

# TRACITION

A MAGAZINE FROM THE AMES REGIONAL ECONOMIC ALLIANCE

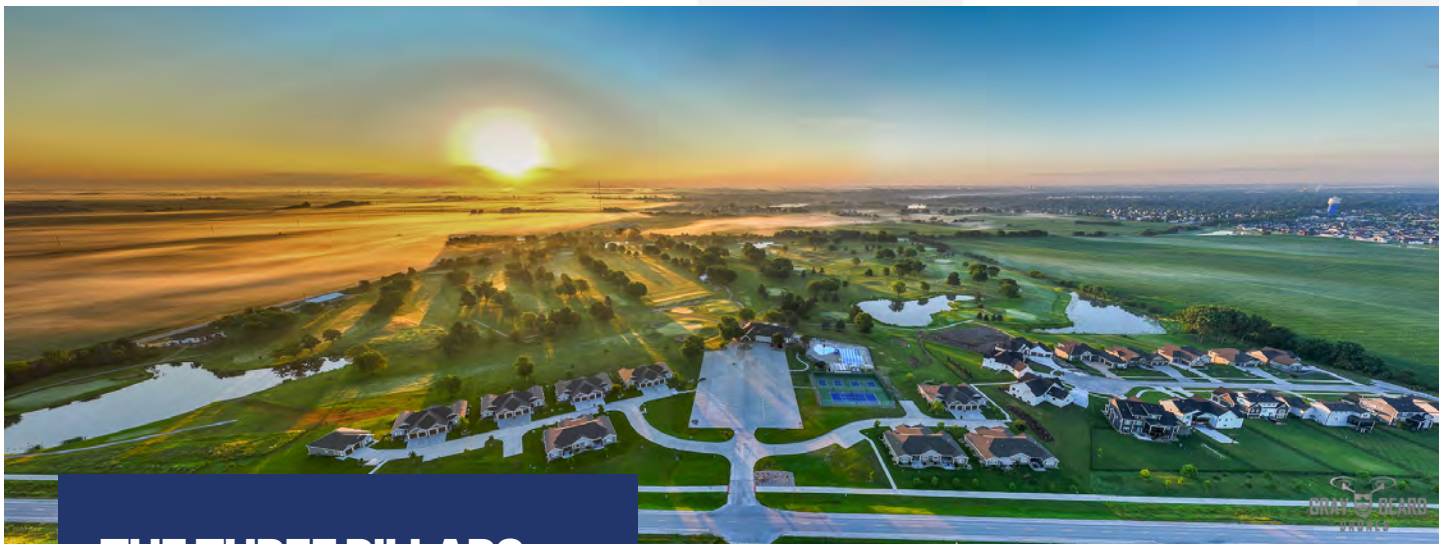
Fall 2025

Issue 12



## URBAN MINING

RECLAIMING RARE EARTH ELEMENTS



## THE THREE PILLARS THAT WILL LEAD OUR WORK WILL BE: LEADERSHIP ENGAGEMENT ADVOCACY



**Dan Culhane**  
President & CEO  
Ames Regional Economic Alliance

In this edition of Traction magazine, I hope you discover a strong and consistent theme of collaboration that defines our region. Whether it's the cutting-edge partnership between Critical Materials Recycling and Ames National Laboratory, or the community energy and creativity that continues to thrive in Downtown Ames businesses, collaboration is at the heart of what moves us forward.

We also highlight three local non-profits—Friendship Ark, The Arc of Story County, and Overflow Thrift Store—that are coming together to create a new shared campus, a true testament to the power of working together for the greater good. Windmill Coffee Roasters is featured for building not just a thriving business but a culture of connection around the simple joy of a great cup of coffee.

This magazine is made possible thanks to the many Traction investors who believe in our mission and support both this publication and the work of the Ames Regional Economic Alliance. Their dedication allows us to continue strengthening partnerships, championing innovation, and elevating the incredible people and organizations that make this region special.

As always, we remain focused on fostering opportunities that will drive growth and prosperity throughout our community. We are proud to partner with so many organizations, businesses, and individuals who are committed to shaping a brighter future for Ames and the surrounding area. I invite you to dive into these stories and celebrate the collaborative spirit that continues to make our region thrive. Together, we are building momentum that will carry us well into the future. The success of our region is truly a shared achievement, made possible by the vision and dedication of countless leaders and community members. Thank you for being part of this journey and for believing in what we can accomplish

### What is Traction?

The **Ames Regional Economic Alliance** and affiliate organizations help create traction in our community. We drive business and community vitality in the Ames region by being connectors. We lead, engage, and advocate for the betterment of our communities. We help get projects off the ground or help move them forward, and we are undeterred in our purpose, cause, and passion. A great idea often needs a little bit of progress and momentum, and we help provide that **traction** to move it forward.



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### On the Cover

In Boone, a quiet technological revolution is turning discarded hard drives into a new source of rare earth elements. Critical Materials Recycling is using a patented, eco-friendly process developed at Ames National Laboratory to extract these critical materials without mining. As global demand for rare earths skyrockets, this rural Iowa company is helping reshape the national supply chain. Read more in this feature article of Traction magazine.

**AMES REGIONAL ECONOMIC**  
**Alliance**

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Centrally and conveniently located in the heart of the Midwest and Iowa, Ames is known for its healthy, stable economy, flourishing cultural environment, and the world-renowned Iowa State University.

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With over 750 members, the Ames Regional Economic Alliance strives to make the Ames region a better place to live, work, and do business by strengthening the economic vitality and the quality of life in the area.

# URBAN MINING

## RECLAIMING RARE EARTH ELEMENTS

At the edge of Boone, in a nondescript industrial building, a high-tech revolution is unfolding. Inside Critical Materials Recycling, Inc. (CMR), a small but growing team is pulling precious rare earth elements—crucial for everything from wind turbines to fighter jets—from an unlikely source: old hard drives.

