

TRACTI • N

A MAGAZINE FROM THE AMES REGIONAL ECONOMIC ALLIANCE

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Issue 14



&
freedom



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



Dan Culhane
President & CEO
Ames Regional Economic Alliance

Since 1987, the Ames Regional Economic Alliance and its partners have proudly honored the individuals, organizations, and businesses whose passion and leadership propel our region forward. As we gathered to celebrate this year's Annual Awards, we were reminded that the vitality of our community extends well beyond any single city or county. It is the product of collaboration across Boone, Greene, Hamilton, and Story counties and the shared commitment of civic, business, and community leaders throughout our region.

This year's honorees embody the spirit of regionalism and partnership that defines our work. From Northwest Bank, our Business of the Year, to trailblazers like Shalika Khindurangala of Piece & Freedom Bakery, and innovators such as Mike Schmid of Inside Golf & Games, these leaders have advanced economic and community outcomes that resonate throughout the region. Community-focused efforts like the Boys and Girls Clubs of Story County's project of the year and the diverse slate of Economic Impact Award recipients showcase the breadth of vision and investment so vital to our collective success.

Our awards also lift up emerging talent, including this year's AREA Young Professionals 4 Under 40 class, and celebrate outstanding contributions to culture, volunteerism, and community development. Whether through expanding access to recreation, preserving green spaces, supporting local entrepreneurs, or strengthening our workforce, these honorees reflect the values that make this region a vibrant place to live, work, and grow.

Their stories are not just individual successes; they are milestones in a broader journey of regional progress and shared prosperity.

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 Downtown Ames, Piece & Freedom Bakery is introducing authentic Ukrainian and European baking traditions through a family-owned business built on craftsmanship and intention. Just one year after opening, the bakery has earned strong community support by staying true to its cultural roots and disciplined approach to growth. Read more in this feature article of Traction magazine.



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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.

AmesAlliance.com

TRACTI • N INVESTORS



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.



Piece & Freedom Bakery has quickly established itself as a distinctive addition to Downtown Ames. The Ukrainian-owned bakery recently marked its one-year anniversary and was honored as the Trailblazer of the Year by the Ames Regional Economic Alliance. Together, those milestones reflect both the business' early success and its growing connection to the community.

For co-owner Shalika Khindurangala, the recognition reflects not only entrepreneurial success, but the community's willingness to embrace something entirely new and unknown for some.

"When we opened Piece & Freedom, we didn't try to imitate what Ames already had," Shalika said in her acceptance speech. "We brought unfamiliar flavors, unfamiliar techniques, and a different pace of work. We trusted that people here would be curious enough to meet us halfway." They were.

From Homeland to Heartland

Piece & Freedom is the result of intersecting journeys shaped by migration, family, and entrepreneurship.

Shalika was born and raised in Kyiv, Ukraine, before moving to the United States in 2009. After time in Arizona and Houston, Texas, she returned to Ames in 2021 and now works as a Data and Technology Specialist in Iowa State University's College of Engineering. Her mother, Ira, is the bakery's head baker, bringing decades of

experience and tradition into every loaf and pastry.

Their business partner, Hanna Petrova, was born in Ukraine as well, in a region that is now under occupation. After living in Washington, Iowa, Hanna moved to Ames in 2024. The two met on Ukrainian Independence Day, August 24, a fitting coincidence that would soon become the foundation of a business rooted in cultural pride.

By November 2024, the pieces were coming together. The bakery officially opened shortly after, intentionally and with a clear sense of purpose.

"When we heard 'Trailblazer of the Year,' we weren't sure if we blazed the trail, or if the trail blazed us," Shalika joked. "But in all seriousness, Piece & Freedom was built on family and community."

Choosing Authenticity

In an industry often driven by speed, scale, and adaptation, Piece & Freedom took a different approach.

"There's this idea that you should 'be your authentic self,' but often that gets Americanized," Shalika said. "We took a stance and said, 'We're not doing that.'"

Everything at Piece & Freedom is made by Ukrainians, using traditional techniques and recipes inspired by Ukrainian and broader European baking traditions. There are no artificial dyes, no shortcuts, and no attempt to dilute



Iryna Khindurangala
Co-owner, Piece & Freedom Bakery

Shalika Khindurangala
Co-owner, Piece & Freedom Bakery

Hanna Petrova
Co-owner, Piece & Freedom Bakery

Most Popular Items:

- **Bread** - Traditional Sourdough or Gouda Green Onion
- **Cookies** - Heart-Shaped Cookies
- **Savory** - Cheese Boats
- **Sweet Cakes** - Kyiv Cake



flavors for mass appeal. Instead, the bakery invites customers to explore something unfamiliar.

“People come in curious,” Hanna said. “They want to try a new cuisine. This isn’t a typical place and that’s what makes it exciting.”

Bread That Brings People Together

If there’s a single product that defines Piece & Freedom, it’s the bread.

During farmers’ market season, the bakery produces upwards of 200 loaves per week, ranging from traditional sourdough to inventive varieties featuring gouda and green onion, feta cheese, peppers, and bright, savory flavors that customers describe as “tasting like pizza.”

Some have gone so far as to call it the best bread in Iowa.

But the menu doesn’t stop there. Heart-shaped cookies, savory Ukrainian cheese boats seasoned with dill, and sweet cakes, most notably the iconic Kyiv Cake, naturally gluten-free and layered with rich buttercream, round out an offering that blends comfort with craftsmanship.

Behind the scenes, the team is continually experimenting, refining, and learning. Releasing their full menu was both a risk and a celebration, and the response has been enthusiastic.

“People are excited,” Hanna said simply. “They want more.”

Small by Design

From the beginning, Piece & Freedom was built with discipline.

Limited days. A focused menu. Controlled growth. “In an industry that often rewards speed and scale, we chose

sustainability and consistency instead,” Shalika said. “Because that’s what lasts.”

