



IOWA STATE FAIR  
BLUE RIBBON  
FOUNDATION

# NEWS

SPRING 2026

## Connecting Across **Fairs**

Over the years, many Iowa State Fair and Blue Ribbon Foundation team members have been fortunate to participate in the International Association of Fairs & Expositions (IAFE) — a non-profit organization serving state, provincial, regional, and county agricultural fairs, shows, exhibitions, and expositions. With the goal of improving fairs and allied fields, the IAFE brings “Fair people” together from across the country — and world — to connect, share ideas, collaborate, and solve challenges.

In December I graduated from the IAFE’s Institute of Fair Management, a two-year professional development program providing education and training on the core competencies of fairs, from operations and risk management to programming and sponsorship. While attending annual conventions and regional meetings, I’ve learned from experienced industry leaders and attended several idea-sparking excursions — including a tour of the Virginia State Fairgrounds (the birthplace of Secretariat) and a visit to the Washington State Spring Fair (they serve scones like we serve cookies).

I’ve also made many Fair friends who I’ll often chat with about recent experiences, issues, or recommendations and whose fairs I hope to attend someday! This is one of the main things I love about the fair industry. Although there are a few friendly rivalries about “who’s the best” (is there really any question?), we are not competitors but are here to help each other succeed. We encourage the sharing and borrowing of ideas because when one fair does well, it’s good for all of us.

In March the Iowa State Fair hosted IAFE members from Illinois, Iowa, Kansas, Missouri, and Nebraska for the Zone 5 regional meeting. From county fairs to state fairs, 280 people gathered for networking opportunities, workshops, and insights on how to make their fairs better. One of the highlights was our Fairgrounds tour, a chance to spotlight several Blue Ribbon Foundation projects, including the renovated Public Safety Building and the current Horse Barn restoration. Our guests were impressed by the infrastructure and pristine condition of our Fairgrounds. It also made our team take a step

back in appreciation of the beautiful grounds we get to steward — but we do not do this alone.

Blue Ribbon Foundation supporters like you are fundamental to making the Iowa State Fairgrounds the pride of our state and a model for other fairs across the nation. As we approach the 2026 Iowa State Fair and celebrate the 250th anniversary of America’s founding, we are excited to continue bringing people together, improving our historic infrastructure, and elevating both the communities we serve as well as our fellow fairs.



**Julianna Curtis**  
Sponsorship Director

# Meet the 2026 Interns

The Blue Ribbon Foundation is excited to introduce Emma Deppe, Morgan McBee and Haley Van Zee as interns for the summer of 2026. They will be busy organizing events and programs such as Iowan of the Day, merchandise sales, Iowa State Fair sponsors and the Corndog Kickoff Benefit Auction.



**Emma Deppe** – Emma is graduating from Kirkwood Community College this spring and will transfer to Iowa State University this fall to major in Sports Media and Communications with a minor in Leadership Studies. While at Kirkwood, she was highly involved on campus, serving as a two-year captain of the Kirkwood Cheerleading team. Emma was also active on the Student Leadership Council and worked with the Kirkwood Marketing team, where she specialized in photography.

Originally from Winterset, Emma grew up involved in 4-H and showing cattle, spending much of her time at the county and state fairs. She even served as the 2023 Madison County Fair Queen and now directs the Madison County Prince and Princess Contest, mentoring youth involved in the fair. With a strong passion for the Iowa State Fair, Emma is excited to expand her experience this summer as the Public Relations Intern for the Blue Ribbon Foundation.



**Morgan McBee** – Morgan is a senior at Iowa State University, majoring in Advertising with a minor in Event Management, and plans to graduate in May. During her time at Iowa State, she has developed a passion for creative storytelling, connecting with people, and planning memorable events.

Morgan grew up in Ankeny, where she was involved in many sports and arts activities. She has always loved people and animals (especially cats) and enjoys opportunities that bring communities together. Some of her favorite memories have been made at the Iowa State Fair, including attending her first big concert at the Grandstand to see Big Time Rush. Having attended the Fair throughout her life, she is excited to experience it from behind the scenes as the Donor Relations Intern. Morgan looks forward to helping create meaningful experiences and contributing to the traditions that make the Iowa State Fair special.



**Haley Van Zee** – Haley is a senior at Drake University studying Information Systems and Data Analytics. She is a member of Phi Theta Kappa and The National Society of Leadership and Success.

