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JANUARY 2026

Living

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WELCOME

A SUPER Sunday

What will you be doing on Sunday, Feb. 8? If you are like 127.7 million other people, you will be watching the Super Bowl on TV. That's a lot of people, many of whom don't know the difference between a touch-down and a home run. And, they don't care. Why? Because the Super Bowl is about much more than football. In fact, for many, it has become an entire Sunday tradition.

Some viewers don't catch a single football play, as they are watching only to be entertained by the advertisements. In most any other TV viewing situation, those watching TV will turn channels, lower the volume or run to the bathroom or to the refrigerator during breaks. But not during the Super Bowl. This viewing audience tunes in to the ads, and companies ante up \$8 million or more for just 30 seconds of promotion to reach them.

Yes, the Super Bowl is one of the most-watched television events in the United States. The record was set last year with the aforementioned 127.7 million, but the highest-rated Super Bowl remains Super Bowl XVI in 1982 with a 49.1 household rating. That means 49.1% of TV-owning households were tuned into the Super Bowl during its broadcast. Viewership of the Super Bowl has remained stable over the years, even as ratings for other events have declined.

My parents were in the half who didn't tune in to the Super Bowl. Football simply wasn't their thing. When I was in college, I began watching the games more seriously. And, when I made my way into the working world as a young man, I got into the Super Bowl scene even more. The food. The festivities. The fun. Oh, and the football, too.

The Super Bowl parties were aplenty, and my friends and I did our best to attend many, making Mondays a challenge. The problem continues today. "Super Sick Monday" is a real thing, as an estimated 22.6 million U.S. employees are expected to miss work due to post-game fatigue, hangovers, and the cultural significance of the event. Some have even suggested that the Monday following the Super Bowl should become a national holiday, possibly even moving Election Day to that date to help encourage more people to get to the polls. It is an interesting idea, although I am not sure it would help with voter turnout, especially for those mourning after their team lost.

I am now more comfortable lounging in my living room and watching the game with family or a few friends. But don't let me drag you down. Check out this month's cover story to see how others are celebrating Super Bowl Sunday — and all football — be sure to get to work on Monday. ■

SHANE GOODMAN

President and Publisher
Big Green Umbrella Media
shane@dmcityview.com
515-953-4822, ext. 305



Tammy Pearson
Editor
515-953-4822 ext. 302
tammy@iowalivingmagazines.com

Martha Munro
Advertising Account Executive
515-953-4822 ext. 314
martha@iowalivingmagazines.com



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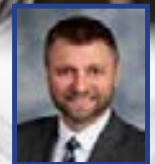
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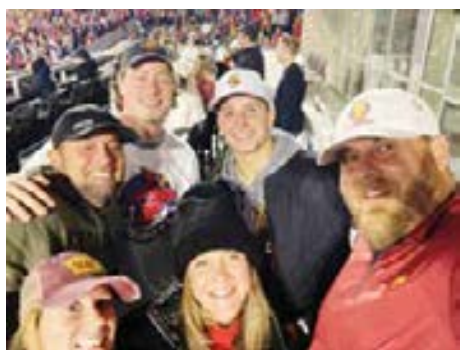
Big game, **BIG PARTY**

Capping off the football season with a watch party to remember

By Rachel Harrington

It's time for the big game, and that's the perfect reason to gather with your fellow fans around the big screen to see which team finishes the year with a championship ring. And you won't be alone. Record-breaking viewership has been reported the last two years, with 127.7 million U.S. viewers last year, according to ESPN.

Chris Shipley found a great tailgate vehicle: an old ambulance that had been converted for just that purpose.



Mark and Haley Hanrahan, Scott and Michelle Sams, Brock Purdy and Mike Rose.



Brad and Summer Fuller enjoy watching the Cyclones.



Brad Fuller and Scott Sams are long-time Cyclone fans.

A “society” of fans

Among those fans gathering to watch the big game will be Scott Sams and Brad Fuller and a group of friends. But, for this group, their heart is really in the tailgating fun they have as part of a group of five families that celebrate the Iowa State Cyclones.

“We have tailgates together at Iowa State, and several of us currently have or have had kids that attend Iowa State,” Sams says. “We made the Ireland trip, the away TCU game in Fort Worth, and the other games in Ames.”

The group has been gathering to celebrate their favorite team off and on again for eight to 10 years. All its members are Iowa State University alumni, and they met each other through their children’s activities in Norwalk sports groups.

“We discovered that we had our colleges in common and that we all have a love for tailgating,” Sams recalls.

Sams says their tailgating has morphed into a large event each weekend. Most games, at least 30-40 people pass through their tailgate, with the Iowa game topping out around 100 people this year. The group gathers in four adjoining spots in the Haunted Forest parking lot outside of Jack Trice stadium. Roughly six hours before kickoff, the group begins setting up the tailgate.

“Sometimes that means we are there in the early morning hours,” Sams says.

They set up four big tents and several grills and bring out various food and beverages. Summer Fuller named the group the “Cyclone Society” and created a logo. They often dress in themes, whether it is a color theme announced by Iowa State for the game or one they choose.

“As a group, we try to support that,” Sams says. “Last year, for the last home game, some of the ladies brought lights and Christmas decor to

set up in the tents. Though the tailgate only lasts about five or six hours, we love to create a fun atmosphere.”

Several families in the group volunteer to haul everything to the tailgate location, and all the tailgate families participate in bringing food for the menu. Sams says he and Fuller are usually in charge of the grilling while others jump in and help handle the rest. He and a few other dads handle the prep and cooking.

“We usually bounce food ideas off the college kids,” he says. “Philly cheesesteaks, smash burgers, or breakfast burritos seem to be popular choices depending on kickoff times. We try to change it up, so we aren’t doing the same thing every time.”

In the fall, during warmer weather games, the attendance to their tailgate is higher. As the weather gets colder and during morning games, the group’s numbers diminish slightly, but a decent size group still joins the tailgate to cheer on the Cyclones. Sams says the group likes to use the phrase, “We’ve never lost a tailgate.” They enjoy the opportunity to hang out with their college-aged kids and their adult friends.

“We have a really good friend group from Norwalk,” he says. “Tailgating gives us a chance to spend time together and to provide a fun, safe atmosphere for college kids to come and hang out with their parents, which may not normally be on an 18- or 20-year-old kid’s mind.”

Though Cyclones football is what brings them together, several members of the group also follow the San Francisco 49ers and Brock Purdy. Sams and Fuller have traveled to a 49ers game or two, and they gather at one of their houses to watch the Super Bowl each year. At press time, San Francisco had secured a spot in the playoffs and Brock Purdy fans have hope of seeing him in the big game.

Carrying fandom everywhere

Brant Wade is a big University of Iowa Hawkeye fan. His passion for the team began with his mom, who liked former Hawkeye Coach Hayden Fry and all his charisma.

“I was kind of born into it,” Wade says. He has faithfully attended home games for the Hawkeyes since 2007 and has held season tickets since 2016 after he graduated college. He has visited 15 of 18 big stadiums for Hawkeye games, including those in Wisconsin, Minnesota and Nebraska. He has attended every CyHawk game since 2011 except for the 2012 game.

Wade chooses the same season ticket seats each year in section 212, rows 13-15.

“I used to buy only six tickets, but it has expanded to 11 with friends and family. I have had up to 16 tickets,” he says.

He has sat in the same section so long that he and his group have gotten to know the other people who regularly sit nearby.

“If any of them aren’t using their tickets for a game, we buy them from them,” he says.

During the games, Wade and his group like to have fun. When a Poncheros Mexican Grill commercial is played on the big screen, Wade and his friends and family will choose the smallest person in the vicinity and do the “burrito lift.”

“It usually takes about three of us to lift the person up,” he laughs.

Wade says, when he was younger, he thought that, if he held his hands in a certain way, it would affect the game. Now, he just feels it is important to cheer loudly, especially in crucial moments in the game.

“It is especially important at home games, because the team feeds off of that,” he says.

The crowd in a football stadium has different vibes in different places. Wade says the crowd at

FEATURE

Kinnick Stadium is packed tightly, making it a loud environment with fan engagement.

"I like to compare it to Hilton Coliseum at Iowa State," he explains. "Jack Trice and Carver are a more relaxed crowd, and it doesn't have as big of an affect on a game."

Wade likes being a Hawkeye fan because of the excitement and experiences it has given him across the country.

"I love getting to interact with fans of other schools, seeing the differences and similarities between us," he shares. "When I went to Michigan, a lot of people thought their fans would be jerks, but I had several Michigan fans that sat around me thank me for coming and said they hoped I had a good time at the Big House."

Though Hawkeye football is his main focus, Wade has also been a lifelong Green Bay Packers fan. He grew up in Decorah, where the Packers seem to be celebrated in force. When he was 4 years old, he received a Green Bay Packers Reggie White jersey as a gift, and he wore it often.

"I double dipped with a Wisconsin game trip to attend a Packers game," Wade says. "However, my Packers love isn't anything compared to the Iowa Hawkeyes."

Still, being a football fan, Wade also watches the Super Bowl — even though his Packers won't be there.

Leveling up the tailgate

In 2022, Chris Shipley saw a listing for a tailgate vehicle — created from an old ambulance — that had been put together by a former Iowa State football player. Though the vehicle was not in working order, Shipley



Brant Wade is a big fan of the University of Iowa Hawkeyes.