That intentional approach has paid off. From early days baking in North Ames to hundreds of customers lining up on the weekend at the Ames Main Street Farmers’ Market, the bakery’s following has grown steadily without losing the personal experience that defines it.

Shalika still maintains her role at Iowa State, balancing career and entrepreneurship. Ira continues to anchor the operation with skill and heart. And Hanna brings both creativity and grit to a business that, one year in, feels firmly rooted.

A Trail Worth Following

The Ames Regional Economic Alliance’s Trailblazer Award honors individuals whose initiative drives new ventures while creating meaningful community impact. For Piece & Freedom, that impact is measured not just in sales or awards, but in moments, shared curiosity, cultural exchange, and the simple act of breaking bread together.

“When we opened, we were afraid,” Shalika admitted. “What if they don’t come? What if they don’t like it?”

“And then,” she said, “they all showed up.”

One year later, Piece & Freedom Bakery stands as a reminder that Downtown Ames remains a place where bold ideas can take root and where authenticity, when paired with care and quality, can turn a small, improbable idea into something lasting.

Learn more about Piece & Freedom Bakery on their website.

www.pieceandfreedombakery.com



► COMMUNITY PROJECT OF THE YEAR

BOYS & GIRLS CLUBS OF STORY COUNTY

The Boys & Girls Clubs of Story County was recognized for their transformative \$7 million expansion that strengthens its long-standing support of local youth. Since 1998, the Ames Club has provided a safe, supportive space offering academics, meals, recreation, and enrichment opportunities. The expanded facility now includes new classrooms, arts, STEM and e-sports spaces, a teaching kitchen, and enhanced meal capacity that will serve up to 30,000 hot meals annually. Together, these improvements ensure the Club's impact will continue to grow for generations. The project stands as a powerful example of what is possible when a community invests in its young people.





NORTHWEST



**Doug Ragaller, Tim Neubauer,
Nate Kuhn, and Joni Kellen**
Northwest Bank

BUSINESS OF THE YEAR

Northwest Bank: Community Commitment in Action

At Northwest Bank, community engagement is not a side initiative; it is central to how the bank operates. In Ames, that commitment is reflected through consistent leadership, meaningful volunteerism, and an intentional investment in people and places. Honored as the 2025 Business of the Year, Northwest Bank continues to stand out as a trusted financial institution deeply rooted in community stewardship.

As one of Iowa's largest family-owned banks, Northwest Bank brings together financial strength and local decision-making. Under the leadership of Regional President Doug Ragaller, the Ames team is actively engaged throughout the region, serving on nonprofit boards, supporting community organizations, and participating in initiatives that enhance quality of life and economic vitality.

"Being part of Ames means more than doing business here," Ragaller says. "It means showing up, building relationships, and investing in the organizations and people who make this community strong."

Ragaller's service on the Board of Directors for the Boys & Girls Clubs of Story County is one example of that commitment in action. By supporting programs that provide safe, enriching environments for youth, his involvement helps strengthen families today while preparing the next generation for future success.

That same sense of responsibility is shared by Tim Neubauer, Vice President and Ag/Commercial Banker at Northwest Bank. Neubauer serves on the AREA Chamber of Commerce Board, where he helps guide efforts that support local businesses, workforce development, and regional collaboration. His service reflects a deep understanding of the interconnectedness between a strong business climate and a thriving community.

Beyond economic development, Neubauer is also committed to youth and character development. He serves on the board of the Fellowship of Christian Athletes and volunteers his time as a youth sports coach for football and basketball. Through coaching, he mentors young people at formative stages of life; instilling teamwork, discipline, and confidence both on and off the field. His involvement highlights how leadership at Northwest Bank often extends into everyday moments that shape families and neighborhoods.

A focus on developing future leaders is also evident in the work of Nate Kuhn, Ag/Commercial Banker and past recipient of the AREA Young Professionals 4 Under 40 award. Kuhn has played a key role in launching the AREA Young Professionals mentorship program, creating meaningful connections between emerging professionals and established leaders. His leadership helps strengthen Ames' talent pipeline while encouraging long-term community investment. Through additional involvement in placemaking efforts in Campustown and service on local advisory councils, Kuhn continues to translate ideas into visible community impact.

Northwest Bank's commitment to place and creativity is further reflected through the work of Joni Kellen, CFP®, Wealth Advisor and recipient of The Ames Foundation Volunteer of the Year Award. As the driving force behind Ames Murals: An Open Air Gallery, Kellen has led efforts to bring vibrant public art to life across the community—coordinating fundraising, partnerships, and artists to transform buildings into shared civic assets. Her leadership has enhanced Ames' visual landscape while fostering pride, storytelling, and connection.

Together, Ragaller, Neubauer, Kuhn, and Kellen exemplify a culture at Northwest Bank that encourages employees to lead beyond their job titles. Their collective involvement underscores the bank's belief that strong communities are built through sustained engagement, service, and personal investment.

In addition to its community leadership, Northwest Bank offers a comprehensive range of financial services, including personal and business banking, agricultural and commercial lending, mortgage services, treasury management, and wealth management. With a relationship-driven and market centric approach, Northwest Bank serves as a long-term partner for individuals, families, farmers, and businesses alike.

That combination of financial expertise and genuine community involvement continues to define Northwest Bank's presence in Ames, making a lasting impact today while helping shape a strong future for the region.





▶ THE AMES FOUNDATION VOLUNTEER OF THE YEAR

JONI KELLEN, NORTHWEST BANK

Joni Kellen was honored as The Ames Foundation Volunteer of the Year for her leadership of Ames Murals: An Open Air Gallery. Through fundraising, coordination with property owners and artists, and community engagement, Kellen has helped transform Ames through vibrant public art. Recent murals at Evert's Flowers Home and Gifts and Torrent Brewery Company highlights her thoughtful approach to placemaking, storytelling, and collaboration that is creating lasting visual impact and community pride throughout the city.



