

TRACTI · N

A MAGAZINE FROM THE REGIONAL ECONOMIC ALLIANCE

Summer 2026
Issue 15



DAVID

COOK

17th PRESIDENT OF IOWA STATE UNIVERSITY



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



Dan Culhane
President & CEO
Ames Regional Economic Alliance

Leadership transitions are defining moments for institutions and communities alike. They are opportunities to reflect on the past while setting a renewed course for the future. Here in the Ames region, we are experiencing just such a moment with the appointment of Dr. David Cook as the next president of Iowa State University.

From the outset, Dr. Cook has approached this role with energy, accessibility, and a clear commitment to engagement. He has already immersed himself in the campus and broader community, demonstrating a leadership style that values connection and collaboration. We were pleased to welcome him as a recent guest on the AREA Podcast, where his thoughtful perspective and forward-looking vision were on full display. It is evident that his focus extends well beyond the university's boundaries, embracing the critical role Iowa State plays in driving regional vitality, innovation, and economic growth.

Our familiarity with Dr. Cook began prior to his arrival in Ames. In 2024, an Ames delegation traveled to Fargo, North Dakota, where he was serving as president of North Dakota State University. During that visit, we had the opportunity to spend some time with him and see firsthand his commitment to partnership and community engagement; qualities that will serve our region well.

As we welcome Dr. Cook, we also extend our sincere gratitude to Dr. Wendy Wintersteen for her exceptional leadership. Her tenure was marked by steady guidance, impactful progress, and a deep dedication to Iowa State's mission.

We look forward to this next chapter with optimism and shared purpose.

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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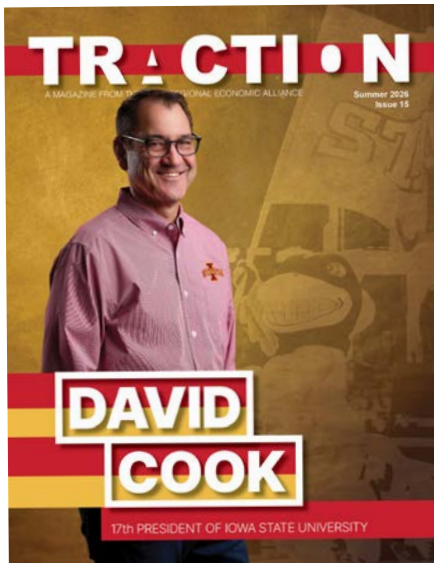
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On the Cover

Returning to the university where he once walked campus as a student, new Iowa State University President David Cook is beginning a new chapter focused on innovation, collaboration, and the land-grant mission. Learn more about Cook's leadership philosophy, vision for the future, and connection to the Ames community in this feature article from Traction magazine.



**304 Main St.
Ames, Iowa 50010
Phone: (515) 232-2310**

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.

17th PRESIDENT OF IOWA STATE



When David Cook walks across Iowa State University's central campus, it still feels familiar.

The Campanile. The Memorial Union. The sidewalks stretching between Beardshear Hall and Curtiss Hall. For Iowa State's 17th president, the path back to Ames is more than a career milestone, it is deeply personal.

Cook officially began his presidency on March 1, returning to the university where he earned his degree in 1992 and where he first discovered the power of higher education. An Ames native and graduate of Ames High School, Cook now leads one of the nation's premier land-grant universities after spending nearly four years as president of North Dakota State University.

Despite decades of administrative leadership experience, Cook insists his return to Iowa State was never part of some carefully constructed career blueprint.

"I never had this idea of coming back to Ames or being the president of Iowa State," Cook said in an interview with Iowa Stater magazine. "That was never a goal."

Still, there is a sense throughout campus and the broader community that Cook's arrival feels uniquely fitting. He's a leader shaped by Iowa State's culture now returning to guide its future.

A Land-Grant Mindset

Cook's professional path has taken him through nearly every level of higher education leadership. Over the course of more than 25 years, he built experience in strategic planning, fundraising, student success initiatives, athletics, government relations, research growth, and financial stewardship.

Those experiences ultimately led him to the presidency at North Dakota State University, another land-grant institution with strong agricultural roots and a growing research profile. That background matters.

Throughout his early months at Iowa State, Cook has repeatedly emphasized the importance of the university's land-grant mission. To him, it is not as a slogan, but a responsibility. "We're a land-grant institution, which means we care about the entire state, including the role we have for the state's workforce," Cook said in an introductory Q&A published by Inside Iowa State.

That perspective aligns naturally with Iowa State's longstanding role as an engine for innovation,

DAVID COOK

IOWA STATE UNIVERSITY

research, entrepreneurship, and workforce development across Iowa.

Cook has spoken extensively about the need for universities, businesses, and communities to work together more intentionally. He emphasized that Iowa State's future success will continue to depend on strong partnerships with industry and the ability to prepare students for a rapidly evolving economy.

He sees higher education not as operating separately from the private sector, but as deeply interconnected with it. "I'm a big believer that higher education needs to work with business and industry," Cook said. "When you blend the academic piece with workforce needs learning, our students leave here well prepared."

That collaborative approach is expected to resonate strongly throughout the Ames region, where Iowa State serves as both a global research university and a powerful economic driver.

Listening Before Leading

Rather than arriving with promises of dramatic change, Cook's early strategy has focused heavily on listening. He entered the presidency with what he described as a detailed "100-day plan," centered on meeting faculty, staff, students, alumni, legislators, and community leaders. "In that plan, I'm going to get out there and do a lot of listening, a lot of learning," Cook said.

That approach reflects a leadership philosophy Cook often describes as servant leadership, one rooted in collaboration, accessibility, and honest dialogue. He has repeatedly emphasized the importance of surrounding himself with people willing to challenge ideas and offer differing perspectives.

"I want to surround myself with people who are smarter than me, but also who have diverging opinions," Cook said. "That's going to make decisions overall a lot stronger because they're going to be challenged."

The emphasis on collaboration appears intentional at a moment when higher education institutions across the country face growing pressure to evolve. Universities are navigating questions surrounding artificial intelligence, workforce readiness, affordability, enrollment shifts, political scrutiny, and the future value of higher education itself.