Haley is from Altoona. She was involved in Girls on the Run, Kids Cafe, Basketball, FCCLA, and Silver Cord. She has attended the Iowa State Fair almost every year of her life. Her favorite memories include riding the Giant Slide, trying new foods with her family, and concerts at the Grandstand. She is excited to get a behind-the-scenes look at the Iowa State Fair while working for the Blue Ribbon Foundation as the Sponsor Relations intern.

# 2026 T.A.G. Team Members

Thank you to the Blue Ribbon Foundation supporters that joined the 2026 T.A.G. team. The loyalty of these generous donors proves that **Together, we can Accomplish our Goals.** These members are making an immediate, positive and direct impact on our historic Fairgrounds.

The 2026 T.A.G. Team project will refresh Legacy Terrace. While bench slats have been updated, much of the landscaping and hardscaping remains unchanged since the area was developed 20 years ago. Planned improvements include replacing broken pavers and cracked concrete, along with planting new trees, shrubs, and flowers to rejuvenate the space.

Sometimes, the smallest improvements make the biggest difference. These updates will be enjoyed by thousands of Fairgoers who pause here each day during the Fair and throughout the year.



Paul & Crystal Abbe  
Blake Anderson  
Ernie & Paula Barnes  
Darrell & Lynda Bauman  
Lynn & Elaine Bohling  
Ronald & Joyce Brewster  
Joe & Bonnie Buman  
Jill & John Byerly  
Kenneth & Linda Cairns  
Fred & Judy Chabot  
Gary & Cindy Cheney  
Daniel & Donna Clark  
Phil & Caren Clevenger  
Don Corrigan  
Jeff & Meg Courter  
Paul & Kiki Curtis  
Dale & Sue Derscheid  
Gary Dinsdale  
Dave & Kelly Donato  
Craig & Carrie Dostal  
Robert & Amy Durian  
Mark & Tammy Ebensberger  
Eker/Saunders Family  
Jerry & Marilyn Erlandson  
Jeff & Vickie Farver  
Sue Fisher  
Tracy Forbes  
Chris & Margo Fox  
Mike & Kayleen Gardner  
Darwin & Jan Gaudin  
Nickie & Cody Gehl  
Michael & Ann Gersie  
James & Kathy Gocke  
Bill & Marilyn Grochala Gorham  
Steven & Lisa Gray

Alan & Lisa Hagie  
John & Kathy Harms  
Holly Hartman & Erik Davis  
Jan Higgins  
Brent & Renee Highfill  
Joe Hintzsche  
Skip Hitchcock  
Dan & Cathy Hogan  
Allen & Wanda Holm  
Dennis & Marian Houseman  
Brock Jackson  
Boman Jackson  
Brili Jackson  
Carolann Jensen  
Julianna Kasper  
Bill & Sarah Keel  
Kenneth Kessler  
James Kopel  
Camie & Kyle Kundel  
Joseph & Ruth Lakers  
Harlan & Mary Lammers  
Mike & Carri Lauterbach  
Ron & Pat Long  
Larry McConnell  
Rollie & Patty McCubbin  
Andrew McDowell  
Doug McKechnie  
Charles & Connie Moore  
Chuck & Mary Morris  
Jason & Cara Morse  
Ken Morse  
Tony & Denise Mudderman  
Burton & Molly Murphy  
Patrick & Angela Nepereny  
Doug & Marcy Ostrander

Michael & Martha Paul  
Dixie Pencil  
Stuart & Laurie Peterson  
Connie Pickett  
Denny Prather  
Martin & Jo Reynolds  
Tricia Rosendahl  
Brad & Jodi Sauter  
VerDon & Donna Schmidt  
Bob & Lynne Schueler  
Jon & Laura Scoles  
Shannon Shepherd  
Mark & Rachel Siegel  
Bruce & Linda Simonton  
Staats Awards  
Theresa Staats  
Glenn & Ginger Sterk  
Virginia Stone  
Adam & Aundrea Suntken  
Jackie Swartz  
Bret & Beth Jensen Thies  
Donald & Cheryl Timmins  
Chuck & Kathy Van Dike  
Susan Vance  
Mel & Kathy Weatherwax  
Jason & Melissa Wehrle  
Bonnie Wetzel  
Jarred & Leslie Whitfield  
Dave Windisch  
Gary & Sandi Yates  
Eric Youngberg & Gary Krogh  
Rod & Deborah Zeitler  
Ronald & Mary Beth Zelle  
Louie & Deb Zumbach

