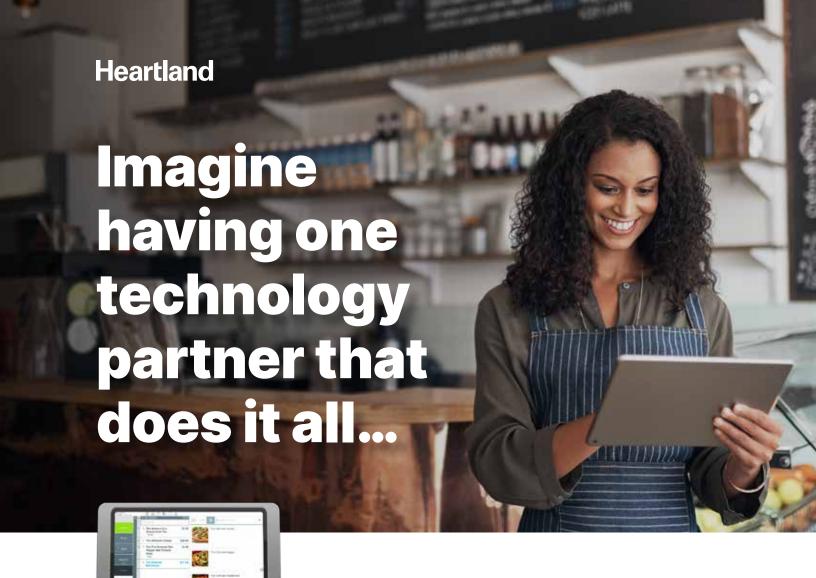
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# IOWA HOSPITALITY ADVOCATE

Iowa Hospitality Advocate is the official publication of the: Iowa Restaurant Association, Iowa Restaurant Association Education Foundation, Iowa Hotel & Lodging Association and Iowa Latino Hospitality Council.

It is produced three times a year and is distributed to hospitality industry professionals across the state of Iowa. Editorial features cover business, legislative, and other trends impacting Iowa members & proprietors.

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# **Letter From the Editor**

As 2024 comes to a close and we look ahead to 2025, it's a good time to reflect on the resilience and innovation of lowa's hospitality industry. This past year brought its share of challenges—rising costs, increased regulation, and shifting guest expectations—but it was also a year of progress and opportunity for lowa's restaurants, bars, and hotels.

One of the highlights for the industry was launching the lowa Latino Hospitality Council. This initiative is already making a difference, empowering Spanish-speaking hospitality owners and operators across the state and introducing the first-ever lowa Latino Restaurant Week, which celebrated the diversity and richness of Latino cuisine across lowa. We also worked to elevate lowa's culinary reputation through partnerships with Choose lowa and the lowa Tourism Office. Together, we showcased lowa as the farm-to-table leader with chef-driven dinners hosted on beautiful lowa farms. These collaborations are more than just events—they position lowa as a culinary destination and a key draw for tourism.

Education has always been a cornerstone of our efforts, but in 2024, we were able to expand our programs significantly thanks to key grants. With the support of a renewed grant from the Governor's Traffic Safety Bureau, we offered ServSafe Alcohol courses across the state in both Spanish and English. Partnering with Iowa Workforce Development, we also use grant funds to provide Certified Food Protection Manager training and began developing a Certified Front of House Professional program in Spanish. These initiatives are equipping Iowa's hospitality professionals with the tools they need to thrive in an ever-changing industry.

As we head into 2025, there's plenty to be hopeful about. While dining trends are shifting—from experiential dining to midweek celebrations—the heart of lowa's hospitality industry remains unchanged. It's still about creating meaningful moments for guests through food, drink, and exceptional service. Yes, new tools like AI and automation will help us adapt, but the personal touch that defines lowa hospitality will always be irreplaceable.

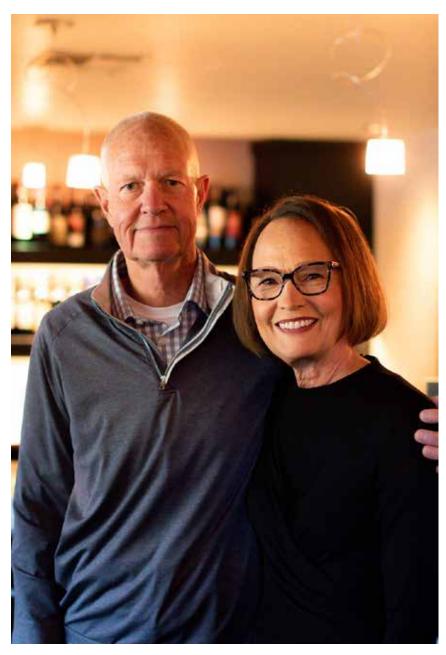
In this issue, we celebrate our 2024 award winners—individuals and businesses whose vision and dedication inspire us all as they raise the bar for the state's hospitality industry.

Here's to making 2025 a year of opportunity and success for Iowa's restaurants, bars, and hotels!

**Jessica Dunker | President & CEO** 

Iowa Restaurant Association | Iowa Hotel & Lodging Association

# Restaurateurs of the Year Jim & Jodi Landau | The Brown Bottle



Jim and Jodi Landau's journey from high school sweethearts to successful restaurateurs reflects their dedication to hospitality and commitment to Cedar Falls. As owners of The Brown Bottle and founders of Montage, they have created beloved dining destinations that combine culinary creativity with community involvement.

The Brown Bottle was originally opened by Jim's parents, Don and Donna Landau. Don had operated a grocery store and burger restaurant in the '60s, followed by a popular pizzeria. However, The Brown Bottle became the family's signature venture. Donna created most of the original recipes, and over the years, Jim and Jodi added their own dishes, ensuring the restaurant adapted to the times, while still preserving its legacy.

Jim began working in the family's restaurant at a young age, and Jodi's first job was at Dairy Queen in Cedar Falls. The two met in high school and married in 1978, with Jodi quickly finding her place in the family business.

In 1985, Jim and Jodi purchased the Cedar Falls Brown Bottle from Jim's parents. 'We had the privilege of continuing the family tradition, but also making the restaurant our own,' Jim said. They kept the restaurant's community focus while putting their own stamp on the menu and experience.

In 1999, Jim and Jodi opened Montage, giving them the opportunity to bring their own vision to life from the start. They blended the types of cuisine they loved and thought the community would embrace. It

also allowed Jodi to apply her interior design talents to create a distinctive atmosphere. Montage played a key role in the early stages of downtown Cedar Falls' revitalization. "We saw the potential in downtown and wanted to create a place that offered both unique food and a great atmosphere," says Jodi. Montage quickly became a favorite, earning a Wine Spectator Award of Excellence in 2002 and every year since. In 2021, Jim and Jodi sold Montage to three longtime employees, ensuring their vision and commitment to quality continue.

The couple took other bold steps, including the forward-thinking decision to make both The Brown Bottle and Montage non-smoking in 1999, long before it was the norm. They've also weathered significant challenges, such as the flood of 2008, which submerged The Brown Bottle, and the COVID-19 pandemic. Through it all, their perseverance has remained constant. "We've always believed in showing up, working hard, and never giving up," says Jim.

For their lasting contributions to Cedar Falls and Iowa's restaurant industry, Jim and Jodi Landau are being honored as the 2024 Iowa Restaurant Association Restaurateurs of the Year.