▶ ENTREPRENEUR OF THE YEAR

MIKE SCHMID, INSIDE GOLF & GAMES

Mike Schmid, President of Inside Golf & Games, was named Entrepreneur of the Year for his innovative vision and impact on the Ames region. Since opening in 2018 at North Grand Mall, Schmid has created a unique, all-ages entertainment destination featuring indoor golf simulators, axe throwing, baseball simulators, and duckpin bowling. His reimagining of mall space into a vibrant social "patio" environment has strengthened the local economy and enhanced community gathering.

COMMUNITY IMPACT AWARDS



OAK PARK TRAIL (CITY OF NEVADA)

The Oak Park Trail project has strengthened the connectivity and quality of life in Nevada. Building on long-standing community support through a voter-approved trail levy, the City of Nevada partnered with Oak Park Estates in 2025 to complete a key trail extension. This project creates a safe, accessible connection across Highway 30 while showcasing one of the most scenic trail routes in Story County and expanding outdoor recreation opportunities.

STORY COUNTY CONSERVATION

Story County Conservation was recognized for advancing regional connectivity and conservation through the completion of the Heart of Iowa Nature Trail, linking five communities and supporting local economies. Combined with the passage of the 2024 Story County Water & Land Legacy Bond, these efforts provide a strong foundation for expanded conservation, recreation, and water quality initiatives, creating lasting impact for communities across Story County.



SLATER SPORTS COMPLEX

The Slater Sports Plex Phase I improvements to their multi-use recreation complex is designed to make it a regional destination. Made possible through donated land, city investment, and county economic development support, the project will feature baseball, softball, and soccer fields, public fishing areas, and trail access. This collaborative effort enhances recreation, tourism, and community pride in Slater.

New Members

- [Thai Kitchen](#)
- [Heritage Coffeehouse + Venue](#)
- [Sleep in Heavenly Peace](#)
- [Dunkin' Donuts](#)
- [Finski's](#)
- [Monterrey Mexican Grill](#)
- [Huxley Communications](#)
- [Rise Pediatric Therapy](#)
- [Ames Voice](#)
- [Daisy's Drinks & Dogs](#)
- [Connectify HR](#)
- [Iowa Home Consulting](#)
- [PC Matic](#)
- [BT Training & Coaching](#)
- [Mort's Water Company](#)
- [Critical Materials Recycling](#)
- [Wings of Refuge](#)
- [Chase Bank](#)
- [Scouting America - Mid-Iowa Council](#)
- [Furniture Mart](#)
- [Behle Inc.](#)
- [EZ Solutions](#)
- [McDonalds, Huxley](#)

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](https://www.AmesAlliance.com)

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

Mary Ann's

SPECIALTY FOODS, INC.



Mary Ann's Specialty Foods: A Family Legacy Driving Regional Impact

For more than 50 years, Mary Ann's Specialty Foods has blended tradition, innovation, and family leadership into a nationally recognized meat business rooted in Webster City. Founded by William "Bill" Korleski in the early 1970s, the company began as a small-town operation built on expertly seasoned and smoked meats. Today, the business is led by the second generation, with members of the third generation actively involved, continuing the family legacy while preparing the company for its next chapter.

Mary Ann's Specialty Foods is best known for its hardwood-smoked hams, bacon, sausages, pulled pork, and ribs, with its own bone-in Kor-Bert ham brand earning a loyal following. With pork remaining the cornerstone of its product lines, the company also offers poultry and beef products, serving "clean" retail brands, foodservice, wholesale, and private-label partners nationwide. Long before "clean label" became an industry standard, Korleski pioneered uncured, no-nitrates-or-nitrites-added recipes, positioning the company as an early innovator in natural meat processing. His innovative recipes and curing methods are now the "key" ingredient top brands seek to create products consumers love!

Leadership of the company has remained firmly in the family. Today, Mary Ann's is led by Bill Korleski's children, Pam Netzel and Kelly Korleski, whose hands-on management style reflects the values on which the company was built. "We grew

**Kelly Korleski, Pam Netzel,
and Collin Coffey**
Mary Ann's Specialty Foods



Inside the 30,000 square foot expansion facility

Learn more about Mary Ann's Specialty Foods on their website.

www.maryannsfoods.com

up in this business,” Netzel said. “My dad’s focus on family values has shaped how we lead our employees, the products we produce, and the customers we partner with.” Korleski added, “Being family-owned gives us the flexibility to respond quickly and thoughtfully. However, we’re not just producing quality meats, my dad taught us that our business is all about growing and supporting healthy, happy families.”

Korleski’s family legacy continues to grow through a major 30,000-square-foot expansion currently underway. Breaking ground in April 2025 and scheduled for completion in April 2026, the project includes new ready-to-eat and bacon packaging rooms, expanded shipping and warehouse space, upgraded employee facilities, and new slicing and packaging equipment. The expansion is primarily focused on packaging capacity, positioning the company to meet rising national demand for clean, healthy foods while improving efficiency and workplace conditions.

The economic impact of Mary Ann’s Specialty Foods extends well beyond its walls. Employing more than 300 people—approximately 83 percent of whom reside in Webster City—the company represents a major source of stable, high-quality jobs in the region. Its continued capital investment signals long-term confidence in central Iowa’s food manufacturing sector and reinforces Webster City’s role in nationwide distribution networks. As Bill Korleski would say, “Let’s Grow Together!”

With third-generation family members, Rachel Zwiefel and Collin Coffey now entering the business, Mary Ann’s Specialty Foods is preparing for its next chapter. “It’s exciting to see the next generation step in,” Korleski said. “It tells us we’re building something that will last.”

From pioneering clean-label meats to investing in workforce and infrastructure, Mary Ann’s Specialty Foods exemplifies how a deeply rooted, family-owned company can continue to innovate, while strengthening the regional economy for generations to come.



