

NORTH POLK

MARCH 2024

Living MAGAZINE Trips OF A lifetime

Residents share stories of their
dreams-come-true vacations

Easter roast

RECIPE

Kringla sales benefit motorcyclists in need

NEIGHBOR

Schaffer enjoys home's character, friendly ghost and all

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WELCOME

104 vacation days

Dream vacation. You have heard the term. You may have even experienced one or two. But, more than likely, your dream vacation may still be something in your mind.

When I was a young man working at The Des Moines Register, I was planning a short vacation and told Denny, a customer of mine, that I would be off work. He looked at me with a stern face and said, "Vacation? You don't work Sundays, do you? That's 52 days of vacation a year." He continued, "Wait, you don't work Saturdays either, do you? That's another 52 days. That's 104 days of vacation per year. How much vacation do you need?"

I was without words. Denny was having fun with me, but there was some truth to what he was saying.

As a teenager, I worked at a local gas station that was open 24/7. Even in the 1980s, staffing was a challenge, especially on Thanksgiving, Christmas and New Year's Day. My family didn't take many vacations, so when the opportunity came to earn time-and-a-half for holiday pay, I was the first to sign up. I enjoyed working those days, as the store traffic was lighter, the customers were cheery, and I liked the paycheck.

When I worked at the Register, we were told that we would not be allowed to take vacation between Thanksgiving and Christmas. Those were the newspaper's busiest times with advertising, and we were to be there to make sure of it. We are not as strict today in our company, but a holiday does mean we have to complete five days of work in four days. The presses keep running.

Author Rob Hill said, "My goal is to build a life I don't need a vacation from." Now that makes sense to me. But, like most things in life, I have learned that there truly are different strokes for different folks. Some people love to travel and spend time on a beach; I get sunburned and have two days of diarrhea. Others want to take a week off and ride a bicycle 468 miles across the state in 90-degree weather; that's not my idea of a vacation. And a select few enjoy time at home working on a list of projects and relaxing with friends and family; that's more my style.

Meanwhile, my wife and kids not only enjoy vacations, they have come to expect them. I am slowly but surely learning to appreciate the time off as well. And, although our ideas of what a dream vacation may be differ, I am happy to be along for the ride.

Thanks for reading. ■



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Trips OF A *lifetime*

Residents share stories of their dreams-come-true vacations

By Lindsey Giardino

For some people, vacationing is a part of their routine. They plan, take and enjoy numerous trips to see the sights and “get away” from the usual hustle and bustle of life. They enjoy good times and make fond memories. They share photos and stories, but it isn’t long before they are looking forward to their next excursion. For some others, a vacation turns out to be much more than that — it is a dream come true, and, no matter how many vacations may follow, none will ever compare. It is a trip of a lifetime.

Although Brooke Van Vark has made numerous trips to Mexico, she says the most memorable one was with her husband, Klage, and their 1-year-old son.



Brandon and Monica Converse enjoy kayaking during their trip to Iceland and Norway.

Bucket list vacation

Brandon Converse first took an interest in Norway more than a decade ago after seeing photos and videos of its dramatic scenery. The country also seemed to be off most tourists' radar, which appealed to him. Finally, in July



Brandon and Monica Converse traveled to Iceland and Norway in part for the beautiful scenery those countries afford.

2019, he and his wife, Monica, made his dream of traveling to Norway come true.

The trip required a lot of research and planning beforehand, but Brandon says he enjoyed the process. He found blogs, read reviews, and located websites with helpful

information. He also had travel guides mailed to his home in Polk City and enlisted some help from a travel agency called Fifty Degrees North.

"Upon receiving the first travel guide, it was then that I knew this could be a dream vacation

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and wanted to make it a reality,” Brandon says. “I ended up spending a little over two years researching and planning for the trip. We knew it would be expensive, but saving was part of the planning process, and I had a feeling it would be worth it.”

The Converses ended up coordinating their travels to celebrate their 10-year wedding anniversary. Because they planned to go for two weeks, Monica added Iceland to the itinerary.

“I told Brandon, if we were going to be away from the kids for that long that we must visit another country as well, so we did a stop-over in Iceland on the way, which had been on my list for many years,” she says.

In Iceland, the couple swam in the Blue Lagoon and toured part of the “Golden Circle,” where they saw volcanic landscapes, Gullfoss Falls and geysers.

“Iceland has amazing scenery and is known as the land of fire and ice and is entirely powered by renewable energy (geothermal mostly), which is very educational and makes for some great scenery and experiences, too,” Monica says. “And they have amazing hot dogs. I’m normally not a big fan of hot dogs, but they are absolutely delicious there.”

From Iceland, the Converses headed to Tromsø, Norway, which is north of the Arctic Circle.

The couple rented a car and traveled south to Senja, Svolvær, and then onto even more impressive landscapes at Sakrisøy and Reine, both storybook-worthy island fishing villages of the Lofoten Islands.

In total, they drove about 400 miles in their rental car.

“We took our time and enjoyed the road trip and the food so much,” Brandon says. “From Norwegian waffles and cheese to the excellent salmon and abundant fresh seafood, even whale steak, we enjoyed each meal.”

The couple enjoyed kayaking in fjords, staying in Rorbuer (fisherman cabins) along the waters and hiking places like Segla, the most famous mountain on Senja island in northern Norway.

Brandon and Monica agreed that, for their 20-year anniversary, Monica gets to choose their destination. Right now, she’s thinking somewhere in southeast Asia like Thailand or Indonesia.

“In the meantime, we try to travel as much as we can throughout the year and are trying to

instill a love of travel in our two daughters as well,” Monica says.

The couple has visited most states in the United States, including Hawaii and Alaska, and many places around the Caribbean, including a recent trip to Belize. They’ve also been to Italy, the Greek Isles, Switzerland and Australia.

“We’d much rather spend our money on experiences than stuff,” Monica says. “We have never regretted taking any trip.”