“We’re not digging into the Earth,” says Dan Bina, President and CEO of CMR. “We’re digging into yesterday’s electronics. This is urban mining at work.”

### Magnets in the Machines

Most people don’t realize that the small, shiny disks in computers contain powerful magnets—and those magnets contain rare earth elements like neodymium and dysprosium. In fact, about 2% of every hard drive’s weight comes from magnets. With millions of hard drives reaching end-of-life each year, the opportunity is massive.

CMR’s patented Acid-Free Dissolution Recycling (ADR) technology, developed at Ames National Laboratory at Iowa State University, uses a proprietary liquid solution to extract these valuable elements. “The liquid is the key,” Bina explains. “The solution does the leaching—it pulls the rare earths out of the hard drives without the environmental harm that comes from traditional mining.”

The process is clean, efficient, and surprisingly productive. From 215 kilograms of shredded hard drives, CMR can recover around 10 kilograms of rare earth mixture—later refined through further separation steps into high-purity metals.

### Shaping the Supply Chain

CMR is already working with tech giants like

Microsoft, receiving end-of-life drives and refining their valuable contents. Currently, their Boone facility can process up to 2 million hard drives annually. “That’s our ceiling right now,” Bina says, “but we’re planning for growth.”

Expansion plans are already in motion, first by scaling the current site, then branching out to new locations. The goal is to source even more drives—especially from hyperscale data centers—while growing partnerships to process magnets from other sources, such as wind turbines.

“A typical wind turbine can have as much magnet content as about 200,000 hard drives,” says Bina. “We’re developing the process now with local partners. That’s the next frontier.”

### America’s Critical Need

The urgency is not just economic—it’s strategic. Over 90% of the global rare earth supply chain runs through China. And while the United States has a few rare earth mines, most of the materials still end up overseas for processing. Less than 3% of global rare earths are currently recycled.

“We need to develop our own ecosystems,” Bina says. “This isn’t just about recycling—it’s about security, innovation, and independence.”

That message has resonated. CMR holds an exclusive global license from the Iowa State University Research Foundation and has attracted support from early investors and key industry partners. As demand for rare earth elements is projected to jump from 100,000 tons in 2020 to over 700,000 tons by 2050, CMR is positioning Boone—and America—at the center of the solution.

### The Big Picture

Drives come to CMR after first passing through traditional recyclers, who strip out copper,





**Dan Bina**  
President and CEO,  
Critical Materials Recycling



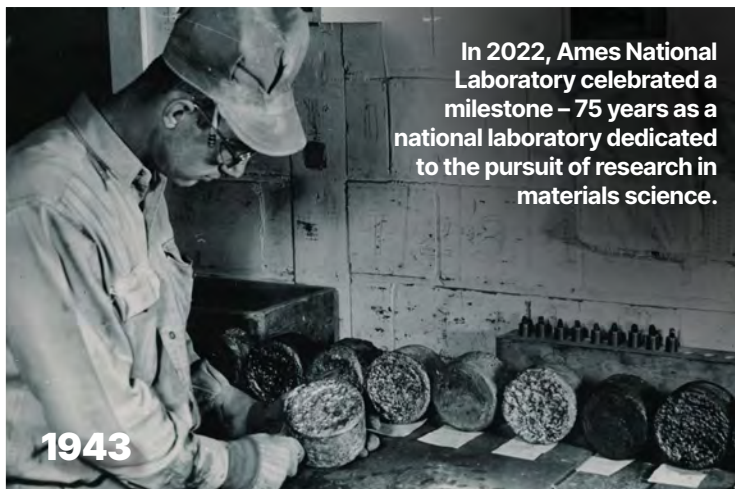
aluminum and circuit boards—those materials go to standard scrap markets. But the magnets? They stay in Boone, where they're carefully reclaimed and refined.

After extraction, the rare earths still must be separated into individual elements and transformed into usable metals. It's a complex process, but one that's essential if the United States hopes to compete in industries from clean energy to national defense.

"The demand for rare earths will only grow," says Bina. "And with only a few domestic mines, the best way forward is to make the most of what we already have—sitting in old devices, server farms, and turbines. We're not just recycling; we're rebuilding the supply chain from the inside out."

Learn more about Critical Materials Recycling online at:

**[www.CriticalMaterialsRecycling.com](http://www.CriticalMaterialsRecycling.com)**



In 2022, Ames National Laboratory celebrated a milestone – 75 years as a national laboratory dedicated to the pursuit of research in materials science.



Ames National Laboratory traces its origins back to the Manhattan Project during World War II, where it played a crucial role in developing materials for the first atomic bombs. Established in Ames, the lab's early work focused on producing high-purity uranium and other rare materials needed for nuclear weapons. This foundational research positioned Ames as a key player in America's nuclear efforts and laid the groundwork for its evolution into a multidisciplinary national laboratory.

Today, Ames National Laboratory operates under the U.S. Department of Energy (DOE), serving as one of the DOE's premier research centers. The lab is managed by Iowa State University and is renowned for its cutting-edge research in energy, materials science, and chemistry. With a strong emphasis on collaboration between government, academia, and industry, Ames Lab advances technologies that support national security, clean energy, and scientific innovation.

Ames National Laboratory has made a significant impact in the field of critical materials—those rare and essential elements crucial for modern technologies such as renewable energy, electronics, and defense systems. The lab focuses on discovering new materials, improving recycling methods, and developing sustainable alternatives to reduce reliance on foreign supply chains. Through its pioneering work, Ames Lab contributes to strengthening U.S. economic and technological competitiveness while addressing global challenges related to resource scarcity and environmental sustainability.