Cook believes Iowa State is exceptionally well positioned to lead through that change. "There are outcomes, metrics, stories that tell you Iowa State is in a very good place," he said. "So, I want to build on that, rather than reinvent anything."

Innovation and Opportunity

If there is a defining theme emerging from Cook's early presidency, it may be innovation.

Again and again, Cook returns to the idea that universities must continuously adapt and challenge themselves. "The world is changing. AI is the latest example, and we want to lead," he said.





For Cook, innovation is not limited to entrepreneurship programs or startup culture. He sees it as a mindset that should exist across every discipline and classroom.

“Innovation doesn’t have to have an entrepreneurial angle to it,” he said. “I think it’s challenging people to grow and think differently every day.”

That philosophy mirrors many of the conversations already happening across the Ames region as business leaders, educators, and entrepreneurs work to position central Iowa for long-term economic growth. Cook also understands Iowa State’s broader role in talent retention.

As Iowa communities compete nationally for workforce growth, universities increasingly serve as critical pipelines for skilled graduates and future business leaders. Cook has spoken about the importance of experiential learning, industry partnerships, and helping students graduate career-ready.

Those priorities align closely with the university’s strategic plan, which Cook has praised as “thoughtful and comprehensive.” Rather than introducing an entirely new direction, he has suggested the institution will continue evolving and building upon existing momentum.

That continuity matters for a university currently experiencing strong enrollment, expanding research activity, and growing national visibility.

A Personal Return

While much of the conversation around Cook understandably focuses on leadership and strategy, there is another dimension to his presidency that resonates deeply with the Iowa State community: authenticity.

Cook is not learning Iowa State from a distance. He lived it. He remembers being a first-generation college student arriving on campus. He remembers walking central campus as a student. He remembers the people and places that shaped his experience.

“To think that I was going from there to where I am now, I think I’d be pretty surprised,” Cook said. That perspective appears to shape how he and his wife, Katie, are approaching their return to Ames.

The Cooks have already made a point of attending campus events, meeting students in dining centers, and immersing themselves in university life. Katie Cook, also an Iowa State graduate and Ames native, has spoken openly about wanting her role to feel authentic and student-centered.

Their accessibility has become noticeable early in the presidency.

During the AREA Podcast conversation, Cook spoke warmly about the energy students bring to campus and the importance of being visible and approachable as university leaders. He described some of his favorite moments as the unscripted interactions; the conversations after events, discussions with students over meals, and opportunities to hear directly from faculty and staff. “Showing up for them is important,” Cook said.

That mindset may ultimately define Cook’s presidency as much as any strategic initiative. At a university known for its strong culture and loyal alumni base, relationships matter. Community matters. Presence matters. For David Cook, Iowa State is more than an institution to manage. It is home.

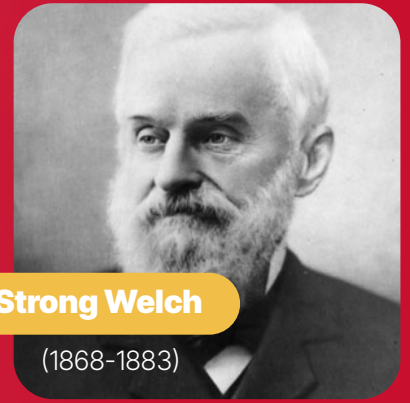


Photos by Chris Gannon, Iowa State University

There are outcomes, metrics, stories that tell you Iowa State is in a very good place. So, I want to build on that, rather than reinvent anything.

-- David Cook

Iowa State University Presidents



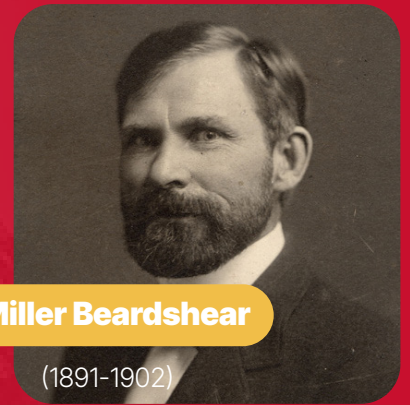
Adonijah Strong Welch

(1868-1883)

Seaman Asahel Knapp (1883-1884)

Leigh Smith John Hunt (1885-1886)

William Isaac Chamberlain (1886-1890)



William Miller Beardshear

(1891-1902)

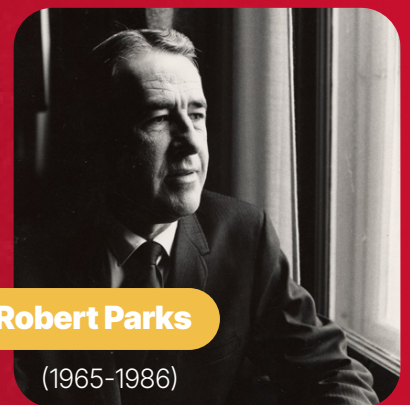
Albert Boyton Storms (1903-1910)

Raymond Allen Pearson (1912-1916)

Raymond Mollyneaux Hughes (1927-1935)

Charles Edwin Friley (1936-1953)

James Harold Hilton (1953-1965)



William Robert Parks

(1965-1986)

Gordon Pryor Eaton (1986-1990)

Martin C. Jischke (1991-2000)

Gregory Geoffroy (2001-2012)

Steven Leath (2012-2017)

Wendy Wintersteen (2017-2025)



WASHINGTON D.C. FLY-IN

April 21-23, 2026

The Ames Regional Economic Alliance Business Advocacy Program focuses on educating and engaging members on key legislative issues impacting the Ames region. Maintaining strong relationships with federal, state, and local elected officials is a core tenet of the organization and a service we are proud to provide to our membership.

This work is most visible during the spring legislative session but continues year-round at the state and federal levels. In all advocacy efforts, the Ames Regional Economic Alliance remains nonpartisan and does not endorse candidates or support political action committees, instead creating opportunities for candidates and constituents to connect and share information.

In April 2026, the Ames Alliance organized the annual Washington D.C. Fly-In, bringing business and community leaders from across the four-county region to meet with elected officials, government leaders, and nonpartisan policy experts.

