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FEBRUARY 2024

Living

RESIDENTS' CHOICE AWARDS

Dallas County residents
share their favorites



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WELCOME

SOMETHING different each issue

I used to publish an automotive photo magazine, much like the Auto Trader, Deals on Wheels or Wheeler Dealer publications of years gone by. These were quite popular 30 years ago. We sold the magazines in the check-out aisles in local stores, and we had to convince store owners or managers to carry them. Part of our pitch was that the magazine was a new product each issue with hundreds of different vehicles for sale and that consumers would return to see what was in the next issue. It wasn't just a sales pitch, though, as it proved to be true.



That was 30 years ago, but I thought about the auto magazine days when we were tabulating the data from this year's Residents' Choice poll, which we are publishing in this issue as we have done for several years. When we look at the results, we find perennial favorites that seem to win their category each year. We also see changes from year to year with some surprises rising to the top. And we see newcomers in the poll that have made an incredible impact in a short time.

Bottom line, much like the auto magazine, the results of each year's poll are different. That makes sense, as the poll is really the pulse of the community at the time. And, as we all know, that pulse can — and does — change.

If you voted, thank you. Your input makes a difference, as the category winners will tell you. If you didn't vote, please take the time to do so next year. It is an easy process.

I have talked with numerous people who represent the people, places and events that are voted as favorites in this poll, and they tell me about the positive impact it has. The poll results are a great resource for readers who are looking to purchase products and services locally. Many of you have likely used the results for that exact purpose. A plumber to hire. A new restaurant to try. A park to visit. The list, literally, goes on and on with the latest and greatest each year.

Be sure to save this issue, as it will come in handy throughout the year. I also ask that you take the time to congratulate the winners with your comments and, when appropriate, your pocketbook. They will appreciate it, and we do, too.

Thanks for reading. ■

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RESIDENTS' CHOICE AWARDS

Dallas County residents share their favorites



February has rolled around again, which means it is time to recognize the Residents' Choice Award winners for Dallas County.

As we continue to improve our poll and respond to what readers say is important to them, we have added categories. This year look for the favorites you haven't seen before such as Outdoor Lawn Equipment Store, Audiologist/Hearing Center, CBD Store, Mental Health Services, Auto Body Shop and more.

Also new this year, note the repeat winners — 26 in total — designated by an asterisk by their name. See who is merging as our "perennial favorites." These favorites are doing it right — building loyalty in their customers.

As always, remember that these favorites were chosen by Dallas County residents. You are likely to agree with some choices and disagree with others, but the results were determined by your area neighbors. If you voted in this year's poll, thank you for participating. And, if you didn't, be sure to look for notices in this magazine of next year's poll opening and cast your vote. With some categories having only a few votes between the top vote-getter and the third-place vote-getter, it's important to note that all those listed are winners, and we congratulate them all.

CBD American Shaman was residents' choice for favorite CBD store. Pictured are Mason Grimes, manager, and Ashley Powell, owner.

Dallas County Residents' Choice for Favorite...

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

Restaurant

Mickey's Irish Pub Waukee

Runners up: Dexfield Diner & Pub; Fiesta Mexican Restaurant

Restaurant for breakfast

*** Patrick's Restaurant**

Runners up: Early Bird Brunch; Waveland Cafe West

Restaurant for lunch

Ambro's Roadhouse Bar & Grill

Runners up: Dexfield Diner & Pub; Mickey's Irish Pub Waukee

Restaurant for dinner

Fiesta Mexican Restaurant

Runners up: 5th Quarter Bar and Grill; Dexfield Diner & Pub

Restaurant for dessert

Billy's Ice Cream Store

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

Place for ice cream

Waukee Ice Cream Shoppe

Runners up: Billy's Ice Cream Store; Home Sweet Cone Ice Cream

Pizza establishment

Casey's

Runners up: 7 Stone Pizzeria; Patrick's Restaurant

Bar

Mickey's Irish Pub Waukee

Runners up: 5th Quarter Bar & Grill; Ambro's Roadhouse Bar & Grill

Coffee shop

*** The Morning Grind**

Runners up: The Coffeesmith; Scooter's Coffee

Catering company

Hy-Vee Catering

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

Server/bartender

Jackson Roberts, Dexfield Diner & Pub



7 Stone Pizzeria was one of the Residents' Choice favorites for place to get pizza.

Runners up: Haley Block, Brickyard Burgers & Brews; Miranda Broeker, Ambro's Roadhouse Bar & Grill

Auto service

*** Alley Auto Sales**

Runners up: Adel Tire & Service; Willard Garage

Auto body shop

Olson's Body & Paint

Runners up: Graham Collision; Modern Motors

Car dealership

*** Shottenkirk Chevrolet**

Runners up: Million Motors; Stivers Ford Lincoln

Preschool/Daycare

University Kids

Runners up: Faith's Flock Preschool; Raccoon River Preschool

Nonprofit

Waukee Area Christian Services

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

School

Meadow View Elementary

Runners up: ADM High School; Northwest High School

Park

Triumph Park

Runners up: Centennial Park; Evans Park

Community festival

*** Adel Sweet Corn Festival**

Runners up: Dallas County Fair; Waukee Independence Day Celebration

FEATURE

Church

Lutheran Church of Hope

Runners up: Faith Lutheran Church; New Hope Church

Pastor

Mike Householder

Runners up: Matt Krause; Ryan Whitson

Chamber of commerce

Waukee Area Chamber of Commerce

Runners up: Adel Partners Chamber of Commerce; West Des Moines Chamber of Commerce