COMMUNITY IMPACT AWARDS



NORTHRIDGE VILLAGE

Northridge Village takes a compassionate, people-centered approach to senior living with meaningful connection to the broader community. More than a care facility, Northridge Village fosters a close-knit environment where residents are deeply valued and supported. In 2025, the organization celebrated five years of Maggie’s Place and ten years of service overall, marking a decade of trusted care. Through community leadership, engagement, and dedication to resident well-being, Northridge Village continues to create lasting impact across the region.



DON WILLIAMS RECREATION AREA

The Don Williams Recreation Area improvements were made possible through strong community partnerships across Boone County. Recent enhancements include a new clubhouse, course upgrades, added shelters, and the planting of 100 new trees, expanding recreational access and environmental quality. Supported by ARPA funds and local foundation grants, this collaborative investment creates a lasting legacy of outdoor recreation, community pride, and quality-of-life impact for residents and visitors.

OGDEN COMMERCIAL / INDUSTRIAL PARK

The Ogden Commercial & Industrial Park was recognized for its role in advancing long-term economic growth and business attraction. In 2024, GRI Outdoors LLC purchased nearly 40 acres on the west side of Ogden to expand its operations serving the renewable energy industry. The property was annexed in 2025 and prepared for development, creating new opportunities for future industry and strengthening Ogden’s position for sustainable growth.

AREAYP

4 UNDER 40



Scott Henry is being recognized not only for his impressive professional accomplishments in the agriculture industry, but for the meaningful economic development leadership and investment he provides throughout the Ames Alliance region. An active investor and Executive Board member of the Nevada Economic Development Council, Scott plays a key role in shaping growth in his hometown of Nevada.

Recognizing the need for diverse housing options, the Henry family launched the NorthView Subdivision, making land available for a multifamily housing development that supports community growth and workforce needs. As the Alliance has grown, Scott has consistently connected economic development teams with key agriculture contacts across the region, strengthening collaboration and opportunity.



► CULTURE AWARD

CONTINENTAL MANUFACTURING CHEMIST

Continental Manufacturing Chemist (CMC), is a company whose people-centric approach has made it a standout employer and a pillar of the Ames region. With a deep history in Central Iowa dating back to 1961, CMC has grown into a leading producer of oral care and animal care products, employing over 170 team members across its Huxley and Madrid facilities.

What sets CMC apart is its unwavering commitment to team members and workplace culture. Their leaders exemplify the organization's dedication to growth from within, mentoring colleagues and creating a collaborative, supportive environment. Even amid rapid expansion and operational pivots, including producing hand sanitizer during the pandemic, CMC has maintained a culture where employees feel valued, empowered, and connected.

► AMES MAIN STREET HERO AWARD

NICOLE RASMUSSEN, FIRST NATIONAL BANK

Nicole Rasmussen of First National Bank was recognized as the Ames Main Street Hero for her outstanding leadership and dedication to Downtown Ames. A longtime volunteer and 2024 Board Chair, Rasmussen has played a key role in strengthening the organization and advancing its mission to support a vibrant downtown. Through board leadership, advocacy for local businesses, and hands-on involvement at community events, her collaborative spirit and commitment have made a lasting impact on Ames Main Street and the community it serves.





GRACE LARKEY

Grace Larkey exemplifies what it means to lead with purpose and heart. In addition to her role as a Communications Advisor at Chevron, Grace serves as the Leadership & Professional Development Lead on the AREA YP 2026 Advisory Council, where she helps shape programming and opportunities for emerging leaders across the region.

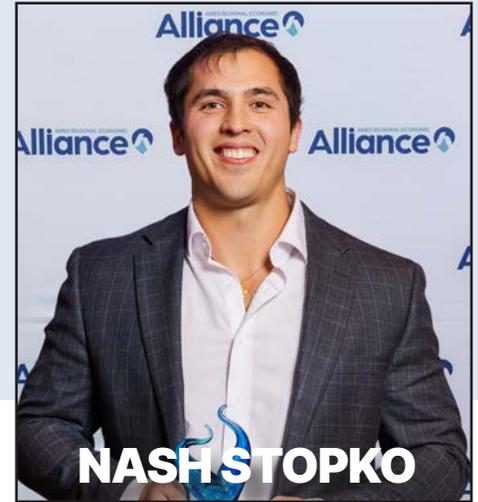
Grace also dedicates her time and talent to numerous community organizations, including the Boys & Girls Clubs of Story County as a Legacy Gala Planning Committee member, the ChildServe Advisory Board, and the Young Leaders Society Committee through United Way of Story County. Previously, she served as Communications Chair for Young Professionals in Agriculture, further demonstrating her commitment to leadership and service.



STACY NEGRETE

Stacy Negrete embodies entrepreneurial spirit, creativity, and community-centered leadership. What began as a heartfelt effort to help fund the adoption of her children, has grown into Oak Lane Candle Co., a welcoming Downtown Ames candle studio and pour bar where guests can create their own custom candles.

Stacy pairs craftsmanship with a strong belief in hospitality and giving back. She actively mentors emerging entrepreneurs through Iowa State University and Des Moines Area Community College, collaborates with local partners such as We The Dreamers and Wings of Refuge, and fosters a supportive workplace where employees feel encouraged and empowered.



NASH STOPKO

Nash Stopko is a standout example of service-driven leadership and dedication to community. As co-owner of Complete Connection Chiropractic, Nash not only provides exceptional care to his clients, but also continually seeks opportunities to uplift those around him.

He has hosted multiple fundraisers benefiting the Boys & Girls Clubs of Story County, volunteers monthly with YSS and shelters across the Des Moines area and has served as President of the Regional Iowa Chiropractic Society. Nash's commitment to connection extends further through mentoring Iowa State University students pursuing chiropractic careers, learning Spanish to better serve patients, and actively engaging as an Alliance Ambassador and AREA YP member.