A fishing experience for the books

When a friend told Andrew DeVries about an amazing trip he took to Guatemala for sailfish fishing, Andrew knew he had to do it himself.

“He told me a group of guys goes to this specific location every two years for sailfish fishing,” he says. “Me being an avid fisherman, I couldn’t resist. As soon as he told me about the location and fishing, I was hooked and wanted to experience this amazing opportunity.”

For the next two years, Andrew planned for the once-in-a-lifetime trip.

About eight months prior to the trip, he



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FEATURE

had to put down a 50% deposit for the resort. About three months prior, he booked his flights, and one month before leaving, he paid the final deposit. Because he'd never been out of the country, DeVries also needed a passport. Waiting for it to get processed was perhaps the most difficult part.

"It was nerve-racking waiting for that to arrive on time," Andrew says.

Finally, it was time to depart. When Andrew arrived in Guatemala City, transportation to the lodge, Casa Vieja, was waiting for his group.

"From the airport, it took us four hours to get to the resort," Andrew says. "It should have only been two hours, but they were harvesting a sugarcane field, which was the reason for the delay. Trucks lined the road to harvest, making it hard to get through. I didn't mind the delay. The views were incredible as we were winding through the mountains, many of which were volcanos."

Once they arrived at Casa Vieja, the group experienced hospitality through

and through.

"They greeted us with drinks, and I was captivated by how amazing the whole resort looked," he says. "The first night, the resort did a hog roast for us, and all the food was simply amazing."

The next day, Andrew woke up to staff knocking on his door with fresh coffee. He was also provided with a tasty breakfast that included freshly squeezed orange juice.

"Then it was on to the main event, the fishing," he says. "We would leave the resort at 7 a.m. and return to the resort at 4 p.m. The group of guys on my boat were the lucky ones. We caught the most sailfish out of all the guys that went."

Andrew adds that most people who fish for sailfish hope to catch just one.

"Not there," he says. "They quickly showed us why it was the sailfish fishing capital of the world. Our boat caught 22 sailfish and five mahi mahi the first day, 25 sailfish and two mahi mahi the second, and 15 and five the third, only because we got distracted by



Andrew DeVries had the fishing trip of a lifetime off the coast of Guatemala, where he caught numerous sailfish.

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a pod of over 500 spinner dolphins that needed to steal the show for the day.”

Although impressive, those numbers were considered on the low side for the boat captains as people sometimes catch 60 to 80 fish in a day.

On the third day of fishing, the wind cleared out the smog from a nearby coal plant so Andrew could fully see the beauty of the volcanoes.

“It was crazy to see the smoke coming from these active volcanoes on the horizon as we were repeatedly battling with these fish of a lifetime,” he says. “It was absolutely everything I was hoping the trip would be, and the food came in at a close second.”

Looking forward, Andrew has other dream vacations in mind, and they all revolve around fishing.

“I would love to go to Alaska or the East Coast to try for a massive bluefin tuna or possibly a marlin trip,” he says. “But, ideally, it would be to take the kids with me on one of these incredible trips and to see their excitement. I would be happy to never reel in another fish in my life if it meant watching them doing it.”

Birthday celebration in paradise

This April will mark Brooke Van Vark’s 13th trip to Mexico. While every trip has been a dream, the one that stood out most was when she and her husband, Klage, took their son for his first birthday.

The family ended up staying 14 days in an all-inclusive, kid-friendly resort that included a water park, kids menus at every restaurant, ice cream shops open around the clock, games and much more.

“It was amazing,” Brooke says. “With going out of the country, you never know how it’s going to be with a small child, but they treated us amazing. They even had everything ready for us when we got there. They had the fridge stocked full of snacks, juices boxes, milk, and even had a pack-and-play ready for him. He had the absolute best time.”

Brooke’s first time traveling to Mexico was in elementary school with her parents and brother. Since then, she’s continued the tradition of going every year. In recent years, the Van Varks have extended their trips to two weeks so they could make the most of

their time.

For Brooke, the choice to continue traveling to Mexico stems from the fact that it’s budget-friendly and beautiful.

“Mexico is one of those places you get the most bang for your buck,” she says. “We always do an all-inclusive so it makes the vacation so much more enjoyable. We usually travel to Playa del Carmen but have been to all the surrounding islands like Cozumel and Isla, which are all pretty amazing.”

Aside from taking her son to Mexico, a few highlights from Brooke’s travels have been getting married in Playa del Carmen, snorkeling at the second largest coral reef in the world and holding a nurse shark.

“If you’re looking for the most relaxing beach vacation, I would highly suggest going to Mexico,” she says. “It’s so beautiful, and the ocean is incredibly blue. We always come back with way more friends who live all over the world that we stay in touch with to this day.”

In the future, Brooke says she hopes to travel to another dream destination: the island of Malta off the coast of Italy. ■

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KRINGLA sales benefit motorcyclists in need

Locker raises funds through the farmers market.

If you've ever attended the Polk City Farmers Market, you likely encountered Rene Locker and her homemade kringla. However, you might not realize that 100% of the sales benefit Run for the Son, a program of the Christian Motorcyclists Association.

The CMA is a nonprofit consisting of motorcyclists who provide assistance to motorcyclists in need and spreads the gospel.

Rene and her husband, Scott, became involved after he bought a Harley Davidson motorcycle in 2010. While they were at the Big Barn in Des Moines, it was hosting its annual bike blessings. He joined a CMA group in 2012, and Rene rides along with Scott.

The CMA provides support at a variety of motorcycle rallies and events. Last year, the Lockers attended the Algona Freedom Rally, handing out food, water and setting up phone charging stations.

They've attended the Sturgis motorcycle rally, working as parking lot attendants and emergency support.

"If a motorcyclist is injured, someone from CMA will assist the family. We will do anything to provide for motorcyclists in need."

The CMA includes member chapters from across Iowa. Rene is happy to help out by donating funds through her kringla sales.

Kringla is a Norwegian cookie. Although it's not part of her heritage, she grew up with it in Huxley.