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put out a message on Facebook jokingly asking his friends to loan him \$2,500 so he could purchase it. A friend of his, Brent Curvey, who is also a former Iowa State football player, reached out to tell Shipley that he had just bought it. Curvey got the vehicle working; however, the day Shipley went to purchase it from Curvey in March of last year, it died. The two men negotiated the price, and Shipley gave Curvey what he had paid for it. He spent about \$1,500 to fix it. Now Shipley uses it to celebrate the Cyclones in Norwalk parades and to tailgate with a group of 10 to 15 friends and family.

Shipley takes the tailgate vehicle to home games and has not yet ventured to take it to an away game.

"I love that we can watch TV in it," he says. "It stores all of our tailgate gear between games, and it has built-in benches and room to hang out inside when the weather is cold. This is also a nice feature when the weather is rainy. I even installed sirens and lights so I can play fight songs."

For his tailgate gatherings, the food menu varies, but Shipley shares they often have pork chops, brats and hot dogs.

"It has its own generator, and it has electricity throughout," he says. "When it is cold, we can hook up crock pots and have things ready to go for game time. Everybody helps bring the food, but I'm kind of in charge of the grill."

Shipley parks the tailgate vehicle in the public lot at Jack Trice Stadium as soon as it is open on game day, usually about six hours prior to kickoff. He and his group tailgate all day long, and, depending on game time, they often hang out a couple of hours after the game has ended.

"Most people who are with us are from Norwalk, Milo and Spencer," he shares. "I'm pretty prevalent on Twitter, so I have a lot of people that will stop by and want to see the ambulance-turned-tailgate vehicle."

Shipley drives the vehicle in Norwalk parades, and, for away games, he sets it up at home for watch parties.

Shipley's love of football isn't limited to the Cyclones. He is also a huge Chicago Bears fan, and he has been since 1984. He has seen both Super Bowls, and, no matter how successful the team has been on a given year, he is still dedicated to watching every single Chicago Bears game. Every year, Shipley purchases the



With a couple of tents and his tailgate vehicle, Chris Shipley and his friends have a perfect set up for tailgating no matter how hot or chilly it might be.

Simple Salami Sliders

Recipe courtesy of "Cookin' Savvy"

Servings: 4-6

INGREDIENTS

- 1 package slider buns
- 8 slices Swiss cheese
- 8 slices salami
- 8 slices ham or other deli meat
- 1 stick butter, melted
- 1 tablespoon Worcestershire sauce
- 2 tablespoons brown sugar
- 1 tablespoon grated Parmesan cheese
- 1 teaspoon onion powder
- 1 teaspoon garlic powder
- everything bagel seasoning (optional)

DIRECTIONS

- Heat oven to 350 F.
- Halve slider buns, creating top and bottom portions. Set top portion aside, leaving bottom portion in original container. Place bottom portion and container in baking dish to prevent sticking.
- Layer Swiss cheese, salami and ham then cover with top buns.
- Mix melted butter, Worcestershire sauce, brown sugar, Parmesan cheese, onion powder and garlic powder. Pour over sliders.
- Cover with foil and bake 15 minutes then remove foil, sprinkle with everything bagel seasoning, if desired, and bake, uncovered, 10 minutes.



NFL Sunday ticket so he can watch all the games. He has an entire man cave basement dedicated to both the Iowa State Cyclones and the Chicago Bears, and every inch of the walls and much of everything else in the room is covered with memorabilia. During away games for Iowa State, when not using his ambulance

tailgate vehicle, he says you can often find him in his basement with his three TVs — all mounted on the walls — with different games showing.

"I jokingly say to all the kids, 'From noon to 6 p.m., you're not allowed to log into any other TV because I have them running.' " ■

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LEGAL By Ken Winjum

RECENT case on government immunity

On Nov. 21, 2025, the Iowa Supreme Court filed an opinion in the case of Mormann v. City of Manchester and Wessels. The case arose out of a high-speed police chase that ended in a motorcycle wreck near Manchester, Iowa. The motorcyclist died from his injuries. His family sued the city and police officer involved in the crash. The jury awarded \$4.25 million dollars in compensatory damages and \$10,000 in punitive damages.



On appeal, the city and police officer raised a number of issues seeking a reversal of the verdict. The court provided a detailed factual recitation which included evidence that, initially, the motorcyclist was traveling at 99 miles per hour, weaved through traffic, dodged several police cruisers, sped through town and continued his journey outside town on a county road.

During the chase in town, a Manchester police lieutenant (James Wessels) commenced his own pursuit. He followed the motorcyclist out of town, reaching speeds of more than 100 miles per hour. During this chase, he suddenly neared the motorcyclist, who had slowed to 62 miles per hour. Wessels passed the motorcyclist on the left, at which time his right mirror hit the motorcyclist. He then steered his vehicle into the right lane and decelerated. The motorcyclist was unable to stop in time and caromed off the left quarter panel of Wessels's cruiser, crashing into the ditch.

Plaintiffs called numerous witnesses including the state trooper who initiated the chase, a member of the Manchester Police Department, an expert in police pursuit policies and an accident reconstructionist. The jury found in favor of plaintiffs.

On appeal, defendants argued that Iowa's Municipal Tort Claims Act (which replaces sovereign immunity) provides that a municipality shall be immune for an act in connection with an emergency response. The court observed that there is a statute specific to police chases (Section 321.231) which allows tort liability where the emergency responder acted with "reckless disregard for the safety of others."

The court noted that this standard for liability is higher than the negligence standard (reasonableness). However, the jury's supplemental verdict finding Wessels acted recklessly toward the motorcyclist defeated the defendants' emergency response immunity.

The court addressed a number of other issues including the nature of the pleadings, sufficiency of the evidence, hearsay evidence (dying declarations) and admission of police department bodycam policies.

The district court's judgment was affirmed (verdict upheld).

Notes: The court observed that a failure to utilize recording devices in violation of department policy could be a basis to infer the officer planned to use intentional force. The officer's persistence in pursuing at high rates of speed after other officers had called off the chase appeared to be a factor. ■

Information provided by Ken Winjum, The Winjum Law Firm, P.L.C., 1220 Sunset Drive., Suite 103, Norwalk, 515-981-5220, www.winjumlaw.com.

Norwalk Public Library News

Banned Books Dinner Club for Teens

Fridays, January 9th & February 6th, 6:30-8:30pm

From January through May, the Norwalk Easter Public Library is offering a special Banned Books Dinner club for teens, courtesy of funding awarded by Brooklyn Public Library from their Books Unbanned initiative. Sessions will include dinner, a keynote speaker, and a themed craft/activity. For each session teens attend, they earn more chances to win a \$100 Barnes & Noble gift card. Registration required - call 515-981-0217 or go online to reserve a space.

Session 1: Friday, January 9th, 6:30 - 8:30pm. Keynote speaker: Teen Services Librarian, Catherine; Activity: Social Deception Games led by The Dealt Hand

Session 2: Friday, February 6th, 6:30 - 8:30pm. Keynote speaker: American Library Association President, Sam Helmick; Activity: Handmade journals

Game On!: Grown-Ups Night Out

Saturday, January 17th, 6-9pm

The Dealt Hand will bring board games to share & we'll bust out our collection of video games. Pizza & snacks provided. Registration required.

Soup-er Trivia Night

Thursday, January 22nd from 6:00-8:00 PM at St. James

Celebrations, \$30/person or \$150/six-person team
Join us for a night of fun and delicious soups from Whip It Good (included in the price)! Don't stew on this one - get your tickets today at <https://givebutter.com/trivia2026>. All proceeds from this event benefit the Norwalk Easter Public Library Foundation.

Indie Lens Pop-Up: The Librarians

Thursday, January 29th 12pm & 6pm

Join us for a free screening of the documentary, *The Librarians*, followed by a brief discussion with guest speakers. Light refreshments provided. Registration required - call 515-981-0217 or go online to reserve your space.

EMPLOYEE SPOTLIGHT!

Coby Klocko, Firefighter/Paramedic



From intern to firefighter to paramedic, Coby Klocko's journey with the City of Norwalk is one rooted in dedication, growth, and a deep commitment to service.

Klocko currently serves as a part-time Firefighter/Paramedic with the Norwalk Fire Department, a role he has proudly held in various capacities since June 2017. What began as an internship quickly turned into a calling, with Klocko progressing through roles as an intern, paid-on-call, part-time, and eventually full-time staff member. Today, while working full-time with the Des Moines Fire Department, he continues to serve Norwalk part-time—staying connected to the department and community where his fire service career began.

What Klocko enjoys most about the job isn't just the work itself, but the people. In a profession where no two days are the same, and uncertainty is part of the job, he values being part of a team that truly has each other's backs. The trust, camaraderie, and support shared among the Fire Department, City staff, and Norwalk residents make the challenges worthwhile—and turn the job into a purpose rather than just a paycheck.

Some of Klocko's most meaningful moments come from seeing teamwork in action during difficult times. Whether responding to emergencies, providing medical care, or helping someone through a crisis, he finds it rewarding to watch the department come together with a shared mission: making a positive difference for the community. Those moments of collaboration and trust are what continue to motivate him to serve.

Klocko's path into the fire service is supported by a strong educational foundation. After high school, he attended Grand View University, studying Business Administration while playing football. In 2017, he earned his Firefighter certifications and EMT license through Des Moines Area Community College, followed by his Paramedic certification from Mercy College of Health Sciences in 2018. He's currently completing a bachelor's degree in leadership, continuing his commitment to personal and professional growth.

When he's not on duty, Klocko prioritizes family, fitness, and balance. He enjoys spending time with his wife, Tori, and their two-year-old daughter, Ivy, and stays physically active to meet the demands of the fire service. For him, maintaining readiness—both physically and mentally—is key to success on and off the job.

