



The BUZZ: Exclusively for Blue Ribbon Foundation Volunteers

YOU – our valued volunteers – are central to the success of the Iowa State Fair Blue Ribbon Foundation's mission, so we want to stay connected to you year-round! Look for issues to be emailed three times a year: January, May and September.



Meet Brooklin

The Blue Ribbon Foundation is pleased to announce that Brooklin Border joined our team as the new Development Manager last month.

Brooklin is no stranger to the Iowa State Fair. She grew up attending the Fair as a 4-H member and some of you may



2026 Volunteer Sign-Up

In just a few short months it will be time to sign up for volunteer shifts at the 2026 Iowa State Fair. The May issue of ***The Buzz*** remains the primary communication tool to kick-off the volunteer sign-up process using the VolunteerLocal portal.

remember her when she served as the Blue Ribbon Foundation's Public Relations Intern in 2022, where she organized the Iowan of the Day program.

Brooklin is originally from Fort Dodge and attended Iowa Central Community College before transferring to Iowa State University, earning her Bachelor of Science degree in Public Relations. Following graduation, she served as a clerk for the Iowa Senate before taking a position as a Program Specialist in the College of Liberal Arts and Sciences at Iowa State University.

Outside of work, Brooklin enjoys theatre and the arts, volunteering for the Iowa 4-H program, and spending time with family and friends.

In her new role, Brooklin will oversee the volunteer program, guide strategic gift planning for the endowment, and manage the Corndog Kickoff auction.

Brooklin will be your new go-to person for all things volunteer related. Feel free to reach out to her at any time with questions, comments, or concerns.

To make this process as easy as possible, detailed sign-up information will be available in the May issue - expect it to land in your inbox mid-month. Once you receive that issue, you will have a few days to prepare for signing up. Check your schedule, talk to friends and family to coordinate volunteer dates and shifts, and give thought to what works for you before going into the portal.

We know it's a bit of a mad rush when the portal opens, especially for groups that want to volunteer together. To solve this issue, we've worked with VolunteerLocal to ensure that groups have a smoother sign-up experience. This process will be the same as last year, but if you are signing up several people together or you have questions, feel free to contact Brooklin anytime and she will talk you through the process.

Questions are always welcome. Reach out to Brooklin@BlueRibbonFoundation.org or 515-262-3111, ext. 370 as you consider your availability to volunteer for the Blue Ribbon Foundation this year.



Project Updates

The sheep, horse, cattle, and swine barns are undergoing major, multi-year renovations. All facilities are being updated with improvements tailored to each barn's specific needs from floors, lighting, offices, restrooms, and more.

Horse Barn

This two-year, \$13.1 million project is being completed in two phases. Phase I was finished before the 2025 Fair, and Phase II began after the 2025 Fair and will conclude before the 2026 Fair. Upgrades include masonry and roofing restoration, new radiant-heat concrete floors, relocated offices, accessible restrooms, improved wash rack areas, new portable stalls, enhanced ventilation, upgraded electrical and lighting systems, and a new fire suppression system.

Sheep Barn

The two-year, \$6.2 million renovation was completed in fall 2024. Improvements included masonry restoration, office remodels, new storm sewer installation, roofing repairs, fully accessible restrooms, interior repainting, sun-shading for the show arena, and a new show ring. New portable pens are being added for 2026.

Cattle Barn

While the full renovation scope is still being finalized, Phase I began after the 2025 Fair. This phase focuses on construction of a new electrical distribution building for upgraded service and storage.

Swine Barn

With the overall project still being developed, Phase I started after the 2025 Fair. This phase includes remodeling the west office, upgrading the west women's restroom for accessibility, and adding new men's, women's, and family restrooms on the east end.

Volunteer Spotlight



For the past 10 to 15 years, **Tammy Newton, Beth Steven, and Sherri Cooney** have been a familiar and dependable presence at Blue Ribbon Foundation events. They volunteer together each year, bringing experience, teamwork, and a strong friendship built through family ties and shared history. Sherri and Tammy are sisters-in-law, and Beth has been a close friend long before Fair volunteering became a tradition.