"My neighbor made it, and she'd bag it up, putting it for sale on grocery counters. I knew I wanted to try to make it," says Rene.

She began baking kringla in 2005, selling it at farmers markets. In 2014, she made it for the Run for the Son CMA charity event.

"I donate the ingredients, and all the proceeds go towards the charity," she says.

She has regular patrons who buy her kringla every week. Christmas and Thanksgiving are busy, as she makes dozens of special orders.

Recently she began making earrings to benefit the CMA. Part of her mission is to explain why she's doing it. "I tell them the story about the CMA and Run for the Son. I prefer to bake, sell and share. It's important to get the word of God out," she says.

She says motorcyclists are a unique bunch.

"You can't judge a motorcyclist by what they ride," Rene says. "You meet all types of people. We wear a vest with a patch on our back to identify our organization. People's attitudes completely change once they see it."

She encourages motorcyclists to get involved in helping others.

"Our mission is great. It's all for one purpose," she says.

For more information on the CMA, visit <https://cmausa.org>. To order kringla, reach out to renelocker@msn.com. ■



Rene Locker raises money for motorcyclists in need by selling kringla.

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POLK CITY Community Library news

ANNOUNCEMENTS

- **National Library Giving Day** is April 3.
 - **Saturday, April 6**, the library will be closed due to fire department training burn on an adjacent property.
 - **National Library Week** is April 7-13.
 - **Fareway Round-up for the Friends of the Library** is April 15-20.

ACTIVITIES

- **Adult Crafternoon: Acrylic Painting**, Tuesday, April 2, 2 p.m. Make flower bouquets with buttons, floral wire and salt shakers. All supplies will be provided. 17 and older, registration required.
- **Wednesday Adult Book Club**, "Klara and the Sun" by Kazuo Ishiguro, Wednesday, April 3, 7 p.m.
- **Babble and Brew**, Thursday, April 4, 10 a.m. Playtime for them, coffee and conversation for you.
- **Local Author Talk with Ann Hanigan Kotz**, Thursday, April 4, 6 p.m. Hanigan Kotz incorporates her own family history and Iowa roots into her writing. Her book, "The Journey of Karoline Olsen," is recommended for women "who look for history-based novels that come alive with the quickening of both relationships and survival tactics." Registration is requested, but not required.

• K-5th Comets Kids Club:

Scrapbooking with Rhonda George, Monday, April 8, 4-4:45 p.m. Children will need to bring 10-15 photographs from home to cut and glue with. Registration required.

• **Coloring Night at Fenders Brewing**, Wednesday, April 10, 4-9 p.m.

• **Friends of the Library Meeting**, Wednesday April 10, 6:30 p.m. Anyone interested in supporting the library is welcome and encouraged to attend.

• **Music and Movement**, Thursday, April 11, 10 a.m. Come shimmy and shake with your child. Dance and sing while building pre-reading skills with rhythm and rhyme.

• **Adult DIY Wire Tree Suncatchers**, Thursday, April 20, 6 p.m. Ages 17 and older, reservation required.

• **Monday Book Club**, "The End of Her" by Shari Lapena, Monday, April 15, 2 p.m.

• **K-5th STEM Book Club**, "Let's Clean Up the Forest" by Amy Krouse Rosenthal, Tuesday, April 16, 4-4:45 p.m. Pick up your copy of

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the book starting April 1 while supplies last. Read, then join us for some fun science experiments that correlate with the book. Registration required.

• **Adult Coloring**, Tuesday, April 18, 5-7 p.m. Ages 17 and older.

• **Messy Munchkins**, Thursday, April 18, 10 a.m. Visit us and let your child explore sensory tables we will put out. Have your child wear clothes that you don't mind getting dirty.

• **Plant Swap**, Thursday, April 25, 5-7 p.m. Stop by the library to trade plants, seeds, and tips with other enthusiastic gardeners. Registration is requested, but not required.

• **Story Time** Mondays and Tuesdays, 10 a.m. Join us at the library for stories, songs and an activity or craft. Choose the day that works best for you. Register online at our website for one of the programs each week. Every story can be logged in our 1,000 Books Before Kindergarten program, too.

• **Chair Yoga**, Mondays, 9 a.m. Join Rachel Snyder via Zoom. We will be broadcasting the class on the big screen in the library or you can join us from home. Chair yoga is a gentle practice in which postures are performed while seated and/or with the support of a chair. No experience is necessary. *Gentle strength training may also be incorporated into the practice. Props such as hand weights, resistance bands and a yoga block may be helpful if desired, but not necessary. The Zoom link can be found on our online catalog at polkcitylibrary.org.

• **Geri-Fit® Strength Training Workouts**, Tuesdays at 9 a.m. Strength training workouts that work for all ages and fitness levels, Geri-Fit is challenging, effective and safe to do. The Geri-Fit® program requires a set of light dumbbell weights, a sturdy chair and water to drink during the workout. Ages 50 and older. Stretch bands are available upon request. If you would like to participate from home via Zoom, please let the library know ahead of time so we can email you the link.

• **Ladies' Wednesday Coffee**. Wednesdays, 10 a.m. to noon. Ladies, join us for coffee and conversation.

• **Sit N' Stitch**. Thursdays, 6-8 p.m. Bring your current project and join us for stitching and conversation.

• **Men's Friday Coffee**. Fridays, 10 a.m. to noon. Gentlemen, drop in for coffee and conversation. Enjoy spending time and having a few laughs or interesting discussions with other men from around the area. ■

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RECIPE

EASY Easter eats

(Family Features) Even if Easter hosting duties fell on your plate this year and added one more thing to your holiday to-do list, that doesn't mean it has to be difficult. After all, Easter is a time meant for fun and fellowship with the food just one part of the celebration.

Building the menu around simple, one-pan dishes can keep the focus where it needs to be: spending time and creating memories with family and friends. These dishes call for short lists of ingredients, many of which you may already have in your pantry, and simple preparation to create a full spread perfect for sharing with loved ones. Plus, using only one pan makes cleanup a breeze, so you can get back to the festivities quickly.