Library

*** Adel Public Library**

Runners up: Roy R. Estle Memorial Library; Waukee Public Library

Camping spot

Timberline Campground

Runners up: Dallas County Fair Campgrounds; Des Moines KOA West Holiday

Grocery store

*** Fareway Meat & Grocery**

Runners up: Aldi; Hy-Vee Grocery Store

Boutique

*** Azalea Lane Boutique**

Runners up: Mainstream Boutique; Real Deals

Retail store

Real Deals

Runners up: AM Apparel; Azalea Lane Boutique

Thrift Store

Goodwill of Central Iowa

Runners up: None

Home improvement retail store

*** Baldon Hardware**

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

Liquor store

Hy-Vee Wine & Spirits

Runners up: Wall to Wall Wine and Spirits; World Liquor & Tobacco + Vapors

Nursery or garden center

*** Harvey's Greenhouse**

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

Place to purchase a gift for a man

Fleet Farm

Runners up: Baldon Hardware; Old Station Craft Meats

Place to purchase a gift for a woman

Real Deals

Runners up: Azalea Lane Boutique; Mainstream Boutique

Bakery

*** Echo's Cookies**

Runners up: Black Water Bakery; River to River Bakery & Pizza

Florist

*** Adel Flowers & Gifts**

Runners up: Hazel Mae Floral Events; Hy-Vee

Dad/child date spot

*** Adel Family Fun Center**

Runners up: The Palms Theatre & IMAX; Warrior Lanes

Mom/child date spot

*** Adel Family Fun Center**

Runners up: The Morning Grind; The Palms Theatre & IMAX

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FEATURE

Place to take your mom and dad

Adel Family Fun Center

Runners up: The Palms Theatre & IMAX;
Patrick's Restaurant

Place to take your kids or grandkids

Adel Family Fun Center

Runners up: The Brenton Arboretum; The
Palms Theatre & IMAX

Children's birthday party spot

*** Adel Family Fun Center**

Runners up: Charlee's Elite School Of Dance;
Tigers' Den

Golf course

Sugar Creek Golf Course

Runners up: Hillcrest Country Club; River
Valley Golf Course

Hair salon

*** Texture Salon**

Runners up: Hairs2You; Studio 10

Physician's clinic

The Iowa Clinic

Runners up: MercyOne; UnityPoint Health

Dental office

Adel Family Dentistry

Runners up: Lush Family Dental; Timberline
Family Dental

Orthodontics office

Johnson Orthodontics

Runners up: Bernhardt and Smith
Orthodontics; Central Iowa Orthodontics

Mental health services

Optimae LifeServices

Runners up: Adel Mental Health; Uhl Therapy
Services

Chiropractic office

Waukee Wellness & Chiropractic

Runners up: Adel Chiropractic; Luellen
Chiropractic

Vision care

Elite Eye Care

Runners up: Adel Vision Clinic; Wolfe Eye
Clinic

Health club or gym

Waukee Family YMCA

Runners up: Anytime Fitness; Fit & Fierce 515

Pharmacy

*** Adel HealthMart**

Runners up: Medicap; Sumpter Pharmacy

Cosmetic services

Texture Salon

Runners up: Iowa Face + Body Med Spa;
Kissed Peach Wax Saloon

Physical therapy

Core Physical Therapy

Runners up: Athletico Physical Therapy;
Maximum Physical Therapy

Dance studio

Premiere Dance Project

Runners up: Charlee's Elite School Of Dance;
Let's Dance

Gymnastics and/or tumbling studio

Charlee's Elite School of Dance

Runners up: Adel Tumbling & Dance Club;
Jacobs Gymnastics

*Thank you for voting us Favorite
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FEATURE

Audiologist/hearing clinic

Woodard Hearing Centers

Runners up: Costco Hearing Aid Store; Waukee Hearing Aid Center

CBD Store

CBD American Shaman

Runners up: Sumpter Pharmacy; Your CBD Store

Financial planner

Travis Gaule, Edward Jones

Runners up: Nathan Clark, Innovative Financial Solutions; Bob Grove, Edward Jones

Law firm

Bergkamp, Hemphill & McClure, P.C.

Runners up: Hopkins & Huebner, P.C.; McKinney Law Offices, P.C.

Accounting firm

Banwart Tax & Accounting

Runners up: Insight CPA; Meriwether, Wilson & Company, PLLC

Veterinarian

Adel Veterinary Clinic

Runners up: Broderick Animal Clinic; Waukee-Clive Veterinary Clinic

Dog groomer

* Handsome Hounds Boarding and Grooming

Runners up: Stylin' Paws; Waukee Pet Salon

Pet care

Handsome Hounds Boarding and Grooming

Runners up: Adel Veterinary Clinic; Stylin' Paws

Lawn care business

Luke's Lawn & Landscaping

Runners up: Grassy Knoll Lawn Care; Ripke Outdoor

Landscaping company

Luke's Lawn & Landscaping

Runners up: Ripke Outdoor; RJ Lawn & Landscape

Heating and cooling business

* Adel & Winterset TV & Appliance

Runners up: Baldon Plumbing Heating & Cooling; Tigges Comfort Services

Electrical business

* Elite Electric & Utility Contractors

Runners up: Ark Electrical Services LLC; Webster Electric Inc.

Plumbing company

* Baldon Plumbing Heating & Cooling

Runners up: Deez Plumbing Services; Lenhart Plumbing

Senior living establishment

Village Cooperative of West Des Moines

Runners up: Adel Acres; Spurgeon Senior Community

Insurance Agency

* LSB Insurance - Eric Schepers

Runners up: Luellen Richardson Insurance Inc.; Bob D. Smith - State Farm

Realtor

* Julianna Cullen, RE/MAX Precision

Runners up: Kevin Howe, RE/MAX Precision; Amy Lucht, RE/MAX



Wolfe Eye Clinic is among Residents' Choice favorites for eyecare.