# CYstarters

## Celebrating a Decade of CYstarters

Ten years ago, Iowa State University made a strategic bet on student entrepreneurship — and it's been paying off ever since. In 2016, the ISU Pappajohn Center for Entrepreneurship launched CYstarters, a summer accelerator designed to give student entrepreneurs the time, funding, and mentorship to fully develop their business ideas.

Backed by the university's commitment to innovation and economic development, CYstarters was created as more than just a program — it was built as an immersive experience to help students explore entrepreneurship as a career path. Participants receive a \$6,500 stipend and spend 11 weeks focused solely on launching or growing their startups, supported by a robust network of mentors, advisors, and fellow student founders.

Over the past decade, more than 100 Iowa State students have participated in the program, representing a wide range of majors and ideas — from food science to engineering to app development. These young entrepreneurs leave the program with more than a business model; they gain real-world experience, professional confidence, and lasting connections.

CYstarters has become a core part of Iowa State's entrepreneurial ecosystem, aligning with the university's broader mission to drive innovation and impact across Iowa and beyond. Graduates of the program have gone on to raise capital, create jobs, and build companies that reflect the diverse talents of the Iowa State community.

Much of CYstarters' success can be traced back to the leadership of Judi Eyles, director of the ISU Pappajohn Center for Entrepreneurship. Her vision and commitment to student-centered innovation helped shape CYstarters from the start. Under her guidance, the program has maintained its momentum and relevance over the years, growing into one of Iowa State's most impactful platforms for student entrepreneurship.

The program's longevity and success are also a credit to the university's continued investment in entrepreneurial thinking. By giving students structured time, financial backing, and access to a collaborative community, CYstarters has helped transform Iowa State into a nationally recognized hub for student innovation.

As CYstarters looks to the future, its impact continues to ripple outward — through alumni, businesses, and a growing culture of entrepreneurship that starts right here at Iowa State University.

Learn more about CYstarters online at:

**[www.isupjcenter.org](http://www.isupjcenter.org)**



# AREA #s

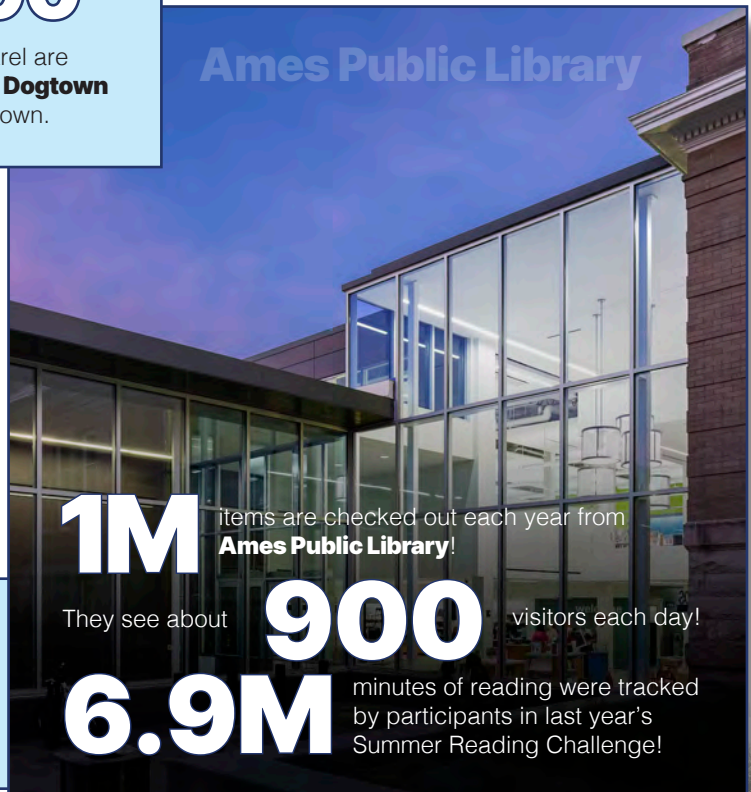
## A Look Across the Region



150,000

pieces of custom apparel are produced each year at **Dogtown University** in Campustown.

### Ames Public Library



1M

items are checked out each year from **Ames Public Library**!

They see about

900

visitors each day!

6.9M

minutes of reading were tracked by participants in last year's Summer Reading Challenge!



100

In the summertime, **Ames Pet Resort** serves more than 100 dogs per day for play, care, and pampering!

On a cold winter day, **Seven Oaks Recreation** in Boone could use up to

1.1M

gallons of water in a 12-hour period to produce snow to keep the fun going!



200

**Eagles Ledge** in Madrid hosted their 200th event in August 2025 since opening in fall of 2021. The scenic venue has quickly become a premiere destination for weddings, celebrations, and gatherings.

623K

The number of paintballs that fly through the air during Seven Oaks summer paintball season!





400

wedding gowns are altered each year at **KN Custom Sewing**, which does not include adjustments in ready-to-wear, formalwear, and military suits.

## North Grand Dental

31,532 • 378,384

Teeth cleaned per month

Teeth cleaned per year



1.75

Over the last 2 years, **Habitat for Humanity** has constructed six homes in the Baker Subdivision in West Ames with two more new homes under construction. Studies have shown that for every dollar invested in a Habitat build, \$1.75 is injected back into the local economy through material and labor purchases, increased property tax base, and more.



**Wheatsfield Cooperative** in Ames is a member-owned grocery and community hub focused on providing local, sustainable, and affordable food options. Beyond groceries, it fosters community engagement through educational programs, events, and support for local producers.

75

# of local jobs created

135

# of local Iowa producers carried

140

years of experience of management staff



8,400

During the summer, **The Loft Resale** in Ames processes and keys in about 8,400 items—clothing, accessories, shoes, and more—each carefully inspected, tagged, and prepared for shoppers. A well-loved consignment shop, The Loft offers quality, gently used items for women, men, and children at affordable prices, providing a sustainable shopping option while supporting the local economy.