A dish like this Easter roast lets you check both the main course and side dishes off your list, relying on the oven to do most of the work for you after some quick prep work.

For more Easter recipe inspiration, visit Culinary.net. ■

Easter roast

Yield: 1 roast

- Salt
- pepper
- garlic powder
- 1 roast (3 pounds)
- 1 bag (1 pound) baby carrots
- 1 bag (1 1/2 pounds) trio potatoes or potato of choice
- 3 cups beef broth
- 1 can (10 ounces) cream of mushroom soup
- 1 tablespoon garlic pepper
- 3 tablespoons brown sugar
- 1 onion, roughly chopped
- 1 bundle asparagus

Directions

- Preheat oven to 350 F.
- Sprinkle salt, pepper and garlic powder over roast and rub into front, back and sides. Place seasoned roast in middle of large roasting pan.



- Place carrots on one side of roasting pan and potatoes on other side.
- In large bowl, mix beef broth and cream of mushroom soup with garlic pepper. Pour mixture over roast, potatoes and carrots. Sprinkle brown sugar over carrots and add chopped onion. Cover and cook 2 1/2 hours then remove from oven, add asparagus and cook uncovered 30 minutes.
- Serve from pan or place on platter for more formal presentation.

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POLK CITY Kiwanis Seniors of the Month

The Kiwanis Club of Polk City announces its Seniors of the Month are Emily Barr, Hannah Drent and Ava Segar.

Emily Barr

"I am a very active and involved high schooler who loves to be busy all the time. I am in many activities and love being able to create lasting and fun memories with my friends. I also care a lot for my grades. I put a lot of work into school, and I really enjoy learning new things. When I'm not participating in my many activities or studying, I like spending time with my friends and family and getting to relax a bit before starting the hectic but worthwhile process all over again."

Emily's parents are David and Bernita Barr of Alleman.

Her favorite school subject is math. She is involved in band, choir, jazz band, jazz choir, speech, musical, color guard and dance. She was honored as 2023 Second Place ISDTA Color Guard Soloist, 2023 All State Individual Speech performer, and 2024 All State Large Group Speech performer. She is a member of the National Honor Society. After graduation, she plans to major in accounting at an undecided university.



Hannah Drent

"I am very passionate about my work inside and outside of school. I am involved in speech, play, musical, Key Club, National Honor Society, National Spanish Honor Society, marching band, concert band, pep band, cross country and track. Outside of curricular activities, I spend my time hanging out with my family, friends and my dog. I attend youth group at Cornerstone Church in Ames. Volunteer work is another piece about me that I am passionate about. My passion for helping others led me to the decision to want to be an occupational therapist. One of my examples of volunteering is hosting a hog roast fundraiser for a family friend. This family has a son who has muscular dystrophy. For the last two years, it has been attended by over 600 people. I have worked with my family and the help of many



others to host this event. The money raised will go towards the expenses for helping maintain this boy's mobility, such as electric wheelchair, ramp van, and an in-home elevator. When I am not volunteering or involved in my curricular activities, I work at Duck Worth Wearing and The LOFT Resale in Ankeny."

Hannah's parents are Jodi and Dale Drent of Slater. Her siblings are Bailey and Alex Drent. Her favorite school subjects are psychology, broadcasting and math. Her honors include All State Speech, Gold Honor Roll, and Distinguished Academic Achievement. She plans to attend Iowa State University to major in psychology and minor in kinesiology then earn a master's degree to be an occupational therapist.

Ava Faith Segar

"My name is Ava Segar, and I will graduate from North Polk High School in May. My parents are Jen and Travis Segar, and I have two older siblings, Gabrielle and Noah, who attend Iowa State University. I have been on the Gold Honor Roll for all four years of high school and am part of the Spanish National Honor Society and DMACC's President's List. I have participated in tennis, Stomp Out Stigma, and numerous bands at North Polk where I have received Best of Center and Outstanding Jazz Soloist awards. Outside of school, I work part-time, read, and love to be around my friends and family. After I graduate, I am keeping my eyes and ears open toward many possible majors at Iowa State University with minors in Spanish and French."

Jen's family is from Polk City. Her favorite school subjects are math and Spanish. ■



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ENHANCING an area treasure

Area group hopes to lend a hand to Big Creek State Park playground.

When she was a young child, Jessica Faue remembers visiting Big Creek State Park with her cousins and having an absolute blast at one of the best beach and playground areas in central Iowa.

As an adult, when she and her husband moved to Polk City in 2017, they started taking their children there as well, often spending entire afternoons running and playing amid the seemingly endless wooden playground structure. The adults continued to have fun there as well.

“We’ve met friends there for picnics, beach days, playground dates, and boat and kayak rentals,” Faue says. “Our boys’ favorite activity is hide and seek or make-believe in their castles/towers at the playground. It’s such a unique playground. So many playgrounds these days are replicas of each other, but this one really gives kids a new and different experience.”

The years and weathering have taken their toll on that majestic playground, however, and signs of age are beginning to show. The playground has begun to deteriorate. Things slowly began disappearing. Fun things like the zip line, a swing, the tire swings, some chains, and then the wood on the benches started noticeably rotting.

Faue, who serves as president of the Polk City Friends of the Parks organization, was saddened. Enough, she says, that in November of 2023, she reached out to Park Manager Andrew Place and asked him if she could help replace broken pieces or gather a volunteer group together.

And the seeds of Friends of Big Creek State Park were planted.

A small group of like-minded people got together and decided the best place to start was the Polk City People’s Facebook group. Just like that, 10 people willing to meet and help with the playground reached out to Faue. The group met officially for the first time in December and decided to pull together a Volunteer Day in the Spring of 2024. Faue put together a Facebook group to gain support and have a means for posting updates.

The page grew quickly, and people have been positive about “helping out or are cheering on our group,” Faue says.

As of right now, no funds are being raised. In order to raise money, the group needs to figure out the best way to do so.