Bank

GreenState Credit Union

Runners up: Racoon Valley Bank; Veridian Credit Union

Photographer

* DKay Photography - Danielle Hawkins

Runners up: Kelsey Arganbright Photography; Lindsey Willis Photography

Place for guests to stay

* Big Blue Bed & Breakfast

Runners up: The Church in Town; Hotel Pattee

Home builder/remodeling contractor

NexGen Baths

Runners up: Heartland Handcrafted; RCI Builders

Outdoor lawn equipment store

Waukee Power Equipment

Runners up: Moss Bros.; Van Wall Equipment

Pest Control

* Paul's AAA Pest Control

Runner up: Central Iowa Pest Control ■

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MACRI awarded CRE® designation

CBRE has announced that Vice President Mike Macri III, CRE, CCIM, MRED, in the company's West Des Moines office has been awarded the CRE® (Counselor of Real Estate) designation by The Counselors of Real Estate®, an international group of high-profile real estate professionals who provide expert advisory services to clients on complex real property and land-related matters. The credential was awarded in January 2024.

Macri joined CBRE in September 2018 and has more than 20 years of industry experience. He is responsible for nearly 2 million square feet of development projects and properties throughout Iowa and the Des Moines metropolitan area on behalf of various landlords and developers. Macri also serves as adjunct professor of practice with Iowa State University College of Design's Community and Regional Planning department where he teaches courses in real estate development for the Master of Real Estate Development program.

"It is an honor to be invited into such a prestigious and respected organization of distinguished real estate professionals," said Macri.

In addition to his work with CBRE, Macri maintains a consultative relationship with the cities of Ottumwa and Maquoketa, as well as Jackson County Economic Development. He's also previously worked with The Garner-Hayfield-Ventura Community School District and served as Consultant for Economic Development for the cities of Pleasant Hill and De Soto, as well as Mills County Economic Development. ■

FINANCIAL services leaders position Bank Iowa for growth

Bank Iowa announced new positions for local financial services leaders within its West Des Moines corporate office. Two of the leaders are joining Bank Iowa.

Jessica Ferin is joining the bank as vice president, operations director, while Amber Weger is joining as vice president, treasury management. Both women are Iowa natives who have so far achieved two decades in the banking trade, each having started their careers as bank tellers.

Ferin, whose banking career began in 2005 as a retail banker in Johnston, comes to Bank Iowa from QCR Holdings where she served most recently as first vice president of payments and digital operations. She is a graduate of the Iowa Bankers Leadership and the Ankeny Leadership institutes.

A Cresco native, Ferin has seen the impact community banks can have on people and families in the area. "Bank Iowa has an excellent reputation for taking care of its people," she said. "The bank's purpose, vision, and values really spoke to me."

Weger, of Ankeny, comes to the bank from another community-based financial institution. She made the move from retail to commercial banking in 2011, beginning her career in treasury management as department administrator.

"I'm excited about the opportunity to grow my career while working for a bank that is family-owned and community-focused," said Weger, who is a board member for Young Variety and a committee chair for the Alzheimer's Association. ■

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MEET Alex Dvorak

Westridge teachers are a “gold standard”

Author’s note: *Jordan Creek Living discovered five former Westridge students who are now teachers at Westridge Elementary School. Alex Dvorak is the second teacher featured.*

When Alex Dvorak attended kindergarten at Westridge Elementary in 1999, recess was on his mind — not the thought that he’d return 22 years later as a teacher.

Today, he is in his second year teaching fifth grade at Westridge. He’s in his seventh year in education, having taught at two other West Des Moines schools previously. He says he enjoyed his experience as a student and was fortunate to find a job at Westridge.

When hired, he replaced one of his previous fifth-grade teachers. A few of his former teachers remain.

“As a student, it always seemed like such a huge place,” says Alex. “Now I reminisce on being a student in the same room I teach in and feel like the walls and room have gotten a bit smaller,” he reflects.

He says, as a child, he aspired to become a teacher. His grandparents were lifelong educators in the Cedar Rapids district, and, whenever he visited them, former students approached them.

“Everywhere we went, students stopped to tell them how much being in their class changed their lives,” he says. “This had a profound impact on me as a child.”

When Alex attended Westridge, his fourth-grade teacher, Lindsey Wheatley, was inspirational in fostering his love of school.

“She was the first teacher I made a true connection with who made me feel seen, heard, loved and believed in,” he says. “I still remember having a surgery that year, and Miss Wheatley dropping off ice cream afterwards, checking to see how I was recovering.”

Alex says the best part of being a teacher is knowing the impact he has on students and their families. He supports kids both in and out of the classroom.

“I like to remind them how they are growing as people. Hopefully the support extends longer than the 180-day school year,” he says.

Alex says teachers are often visionaries and leaders who shape society and help students be successful and achieve their goals.

“Teachers at Westridge put on a gold standard. They are incredible,” he says. “The experiences here at this building were exciting and fun, but also impactful enough to shape our futures into teachers who wanted to return ‘home’ to Westridge Elementary and give some of those same magical moments to students. I still believe in the magic and joy of Westridge; it remains today as it did when I was a student.” ■



Alex Dvorak is one of five Westridge teachers who also attended the school.

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Rotary holds live auction

Tuesday, Feb. 27, 5:30-7:30 p.m.

Glen Meadows Retirement
Community Auditorium,
850 S. 60th St., West Des Moines

The Rotary West Des Moines club is having a live auction fundraising event to support the club's community and charity activities. The event begins with networking and an optional \$15 dinner with wine from 5:30-6:30 p.m. The live auction fundraiser follows from 6:30-7:30 p.m.

Mentoring For Women

March 8

Join the West Des Moines Chamber for this full-day event including breakfast, a fashion show at lunch brought to you by White House Black Market, and an afternoon cocktail reception. For information and registration, visit <https://members.wdmchamber.org/events/details/2024-mentoring-for-women-summit-presented-by-wellabe-featuring-100-mentors-3548?calendarMonth=2024-03-01&lookahead=365>.