Each year, the Iowa Restaurant Association celebrates the people and businesses who make Iowa's hospitality industry extraordinary, and our 2024 award winners set the bar once again. In November, we honored the professionals and establishments that pour their hearts into crafting unforgettable experiences. From inspiring mentors shaping the next generation to restaurateurs creating spaces where communities thrive, these winners embody the spirit of Iowa's hospitality culture.

These awards remind us why lowa's restaurants, bars, and dining experiences are about more than just great food—they're about building connections and fostering community.

Nominated by peers, customers, and employees, and carefully selected by the Iowa Restaurant Association, these winners exemplify excellence in Iowa's hospitality industry. Three of them—Restaurant Neighbor Philanthropist, American Dream, and Faces of Diversity— will go on to the national stage, showcasing the excellence that sets Iowa's hospitality industry apart.

These stories are about more than awards—they're about passion, dedication, and the impact hospitality has in our lives. We're excited to share them with you in the pages ahead.

See the Iowa Restaurant Association YouTube channel for additional features on each winner.

# Chef of the Year Chef Anthony Nace | Park Street Kitchen & Bar



Native Iowan Chef Anthony Nace's culinary journey reflects hard work, creativity, and a deep passion for crafting memorable dining experiences. His talent first became evident at family gatherings and was further ignited in high school, where industry professionals recognized his skills in a classroom competition. Inspired, Anthony pursued formal training at Indian Hills Community College, laying the groundwork for a career that has spanned private clubs, restaurants, and hotel kitchens.

Today, as Executive Chef at Hilton Des Moines Downtown, Anthony oversees Park Street Kitchen and Bar and 14,000 square feet of banquet space, managing a team of about 20 culinary professionals. "The kitchen's high pressure and high reward also work well for my personality," he says, adding that he values the creative freedom his role offers in serving diverse national and international guests.

Anthony's "purchase-to-plate" philosophy means he considers every detail, from ingredient sourcing to plating, with an eye on quality, minimal waste, and presentation. His experience, including roles at Radish and Blu Toro Cantina and Grill, has honed his innovative approach, earning him awards like the lowa Restaurant Association's 2023 Culinary Competition title and the Midwest Winner title in the 2017 Chaine des Rotisseurs Young Chef Competition.

In the kitchen, Anthony describes himself as being "ducky"—calm and collected on the surface, with an intense drive beneath. "Ducks also have a sheen that lets water roll off their feathers," he explains, a metaphor that reminds him to stay focused and not get rattled by the unexpected challenges that inevitably arise in an industrial kitchen.

Quick to acknowledge those who helped him, Anthony often credits his mentors, from high school instructors to industry professionals. Today, he pays it forward by mentoring students in a local ProStart classroom, hoping to inspire young chefs as he was once inspired.

"For me, it's about riding the wave and enjoying each step of the journey," says Anthony. It's that calm demeanor, dedication to the culinary arts, and creative vision, that earned Chef Anthony Nace is the honor of Iowa Restaurant Association 2024 Chef of the Year.



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# **Emerging Leader of the Year**

# Isabella Santoro | Northside Diner



When Isabella Santoro and her husband, Ed, opened Northside Diner in Washington, they weren't simply reviving an iconic spot—they were honoring its legacy. The former Winga's Café, a community mainstay since 1928, had been waiting for the right owners to carry it forward. The diner now showcases carefully restored details, from the original tin roof and wood floors to brick walls that have seen generations of Washington residents dine there.

Isabella, who grew up in Italy, was deeply influenced by the country's culture of hospitality and beauty. She daily seeks ways to build a vibrant community and experiential restaurant. Northside Diner's menu celebrates nostalgia and innovation, with classic smash burgers and tenderloin sandwiches made from locally sourced meats alongside falafel bowls and kombucha on tap—pairings that combine comfort food with Isabella's personal favorites.

The décor, too, tells a story. Walls display book art crafted from the now-closed lowa Wesleyan library, reflecting Isabella's love for literature and repurposing anything and everything. Many visitors come to see her unique "book clock," where book titles with the numbers 1 through 12 represent the hours. While many of Winga's original features remain, Isabella's Italian roots are also reflected in touches like wine on tap, served by the half-liter or liter—a rarity in the area.

Stepping into Northside Diner is an intimate look at both Washington's and Isabella's history. Isabella preserved Winga's beloved soda fountain, now a focal point of the updated bar, and added countertops crafted from the wood of local bowling lanes. Displays feature postcards from her travels and a collection of

Winga memorabilia. "For me, this place is like a cozy book—something familiar but with a few surprises," she says.

Beyond her work at the diner, Isabella's commitment to Washington shines through her community involvement—a trait she credits learning from her mother. An active grant writer, she has helped fund public murals, expand local accommodations, and support various community projects. Earlier this year, her love for the town helped Washington win a mural contest, with her video and essay capturing the judges' attention. "If I want Washington to be a certain way, I can't wait for someone else to do it," she reflects. "You have to build the community you want to live in."

For her commitment to using hospitality as a way to blend Washington's rich past with a vibrant future, Isabella Santoro is honored as the Iowa Restaurant Association's 2024 Emerging Leader Award Winner.

# **Champion of the Year** Eric Goranson | Goranson Consulting



Eric Goranson, owner of Goranson Consulting, has been a steadfast advocate for Iowa's hospitality industry since 2016. As the Iowa Restaurant Association's contract lobbyist, he has navigated nine legislative sessions, deftly managing the complexities of the legislative process and advancing critical issues for restaurants and bars across the state.

Eric's journey into lobbying was unconventional. He started in 2006 with no prior experience, taking on clients others might avoid. He learned by observing, asking questions, and building his knowledge from the ground up. Today, he represents a range of clients, including the lowa Restaurant Association, Habitat for Humanity, and the lowa Association of Christian Schools, among others.

Eric's approach to advocacy is personal. "I want clients to know that I care about them more than anything else, and I want legislators to see that commitment to my clients," Eric says. "If it's true, you're way more effective." What attracted him to the restaurant industry was its complexity and how it touches every part of lowa's economy. "I can't think of another industry that affects taxes, employment, and community life like restaurants do," he says. "It's a combination of business and memories, and every lowan values that."

Eric's advocacy has led to several key victories for Iowa's hospitality industry, including DRAM shop reform, cocktails-to-go legislation, youth employment changes, third-party delivery protections, and more. DRAM shop reform, in particular, was one of his most challenging efforts, as he faced intense opposition and emotionally charged arguments. Prior to Eric's involvement, the association had tried for decades to make changes. His persistence paid off after two years of hard work.

Known for his constant presence at the Capitol, Eric believes that relationships and grassroots involvement are essential. "You don't win if you don't show up," Eric says. Legislators always know where to find him, and his clients feel like he's part of their team.

Outside of work, Eric and his wife Rachel have two children. He has an eclectic set of interests ranging from hunting to singing and playing guitar to watching women's soccer.

For his tireless efforts to protect and promote lowa's hospitality industry, Eric Goranson is being honored as the lowa Restaurant Association's 2024 Industry Champion.

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# Rural Operator of the Year

# Marty Duffy | The Cellar Peanut Pub



Marty Duffy loves knowing his customers have a "cool place" to enjoy great beer and conversation. As the owner of the Cellar Peanut Pub in Pella, Marty has created a space where patrons feel comfortable, learn about craft beer, and enjoy the kind of shabby chic atmosphere you'd expect in a big city. He regularly hosts "Beer School," inviting breweries to share their craft and helping his patrons feel confident and "smart" about their beer choices. During Pella's Tulip Time, when up to 20,000 visitors flood the small town, Marty loves surprising visitors with the unexpected charm of his pub.