**Varsity Carwash** employs over two dozen ISU and DMACC students each semester, providing them with on-the-job training and skill-development in a multitude of fields, including equipment maintenance, marketing, graphic design and customer care.

In one year, **CIT Signature Transportation** travels about 540,000 miles. This is 45,000 - 60,000 miles per bus across the intercontinental United States and Canada. Bonus facts: the top two lost items on a bus include a water bottle and an ear pod (yes, usually just one).



540,000



# PLAY IN AMES

## Downtown Ames Fourth of July Parade

Main Street was full of energy as the community gathered to celebrate Independence Day with one of Ames' most cherished summer traditions—the Fourth of July Parade. Featuring colorful floats, marching bands, local organizations, and spirited performances, the event brought out hundreds of residents in patriotic red, white, and blue. From food trucks and music to community groups and families lining the streets, the morning offered a festive, family-friendly atmosphere that celebrated the heart of Ames. The annual event continues to be a highlight of the summer, showcasing the pride and togetherness that define the downtown experience.

## FOLLOW US ON SOCIAL



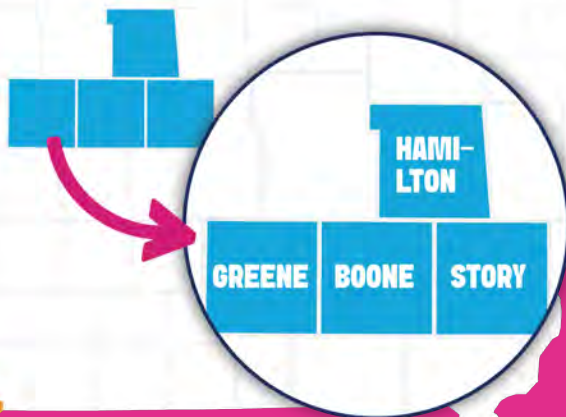
**McHose Park**  
Boone, Iowa



**SCORE Recreation Athletic Complex**  
Nevada, Iowa



## GETTING AROUND IS EASY (FROM TOWN TO TOWN THAT IS!)



**Miracle Park at Inis Grove**  
Ames, Iowa





## Farm to Table

The 2025 Farm to Table Dinner, hosted by the Ames Main Street Farmers' Market, was a standout summer evening that brought together local flavors, community spirit, and a stunning outdoor setting at Prairie Moon Winery. Guests enjoyed a multi-course meal crafted by Chef Aaron Holt of Catering by Doolittle Farms and Chef Grant Gillon, winner of Season 13 of MasterChef. Each dish showcased fresh, seasonal ingredients sourced directly from local producers and vendors. The event highlighted the strong connection between Ames-area farmers, chefs, and residents—and underscored the value of supporting a thriving, local food system.

**Chefs Grant Gillon  
and Aaron Holt**



## ONLINE MEMBER DIRECTORY



*Looking for a local business? Consider one of our over 750 Ames Regional Economic Alliance members through our online directory. Visit our website at:*

**AmesAlliance.com**

*Scan the QR code to access our online directory to search for some of the businesses gaining traction.*

### New Members

- [Rootwise Environmental Nature](#)
- [Bold Dance by Peach](#)
- [Studio192 and Co.](#)
- [Letter Eats By B](#)
- [Jersey Mike's](#)
- [Hauswirth Hair Creations](#)
- [The Trusted Bookkeeper, LLC](#)
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- [Denovo Construction Services](#)
- [Mama Glow Co & Sippin' Pretty](#)
- [United Equipment Accessories](#)



# WINDMILL

## COFFEE ROASTERS

### Building a Coffee Culture

Windmill Coffee Roasters is quietly shaping a coffee culture across Central Iowa. Founded by Andrew Burgason, Windmill emerged from a family legacy of coffee excellence. Andrew's father opened Burgies Coffee & Tea in 1997, but as Andrew recalls, the need for a dedicated roasting operation quickly became clear.

"We started roasting simply to supply our own shop," says Burgason. "But as more local cafés and businesses sought high-quality beans, we realized Iowa needed an independent wholesale roaster that could both deliver exceptional coffee and foster meaningful relationships across the supply chain."

Today, Windmill sources coffee from 12 countries spanning Central and South America, Africa, and Asia. Each coffee has its own journey, often involving dozens—if not hundreds—of hands before it reaches the roaster. Andrew emphasizes the intentional relationships they've built with producers.

"Quality is the most important thing," Burgason explains. "Just as important is continuing the relationship. We've sought out producers we know by name. In El Salvador, we have a decade old relationship with producer Anny Ruth. In Costa Rica, we buy the majority of our coffee from Javier, a producer we continue to connect with over Instagram. Our commitment allowed him to expand his business. That's what coffee is all about—honoring the process and the people."

Windmill's purchasing decisions are guided by quality, price, and integrity. They sample each coffee, commit to specific quantities, and sign contracts that ensure producers receive a fair return. It can take two to three months for coffee to travel from origin to their roastery in Ames, but that time and investment underscore Windmill's dedication to ethical sourcing.

"Coffee is seasonal," Burgason notes. "Some regions have multiple harvests, while others have just one. We rotate through coffees every few months, so there's always something new—but always something exceptional."

### Expanding Beyond the Bean

Windmill's mission extends beyond roasting. The team is actively building an ecosystem to support Iowa's independent coffee shops. From offering wholesale support and equipment repairs to serving as a sort of incubator for new cafés, Windmill is dedicated to elevating the region's coffee scene.

"My vision for Windmill is to connect the dots even more," says Burgason. "I want to help our partners understand where their coffee comes from and how it impacts the entire supply chain. Coffee is a scarce commodity. The more education and transparency we provide, the more we can raise the value of every cup."