Jordan House Museum tours

Jordan House Museum, 2001
Fuller Road, West Des Moines

Walk in the footsteps of history at the historic Jordan House Museum, the home of the Jordan family and the only Underground Railroad stop open to the public weekly. Learn about the history of West Des Moines, beginning with rocks and fossils, through the indigenous peoples, early settlers and the development of railroads and Valley Junction. For more information, visit www.wdmhs.org/visit.

Community Police Academy

Applications due Feb. 29

Sessions March 7-May 16

The West Des Moines Police Department is hosting its 21st Community Police Academy in 2024. CPA is 10 weeks of informational sessions covering all the best topics of everyday police work. Registration is open now. Classes begin on March 7 and will continue every Thursday evening through May 16 from 6:30-9 p.m. Participants must be 18 years of age or older, willing to participate in at least eight sessions, and submit to a background check. There is a \$40 registration fee to cover a CPA shirt and other miscellaneous course materials. Deadline to apply is Feb. 29. Applications can be submitted online at www.wdm.iowa.gov/police.

Elks Pancake Breakfast Buffet, Bake Sale and the Easter Bunny

Sunday, March 10, 8 a.m. to noon
West Des Moines Elks Lodge, 2060
N.W. 94th St., Clive

The Easter Bunny will be at the Elks breakfast to greet the children and have treats to share. The breakfast buffet includes: biscuits and gravy, french toast, scrambled eggs, bacon, sausage patties, cheesy potatoes, and all you can eat pancakes (including blueberry and chocolate chip pancakes), orange juice, milk, and coffee. Enjoy a bloody mary or mimosa for \$3.50. Cost is \$10 for adults and \$5 for children 10 and younger. Proceeds support the Hoop Shoot Program, other youth activities and veteran support activities.



Iowa Wild home games

Wells Fargo Arena

233 Center St., Des Moines

iowawild.com

- Feb. 9 at 7 p.m. vs. Tucson
- Feb. 10 at 6 p.m. vs. Tucson
- Feb. 19 at 5 p.m. vs. Rockford
- Feb. 21 at 7 p.m. vs. Rockford



February Luncheon:

LGBTQ+ Leaders

Feb. 15

The public is invited to the West Des Moines Chamber's February luncheon dedicated to fostering connections with LGBTQ organizations throughout the region. This event aims to provide valuable insights for the community, offering opportunities to learn, support and increase awareness about the inspiring individuals who make up our diverse region. For information and registration, visit <https://members.wdmchamber.org/events/details/february-2024-luncheon-lgbtq-leaders-3537?calendarMonth=2024-02-01>.

Book discussion

Every third Thursday, 7-8 p.m.

Jordan House Museum,
2001 Fuller Road,
West Des Moines

Des Moines Art Center exhibit

Through Feb. 18: "Double Take"

4700 Grand Ave., Des Moines
Desmoinesartcenter.org

Sixth Annual Super Bags Tournament

Feb. 11

Smash Park, 6625 Coachlight Drive,
West Des Moines
smashpark.com/location/west-des-moines

You honed your skills during tailgate season. Now it's time to see if you've got what it takes against the best bags, or cornhole, players in the metro area at Smash Park. Registration begins the day of at 9 a.m.



EVENTS IN THE AREA

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

Check for cancellations

Des Moines Performing Arts productions

Des Moines Civic Center, Cowles Commons, Stoner Theater, Temple Theatre, 221 Walnut St., Des Moines
dmpa.org

- Feb. 6-11: "Company"
- Feb. 15: Capital City Pride Presents: Brea Baker
- Feb. 17: The Peking Acrobats
- Feb. 20: Les Ballets Trockadero de Monte Carlo
- Feb. 27 through March 3: "Les Misérables"
- Feb. 27 through March 17: "Dixie's Never Wear a Tube Top While Riding a Mechanical Bull"



Iowa Wolves home games

Wells Fargo Arena, 233 Center St., Des Moines
iowa.league.nba.com

- Feb. 23 at 7 p.m. vs. Rio Grande Valley Vipers

Dome After Dark

Fridays, 6-10 p.m. through March
Des Moines Botanical Garden,
909 Robert D. Ray Drive, Des Moines

Enjoy the conservatory and gardeners show house illuminated with unique and colorful lighting. Details at dmbotanicalgarden.com



CITYVIEW Chocolate Walk

Friday, Feb. 23, 5-9 p.m.

West Glen Town Center, 5465 Mills Civic Parkway,
West Des Moines

Like chocolate? Like chocolate drinks? Then you'll love this event. For a ticket price of \$25 (\$35 at the door), attendees will receive 10 tickets that can be redeemed for sample cocktails at participating venues. Attendees will also be provided tickets for chocolate dessert samples at participating retail stores. A shuttle bus from Majestic Limousine will be providing transportation to each location, although most are only a short walk away. For a link to purchase tickets, visit chocolatewalk.dmcityview.com. ■

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ET-CTY-AD-CONS (11-23)

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RECIPE

A BETTER-FOR-YOU breakfast favorite

(Family Features) Whether you're encouraging loved ones to start a new wellness kick or looking to add new ideas to an already-nutritious menu, families at any stage of a journey toward better health can use newfound favorites to bring fresh flavors to the table.

Start by ramping up your family's breakfast with these slightly sweet mini Greek yogurt pancakes with cinnamon-maple topping for a protein-packed way to start the day with a healthy addition of fresh berries. This dish from Milk Means More provides a delicious breakfast that allows you to bring everyone together for a tasty, nutritious meal no matter the occasion. Dairy foods, like the low-fat or fat-free milk and yogurt found in this recipe, are fundamental to good nutrition.

Constructing a better-for-you menu calls for a balanced diet with a variety of foods to get essential nutrients. This balance is important for maintaining healthy gut and immune function while optimizing overall wellness.

