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WINTER 2025

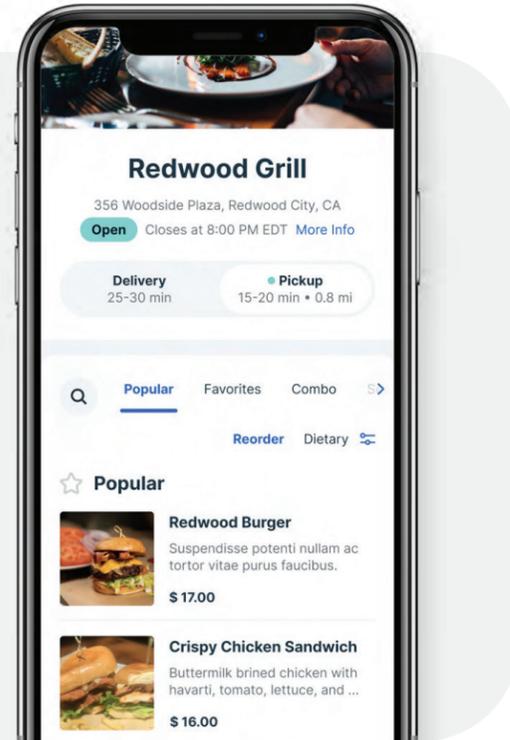


Iowa Restaurant Association
Restaurant Neighbor Philanthropist of the Year
Alfonso Medina
La Carreta Mexican Grill

INSIDE: Iowa Restaurant Association's Annual Industry Award Winners & 2025 40 Women to Watch

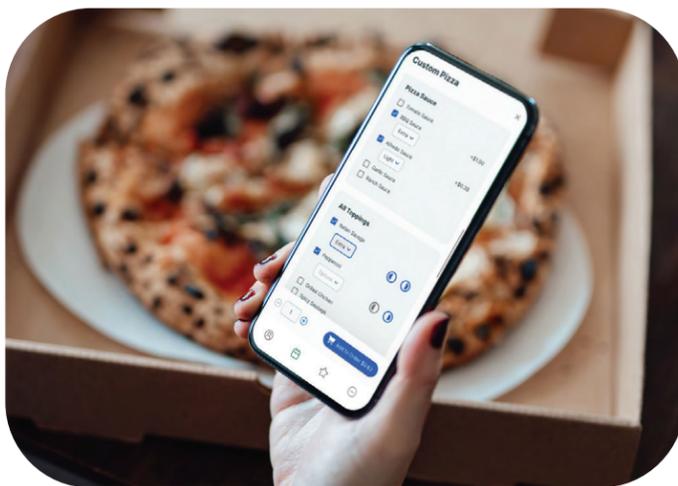
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IOWA HOSPITALITY ADVOCATE

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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Celebrating the People

Who Lead, Inspire, and Set the Standard for Iowa Hospitality

Each year, the Iowa Restaurant Association shines a spotlight on the people and businesses who make Iowa's hospitality industry exceptional—and this year's award winners continue to raise the bar. In November, we gathered to celebrate the professionals and establishments whose passion, creativity, and leadership shape the places we love to dine, gather, and connect.

From inspiring mentors guiding the next generation to operators creating welcoming spaces where communities come together, these honorees embody the heart of Iowa hospitality. Their work reminds us that our industry is about far more than what's on the plate—it's about relationships, opportunity, and the sense of belonging that hospitality creates.

Nominated by peers, customers, and employees, and carefully selected by the Iowa Restaurant Association, these winners represent the very best of our industry. Our Community Impact winners will advance to the national stage, carrying Iowa's story of excellence beyond our state lines.

These pages share more than award titles—they share stories of dedication, resilience, and the meaningful impact hospitality has on our communities. We're proud to celebrate these leaders and invite you to explore their journeys ahead.

Additional video features on each winner are available on the Iowa Restaurant Association YouTube channel.



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Bob Rand & Lorrie Luense
Archie's Waeside | Le Mars

If you ask siblings Bob Rand and Lorrie Luense what truly seasons the steaks at Archie's Waeside, they won't start with marbling or the dry-aging room. They'll start with family—their grandfather Archie Jackson, who escaped Russia and learned to cut and age beef in the packing houses; and their mother Valerie, who kept the doors open, grew the place, and taught her kids how to run a restaurant with heart.

You feel Valerie everywhere. Her beloved Department 56 Christmas villages sparkle year-round in the dining rooms, a twinkling wink that says this house is still a home. You hear Archie in the stories—told with giggles—about a larger-than-life butcher who believed Iowa beef was the best on earth and proved it nightly from a small roadhouse in Le Mars.

Bob keeps the craft as close as family. When he's in Le Mars, you'll often find him stepping up to the same butcher-block boards his grandfather used, hand-cutting steaks by feel and eye just as Archie did. Those boards, worn smooth by millions of cuts, are a reminder that the heart of Archie's is still in the hands that prepare the beef. Longtime staff, some of whom have been in the kitchen for decades, carry on those traditions daily. Bob himself often heads to the line to expedite, inspecting each plate before it leaves the kitchen—because at Archie's, every steak is someone's most important meal that day.

Ask about awards and he'll shrug, then tell you where the James Beard "America's Classics" medal (2015) usually lives: in a kitchen cabinet. When his kids used to complain about dinner, he'd pull out the medal, slip it over his neck, and say, "When you have one of these, you can complain." (They ate.) Wine at Archie's is a family album, too. Years of

friendships in Napa turned into Archie's private-label vintages, each bottle a chapter: an artist's rendering of Valerie; a black-and-white photo of Archie; and a favorite label that shows all three generations—Archie, Valerie, and toddler Bob. That last one even needed special ATF approval because it features a child... Bob himself. The message on every cork is the same: this place is built on people.

Lorrie is the heartbeat in the dining rooms—remembering names, celebrating milestones, making sure first-timers feel like regulars and regulars feel like family. Together, she and Bob have kept the menu a love letter to American beef—a dozen-plus cuts—and the service straightforward and warm. Relish trays roll, Manhattans land, and conversations drift from "How do you like it cooked?" to "How's your granddaughter?"

National attention has come—Rachael Ray, NPR's The Splendid Table, and that James Beard medal—but Archie's remains proudly itself: a small-town steakhouse where employees stay for decades and where guests mark engagements, anniversaries, and 50-year class reunions in the same booths their parents did.

"Our philosophy is simple," says Bob. "Be here. Be here to greet, to mentor, to cut, to taste, to tell the old stories and make room for new ones."

For stewarding an Iowa icon with skill, humor, and unmistakable love, siblings Bob Rand and Lorrie Luense of Archie's Waeside are the Iowa Restaurant Association's 2025 Restaurateurs of the Year.