Looking ahead, Windmill Coffee Roasters continues to grow its network across Central Iowa, championing both quality and community. For Andrew, each bag of roasted beans represents a global story—one of countless hours, hands, and traditions—that deserves to be shared.



Pictured: Brandon Thomas, Andrew Burgason, Robb Pearson, Corey Stephens; Not pictured: Jenna Fagen





## **You can find Windmill Coffee across the AREA:**

• Ames Golf and Country Club • Ames Regional Economic Alliance • Bellbottom Mobile Cafe • Boehringer Ingelheim • Burgie's North • Burgie's South • Burgie's Nevada • Dog-Eared Books • Haverkamp Properties • Labyrinth Coffee • Marmalade Moon • McFarland Clinics • RES Group • The Filling Station • Wheatsfield Market • Workiva •

Learn more about Windmill Coffee Roasters online at:

**[www.windmillcoffee.com](http://www.windmillcoffee.com)**





# Non-Profit Center

## Friendship Ark • The Arc of Story County • Overflow Thrift Store

Three Ames service organizations—Friendship Ark, The Arc of Story County, and Overflow Thrift Store—are partnering to create a new service and retail campus in west Ames at the JAX Outdoor site. Renovations begin in late 2025, with Friendship Ark and The Arc relocating offices and programs to a fully accessible building featuring spaces like a reflection garden and a gym for Special Olympics and community use. Overflow will open its third retail store at the site, expanding thrifting access for central and west Ames and Boone County. Donations will be accepted starting in October, with the store opening in early November. The campus will foster deeper community connections and support, offering space for collaboration and enrichment.



## Ames Splash Pad

A standalone splash pad featuring 37 interactive water elements is coming to Daley Park in west Ames, filling a long-standing gap in aquatic amenities for the area. Approved by the City Council in June 2025, the splash pad is designed for all ages and includes shaded seating, outdoor showers, and utility upgrades. Construction is underway, with completion expected by June 1, 2026. The \$992,000 project is funded by the city, with surplus funds earmarked for park maintenance facility improvements.

## Furniture Mart (Ames)

A 91,000 sq ft Furniture Mart store is under construction between Target and Walmart on SE 5th Street, with an anticipated November opening—the first large-scale furniture retailer in Ames since about 2010. The \$7 million development, backed by a five-year tax abatement, is expected to generate \$9–10 million in annual sales, contribute roughly \$30 million to the local economy, and employ around 20 staff. Local contractors are advancing site preparation—including elevating the pad out of a flood plain—and construction to help keep consumer spending local and fill a longstanding market gap.







Renderings were designed and provided by **10Fold Architecture + Engineering**



### **Chevron Ames Technology Center**

State and local along with company leaders at Chevron Corporation celebrated the grand opening of the Ames Technology Center in June 2025. The 45,000 square foot facility, which sits on the Chevron Campus in Ames will expand the company's lower carbon fuels technology development and advanced technical support capabilities by adding new analytical laboratory and research & development space, along with new offices. With investments like this one, and a commitment of \$8 billion to grow its lower carbon businesses by 2028, Chevron is building a portfolio of lower carbon solutions that are available in the marketplace.

# AN AERIAL UPDATE



### **Anthem Housing Project (Huxley)**

Anthem, a 120-acre mixed-use development on the southern edge of Huxley, is moving forward with streets complete and the first commercial strip building being framed. Led by Chris Gardner of Bella Commercial, the \$120 million project includes senior living, retail, apartments, and industrial space across three 40-acre parcels. Foundations and underground infrastructure are in place on the south end, and sanitary sewer and stormwater work is underway. Turn lanes and a roundabout on U.S. Highway 69 are under construction and expected to be finished by November 1st.



### **Daisy Brand (Boone)**

Daisy Brand's \$1.2 billion, 1 million-square-foot dairy processing facility in Boone—its "most ambitious project yet," according to President Ben Sokolsky—is steadily moving forward following its May 2025 groundbreaking. Site grading, utility work, and infrastructure installation are underway with local contractors keeping the project on schedule. The facility, which is expected to create 106 jobs initially and up to 255 as demand grows, is also fueling workforce development through engineering recruitment efforts and summer internships for five Iowa State University students.



### **Generation Repair & Service (Story City)**

Generation Repair & Service (GRS), which specializes in repairing and maintaining wind turbine gearboxes, main shafts, electrical components, and tooling for wind farms across 29 states and Canada, is moving forward with a \$17 million expansion and partial remodel of its Story City facility. Supported by a \$481,500 tax incentive from the Iowa Economic Development Authority, the project's steel structure is in place, with wall sheeting and roofing nearing completion. An onsite crew of about 40 workers is pushing toward an end-of-September occupancy for the new addition, with the full remodel expected to wrap up by January 2026.





**Stacy Negrete**  
Owner, Oak Lane Candle Co.



### Handcrafted Candles with a Purpose in Downtown Ames

For nearly seven years, Oak Lane Candle Co. has been a steady presence in Downtown Ames. Owned and operated by Stacy Negrete, the business has grown from a home-based candle-making hobby to a thriving brick-and-mortar store on Main Street. Known for its clean-burning, small-batch soy candles, Oak Lane stands out for its commitment to quality, community, and purpose-driven work.

Negrete's journey started in 2015 as a way to raise funds for her family's international adoption. "What began as a creative way to support our adoption quickly grew into something much bigger," she said. Within hours of launching her first Etsy listings, orders poured in faster than she could keep up. That early success laid the foundation for what would become Oak Lane Candle Co.