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Registration ends Feb. 1



Men's Basketball League

January 14 - February 18
& February 25 - April 1



Winter Adult Fitness Programs

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the public library!

Celebrate Earth Day & Arbor Day

Earth Day in the U.S. began in 1970 as 20 million Americans, from all walks of life, mobilized in an effort to change our environment. Today, Earth Day is celebrated by more than a billion people per year in 192 countries. Arbor Day began over 150 years ago, in 1872 and is similar to Earth Day because it celebrates nature. Arbor Day's specific purpose is to celebrate the planting, upkeep and preservation of trees. Here in Norwalk we have scheduled projects for **Wednesday, April 22 from 1:00 p.m. - 4:00 p.m.** We will help you plan ahead, and provide you opportunities to give back to make Norwalk a great place to live, work and play!

*Volunteers of any age are welcome
unless otherwise noted!*

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for Earth Day and Arbor Day
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A NEW year – a new breakthrough?

It happened 11 years ago this month. Fourteen-year-old John Smith and two friends were playing on a frozen lake near St. Louis. Suddenly, the ice cracked and broke, sending all three of them into the icy depths. John's friends were able to make it to the edge and were soon pulled out, but John sank down beneath the water. By the time emergency personnel found him (a miracle in itself) John had been under the water for 15 minutes. He was unresponsive, but the EMTs didn't stop trying to resuscitate him. At the hospital, the ER personnel likewise continued those efforts but to no avail. Young John Smith was dead. Realizing there was nothing else they could do, the doctors called his mom into the room so she could say her good-byes.

When Joyce walked into that hospital room, she was admittedly afraid and, in that moment, she had a choice to make: accept the way things were — impossible, hopeless, seemingly beyond repair. Or she could exercise her faith and call out to God in prayer for a breakthrough. Psalm 56:3 says, "When I am afraid, I will trust in You."

Thankfully for John and his family, because John's mother knew the power of God and had personally experienced the spiritual breakthrough of salvation, she likewise knew she could position herself and her son for a miracle and step out in faith. So, she prayed asking God to bring back her son. God heard and answered, and John not only came back to life, but he, likewise, against the predictions of the entire medical community, soon was back to normal health. An unfortunate breakthrough on the ice had turned into a miraculous breakthrough of divine grace.

I have learned that God doesn't always answer my prayers of desperation in the way I would like or in the timing I would like. But, I also recognize that he invites us to entrust our needs and even our impossible situations to him by faith in prayer. I can attest to the reality that God loves us no matter how he ends up answering our desperate prayers, and his ways, though sometimes mysterious to us, are always best, and sometimes he chooses to do what only he can do.

The world is full of people in need of some kind of breakthrough in their life. Maybe you are one of them. Whether it be a marriage in trouble, children in distress, a dead-end job, finances that are in shambles, relationships in disrepair, health situations, or an immediate life and death situation, whatever the need, the same power that raised Christ from the dead is available to us today. Jesus broke through death, sin and the grave and is alive today, and He is still in the business of breaking through impossible situations, bringing things and people back to life. I believe he would love to hear from you in your breakthrough need. Why not give him the chance? You've got nothing to lose. ■

Pastor Rob Jones is the senior pastor of Fellowship Community Church in Norwalk. The church was founded under his leadership in 1995.



NEW 2026 IRA and retirement plan limits

Many IRA and retirement plan limits are indexed for inflation each year. Several of these key numbers have increased once again for 2026.

How much can you save in an IRA? The maximum amount you can contribute to a traditional IRA or a Roth IRA in 2026 will be \$7,500, up from \$7,000 in 2025. The catch-up contribution for those age 50 or older is \$1,100, increased from \$1,000 in 2025. You can contribute to both a traditional IRA and a Roth IRA in 2026, but your total contributions cannot exceed these annual limits.

Can you deduct your traditional IRA contributions? If you are not covered by a work-based retirement plan, your contributions to a traditional IRA are generally fully tax deductible.

If you're married filing jointly and not covered by an employer plan but your spouse is, you may generally claim a full deduction if your modified adjusted gross income (MAGI) is \$242,000 or less. Your deduction is limited if your MAGI is between \$242,000 and \$252,000 and eliminated if your MAGI is \$252,000 or more.

For those who are covered by an employer plan, deductibility depends on income and filing status. If your filing status is single or head of household, you can fully deduct your IRA contribution in 2026 if your MAGI is \$81,000 or less. If you're married and filing a joint return, you can fully deduct your contribution if your MAGI is \$129,000 or less. Taxpayers earning more than these thresholds, phaseout limits will apply.

Can you contribute to a Roth IRA? The income limits for determining whether you can contribute to a Roth IRA will also increase in 2026. If your filing status is single or head of household, you can contribute the full \$7,500 (\$8,600 if you are age 50 or older) if your MAGI is less than \$153,000. And if you're married and filing a joint return, you can make the full contribution if your MAGI is less than \$242,000. Taxpayers earning more than these thresholds, phaseout limits will apply.

What's new in 2026 for retirement plans? If your employer sponsors a retirement plan, you can save even more in 2026. The 401(k), 403(b) and 457 federal annual maximums have increased: If you will be under the age of 50 for all of 2026: \$24,500. If you will be turning age 50 to 59 or age 64 or older by December 31, 2026: \$32,500. If you will be turning age 60 to 63 by Dec. 31, 2026: \$35,750. ■

For more information, please contact Kourtne Klocko with City State Bank Trust & Investments at 515-986-2265. Not FDIC insured. Not deposits or other obligations of the bank and are not guaranteed by the bank. Are subject to investment risk, including possible loss of principal. City State Bank does not provide legal advice. Each taxpayer should seek independent advice from a tax and/or legal professional. These materials are based upon publicly available information that may change at any time without notice.



HEAT pump or furnace?

Are you building a new home or ready to replace your old heating system? Choosing the right heating setup for Iowa's freezing winters is a big decision — especially when furnaces are not the only option anymore. Heat pumps have started making headlines for their energy efficiency and versatility. But what's the best choice for keeping warm in our climate?

Your heating and cooling professional can help you understand the ins and outs of heat pumps and furnaces so you can make the best decision for your home and your budget.

Should you buy a furnace or a heat pump? Think of choosing between a furnace and a heat pump like picking the right vehicle for your lifestyle. A furnace is like a rugged 4x4 truck: dependable, powerful and designed to handle Iowa's coldest, toughest conditions with ease. A heat pump, on the other hand, is like a versatile crossover SUV: efficient, great for all-around performance, and capable of handling both winter and summer conditions in one go.

Benefits of furnaces: Furnaces are a fantastic choice for handling the cold Midwest winters we see here in Norwalk. A furnace is usually installed in a basement or utility room and connects to a duct system to distribute the warm air. If you already have existing ductwork, a new furnace installation is pretty straightforward.

In Iowa, the two most popular types of furnaces are:

- **Gas furnaces:** Powered by natural gas or propane, these are known for their affordability and efficiency. If you already have a gas line, a natural gas furnace can be a very cost-effective choice.

- **Electric furnaces:** A good alternative for homes without gas lines, an electric furnace is easier to install but may cost a bit more to operate during those extra-cold winter days.

Benefits of heat pumps: Heat pumps are a great, flexible, and energy-efficient solution for heating and cooling in Iowa. Unlike furnaces that generate heat, heat pumps have indoor and outdoor units and work by pulling warmth from the outdoor air — even in chilly weather — and transferring it indoors. In summer, they reverse to function as an air conditioner, moving cool air throughout your home.

There are a few main options for your heat pump installation:

- **Air source heat pumps:** These are ideal for whole-home heating and cooling and connect to ductwork to distribute warm or cold air evenly. Air source models are popular in Iowa for their affordability and energy efficiency.

- **Ductless mini-splits:** Perfect for heating and cooling specific areas without ductwork, such as sunrooms, home offices or finished basements, and there are great options available for a whole home or business. Mini-splits offer zoned comfort and flexibility, allowing you to control the temperature of individual rooms while avoiding the cost of installing new ductwork. ■

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



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MEET Kendra Garcia

Fulfilling to make a difference

Born and raised in Norwalk, Kendra Garcia graduated with the class of 2006. During high school, Garcia played sports and served as a track manager. She then attended La' James International College to become a licensed cosmetologist. Garcia worked as a cosmetologist for a few years before moving to the West Coast, where she lived for about five years before returning to Iowa in 2013 and welcoming her first child.

Now a mother of three, Garcia is glad to be in her hometown.

"I wanted to raise my kids in the same community where I grew up — one where I've always felt safe and supported and that truly helped shape the person I am today. I love Norwalk and all that it represents," Garcia says, "There's something really special about being able to give back to your community and help it grow."

This fall, Garcia began her first year working as a special education paraeducator at Orchard Hills Elementary School. In her current role, Garcia works one on one with a third-grade student with special needs. Each day, she focuses on creating a positive, structured and supportive environment for her student. Garcia says she is excited for the opportunity to make a positive impact on young minds.

"My goal is to help create a structured, stable environment where students can feel supported and confident, because I believe we all do our best when we have consistency and care around us," Garcia says.

Garcia and her student begin each morning getting settled in, followed by short learning activities tailored to her student's needs. During the day, she also assists with academics, sensory breaks and therapies, along with helping with meals and transitions. Garcia says that working with her student has taught her about patience, compassion and celebrating small victories.

"I've always felt like working with kids was what I was meant to do," Garcia says. "Being around kids keeps me young at heart. My goal is to inspire, teach and be a positive role model for children."

This school year, Garcia is looking forward to building stronger connections with her students while watching their confidence grow. She is also excited to continue finding creative ways to make learning fun, inclusive and meaningful to everyone in her classroom.