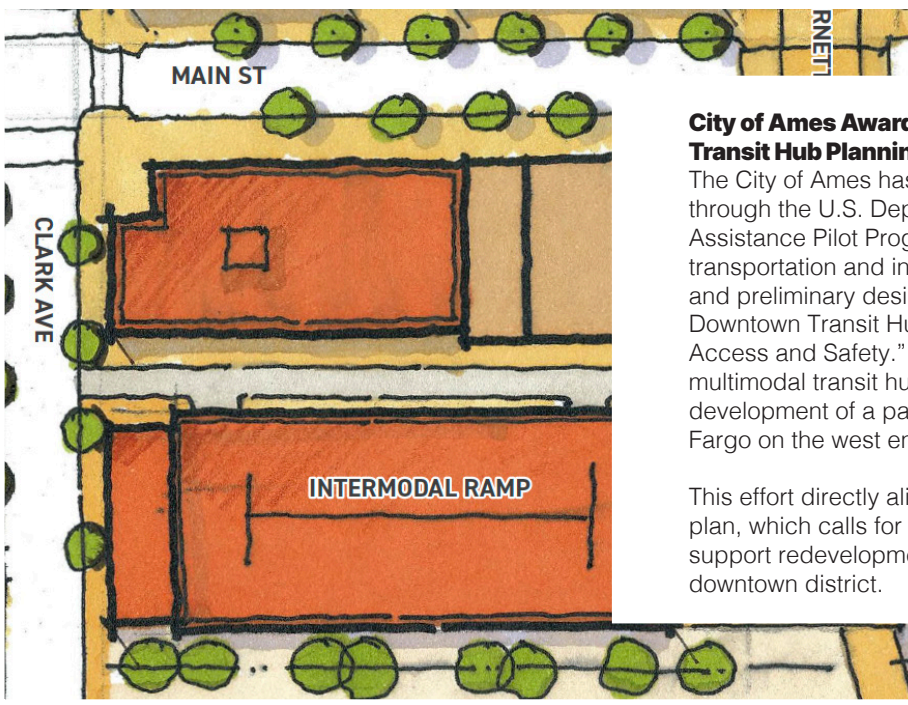
During the three-day visit, the delegation met directly with Senator Joni Ernst, Representative Randy Feenstra, Representative Ashley Hinson, and Representative Zach Nunn. A packet of policy priorities was shared, with candid discussions on legislation ranging from housing to the upcoming Farm Bill.

The delegation also engaged with Senator Grassley's staff on Senate policy issues and visited the Embassy of Canada to meet with trade specialists. With Iowa exporting roughly \$5 billion annually to Canada, the group gained valuable insights on international trade relationships impacting the region. Additional briefings included polling perspectives ahead of the 2026 midterm elections and discussions on energy demand and surface transportation policy.

This annual fly-in is critical to building direct relationships with just not our elected officials but their staff as well. Such work can create even greater opportunities throughout the years as federal partnership opportunities arise for local regional initiatives and the ability to partner and advocate for future support. Planning for 2027 is already underway with the fly-in tentatively scheduled for April 2027.



This year's delegation included representation from the City of Ames, City of Boone, City of Nevada, City of Webster City, Boone County, Greene County, Hamilton County, Story County, Iowa State University, and many private business partners across the four-county region.



City of Ames Awarded Federal Grant to Advance Downtown Transit Hub Planning

The City of Ames has been awarded a \$500,000 planning grant through the U.S. Department of Transportation's Rural and Tribal Assistance Pilot Program, supporting the next phase of downtown transportation and infrastructure planning. The grant will fund planning and preliminary design work for the project titled, "Multi-Modal Downtown Transit Hub in the City of Ames: Enhancing Downtown Access and Safety." This initiative will explore the feasibility of a multimodal transit hub in Downtown Ames, including the potential development of a parking structure on the city-owned lot behind Wells Fargo on the west end of Main Street.

This effort directly aligns with the *Downtown Ames: A Guiding Vision* plan, which calls for strategic investments that enhance accessibility, support redevelopment, and create a more vibrant, connected downtown district.

Rendering from the Downtown Ames: A Guiding Vision document. Conceptual only and subject to change.

Webster City Gateway Industrial Park Achieves Site Certification

The Webster City Gateway Industrial Park has officially been designated an Iowa Certified Site, marking a significant milestone for economic development in Hamilton County and the broader Central Iowa region. The site has undergone extensive evaluation and preparation to ensure it is ready for future development opportunities. Site certification is a comprehensive process that verifies key development factors such as land ownership, utility access, transportation infrastructure, and environmental considerations. By eliminating many of the unknowns that can delay projects, certified sites provide businesses with greater confidence and speed-to-market, two critical factors in today's competitive economic landscape.



The 478-acre, rail-served industrial park is strategically located near Iowa Highways 17 and 20, minutes from Interstate 35



Central Iowa Middle School Expo

The Central Iowa Middle School Expo once again brought strong energy and enthusiasm as more than 700 seventh grade students gathered for a day of hands-on career exploration and interactive learning. The annual event connected students with local businesses, organizations, and educators who showcased a wide range of industries, skills, and career pathways available across the region.

From engaging demonstrations and activity stations to real-world conversations with professionals, students were encouraged to think creatively about their futures and discover new possibilities. The success of the Expo reflects the strong partnership between local school districts, employers, and community leaders committed to workforce development and career awareness at an early age. A special thank you goes to all of the businesses, volunteers, and educators who helped make this impactful experience possible.