“My hope is to get a group together to form a board and potential 501c3 Friends of Big Creek so we could open a bank account, apply for grants, and ask for corporate/individual donations,” Faue says. “To do that, we need a core group of six to eight people who are passionate about the whole park and who are willing to put in some volunteer time every few months.”

Unfortunately, there are only so many state dollars to spread around. The needs, like always, are many. Faue and the group understand this. Hard decisions will need to be made. The playground is on its last years, and without help from concerned citizens, the State Park will have to figure out what their options are on a limited budget.



“That would lead to an inferior outcome in my opinion,” Faue says. “I wouldn’t want to see a small generic playground installed to replace this iconic one.”

Those who would like to help can first follow the group on Facebook, then get in contact if they’d like to join the meetings and be more involved, want to financially help, or want to supply items needed for the group’s upcoming Volunteer Day April 27 from 8 a.m. to noon.

Faue says 30 people are needed to help replace boards, replace chains and swings, replace tires, stain the wood and weed the sand.

“Nothing too ‘handy.’ We’ll be able to provide instructions,” Faue says. “We have people in our group who will be in charge of sawing boards, so the 30 volunteers won’t need to worry about that. We’re requesting that only people over 16 attend as the playground area will be shut down, and we don’t want kids playing on it while we have tools and stain out. We have one volunteer who offered to bring snacks and drinks for the others.”

Supplies needed will include swing chains, quick links, rubber hose and tire coating which can be purchased and dropped off to Place at the park anytime before the event.

Time is of the essence, Faue says.

“We hope that our Volunteer Day will shed light on the playground and the park’s need to eventually replace it,” she says. “We’re hoping that enough people appreciate the uniqueness so we can gain awareness and support to replace it with a composite replica.” ■



THE COMETS CORNER

NEWS FROM NORTH POLK CSD

MARCH 2024

ACTIVITY SUCCESS CONTINUES AT NORTH POLK

At NPCSD, a crucial aspect of the overall learning experience is students' involvement in extracurricular activities extending beyond the regular school day. We've observed substantial growth in participation, with our activities consistently delivering impressive results on the biggest stages.

Athletics:

The High School Boys Wrestling Team showcased outstanding prowess this year, with a record-breaking 7 athletes qualifying for the State Wrestling Tournament at Wells Fargo Arena. Additionally, Elyse Engebretson on the girls side, in collaboration with Ankeny, competed in the Girls State Tournament at Xstream Arena in Coralville. The boys finished 11th in the Class 2A state tournament with 57 points, boasting 7 qualifiers, 3 medalists, and 1 Runner-Up in Ben Bryant.



In girls' basketball, the North Polk Girls Basketball team made its fifth appearance in the last seven seasons in the Iowa Girls Basketball State Tournament. They avenged last year's loss in the quarterfinals against #4 seed Dallas Center-Grimes with a hard-fought 48-42 win. The Comets faced the Clear Creek-Amana Clippers, the #1 seed with an



undefeated record, in a reminiscent matchup from the 2023 State Tournament. Despite a valiant effort, the Comets fell just short in the semifinals with a final score of 50-48, concluding the season as 4A State Semi-finalists.

Fine Arts:

Jazz Choir Goes Back-To-Back-to-Back!

Our Fermata Nowhere Jazz Choir has received its third straight invite to the Iowa Vocal Jazz Championships and is just one of eight 3A choirs invited. Join us at Waukee High School on Wednesday, March 27th to watch this group perform. Huge congratulations to our remarkable singers!

Speech

Not one but two groups were selected for the All-State Speech Festival hosted at ISU! Congratulations to the following students who earned this amazing distinction:



Improv (Performing)

Emily Barr
Layla Arp
Noah McGough
Ella Hill
Aidan Trier

Improv (Non-Performing)

Lucas Bakken
Stockton Huether
Carly Jepsen
Ruth Turczynski
Will McConnell

Congratulations to our winter activities participants on outstanding seasons! Please note this isn't an exhaustive list of all student achievements in extracurriculars.

KINDERGARTEN AND NEW STUDENT ENROLLMENT FOR THE 2024-2025 SCHOOL YEAR

Mark your calendars! Transitional Kindergarten, Kindergarten, and New Student sign-ups for the 2024-25 school year are just around the corner. Registration opens for all on March 18th. Don't miss your chance to secure a spot!

To register for Transitional Kindergarten/Kindergarten, visit www.northpolk.org, go to School Registration, and choose 2024-2025 New Student Registration. Follow both steps to enroll your incoming kindergartener. This also applies to current North Polk preschool students transitioning to Kindergarten this fall. New students entering grades 1 through 12 can also register during this period.

Registration for existing students (KG - 11th grade) will open in April.

For any inquiries or questions, contact Lynette Foster at lynette.foster@northpolk.org. Thank you for your cooperation and we can't wait to welcome you here!



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NEW treatment for dry eyes

Having dry eyes sounds like such a trivial problem, but those who suffer from it know it can be a serious burden. Approximately 16 million Americans suffer from dry eye disease, and it's a growing problem due to increased screen time. The symptoms include stinging, burning, a gritty sensation, red eyes, fluctuating vision and, in some cases, watery eyes. I still remember going to the eye doctor when I was in college to seek some help for my dry eyes, and all I got was a sample of some lubricating drops which did little to ease my suffering. Thankfully, dry eye management is now one of the most rapidly growing areas of eye care. There are a variety of new treatment options such as prescription medications, oral supplements, eyelid cleaners, improved artificial tears, and light therapy. Intense pulsed light, also known as IPL, is a machine that delivers controlled pulses of red and infrared light to the face and eyelids. IPL has been used for more than two decades in dermatology, but recently it has become popular in eye care due to the realization that it helps people with dry eyes. Treatment with IPL has been shown to improve oil gland function, decrease ocular inflammation, destroy vessels associated with rosacea, reduce the population of bacteria on the eyelids, and increase tone of eyelid skin, which may improve blinking. All of those benefits can ease the discomfort and pain from dry eyes. Patients have had great success with IPL, and we are committed to helping patients get relief from their dry eye symptoms. ■



Information provided by Dr. Todd Pietig, Ankeny Family Vision Center, 311 N. Ankeny Blvd., Ankeny, 515-964-1671.