Tammy and Beth began volunteering through Wellmark's employee volunteer program, while Sherri found similar opportunities through Principal. What started as a way to give back quickly became an annual tradition they looked forward to, and over time they began volunteering together.

Some of their favorite memories come from the Corndog Kickoff, where the fast-paced beverage service leads to plenty of laughter as drinks seem to disappear almost as quickly as they're set down. During the Fair, they enjoy people-watching, visiting the Agriculture Building and Shopper's Mart, and taking in sunsets



The Blue Ribbon Foundation is lucky to have many dedicated volunteers who help make the Iowa State Fair unforgettable. Among them are **Mark and Darla Carver**, who have volunteered since 2004, usually in the 1854 Society Hospitality Suite.

The Hospitality Suite has moved several times over the years, from the Earth Home to the house by Grandfather's Barn, then the William C. Knapp Varied Industries Building, and now Jake's Club in the Richard O. Jacobson Exhibition Center. Through it all, Mark and Darla have helped ensure every guest feels welcome.

They first got involved when their daughter started working for the Foundation and mentioned the need for volunteers. Since then, they have continued because they believe in the Foundation's mission. They want to help the Blue Ribbon Foundation project the best image possible. The Foundation and 1854 Society members have become their Fair family, which they look forward to seeing every year.

from the top of the hill. Favorite Fair foods include Chuckies tenderloins, Old Time kettle corn, elephant ears, and corndogs.

Beth's love for the Fair began in childhood and later led her to join the 1854 Society, encouraging Tammy and Sherri to join as well. They attend nearly every day of the Fair - though Beth jokes that she goes 12 of the 11 days. Tammy fondly remembers opening day as a family tradition from years past, while Sherri has long aimed to attend daily.

What keeps them coming back is simple: they enjoy working together, supporting the Blue Ribbon Foundation, and helping events run smoothly. For Tammy, Beth, and Sherri, volunteering is about giving their time, creating memories, and supporting a tradition they're proud to help carry forward.

Thank you, Tammy, Beth, and Sherri!

Mark and Darla have many favorite memories, including watching Fair families grow over generations and meeting people from across the country and the world. They also enjoy Fair favorites like corndogs, mini donuts, lemonade, and brisket. Their favorite attractions include the Bruce L. Rastetter 4-H Exhibits Building, livestock shows, William C. Knapp Varied Industries Building, Agriculture Building, and the draft horses.

For Mark, the Fair has been part of his life since childhood, attending with his parents, camping with his grandparents, and working in concession stands at age 12. Darla also has deep family roots at the Fair with bricks honoring her parents outside the Cattle Barn. For both, the Iowa State Fair has always been a special family tradition.

Thank you, Mark and Darla!

Important Dates

Corndog Kickoff - Saturday, July 11

Volunteer Reception - Tuesday, July 21 (tentative)

Iowa State Fair – August 13 to 23



State Fairs: Growing American Craft at the Smithsonian

Did you know the Iowa State Fair is being featured at the Smithsonian? The Fair is part of an exhibition called *State Fairs: Growing American Craft* at the Smithsonian American Art Museum's Renwick Gallery in Washington, D.C. The exhibit runs through September 7, 2026.