FITCH FAMILY INDOOR AQUATIC CENTER



**YOU'RE GOING TO
LOVE LIVING HERE**



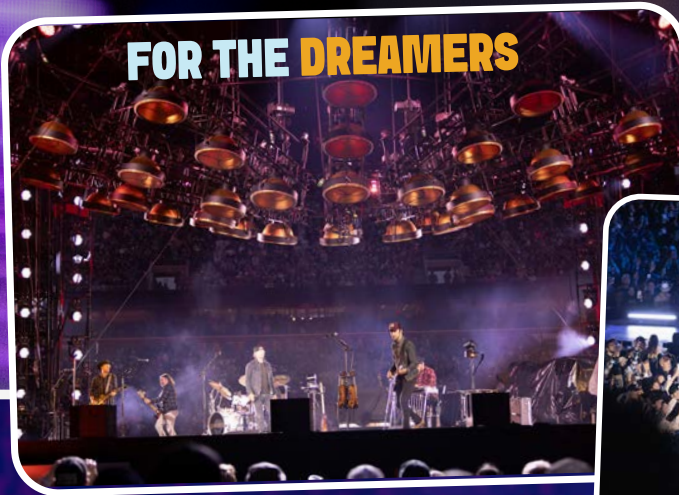
Fitch Family Indoor Aquatic Center

The Fitch Family Indoor Aquatic Center opened in May, marking a major milestone for Ames and expanding year-round recreation opportunities for residents. The 38,900-square-foot facility features a 25-yard, six-lane lap pool, a zero-depth splash pool with a current channel, party rooms, multi-purpose spaces, and a dedicated walking area. Construction began in spring 2024 and reached substantial completion in early 2026. The new center is designed to serve swimmers of all ages and abilities, providing a modern, accessible space for fitness, fun, and community connection throughout the year. The phased opening in May will lead to an open house and ribbon cutting in September.

PLAY IN AMES

Luke Combs at Jack Trice Stadium

Country star Luke Combs delivered a high-energy performance at Jack Trice Stadium in Ames on April 11, 2026, drawing a massive crowd of over 60,000 people and continuing the venue's emergence as a major concert destination. The *My Kinda Saturday Night Tour* stop followed the landmark 2024 show featuring George Strait, Chris Stapleton, and Little Big Town, and comes ahead of the Post Malone & Jelly Roll concert in July, reinforcing momentum for large-scale entertainment events in the community. Fans packed the stadium, creating an electric atmosphere as Combs delivered hit after hit, showcasing why Ames continues to attract nationally recognized artists and memorable live experiences for residents and visitors alike.



Luke Combs photos by Colby Schwantes/Iowa State Daily

New Members

- [Cardinal FPV-Cinematics](#)
- [Boone FLEX](#)
- [Blum Agency, Farm Bureau Financial Services](#)
- [Stacey Hannigan, LMHC, PLLC](#)
- [T-Fiber](#)
- [Cornerstone Caregiving](#)
- [Matthew Coronas](#)
- [Play & Learn Early Childhood Center](#)
- [Home Kneads Bakery](#)
- [Creative Counseling Services](#)
- [Cultivate Wellness](#)
- [Deal's Orchard](#)
- [McGough Construction](#)
- [BrandWorks, LLC](#)
- [ReForm Total Fix and Finish](#)
- [Ames Play Yard](#)

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.

Ames Main Street Farmers' Market

Expands for 2026 Season

The Ames Main Street Farmers' Market returned for the 2026 season with more room to grow and plenty of momentum to fill it.

Now stretching into the 200 block of Main Street, the expanded footprint marked a visible evolution for one of Downtown Ames' most popular weekly gatherings. What had long been a bustling corridor of vendors and visitors opened up into a broader, more walkable experience, giving both longtime attendees and first-time visitors more space to explore everything the market had to offer.

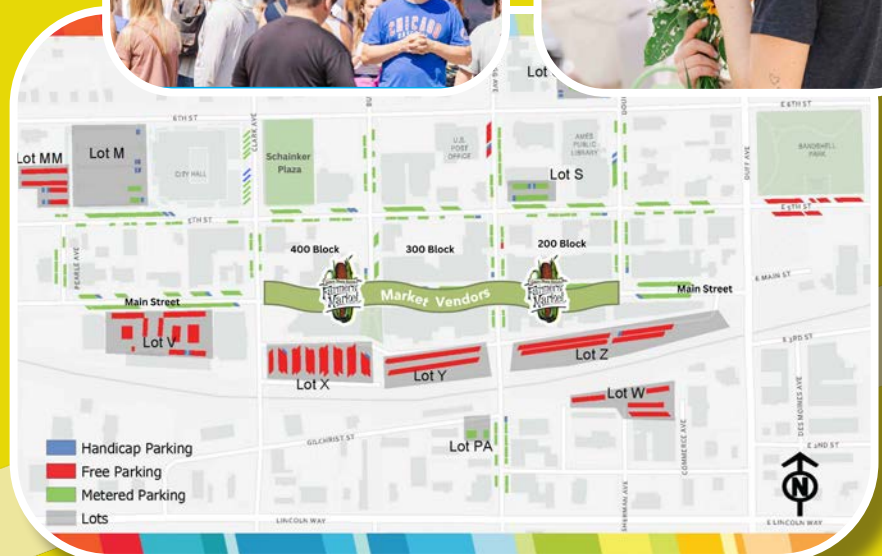
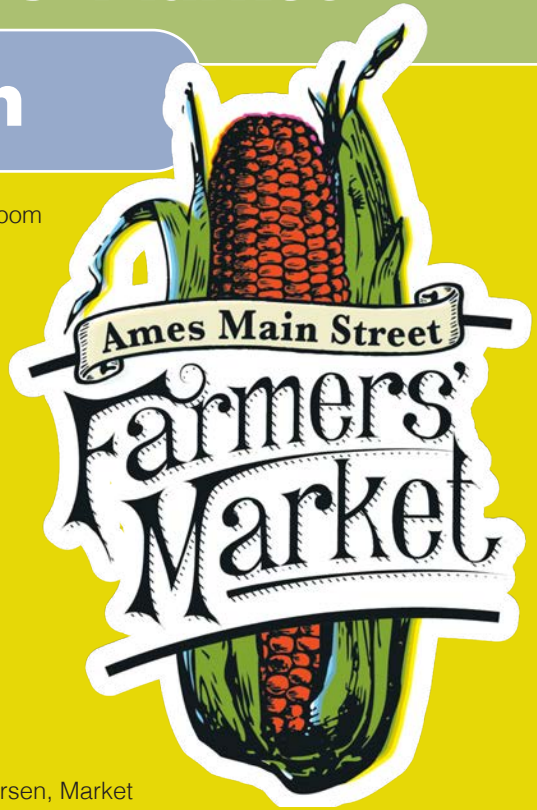
The expansion came on the heels of a record-setting year. During the 2025 season, the market drew more than 8,000 people in a single day, underscoring both its popularity and its capacity challenges. Vendor demand had also continued to outpace available space, with a consistent waiting list of farmers, food producers, and artisans hoping to join.