Chef Sam Gelman
The Webster & Paper Crane | Iowa City

Chef Sam Gelman's path to becoming the 2025 Iowa Restaurant Association Chef of the Year begins and ends in Iowa City. He grew up spending time on the community's northside, where he often met his father and grandfather for milkshakes and egg salad sandwiches at the lunch counter of Pearson's Drug Store—the very spot where The Webster now stands. Gelman named the restaurant for his grandfather, Dr. Webster Gelman, whose artwork now hangs on the walls.

Sam developed a passion for food at a young age. He began collecting cookbooks, experimenting in the kitchen, and working in local restaurants while still in high school. At 18, he was accepted to the Culinary Institute of America in Hyde Park, New York.

After graduating, Gelman built his career in some of the country's most demanding kitchens. He worked with acclaimed chefs such as Ken Oringer and David Chang, becoming a top lieutenant in Chang's Momofuku Restaurant Group and helping open restaurants across the United States and Canada.

When it came time to open his own restaurant, Gelman and his wife, Riene, returned to Iowa City in 2021 to launch The Webster in the heart of the northside neighborhood where he grew up. The restaurant quickly drew national attention, earning a place on The New York Times' 2023 list of 50 restaurants nationwide that excite its editors, as well as recognition on USA Today's Restaurants

of the Year list. The Webster features an open kitchen, chef's counter, private dining spaces, and a carefully curated wine cellar with thousands of bottles selected by Riene. Gelman and his team fabricate whole animals in-house, source locally whenever possible, and create a seasonal menu that changes daily.

"I wanted to create neighborhood restaurant where people can come in regularly and feel at home, while still drawing guests from across the region," Gelman says.

That philosophy has turned The Webster into both a community anchor and a regional destination.

Last year, the Gelmans expanded their commitment to Iowa City's dining scene with Paper Crane Ramen Shop & Cocktail Lounge, opened just across the street with longtime collaborator Edwin Lee. Paper Crane introduces ramen crafted with care alongside a beautifully designed cocktail lounge aimed at Iowa City's more mature residents and visiting diners. Together, the two restaurants bring new energy and variety to the northside.

For his culinary excellence, his investment in his community, and his influence on the state's dining reputation, Chef Sam Gelman is the 2025 Iowa Restaurant Association Chef of the Year.



May Schaben

Iowa Restaurant Association Education Foundation | West Des Moines

For 30 years, May Schaben has been the steady hand and passionate heart of the Iowa Restaurant Association. She joined the Association in November 1995 as its only employee, working under then-CEO Doni Denucci. With little more than a stack of paper records and a determination to rebuild, she began transferring members into a new database, helping reorganize the board, managing finances, planning trade shows, and supporting legislative efforts. Over time, she would hold nearly every position in the organization, even serving as interim CEO between Denucci and current CEO Jessica Dunker.

Schaben, a Bettendorf native, literally grew up in the Association. Alongside her professional milestones, she got married in the Des Moines Metro, and raised two children—Erin, now a college freshman, and Luke, a high school student. Her family has grown up alongside her IRA career, and many restaurateurs, sponsors, and board members have watched her journey unfold.

Her greatest professional legacy is tied to education. In 2012, Schaben became Executive Director of the Iowa Restaurant Association Education Foundation, dedicating herself fully to building ProStart in Iowa. What began with three schools has grown to more than 30, impacting hundreds of high school students across the state. She created scholarships, strengthened relationships with Iowa's colleges, and helped develop articulation agreements so ProStart graduates could earn college credit. She also co-founded

the Association's annual culinary competition, which has become one of the longest-standing and most prestigious contests in the state.

Schaben is quick to share that what has kept her motivated is not only the variety of the work but also the people she has met along the way—restaurateurs, educators, students, and colleagues who became like family. She takes special pride in giving lost or uncertain students a pathway into hospitality, an industry she champions as one of the last where entrepreneurship and upward mobility remain within reach for anyone willing to work hard.

Those who know Schaben also know her devotion to Notre Dame, often hearing her say, "Play Like a Champion." It is a fitting mantra for a professional who has spent three decades helping others believe in themselves and in the opportunities this industry provides.

"It's hard to sum up 30 years of gratitude for the job and career I've had," she reflects. "This industry has loved me, and I've tried to love it back by helping build it."

For her dedication, vision, and commitment to education, May Schaben is the Iowa Restaurant Association's 2025 Champion Award winner.

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Brad Waldron

The Rusty Duck | Dexter

Brad Waldron didn't buy a destination restaurant—he built one. In 2004, a friend tipped him to a little place down a road he'd never driven. The bar was covered in blue shag carpet, the building needed everything, and the price was high. Brad countered, kept the heavy old flat-top (which he still uses today), and went to work.

Twenty-one years later, diners drive from hours away—and even from Japan, Australia, and Saudi Arabia—for steaks, burgers, and exacting, warm hospitality.

Waldron is the Rusty Duck's keeper of details. He cuts his own steaks from fresh, choice boxed beef and grinds trimmings for hand-patted burgers (8 or 14 ounces).

In 2011, he business trajectory was set when he earned "Iowa's Best Burger." Later that year, he added Top Ten Tenderloin honors. The rush grew; the standards didn't budge. Salads go out on chilled plates, garnishes face the guest, and hot food hits the table the moment the bell rings.

The menu is decidedly Iowa—big cuts, honest sides. The steak de Burgo (butter or cream sauce—your call) anchors favorites like blackened ribeyes, onion rings, and "homies." Portions are generous by design.

"I don't skimp," Brad says. "If you're going to make people drive to Dexter, you'd better make it worth the drive."

His path runs through kitchens that taught discipline and consistency: Gino's (kitchen manager), opening The Big Steer for a cattleman who trusted his standards, owning Figlia's —and even a stint selling cars when life demanded it. He came back the way most lifers do—because nothing matches the Friday/Saturday dinner rush. "I don't get paid by the hour," he jokes. "I get paid by the table."

It's family, too. His son is often on the line; his daughter will still occasionally work the front. Long-time employees—teachers, nurses, veterans—return because they know what's expected and why. New hires may think Brad's tough until they realize he's demanding on their behalf and the guest's—lessons rooted in his Grandma Leona's kitchen, where Brad learned to cook.

Brad rarely advertises; he trusts the room and the plate. Ask him for advice and he won't give a slogan—he'll give a standard: be consistent. Show up. Make it the same—and hot—every time.

For building a rural institution on craft, discipline, and heart, Brad Waldron of The Rusty Duck is the Iowa Restaurant Association's 2025 Rural Restaurateur of the Year.



Jason Krull

Aura Restaurant & Lounge | Clive

Cephus Wright

Aura Restaurant & Lounge | Clive

When Jason Krull and Cephus Wright bought Aura Restaurant & Lounge in Clive in 2024, it wasn't the beginning of their story—it was the culmination of years spent working side by side in restaurants across the Des Moines metro.