▶ AMES MAIN STREET FARMERS' MARKET BUSINESS OF THE YEAR

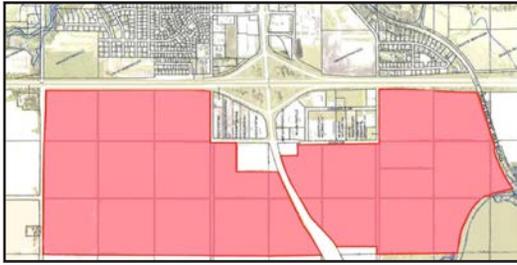


WHEATSFIELD COOPERATIVE

The Ames Main Street Farmers' Market recognized Wheatsfield Cooperative as its Business of the Year for its deep-rooted partnership and longstanding support. From the Market's earliest planning stages, Wheatsfield was instrumental in research, collaboration, and bringing the concept to life, even stepping in as an early vendor to help establish momentum.

Wheatsfield's mission closely aligns with the Market's commitment to sustainability, equity, and community connection. Through its consistent support of local farmers, small businesses, and a resilient local food system, Wheatsfield has helped the Market grow into one of Ames' most cherished weekly traditions, creating a welcoming space where the community gathers each Saturday during the season to connect, shop, and celebrate local.

ECONOMIC IMPACT AWARDS



CITY OF WEBSTER CITY

Webster City achieved certification of a new 450-acre industrial site through the State of Iowa's Certified Site program, demonstrating extensive due diligence in infrastructure, environmental review, zoning, and transportation access. Site certification reduces risk and shortens timelines for expanding businesses and site selectors. As one of the largest newly certified sites in Iowa, the project positions Webster City to compete for large-scale industrial investment, support job creation, and strengthen long-term economic growth and regional competitiveness.



CRITICAL MATERIALS RECYCLING

Critical Materials Recycling (CMR), based in Boone, is advancing an emerging industry vital to national security and long-term economic growth. Through innovative technology developed with Ames National Laboratory at Iowa State University, CMR recovers rare earth materials from sources such as hard drives and decommissioned wind turbines. These materials are essential for consumer electronics, electric vehicles, renewable energy systems, and defense applications. As global demand for rare earth metals increases, CMR is helping rebuild a resilient domestic supply chain. The company exemplifies innovation, quality, and environmentally responsible design while positioning central Iowa at the forefront of a 21st-century industry.



DAKOTA SUPPLY GROUP

Dakota Supply Group (DSG) completed a new 30,000-square-foot facility on Bailey Avenue in Ames' North Dayton Industrial Park, marking a significant regional investment and continued commitment to the community. The modern warehousing and distribution center strengthens supply chains supporting plumbing, electrical, and HVAC industries. Designed to enhance logistics, capacity, and customer experience, the facility reflects DSG's dedication to its employee-owners and customers. As a 100% employee-owned company with more than 125 years of innovation, DSG's expansion demonstrates confidence in Ames and a forward-looking approach to growth across Iowa.



LINCOLNWAY ENERGY, LLC

Lincolnway Energy surpassed 100 million gallons of annual ethanol production in 2025, doubling the plant's original design capacity. Founded in 2004 as a 50-million-gallon facility, the company's growth reflects sustained capital investment, technological advancement, and a strong focus on efficiency. Located near Nevada, Lincolnway Energy supports hundreds of Iowa farmers, fuels the regional economy, and reinforces Iowa's leadership in renewable energy production.



STRAND ASSOCIATES, INC.

Strand Associates opened a new 30,000-square-foot office in the Iowa State University Research Park, consolidating more than 70 employees into a modern, collaborative workspace. Following the acquisition of FOX Engineering, the facility is designed for flexibility and future expansion. The investment strengthens Strand's ability to deliver innovative civil and environmental engineering solutions while supporting high-quality professional jobs and enhancing the vitality of the Research Park.



UNITED EQUIPMENT ACCESSORIES, INC.

United Equipment Accessories, a family-owned manufacturer of custom slip rings, reels, and hydraulic swivels, expanded its Iowa operations in 2025 with a new \$4.2 million manufacturing facility in Ames (rural Boone County). The expansion strengthens access to workforce and engineering talent from Iowa State University, supports advanced manufacturing, and is expected to create more than 25 new jobs in the Alliance region.



Magic Matt's Cleaning didn't begin with a flashy business plan or rapid-growth ambition. Instead, it started with a simple belief: people deserve a home and workplace they feel proud of and a service company they can truly trust. That belief, paired with a commitment to showing up and doing the right thing, has guided the company from its earliest days to its continued growth today.

Founded by local owner Matt Bohner, Magic Matt's Cleaning was built on a foundation of core values that still shape every decision: honesty, integrity, professionalism, accountability, and growth. What began as a small residential cleaning operation has expanded into a trusted name serving both homes and businesses across the region.

At Magic Matt's, cleaning is about health, consistency, and peace of mind. The company delivers detail-driven, reliable service while prioritizing respect for both clients and team members. They take a people-first approach that has fueled long-term client relationships and sustainable growth.

The company offers a full range of professional services, including recurring residential cleaning, deep and one-time cleans, move-in and move-out services, commercial and office cleaning, carpet cleaning, and air duct and dryer vent cleaning. Each service is customized to meet client needs, with pricing structured per project rather than per hour, reinforcing transparency and trust. Clients regularly cite the company's thoroughness, friendly staff, and fresh results, without harsh chemical smells, as reasons they continue to choose Magic Matt's.

That same values-driven mindset extends beyond the business itself and into the broader community. Magic Matt's Cleaning invests in training, supports local organizations, and works to create a stable, respectful workplace where employees can grow. It's an approach that mirrors Matt Bohner's own involvement throughout the Ames region.

If you've attended an Ames Regional Economic Alliance event, chances are you've met Matt. Known for his approachable nature and genuine interest in others, Matt consistently shows up, engages fully, and helps ensure people feel welcomed and connected. That commitment earned him recognition as the 2025 Ames Regional Economic Alliance Ambassador of the Year, an honor reserved for individuals who go above and beyond in service to the business community.