The business name is a nod to Negrete's childhood home in southeast Iowa, where a long driveway lined with oak seedlings left a lasting impression. "Oak Lane is a reminder to grow something meaningful and lasting," she said. That mindset has carried through each stage of the business—from early product testing in her kitchen to opening a storefront and studio in Ames.

Each candle is made with 100% soy wax sourced from Midwest farms, with phthalate-free



fragrance oils and lead-free cotton wicks. Negrete pours each candle by hand in the back of her store, which also features a small retail space and a pour bar for custom scent-making experiences. Customer favorites like Mint + Grapefruit and Oakmoss + Amber have become staples, and seasonal scents give shoppers something new to explore throughout the year.

Oak Lane's approach is rooted in transparency and simplicity. There's no mass production—just small batches made with intention. "Our goal is to make something that fits seamlessly into people's lives," she said. "We care about how our products are made and how they make people feel when they use them."

Community has always been at the center of Oak Lane's growth. Selling at the Ames Main Street Farmers' Market helped Negrete build relationships with customers, receive feedback, and test new products. Support from other small business owners on Main Street has also been instrumental. "There's a real sense of collaboration here," she said. "People want to see each other succeed."

During the pandemic, Oak Lane quickly pivoted to an online and local delivery model, which helped the business maintain momentum while many storefronts were forced to close or scale back. That adaptability gave Negrete the confidence to

take the leap and leave her other job in early 2021, making Oak Lane her full-time focus.

As the business continues to grow, Negrete is exploring new ways to reach customers—both locally and beyond. That includes expanding the pour bar experience, introducing new scent lines, and continuing to partner with other local makers and small shops. "We're proud to be part of the small business community in Ames," she said. "And we're excited for what's ahead."

Oak Lane's store has also become a destination for visitors looking for unique gifts and a relaxing, personalized experience. Whether it's a custom-poured candle, a favorite seasonal scent, or a conversation with Stacy herself, customers often leave with more than what they came for.

For Negrete, success is rooted in staying authentic and connected. "We're not trying to be the biggest. We're focused on being meaningful," she said. "And that's enough."

**[www.oaklanecandleco.com](http://www.oaklanecandleco.com)**



### Café Diem

Café Diem has been a cozy staple since 2000 and consistently ranks among Story County's top-rated coffee shops. It effortlessly blends a homey and industrial-chic vibe that draws a diverse mix of students, freelancers, locals, and visitors. Regulars rave about signature cold brews, lattes, chai drinks, oversized cinnamon rolls, and savory offerings. Whether you're looking to work, socialize, or relax, Café Diem delivers a warm, welcoming experience in the heart of Ames.



### Little Woods Herbal

Little Woods Herbal in Downtown Ames is a specialty tea and herb shop offering organic loose-leaf teas, herbal blends, and wellness products curated with intention. The shop blends traditional herbal wisdom with modern sustainability. Whether you're seeking a soothing tea, natural remedy, or a unique gift, Little Woods offers a welcoming, aromatic experience rooted in community and care.



### Moorman Clothiers

Moorman Clothiers is a distinguished menswear store in Downtown Ames specializing in classic, tailored apparel and fine accessories. Known for exceptional service and timeless style, Moorman's offers quality garments that blend sophistication, comfort, and craftsmanship for every occasion.





Work **well.** Play **well.** Live **well.**

### Celebrating 30 Years

Thirty years ago, Steve and Michelle Cassabaum were looking for a place to call “home,” not only for their growing family, but also for the physical therapy business they were starting.

Nevada fit their vision in terms of community size, education, and faith. “We wanted our kids to go to a small school, but one big enough for them to have opportunities ... and the St. Patrick’s church community was important to us,” Michelle noted.

Looking back, the couple said they made the right decision. And not only have the Cassabaums benefited from what Nevada offered — the community has also benefited from their business, 21st Century Rehab, and their active involvement. They’ve been part of many local achievements, such as the new hospital and long-term care facility, SCORE, and the new Nevada Field House.

After marrying in 1991, the couple moved back to Iowa from St. Louis to be closer to family and to start 21st Century Rehab. Michelle, originally a pharmacist, returned to school for a degree in health care administration so they could run the business together — Steve focusing on physical therapy, and Michelle on operations.

The business began in the basement of the old Story County Hospital with just Steve and two employees. Today, 21st Century Rehab operates clinics in 13 other Iowa communities and employs around 125 people, including 18 in Nevada. Steve laughs remembering those early days: “I was used to wearing a button-down shirt and tie in St. Louis. That lasted about three days in Nevada, because it was so hot in that basement.”

Steve still treats patients a few days a week and mentors younger therapists. Michelle continues to manage the administrative side. The couple isn’t ready to retire just yet — but they are planning a celebration. August marked 30 years since the business began, and they’ll be hosting a special event for their team, with possible plans for a community event too.

Asked how they’ve worked so well together for so long, Michelle points to trust. “We have complete trust in one another, and that has allowed us to focus on our unique talents.” Steve agrees: “The trust is there, and we continue to complement each other’s strengths each and every day.”

**Michelle and  
Steve Cassabaum**  
Owners, 21st Century Rehab

Learn more about 21st Century Rehab online at:  
**[www.21stcenturyrehab.com](http://www.21stcenturyrehab.com)**



A podcast from the Ames Regional Economic Alliance

# AREA POD



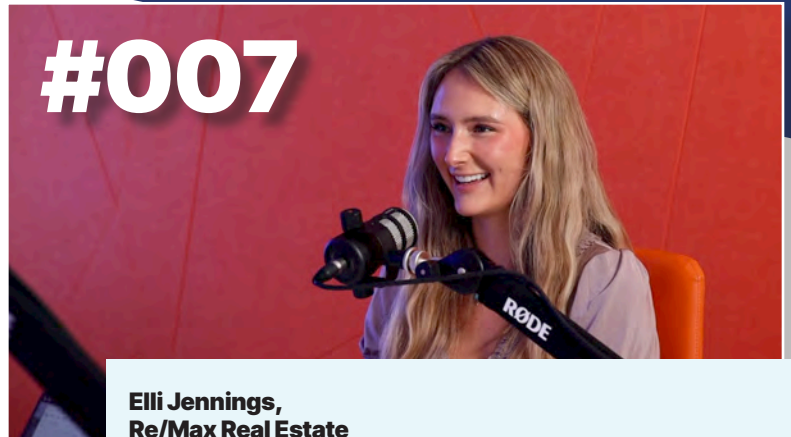
PERSONAL STORIES, PROFESSIONAL JOURNEYS.