Their friendship, forged through long shifts and shared goals, always circled back to the idea of someday owning a place together—a promise they sealed during COVID over a half-bottle of Scotch. They left it corked for five years and finally reopened it to celebrate their purchase of Aura.

Jason's path began at Bruegger's Bagels in West Des Moines at 16, when he needed money for a car. That first job launched a career that led to leadership roles opening and managing restaurants, where he earned a reputation for rolling up his sleeves—whether as general manager, server, or even dishwasher on a busy night.

Cephus's journey was equally hands-on. An East High graduate, he moved from construction to Hy-Vee before finding his footing in restaurants, where he quickly excelled as a server, bartender, and beverage director. He also pursued Level 1 Sommelier certification, forming a tasting group and building a deep knowledge of wine that now shapes Aura's Third Thursday wine dinners. A constant student of the industry, Cephus devours books and draws inspiration from

mentors and colleagues across Iowa. Jason credits Cephus with pushing him to take more risks, while Cephus says he's learned from Jason the importance of balancing ambition with family—a lesson especially meaningful as both raise young families while running a restaurant.

Together, Jason and Cephus have made Aura a neighborhood anchor, pairing seasonal menus with thoughtful hospitality. They are owner-operators in the truest sense, willing to work any position in the building to ensure service never falters. Aura remains a place where guests can enjoy experiential dining built on food, wine, and service that reflect both partners' strengths—Krull's steady operations background and Cephus's sommelier training and passion for beverages.

Notes Cephus, "We don't just see ourselves as a family in the restaurant—we're a team, and our goal is to win championships. That means training, educating, and holding ourselves accountable so every guest has an experience worth remembering."

For their vision, teamwork, and drive to create lasting impact, Jason Krull and Cephus Wright are the Iowa Restaurant Association's 2025 Emerging Hospitality Leaders.

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When Alfonso Medina reopened his family's restaurant, La Carreta Mexican Grill, in Marshalltown in 2018, he knew he wanted it to be more than a place to serve burritos and tacos. He wanted it to be a gathering space where culture, conversation, and community could come together.

That vision became national news in 2020, when Medina responded to an anonymous letter criticizing a yard sign he had placed outside the restaurant supporting human rights. His reply – “No Love, No Tacos” – went viral. Medina trademarked the phrase and used it not for personal gain, but to fuel scholarships at Marshalltown Community College.

Over the past decade, the Medina family has awarded scholarships to dozens of students who write about “What the American Dream Means to Me.”

The giving has not stopped there. Medina has quietly paid off thousands of dollars in school lunch debt for Marshalltown students, donated a bike repair station to the city's trail system, and kept food flowing during crises – from the pandemic to the derecho storm that devastated Iowa.

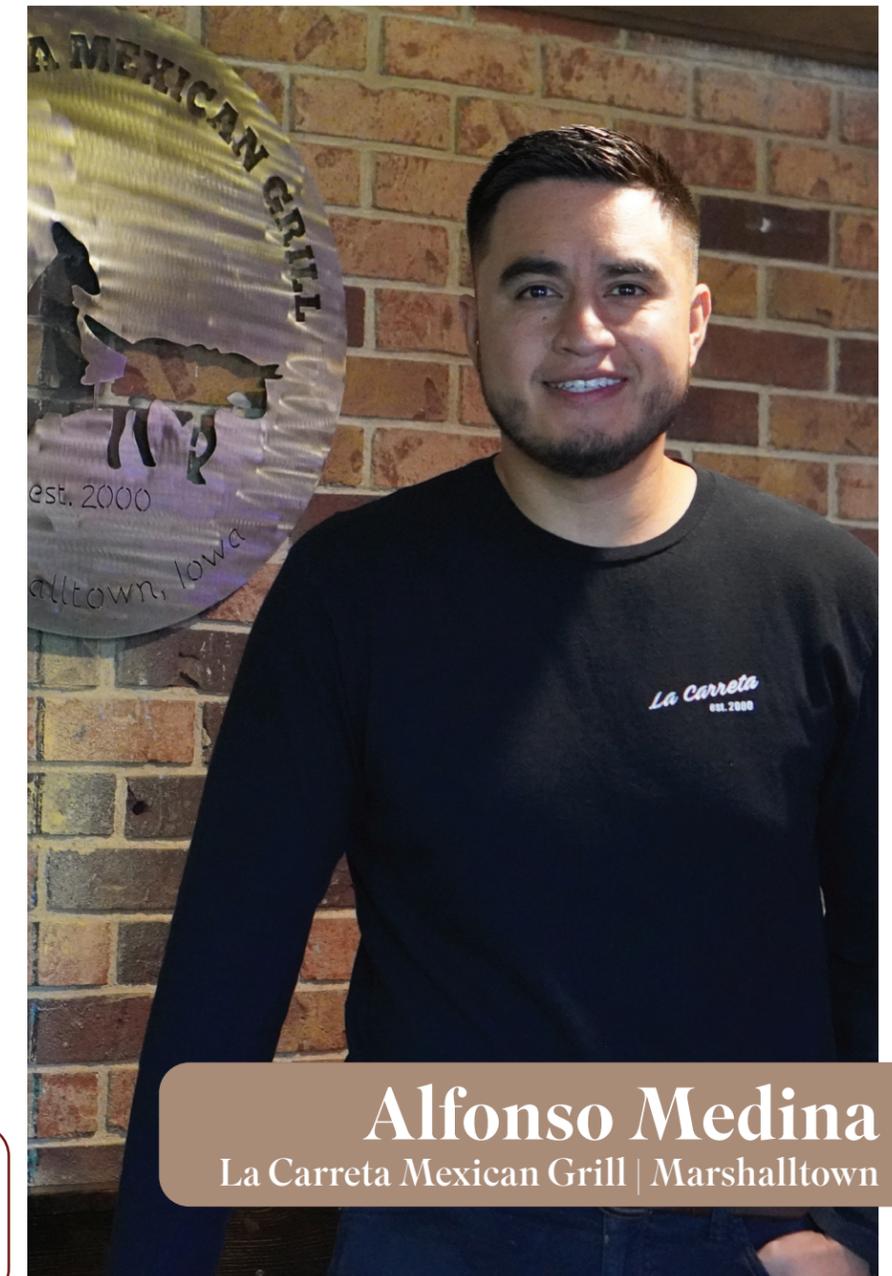
He says it is simply an extension of his philosophy: “If a small restaurant like ours can make an impact, others can too.”

Medina also lives this belief inside his own four walls. He gifts copies of The Four Agreements to staff and customers, using its lessons as a foundation for how people can treat one another. His restaurant has become a place of harmony, where conversation is encouraged and respect is expected. And the food has received national recognition as well – in 2019, La Carreta's burritos were named to Food Network's list of the best in America.

Family remains at the center of his purpose. Medina and his wife, Vanessa, are raising their young daughter Amelia with the same values of kindness and resilience that guide La Carreta. He is intentional about closing the restaurant on Sundays and around the holidays, giving his team time for their own families as well.