"One of my biggest rewards as an educator is seeing growth — those small victories when a student masters a new skill, connects with a peer, or just feels proud of themselves. It's incredibly fulfilling to know you're making a difference," Garcia says. ■



As a paraeducator, Kendra Garcia enjoys seeing the growth in students and building relationships.

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IOWA
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A COMMUNITY reader

Walker gives back through reading to youth.

Steve Walker, a friendly face at Luana Savings Bank in Norwalk, says he strongly believes the Norwalk community is engaged and shares a commitment to volunteerism.

He adds, he is fortunate to work for an employer, like many in the Des Moines metro, which encourages volunteering by offering volunteer time off. Walker has had the privilege of volunteering with many organizations over the years, but the one he's most passionate about is Everybody Wins! Iowa, a nonprofit dedicated to ensuring children's success in school and life through weekly one-to-one read-aloud experiences with caring adults. Its primary program is Power Read.

Through Power Read, volunteer reading mentors visit a student for a short period of time each week. Students and mentors spend their time talking, reading aloud one-to-one and building positive attitudes about reading. Volunteers also serve as role models and help enhance students' self-esteem.

"I've been volunteering for EWI for over 10 years, and the kiddos we read to are genuinely excited and enthusiastic to participate in their reading time," Walker says. "I'm a strong believer that strong literacy skills early on in life can lead to great success later in life."

One of Walker's favorite memories came several years ago while reading with a child when local Channel 5 News visited the school and interviewed the pair about the Everybody Wins! Iowa Power Read program.

"The following week, after we both saw the news segment, my kiddo and I laughed about how we were like TV stars," Walker says.

Beyond the fun moments, Walker values the consistency and trust that form through weekly visits. Many students benefit simply from having an adult who shows up reliably, listens and encourages them. Hesitant readers gain confidence, improve their skills and take pride in their progress — small changes that can make a lasting difference in a child's academic journey.

Walker encourages others to volunteer with Everybody Wins! Iowa or other organizations they are passionate about.

"At EWI, the time commitment is only 30 minutes per week and is fulfilling, meaningful and fun," he shares.

Walker specifically volunteers with the program at Orchard Hills Elementary in Norwalk, where several students are currently on the waitlist, hopeful for a volunteer to sign up.

If you are interested in volunteering with the program, contact Jean Strable at jstrable@norwalk.iowa.gov. ■



Jason Siemens of Edward Jones presents the Neighbor Spotlight certificate to Steve Walker.

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INVESTMENT

By Daniel Rundahl

A SMART start to 2026



The start of a new year is one of the best times to reset, refresh and make intentional decisions about your money and finances. Rather than setting unrealistic "resolutions," the most successful financial strategies are built on clear goals, consistent habits and thoughtful planning.

Begin with reflection: Before you look ahead, look behind. Assess how 2025 finished. Examine your income, expenses, savings and investments. Identify where your money went, what worked well and what didn't. Were there unexpected expenses or missed saving opportunities? This provides valuable insight and helps you avoid repeating the same mistakes.

Set clear, purpose-driven goals: Financial goals should be specific and meaningful. Define concrete objectives such as building a six-month emergency fund, paying off a credit card balance, or increasing retirement contributions by a certain percentage. Clear goals give your money direction and make progress measurable. Keep your goals in front of you. For years, I have kept three goals of varying importance taped to the corner of our bathroom mirror.

Pay yourself first through automation: Automation is one of the most effective tools in saving and planning. Set up automatic transfers to savings and investment accounts as soon as you receive your paycheck. This approach removes emotion from saving decisions and builds consistency. Over time, small, automated contributions can lead to significant results.

Strengthen your emergency fund: An emergency fund is the foundation of financial security. Aim to save three to six months of essential living expenses in a liquid, low-risk account. This cushion protects you from job changes, medical expenses or unexpected repairs and helps prevent reliance on high-interest debt.

Review investments and manage risk: The new year is an ideal time to review your investment portfolio. Ensure your asset allocation still aligns with your goals, time horizon and risk tolerance. Life changes — like marriage, children or career shifts — often require adjustments. Rebalancing keeps your strategy aligned rather than reactive to market noise.

Create a thoughtful debt strategy: Not all debts are built equal. High-interest consumer debt, like credit cards, should be addressed aggressively, while lower-interest debt may be managed more strategically. List balances, interest rates and payoff targets to create a clear and realistic plan.

Plan for known expenses: Planning for upcoming costs such as vacations, education expenses, insurance renewals, or major purchases in advance reduces financial stress and helps you stay within budget.

Keep it simple and sustainable: The most effective financial plans are simple and repeatable. Focus on habits you can maintain throughout the year. Review your progress periodically, adjust as needed, and celebrate milestones along the way.

A strong financial start to the new year is built on intention and consistency. With steady effort and a clear plan, you can create a financial foundation that supports both your short-term needs and long-term goals. ■

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Information provided by Daniel Rundahl, Financial Advisor, Rundahl Financial Consultants, 8230 Hickman Road, Suite 300, Clive, 515-727-1701, drundahl@rundahlfinancial.com, www.rundahlfinancialconsultants.com.

EDUCATION

ARTS Council awards scholarship to Schnoor



Norwalk High School graduate Lucas Schnoor, center, was awarded a scholarship to support his art education by the North River Arts Council, represented by President Evan Hoyt and Norwalk High School art teacher Angela Davidson.

Norwalk High School graduate Lucas Schnoor is pursuing his artistic dreams, thanks in part to a scholarship from the North River Arts Council. Schnoor is in his freshman year at the Kansas City Art Institute.

The scholarship is the first awarded by the Warren County-based Arts Council, formed in 2020 to support artists and the arts. The scholarship fund was started by an anonymous donor and is designed to support high school artists in a Warren County community. Schnoor was nominated for the scholarship by his art teacher and North River Arts Council member Angela Davidson.

"As an artist, Lucas is persistent in his desire to make art. He is not afraid to try new things and has a strong willingness to learn," she said. "I am excited to be part of an organization that's supporting young artists like Lucas."

Schnoor is now in his first year of classes at the Kansas City Art Institute. He left high school with a passion for throwing ceramics on a wheel, but is currently taking art history classes and working in a variety of media as part of his exploration courses at KCAI.

"Mrs. Davidson has been there all the way, pushing me forward, giving me the best advice," Schnoor said at the November council meeting, where he was awarded his scholarship, with Davidson looking on. "She's impacted many students with her teaching skills and the person that she is."

After graduation, Schnoor is interested in working in a studio environment, creating installations for private and public spaces, and primarily focusing on ceramics. He's also interested in a post-graduate degree and teaching art.

For more information about the North River Arts Council, visit the organization's website at northriverartscouncil.org. Donations to the scholarship fund may be sent to NRAC, P.O. Box 592, Carlisle, IA 50047. ■

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Upcoming in Norwalk Living magazine:

"I do!" Stories about marriage proposals: Share the story of how your courtship culminated in a proposal to remember. Email tammy@iowalivingmagazines.com to share your story!

Rescue animals: Do you have a beloved rescue animal in your family? Share your story of how you came to find your pet — or it came to find you! Email tammy@iowalivingmagazines.com.

Norwalk Easter Public Library Events

1051 North Ave., Norwalk

KIDS

- Graphic Novel Book Club: Tuesdays, Jan. 13 and Feb. 10, 4:30 p.m.

TWEENS

- Tween Hangout: Mondays, Feb. 2, Feb. 9, 3:45 p.m.
- Tween Special: DIY Dragon Eggs: Monday, Jan. 12, 3:45 p.m. Register: <https://norwalklibrary.org/calendar/>.
- Tween Boba & Books: Tuesday, Jan. 27, 3:45 p.m. Register: <https://norwalklibrary.org/calendar/>.

TEENS

- Banned Books Dinner Club: Fridays, Jan. 9, Feb. 6, 6:30 p.m. Registration required: <https://norwalklibrary.org/calendar/>.
- Teen After Hours Dungeons and Dragons: Friday, Jan. 16, 5:30 p.m. Registration required: <https://norwalklibrary.org/calendar/>.
- Books, Bites, and Boba: Tuesday, Jan. 27, 6-7 p.m. Registration required: <https://norwalklibrary.org/calendar/>.
- Library Lock-In: Saturday, Jan. 31, 7 p.m. to Sunday, Feb. 1. Registration required: <https://norwalklibrary.org/calendar/>.
- Teen Takeover Hangout: Thursday, Jan. 22, Feb. 5, Feb. 12, 3:30 p.m. Register: <https://norwalklibrary.org/calendar/>.

ADULTS

- Forever Fit: Mondays and Wednesdays through January, 9 a.m. and 10 a.m.

Middlebrook Mercantile events

4125 Cumming Ave., Cumming

- Friday, Jan. 9, 6-9 p.m. Live Music: Jasper Tide
- Saturday, Jan. 10, 6-9 p.m. Live Music: Brian Herrin
- Sunday, Jan. 11, 2-5 p.m. Live Music: Heath Alan
- Thursday, Jan. 15, 6 p.m. Event: Trivia
- Friday, Jan. 16, 6-9 p.m. Live Music: Dan Trick
- Saturday, Jan. 17, 6-9 p.m., Live Music: Tom Pevear
- Sunday, Jan. 18, 2-5 p.m., Live Music: Velvet Trio
- Friday, Jan. 23, 6-9 p.m., Live Music: Randy Burk and the Prisoners
- Saturday, Jan. 24, 6-9 p.m., Event: Open Mic Night
- Sunday, Jan. 25, 2-5 p.m., Live Music: Matt Woods Band
- Wednesday, Jan. 28, 6-8 p.m., Event: Music Bingo
- Thursday, Jan. 29, 6 p.m., Event: Trivia
- Friday, Jan. 30, 6-9 p.m., Live Music: Vida Sisters
- Saturday, Jan. 31, 6-9 p.m., Live Music: Taylor King
- Sunday, Feb. 1, 2-5 p.m., Live Music: Sumpin Doo
- Wednesday, Feb. 4, 6-7 p.m., Information Session: What Is Middlebrook?