Presented by  **FLYNN  
WRIGHT**

The AREA Podcast is available on major streaming platforms, including Spotify, Apple Podcasts, and Amazon. Viewers can watch a video version of each episode on the Alliance YouTube channel.



## #007



**Elli Jennings,  
Re/Max Real Estate**

With a social media following in the tens of thousands, she has built a trusted brand by celebrating community, sharing authentically, and using digital platforms to connect with people in meaningful ways.

AREAPOD

EPISODE

## #008

WITH **REYNOLDS CRAMER**



**Reynolds Cramer,  
CEO, Fareway Stores**

With nearly 140 locations across the Midwest, Fareway continues to grow while staying true to its core values. We talk about leading through change, decision-making, and what it means to serve communities.

## #010



**David Spalding,  
Vice President, Economic Development & Industry  
Relations, Iowa State University**

We talk about how the university drives innovation through research and partnerships, connects with industry leaders to solve real-world challenges, supports entrepreneurs through programs like CYstarters and the ISU Pappajohn Center for Entrepreneurship, and fosters economic growth across Iowa by preparing the next generation of business and community leaders. David also shares insights from his time on Wall Street and how that experience continues to shape his leadership at Iowa State.

## #009



**CJ Warner,  
Energy Executive, Chevron Board of Directors**

As a trailblazing energy executive with more than 40 years of experience and a current member of Chevron's board of directors, we dive into how the energy industry has change, leadership lessons from the C-suite, and the evolving role of innovation in global sustainability.

AREAPOD

EPISODE

## #011

WITH **AMBER DEARDORFF**



**Amber Deardorff,  
President & CEO, Mary  
Greeley Medical Center**

From intern to executive, she shares her 20-year journey through nursing and leadership at Mary Greeley. We talk about workforce culture, the future of healthcare, and staying grounded in a people-first mission shaped by local roots.



# PAVING SUCCESS WITH MANATT'S

Scott Johnson didn't take a traditional route to leadership. He started at Manatt's in 2009 as a general laborer on a concrete crew. Today, as General Manager of the Ames Asphalt Division, Johnson oversees a versatile team delivering complex construction projects across central Iowa.

"I wasn't someone who thrived in a classroom," he says. "But I enjoyed work that challenged both my mind and body. Construction fit that mold—and I had a knack for it."

That passion, paired with a deep commitment to learning, helped Johnson rise through the ranks—foreman, superintendent, general superintendent—before stepping into his current role in April 2025. Now, he leads one of Manatt's most capable divisions, offering dirt work, underground utilities, concrete, and asphalt services under one umbrella.

## A Legacy of Excellence

Manatt's story mirrors Johnson's:

growth built on hard work. Founded in 1947 by Junie Manatt, the company started with a single truck and a local sand pit. Today, Manatt's is a third-generation, Iowa-based leader in heavy highway construction and materials, employing over 700 professionals across more than 50 locations.

Yet its mission remains personal. Core values—Family, Excellence, and Human Potential—shape how teams work and grow. For Johnson, these values aren't just words.

"I lead by empowering others," he says. "I want our team to have the confidence and autonomy to make good

A full-page photograph of Scott Johnson, General Manager of the Ames Asphalt Division, leaning against a large red Manatt's truck. The truck has the number 2230123 on its side and a 'W' logo with a star. The background is a clear blue sky.

**Scott Johnson**  
General Manager, Ames Asphalt Division



decisions. When people feel ownership, they succeed."

That leadership shows up on the job. Johnson has overseen major projects like paving Highway 65—where his team achieved a 97th percentile smoothness score—and campus work at Iowa State University, including Hilton Coliseum and CyTown.

### Focused on People and Performance

Johnson spends as much time as possible in the field. "Being present helps me stay connected to the work and the team," he says. "Everyone's voice matters."

He's also driving changes to improve efficiency and quality—introducing smaller, more flexible crews, tailoring daily safety talks, and hosting debriefs after projects are completed. The result is a division that adapts to each job while delivering consistently high standards.

"Success means hitting three targets: profitability, safety, and customer satisfaction," Johnson says. "You need all three."

Workforce expectations have shifted since he entered the industry in 2004. Long hours used to be the norm; today, employees value work-life balance. Technology has advanced too, with GPS-guided machinery improving precision and planning.

But one thing hasn't changed: opportunity. "I started at the bottom," Johnson says. "If you're dependable and willing to learn, there's no limit to what you can do here."

### Looking Ahead

As Manatt's continues to grow, Johnson sees his role as building on a strong foundation and preparing the next generation of leaders. "Helping people grow is the most rewarding part of the job," he says. "That's what Human Potential means to me."

With a reputation for quality, a culture of collaboration, and a leader who understands the work from the ground up, the Ames Division is paving more than roads—it's building careers and lasting impact across Iowa.



Learn more about Manatt's online at:

**[www.manatts.com](http://www.manatts.com)**



## Boys & Girls Clubs of Story County Open New Facility

(June 4, 2025)

The Boys & Girls Club of Story County celebrated the grand opening of its newly expanded Ames facility earlier this year, unveiling an additional 7,500 square feet as part of a \$7 million modernization project. The expansion includes upgrades across the facility—such as HVAC, lighting, fire, and security systems—plus enhanced kitchen and classroom areas, enabling the organization to more effectively deliver programming and meals to youth in the community.