By opening up an additional block, organizers created new opportunities, welcoming more vendors into the fold while easing congestion for the thousands who make Saturday mornings downtown a weekly ritual.

"This market has really become a cornerstone event for Ames," said Lojean Petersen, Market Director. "The expansion allowed us to say yes to more vendors and create a more comfortable, enjoyable experience for visitors. You could feel the difference right away on opening day."

The 2026 season, now underway, marked the 16th season of the Ames Main Street Farmers' Market featuring approximately 95 vendors each week. From fresh produce and locally raised meats to baked goods, prepared foods, and handcrafted items, the market continued to reflect the diversity and creativity of central Iowa's small business community.

On opening day, that energy was easy to spot. Families moved between booths with coffee in hand, lines formed early for popular vendors, and live music carried across the expanded footprint. The additional space did not change the character of the market. It amplified it. With the season now in full swing, the expanded market is expected to continue drawing strong crowds throughout the summer and fall, further cementing its role as one of Downtown Ames' most defining and well-attended traditions.



For more information, visit

[www.DowntownAmes.org/
FarmersMarket](http://www.DowntownAmes.org/FarmersMarket)

National Premiere: April 30, 2026

In September 2025, the crew of John McGivern's Main Streets visited Ames with their production crew to record an episode for their popular show on PBS. That Ames episode premiered nationally in April 2026 and can now be viewed on YouTube. The crew spent time exploring Downtown Ames, visiting local favorites like The Recipe, Dog-Eared Books, Piece & Freedom Bakery, the Ames History Museum, Della Viti, and Ames British Foods & Gifts, while also spending time at Danfoss Power Solutions, Hickory Park, Reiman Gardens, and Iowa State University.

Coordinated with the Ames Regional Economic Alliance and Discover Ames, the visit highlighted the community's blend of innovation, local business, and Downtown charm.



John McGivern and Emmy Fink
Hosts of John McGivern's Main Streets





Molly Kardelis
Manager/Chef, The Dot

Dawn Budd
Owner, The Dot

THE Dot



On the west side of Ames, The Dot has quickly become a go-to spot for fresh, thoughtfully prepared breakfast & lunch, and a welcoming, community-focused atmosphere. Open Wednesday through Sunday from 8 a.m. to 2 p.m., The Dot keeps things simple in the best way, serving breakfast all day and creating a space where people feel comfortable settling in.

Owner Dawn Budd and Manager/Chef Molly Kardelis built The Dot around a clear idea: great food should be accessible to everyone. That philosophy shows up immediately on the menu, which is designed to accommodate a wide range of dietary needs. Whether you're looking for gluten-friendly, dairy-free, nut-free, vegan, or vegetarian options, the goal is the same: no one should feel like an afterthought when they sit down to eat.

"For us, it was really important that everyone who walks through the door feels like there's something here for them," Budd said. "Food brings people together, and we didn't want anyone to feel excluded from that experience."

That level of intention carries through to the ingredients. The Dot prioritizes locally sourced products whenever possible, working with area producers to bring fresh, high-quality food to the table. It's a commitment that shapes both the flavor and the experience. Dishes are made with real ingredients, and you can taste the difference; the eggs, produce, coffee/tea, and baked goods all reflect a focus on quality and care.

"We're really proud of the relationships we've built with local suppliers," Kardelis said. "It's not just about freshness, it's about supporting the community and knowing where your food comes from."

Inside, the atmosphere strikes a balance between relaxed and lively. It's the kind of place where you can stop in for a quick bite or stay longer without feeling rushed. Some tables are filled with friends catching up, while others are occupied by regulars enjoying a quiet cup of coffee. The space is warm and approachable, with a style that leans into a sense of Midwest nostalgia without feeling dated.

That personality shows up in small but memorable ways, like the collection of salt and pepper shakers found on each table. Each set adds a bit of charm and individuality, reinforcing the idea that The Dot is designed to feel personal rather than polished.

"We wanted the space to feel comfortable and a little familiar," Budd said. "Those small details matter. They help create an environment where people can relax and just enjoy their time."

More than anything, The Dot has established itself as a gathering place. It's not



www.thedotames.com



just about the food, although that's a major draw. It's about creating an environment where people feel welcome, whether they're stopping in for the first time or returning for their usual order.

"In a lot of ways, we see The Dot as a community space as much as a restaurant," Budd said. "If people leave feeling a little more connected, or like they had a really good start to their day, then we've done what we set out to do."

In a community like Ames, places like The Dot play an important role. They connect people, support local producers, and offer something that feels both consistent and intentional. With its focus on fresh ingredients, inclusive options, and a comfortable setting, The Dot continues to build a loyal following on the west side, one dish at a time.





**CrawDaddy
OUTDOORS**

**ADVENTURE
STARTS
WHEN
YOU'RE
WILLING
TO GET
OUTSIDE
YOUR
COMFORT
ZONE.**



Jamie Borglum
Owner, CrawDaddy Outdoors



CrawDaddy Outdoors is bringing a renewed kind of energy to Ames, one built around exploration, skill building, and a willingness to step beyond the familiar. Originally founded in Waverly, Iowa, the outdoor retailer and adventure company has expanded into Downtown Ames, creating a hub for both seasoned adventurers and those just beginning to discover the outdoors.

Owner Jamie Borglum launched CrawDaddy Outdoors with a vision that extends well beyond selling gear. After operating in Waverly for two years, the move into Ames marks a natural next step, placing the business in a community with strong access to trails, water, and outdoor enthusiasts. The Downtown location offers a carefully curated selection of equipment and apparel, from kayaks and paddling gear to backpacks, camping supplies, and outdoor lifestyle goods.

The Ames location also reflects a growing demand for accessible outdoor recreation in Central Iowa. With more people looking for ways to stay active and connected to nature, CrawDaddy Outdoors is meeting that interest by creating a space that feels welcoming, educational, and community driven.

But retail is only part of the story. CrawDaddy Outdoors has built its identity around experiences. Throughout the year, the company offers an extensive lineup of trips, classes, and clinics, totaling more than 100 days annually. These range from beginner friendly kayaking lessons and backpacking clinics to more advanced offerings like orienteering and whitewater river courses. The goal is simple. Equip people not just with gear, but with the confidence and skills to use it.