Find additional better-for-you recipe inspiration at MilkMeansMore.org. ■

Mini Greek yogurt pancakes with cinnamon-maple topping

Recipe courtesy of Marcia Stanley, MS, RDN, culinary dietitian, on behalf of Milk Means More
Total time: 25 minutes
Servings: 6

Topping:

- 1 3/4 cups plain Greek yogurt (fat free, 2% or 5%)
- 1/3 cup maple syrup
- 1/2 teaspoon ground cinnamon

Pancakes:

- 1 cup all-purpose flour
- 2 tablespoons sugar
- 1 teaspoon baking powder
- 1/4 teaspoon baking soda
- 1/8 teaspoon salt
- 1 egg, lightly beaten
- 3/4 cup plain Greek yogurt (fat free, 2% or 5%)
- 1/2 cup milk (skim, 2% or whole)
- 3 tablespoons melted butter
- 1 teaspoon vanilla
- oil
- 1 cup fresh blueberries or chopped fresh strawberries

To make topping:

Stir yogurt, syrup and cinnamon. Cover and refrigerate.

To make pancakes:

In mixing bowl, stir flour, sugar, baking powder, baking soda and salt. In separate bowl, whisk egg, yogurt, milk, butter and vanilla. Add yogurt mixture to flour mixture. Stir just until combined (batter should be slightly lumpy).

- Scrape batter into large plastic food storage bag. Oil nonstick griddle or large nonstick skillet. Heat over medium heat. Cut off about 1/2 inch from corner of plastic bag. Squeeze batter, about 1 tablespoon at a time, onto hot griddle. Cook 1-2 minutes per side, or until pancakes are golden brown, turning to second sides when bubbles form on surface of pancakes and edges are slightly dry.
- Serve warm pancakes topped with cinnamon-maple yogurt and sprinkled with berries.



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HOW CAN voluntary benefits help your business and employees?

Voluntary benefits are optional insurance benefits offered to employees. These plans are often 100% employee paid and payroll deducted or can be partially paid by the employer.

For the employer, voluntary benefits help recruit and retain skilled employees by enriching the benefit package without adding to the employer's bottom line. Benefits help promote employee health and wellness. Under IRS Section 125, some benefits can be paid pre-tax, saving both the employee and employer money.

Employees like the convenience of having quality insurance plans offered to them at work with the ease of payroll deductions. Employees can customize coverage for their specific needs depending on their stage in life. Voluntary benefits can increase access to coverage for



employees with pre-existing conditions with many options guaranteed issue or limited underwriting.

Voluntary benefit options

- **Dental insurance** with an emphasis on preventive benefits. Routine exams and cleanings can be covered at 100%. Routine exams can help catch and treat a cavity early. Delay in treating a simple cavity can turn into something more serious. Dental insurance also helps finance major expenses like root canals, crowns, implants and dentures.

- **Vision insurance** helps pay for routine exams, glasses or contacts and can offer discounts on lasik eye surgery. Vision exams become more important as we strain our eyes using more digital technology and spending more time at work and personal time on our computers, tablets and cell phones. Vision exams are also important for children who don't understand what they should be able to see. I got glasses when I was in third grade and

remember the "wow" moment when I could easily see the chalkboard. (OK, I know I'm aging myself. Yes, I went to school when the teacher actually wrote with chalk on a board.)

- **Short and long term disability coverage** replaces income when not able to work due to an illness, accident or maternity leave. A disability, even for a short period of time, with the loss of income and medical bills on top of it, can really throw finances into a tailspin.

- **Cancer and critical illness coverage** can help pay for medical out-of-pocket costs and other burdens caused by an ongoing illness.

- **Voluntary life insurance** is an easy and convenient way for an employee to increase their life insurance on themselves, their spouse and dependents. ■

Information provided by Laura Patton, FHIAS, Patton Insurance Benefits, 1112 Maple St., West Des Moines, 515-270-8178.

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FEEL the love at the WDM Library



Back by popular demand, we have a Blind Date with a Book display on the second floor near the new books. Read the short description on the outside of a wrapped book, take a chance on love, and check it out. Then let us know how your “date” went by tagging us in your review on social media. We’ll be keeping an eye on Facebook and Instagram and sharing date reviews as the month goes on.

Upcoming event highlights

Reminder: The library will be closed on Monday, Feb. 19, for staff training.

Introduction to Dungeons & Dragons

Saturday, Feb. 10, 17 and 24, 9 a.m. to noon, ages 15 and older

Join us for three sessions that will introduce you to the social, exciting and imaginative experience of D&D. Attendees will not only learn the basic rules, but also how to create a character — and then play through a game. Content will also be offered to help new Dungeon Masters get started running their own games. Registration required.

Where to Start to Love Your Heart

Tuesday, Feb. 13, 6:30-7:45 p.m., for adults

Taking care of your heart doesn’t have to be complicated. You can start by uncovering some common heart care myths and then begin your journey toward heart health with three simple dietary strategies and three supplements to pump up your heart health. No registration required.

Valentine’s Day Storytime

Wednesday, Feb. 14, 6:30-7:30 p.m.; Thursday, Feb. 15, 10:30-11:30 a.m.; and Friday, Feb. 16, 10:30-11:30 a.m., ages 2-6 with adult.

Join us for a Valentine story time including a puppet show, stories, rhymes and songs. All you need is love... and stories. Registration is required.

Teen After Hours Mini Golf

Friday, Feb. 23, 5:45-8:30 p.m., grades 6-12

Join us for an after-hours mini golf game throughout the library. Pizza will be served. Signed permission slips required to participate. Registration required. ■

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WHY would I prepay funeral expenses?

Preplanning one's final arrangements is something that everyone should do. While it is not necessarily an easy topic to address, having arrangements in place can provide a great deal of peace of mind, both for the person making the arrangements and for those loved ones who will be left behind.

No one comes through the doors of the funeral home on the day that their loved one has died and regrets that the plans have already been made. In fact, it is quite the opposite. Families experience great relief knowing that plans are in place, decisions have been made and, perhaps, the expenses have already been handled.