"We're all about supporting local breweries and creating a space where people can connect over great beer," says Marty.

Originally from New Jersey, Marty moved to Tracy, lowa, during high school and graduated in a class of just 25. He attended William Penn University but was drawn to hospitality early on. In his 20s, he saw the opportunity to open his first Cellar Peanut Pub in Oskaloosa. When his father declined to help fund the endeavor, Marty turned to his grandmother. She agreed—under one condition. Marty had to be the only employee until he paid off the loan, which took three years. He honored what he calls a "Judge Judy" style contract, building the foundation for what the pub has become today.

The Cellar Peanut Pub is a gathering place where people from all walks of life can talk, relax, and enjoy great beer. Marty ensures every customer is greeted when they arrive and thanked when they leave. The Cellar Peanut Pub does not have a kitchen, so patrons are encouraged to bring in meals from nearby restaurants.

Though Marty once owned pubs in Oskaloosa and Newton, he has now focused solely on the Pella location, balancing business with raising his three children. His

wife, Betsy, owns Gezellig Brewing Company, and the pub proudly features her award-winning beers among the 70 on tap.

Marty's dedication to his community and craft beer has earned the pub national recognition, including invitations to the New York Food & Wine Festival, where his famous Bloody Marys have impressed celebrity judges including Oprah.

For his passion and commitment to creating a craft beer haven in small-town lowa, Marty Duffy is the lowa Restaurant Association's 2024 Rural Operator of the Year.

# Philanthropist of the Year

# Katie Huff | Tiger Drive-In



In May 2024, a devastating tornado swept through Greenfield, taking four lives and destroying over 150 homes and businesses. While hundreds of volunteers would eventually come to aid in the recovery, it was locals like Katie Huff, owner of the Tiger Drive-In, who stepped up immediately to provide comfort and support.

The 60-year-old Tiger Drive-In, with its classic exterior walk-up window design, miraculously survived the tornado with only minimal damage despite an employee's car being tossed against its side. Recognizing her opportunity to help, Katie mobilized her team almost immediately after the tornado hit. Although there was no power, friends brought in generators, allowing her to serve hot and cold food. "There were a lot of things I couldn't do," says Katie of the devastation, "but I could feed people."

She and her team began handing out free ice cream, chili dogs, and sandwiches to volunteers, first responders, and residents. Initially using her own inventory, she was able to continue the free meals for weeks thanks to donations pouring in from across the country. "I like to say the angels appeared," Katie explains. "An article in the *New York Times* about our community touched people as far away as Florida and Colorado, and they sent money to keep us going. Their generosity allowed us to serve meals for weeks to people who were displaced and to those who were helping our community rebuild."

Although not a native of Greenfield, Katie carries a strong sense of community. Eight years ago, she and her father invested in the Tiger Drive-In, using his retirement funds to help purchase the business. Originally opened in 1963 as a Tastee Freez, the Tiger Drive-In was already a community institution, appreciated for its lowa nice atmosphere and as a place for first jobs for many local teens. "It's been a gathering place for generations," smiles Katie as serves customers a piece of their daily home baked pie. "Greenfield embodies small-town spirit."

Concludes Katie, "Restaurant people are called to hospitality—we work so others can play. And in times of crisis, if we can feed people and take one worry off their plate, that's what we'll do." That commitment to her community in times of crisis, as well as in daily life, is why Katie Huff is being honored as the Iowa Restaurant Association's 2024 Restaurant Neighbor Philanthropy Award Winner.

Cheers to the 40 Women Elevating lowa's Hospitality Industry. . . A Toast to Your Success!

Special congratulations to the list of women and restaurants we work with!

- Abbey Maas
   The Stuffed Olive; Des Moines
- Andrea McGinness
   WineStyles; West Des Moines
- Kasi Tenborg Carroll
   The Hotel at Kirkwood Center;
   Cedar Rapids
- Rheanne Kinney
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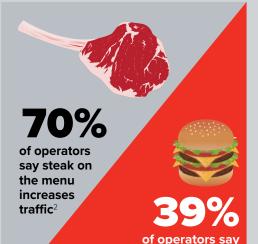
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Soy-Based Burger, 4 oz, raw <sup>8</sup>	240	14	8	0	370	9	19
Pea-Based Burger, 4 oz, raw <sup>9</sup>	250	18	6	0	390	3	20

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# Purveyor of the Year Iowa Beef | Ames



The lowa Beef Industry Council (IBIC) has collaborated with lowa's restaurant industry for decades, advancing both culinary innovation and consumer appreciation for quality beef across the state. But it was their partnership with the lowa Restaurant Association and the launch of a professional chef culinary competition in 2004 that truly elevated the groups' shared commitment to bringing lowa beef to the forefront.

Originally envisioned by then-Association Board Chair Paul Trostel and retired IBIC Executive Director Nancy Degner, the competition was designed to inspire chefs to feature lesser-known beef cuts, encouraging consumer interest in diverse flavors. Initially a traditional blind-tasting event, the competition later evolved to in-restaurant judging to allow dishes to be appreciated in their intended setting. Each year, the competition culminates at the Association's annual Gala with a People's Choice Award, where the public samples competition dishes and votes for their favorites, and top chefs receive cash prizes recognizing their innovation.

The partnership between IBIC and the Association doesn't end with the competition. IBIC's lowa's Best Burger Contest, launched 15 years ago, further celebrates lowa's dining scene and promotes culinary tourism. This year, more than 500 nominees vied for a spot in the top 10, with burgers evaluated on taste, appearance, and proper doneness by anonymous judges—a meaningful achievement and major business driver for winning restaurants.

Beyond competitions and contests, IBIC is a key supporter of the lowa Restaurant Association Education Foundation, providing both funds and beef for high school classrooms. Their "Beef 101" program educates ProStart students and culinary school students in meat cutting and preparation, nurturing the next generation of food industry talent.

"Chefs play a huge role in inspiring consumers to explore beef in new ways," says IBIC Executive Director Mike Anderson. "Our industries are linked—finding creative ways to use all parts of the product benefits us all." Adds IBIC's Kylie Petersen, "Seeing chefs and restaurateurs embrace beef with as much passion as we feel about our farms is inspiring."

For its dedication to advancing Iowa beef and strengthening partnerships within the restaurant industry, the Iowa Beef Industry Council is honored as the Iowa Restaurant Association's 2024 Purveyor Partner of the Year.

# **Sustainability Award Winner** Gilroy's Kitchen + Pub + Patio | Carl Wertzberger



Since opening in 2016, Gilroy's Kitchen + Pub + Patio in West Des Moines has made sustainability a core value of its operations. From the beginning, the team has focused on fine-tuning the small details through energy-efficient practices, waste reduction, and community support in their daily operations.

"Sustainability is more than a responsibility," says Carl Wertzberger, managing partner at Gilroy's. "It's the right thing to do. Whether it's reducing energy use or donating food to local organizations, we're always looking for ways to benefit both our business and the community."

A standout initiative at Gilroy's is the use of GridPoint technology to optimize energy consumption through a smart HVAC system. This innovative system automates building functions and actively manages energy operations. By providing real-time insights into energy performance, the technology helps reduce costs, optimize energy use, and ensure consistent temperature comfort for guests and employees in varying climate conditions. As Carl notes, "Optimizing our building this way frees up time and resources for our team to focus on delivering exceptional dining experiences."