# Iowan of the Day **Nominations**

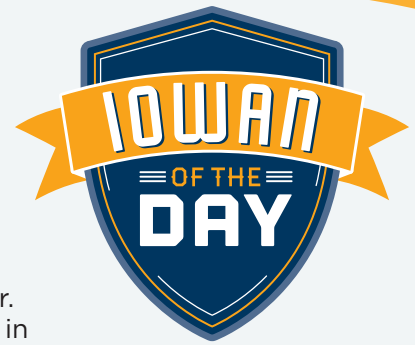
Communities across the state are built on the dedication, compassion, and generosity of volunteers who give their time to help others. From organizing local events to supporting families in need, these individuals quietly make a powerful difference every day.

The Blue Ribbon Foundation needs your help to recognize their impact by submitting nominations for the 2026 Iowan of the Day program.

With support from **Cookies Food Products**, the Foundation will honor 10 outstanding Iowans during a special celebration at the Iowa State Fair. Winners will be recognized on the Anne & Bill Riley Stage, receive \$200 in cash, enjoy golf cart access, VIP parking, gate admission for four, and hotel accommodations at the Des Moines Marriott Downtown, along with four tickets to the evening Grandstand show.

You can download the nomination form from the Blue Ribbon Foundation's website. Nominees from 2023, 2024, and 2025 will be reconsidered, and all nominees must currently reside in Iowa. The nomination deadline is July 1.

The Iowan of the Day award is a simple way to say "thank you" to those who give so much of themselves for others. Together, we can honor these everyday heroes and celebrate the remarkable difference they make across our state.



## Big Impact Comes in Small Percentages **A Little From Your Estate Goes a Long Way**

**"Give it your all."** You've probably heard that from a coach, mentor or loved one sometime in your life. But when it comes to planning your estate, you don't have to take an all-or-nothing approach.

You may have many people and nonprofits like the Blue Ribbon Foundation that you love and wonder how you can possibly take care of them all after you're gone. Here's the solution: Harness the power of percentages and divide your "estate pie" so everyone and everything you care about gets a slice.

### **Here's how:**

- 1.** Take inventory of your estate. It's likely larger than you think. Assets such as real estate, life insurance, and investment and retirement accounts can quickly add up.
- 2.** Determine which people and causes you'd like to benefit and in what percentages. You can provide for loved ones and still make a big difference to a nonprofit like our organization with 10%, 5% or even 1%.
- 3.** Create or update your will or update your beneficiaries to align with your percentages. Contact your estate planning attorney or use an online planning tool for your will. Adding or changing beneficiaries for accounts such as IRAs or life insurance is as simple as filling out a paper or online form.

One more advantage of giving percentages of your estate: The dollar value of your gift adjusts in proportion to the size of your estate. No need to worry about whether a certain amount is "enough" as the economy goes up or down.

Ready to find out what even a small percentage of your estate can do for the Blue Ribbon Foundation? Contact Brooklin Border at 515-262-3111 ext. 370 or [Brooklin@BlueRibbonFoundation.org](mailto:Brooklin@BlueRibbonFoundation.org) to begin your no-obligation conversation.

**Read more on the Blue Ribbon Foundation's Planned Giving website.**



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# T-Shirt Design Contest

Do you have a bold idea, a creative spark, or a message worth wearing? Join the Blue Ribbon Foundation's T-Shirt Design Contest and transform your imagination into a design that stands out. This is your chance to turn your ideas into wearable art and showcase your unique style to all Iowa State Fairgoers.

Whether you're inspired by bold graphics, clever slogans, or meaningful messages, we want to see what you can create to capture the spirit of the Iowa State Fair. The winning design will be featured on official merchandise, giving your work the spotlight it deserves and bragging rights to match.

Open to artists of all skill levels, this contest is all about imagination, originality, and representing the Iowa State Fair. Submit your design, rally your supporters, and watch your vision come to life. Don't miss this opportunity to be part of something exciting and leave your signature on a design that others will proudly wear.

**Submit your design by May 1.** A selection committee will choose the top five designs. Those designs will be posted on the Iowa State Fair Blue Ribbon Foundation's website and Facebook page with voting via Facebook "like" or online via our website. Voting will be open from May 11-15. The winner will be announced on May 18, and the top three will receive Iowa State Fair prize packages.