For Medina, good food is only part of the story. “We sell tacos,” he says, “but what we're really building is community.”

For his generosity, courage, and creative approach to using a restaurant as a platform for positive change, Alfonso Medina is the Iowa Restaurant Association's 2025 Restaurant Neighbor Philanthropist of the Year.



Alfonso Medina
La Carreta Mexican Grill | Marshalltown



Betti Grandgenett
Zombie Burger + Drink Lab | Des Moines

For more than 25 years, Michelle “Betti” Grandgenett has been a steady presence in Des Moines restaurants and a part of the Orchestrate family—even before the company was founded. From the early days at Raccoon River Brewing Company to her role today at Zombie Burger + Drink Lab, she has built a career centered on service and relationships.

Her approach is simple: lead with kindness and gratitude, a philosophy she sums up by saying, “The food here is amazing—it sells itself. What I sell is the experience.”

Regulars agree, coming not just for a meal but for the warmth of being welcomed by her. When mentoring younger servers, she reminds them that the people you work with shape your experience. Her best advice? “Take care of yourself—if you don’t, you can’t take care of other people.”

Though offered management roles, Betti chose to remain a server because it’s where her passion lies. She is happiest on the floor, caring for guests and training the next generation. Over the years, she has even trained the children of Orchestrate’s owners, a reflection of her longevity and trusted role.

Her dedication extends beyond the restaurant. Once, when a guest realized he had left his laptop behind while his flight was boarding at the Des Moines airport, Betti sprung into action, delivering it

to the airport herself to ensure he made both the flight and his deadline.

But for Betti, the true highlights are the long-term relationships she builds with guests. She fondly recalls an elderly man who visited Raccoon River Brewing Company every Friday afternoon. Betti would reserve his favorite table, set it with a bottle of wine, and greet him with warm conversation upon his arrival. This routine continued for years. While it may seem like a small gesture, this consistent dedication to guest service reflects Betti’s genuine thoughtfulness and care for others.

Betti and her husband raised two children in Des Moines, and she credits the flexibility of restaurant work with allowing her to build a career she loved while still making it to school events. Now, with her children grown, she appreciates that same balance for travel, family time, and caring for her two dogs.

She describes her coworkers as a second family, recalling group trips like one to the Kentucky Derby. Leaders at Orchestrate call her “the perfect example of a hospitality professional—someone who lifts up guests, coworkers, and the restaurant itself through her dedication every single day.”

For her decades of service, her mentorship of others, and the joy she brings to hospitality, Michelle “Betti” Grandgenett is the Iowa Restaurant Association’s 2025 Employee of the Year.



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When Rob and Dr. Christi Taylor founded Revelton Distilling in Osceola, they wanted to prove that world-class spirits could be made from Iowa grain — and that “buying local” begins with supporting your own community.

Every bottle at Revelton starts with Iowa grain — corn, rye, and barley — grown by farmers in Clarke, Decatur, and Adams counties. The distillery’s spent mash returns to nearby farms as feed, creating a true “grain-to-glass-to-grain” cycle. Revelton looks for farmers who use soil-health and conservation practices like dual-cropping rye and soybeans.

“If we ask people to buy local, we have to practice what we preach,” Rob says. “That means using Iowa ingredients, hiring Iowa people, and finding sustainable ways to give back to Iowa farms.”

The idea started on a road trip to Kentucky, when a Wild Turkey distiller asked Rob, then serving in the Iowa House, a question that struck him.

“Why do you use the best corn in the world to make ethanol instead of whiskey?” On the 13-hour drive back, the Taylors pondered what an Iowa-made bourbon could become. That was 2011. Friday date nights soon turned into business-planning sessions, and by 2020, their dream had a front door.

From the beginning, efficiency was built into the design. Revelton’s facility is powered by solar panels, heated and cooled by geothermal systems, and lit entirely by LEDs.

“Nothing goes down the drain here except the water we use for cleaning,” Rob notes. Advanced filtration achieves near-glacier purity while minimizing waste.

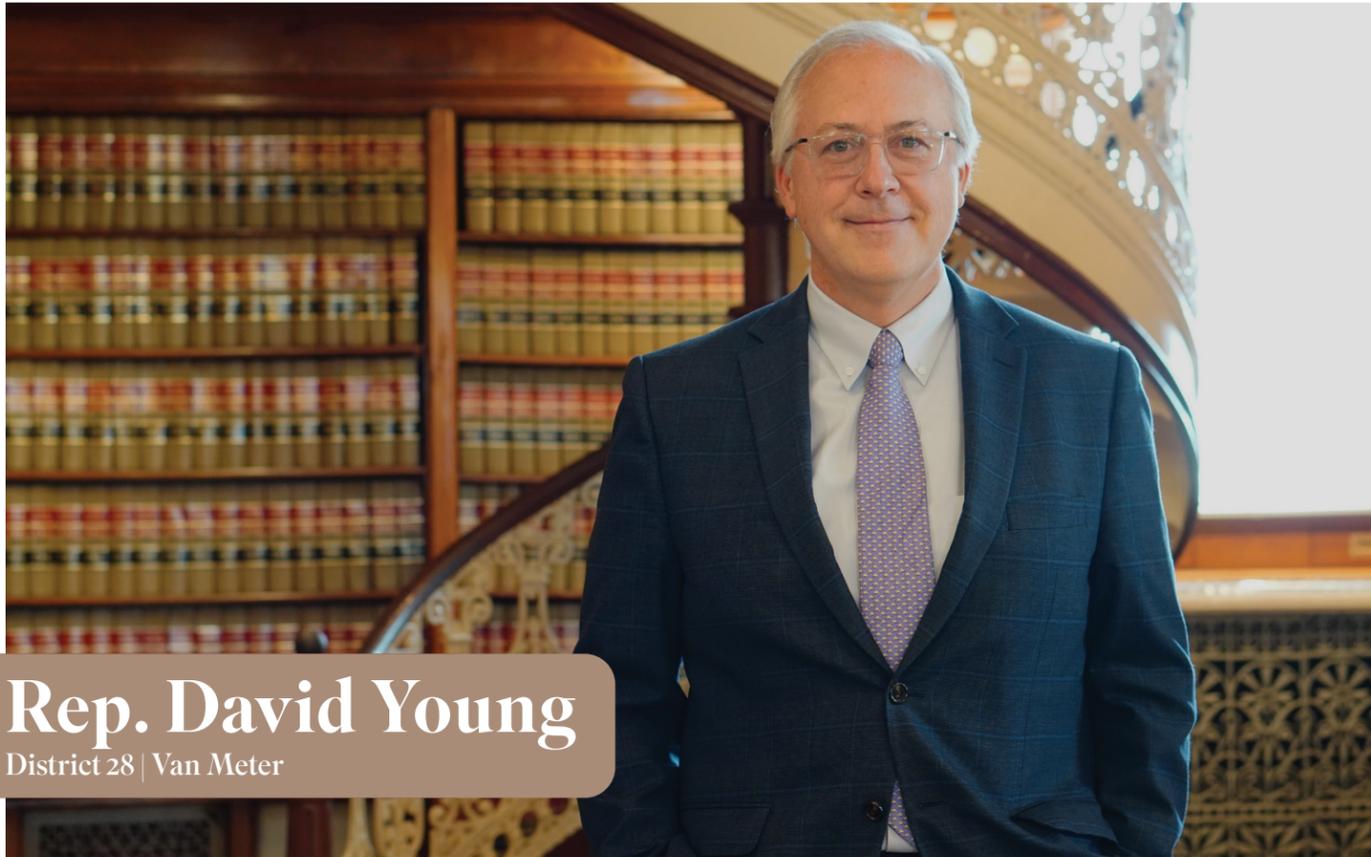
In the distillery, even the byproducts are reused — lime peels from the tasting room’s cocktails become part of the next botanical run in Christi’s gins, while the fruit stays for drinks. Upstairs, the Art Deco-inspired tasting room welcomes more than 20,000 visitors each year to sample Revelton’s family of spirits — neat or in handcrafted cocktails. The lineup even includes Revelton’s own house-made root beer.