In addition to their energy efforts, Gilroy's runs a comprehensive recycling program, having kept over 6,500 bushels of bottles and cans out of landfills. These initiatives have saved significant energy and reduced emissions, proving how small actions can lead to big environmental impacts.

The restaurant's commitment to sustainability extends to philanthropy as well. Each week, they partner with Urban Dreams, a local nonprofit, to donate surplus food from brunch services, helping those in need while minimizing food waste.

Gilroy's also embraces innovation, from cutting-edge marketing platforms to operational streamlining, continuously evolving to enhance guest experiences and stay ahead in a competitive industry.

With their proactive approach to energy management, waste reduction, and community engagement, Gilroy's is setting an example for the restaurant industry. This is why they are being honored the Iowa Restaurant Association and award sponsor Woodriver Energy with the 2024 Sustainability & Innovation Award.



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#### **Meet The Instructor**

**Instructor Amy Stevens** is a current bar owner who brings 27 years of teaching and 15+ years of hospitality industry experience to the classroom.

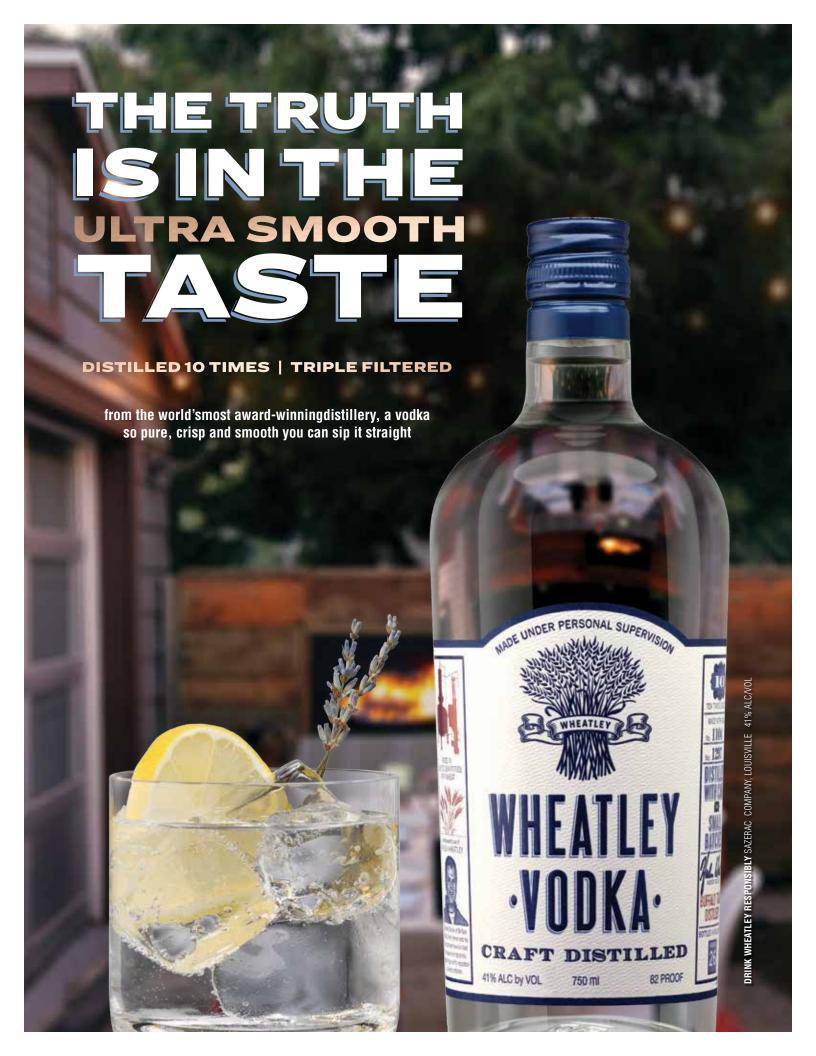
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# **Employee of the Year** Emily Eppler | Foodie Garage Eatery

Emily Eppler, general manager and server at Foodie Garage Eatery, has been a part of the Dubuque restaurant scene for more than 20 years. She began her career at Midtown Marina, where she served, bartended, and even cooked when needed. After briefly stepping away from hospitality, Emily quickly realized, "a desk job isn't for me." In 2021, she joined the team at Foodie Garage and quickly became a vital part of the award-winning eatery.

Opened in 2019 by Chuck and Alysia Bowers, Foodie Garage Eatery offers reimagined comfort food with a menu featuring 82 unique burgers. The 44-seat restaurant, decorated with vintage decor, reflects the personality of its owners and the surrounding neighborhood. Foodie Garage has built a loyal following and landed a spot on Iowa's Best Burger list multiple times. The restaurant can go from empty to packed in minutes, and Emily is in the middle of it all, keeping everything running smoothly.

"Emily is the heart of our team," says owner Alysia Bowers. "Her passion for both the restaurant and our customers shows every day."

Even during the busiest times, Emily has the ability to make patrons feel like they're her only table, guiding them through the extensive menu and typically recommending five burgers based on their tastes. Her ability to manage both the floor and the flow of service is key to the restaurant's success.

Emily's relationships with her customers run deep. She chokes up when talking about a regular who recently passed away. He would stay all day, coming in for breakfast, lunch, and dinner, and Emily still misses him. "It's more than just a job to me," she says. "When people walk through the door, I want them to feel like they're part of something special, and I'm here to make sure they leave feeling cared for."



In addition to managing the front of house, Emily trains new servers, ensuring that Foodie Garage's customer-focused approach is understood and upheld. She treats the restaurant as if it were her own. Emily balances her dedication to the restaurant with raising four daughters and being with her partner of 20+ years.

Emily Eppler's dedication to customer service and genuine love for her work have earned her the title of 2024 Iowa Restaurant Association Employee of the Year.

# Legislator of the Year Majority Leader Matt Windschitl | District 17



Majority Leader Matt Windschitl has played a critical role in advancing key legislative initiatives that have supported lowa's hospitality industry. Though not often in the spotlight, his behind-the-scenes leadership has been essential in navigating complex legislation and ensuring its success, particularly during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Windschitl was instrumental in securing a \$40 million restaurant and bar relief fund when the industry was reeling from the effects of the pandemic. His support also paved the way for reforms like cocktails-to-Go, third-party delivery protections, youth employment reform, and allowing restaurants and bars to step outside of traditional distribution channels to purchase limited cases of beer at retail for resale during times of need.

As Majority Leader since 2019, Windschitl has focused on empowering his colleagues, smoothing the path for them to take the lead on critical issues. "Good governance is about giving people the tools and space to succeed," Windschitl says. "I believe the role of government is to create an environment where businesses can thrive and individuals can succeed—not to stand in the way."

A father of two, Windschitl brings his commitment to both his family and his state into his legislative work. He has spent over 18 years in the lowa House, steadily building a reputation for listening to all sides and working through tough issues with a calm, collaborative approach. A U.S. Marine Corps veteran who served in Iraq, Windschitl applies the leadership principles he learned in the military to his work in the legislature, helping others succeed while rarely stepping into the limelight.

"Matt Windschitl has been a stalwart supporter of the hospitality industry," said Jessica Dunker, President and CEO of the lowa Restaurant Association. "His steady leadership may seem quiet, but it has been vital in achieving results that matter to our community."

For his invaluable contributions and his commitment to helping the hospitality industry succeed, House Majority Leader Matt Windschitl is being honored as the 2024 Iowa Restaurant Association Legislator of the Year.