Rain Barrel Workshop

Wednesday, Jan. 14, 6:30-8 p.m.

Norwalk Easter Public Library, 1051 North Ave., Norwalk

Join the Rain Barrel Workshop to learn all about the benefits of installing a rain barrel on your property. You will leave the workshop with your own assembled 55-gallon rain barrel. Instruction for this workshop is provided by ISU Extension and Outreach Warren County Master Conservationist program. Class size will be limited to the first 12 registrants. You will learn about benefits of rain catchment systems for conservation and local programs for homeowners; best management practices homeowners can implement around the landscape to lessen the negative impacts stormwater has on water quality; and parts and functions of the rain barrel.

This event is being offered at \$50 per barrel to cover the cost of supplies. Norwalk residents may receive a rebate for the cost of the program once their barrel is constructed and installed. Registration is required, <https://pci.jotform.com/form/251035997617163>.

Coffee and Camaraderie

First Tuesdays of the month, 10 a.m. to noon

Norwalk United Methodist Church, 1100 Gordon Ave.

All veterans and service members are invited for a morning of coffee and camaraderie, a morning of connection and community. Whether you're a veteran, active-duty member, spouse or caregiver, everyone is welcome. Enjoy coffee and come together to form new friendships and share stories and experiences.

Legacy Presents: Tunes & Treats with the Jeff Arrandale Band

January 22, 1 p.m.

Indianola Parks and Recreation Center, 2204 W. 2nd Ave., Indianola

Legacy is proud to sponsor an afternoon of music, community, and joy at the beloved Tunes & Treats Concert Series! Join us for a lively performance by the Jeff Arrandale Band, known for their heartfelt sound and engaging stage presence.



CITYVIEW's Fire and Ice

Saturday, Jan. 24, 1-4 p.m.

Valley Junction

CITYVIEW brings back its legendary Valley Junction area pub crawl. Fire and Ice is a hockey-themed liquor sampling event that will be sure to warm up your winter blues. With your event ticket, you will receive 10 individual drink tickets to sample some of the best winter cocktails from establishments in the Valley Junction area. Tickets are \$25 in advance and \$35 at the door. Follow the QR code for tickets.



EVENTS IN THE AREA

Check for cancellations

Fundraisers for the Norwalk Easter Public Library Foundation

• Trivia Night fundraiser for Library

Jan. 22, 6-8 p.m.

St. James Celebrations, 9774 G24 Highway, Indianola



Trivia Night fundraiser will be Jan. 22. The cost is \$25 per person, or you can form a team of up to six for \$125. You can come solo, and we'll place you on a team. Mark your calendar and join us for a night of fun and good food (included in the price). Watch for more details via email or Facebook.

• Step into the Glamour of the Gilded Age!

Thursday, Feb. 5, 6-9 p.m.

Join us for an unforgettable Murder Mystery Night fundraiser for the Norwalk Easter Public Library. This year's thrilling theme: Murder on the Continental Express. Will you play the role of a suspect (\$30) or a clever detective (\$20)? Either way, intrigue awaits. Enjoy delicious snacks and refreshing mocktails as you unravel the mystery. Tickets go on sale in January. Follow Norwalk Easter Public Library Foundation on social media for updates to secure your spot before they vanish.

Warren County Master Gardeners Think Spring Garden Seminar

March 7, 9 a.m. to 3 p.m.

Simpson College, 701 N. C St., Indianola

The Warren County Master Gardeners will be hosting their annual Think Spring Garden Seminar on the campus of Simpson College in the Hubbell Hall of the Kent Campus Center. Garden enthusiasts can learn from horticulture experts, shop with local vendors, win door prizes and enjoy a delicious catered lunch. You do not need to be a Master Gardener to enjoy this event. Register at: <https://go.iastate.edu/HSILYW>.

Cinch World's Toughest Rodeo

Jan. 9-10

Casey's Center, 233 Center St., Des Moines

Action-packed performance featuring some of the nation's most talented rodeo athletes, livestock and specialty entertainers. The world's toughest cowboys on a mission to become the Pro Rodeo's World Champion. More info: www.iowaeventscenter.com.

Des Moines Art Center inaugural Social Saturday event

Saturday, Jan. 10, 11 a.m. to 2 p.m.

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

Join the Des Moines Art Center's inaugural Social Saturday event and celebrate all things comfy and cozy with a Snow Day theme. Come in out of the cold as we warm up with hot chocolate in the Art Center Café, create snowmen prints in the Art School studios, enjoy a film screening in the auditorium, take a free guided tour in the galleries, peruse the current exhibitions and more. Guests are invited to wear their coziest clothes, bundle up for sweater weather, and escape into joy and warmth at the Art Center. More information: <https://desmoinesartcenter.org/event/social-saturday-snow-day/>. ■

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A BEAUTIFUL blend

Hoyts collaborate on art.

Evan and Summer Hoyt are a married artistic team, and they collaborate on all their projects. Evan says that Summer is the painter and illustrator.

“She will illustrate something like a bird or a flower,” he explains. “I will then create a digital illustration and use it to hand-cut stencils and spray paint them onto a background Summer has created. She will then embellish on them.” The Hoyts enjoy creating their artwork on textured canvases or upcycled paper.

Evan and Summer met in 2011 at the University of Northern Iowa and married in 2012. They welcomed their first child in 2016, and life took over. Their art fell to the wayside. During the 2020 COVID shutdown, the time at home allowed them both to refocus on art. They each embarked on their own artistic paths again, but this time they noticed a change.

“As we were going on our own paths, we found each other crossing paths or helping the other on projects,” Evan states. “The more we started working together, the more we liked the results.”

In 2021, the Hoyts participated in art festivals with separate booths, but they struggled. In 2023, they decided to work out of a joint booth and found that, just as they are married in life, they found satisfaction and joy in being married in their artwork. Since then, they have participated in many arts festivals including the Waukee Art Festival, Indianola Art Festival and Sioux City Arts Festival.

“In 2026, we will probably not participate in as many art festivals since we have a newborn in the house,” Evan shares. “With a child that will be under 1 year old, we are not so sure that crossing the state or traveling out of state is in the cards for us. We plan to do more solo and group exhibitions, instead. In April and May, we will exhibit our work at the Urbandale Public Library, and, in September and October, we will exhibit it at the Johnston Public Library. Every time we get a chance to exhibit, we are proud of it.”

One of the Hoyts’ favorite joint art pieces is also one of their earlier pieces.

“The painting encapsulates what we are doing,” Evan says. “It is called ‘Marriage Dance.’”

It is a large expressionistic piece that showcases two herons locked in a courtship dance. It has an atmospheric washed background, and Evan says the stencils complement each other in the artistic space.

Evan joined the North River Arts Council in early 2021 as a board member representing Norwalk and almost immediately began serving as treasurer. In 2025, he became president of the NRAC. Through his time with the NRAC, Evan has found it to be a great source of networking with other artists — for collaboration and for professional development opportunities.

“It has kept us busy and more productive in a good way,” he says. “It inspires us to become better in our craft by being surrounded by so many talented artists.”

For those interested in viewing more of the Hoyts’ work, visit www.theartists Hoyt and [@theartists Hoyt](https://www.instagram.com/theartists Hoyt). ■



Evan Hoyt



Summer Hoyt



WHERE I find inspiration — and a new comfort-food favorite

Today's home cooks have no shortage of inspiration. With a quick search online, we can access thousands of recipes from trusted test kitchens, community-driven platforms and individual food bloggers. While I appreciate that convenience, I still find myself reaching for cookbooks, browsing new releases at the bookstore and checking out titles from the library — a perfect way to “test drive” a recipe before committing to it.

Another favorite source of inspiration is Family Features, a free recipe site filled with reliable dishes and beautiful photography that never fails to spark my creativity in the kitchen. This month's recipe, loaded Philly cheesesteak baked potatoes, brings together two of my favorite comfort foods: steak and potatoes — both of which also happen to be Shane's favorites. It takes the familiar flavors of a classic Philly cheesesteak sandwich and transforms them into a warm, satisfying baked potato meal. It's hearty, comforting and perfect to enjoy for dinner, with plenty left over for lunches throughout the week. ■

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



Loaded Philly cheesesteak baked potato

Recipe courtesy of Real California Milk

Prep time: 10 minutes

Cook time: 1 hour, 11 minutes

Servings: 4

Ingredients

- 4 large russet potatoes, washed
- 1 cup Real California sour cream
- 1-2 tablespoons Real California whole milk
- 1/4 cup Real California unsalted butter, divided
- 1 small green bell pepper, thinly sliced
- 1/2 small yellow onion, thinly sliced
- kosher salt, to taste
- freshly ground black pepper, to taste
- 1 pound fresh shaved sirloin steak
- 2 cups shredded Real California provolone cheese

Directions

- Preheat oven to 425 degrees F and line baking sheet with aluminum foil.
- Prick potatoes all over with fork. Bake until potatoes are tender and fork

inserted easily comes out, 45 minutes to 1 hour. Split tops of potatoes open with knife and fluff potato flesh with fork. Set aside.