While prepaying funeral expenses is never a requirement for someone to place their arrangements on file with a funeral home, it is an option available and one that you should know about.

There are many benefits to prepaying funeral expenses. Most importantly, it allows a person the opportunity to purchase funeral arrangements at current prices, with the guarantee that those services and merchandise selections will be provided, at no additional expense to the family, at the time the funeral home's services are needed.

Keep in mind, funeral arrangements will never be less expensive than they are today.

Whatever your funeral home of choice is, make sure you understand your options, and then make the decision that is right for you. ■

Information provided by Sarah Masteller, Advanced Planning Counselor, Hamilton's Southtown Funeral Home, 5400 S.W. Ninth St., Des Moines, 515-697-3679



MLK DAY Youth Leadership Scholarship winners

The West Des Moines Human Rights Commission and the WDM MLK Day Planning Committee announced this year's Martin Luther King Day Youth Leadership Scholarship winners.

Three students were selected to receive awards because of their leadership and contributions in the areas of promoting peace and understanding; celebrating diversity, equity and inclusion; and improving communication and cooperation between diverse populations in the West Des Moines community and schools.

The scholarship winners were announced during the celebration held at the MidAmerican Energy Company RecPlex on Monday, Jan. 15, to honor the life and legacy of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Each student will receive a \$500 scholarship award.

2024 Youth Leadership Scholarship award winners:

Melvin Bryson

Melvin was born and raised in Las Vegas, Nevada, and moved to West Des Moines in 2019 in pursuit of a better-quality education. He is a senior at Valley High School and an active member of the Varsity Debate team, Refugee and Immigrant Student Embassy (RISE), Valley's CORE group (Community of Racial Equity), and is working to develop a Black History Month program for students. He plans to pursue a degree in finance and eventually attend law school.

Yasser Samir

Yasser is an Iraqi-born refugee who came to America in 2009 in the pursuit of a better life. He is a senior at Valley High School and has dedicated himself to serving as an ambassador of change. His advocacy work surrounds helping newcomer Arabic-speaking students. He is a member of the Refugee and Immigrant Student Embassy (RISE) and has presented at several conferences including the DSM Human Rights Symposium, where he discussed how to better support refugee youth in the community. Yasser plans to pursue a degree in engineering at the University of Iowa.

SirMichael Carrington Williams-Thomas

SirMichael is a freshman at Timberline School in Waukee. He is an active member of the Student Advisory Leadership Council, Speech and Debate Team, Mock Trial, Jazz Band and Performance Band and served as chair for the first Black History Month program. Additionally, he is the regional teen president for the central region of Jack and Jill of America, Inc., overseeing the states of Iowa, Illinois, Kansas, Missouri, Oklahoma, Arkansas and Colorado. He is also a member of the National Teen Board (NTB), where he and his six peers help to strengthen and amplify the voices of Black teens on a national level. ■

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THE LEGALITIES of buying or selling a home

You don't want to spend more money than you have to. This is especially true when you are buying or selling a house. You can save by selling your home with the assistance of an attorney.



When you contemplate selling your home, before you ever put it on the market, you have to know three critical things:

- The value of your home
- The legal documents you need
- How to complete the sale

You must determine how much the house is worth to you. Understand the costs that go into a transaction so that you can calculate a fair price. The seller will have to pay off a mortgage, bring the taxes up to date, and pay for some of

the standard closing costs. The buyer will have fees and costs associated with obtaining a loan.

Once the buyer and seller agree on a price, there are legal documents to sign. The purchase agreement contains the details of the transaction, such as the sales price, the closing date, the financing terms, and any special contingencies. Always have a purchase agreement reviewed before you sign it to avoid vague, illegal or incomplete terms. We help buyers and sellers understand their rights. The purchase agreement is a binding contract, and it is vital that it is drafted correctly.

Iowa law requires that the seller provide a written disclosure statement to a purchaser. The seller's disclosure statement is required even if a property is being sold in "as-is" condition. For homes built prior to 1978, a lead-based paint disclosure statement is required by federal law. State law requires that a seller inform a

buyer about radon testing. If the home has a septic system, the law requires that the system be inspected prior to sale. The deed and other supporting documents transfer title to the new buyer.

Completing the sale is the final step. The abstract of title must be brought up to date and examined. Title issues for the buyer or seller must be addressed. The legal documents to convey title must be drafted, reviewed and signed. A settlement company must collect and disburse the funds.

You deserve a trusted team of legal experts who can provide information, specialization and protection when you buy or sell a home. ■

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

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HEALTH

By Lance Andersen

GET LOST — in a daydream

"How will you go about finding that thing the nature of which is totally unknown to you?" —Meno.

This may seem like a philosophical question, but it appears just as important for every individual to answer today as when it was first said in ancient Greece. Wishing others to "get lost" could be well intentioned, because getting lost can cause what was unfamiliar to appear. "Lost" comes from the Old Norse "los," and one translation is "falling out of formation." This implies it's an action rather than a state of being.

Good news is you can access the expansive blue from anywhere thanks to the power of your mind. Daydreaming stimulates creative innovation in the brain's right hemisphere but also activates the hippocampus, which suggests this could help improve learning and memory. Somewhat paradoxically, daydreaming about recent events helps cement them into memory, so the wandering mind is perhaps never lost. If daydreaming sounds lazy, call it "quiet wakefulness," which is a relaxed state of environmental awareness that helps us process things when we are both awake and at rest. Without it, we may never have heard of Einstein. It's up to you to find what "flow state" helps spontaneous connections in your brain. It's clear from MRI scans that your brain is very active during daydreaming, but how active is it at other times? ■



Information provided by Lance Andersen, LMSW, SS Therapy and Consulting, Ltd., 4725 Merle Hay Road, Suite 205, Des Moines, 515-528-8135, www.sstherapyandconsulting.com, andersen@sstherapyandconsulting.com.