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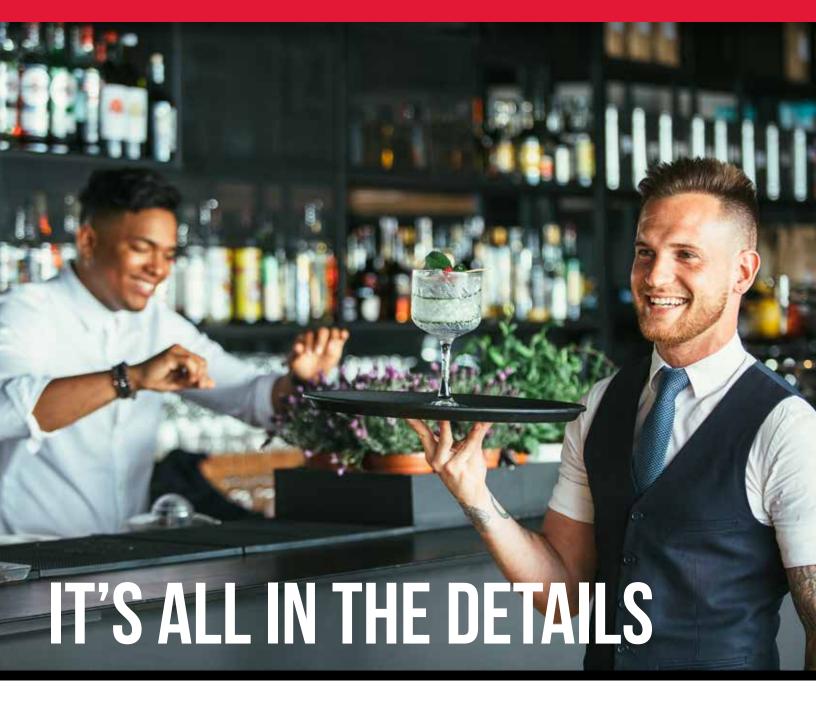


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# Faces of Diversity Lum Naw | MinGaLaBar Burmese Kitchen



Lum Naw's journey from Burma to Iowa is a remarkable testament to resilience, faith, and the power of sharing culture through food. Arriving in the U.S. as a refugee, Lum settled in Iowa with her younger siblings, supporting them while they attended school.

Entrepreneurial from the start, she opened a hair salon but always had a dream to share Burmese cuisine with the community. A woman of faith, she often prayed for the right opportunity to present itself and believes that opening Mingalabar was truly meant to be.

MinGaLaBar, meaning "welcome" but also offers a blessings and peace, encapsulating the spirit of Burmese hospitality in both name and experience. Lum has always shared love through food, first opening her apartment and later her home for Burmese church gatherings, cooking for everyone until the group outgrew her space and moved to its own building.

That restaurant's menu highlights traditional Burmese dishes—a fusion of Indian, Thai, and uniquely Burmese flavors. The walls are adorned with traditional photos from Burma and ingredients sourced from her husband's nearby grocery store add authentic touches, turning each meal into a cultural experience.

"With MinGaLaBar, I want guests to leave feeling happy and satisfied, to think about it, talk about it, and come back to try something new. Food is where we meet and share our culture and love for one another," Lum says.

For less adventurous guests, she offers familiar options like sushi and Chinese-American favorites, though she always encourages them to try a Burmese dish, confident they'll find something special.

Opening MinGaLaBar came with challenges. Lum purchased an old Pizza Hut and believed that with some interior changes, it would be ready to go. But the venture required extensive and costly upgrades, such as a new hood and grease trap.

"I stayed focused on this dream," Lum recalls, even as the process demanded time and investment.

Her perseverance paid off, and MinGaLaBar has grown into more than a restaurant—it's a community gathering spot that offers lowans a taste of the vibrant culture of Burma.

For her resilience, vision, and unwavering commitment to sharing Burmese culture, Lum Naw is being honored as the Iowa Restaurant Association's 2024 Faces of Diversity Award Winner.

# **American Dream**Gloria Henriquez | Tullpa



Gloria Henriquez's journey to the U.S. began in 1999 when she left South America to escape violence, seeking safety and opportunity. After initially settling on the East Coast, Gloria faced the challenge of adapting to a new language, job, and culture. Family later brought her to lowa when her mother became ill; Gloria wanted her mother's final years to be filled with family and togetherness. Today, she has found a deep sense of belonging here in lowa.

She originally used her training to work as a registered nurse, but Gloria's love for cooking and cultural heritage kept tugging at her heart—calling her to the restaurant industry. In 2022, she decided to make the leap and opened Tullpa in Urbandale, bringing a unique blend of Ecuadorian, Peruvian, and Colombian flavors to central lowa. "'Tullpa' means 'fire pit' in Quechua," she explains, "and it represents the warmth and tradition I want people to experience here."

Her menu features authentic South American dishes like Llapingachos, Bandeja Paisa, and Lomo Saltado, providing her guests with a true taste of the Andes. "One of the most meaningful moments for me is when someone tells me that a dish reminds them of their grandmother," Gloria shares. "It brings tears to their eyes—and mine."

Gloria's restaurant quickly gained a devoted following, winning "Best Local Restaurant" in Urbandale, an achievement that affirmed her decision to open Tullpa and share her culture. She credits her success to the hard work and values instilled by her family, noting that her dedication to Tullpa is inspired by her parents' strong connection to community.

In addition to her work at Tullpa, Gloria is a committed advocate for Latino entrepreneurs as the founding board chair and president of the lowa Latino Hospitality Council. Through her role, she supports the visibility, education, and success of Latino-owned businesses across the state. "Being part of this community means giving back," she says. "I want to empower others to see that they can build their own dreams here in lowa."

For Gloria, Tullpa is more than a restaurant—it's a bridge connecting cultures, fostering understanding, and sharing the beauty of her heritage. For her dedication to celebrating Latino culture and her commitment to community, Gloria Henriquez is being honored with the Iowa Restaurant Association's 2024 American Dream Award.



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# Mentor of the Year

# **Chef Eric Divis | South Sioux City Marriott Riverfront**



At just 23, Chef Eric Divis is making his mark in the industry, as well as his former high school classroom. As the Banquet Sous Chef at the South Sioux City Marriott Riverfront, he manages a 55,000-square-foot event space that can host up to 2,100 guests. Eric began working in the Marriott kitchen straight out of high school while attending Western Iowa Tech culinary school. At only 19, he was promoted to sous chef. "I love the organization and planning that banquets require," he shares. "It's a great fit for my way of thinking."

Beyond his role at the Marriott, Chef Eric is also a mentor in Sioux City North's ProStart classroom—the same program he participated in during high school. Adopted by North High during Eric's senior year, ProStart gave him a taste of the industry, but he only experienced a portion of the two-year curriculum. Now, he's excited to see the full program in action, especially with hands-on skills like budgeting and safety standards that weren't part of his experience. "As a chef, most of my day isn't spent cooking—it's planning and managing, which is what I want to show students," he says. "The real side of being a chef includes a lot of responsibility."

Chef Eric regularly joins ProStart classes, guiding students through everything from prepping staff luncheons to meat fabrication. He collaborates with a Western Iowa Tech chef instructor to offer steak-cutting demonstrations, and the ProStart students join Sioux City's fire science class for joint grilling sessions. "Cooking with love can't be automated," Eric shares. "I want students to see that the personal touch is what makes cooking truly special."