- In small bowl, combine sour cream and milk, adding more milk as needed, until sour cream is pourable. Set aside.
- In large skillet or on griddle over medium-high heat, heat 1 tablespoon butter. Add peppers and onions; cook until tender, 3-4 minutes. Season with salt and pepper, to taste. Transfer to plate and set aside.
- Clean skillet then melt remaining butter. Add steak and cook until fully cooked and lightly browned, 3-4 minutes. Season with salt and pepper, to taste. Return vegetables to skillet and toss to combine.
- Evenly top each potato with 1 tablespoon butter, steak mixture and cheese. Transfer to oven and bake until cheese is melted, 2-3 minutes. Drizzle with sour cream and serve.

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PREP your winter emergency weather kit

You are probably familiar with emergency kits, but have you ever considered packing a shovel in your trunk or hauling around a bag of cat litter?

Hauling that shovel could come in handy if your car ever lands in a ditch, and having that cat litter on standby could offer the much-needed traction. Consider the following information before you take your next road trip or family vacation.



Better safe than sorry

Winter weather can turn a routine trip into a dangerous situation, but being prepared can make the difference between life and death when facing hypothermia. No one plans to be marooned roadside, but with severe weather looming, it's always a possibility. Be ready for Jack Frost with a winter emergency weather kit.

Consider the basics

• **First aid kit:** cell phone and car charger, flashlight with new batteries, candle with matches or lighter, ice scraper and snowbrush, shovel, hazard sign or brightly colored flag, cat litter or sand, bottled water and non-perishable food items, warm clothing, winter boots and gloves, blanket

and battery jump pack or jumper cables.

If you happen to live in a rural area or plan on taking a more extended trip, you may want to consider adding a few extra items to your kit. Adding these items can better prepare you for an emergency.

• **Add-on items:** flares or emergency strobes, light sticks, hand warmers, toilet paper, basic tool kit, tire chains/tow ropes.

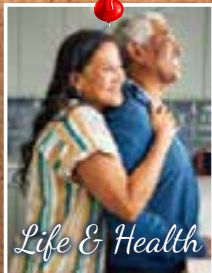
In the case of highway accidents or ice storms, motorists get stranded in groups. Ensure you have enough supplies for you and your family and pack a little extra to help the other stranded travelers.

You can also buy ready-made kits in stores and online. Make sure whatever you buy includes the basics, such as jumper cables, first aid and ice scrapers. To ensure your emergency kit is working and up to date, you should update your emergency kit at least twice a year. This could be to replenish your non-perishable food supply or to ensure your batteries and battery jump pack have enough energy to get you through a tough situation.

For more tips, you can visit the Lane Insurance Facebook page. ■

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UNDERSTANDING the difference between assisted living and long-term care

When it comes to senior living options, many families in the Des Moines area are unsure about the differences between assisted living and long-term care. A common misconception is that assisted living is only for fully independent individuals, but, in Iowa, that's not the case.



Assisted living is designed for older adults who need some help with daily tasks but do not require 24-hour medical care. Residents live in private apartments and receive personalized support, which can include assistance with bathing, dressing, medication management, meals, housekeeping and more.

Long-term care, also known as a nursing home, is for individuals with complex medical needs who require continuous skilled nursing services. This level of care is typically for those recovering from serious illness or surgery or for

those with chronic conditions that demand more intensive oversight.

What assisted living can provide in

Iowa: Under Iowa's assisted living regulations, communities are licensed to provide support with Activities of Daily Living (ADLs) — including bathing, dressing, grooming, toileting, mobility and medication administration.

Residents do not have to be fully independent in all ADLs to qualify for assisted living.

In fact, many assisted living residents need help with one or more daily tasks, and communities are staffed with trained caregivers to meet those needs. Services are typically delivered based on a customized care plan created with input from the resident, family and healthcare providers.

Key benefits of assisted living

For families navigating care decisions, assisted living offers: private apartments with safety features and emergency response systems; 24/7

staff support; personalized care plans that adjust as needs change; nutritious meals and social dining; life enrichment programs that promote physical, mental and emotional wellness; housekeeping and laundry services; and scheduled transportation for medical appointments and outings.

Residents in assisted living communities enjoy a greater sense of independence, choice and dignity — while still receiving the support they need to live safely and comfortably.

Final thoughts

If you're in the Des Moines area and unsure which level of care is right for your loved one, it's important to know that assisted living in Iowa can support more than just "independent" seniors. ■

Information provided by Ashley Bergman, Addington Place of Des Moines, addingtonplaceofdesmoines.com. Written by Discovery Senior Living, 3461 Bonita Bay Blvd., Suite 100, Bonita Springs, FL 34134.



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ART that grows

Fuller brings church mural to life.

In early summer 2025, Allie Fuller was approached by Pastor Mike Fillmore from Norwalk United Methodist Church about a special project at the recently purchased South Side Church and Community Center in Des Moines.

Renovations on the center had begun, and Fillmore had a vision for a mural within the space. He and Beth Greiner, Norwalk UMC's director of Christian education and communication, both thought Fuller would be a good choice to design and complete it.

"I greatly appreciated the honor and was more than happy to say yes," Fuller says.

The mural Fuller created depicts three hands planting a seed together in a garden. One person has dug a hole, the next is dropping in the seed, and the last is getting ready to water it.

"I was inspired by the idea of illustrating how people of different backgrounds can come together to create beauty," she explains. "One person can plant a seed, but a community can plant a garden. To me, it was truly special to illustrate the effect of a diverse group of people coming together to work toward a common goal."

Fuller's creative process involved extensive learning and research. She began by sketching her idea on a thumbnail scale before transferring it to her iPad and completing a full-color digital mockup.

"But then I got stuck as I had no idea how to transfer the design from a digital file to the much larger physical canvas, or even what paint to use," Fuller shares. "It took a lot of time surfing the internet and learning from other muralists' methods for me to figure out how to bring this idea to life. Through the use of a projector and a lot of time at the paint store, I was finally able to transfer the design and paint my vision."

When people see the mural, Fuller hopes they take away a sense of fellowship and love.

"The South Side Church and Community Center is waiting with open arms for anyone and everyone, here to care for every neighbor," she says. "I hope my mural illustrates this warm welcome and inspires a sense



Allie Fuller hopes her mural conveys a sense of fellowship.

of gratitude in us all for the community around us."

Completing murals like this one for the community fills Fuller with joy.

"I hope to not only execute my artistic vision, but to create works that are meaningful to my neighbors, too," she says. "Growing up in Norwalk also gave me the privilege of being a student of Angela Davidson at Norwalk High School. I learned so much from her teaching, and her guidance has proven to be priceless time and time again. Without her, I doubt I would be the artist I am today."

Fuller is currently working on two additional murals — one for Reese Marie Salon, which recently opened in Cumming, and another being designed for installation in the City State Bank Norwalk Fieldhouse.

"I am very excited to complete these works and see them in their spaces," she says. ■

THE POWER of the second opinion

Don't rush major repairs.

As we kick off 2026, many of us are setting new goals and looking for ways to be more intentional with our decisions. In the world of auto maintenance, one of the most valuable tools you can carry into the new year is the second opinion. When faced with a high-cost repair, the initial shock can cloud your judgment. Taking a moment to pause and seek another professional perspective is often the smartest financial move you can make.



Here are five indicators that it's time for a second opinion:

1. The symptom-diagnosis mismatch: If the fix seems extreme — such as needing a new transmission for a minor shudder — get a second look. A different technician might find a simpler, less expensive cause.
2. High-cost sticker shock: Major repairs like engine overhauls deserve price verification. A second shop can help you determine if the scope of work is necessary and if the pricing is competitive.
3. The “laundry list” of repairs: When a shop presents many recommendations, it may be hard to separate safety items from elective maintenance. Start by asking your shop to prioritize: What is a “must-fix” for safety and what can wait? A transparent shop will guide you. However, if you feel they are being alarmists or pushing “all-or-nothing” repairs, seek a second opinion to verify what requires immediate

attention.

4. High-pressure sales tactics: Reputable technicians understand that major repairs are significant financial decisions. If a shop pressures you to sign off immediately, treat it as a red flag. If you choose to leave without performing a critical safety repair, a trustworthy shop will ask you to sign a waiver of liability. This acknowledges the risks while respecting your right to a second opinion.

5. The “investment vs. value” dilemma: For older or high-mileage vehicles, a costly repair might not be the best move. A second shop can provide a fresh perspective on long-term reliability, helping you decide if that money is better spent on a repair or a replacement.

The bottom line: Trust your instincts. Confidence in your provider is as important as the repair itself. If a diagnosis feels overly technical, rushed or dismissive, seek another perspective. It is your vehicle, your safety, and your budget on the line.

Great service providers know that trust is built on transparency. Ensuring you feel confident in the path forward provides the peace of mind you deserve.

Wishing you all safe travels and a very happy New Year. ■

Information provided by Chris Werner, owner and lead technician, Werner's Elite Auto, 506 1/2 E. Euclid Ave., Indianola, 515-259-0122, www.wernerseliteauto.com.



COMPLIMENTARY 2ND OPINION

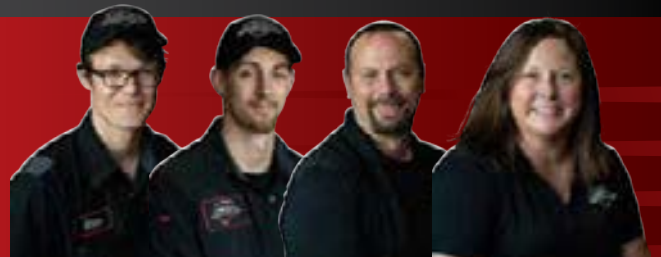
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HOME HEALTH

By Aaron Wheeler

FRESH year, fresh approach

Staying independent at home as you age

Michael, 69, has lived in his Clive home for more than four decades and intends to stay put for the long haul, but his daughter and son-in-law are uneasy. Michael is doing well today, yet, if he ever needs support, his family will not be nearby, as they live several states away.