EMOTIONAL granularity

The way we describe our emotions has a strong influence on how much relief we get from talking about them. For instance, simply acknowledging "I was mad" isn't likely to change our feelings much, whereas something more specific has a much higher likelihood of creating insight and consolation, such as: "I felt disrespected because I had previously explained why I didn't want a surprise birthday party, so when my friends threw me one anyway, it seemed like they were disregarding my wishes, on my birthday of all days. It also made me worried I couldn't trust them to respect my feelings going forward." Lisa Feldman Barrett explains this phenomenon in her book "How Emotions Are Made," and she terms it emotional granularity. She also explains research she has carried out showing that, when people use more specificity (higher emotional granularity), this has the effect of heightening positive emotions and down-regulating the intensity of negative ones. Therefore, a simple (but not always easy) principle for enhancing our emotional wellness is pushing ourselves to be more detailed in how we label and explain our feelings. If this is something you are struggling to do on your own, a licensed mental health professional can help expand your emotional vocabulary and understand the source of troubling feelings. ■



Information provided by Elijah Evans, LMHC, SS Therapy and Consulting, Ltd, 4725 Merle Hay Road, Suite 205, Des Moines, IA 50322, 515-528-8135, evans@sstherapyandconsulting.com, www.sstherapyandconsulting.com.

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GIRLS. Bees. Poor Things. And A Missing Apostle.

So, how were your holidays? See any good movies? Me neither! I am somewhat joking on that one, but I was not blown away by much that I saw. We tend to expect high-impact movies during the holiday season. This one came up short.

Meanwhile, we trudge forward into 2024, eagerly awaiting “Dune Part 2” on March 1. If you didn’t see the original, you only have a short time to catch up. Watch it on the biggest television in your house, and you will be blown away.

Alright, let’s catch up.



“MEAN GIRLS” (in theaters)

I loved the original movie and was looking forward to what I thought was an update. I was wrong. It is a film version of the award-winning Broadway play. So you know the story, but every once in a while they stop to break into song and dance. It is still a lot of fun, just not quite as much as I was hoping for. **Grade: B**



“THE BEEKEEPER” (in theaters)

I like Jason Statham, but the man makes some stupid action movies. That being said, he does make a good one every once in a while. Based on the box office draw, I’m not alone in saying that “The Beekeeper” is one of his better, maybe his best? He is retired military and minding his own business in the back of a rented barn. His business is honey and keeping a few beehives. When a scam caller takes all of

the money from the old woman he rents from, Statham is on the trail immediately and, let me tell you, he is unhappy. No one is going to stop him from catching these idiots. From there we get lots of punches, kicks, gunshots and a kitchen sink. It is non-stop action with a flimsy story but enough to keep you entertained. The action is great, the bad guys are really slimy, and you will relish the butt-kicking you get to watch. The box office has been brisk, so this will likely not be the last time we see this beekeeper. **Grade: B-**



“I.S.S.”

The International Space Station is the setting for this movie that tells the story of an American crew that joins the Russians at the Space Station for a joint venture. When huge trouble on Earth strikes, both teams are told to take over the station. An action film in a tight situation in space always proves to be fun. It is not a great film, but it has enough moments for me to mildly recommend it. **Grade: C+**



“POOR THINGS”

This film is by director Yorgos Lanthimos, who gave us “The Lobster” and “The Killing of a Sacred Deer,” two movies I reluctantly suffered through. His new film, “Poor Things,” has received the same type of praise as those earlier films, and I will respectfully disagree. The cast includes Willem Dafoe, Mark Ruffalo and a brilliant (and Oscar-winning) Emma Stone in a film that defies description — and that’s not

a good thing. It is dark and disturbing but also tries to be funny. Let’s just agree to disagree.

Grade: D-



“SOCIETY OF THE SNOW”

You can find this one on Netflix. It’s a remake of the true and harrowing story of a plane full of rugby players who crash in the Andes mountains. There was a movie titled “Alive” years ago that tackled this same story but not nearly as well. Both movies are good, but this one ramps it up yet tempers itself in certain areas that are controversial. This is well made and enthralling, to say the least. **Grade: A-**



“THE BOOK OF CLARENCE”

My Catholic education failed to clue me in on this missing Apostle who has quite a bit to do and quite a bit to say. It is a thought-provoking and well-produced film that will challenge you and might even start some very interesting conversations. **Grade: B+ ■**

Michael C. Woody has been reviewing movies on radio and television since 1986 and can be heard talking movies every Wednesday afternoon at 2:30 p.m. on KXn0 106.3 with Keith Murphy and Andy Fales. You can also follow him on Twitter @MrMovieDSM.

WHAT SHOULD you do with your tax refund?

It's that time of year when many people start receiving their tax refunds. If you get one, what will you do with it?

Of course, the answer will depend somewhat on how big your refund is. Last year, the average refund amount was about \$2,750, according to the Internal Revenue Service's Filing Season Statistics report.

Whatever the size of your refund, you'll want to maximize its benefit. Here are a few suggestions:

- **Contribute to your IRA.** If you were to receive about \$2,750, it would go a long way toward funding your IRA for the year — but any amount would help. You still have until April 15 to contribute to your IRA for the 2023 tax year, but if you've already "maxed out" on it, you could use your refund for 2024, when the annual contribution limit for a traditional and Roth IRA is \$7,000, or \$8,000 if you're 50 or older. And by getting an early start toward fully funding your IRA for the year, you can reduce the pressure of having to come up with large amounts later.