Chef Eric credits his former instructor, ProStart

educator Kelsey Miller, for inspiring his commitment to mentorship. "Kelsey was a real mentor to me; it's an honor to be back in her classroom, sharing what I've learned," he says. He's particularly proud of today's students, who are gaining essential certifications like Food Handler and Certified Food Protection Manager—skills that set them up for success in a demanding industry.

Concludes Chef Eric, "The culinary world gives back as much as you put into it. Seeing these students grow and knowing I can play a part in that—it's incredibly rewarding."

For his dedication to inspiring and nurturing new culinary talent, Chef Eric Divis is being honored as the Iowa Restaurant Association's 2024 Mentor of the Year.

# **ProStart Educator of the Year**

# **Kelsey Miller | South Sioux City High School**



Sioux City North ProStart teacher Kelsey Miller had already built a successful career in the restaurant industry when she discovered a passion for teaching. "I never thought I'd be a teacher," laughs Kelsey, who had often struggled in school. "But when I realized the impact I could have on students, it felt like the right path." Kelsey first entered her Sioux City North FCS classroom as a student teacher, and since taking the reins, she has grown the program from just eight students to over 80.

Her approach to teaching is shaped, in part, by a desire to give students the opportunities she wishes she'd had. A portion of class time is dedicated to preparing students for industry certifications through ServSafe. This year alone, her students earned 55 Food Handler certifications, which Kelsey proudly displays in the hallway outside her classroom. ProStart 2 students have the opportunity to study for and take the advanced Certified Food Protection Manager exam, with eight out of eleven passing this year. For one student already working in the industry, this credential led to an instant \$2-per-hour raise.

Kelsey organizes hands-on projects like special faculty lunches, where teachers order and pay for meals that students prepare and serve. Departments often gather for these meals, watching students step into their roles as servers. "When students see the staff enjoying a meal they helped create, they feel proud and gain confidence," she says. Teachers across the school often notice the difference these experiences make, as students develop skills in teamwork, ownership, and professionalism they can carry into any future career.

Kelsey emphasizes the food industry's opportunities for rapid growth and financial stability, especially for students who may not pursue college. "It's a real-world career path where hard work is rewarded, and you can advance quickly," she says, pointing to former student Chef Eric Divis, who now returns as a classroom mentor. "Having someone close to their age, who was once in their shoes, really helps them see what's possible," she shares.

For Kelsey, teaching is about creating a supportive environment where students gain life skills alongside their culinary education. For her dedication to her students, their futures, and building the industry, Kelsey Miller is being honored as the 2024 lowa ProStart Educator of Excellence.



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# Celebrating 40 Women Making an Impact in Iowa's Hospitality Industry

Each year, the Iowa Restaurant Association celebrates the exceptional women shaping Iowa's hospitality industry. From restaurateurs and hoteliers to tourism leaders and purveyors, these honorees embody the creativity, resilience, and innovation that drive the industry forward.

Women have long been at the heart of hospitality, making up 56% of the workforce—well above the national average for other industries. Yet, while women lead in entry- and mid-level roles, only 38% hold executive positions. Despite these challenges, women entrepreneurs are creating their own opportunities, with one-third of restaurants majority-owned by women and nearly half co-owned by women.

This year's honorees are also revitalizing lowa's small-town hospitality scene in remarkable ways. Many are breathing new life into rural Main Streets, opening bricks-and-mortar businesses that serve as hubs for their communities. Others are leading the charge in industries supporting hospitality, such as tourism, food distribution, and marketing. Collectively, they reflect the strength of women driving the industry forward and uncovering opportunities in an-ever evolving environment.

These 40 women exemplify leadership, mentorship, and the power of hospitality to transform both lives and communities. Read on to meet the 2024 honorees and discover how they are building lowa's hospitality future.

Thank you to 40 Women to Watch sponsor Delta Dental. See extended stories on each honoree at restaurantiowa.com.



**Abbey Maas** The Stuffed Olive

Abbey entered the industry to "pay bills" but ultimately found a fulfilling career. Now the lead bartender and assistant manager, Abbey has been instrumental in building The Stuffed Olive's brand. She credits this in part to a commitment to continual self-education. Says Abbey, "The more you know, the better you can adapt."

#### **Abby Cary** Fun Station Adventure Park

Abby's career showcases the infinite paths available to women in hospitality. She started hosting at age 14 and stayed with the company moving through their management track. Today she is Corporate Director of Operations for parent company Edwards Entertainment. Abby exudes hospitality and is committed to providing exceptional experiences for her staff and guests alike.



## **Alesia Lewis** Longhorn Steakhouse

Alesia's nominator says that as Managing Partner for LongHorn Steakhouse she has literally "increased every metric of success." Alesia has also mentored and encouraged other women, promoting two up and coming stars into management. Alesia says that hospitality is a fulfilling career that fills her desire to help others and provide exceptional service.



#### **Amelia Keller** Barrett's Quality Eats

At only 21 years old, Amelia is already serving as the Events & Catering Coordinator for Barrett's Quality Eats, one of the Iowa City area's hottest new restaurants. She is also a full-time student at University of Iowa. Her nominator notes. "Amelia's success-driven mindset and relentless pursuit of excellence have raised the bar for lowa hospitality."



### Andrea McGinness WineStyles

After opening a WineStyles in 2006, Andrea and her husband later purchased the company. They rebranded to include wine and craft beer service on tap, as well as gourmet foods and small plates. Today WineStyles is known as a "wine shop by day," and "wine bar by night." She has always been drawn to the industry. Says Andrea, "We are in the people business!"



Annie is a principal of one of the state's largest independent restaurant groups which includes nearly two dozen bars, restaurants and nightclubs. Annie is a true owner/ operator, who can still be found working the floor. She is described by many as a mentor and teacher who always has time to invest in her team.



**Arletta McCoy** Lady Jerk's Soul Food Catering

As founder and owner of Lady Jerk Soul Food and Catering, Arletta credits her grandmother as her inspiration. Arletta worked in assisted living before starting her award-winning business. She encourages women entrepreneurs stay the course—even when the going gets tough. Says Arletta, Make your dreams come true because you are strong enough to do it!"



# **Brenda Ochiltree**

The Candy Kitchen Brenda is an eighth generation owner of The Wilton Candy Kitchen which was founded in 1909. In her nearly 20 years as co-owner Brenda has helped employees prioritize customer service. Her philosophy is unwavering. "Be sincere. Treat people as you would want to be treated and do it with a smile."



#### **Brittany Todd** Mill Street Mocha

The owner of Mill Street Mocha is passionate about changing service industry stereotypes. Says Brittany, "It IS acceptable to "flip burgers", "make fancy coffee" and "scoop ice cream" as a career stepping stone, AND as a career path. Don't settle if it's not what you want for yourself, but don't see it as failure if you enjoy what you were doing every day."



#### **Brynn Vander Beek** Montage | Le Petit

Brynn is a critical part of both Montage and Le Petit teams. These independently-owned eateries provide unique experiences and according to her nominator, Brynn is one of their best kept secrets, writing, "Brynn works tirelessly to ensure both businesses run smoothly and that we are well connected within the community."







**Cat Wood** Hyper Energy Bar

Cat Wood says the "sky's the limit" for women in hospitality. The Area Chief Operating Energista, for Heart of America's Hyper Energy Bars, Cat has worked her way through the ranks of the multistate hospitality group. Says Cat, "Be the energy in your own career. Challenge yourself to be the culture leader."