Together with their 27-member team, the Taylors have created a family-friendly destination that fuels Osceola’s growing tourism economy. Their “others before self” philosophy extends beyond their walls through partnerships with local farms and wineries, live-music events, and programs like Harvest Hosts that invite travelers to experience southern Iowa hospitality firsthand. By sourcing within 50 miles whenever possible and working directly with local producers, the Taylors have turned one distillery into an anchor for rural renewal.

For blending innovation, stewardship, and local pride in every pour, Revelton Distilling Company is the Iowa Restaurant Association’s 2025 Sustainability Award winner.



Rob & Dr. Christi Taylor
Revelton Distilling Company | Osceola



Rep. David Young
District 28 | Van Meter

Representative David Young’s connection to hospitality goes back to his family’s roots. His grandparents ran Young’s Café in Van Meter in the 1950s and were even ahead of their time in the portable food business—selling sack lunches to bridge construction workers straight from their car. Young himself worked as a server while attending Drake University, the first male server at Johnny’s Vets Club in Valley Junction.

He often says that working in restaurants is like earning a Ph.D. in social and emotional learning, teaching compassion, teamwork, and resilience—lessons that have stayed with him throughout his public career.

Not long after graduating from Drake, Young loaded up his car and drove to Washington, D.C., determined to work for his home state of Iowa. Without a job lined up, he knocked on dozens of doors on Capitol Hill until opportunities opened and eventually becoming Chief of Staff to Senator Chuck Grassley. That role gave him a deep understanding of how federal policy intersects with Iowa communities and introduced him to national partners such as the National Restaurant Association. In 2014, he ran for Congress himself, representing Iowa’s 3rd District from 2015 to 2019, before returning to his roots and continuing his service in the Iowa House of Representatives.

At both the federal and state levels, Young has earned respect as a pro-business legislator who understands the challenges restaurants face. He introduced Iowa legislation to eliminate state income tax on tips, ensuring that servers keep more of what they earn. Beyond policy, his reputation is one of accessibility and responsiveness.

“My favorite work has always been directly helping constituents,” Young reflects. “In Congress, I made sure to visit all 16 counties in my district every month, and at the Statehouse, I still feel the same way. It’s about helping people get relief, answers, and access when they need it most. It’s listening and leading.”

For his long record of support, his deep respect for the industry, and his ability to connect policy with people, Representative David Young is the Iowa Restaurant Association’s 2025 Legislator of the Year.

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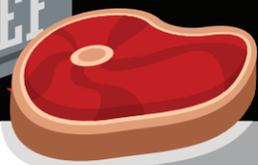
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Chef Arturo Mora
Roots 95 & Flame Cantina | Johnston

When Arturo Mora emigrated from Mexico in 1995 with little money and speaking only Spanish, he carried two things: determination to work hard and a belief that food could create opportunity. Nearly 30 years later, he owns Flame Group, a hospitality company employing more than 75 people through food trucks, catering, and restaurants including Flame Cantina, Flame Taqueria, and Roots 95 Craft Kitchen & Bar in Johnston.

\$100 day at a festival, the truck grew steadily, generating \$300,000 in sales in 2020. That success paved the way for restaurants in Johnston, Ankeny, and most recently, Norwalk.

The name Roots 95 carries deep meaning. “Ninety-five was the year I immigrated,” Mora explains. “Roots are your foundation—for your family, your community, your business.”

Mora's path was anything but easy. He started as a teenager in Chicago, making hashbrowns in a small Greek café before moving into chain restaurants like Panda Express, where he helped locations in Iowa. Hungry to learn fine dining, he volunteered in fine dining kitchens until chefs recognized his talent and brought him on. He eventually left a stable corporate job, trading salary and benefits for hourly work, because he knew growth required sacrifice.

That philosophy guides not only his restaurants but also his role in the wider industry. Mora serves on the board of the newly formed Iowa Latino Hospitality Council, where he shares his experience to support other entrepreneurs building their own foundations.

Those choices paid off. Mora rose through roles at Phat Chefs, Christopher's, and The Cheesecake Factory, where he helped open restaurants across the United States and Mexico City. But with a young family in Iowa, he wanted to build something of his own.

He credits his wife, Hayley, a West Des Moines teacher, for keeping their family grounded and beams with pride at their children: Julia, who nominated him for the award, and Sam. Julia's words capture both his drive and his priorities: “My dad is the hardest worker... even with his restaurants and food trucks he still makes it to my track and cross-country meets.”

Using a personal loan, he bought and retrofitted a used truck by hand, launching the Flame food truck in Des Moines. From its first

For his resilience, vision, and devotion to both family and community, Arturo Mora is the Iowa Restaurant Association's 2025 American Dream Award winner.