- **Build an emergency fund.** Your tax refund could help you start or expand an emergency fund. It's a good idea to keep up to six months' worth of living expenses in such a fund, with the money kept in a liquid, low-risk account, separate from the funds you use for your daily expenses. You might need to draw on this fund for unexpected expenses, such as a major home or car repair or a medical bill that's not fully covered by your insurance. Without such an emergency fund in place, you might be forced to dip into your IRA or other retirement accounts to pay for these types of costs, and such a move could be expensive, resulting in taxes, penalties and lost opportunities for growth.

- **Contribute to a 529 plan.** If you have children or grandchildren, and you'd like to help them further their education someday, you might consider investing in a 529 education savings plan. With a 529 plan, earnings and withdrawals are federally tax free, provided the money is used for qualified education expenses. Based on where you live, your 529 plan may provide state tax benefits, too. (It is possible, though, that 529 withdrawals could affect financial aid packages, depending on who owns the account.) A 529 plan can be used to help pay for college, accredited trade school programs, some K-12 expenses and even to help repay some student loans.

- **Pay down debts.** Most of us probably wish we could reduce our debt loads. Your tax refund may give you a chance to do just that. But which debts should you tackle first? You could follow the "snowball" method by paying off the smallest of your loans or debts as quickly as possible. Or you could choose the "avalanche" route by making minimum payments on all debts and using extra funds — such as your tax refund — to pay off the debts that carry the highest interest rates. Either method could help you save money in the long term.

Your tax refund can be a valuable asset, so use it wisely. ■

This article was written by Edward Jones for use by your local Edward Jones Financial Advisor. Edward Jones. Member SIPC. Information was provided by Kyle Matzen, AAMS, 407 W Bridge Rd. Suite 7, Polk City, 515-984-6073.



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A DREAM home in Elkhart

Schaffer enjoys home's character — friendly ghost and all.

Living in Elkhart, Angie Schaffer can see the bright lights of Ankeny off to the west, Ames to the distant north, and Des Moines to the south.

"We feel so close to everything we could ever need and yet hidden away in our secret town, tucked away from the hustle and noise ... the heart of Iowa," Schaffer says.

She and her family, which includes her husband, Scott, and three children, Phoebe, Toby and Lydia, moved to town in May 2012. Angie says she found the perfect old house right across the street from a park and immediately felt like they had found home.

Their only requirements when looking for a house were that it sit on a large lot with mature trees and had been built before 1950.

"We've always loved the character of older houses," Angie says. "The housing market looked a little different in 2012 than it does today, and we snagged our house for a price that felt like highway robbery. When we drove up to it under the shadow of the water tower and saw its Gothic style pitched roof, picture window and corbels, we knew it was the one for us."

The house was built around 1900 and now sits on a half-acre lot after a history of being surrounded by farmland. This history includes being owned by the town banker in the day of horse-drawn wagons.

"We now believe he still resides here as a friendly house ghost who



Scott, Angie, Phoebe, Toby and Lydia Schaffer don't mind living in a home with a friendly ghost, says Angie.

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WHERE WE LIVE



The Schaffers updated their home's kitchen to give it a style of their own.

opens cupboards and likes to watch church TV in the middle of the night," Schaffer jokes.

At one point, a local hairstylist ran a beauty shop out of the current laundry room.

Since moving in, the Schaffers have updated the kitchen, added a pantry and finished rooms upstairs for the kids. They also ripped out the carpet and drop tile ceilings and discovered a pocket door to their front room that was hidden away in the wall. Future goals include adding a second bathroom and adding built-in bookshelves to house their collections of books and LEGO builds.

"We love that our home and lot were both blank slates when we moved in, and it gave us the chance to make everything feel like ours," Angie says.

One special thing is that, in the fall, Monarch butterflies migrate right through the alley behind the house, and the trees are laden with hundreds of them.

"Our yard is also home to a number of overweight squirrels, bunnies, hummingbirds, the occasional praying mantis, bats, tree frogs and garden toads," Angie says. "There's even a few friendly chipmunks — Chippy and Turd Ferguson — that will take peanuts from us. We keep a little flock of chickens, with names like Tater, Grandma and Karen, in a coop off our garage, and they reward us with hilarious antics and eggs. It's a little like living in a Disney movie minus the dead parents and evil queen."

For the Schaffer family, Elkhart still feels like a small town even amid its growth. Both Angie and Scott have gotten involved in city activities, too. Scott serves on the Elkhart Community Betterment committee, and Angie was elected to city council in 2022 after previously serving on the planning and zoning committee.

"We plan to grow old here, and I can't imagine raising our kids anywhere else," Angie says. "This is home, house ghost and all." ■



The Schaffers' garden is home to a variety of wildlife.

A detailed illustration of a modern fire truck, primarily red with white accents. It features a large chrome grille, multiple headlights, and emergency lights on the roof. The side of the truck shows various compartments and equipment, including a ladder and hoses. The truck is shown from a front-three-quarter view, facing left.

Trial challenges, performance demonstrations, mini-rodeo, competitions and more will be featured.

EVENTS IN THE AREA

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

Be sure to check for cancellations.



Hoyt Sherman Place performances

1501 Woodland Ave., Des Moines
hoytsherman.org

- March 24 at 8 p.m. Pink Floyd Laser Spectacular
- March 26 at 7:30 p.m. Brian Culbertson - The Trilogy Tour

53rd Annual Juried Student Exhibition

March 24-April 14
Anderson Gallery, 1310 25th St., Des Moines
andersongallery.wp.drake.edu

A showcase of the students of the Drake Art & Design program, this competitive juried exhibition highlights student work in a variety of media.

The Grimes Business Expo

Tuesday, March 26, 4:30-6:30 p.m.
Meadows Gymnasium, 2555 W. First St., Grimes

The public is invited to the 14th year of the Business Expo. Check out some local businesses and what they have to offer. Look for plenty of free goodies from Grimes Chamber member businesses, face painter, and a balloon artist. Free admission and kids are welcome.