### **Cathy Bishop** The Venue at Aggies

30 years ago, this Colorado bank examiner returned to her hometown and opened a BBQ restaurant which later became an event venue. Her smoker, dubbed, "The Beast" still works nonstop. Named the SBA lowa 2024 Small Business Person of the Year, she also serves on the boards of the Siouxland Chamber and the Sergeant Bluff Community Foundation.



#### **Chelsea Funk** Cattlemen's Steakhouse

Nominated by her team, Chelsea is defined by many as the very "essence of hospitality." She worked in her mother's bakery before joining the Catttlemen's Steakhouse team as a server. She was quickly promoted to shift manager, trainer, and then manager where today she focuses on the business, as well as customer experience.



#### **Clara Chaplin Bolton & Hay**

Clara has worked with restaurants on their commercial kitchen equipment and supply needs for more than 20 years. She thinks hospitality taps much of what women do best-mentoring, leading and helping others. Clara encourages women not to limit themselves saying, "There are many avenues to take within the industry. Find where you fit!"

#### **Danielle Cobley**

Guesthouse Tavern & Oyster Bar This GM says hospitality "makes me happier than any other type of industry." Danielle has charted a career that included many of the area's most popular restaurants and see possibilities for other women as well. "We are strong and determined - this is a great industry to get things done, see change and



**Connie Schlichting** Kinseth Hospitality

With more than 25 years of hospitality experience, the now Food & Beverage Director for Kinseth Hospitality oversees their portfolio of full-service hotel properties, including Hilton, Marriott, and IHG Brands in Eastern Iowa and Western Illinois. Connie's passion is taking an immersive hands-on approach and teaching by example all while sharing her vast knowledge with her properties.



**Jade Heine Bremer Brewing Company** 

Covid was the catalyst for this home brewer to turn her passion into a career. Today Jade serves as her award-winning brewery's taproom and kitchen manager. Says Jade, "Hospitality, specifically the brewing industry, is a great industry for women. The craft beer industry is becoming more diverse and many women are making our mark along the way."



**Jade Luter** Daisy's Garage

For the owner of Daisy's Garage and Cruz's Café with another establishment on the way, hospitality is more than just business—it's a way of life! A serial entrepreneur, Jade is always on the hunt for new ways to innovate saying, "Never sell yourself short, you can accomplish anything as a woman in this industry!"



create smiles."

**Jessie Stein** Barley's Bar

As Barleys manager and event coordinator, Jessica appreciates playing a part in patrons' significant life events. Says Jessica, "I love that our customers trust us to make their events special." Jessica, whose prior career was in social work, also values the flexibility of the industry, which allows her to prioritize family first.



#### **Jennifer Santoro** Northside Diner

Jennifer has delighted patrons from lowa to England in food trucks and fine dining restaurants. The chef of a rural café she helped reimagine into a culinary destination, Jennifer says of women in hospitality, "We can become great role models of dedication, patience, tolerance, positive attitudes and responsibility. We can build and become part of something great."





**Jonnann Benedict Destination Grille** 

When Jonnann left a nursing career to help open a sushi restaurant people were perplexed. But the now managing partner and GM of Destination Grille says it was one of the best decisions of her life saying, "I'm regularly asked why I would leave nursing to open a restaurant—as though I downgraded my career. In reality, it's just as rewarding and



The employee who nominated Karley call her "a force to be reckoned with" and the "backbone of the establishment." Now the GM of the popular restaurant Karley says, "It's that love of good conversation that helped me find a home in hospitality," adding the industry is an "amazing land of misfits" because there's a place for everyone.



#### **Kasi Tenborg Carroll** The Hotel at Kirkwood Center

Kasi recalls playing restaurant with her grandfather. Perhaps that is what sparked the interest for the now Director of Food & Beverage of the state's largest full-service teaching hotel. Regardless of the position, for Kasi hospitality has ever felt like work. "It has always been an act I have enjoyed, even on the hard days, sometimes more on the hard days."



Kathleen Vondrak Oakview Group

Growing up Kathleen was known as "Julie the Cruise Director." So planning events was second nature for the now General Manager of Food & Beverage for OVG Hospitality. Advises Kathleen, "Learn the ins and outs of the operation whether it has a direct correlation to your job or not. The knowledge will be the foundation of your success."



Kathryn Wiklund Fresko

As Beverage Director for one of Des Moines' hottest restaurants, Kathryn says it takes passion and compassion to keep a hospitality business thriving. Noting, "This world is full of uncertainty, so I want to prove to patrons that when they come in they are promised one thing, and that is to forget the world and enjoy the moment they are in."



Kelly Crosby's nominator says she "has been making people's dream come true for her entire career." The Catering Director has helped countless guests plan and execute events. When she needs a reminder of why she spends countless hours on every detail, she opens a file of hundreds of hand-written notes from appreciative guests, events or organizations that she's worked with.



**Kim Carlson Bonnet** Rubaiyat

Kim has worked every restaurant role in her 30 year career. She constantly seeks ways to enhance guest experience in her awardwinning fine dining establishment noting, "I get to do my job. I want to do my job. There isn't a mentality that I "HAVE" to do a job...I am present every day. I want my guests to know how much I appreciate them."



**Madeline Trumm** Isle Casino Hotel

As the Hospitality Manager for a 194 room Casino Hotel, Madeline Trumm also manages the organization's housekeeping, food and beverage outlets, and sales and events teams. After completing a business administration degree at UNI she quickly realized hospitalitywas her passion. Says Madeline of her career potential, "The hospitality industry has countless opportunities and avenues for professional growth."

Nisa Salmen Hardline Coffee Co.

Nisa says hospitality is "a true calling" and those who answer are in a unique position to better the lives of others. Her nominator calls her coffeeshop the "cultural hub of downtown Sioux City." Says Nisa, "My career in hospitality has blessed me with the opportunity to create an inclusive gathering space and engage with my community in an impactful way."



**Noreen Otto** Iowa Brewers Guild

Noreen likes to talk about the "shine theory": the concept that when we celebrate the women around us, it helps us shine. As **Executive Director of the Iowa Brewers** Guild, she represents a group that agrees. Says Noreen, "The motto of the Iowa Brewers Guild is "Drink Beer. Make Friends." and that positive message is about community and celebration."







**Rachel Holt** The Quarry

As a self-taught restaurateur, caterer, and baker, this coffee shop turned restaurant owner believes there are many paths women can take in the hospitality industry. Says Rachel, "While education at any level can help with beginning a job in hospitality, it is the combination of learned skills and hands-on experience that can establish a lifelong and successful career in this industry."

#### Rae Guillermo Dessert Mixologist

Rae's lifelong pursuit has been a study of food and drinks. The once university food service manager, discovered her passion for recipe writing and helped write a benefit cookbook. She traveled the globe developing breakfast food products until reuniting with a college friend to create plant-based line of desserts. Says Rae, "Finding creative solutions every day is guaranteed in this industry!"



#### **Rheanne Kinney** Wakonda Club

As GM and COO for a 100+ year old golf and country club, this one-time accountant says she learned the business "from the balance sheet." But adds the best thing about hospitality is making the world a better place." Says Rheanne, "We may not be saving lives, but we are certainly improving them. People always have, and always will, need hospitality."



### Sara Winkleman S&B Farms Distillery

This distillery co-founder helped transform corn grown on her Kossuth County farm into award-winning spirits. Inspired by a friend's moonshine project, Sara's entrepreneurial spirit was ignited. Today her friends serve as her tasters. "It's a lot of trial and error," says Sara. "It's got to be, 'Wow, this is amazing.' So until we hit that 'amazing,' I don't stop."