That philosophy will be on full display this summer with a pop-up kayak rental operation at Ada Hayden Heritage Park. The temporary location will make it easier than ever for residents and visitors to get on the water, try something new, and experience Ames from a different perspective. It also serves as an accessible entry point for those who may be curious about paddling but unsure where to start.

For Borglum, these local experiences are part of a broader mission that includes both nearby adventures and global travel. CrawDaddy Outdoors organizes immersive trips across the country and around the world, including excursions to Peru's Sacred Valley and Machu Picchu. These journeys combine physical challenge with cultural exploration, offering participants a deeper connection to both nature and themselves.

Borglum embraces that same spirit personally, often venturing into the wilderness multiple times a year, including solo expeditions that push him mentally and physically. That mindset shapes the brand and its approach to customers.

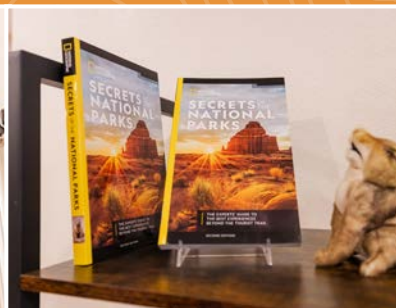
"We want people to realize they're capable of more than they think," Borglum said. "Whether it's your first time in a kayak or hiking a trail in another country, there's something powerful about taking that step."

As CrawDaddy Outdoors settles into its new home in Downtown Ames, it is poised to become more than just a store. It is a launching point for new skills, new experiences, and new perspectives on what it means to get outside.



Learn more about CrawDaddy Outdoors on their website.

www.CrawDaddyOutdoors.com

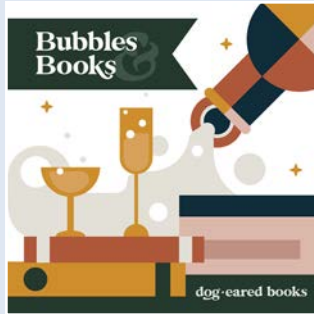


What are you Listening to?



City of Ames Podcasts

The *City of Ames Podcast Network* is a collection of shows designed to help residents better understand, connect with, and participate in life in Ames. The network brings together a variety of conversations that blend civic information, behind-the-scenes insight, community education, and personality-driven storytelling. Each podcast goes beyond announcements to explore why topics matter, who is involved, and how they impact everyday life in the community.



Bubbles & Books

Bubbles & Books is a lively podcast from Dog-Eared Books celebrating great reads and champagne. Hosted by co-owners Ellyn Grimm and Amanda Lepper, it blends engaging book discussions with humor, personal insights, and recommendations across genres, inviting listeners to discover new titles and connect with Ames' local literary scene.



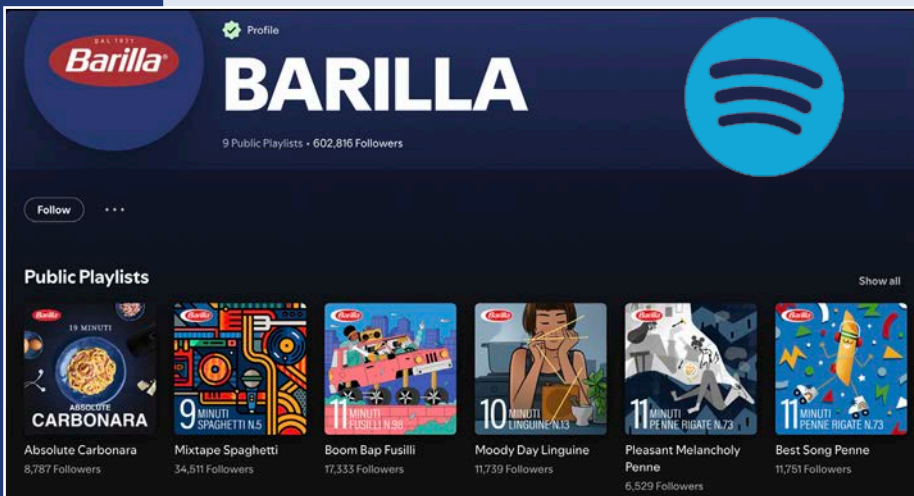
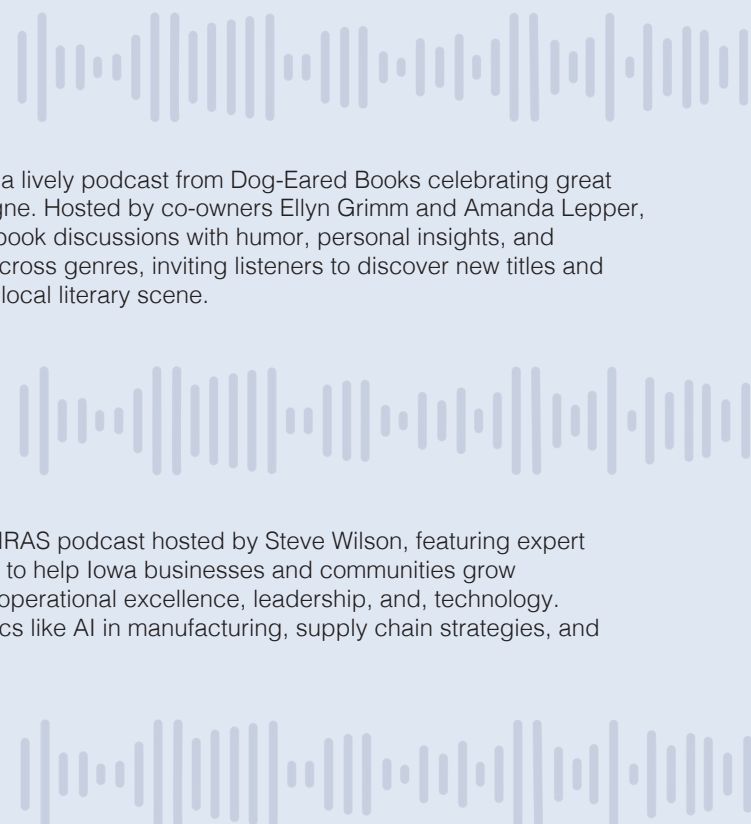
Industry Iowa

Industry Iowa is a CIRAS podcast hosted by Steve Wilson, featuring expert interviews designed to help Iowa businesses and communities grow through insights on operational excellence, leadership, and, technology. Episodes cover topics like AI in manufacturing, supply chain strategies, and workforce culture.