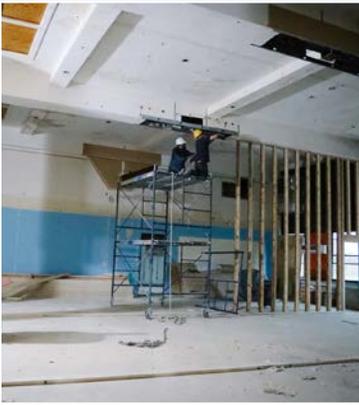
Through his natural ability to bring people together, Matt strengthens relationships and builds community; qualities that reflect both his leadership style and the culture behind Magic Matt's Cleaning. As the company continues to expand, its mission remains unchanged: show up, do the right thing, and leave every space, and every interaction, better than it was before.

Learn more about Magic Matt's Cleaning on their website:

www.magicmattscleaning.com



Matt Bohner
Owner, Magic Matt's Cleaning



HOUSING IMPACT AWARDS

Housing is more than rooftops and floorplans. It is workforce strategy. It is downtown revitalization. It is quality of life. Across the Alliance four-county region, communities are confronting the same reality: growth depends on having places for people to live. This year's **Housing Impact Award**, presented by the Ames Regional Economic Alliance, recipients represent a cross-section of solutions, large and small, urban and rural, new construction and adaptive reuse, all working toward the same goal of strengthening the region's housing ecosystem.

In Nevada, multiple projects illustrate how layered that strategy must be. **OakPark Estates** is breathing new life into the former Oak Park Academy campus, blending history with modern need through townhomes, single-family homes, and preserved brick buildings converted to rentals. Just across town, **NorthView** is carving out 33 new single-family lots designed for entry-level buyers ready to plant roots. And **Sierra Heights** is scaling rental options in a community where thousands commute in daily for work, delivering 138 townhomes that support workforce retention and long-term economic competitiveness. Together, they demonstrate that no single product type solves a housing challenge.

Smaller communities are proving that impact is not defined by size. In Maxwell, **Rock Creek Ridge** marks the first new speculative housing development in more than two decades. Through collaboration between developers, builders, the city, and county partners, the project shows how even a handful of homes, supported by workforce housing tax credits and creative financing, can signal momentum and confidence.

That same spirit of reinvestment is visible in Jefferson. **The Jeffersonian Middle School Housing Renovation Project** is transforming a vacant 1921 school into 25 downtown apartments, leveraging historic and workforce housing tax credits alongside local support. Nearby infill projects by **Origin Homes** are delivering energy-efficient residences that fit seamlessly into established neighborhoods. One reimagines the past; the other builds for the future. Both reinforce that housing is central to community vitality.

In Boone, thoughtful neighborhood planning is shaping growth.



Oak Park, a 53-lot custom home community adjacent to McHose Park, blends natural amenities with intentional design. **Prairie Place** adds townhomes and apartments near Highway 30, schools, and recreation, strengthening workforce housing options through public-private partnership. These developments underscore that location, connectivity, and collaboration matter as much as the homes themselves.

Meanwhile in Huxley, **The Republic at Anthem** represents the first residential phase of a larger mixed-use vision. As the city grows, modern market-rate apartments help retain residents locally while laying the groundwork for integrated, long-term development.

And in Ames, the **Baker Subdivision** is transforming a long-vacant school site into new single-family homes, including seven built by Habitat for Humanity of Central Iowa. The project demonstrates how community-driven housing can expand opportunity while revitalizing underutilized land.

Behind these projects stand strong partners and builders. **Prairieland Homes**, named Builder of the Year, has set a standard for quality and energy-efficient construction for more than five decades. **Howell Investment Finance**, led by Denny Howell, is recognized as Housing Partner of the Year for assembling complex financing packages that make transformative projects possible.

Together, this year's award recipients tell a powerful story: housing is not a single project or policy. It is a regional commitment. And when communities align vision, investment, and partnership, they create more than homes, they build the foundation for sustained economic vitality.

A podcast from the Ames Regional Economic Alliance

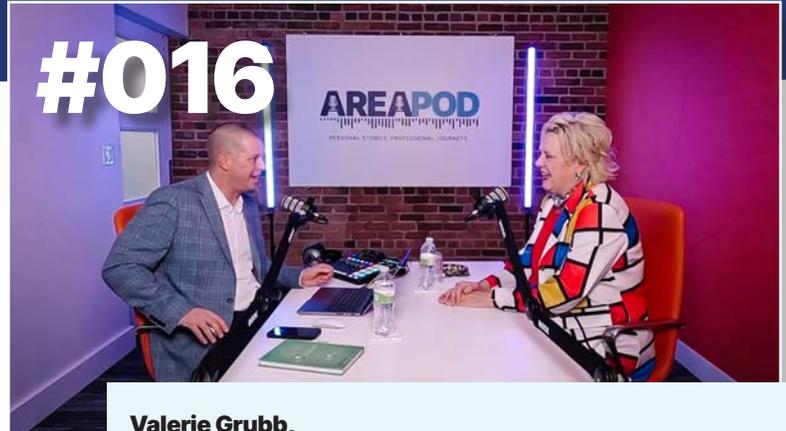
AREA POD



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.



**Valerie Grubb,
Keynote Speaker and Author on Leadership**

She shares insights from her remarkable career—from engineering at Rolls-Royce to senior operations roles with NBC Universal and Oxygen Media—and how those experiences shaped her passion for developing leaders. Val breaks down the realities of today's multigenerational workplace, what organizations often miss about culture and retention, and the practical tools leaders need to elevate their teams in a rapidly changing world.



**Roger Underwood,
Ag Tech Innovator &
Investor**

A proud Iowa State alumnus and co-founder of Becker Underwood, Roger shares his entrepreneurial journey scaling a global ag business, his perspective on the future of agriculture, and how innovation, technology, and global thinking are reshaping food production.