HEALTH

By Ashley Powell

NAVIGATING seasonal depression

CBD, or cannabidiol, has gained widespread attention for its potential benefits in addressing anxiety and depression. Research shows that CBD interacts with the endocannabinoid system, a complex network of receptors in the body, which plays a crucial role in regulating mood and stress responses.

Several studies, such as one published in the Journal of Clinical Psychology, indicate that CBD has anxiolytic (anxiety-reducing) properties. The compound influences serotonin receptors, impacting the brain's neurotransmitter levels associated with mood regulation. This contributes to the reported calming effects observed in individuals using CBD.

Moreover, a review in the Neurotherapeutics journal highlights CBD's potential in managing various anxiety disorders, including generalized anxiety disorder (GAD), social anxiety disorder (SAD), and post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD).

Research, such as a study in the Journal of Chemical Neuroanatomy, proposes that CBD also has antidepressant effects by interacting with receptors involved in the regulation of mood and emotions.

While more research is needed to fully understand the mechanisms and long-term effects, these findings indicate that CBD holds promise as a natural option for individuals dealing with anxiety and depression. ■



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. References: 1. Blessing, E. M., et al. (2015). Cannabidiol as a Potential Treatment for Anxiety Disorders. Journal of Clinical Psychology. 2. Campos, A. C., et al. (2016). Cannabidiol rescues acute hepatic toxicity and seizure induced by cocaine. Frontiers in Behavioral Neuroscience. 3. Sales, A. J., et al. (2019). Cannabidiol Induces Rapid and Sustained Antidepressant-Like Effects Through Increased BDNF Signaling and Synaptogenesis in the Prefrontal Cortex. Journal of Chemical Neuroanatomy.

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WELLNESS

By Kristen Shelton and Amanda Kramme

BENEFITS of personalized IV therapy

Do you find yourself tired, stressed, or does your body feel depleted day after day?

Have you ever heard of IV therapy or the various benefits that intravenous therapy can provide to you and your health foundation? IV therapy provides a rapid, direct route for delivering fluids and essential nutrients, such as vitamins, minerals and electrolytes, into the bloodstream, ensuring maximum absorption. This method is often used for quicker hydration, nutrient replenishment, support for certain medical conditions, and enhanced overall wellbeing. Personalized IV therapy involves tailoring the infusion to an individual's specific needs. This may include a customized blend of vitamins, minerals, antioxidants, and other nutrients based on the person's health goals or deficiencies. Healthcare professionals assess factors such as medical history, lifestyle and current health status to design a personalized IV therapy infusion and/or care plan. While some people seek this for energy boosts, immune support, overall wellness, stress relief or athletic recovery, others may benefit to seek support for chronic conditions. Booking a trip, long hours at the office, recovering from a workout, or looking to best support your whole body and longevity? IV therapy can boost your vitality from within. When you're ready to experience the most refreshed and revitalized you, consider IV therapy for its safe and effective results. ■



Information provided by vVid Wellness + Mobile IV, 1980 N.W. 94th St., Suite E/F Clive, 515-415-1550, www.livin-vivid.com.

SENIOR

By Brooke Baker

ASSESSING when your loved one needs more care

Is your loved one having a hard time getting to appointments, seems confused by instructions or perhaps isn't paying bills on time? Sometimes an older adult's need for additional help is gradual.

Here are some ways you can evaluate how your loved one is doing in terms of health, safety and quality of life.

Mobility: Are they shuffling or dragging their feet? Do they spread their feet far apart to maintain balance? **Depression:** Are there changes in energy levels, irritability or anger, difficulty sleeping, eating more or less than usual? **Money matters:** Are there stacks of unopened mail and unpaid bills, uncashed checks, or key documents that haven't been dealt with? **Driving:** Are there scratches or dings on the car? Do they forget how they got somewhere? **Changes in appearance:** Are they wearing the same clothes every day, not cutting their nails, have matted hair, have odor from not bathing etc.? **Life at home:** Do you see spoiled food in the fridge, dirty towels or bedding? Is there a smell of urine in the house? **Medication:** Check dates on pill bottles. Are their medications being taken as directed and are they being refilled?

These are indicators help may be needed. Adult day programs can provide socialization, exercise, well-balanced meals, engaging games and activities, physical therapy, and more to help. ■

Information provided by Brooke Baker, Grace Estates, 801 N.E. Venture Drive, Waukee, 516-518-0977, www.graceestatesadc.com.



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ENROLL TODAY!

HOW TO best use your 2023 tax refund

When your tax refund arrives, it presents a unique opportunity to make strategic financial decisions. Rather than succumbing to the temptation of immediate spending, consider these six wise ways to use your tax refund to your advantage.



- **Build your emergency fund.** If your emergency fund is below recommended levels, allocate your tax refund to bolster it. I suggest maintaining at least three to six months' worth of expenses in your emergency fund. While a regular savings account works, a certificate of deposit can offer a higher interest rate, making it an attractive option for secure savings.

- **Contribute to retirement.** Secure your future by directing your tax refund into an individual retirement fund, whether you choose a Roth or Traditional IRA depends on your financial goals. A traditional IRA allows for tax deductions on contributions but taxes

withdrawals, while a Roth IRA provides tax-free withdrawals but no upfront deduction. Aim to accumulate ten times your salary in retirement savings by age 67 for a comfortable retirement.

- **Pay down credit card debt.** If burdened by credit card debt, use your tax refund to pay it down. Credit cards typically carry high interest rates, and clearing this "bad debt" can free you from prolonged financial strain. Unlike mortgage or student loan debt, credit card debt doesn't contribute to appreciating assets, making it a priority for repayment.