Amazing Education Podcast

The *Amazing Education Podcast* highlights incredible stories from within Ames' school, featuring students, staff, alumni, and community members. Whether you're interested in learning more about district initiatives, hearing from students, or gaining new insights into the world of education, this podcast is a fantastic way to stay connected.



Barilla Spotify Playlist

In Issue 13 of *Traction* magazine, we highlighted how the Ames plant is the heart of Barilla's U.S. operations, producing over 1.2 million boxes of pasta daily. Barilla's "Playlist Timer" on Spotify is a branded campaign featuring curated playlists tailored to the exact cooking times of popular pasta shapes, ensuring perfect al dente noodles when the music stops. The playlists last roughly 9–11 minutes and feature popular hits, indie, and hip-hop, with covers designed by Italian artists.

A podcast from the Ames Regional Economic Alliance

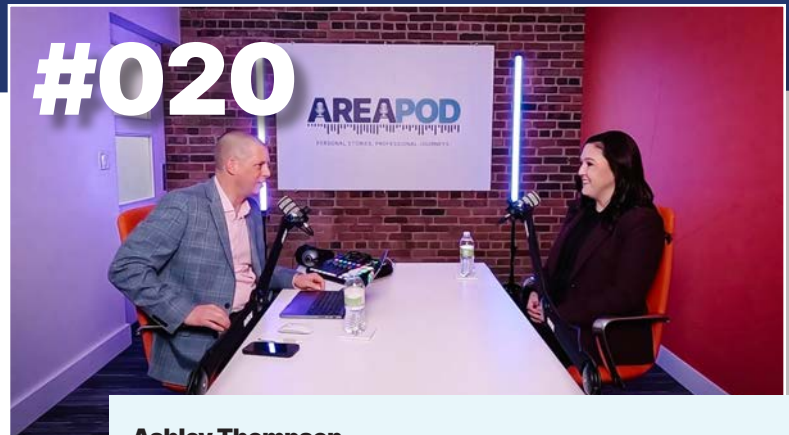
AREA POD



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.



#020

Ashley Thompson, President & CEO, United Way of Story County

Ashley shares her leadership journey, the evolving needs across the community, and how the United Way is bringing partners together to address challenges and drive long-term impact across Story County. She also highlights the importance of collaboration between nonprofits, businesses, and local leaders, and how data, community insight, and strategic investment are helping tackle complex issues like housing, financial stability, and access to essential services.



Dr. David Cook, President, Iowa State University

Dr. Cook shares his journey back to Ames to lead his alma mater, his leadership approach, and how Iowa State is building on its land-grant mission to drive innovation, workforce development, and economic impact across the state and beyond for future generations.



Brent Shanks, Co-Founder and Chief Technical Officer at Pyrone Systems

Brent shares his journey from academic research to launching a biotech startup, how Pyrone is developing sustainable alternatives to traditional chemicals, and what it takes to bring breakthrough science into real-world use. He also discusses the challenges of scaling tech innovation, navigating regulatory pathways, and building a team capable of translating cutting-edge research into practical, market-ready solutions that can compete globally and deliver measurable environmental impact.



#023

Paul Shirley, Author and Former Iowa State Cyclone Basketball Player

Paul shares his journey as a professional basketball player across the NBA and overseas, his transition into writing, and how his work today helps individuals and teams build better habits, find focus, and create more meaningful work. He also reflects on the realities of chasing elite performance, the lessons learned from constant reinvention, and how discipline, creativity, and perspective shape long-term success beyond sports.



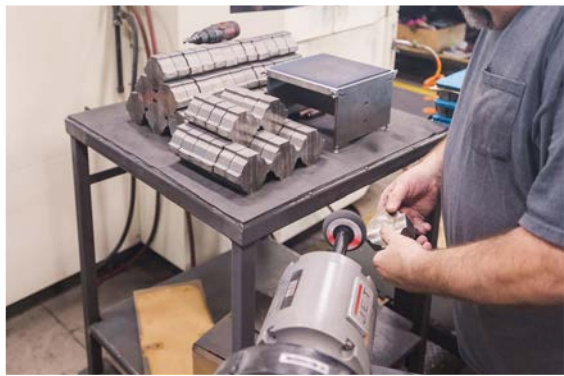
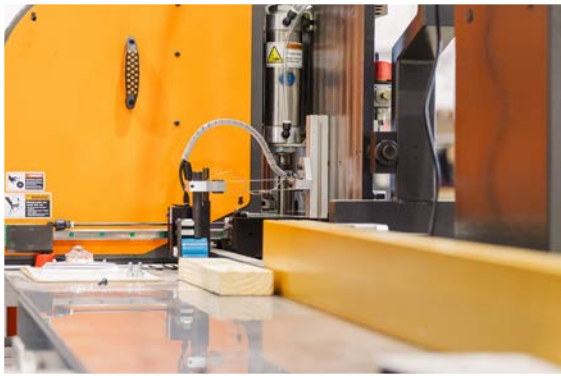
The AREA Podcast earned top honors at the 32nd Annual Communicator Awards with recognition from the Academy of Interactive & Visual Arts

TSI

TECHNICAL SERVICES, INC.



Grant Simpson
Vice President,
Technical Services of Iowa, Inc.



For nearly five decades, Technical Services, Inc. has quietly helped manufacturers solve some of their most complex production challenges. From custom automation equipment to precision machining and robotics integration, the Ames-based company has built its reputation on designing systems tailored to the exact needs of its customers.

Founded in 1977 by Loran Simpson, Technical Services began as a custom machine design and build company focused on helping manufacturers improve efficiency, quality, and safety through automation. Today, the company operates out of a 60,000-square-foot facility in Ames and employs more than 60 people, continuing a family legacy now led by the third generation of Simpsons.