## Torrent Brewing Company Competes in Main Street Iowa's Open 4 Business Competition

(August 4, 2025)

Congratulations to Torrent Brewing Company for earning \$10,000 at this year's Main Street Iowa Open 4 Business competition in Muscatine. The Open 4 Business program supports business development in designated Main Street Iowa districts across the state. Applicants completed an online application and submitted a video pitch outlining how they would use the grant to expand and grow their business.



## Ames Alliance and Greene County Development Corporation Form New Strategic Partnership

(August 6, 2025)

The Ames Regional Economic Alliance and Greene County Development Corporation have formed a strategic partnership to boost collaboration and regional growth. By combining resources and expertise, they aim to attract investment, support businesses, and enhance vitality across county lines. The partnership reflects a shared commitment to fostering lasting economic opportunity, innovation, and prosperity in Central Iowa.



# ▶ TRACTI • N Contributions

### Final Comments from the Editor:



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Vice President,  
Marketing & Communications  
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### Story Photography

KandE Productions

### Aerial Photography

Gray Beard Drones

### Printing:

Sigler Companies

### Additional Contributions

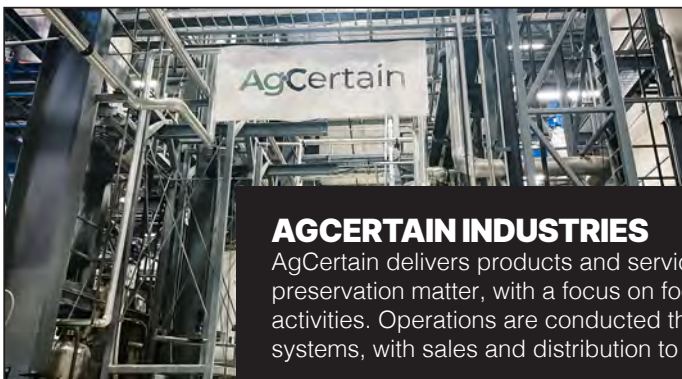
Dan Bina	Amanda Gates
Kevin Stoll	Sara Bryan
Lindsey Murray	Emily Hampton
Andrew Burgason	Anne Taylor
Robb Pearson	Sarah Mader
Beth Lucht	Dan Nutini
Stacy Negrete	Jillian Ocken
Marlys Barker	Kim Grzywacz
Michelle Cassabaum	Melissa Lanphere
Scott Johnson	Elle Storey

Launching the AREA Podcast in March has been one of the most rewarding projects I've taken on. Every episode is a chance to sit down with leaders whose work shapes our region, but it's the personal stories behind their titles that make each conversation special. These interviews have reminded me that leadership is often built on small, consistent acts that compound into lasting impact—and sharing those stories with our community is a true honor.

What I didn't anticipate was how much joy I'd find in the process itself. From the energy in the room during a conversation to the quiet reflection while editing, the podcast has become a space where connection and storytelling meet. I've learned as much as I've shared—about industries, leadership, and the shared values that make this region thrive. Each guest leaves me inspired, and I hope our listeners feel that same spark.



# TRACTI • N INVESTORS



**AgCertain**

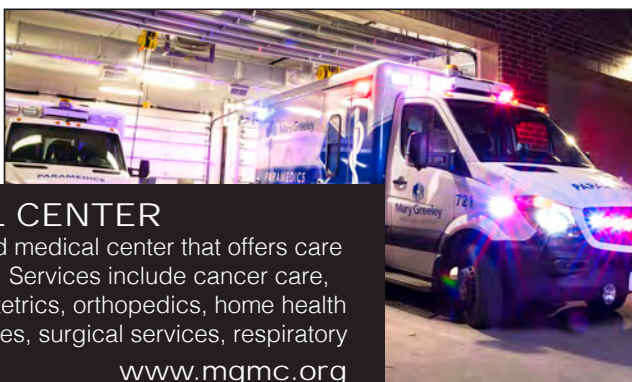
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[www.agcertain.com](http://www.agcertain.com)



**Mary Greeley**  
MEDICAL CENTER



## MARY GREELEY MEDICAL CENTER

Mary Greeley Medical Center is a 220-bed medical center that offers care to residents in 14 counties in central Iowa. Services include cancer care, cardiac care, mental health services, obstetrics, orthopedics, home health services, hospice care, emergency services, surgical services, respiratory care, stroke care, and diabetic care.

[www.mgmc.org](http://www.mgmc.org)

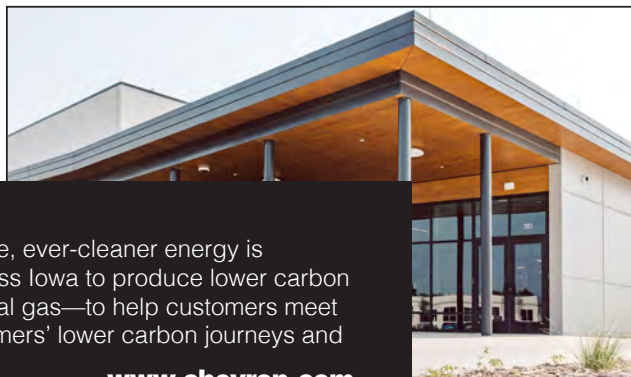


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At Chevron, we believe affordable, reliable, ever-cleaner energy is essential to progress. We're working across Iowa to produce lower carbon fuels—like biodiesel and renewable natural gas—to help customers meet their goals. We're proud to support customers' lower carbon journeys and the communities where we live and work.

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