**Clayton Mooney,
Co-founder, CEO, and Chief Farmer at Clayton Farms**

An Iowa State graduate and entrepreneur, Clayton shares his unconventional path from professional poker to agriculture, how discipline and risk-taking shaped his entrepreneurial journey, and how his passion for running ultramarathons influences how he builds and leads for the long term. He also discusses his belief that modern farming must blend technology, purpose, and performance to deliver healthier food to more people.



**Mike Espeset,
CEO, Story Construction**

Mike reflects on his journey from longtime president to leading a 100 percent employee-owned company, and how Story Construction has grown into one of Iowa's premier builders while staying grounded in its people-first values. He discusses the power of employee ownership, the systems and strategy driving continued expansion, and the company's deep commitment to strengthening the communities it helps build.





**American
Packaging**
CORPORATION



In communities like Story City, advanced manufacturing doesn't always announce itself with fanfare. Oftentimes, it is found in the everyday moments of life like in the crinkle of a snack bag, the tear of a salad kit, or the resealable pouch of pet treats pulled from a pantry shelf.

At the center of many of those moments is American Packaging Corporation (APC), whose Story City facility serves as a Center of Excellence for flexible packaging and a powerful economic engine for central Iowa.

Delighting the Brands You Enjoy

American Packaging's work is both highly technical and surprisingly familiar. The company partners with brand owners ranging from multinational consumer packaged goods companies to emerging boutique brands. While APC's name may not be on the front of the package, its expertise is often wrapped around the products families use every day.

When you open a fresh salad kit, APC may have produced that bag. When you reach for your favorite snack or candy, APC may have engineered the pouch or wrapper. When you scoop food for your dog or cat, there's a good chance the durable, high-performance pouch was manufactured in Story City.

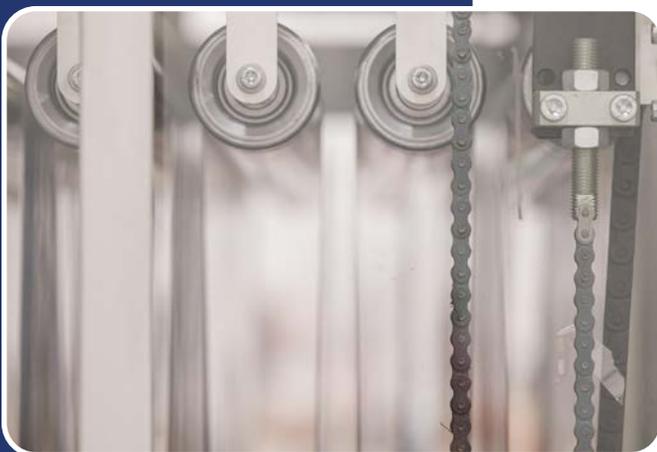
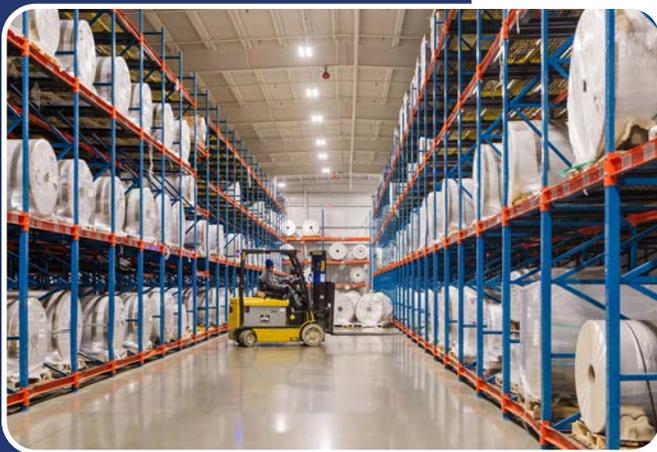
The facility produces packaging found in nearly every grocery aisle, from snacks, confections, baking mixes, refrigerated and frozen foods, health and personal care products, and pet food. Its capabilities include advanced flexographic printing, laminating, coating, and pouch and bag forming. These are state-of-the-art technologies that ensure packaging not only protects products but also promotes brands on crowded retail shelves.

It's a formula that has earned industry recognition, including awards from the Flexible Packaging Association, and has fueled steady sales growth and expansion.

An Unprecedented Investment in Growth

That growth is accelerating. APC's latest investment in Story City, a nearly \$8 million expansion, underscores both market demand and the company's long-term commitment to the region.

The project includes a 20,000-square-foot addition to the facility, new state-of-the-art pouching equipment, and the creation of 25 new jobs. Construction began in October 2025 and is expected to be completed by fall 2026. The expansion will increase capacity for pouches and bags serving high-growth categories such as pet food, baking mixes and ingredients, lawn and garden, home care products, and more.





Supported through partnerships with the City of Story City and the Iowa Economic Development Authority's High Quality Jobs program, the project represents more than just square footage. It reflects a strategic investment in new capabilities, advanced product technologies, and people.

"This expansion is about positioning Story City for the future," says Plant Manager Alex Durlam. "We're investing in equipment and technology, but just as importantly, we're investing in our APC family members. Our success has always been built on the people who walk through these doors every day."



Alex Durlam
Plant Manager
American Packaging Corporation

Leadership Rooted in Experience

Durlam's perspective is shaped by 16 years with American Packaging; a career that has spanned nearly every corner of the operation. He has served as Printing Manager, Ink Department Manager, Finishing Department Manager, Quality Assurance Manager, and Process Engineer before stepping into the plant manager role.

That progression gives him a rare, end-to-end understanding of the manufacturing process. "Having worked in so many departments, I've seen how every detail matters," Durlam says. "From ink formulation to quality assurance to finishing, each step impacts the final product our customers rely on. That experience helps us collaborate better and solve challenges faster."