Vice President Grant Simpson grew up around the business. As a kid, he spent time in the shop watching employees fabricate parts, wire control panels, and assemble custom-built machines for customers across the country. "I was sweeping floors, helping where I could, and just being around the environment from a young age," Simpson said. "You don't realize it at the time, but you're learning how the business works and what makes it special."

That early exposure eventually shaped his decision to return to the family company after working in the oil field industry following college. "I enjoyed the work, but the work-life balance wasn't great," Simpson said. "Coming back to TSI felt like an opportunity to be part of something meaningful and help shape where the company was headed next."

For much of its history, Technical Services specialized in fully customized machines built around a customer's product or manufacturing process. The company engineered systems for a wide range of industries, often creating one-of-a-kind solutions that automated repetitive or highly specialized tasks. "If a customer had a product they needed manufactured more efficiently, we would design and build the machine specifically for that application," Simpson said. "Everything was custom."

That work remains an important part of the business today, but over the past two decades the company has strategically diversified, creating a more scalable product line through its RazorGage technology.

Originally developed in the early 2000s, RazorGage began as a linear measurement and positioning system designed to improve cutting accuracy and reduce waste in woodworking and manufacturing applications. Over time, the technology evolved into a sophisticated automated optimization platform used by cabinet makers and manufacturers around the world.

"It's essentially an automated tape measure combined with optimized software," Simpson said. "A customer can generate a cut list, load the material, and the system calculates the most efficient cuts while minimizing waste."

Today, RazorGage represents roughly half of the company's business and has expanded Technical Services' reach far beyond Iowa. The systems are distributed worldwide and used primarily by small- to mid-sized cabinet makers and woodworking operations looking to improve efficiency and productivity. The shift toward RazorGage also helped the company navigate the cyclical nature of custom machine building.

"Custom automation projects can fluctuate with the economy," Simpson said. "RazorGage gave us a product line that created stability while still aligning with what we do best, which is solving manufacturing problems."

Technical Services has continued evolving in recent years, including the acquisition of Mid-America Manufacturing in 2020, further expanding its machining capabilities and high-mix, low-volume production work.

For Simpson, the challenge now is balancing the company's strong legacy with a vision for the future. "There's a responsibility that comes with being the third generation," he said. "But it's also exciting because we have an opportunity to continue growing, investing in technology, and finding new ways to serve customers while staying true to what built the company in the first place."



Edible Garden Receives Incentives for Webster City Expansion

(April 17, 2026)

Edible Garden has announced the launch of Edible Garden-Prairie Hills, a new 6.2-acre facility in Webster City, Iowa. The Iowa Economic Development Authority is supporting the expansion project by approving a \$2,660,000 incentive package through its Business Incentives for Growth (BIG) program. The incentives will support Edible Garden's transformation of an existing 400,000-square-foot facility into a high-capacity, technology-driven ready-to-drink (RTD) beverage production plant.



Iowa State Releases Innovation at Work: 2026 By the Numbers

(May 5, 2026)

Iowa State University released its *Innovation at Work: 2026 By the Numbers* report, highlighting research and innovation improving lives across Iowa. Researchers attracted \$329.9 million in FY2025 funding, while nearly 20 Iowa companies licensed Iowa State technologies, generating \$15.3 million in revenue. Globally, sales of Iowa State-licensed technologies exceed \$136 million, with 108 active license and option agreements generating income.



Story County Child Care Feasibility Report Released Soon

A regional child care study led by Pendulum Dependent Care Solutions is nearing completion, with a full report coming soon. Conducted in collaboration with United Way of Story County, Ames Regional Economic Alliance, Iowa State University, and other regional partners, the three-phase effort examined the current child care landscape, gathered community input to better understand system gaps and barriers, and is now developing a strategic roadmap to guide long-term improvements and future investment in the region's child care system.



▶ TRACTI • N Contributions

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Cover Photography
McClanahan Studio

Printing:
Sigler Companies

Additional Contributions

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| Krysta Steckelberg | Ashley Thompson |
| Angie Hunt | Brent Shanks |
| Susan Gwiasda | Paul Shirley |
| Keith Abraham | Grant Simpson |
| Colby Schwantes | ... |
| Dawn Budd | and the entire |
| Molly Kardelis | Alliance team |

Every issue of Traction magazine begins the same way: with a story worth telling. What continues to inspire me is how often those stories reveal that strong communities are built by people willing to create, collaborate, and invest in something larger than themselves. I hope that spirit is evident throughout the pages of this magazine, across our social media content, and in the conversations I have on the AREA Podcast. Through each platform, our goal remains the same: to highlight the people, ideas, and momentum shaping our region's future.

I recently shared that "every conversation is an opportunity to capture the ideas, experiences and momentum shaping our region." That responsibility continues to motivate our work every day. Community storytelling is more than content creation. To me, it is about building relationships, documenting meaningful work, and helping others better understand the incredible things happening around us every day. I remain deeply grateful for that opportunity.

TRACTI • N INVESTORS



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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.

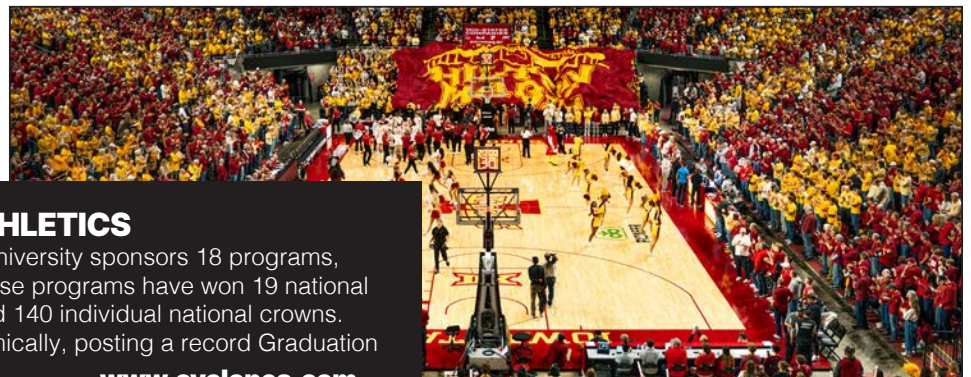
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Photo by Colby Schwantes, Iowa State Daily