## 1ST PLACE

- Your T-shirt design is produced to sell at the Iowa State Fair
- 2 T-shirts, 2 admission tickets, 2 Fair Value Packs, 2 tickets to the Grandstand concert of your choice, \$50 in food coupons and parking for a day at the Fair

## 2ND PLACE

- 2 admission tickets, \$25 in food coupons, parking for a day at the Fair and a T-shirt with your design

## 3RD PLACE

- 2 admission tickets, \$25 in food coupons and a T-shirt with your design

Visit the Blue Ribbon Foundation's website for a list of contest rules and design guidelines.



**2024 Winner**  
Clint Hansen,  
Urbandale, IA



**2025 Winner**  
Abigail Bieker  
Harlan, IA

# Project Update

Nothing compares to the historic Iowa State Fairgrounds! Since the Iowa State Fair first moved to its current location in 1886, the grounds have continually evolved. Over time, buildings and landmarks have been updated, making ongoing improvements and renovations an essential part of preserving this cherished tradition.

## Projects Planned for 2026:

- Grandstand roof replacement (Phase I)
- New entrance to Lot C (University Avenue and East 38th Street)
- \$2.5 million renovation of the Varied Industries Building, including:
  - Concessions kitchen upgrades
  - New second-floor window coverings
  - New flooring in conference rooms, south hallway, and southeast lobby
  - Southwest restroom renovation
- Installation of new fans in the Outdoor Arena
- New street signs throughout the Fairgrounds and Campgrounds
- Cookie Building HVAC improvements
- Agriculture Building roof replacement (Phase I)
- Additional ADA seating in the Grandstand
- 4-H Exhibit Building display fixture replacement (Phase II)
- New shaded seating area east of the Cookie Building
- New doors for the Agriculture Building (Phase II)
- Grounds-wide public address (PA) system for emergency announcements (Phase II)
- Campgrounds Restroom #4 renovation (Phase II)
- New show ring and portable pens in the Sheep Barn
- Lot N improvements (concessionaire supply area)
- Horse Barn Renovation (Phase II)
- Cattle Barn Renovation (Phase I)
- Swine Barn Renovation (Phase I)

Supporting the Blue Ribbon Foundation's mission means investing in the future of the Iowa State Fairgrounds. Your generosity helps enhance facilities that serve millions of visitors each year. Every contribution plays a vital role in maintaining an environment where agriculture, education, and community come together. By giving, you ensure that this treasured Iowa tradition continues to grow and thrive for generations to come.

We are deeply grateful to the donors who already support us. Your commitment and belief in our work make every enhancement possible. Because of you, important projects move forward and the Fair's legacy remains strong. Thank you for standing with us and helping turn our vision into reality. Your support truly makes a lasting difference.

**We invite you to be part of these important improvement projects. Please consider making a donation today.**



# 2026 Benefit Auction *American* **CLASSIC**

*Iowa State Fair Blue Ribbon Foundation*



## *Corndog Kickoff Patron*

As the Iowa State Fair prepares to celebrate America's 250th birthday, we are honoring a year rooted in heritage, history, and heartland pride, while embracing the innovation and creativity that will shape the Fair's future for generations to come.

The Blue Ribbon Foundation is proud to contribute to this legacy by preserving and restoring the historic Iowa State Fairgrounds. Through ongoing renovations and maintenance of our barns and buildings, we ensure this treasured landmark continues to shine. In 2026, we are especially excited to salute the red, white, and blue.

We invite you to stand with us to support our annual benefit auction, the Corndog Kickoff, on Saturday, July 11. This year marks the 30th anniversary of this beloved event — a true celebration of everything that makes the Iowa State Fair an "American Classic."

Your generous support helps fund vital improvements, including modernizing restrooms, installing a grounds-wide

public address system for emergency announcements, and continuing enhancements to the Horse, Cattle, and Swine barns that host cherished livestock shows throughout the year.

For Iowans, the Iowa State Fair is more than an event — it is a proud tradition. Your participation as a Corndog Kickoff Patron ensures this treasured gathering remains strong, vibrant, and accessible for families across our state.

Listed are the different Patron levels and benefits. To become a Patron, please send your donation to the Foundation or register online.

Thank you for your continued support of the Corndog Kickoff and the Blue Ribbon Foundation's mission. Together, we honor our past, strengthen our present, and confidently look toward a bright future — standing proud for our state and our nation.



## *Corndog Kickoff Auction Donation*

The Iowa State Fair Blue Ribbon Foundation is seeking items and experiences for the Corndog Kickoff's silent and live auction. Proceeds from the auction help preserve and improve the buildings, barns, and public spaces that generations of Fairgoers cherish. Your donation plays a direct role in ensuring the Fairgrounds remain a vibrant gathering place for years to come.