Their worry makes sense. Aging at home with independence is a goal many of us share, but it is not guaranteed. Ongoing health conditions can make living alone risky, and around-the-clock help at home can come with a steep price tag.

That reality can trigger an important question for you or for someone close to you: If moving into a community for older adults is not the preferred path and future health changes are a concern, what options exist now?

One approach to explore is a Continuing Care at Home (CC@H) membership model. Often offered through an organization that serves older adults, a CC@H program helps people stay focused on their health and well-being while remaining at home, and it can support financial planning for potential services and care later.

If you are considering a CC@H program, ask for clear details about what is included. A strong program should do more than promote healthy habits so you can remain independent longer; it also should provide a practical way to help cover future long-term care needs, should they arise.

Before enrolling, consider asking questions such as these:

- **Does the program provide personalized support, such as wellness coaching?** Research shows people are more likely to follow through with meaningful changes when they have encouragement from a trusted guide or advocate.
- **Are care options and costs addressed?** A well-designed program can help support care if it becomes necessary — whether that is in-home services or care in a senior living community later.
- **What is the track record of the organization behind the program, and how is it regarded in the senior living field?** Even with strong benefits on paper, you should feel confident in the provider's stability, experience, and results.

CC@H programs vary widely. If one seems like a fit, take the time to confirm it aligns with your needs today and the possibilities tomorrow, and that it delivers real peace of mind. ■

Aaron Wheeler is Vice President of Home and Community-Based Services for WesleyLife, which provides health and well-being services, including WellAhead — A WesleyLife Well-Being Experience, a CC@H offering. To learn more, visit wesleylife.org/wellahead.



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When it comes to dining, you can still enjoy cooking at home — or choose from multiple restaurants offering chef-prepared meals that residents rave about.

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WELLNESS

By Jen Penisten

REJUVENATE your skin with radiofrequency microneedling

Radiofrequency (RF) microneedling is an advanced, minimally invasive treatment that revitalizes the skin by combining the benefits of traditional microneedling with the power of radiofrequency energy. This dual-action technology works by creating controlled micro-injuries in the skin while simultaneously delivering gentle heat energy deep into the dermis. The result is a powerful boost in collagen and elastin production which reveals tighter, firmer skin with better texture and tone.



RF microneedling can be performed on the face, neck, chest, stomach, thighs, etc. This addresses a wide range of skin concerns. On the face and neck, it helps reduce fine lines, wrinkles, acne scars and enlarged pores while improving skin texture and tightness. When applied to the chest and body, it targets crepey or lax skin, stretch marks and uneven tone, helping to smooth and tighten areas that have lost elasticity.

RF microneedling has roughly a one- or two-day social downtime, with makeup, exercise and any activities that can heat the skin to be avoided. Over the following weeks, as collagen remodeling continues, the skin becomes smoother, firmer and more radiant. Results continue for two to three months after your last treatment.

Whether you're looking to refresh tired skin, soften lines or restore firmness, RF microneedling offers natural-looking, long-lasting results. ■

Information provided by Jen Penisten, MSN, RN, NP-C, CEO/owner, Vivid Life Spa, 1951 E. 18th St., Suite 105, Norwalk, 515-850-7848, vividlifespaspa.com.

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HEALTH

By Dr. Jesse Stumbaugh

PAIN from shoveling? Try shockwave therapy

Every winter, snow shoveling leads to thousands of injuries, primarily lower back strains, shoulder pain, muscle spasms and tendonitis from repetitive twisting, lifting heavy wet snow, and poor posture. These musculoskeletal issues can linger, turning a seasonal chore into chronic discomfort.



Shockwave therapy offers a powerful, non-invasive solution. This advanced treatment uses high-energy acoustic waves to penetrate deep into affected tissues, stimulating natural healing processes. It boosts blood circulation, breaks down scar tissue, reduces inflammation, and promotes collagen production and tissue regeneration — ideal for strained backs, sore shoulders and overworked tendons.

Patients often experience significant pain relief after just three to six sessions, with improved mobility and no downtime. Unlike medications or injections, shockwave is drug-free and safe, accelerating recovery from shoveling-related overuse injuries.

Backed by clinical evidence for treating tendinopathies, myofascial pain and chronic back issues, shockwave therapy helps you heal faster and stronger. Don't let winter pain hold you back — embrace the season pain-free. Consult a specialist today and discover how shockwave can get you moving again. ■

Information provided by Dr. Jesse Stumbaugh, Norwalk Chiropractic, 1300 Sunset Drive, 515-981-9208, www.norwalk-chiropractic.com.

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Q: How does vision affect a child's education?

A: A good education for your child means good schools, good teachers and good vision. Your child's eyes are constantly in use in the classroom and at play. It has been estimated as much as 80% of the learning a child does occurs through his or her eyes. So, when his or her vision is not functioning properly, learning and participation will suffer.

Some of the visual skills needed for school are clear near and distance vision, binocular coordination, eye movement skills, focusing skills, peripheral awareness and eye/hand coordination.

Signs that may indicate a child has vision problems include frequent eye rubbing or blinking, short attention span, avoiding reading or other close activities, frequent headaches, covering one eye, tilting head to one side, one eye turning in or out, seeing double or losing place when reading.

If any of these things are occurring, your child will have to work harder. Because vision changes can occur without you or your child noticing them, your child should visit the optometrist at least every one to two years. ■

Information provided by Michael O'Meara, O.D. of Optometric Associates of Warren County, P.C., 1228 Sunset Drive, Norwalk, 515-981-0224.





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ORAL health in your golden years

I often remind my senior patients that our mouths change with age just like the rest of our bodies. Many dental problems that weren't concerns in your younger years become more common with age. Receding gums can expose tooth roots, increasing sensitivity and risk of decay. Dry mouth — a side effect of most medications — significantly increases the chance of cavities and oral infections. Years of wear can also lead to cracked teeth and loose fillings. Arthritis contributes to lower dexterity and in increased difficulty to care for your teeth at home the way you used to.

These changes make regular dental care more important than ever. Routine exams allow us to catch problems early, when treatment is simpler, less invasive, and far less costly. Professional cleanings also help prevent gum disease, which has been linked to heart disease, diabetes complications, and other systemic health issues.

If you're retired and no longer have employer-sponsored dental coverage, you still have options. Independent dental insurance plans, discount dental plans, and some Medicare Advantage plans can help reduce costs. Your dental office should be able to help explain what might fit your needs and budget.

In the long run, consistent dental care protects not only your smile — but your overall health and finances, too. ■

Information provided by Dr. Elizabeth Fleck, Norwalk Family Dentistry, 1101 Chatham Ave., Suite A, Norwalk, 515-256-9000, www.norwalkfamilydentistry.com.





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REAL ESTATE

By Vonnie Potter

NEW year, new home

The new year is a popular time to make big moves, and buying or selling a home is no exception. Whether you are starting fresh or planning your next chapter, preparation is key to a successful real estate experience.

If you are selling a home, start by setting clear goals and understanding your local market. Meet with a trusted real estate professional to determine a competitive price and create a marketing plan. Small improvements can make a big difference — fresh paint, decluttering and simple staging help buyers envision themselves in the space. Professional photos and strong online exposure are especially important as many buyers begin their search digitally.

For buyers, the new year is the perfect time to get financially ready. Review your budget, check your credit, and get pre-approved for a mortgage to strengthen your position. Knowing what you can afford allows you to act quickly when the right home becomes available. Be clear about your priorities but stay flexible as inventory and competition can vary early in the year.

Whether buying or selling, timing, preparation and expert guidance matter. The new year offers renewed motivation and opportunity — by planning ahead and working with the right professionals, you can turn your real estate goals into a successful reality. ■



Information provided by Vonnie Potter, SRES, MA "Advocating Smart Home Choices for Our Community," Iowa Realty, 200 Army Post Road, Suite 60, Des Moines, Iowa 50315, 515-710-3722, www.vonniepottter.com, www.vonnie@iowarealty.com.

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PLAN AHEAD

By Scott Eriksen

PLAN ahead in 2026

Will 2026 be the year? It might be cleaning out the basement. Perhaps it is getting a will in place...or updated. Or maybe it is finally getting your funeral prearrangements addressed. We hear it all the time: "I am so glad to have this taken care of."

Planning your final arrangements begins with a simple conversation and can be a pleasant process. Planning ahead also allows you time to give thoughtful consideration to these important decisions. There are many options to think about when addressing your final arrangements, and there are even prepayment options available to those who wish to have their final financial obligations handled in advance.

An advanced planning consultant can walk you through these choices and options.

Start the year by crossing something off your "to-do" list. Reach out to your funeral home of choice and schedule a meeting to get your prearrangements in place.

You will be glad you did...and so will your family. ■



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

TREATING tinnitus with hearing devices

Tinnitus sufferers often struggle with solutions to quiet the ringing in their ears, but one of the most effective might already be at their fingertips. If you have hearing loss and tinnitus and wear hearing devices, relief could be just a button or two away.



What causes tinnitus?

Tinnitus is not a medical condition itself but a symptom of another disease. Almost anything that can cause hearing loss can also cause tinnitus, which helps explain why so many individuals with hearing loss have tinnitus. The list of causes is extensive; aging, noise exposure and ototoxic medications (drugs that can lead to hearing loss) are among the most common.