Elks Spring Style Show Fundraiser

Saturday, April 6 from 10 a.m. to 2:30 p.m.
West Des Moines Elks Lodge, 2060 N.W. 94th St., Clive

Go shopping and enjoy lunch at the Elks Spring Style Show Fundraiser. Many fabulous vendors and terrific door prizes are included. Cost is \$15 for admission and funds benefit the Elks' veterans projects. Fashion show starts at 11 a.m. with shopping and lunch to follow. A 50/50 raffle will also be held. Must be present to win prizes.



You Can Grow Orchids

Saturday, April 13, 10 a.m. to 3 p.m.
Canoyer Garden Center, 3355 S.E. Gateway Drive, Grimes

The Central Iowa Orchid Society is hosting an orchid event, with an orchid display, culture information, orchid sale and orchid clinic in which experts will answer questions about your troubled orchid and even help to repot it. Follow them on: Central Iowa Orchid Society Facebook page.

Michael Jefry Stevens and Christian Howes

Sunday, May 5, 2 p.m.
Caspe Terrace, 33158 Ute Ave., Waukee

Over the past 40 years pianist/composer Michael Jefry Stevens has been associated with some of the most important figures in modern jazz. Ranked among the top violinists in jazz, Christian Howes has demonstrated his virtuosity and creativity on numerous recordings since the early 2000s. As evidenced by their 2023 release, "Precipice," when you combine these two improvisers, you end up with pure beauty and joy in every note. Tickets for Jazz at Caspe Terrace concerts are \$30 each and can be ordered by calling 515-279-6452 or emailing abegold1951@gmail.com. You can also purchase tickets at jazzatcaspe.weebly.com. Seating is limited to 130 so reservations are encouraged. Caspe Terrace is owned and operated by the Jewish Federation of Greater Des Moines.



Events at The Brenton Arboretum

Various dates
25141 260th St., Dallas Center

For more information or to register, visit www.thebrentonarboretum.org/events.

- Wednesday, March 27, 10-11 a.m., Nature's Healing.
- April 4 and April 18, Nature Club, varying times. Register by age group.
- April 21, noon to 3 p.m., Earth Day Celebrations; 1-3 p.m., Exploratory Beekeeping.
- April 27, 7 a.m., Birds & Bagels. ■

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 which will be illuminated with unique and colorful lighting. Details at dmbotanicalgarden.com.

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OUT & ABOUT

RIBBON Cutting

A ribbon cutting was held for Home State Bank Feb. 22.



A ribbon cutting was held for Home State Bank Feb. 22.



Clayton Harreld and Shane Torres



Joe and Mindy Lankford



Eric Hockenberry and Jeremy Arends



Nick and Ron Burdine



Ricky Bennett and Quentin Zart



Jessica, Olivia and Keith Bormann



Nikki Mulberook, Jamie Anderson, Melisa Cox and Nicole Strom



Larry Pollard, Tiffany McClain, Bishop Orlando McClain and Khamdeng McClain

PEP Band

Pep Band played at the varsity basketball game on Feb. 6.



Marcus Welch



Nathan Harrington



Hannah Drent and Sonya Goering



Katelyn Phillips and Becca Houser



Stella Weers and Mr. Collin Bell (director)



Vinson Spittler and Aidan Trier



Trey Conley and Isaac Hill



Robert Spencer and Keelie Maas



Addi Keys, Izzy Lowe and Aurden Selmecki



Josie Moore and Claire Nefzger



Krist Schoenberg and Sadie Goering



Kady Fry, Jacob Houser and Ruth Turczynski



SUREFIRE STRATEGIES FOR SPRING CLEANING SUCCESS

Spring is one of the best times to sell your home. However, getting a property ready for an open house usually requires much more than just a deep cleaning. For advice on how to make your home market-ready in today's competitive real estate market, contact me at your earliest convenience.



 **Susie Sheldahl**
REALTOR

515-419-1620
susie@susiesheldahl.com

113 W Broadway Street
Polk City, IA

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Licensed to sell in the state of Iowa.

Efficiency experts say staying motivated is the key to spring-cleaning success. The more you allow yourself to procrastinate or get sidetracked, the longer this seasonal rite of passage will drag on.

As Joan Rivers once joked, "I hate housework. You make the beds, you wash the dishes, and six months later you have to start all over again."

If even the idea of spending multiple days giving your house a deep seasonal cleaning leaves you feeling more exhausted than excited, try some of these motivational tricks:

SCHEDULE AN EVENT - Inviting friends to a dinner or other event at your house is a great way to overcome any spring-cleaning procrastination. Once the date is set and the invitations made, you have a true deadline for getting things ship-shape, plus something fun to look forward to when all is said and done.

START WITH AN EASY TASK - The more cleaning you have to do, the harder it can be to get started. So begin with a task that's easy, yet still meaningful. For example: cleaning the front door, inside and out. Once you've got dirty hands and endorphins pumping, it will be that much easier to tackle a bigger project, like that grungy oven.

COMBINE SOME AUDIO - Up-tempo music is a great motivator, but audio books can also be helpful. You get so engrossed in an hours-long story that you keep cleaning just so you can hear more.

TAKE BREAKS MID-TASK - We all need breaks, but if you take them after finishing a task, it will be that much harder to start on the next task. Take breaks mid-task, and you'll always be motivated to finish it out and move.

DON'T ALLOW YOURSELF TO BE DISTRACTED - Each time you're tempted to stop cleaning, pick through a box of mementos, repair a broken nick-knack, etcetera, jot the idea on a pad of future to-dos so you don't forget, and keep cleaning. To eliminate outside interruptions, turn off your mobile devices.

TRY SHORT BURSTS - For some people, spending hours cleaning the house is just too boring; the list of to-dos is simply too long. If that's you, consider working in short, 30 minute bursts over a longer time period (like a week). For the best follow-through, schedule these cleaning bursts at the same time every day (eg. just before your morning shower or between dinner and dessert).

MAINTAIN THE SHINE - Instead of letting everything go to pot again after your annual spring cleanup, make an extra effort once a week to spruce up one new area (e.g. the stovetop) or ongoing trouble spot (eg that bathroom scum).

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