at Brightside Aleworks** is every third Thursday between May and October from 5-8 p.m.

- For car enthusiasts, **Sugar Shack is hosting Car Night** on Tuesdays. (Be sure to check their Facebook page for details).

Looking ahead: July brings us our **Fourth of July parade** and the **Chamber's Annual Golf Outing** on July 31 at Terrace Hills (9 a.m. to 4 p.m.). Don't forget, as we get into early August, we have the annual **National Night Out** event on Aug. 4 at the Sam Wise Youth Complex.

Our community has something to offer for everyone, and it's easy to find details for the events I've mentioned in this article plus many more. You just have to head to the Altoona Chamber's website and click away to plan your summer activities. ■

Information provided by Twila Shreves, 2026 Altoona Chamber President, Owner, Hidden Treasures Gifts and Book-Tea-Que.

JUNE 11th - 13th
 JULY 9th - 11th
 AUGUST 6th - 8th
 SEPTEMBER 3rd - 5th

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Register on
www.altoonachamber.org
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altoonachamber.org/events



Julie Schneider and Sarah Jaschen at the Iowa Donor ribbon cutting April 30.



Nikki Hicks and Nikki Morgan at the May 6 SkinFusion FX skin cancer screening event.



Jacie Mitchell and Ellie Moad at the May 6 SkinFusion FX skin cancer screening event.



Brett McAllister at the May 6 SkinFusion FX skin cancer screening event.



Kari Atzen and Kayla Holt at the May 6 SkinFusion FX skin cancer screening event.



Heidi Kline and Danielle Loutzenhiser at the May 6 SkinFusion FX skin cancer screening event.



Kennedy Wilson and Nikki Morgan at the Dynamic Storage Spaces XL ribbon cutting with Altoona Chamber on April 24.



Janine Gustafson and Angel Martinez at the Dynamic Storage Spaces XL ribbon cutting with Altoona Chamber on April 24.



Jacque Warwick and Amy Ferguson at the May 6 SkinFusion FX skin cancer screening event.



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Dr. Amy Jensen; Jen Alexander, Pharm. D; Dr. Kari Swain; Dr. Lacey Dettmering and Nikki Barkhaus at Women of Vision, held at Pennie Carroll and Associates in Des Moines April 29.

OUT & ABOUT



Kyle Lee, Zaid Gustafson, Dan Douglas and Eric Yoeger at Perk Before Work May 5 at Sylvan Learning Center.



Heather Sievers, Melissa Horton and Stephanie McCuen at Perk Before Work May 5 at Sylvan Learning Center.



Heather Sievers, Angela Jones and Allie Jones at Perk Before Work May 5 at Sylvan Learning Center.



Jennifer Armatis, Linda Lawson, Jen Holschag, Emily Baker and Lori Slings at Perk Before Work May 5 at Sylvan Learning Center.



Tom Gustafson and Kyle Lee at the Dynamic Storage Spaces XL ribbon cutting with Altoona Chamber on April 24.



Tom Gustafson, Kyle Lee, Zaid Gustafson and Janine Gustafson at the Dynamic Storage Spaces XL ribbon cutting with Altoona Chamber on April 24.



Mary Simon and Jackson Harper-Griffith and the Iowa Donor ribbon cutting.



A ribbon cutting was held for Be Well Collective May 1.



Kyle Lee and Dr. Callie Williams at the Be Well Collective ribbon cutting May 1.

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