How hearing devices help

Researchers have discovered the following about how hearing devices can help manage tinnitus:¹

- 27.8% of hearing device users report a moderate to substantial reduction in their tinnitus symptoms when using their devices.
- Two out of three people experience tinnitus relief when wearing hearing devices most or all of the time, and 29% report that using hearing devices alleviates their tinnitus all of the time.

Hearing devices help with tinnitus in several ways. Wearing them regularly reduces the cognitive burden involved in the listening process, decreasing stress and anxiety — factors that tend to worsen tinnitus symptoms.

Because hearing devices amplify background sounds, turning up the volume when wearing them can help cover up the sound of tinnitus. This allows the brain to focus on ambient

noises instead and is especially effective for patients whose tinnitus occurs at the same frequency as their hearing loss.

Boosting the volume is also helpful for those patients whose tinnitus is so loud and distracting that it interferes with their ability to follow conversations or watch television. Amplifying these sound signals helps mask the ringing in their ears and allows them to hear better.

If you have hearing loss and are also experiencing tinnitus, try your hearing devices. They might just make a difference. ■

Information provided by Dr. Kelly Cook, Audiologist, Iowa Hearing Center, 1228 Sunset Drive, Suite B, Norwalk, 515-416-5990, www.IowaHearingCenter.com. 1. Kochkin, S et al. (2011). MarkeTrak VIII: The prevalence of tinnitus in the United States and the self-reported efficacy of various treatments. The Hearing Review. <http://www.hearingreview.com/2011/11/marketrak-viii-the-prevalence-of-tinnitus-in-the-united-states-and-the-self-reported-efficacy-of-various-treatments/>

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COMMUNITY

NOVAK graduates from law enforcement academy



ILEA Director Brady Carney, Officer Paige Novak and Iowa Attorney General Brenna Bird

Iowa Attorney General Brenna Bird congratulated Officer Paige Novak on her graduation from the Iowa Law Enforcement Academy in a ceremony held at Rising Sun Church of Christ in Pleasant Hill on Friday, Dec. 19.

Officer Novak was part of the 324th graduating class and completed the academy's rigorous 16-week training program that consisted of coursework in policing communications, criminal law, physical fitness and emergency response. She also received training in patrol procedures, investigations and tactical and administrative skills. Attorney General Bird welcomed the graduates on stage as they were presented their diplomas by ILEA Director Brady Carney.

"I am proud of our Iowa Law Enforcement Academy graduates for answering the call to serve," said Attorney General Bird. "It is a challenging and demanding job, but it's essential for the safety of our communities. Our state is grateful to them and their families for their selfless sacrifice. As Attorney General, I look forward to working with them in the line of duty and my office will always be here to offer unwavering support."

Officer Novak will serve with the Norwalk Police Department. ■

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OUT & ABOUT

RIBBON Cutting

Family Pet Veterinary Center held Pet Photos with Santa and a ribbon cutting on Dec. 6.



Family Pet Veterinary Center held Pet Photos with Santa and a ribbon cutting on Dec. 6.



Brooke Currier and Kayla Hughes



Megan Smith and Morgan Doll



Lundyn Carlson, Emma Thompson and Emma Spencer



Libby Abbitt, Chewy, Santa and Jamie Quick



Tater Tot and Santa



Penny and Santa



Cheeto and Santa



Santa and Wrigley



Evie and Santa



Simba and Santa



Knox and Santa

CHAMBER Lunch

Norwalk Area Chamber held its Holiday Lunch Dec. 11 at Fellowship Community Church.



Chief Staples, Dan Obley and Manny Toribio



Chad Leeper and Lucinda Sperry



Cyndie Strawn and Jan Sparks



Angie Cooper and Tanya Apana



Newton Standridge and Nate Liedtke



Jim Lane and Dave Rewerts



Ken Tague and Joe Strong



Kenzie VanHaaften and Amy Duncan



Pastor Rob Jones and Angie Croll



Travis Stanley and Andrea Travi



David Albrecht and Chad Leeper

CLASSIFIEDS

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Fall Activity Highlights



NORWALK COMMUNITY SCHOOL DISTRICT NEWSLETTER

JANUARY 2026

DANCE

State Champions in Jazz, First Runner-Up in Pom, 4th Place Hip Hop

"The Norwalk Dance Team delivered one of the most memorable State performances in program history. After months of commitment, early mornings, late practices, snowstorm workouts in living rooms and basements, and a level of focus and determination that never once wavered—this team stepped onto the State floors with purpose. And they rose" -Nicole Prenger, Norwalk Dance Coach



FOOTBALL

Norwalk Warrior Football competed in class 5A for the first time in school history and finished with a 5-4 overall record. A few highlights for the year were beating a storied Iowa City High team, winning homecoming over Des Moines East, and coming away with a victory at Urbandale in a close game.



The following players were also nominated for their success this season:

5A All State 1st Team: Luke Brewer, Eli Robbins
All District: 1st Team: Luke Brewer (5A District 1 Defensive MVP) Eli Robbins, Victor Esparza, Greer Langel, **2nd Team:** James Hatlevig, Xavier Bush, Owen Siemens, Luke Rewerts, Brady Wilkening, Gavin Ross, **Honorable Mention:** Breck Welch, Jamison Giesemann
Academic All State: Brady Wilkening, Cael Bemis, Christopher Bellizzi, Eli Robbins, Gavin Dehmer, Isaac Peter, James Hatlevig, Kayden Frank, Luke Brewer, Owen Siemens, and Xavier Bush

VOLLEYBALL

Norwalk's 2025 volleyball season was one to remember. The Lady Warriors finished with a program record for wins in a season at 29-12. The Warriors season ended with a hard fought loss in the Class 4A State Quarterfinal in the Xstream Arena in Coralville.



All Conference: 1st Team: Elle Hatlevig (Unanimous), Reese Heim, **2nd Team:** Hadley Michael, Delaynee Steele, **Honorable Mention:** Ava Carlson, Myla Brown

At the state level, the Lady Warriors also had three members on the *IGCA 4A Central All-District Team:* Hadley Michael, Reese Heim, Elle Hatlevig.

The Lady Warriors also placed two players on the *IGCA 4A All-State Teams:* **2nd Team:** Elle Hatlevig, **3rd Team:** Reese Heim

GIRLS CROSS COUNTRY

The varsity girls cross country team had strong team and individual performances this season. At the Little Hawkeye Conference Meet, the team placed 3rd with 77 points. The warriors placed 3rd at the State Qualifying meet, making history as the first 4A girls team qualification in Norwalk history. As a team they placed 15th at the State Cross Country meet led by Freshman Hannah Schmitz who posted an all-time school record of 19:17. Individual qualifiers also included Gabby Drymon, and Olive DeRocher. Pearl Brown, Lucy Evans, Grace Wetzeler and Ava Brungradt also competed at the State Meet for the Warriors.



BOYS CROSS COUNTRY

The varsity squad qualified as a team for their 7th straight IHSAA State Cross Country meet, competing in Class 4A and finished in 13th place overall. Members of the team who competed at state include Teegan Kralik, Sam Parker, Sam Buhrow, Lane Osterloh, Oliver Tice, Brayden Walderbach, and Aksel Beedon. This squad also won their 2nd straight regional qualifying meet in Council Bluffs.

In addition to their state and district success, the following runners earned these postseason honors:

All Conference 1st Team: Teegan Kralik, Sam Parker, Lane Osterloh, Aksel Beedon, Sam Buhrow

All District: Teegan Kralik, Sam Parker, Aksel Beedon, Sam Buhrow

GIRLS TENNIS

The Norwalk girls tennis team transitioned away from spring seasons to fall seasons, marking the first ever fall tennis season. Thirty-three total students went out this year. The Warriors finished 10-4 overall and 2nd place in the Little Hawkeye Conference.



The Norwalk tennis program will graduate seven seniors. The seniors (pictured) are Livie Caldwell, Megan Chambers, Jacey Crane, Emma Dautovic, Teyla Dvorak, Lindsay Nelsen and Addie Smith.

BOYS GOLF

Norwalk qualifies for 4A state fall golf for the first time in history. Norwalk finished 9th out of 12 teams. Tillman Papcun led the Warriors at state placing 12th individually. Ian Lux, Parker Cary, Lane Juergens, Kota Bentz, and Dayton Poen also participated in the state meet.



FOOTBALL CHEER



GIRLS SWIMMING

Norwalk's Mallory Betts and Eva Smith (pictured) competed on the Des Moines Lincoln 400-yard freestyle relay team at the Girls State Swimming and Diving Meet held at the University of Iowa.



MARCHING BAND

In October, Norwalk participated in the Iowa High School Music Association State Festival. Norwalk received a 1 rating, the highest possible score, placing 5th in class 4A at the Waukee Marching Invitational.



ALL-STATE MUSIC

Norwalk High School Vocal Music had two students selected for the All-State Chorus, Evelyn Kralik and Sophia Magil (pictured).



Norwalk High School Band had an incredible number of students designated All State. This years all state band members from Norwalk include Gavin Housley, Rylee Campbell, Zane Wihlm, Elizabeth Winters, Gracelyn Lors, Ellie Prier, Carson Menke.

THEATER

This year's fall play was *Bringing Down the House*, which was a madcap comedy about a trio of producers trying to get their show ready to perform for investors with the hope of getting it on Broadway with zany moments one after another.



The play featured a cast of 28 students. Many of the cast were involved in other activities which made rehearsals challenging. Much like the characters in the play, the cast worked through those challenges and came together as a supportive group to put together an amazing show.

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