Sales:

BEEF DRIVES^{1,2}
greater overall profit dollars



as diners tend to order more appetizers, sides, desserts and alcohol



70%
of operators say steak on the menu increases traffic²

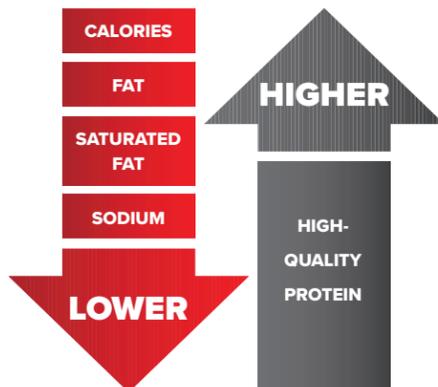


39%
of operators say increased demand for the product is why they've increased ground beef volume²

Sustenance:

93%

Lean Ground Beef



Than Meat Substitutes

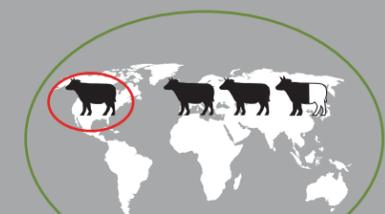


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Sustainability:

Beef is more sustainable than ever

The U.S. has had the **LOWEST** beef emissions intensity in the world since 1996.³



Globally, it takes 2.66 cattle to produce the same amount of beef that comes from **JUST ONE ANIMAL IN THE U.S.**⁴

	Calories (kcal)	Total Fat (g)	Saturated Fat (g)	Cholesterol (mg)	Sodium (mg)	Total Carb (g)	Protein (g)
Ground Beef 80% Lean, 4 oz, raw ⁵	290	23	9	80	75	0	19
Ground Beef 93% Lean, 4 oz, raw ⁶	170	8	3.5	70	75	0	24
Ground Beef 96% Lean, 4 oz, raw ⁷	150	4.5	2	70	75	0	25
Soy-Based Burger, 4 oz, raw ⁸	240	14	8	0	370	9	19
Pea-Based Burger, 4 oz, raw ⁹	250	18	6	0	390	3	20

2021 © Cattlemen's Beef Board and National Cattlemen's Beef Association #032221-22

1. 2016 Chef and Beef Value Study (Datassential)
2. 2019 Technomic Volumetric Study
3. Climate Watch Data, Agriculture. Found on <https://www.climatewatchdata.org/sectors/agriculture?emissionType=13&emissionsCountry=EUU&filter=#drivers-of-emissions>; FAO-STAT, Emissions intensities. Found on <http://www.fao.org/faostat/en/#data/EI>
4. U.N. Food and Agriculture Organization. FAOSTAT Database – Food and agricultural data. Available at: <http://www.fao.org/faostat/en/#home> accessed December 6, 2019
5. USDA National Nutrient Database for Standard Reference for beef. NDB# 23572 <https://ndb.nal.usda.gov/ndb/search/list>
6. USDA National Nutrient Database for Standard Reference for beef. NDB# 23472 <https://ndb.nal.usda.gov/ndb/search/list>
7. USDA Ground Beef Calculator: <https://ndb.nal.usda.gov/ndb/beef/show>
8. www.impossiblefoods.com/burger/
9. <https://fdc.nal.usda.gov/fdc-app.html#/food-details/797991/nutrients>



Claire Anderson
Johnston High School | Johnston

For Claire Anderson, teaching ProStart at Johnston High School is about more than introducing students to culinary skills. It's about helping them find a future. Since 2018, Anderson has built a program centered on clear, tangible outcomes—especially helping students earn the ProStart Certificate of Achievement (COA). With that credential, students graduate high school with up to a semester of college credit and a clearer path into the restaurant industry.

Anderson's own path began in Conrad, Iowa. After graduating from BCLUW High School, she followed her mom into teaching, graduating from Iowa State University with a Family and Consumer Sciences Education degree. She started her career at Cedar Falls High School before moving to Johnston, where she helped launch the school's ProStart program.

Anderson credits her student teaching experience with now retired Hampton-Dumont ProStart teacher Jane Hoegh as pivotal. "She showed me what this program could be," Claire recalls. "When you start teaching, you have to figure out your niche—whether that's competitions, industry connections, mentoring, or curriculum. Pick one and do it really well. For me, it's the COA. It's the best way I can help students connect their classroom experience to real-world opportunities."

Her results speak for themselves. In her second year, Johnston had four students earn COAs, each completing a demanding skills

checklist and logging at least 400 hours in restaurants. Many have launched directly into the industry or advanced their education sooner.

Anderson points to former student Grace Kinnick as an example. Says Claire, "She earned her COA, graduated early, went on to Iowa Culinary Institute, and today works at Big Grove. Her story shows what the COA can do."

Industry partners have been key to that success. Anderson has built strong ties with local chefs, including Chef Anthony Nace, who regularly speaks to her classes. "He connects with students in a way that rivals a college program," she says.

Outside the classroom, Anderson is quick to give credit to her students.

"You can't do this without really good kids. They're the key. I've been lucky to teach students who bring passion, and my role is to give them the structure and opportunities to see what's possible."

For her commitment to student success, her focus on meaningful outcomes, and her belief that high school culinary programs can change lives, Claire Anderson is the Iowa Restaurant Association's 2025 Educator of Excellence.

For many Iowa restaurants, energy isn't just another line item—it's one of the largest fixed costs they face. That's why the work of Iowa Restaurant Association partner and 2025 Purveyor of the Year WoodRiver Energy has become critical to the success of many operators.

"Restaurants are vital to every community," says Don Krattenmaker, COO of WoodRiver Energy. "They're where people gather, celebrate, and connect. Helping them manage energy costs means they can keep doing what they do best—bringing people together."

Since entering the Iowa market 11 years ago, WoodRiver has helped hundreds of restaurants save thousands of dollars each year while bringing stability to an unpredictable expense.

The process is simple: utilities still deliver and maintain the system, but WoodRiver supplies the gas—with no equipment changes and no service disruption. Operators can either save 5% on every bill compared to the utility or lock in fixed rates for long-term budget certainty.

To get started, restaurants provide two recent utility invoices. WoodRiver builds a custom plan, and once the switch is made, the only change operators see is that their bill now comes from WoodRiver instead of the utility.

Their focus also extends beyond bills to sustainability. While it may seem unusual for a natural gas company to celebrate reduced gas use, WoodRiver believes the best long-term value for customers comes from using energy more efficiently. "The best thing any business can do is cut a decatherm," explains COO Don Krattenmaker. "Using a little less energy benefits the customer, the environment, and the community."

That commitment has shaped the company's work in Iowa. Four years ago, their team approached the Association about creating a Sustainability Award. Today, the award—sponsored annually by WoodRiver—recognizes operators making meaningful improvements that inspire others across the industry.

By combining budget certainty, sustainability, and practical solutions, WoodRiver Energy has become one of the restaurant industry's most trusted partners. That record of service is why they are the Iowa Restaurant Association's 2025 Purveyor of the Year.



WoodRiver Energy
Don Krattenmaker | Chief Operating Officer



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2025 40 Women to Watch in Iowa's Hospitality Industry



Chef Alex Smith
Plated Table

Chef Alex Smith has built Plated Table in Iowa City with creativity, independence, and a commitment to women in hospitality. She and her partner designed and built the restaurant themselves, giving her the freedom to shape both the space and its culture. With a majority-female staff—and a kitchen crew made up entirely of women—Alex is intentional about creating opportunities that are too often rare in the industry.