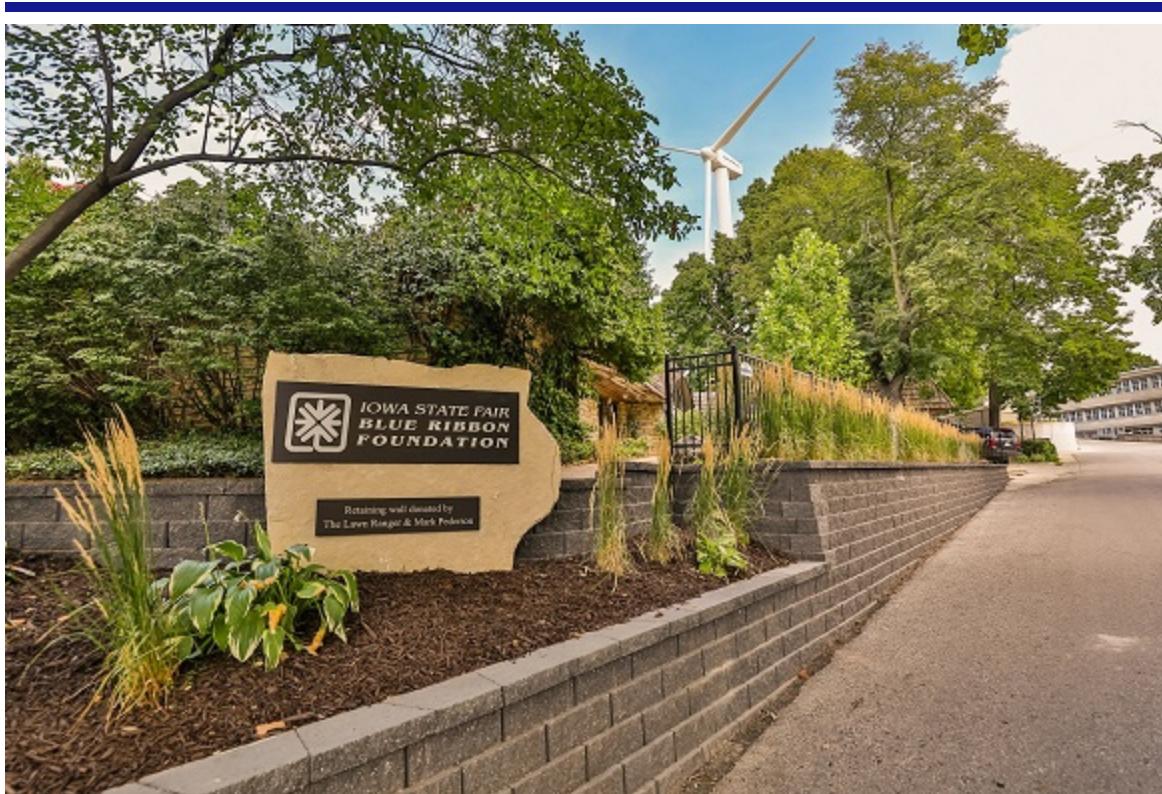
The exhibit shows off some of the best work from state fairs across the country and Iowa has a strong presence. Visitors can see handmade quilts, a pyramid of home-canned fruits and vegetables (pictured below), and a life-sized butter cow (pictured above), sculpted on-site for the exhibition.

These displays highlight the creativity and hard work that go into Fair competitions. Things that are usually seen at the Iowa State Fair each summer are now being shared with visitors from across the nation at the Smithsonian.

To learn more, check out [*The Iowa State Fair Goes to Washington*](#) article by Maxwell Schaeffer. The article explores the exhibit and Iowa's role in it, sharing how Iowa State Fair traditions made their way from the Fairgrounds to a national museum, with interviews from Iowa artists and exhibitors.

Maxwell Schaeffer also hosts the official Iowa State Fair Podcast with his media partner, Amy Sweet. Their episode, *From the Fairgrounds to the Smithsonian*, is a wonderful tribute to the extraordinary Iowans whose "Fair projects" have become part of this national exhibition. It's available wherever you listen to podcasts, or you can [tune in here](#).

And, check out this special episode from [*CBS Sunday Morning*](#) that highlights the exhibition.



Blue Ribbon Foundation Staff and Contact Information:

Peter Cownie, Executive Director | 515-262-3111, ext. 371

Robin Taylor, Assistant Director | 515-262-3111, ext. 373 | [Email Robin](#)

Julianna Curtis, Sponsorship Director | 515-262-3111, ext. 376 | [Email Julianna](#)

Drew Sniezek, Communications Manager | 515-262-3111, ext. 375 | [Email Drew](#)

Brooklin Border, Development Manager | 515-262-3111, ext. 370 | [Email Brooklin](#)