- **Invest in education.** Allocate extra funds towards education, whether for yourself or your child. Investing in education is an investment in human capital, proven to enhance salary potential, social mobility, fulfillment and even health. Consider placing your refund in a college savings vehicle to potentially benefit from tax advantages.

- **Increase your home value.** If your emergency and retirement savings are adequate, and you're free from credit card debt, consider investing your tax refund in your home.

Funding a renovation project can not only enhance your living space but also increase your property's value. Focus on changes that improve your family's overall quality of life if selling is not on the immediate horizon.

- **Give to charity.** Contribute your tax refund to a cause close to your heart. Beyond the emotional reward, charitable giving may offer tax benefits. Keep detailed records of your contributions if you plan to itemize deductions in the following tax year.

Your tax refund is a valuable resource that can shape your financial future positively. By strategically allocating these funds, you can build a stronger financial foundation, secure your retirement, and contribute to both personal and societal wellbeing. ■

Information provided by Michael Jiskoot, Valiant Wealth, 3408 Woodland Ave., Suite 204, West Des Moines, 515-223-6068. At Valiant Wealth, we ascribe to many of these principles, and I advise my clients to take a measured and proactive approach to achieving their financial goals.

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KAPUR is an 'open book' for CultureALL

Speaker promotes understanding, respect for other cultures.

Jeevanjot “JJ” Singh Kapur of West Des Moines is on a mission to help Iowans value and respect other cultures. He’s part of the Open Book program through CultureALL.

CultureALL is a nonprofit which assists Iowans in participating in and respecting other cultures. Open Book is a “human library” with people who are “books,” telling others a chapter of their life. Open Books share their stories regarding identity, nationality, sexuality and disabilities.

JJ shares his story of his Sikh faith. JJ was born in West Des Moines; however, his mom was from India and his dad from Singapore. He recalls, as a child, flying on an airplane 24 hours to see his extended family in Singapore.

“I learned how food and religion were important to the culture,” he recalls. “I learned to respect. We always waited for everyone to arrive before we start to eat.”

His dad was a great teacher who made things fun.

“He taught me to learn about myself first before learning about my peers, who would ask questions about why I don’t cut my hair,” he says. “We put turbans on our jack-o-lanterns and snowmen.”

After 9/11 was a tough time for his family, as they were targeted for wearing turbans. Yet he hoped to bust stereotypes by posting a funny video, “21 survival tips to use a turban.”

While attending Valley High School, JJ won a national speech contest, talking about culture and the 9/11 aftermath.

“It was a high honor. I was the first Sikh in a turban to ever win. It was the largest stage to share my culture and make myself legible,” he says.

JJ attended Stanford and didn’t think he’d return to Iowa after graduation in 2022. Stanford, located in California, was more diverse than Iowa, yet he longed for his West Des Moines home. He helps train new Open Books, who share personal stories with groups, businesses and schools.

“I want to make Iowa better than when I arrived here with regards to cultural acceptance. I am an Iowan,” he says.



Jeevanjot “JJ” Singh Kapur speaks about a chapter of his life as an “Open Book” in the CultureALL program.

JJ says the public is generally respectful. He’s eager to tell his story to educate people.

“Seeing the warm and curious questions, sometimes ‘Iowa nice’ gets in the way. It’s given me a level of belonging that I cherish,” he says.

He encourages people to experience different cultures through food, festivals and more. He suggests that people ask questions in a respectful way.

“It starts from having the courage to ask. If we don’t, it leads to ignorance and prejudice,” he says.

JJ wants to be a catalyst for change and acceptance through Open Book.

“There is a saying, ‘Don’t judge a book by its cover.’ The cover is just a characteristic of who they are. When you get to know someone, you quickly realize they have so many chapters to their life story.”

For more information about CultureALL, visit www.cultureall.org. ■



OUT & ABOUT



Receiving a certificate for one of Dallas County Residents' Choices for Favorite Outdoor Lawn Equipment Store was Waukee Power Equipment.



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Receiving a certificate for one of Dallas County Residents' Choices for Favorite Chiropractic office was Waukee Wellness & Chiropractic.



Receiving a certificate for one of Dallas County Residents' Choices for Favorite Senior Living Establishment was Village Cooperative of West Des Moines.



Receiving a certificate for one of Dallas County Residents' Choices for Favorite CBD Store was CBD American Shaman.



David Bergen and Dominic Thompson at Urban Cellar wish everyone a Happy Valentine's Day.



Crystal and Brenden McLemore at Nan's Nummies wish everyone a Happy Valentine's Day.

OUT & ABOUT



Maddie Schulte and Brooke VanderPloeg at Rouge Style Company wish everyone a Happy Valentine's Day.



Reese Nelson and Abi Gross at Coffee Cats Cafe wish everyone a Happy Valentine's Day.



Jeanne Reichenbacher and Bailey Jungman at The Spice & Tea Exchange wish everyone a Happy Valentine's Day.



Abbie Lane at Candle Bar DSM wishes everyone a Happy Valentine's Day.



Amy Hilmes at Happy DSM wishes everyone a Happy Valentine's Day.



Joe Burch at Burch Auto Repair wishes everyone a Happy Valentine's Day.



Lisa Ehrhardt and Christina Crook at Upcycled DSM wish everyone a Happy Valentine's Day.



Jason Moore at Glen Meadows wishes everyone a Happy Valentine's Day.



Mandy Berkley at Homespun Elegance wishes everyone a Happy Valentine's Day.



Michelle LaBrecque at Femme / Revival wishes everyone a Happy Valentine's Day.



Angelina Fisher at WORN wishes everyone a Happy Valentine's Day.



Carol Oakley at The Spa at West Glen wishes everyone a Happy Valentine's Day.



Betty Morgan at Joint Chiropractic wishes everyone a Happy Valentine's Day.



John Paladii at Operating Room wishes everyone a Happy Valentine's Day.



Connor Dodson at Ubreakifix wishes everyone a Happy Valentine's Day.

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