#### **Sherry Ziegler Waner** Des Lux Hotel

With more than 20 years as the Bar Manager, Sherry understands the importance of hospitality and quality. Known for one of the state's best martini menus, Sherry is quick to customize a cocktail based on a few well-asked questions. Her nominator wrote, "Sherry has been an encourager and uplifted women in the Des Moines hospitality industry for decades."



By age 8, this award-winning chef knew her future career choice. Her nominator wrote, "Chef Tessa's creations never fail to impress and inspire." But Tessa also takes seriously her role as mentor saying, "The inclusive, diverse, and vibrant culture of the hospitality industry holds pace for anyone who is willing to show commitment to their team and the guests they serve."



## **Chef Thi Truong** Vibes Kitchen & Bar

This highly accomplished chef is also a passionate advocate for minority and refugee women entrepreneurs. She is willing to help anyone take their cooking talents and turn them into a business. Says Chef Thi, "If I can do it, you can, too." Today, her innovative dishes have made Vibes Kitchen & Bar one of the metro's most popular restaurants.



# **Tonya Grimm**

Sundown Bar & Grill

After a successful healthcare career, Tonya decided to pursue her dream of opening a restaurant. She first worked at Sundown Bar & Grill and within a year, purchased the longstanding local establishment. She immediately put her special touches in place -keeping favorite dishes but also expanding the menu to draw in new clientele while still keeping the regulars coming in.

#### Ximena Rojas Blue Bean

Ximena is passionate about creating spaces where people can connect, collaborate, and thrive. She loves providing an environment where great coffee and a sense of community converge. Blue Bean features coffee flights and gourmet toasts, as well as hybrid, high tech shared work spaces. Ximena's advice, "Build a strong network, seek mentors, and never underestimate the power of resilience."

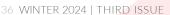


#### **OC Lemonade Stand Restaurant**

Yasmin provides opportunities to people who dream of starting their own foodservice operation. The Lemonade Stand is a For-Profit Mission-Based Restaurant focused on people development for the Quad Cities hospitality market. Coined "Turn Key Operator Interns" the employees are expected to learn kitchen, service, ordering and inventory, scheduling as well as office operations.











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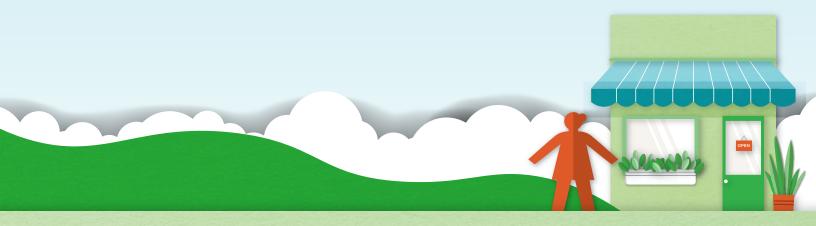


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# Federal Issues Pose Growing Challenges for Iowa Hospitality Operators

In 2024, federal regulations and agency decisions created significant hurdles for Iowa's restaurants and hotels. Shifting rules and court decisions forced the hospitality industry to navigate an ever-shifting regulatory landscape. As 2025 approaches, federal policies will likely play an even larger role in shaping the industry's future.

#### **Major Wins, Ongoing Challenges**

Recent advocacy efforts have delivered key victories. For example, restaurants were excluded from the FTC's final rule on junk fees, saving operators billions in potential costs. This win, achieved through grassroots advocacy led by the National Restaurant Association, underscores the importance of industry engagement. Similarly, a federal court struck down the Department of Labor's overtime rule, avoiding costly salary threshold changes for both restaurant and hotel operators. However, not all battles have remained resolved. In a surprising turn of events, the Fifth Circuit Court of Appeals has once again halted the enforcement of the Beneficial Ownership Information (BOI) registration requirements under the Corporate Transparency Act (CTA). This decision reverses the December 23rd ruling that reinstated the BOI reporting mandate.

While the U.S. Department of Treasury's Financial Crimes Enforcement Network (FinCEN) has not yet issued formal guidance in response to the ruling, it is expected they will comply. This ongoing regulatory uncertainty highlights the importance of monitoring updates from FinCEN. Restaurant and hotel operators should consult their legal or financial advisors for guidance on whether to file voluntarily or wait for further clarification.

The reinstatement of this rule, along with other ongoing challenges like OSHA's proposed Heat Rule, highlights the fluid nature of federal regulations. Both restaurant and hotel operators must stay vigilant as these policies continue to evolve in 2025.



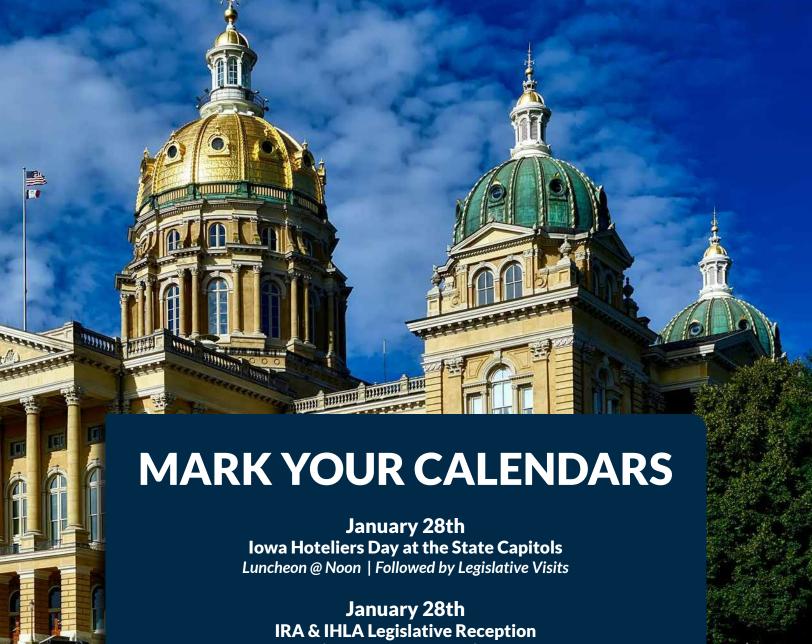
Swipe fees on sales taxes, excise taxes, and gratuities place an unnecessary burden on lowa's hospitality and retail sectors. Banks charge swipe fees on the full transaction amount, including taxes and gratuities—funds that businesses do not keep but remit to state and local governments. This practice forces operators in lowa's restaurants, bars, hotels, grocery stores, and convenience stores to cover costs unrelated to their revenue, effectively penalizing them for serving as tax collectors.

Advocating for legislation to prohibit swipe fees on taxes and gratuities is critical to leveling the playing field for Iowa businesses. Similar reforms have passed in Illinois and would also align with federal efforts such as the Credit Card Competition Act, which aims to introduce competition in credit card payments. Eliminating these fees on sales tax and gratuities will be a top issue for the Iowa Restaurant Association and Iowa Hotel & Lodging Association in 2025.

## Become a Voice for the Industry

In the months ahead, hospitality operators will have multiple opportunities to engage in advocacy efforts at both the state and federal levels. These events provide a platform for restaurants, hotels, and other stakeholders to connect with lawmakers and push for solutions that strengthen the industry. With critical issues on the horizon, participating in these efforts is a vital step toward shaping a stronger future for lowa's hospitality sector.





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