We welcome a wide variety of items, including gift baskets, restaurant and retail gift cards, event tickets, handcrafted goods, artwork, collectibles, farm and garden items, themed baskets, overnight stays, unique experiences, and behind-the-scenes tours. Popular packages often feature local flavors, family fun, home décor, wellness

items, or Iowa-made products. Every contribution, large or small, helps strengthen our fundraising efforts and brings us closer to our goal of preserving the Fair's legacy.

Do you have an auction package idea or know someone who might support the auction? Let us know.

For more information about becoming an auction donor, please contact Brooklin Border at 515-262-3111 ext. 370 or [Brooklin@BlueRibbonFoundation.org](mailto:Brooklin@BlueRibbonFoundation.org).

Thank you for considering a donation and helping us build a stronger future for the Fairgrounds.



### *Best of Show - \$10,000:*

- 24 Exclusive Early Admittance Admission Tickets with 3 Reserved Tables
- Logo recognition in Invitations, Auction Books and Event Signage

### *Grand Champion - \$7,500:*

- 16 Exclusive Early Admittance Admission Tickets with 2 Reserved Tables
- Logo recognition in Invitations, Auction Books and Event Signage

### *Champion - \$5,000:*

- 8 Exclusive Early Admittance Admission Tickets with 1 Reserved Table
- Logo recognition in Invitations, Auction Books and Event Signage

### *Blue Ribbon - \$2,000:*

- 8 Exclusive Early Admittance Admission Tickets with 1 Reserved Table
- Name recognition in Invitations and Auction Books

### *Red Ribbon - \$500:*

- 4 Admission Tickets
- Name recognition in Invitations and Auction Books

### *White Ribbon - \$250:*

- 2 Admission Tickets
- Name recognition in Invitations and Auction Books



# Mailbox

"Volunteering is the highlight of our Iowa State Fair experience every year because the people we meet and talk to are always so much fun. We truly enjoy our shift in the Elwell Family Food Center. Thank you for making it possible!"

*Sara Erlandson Cole*  
BLOOMINGTON, MN



IOWA STATE FAIR  
**BLUE RIBBON  
FOUNDATION**

P.O. Box 57130  
DES MOINES, IA 50317

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Permit No. 4301

## NEED TO CONTACT US?

**CALL**  
515-262-3111 Ext. 371

**EMAIL**  
Info@BlueRibbonFoundation.org

**MAIL**  
P.O. Box 57130  
Des Moines, IA 50317

**WWW.BLUERIBBONFOUNDATION.ORG**

## It's Time to Volunteer

Volunteers are the heart of every nonprofit. They help advance the mission, strengthen the community, and create meaningful change. The Iowa State Fair Blue Ribbon Foundation is deeply grateful to our dedicated volunteers whose generosity and hard work make a lasting impact on our organization and the beloved Fairgrounds. Your time, energy, and commitment truly make a difference, and we thank you for supporting our mission.

### Corndog Kickoff

Volunteers are needed for the Corndog Kickoff on Saturday, July 11 — our largest fundraising event of the year. Opportunities include selling merchandise, serving drinks, running prize games, assisting with mobile bidding, and helping guests throughout

the event. This celebration helps build excitement leading up to the Fair, and it's a great way to get involved while supporting a meaningful cause. Past volunteers will be contacted by email, but we are often looking for new people to join us.

### Iowa State Fair

Each summer, more than 650 volunteers help make the Iowa State Fair a success. These volunteers assist shoppers at six merchandise stands, sell bottled water at seven booths, welcome 1854 Society members in the Hospitality Suite, and ensure BINGO runs smoothly on the Grand Concourse. Their dedication plays a vital role in helping us reach our annual fundraising goals and provide a positive experience for Fairgoers.

The VolunteerLocal portal remains the primary way to sign up for Iowa State Fair volunteering and will open on May 20. The best way to stay informed about upcoming opportunities and updates is through the volunteer page on the Foundation's website.

Volunteering with the Blue Ribbon Foundation is rewarding, meaningful, and fun. That's why so many of our volunteers return year after year. We invite you to join us, share your time and talents, and be part of something truly special.

**Contact Brooklin Border for all volunteer opportunities at [Brooklin@BlueRibbonFoundation.org](mailto:Brooklin@BlueRibbonFoundation.org) or 515-262-3111 ext. 370.**