Alyssa Peterson
Healthy 2 Wholesome Meals

At 21, Alyssa Peterson began meal prepping out of her parents' basement, trading nights out for recipe testing and planning menus. She launched Healthy 2 Wholesome Meals just weeks before Covid, adapting through uncertainty and growing a loyal following. Today, she runs her own commercial kitchen in the Quad Cities, preparing 500 meals a week.

Amanda Hollinger
White Willow/Willow on Grand

Amanda Hollinger discovered her passion for hospitality while working part-time in college. Today, she manages sales and events at Willow on Grand and coordinates for White Willow Events, helping couples and families create lasting memories. A mother of two, Amanda credits hospitality with giving her the chance to grow as a leader while also balancing family life.



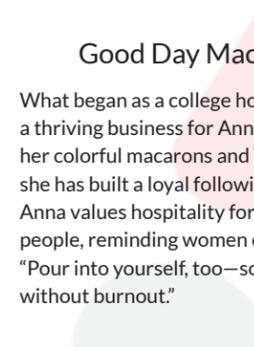
Amanda Riordan
Aramark at Grandview University

When the 2008 recession forced Amanda Riordan to change careers, she chose culinary school over law school—and never looked back. Now Food Service Director for Aramark at Grand View University, Amanda brings leadership experience from country clubs, schools, and retirement communities. Amanda believes women thrive when they focus on "leading in their own way."



Ande Long
The Hotel at Kirkwood Center

For Ande Long, hospitality has always been the only path. A mother of two, Ande embraces the challenge of balancing family life with a demanding industry—and uses her position in a teaching hotel to show students it's possible to "have it all." Her advice: "Be the obvious answer...on hard days, come back tomorrow and try again."



Anna Lam
Good Day Macarons & More

What began as a college hobby has grown into a thriving business for Anna Lam. Known for her colorful macarons and Vietnamese coffee, she has built a loyal following on social media. Anna values hospitality for its connection to people, reminding women entering the field: "Pour into yourself, too—so your passion lasts without burnout."

Becky Kilsares
LaValle Hospitality Group

Becky Klisares is the General Manager and Director of Sales and Events at River Center Events and Catering in Des Moines. In this role, she oversees day-to-day operations and works with clients to coordinate weddings, corporate gatherings, and community events. She has years of experience in event management, including a past role at West Glen Town Center.



Beth Romer
Choose Iowa

Beth Romer grew up around a kitchen table where her farm family practiced everyday hospitality—sharing meals, coffee, and conversation with anyone who stopped by. Today, as Program Director of Choose Iowa, she helps consumers find Iowa-grown, Iowa-raised and Iowa-made food, beverages, and ag products. Her mantra? "Make things better than I found them."



Blair Zachariasen
Wall to Wall Wine & Spirits

Blair Zachariasen has earned the WSET Diploma in Wines and is also a Certified Sommelier and a Certified Specialist of Wine. She returned to Iowa from New York City to lead wine, beer, and spirits programs. Blair is known for her colorful and approachable way of teaching flavor, and her dedication to making wine and beer education accessible to all.



Brooke Avila
Iowa Distilling Company

As Marketing Director at Iowa Distilling Company, Brooke has been instrumental in putting Iowa-made spirits on the map. From bold Prairie Fire to smooth Iowa State 1858 Vodka, her brand vision has helped local labels find their way into back bars across the state and beyond. A natural storyteller and community advocate, she blends marketing with impact.



Cassandra Spence
Culinary Annex

After serving as resident chef at the Des Moines Social Club, Cassandra founded The Culinary Annex in Valley Junction, a modular kitchen and creative space for classes, events, and culinary entrepreneurs. She encourages women in hospitality to build connections: "It's important to make friends and create community to uplift yourself as well as others."

Cienna Daniels
George's Local/4th & Main Hospitality

Cienna Daniels turned an eight-year career as a server and bartender into her current role as General Manager of George's Local. She believes food is never just food, but a way of bringing people together to celebrate, connect, and create lasting memories. Her advice: "Don't be afraid to take up space and let your personality shine."



Danette Meyer
Grant Ranch Grub & Pub

A third-generation restaurant and bar owner, Danette has worked in nearly every role over her 30-year career. She launched Grant Ranch Grub & Pub during Covid while raising five children. She credits her supportive community for helping her reach her goals. Danette encourages young women to "set both short- and long-term goals" to build the career they envision.

Dee Schuck
Main Street Café & Bakery

As Bakery and Events Manager, Dee has been instrumental in building award-winning success. The bakery has earned honors including Best Desserts, Best Cakes, and Best Bakery in Ankeny. But Dee's impact extends beyond accolades—her presence on the floor, greeting customers and ensuring every detail is right, sets the tone for the entire restaurant.



Dionne Sama
Palms DSM

Dionne and husband, Amara, spent years serving Caribbean and West African flavors from a food truck before opening Palms DSM. Now, in their first brick-and-mortar space, Dionne helps lead a restaurant that is as much about culture as cuisine—believing food is a universal connector, turning every plate into an invitation to gather, share stories, and feel at home.

Cassie McCreary
McCreary's Hospitality

For Cassie McCreary, hospitality is about turning customers into family. Since 2008, McCreary's Hospitality has grown from a small garage-based catering business into a thriving operation serving private parties and weddings, as well as corporate and community events across northwest Iowa. Cassie is guided by her belief that "everyone deserves to be seen and feel seen."



Cyndi Gryte
Juniper & Olive Co.

Cyndi's cozy café and bistro blends vintage charm with modern hospitality. Located in a restored 1881 building, they offer coffee, craft cocktails, and small plates with a focus on local flavors. After years in New York City, including time at the iconic Coyote Ugly, Cyndi returned to Iowa to create a welcoming gathering place where people can connect.

DeAnna Rogers-Walter
Cafe D'Marie

DeAnna Rogers-Walter took an unexpected path when she and her partner, Rick, opened their historic Davenport home as Café D'Marie in 2009. What began as a personal venture quickly became a destination, known for its eclectic menu, warm welcome, and sense of community. Café D'Marie has since earned national recognition, including a spot on Yelp's Top 100 Restaurants in 2023.



Diana Giles
Walker Homestead Farm & Winery

Diana Giles has built a career at the intersection of wine, food, and hospitality. A Certified Sommelier with WSET II distinction, she spent a decade in wine and spirits sales before returning to Iowa to pursue culinary training. Today, as GM and Food & Beverage Director, she leads the winery's menu development and curates immersive farm-to-table experiences.

Emily Ewoldt
Haverhill Social Club

At the Haverhill Social Club, Emily Ewoldt turns a small-town bar into a year-round gathering place. She dreams up events that bring people out in every season—from HaverChill Day and chili cook-offs to a growing "show and shine" car and motorcycle meet—while hosting fundraisers that support families, the fire station, and the park.



Giovanna Rodriguez Padilla
Iowa Latino Hospitality Council

Giovanna Rodríguez Padilla is the first Director of the Iowa Latino Hospitality Council, where she is building resources and opportunities for Spanish-speaking hospitality owners and entrepreneurs. In 2025, she led Spanish-language promotion efforts that brought nearly 200 restaurant professionals into certification programs.