He credits the company's culture of teamwork and continuous improvement for enabling both personal advancement and plant-wide performance.

"There's a real sense that we're one team," he says. "When something needs to be done, people step up. That culture of excellence is what allows us to compete nationally while operating right here in Story City."

Family Ownership, Community Impact

Founded more than 120 years ago, American Packaging remains a family-owned business with a long-term outlook. Employees are often referred to as part of the "APC family," a reflection of a culture that prioritizes safety, professional development,

and advancement.

That family mindset extends beyond the plant walls. APC is an active community partner throughout central Iowa, supporting scholarships, local sports teams, community programs, and philanthropic organizations. Its expansion amplifies that impact, adding jobs, increasing payroll, and strengthening the regional supply chain.

For Story City and the surrounding counties, the economic ripple effect is significant. The facility's advanced manufacturing capabilities attract national brands, generate capital investment, and reinforce the region's reputation as a hub for high-quality production.

"This isn't just growth for our company," Durlam says. "It's growth for the community. We're proud to create opportunities here and careers that people can build a future around."

A Center of Excellence in Central Iowa

As construction progresses and new equipment arrives, the Story City facility continues operating at full capacity; printing, laminating, coating, and forming the packaging that protects and promotes products across the country.

It's a reminder that advanced manufacturing in central Iowa doesn't just serve local markets; it touches households nationwide.

And for American Packaging Corporation, the story is still unfolding one pouch, one partnership, and one investment at a time.

Learn more about American Packaging Corporation on their website.

www.americanpackaging.com

Ames Alliance Announces Ames Documentary Film Festival

(January 22, 2026)

The Ames Regional Economic Alliance, in partnership with the Octagon Center for the Arts and Ames Main Street, will launch the Ames Documentary Film Festival on September 27, 2026, in conjunction with The Octagon Art Festival. The event will feature short nonfiction films under 40 minutes that spotlight powerful stories from across the country while celebrating local creativity. Categories include Short Documentary and Student Short Documentary, with submissions accepted through FilmFreeway and an anticipated lineup of 12–18 films.



Post Malone and Jelly Roll are Coming to Ames in July 2026

(February 2, 2026)

Post Malone and Jelly Roll will bring The BIG ASS Stadium Tour Part 2 to Jack Trice Stadium in Ames, Iowa, on July 17, 2026. The chart-topping artists continue a record-breaking run with high-energy, genre-blending performances in major stadiums nationwide, joined by special guest Carter Faith. The Ames stop marks one of the region’s largest live music events, drawing fans from across the Midwest. The tour has already surpassed one million attendees and features fan-favorite hits and new music from both artists.



Pizza Pie Looza Announces FUEL and Chris Cagle as Headliners

(February 10, 2026)

Get ready for two full days food vendors, family fun, and live music at Pizza Pie Looza in Nevada, Iowa on May 8–9, 2026! The festival will feature headlining performances by rock band FUEL and country artist Chris Cagle, bringing big-name entertainment to central Iowa. Along with tasty eats and local vendors, enjoy activities for all ages and memorable shows under the spring sky. Stay tuned for more details and ticket info at pizzapielooza.com.



▶ TRACTI • N Contributions

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| Judge Johnston | Roger Underwood |
| Doug Ragaller | Clayton Mooney |
| Joni Kellen | Mike Espeset |
| Pam Netzel | Stacy Kilstofe |
| Uriah Hansen | Teri Meadow |
| Matt Bohner | Alex Durlam |

I’ve been asked several times recently how much I edit episodes of the AREA Podcast. The answer is zero. I personally prepare for each episode with notes and ideas of things to talk about, but I rarely share those with the guest. It’s a way for me to keep the conversation going, but that is the easy part. We simply enter the studio and start recording and the conversation forms its own path. There’s a level of trust that comes with that approach.

One of the things I love most about hosting the podcast is that those conversations often challenge my thinking or force me to frame aspects of my world differently. On recent episodes, we talked about how leaders are often ambitiously wired, they need to be able to adjust their altitude to understand and make decisions, and how one entrepreneur jumped in and figured it out along the way. These conversations sharpen my perspective and strengthen how I lead. It’s a reminder that growth, for me and for our organization, often begins by simply listening.

TRACTI • N INVESTORS



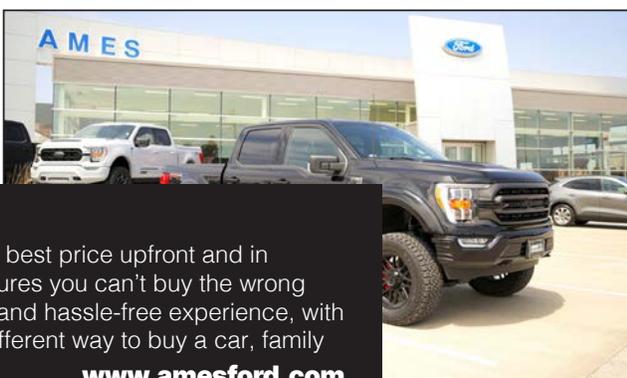
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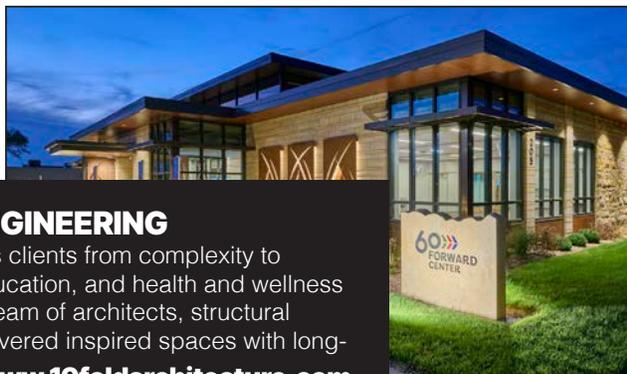
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