Jacqueline Millian
Mammitas Coffee

Jacqueline opened Mammitas Coffee as a welcoming space that celebrates her Spanish heritage and honors her mother and grandmother, for whom the café is named. Featuring signature drinks and traditional desserts, Mammitas has become a one-of-a-kind gathering place in Iowa City. With three generations working side-by-side, Mammitas feels like home away from home.



Kaitlyn Koranda
The Fun Station Adventure Park

Kaitlyn's career in hospitality started with a high school job and has worked her way up to Operations Manager at The Fun Station Adventure Park in Cedar Rapids. Along the way, she built leadership skills, gained confidence, and found a passion for supporting her team and creating great guest experiences. Her advice to women in hospitality: "Be open to every opportunity."



Kellie Soper
Roots 95/Flame Group

With degrees in Non-Profit Management and Curriculum and Instruction, Kellie Soper never expected her career path to lead to hospitality. After 12 years at home raising her children, she joined Roots 95 as a server and soon became Catering and Events Manager. Kellie encourages young women to "follow a passion, take a risk, and believe in what you do."



Kristy Maras
The Des Moines Embassy Club

Catering Manager at the Embassy Club, Kristy Maras, brings years of experience in roles ranging from banquet manager to fine dining trainer. Kristy believes hospitality is one of the few industries where emotional intelligence, intuition, and leadership intersect daily. Reflecting on her career, she shares that "hospitality has given me the platform to lead with heart."



Heather Thompson
B-Bop's

Heather Thompson has built her career at B-Bop's, starting as a team member at 14 and working her way up to General Manager at Iowa's largest B-Bop's in Cedar Rapids. Heather's advice to young women in hospitality: "Always be teachable and willing to learn. Work hard, stay flexible, and always be a team player."



Jill Roling
Iowa Des Moines Supply/Baker Paper & Supply

With nearly 25 years in the industry, Jill has built a career defined by adaptability and growth. Her nominator notes, "In a small company where everyone wears multiple hats, Jill takes that to the next level—she's capable of covering every role when needed, leading by example and with a relentless growth mindset."

Kara Kelso
The Slow Down Coffee Co.

In 2020, Kara Kelso and her husband transformed an old hardware store in Des Moines' Highland Park neighborhood into The Slow Down Coffee Co.—a warm, inclusive space designed for connection in an increasingly isolated world. Kara believes coffee is a catalyst for meaningful relationships, and her shop has become a hub for community and collaboration.



Kiley Simonson-Frank
Cattlemen's Steakhouse

Kiley's path has taken her across nearly every restaurant role, now Sous Chef at Cattlemen's Steakhouse. A culinary school graduate, she also spent years as a high school foods teacher, inspiring students to discover their own passion for cooking. Much of her own work is rooted in memories of her late mother, reflected in the flavors and dishes she cherished.

Madeline Krantz
New World Kitchen

Madeline is a self-taught chef and entrepreneur who helped pioneer Iowa's plant-based dining scene. She opened Des Moines' first fully vegan restaurant, New World Café, in her early 20s, later relaunching it as New World Kitchen, a whole-food meal-prep company. She uses hospitality to uplift people and create meaningful experiences.





Mandy McCrary
US Foods

In 2024, Mandy McCrary stepped into the role of Senior Transportation Manager at US Foods and immediately made a lasting impact on her team and customers. Named the company's Culture Champion for embodying its core values and honored with the 2024 Presidential Award, Mandy believes hospitality is about listening, building trust, and providing solutions people can count on.

Maren Beard
Luna Valley Farm

Maren has turned her passion for sustainable food systems into a thriving hospitality venture. After earning a master's in Sustainable Food Systems and spending a decade advancing sustainability at Luther College, she now works full-time on her co-owned farm. Luna Valley is known for its certified organic practices, grass-fed meats, and sellout wood-fired pizza nights.



Mary Earnhardt
Iowa Gaming Association

Mary became President and CEO of the Iowa Gaming Association in January 2025, leading one of Iowa's major tourism and economic engines. Because casinos operate as hotels, restaurants, and event centers, her work sits at the heart of the state's hospitality industry. She collaborates closely with partner associations and previously held senior roles in public policy.



Mary Schott
ISU Dining, Iowa State University

Mary Schott has built her career with Iowa State University Dining, starting as a student employee in 2003 and now serving as Associate Director of IT, Menu Management and Nutritional Services. She oversees systems that manage more than 10,000 recipes across 23 dining locations. In 2022, her team earned the national CBORD Visionary Award for innovation in dining technology.



Megan Libe
Libations on Iowa

From mobile bartending to opening her own lounge, Megan Libe has built a fast-rising career in hospitality. She launched The Tippy Travelers in 2022, bringing stylish setups and creative cocktails to weddings and events, and quickly became a go-to name in Eastern Iowa. Now she's expanding her vision with Libations on Iowa, a brick-and-mortar lounge offering cocktails, small bites, and event space.



Natalie Carroll
Over the Top Ice Cream

Natalie Carroll went from teaching in the classroom to teaching behind the counter. A former Spanish and Language Arts teacher, she now mentors teens in the art of "unreasonable hospitality" at Over the Top Ice Cream. Under her leadership, the shop has earned local and national recognition, including the 2025 Iowa State Fair's Sweetest Food award for their Scotcheroo Shake.



Shannon Arnold
Hyatt Regency Coralville & Conf. Center

With 20 years in hospitality, Shannon has built a strong reputation in events and operations. As Director of Events and an Executive Committee member at the Hyatt, she oversees major corporate and community gatherings. Her team has driven more than \$1 million in food and beverage growth, and the property now ranks #3 among all Hyatt Regencies for F&B experience.



Susan Stapleton
The Des Moines Register

Susan is central Iowa's trusted dining voice, connecting readers to the people, trends, and stories shaping the state's hospitality scene. As entertainment editor and dining reporter at The Des Moines Register—and former lead at Eater Vegas—she blends national expertise with local insight, celebrating restaurants and chefs while strengthening the bond between community and cuisine.



Trang Pham
The Eggroll Ladies

Trang Pham is both an entrepreneur and a trailblazer. In 2016, she became Iowa's first woman infantry officer with the Iowa Army National Guard after the combat arms ban was lifted. At the same time, she built The Eggroll Ladies from rolling egg rolls to help families in need into a food truck, nonprofit, and now a brick-and-mortar business with plans for wholesale distribution.



Whitney Linville
redhead media

Whitney Linville brings nearly 20 years of hospitality experience to her work. After roles from late-night bar shifts to leading restaurant teams, she launched redhead media full-time in 2022. She helps restaurants share their stories through photography and digital marketing that honors their craft, strengthens community connections, and contributes to Iowa's dining scene with authenticity and impact.



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