

ENERGIZING  
COMMUNITIES  
THROUGH  
CONNECTIONS!



# IOWA RURAL

// SUMMIT 2025

RURAL ROCKS!

## Summit Packet

April 9-11, 2025

Gateway Hotel & Conference Center

2100 Green Hills Drive | Ames, IA 50014

PLATINUM SPONSOR





# IOWA RURAL // SUMMIT 2025

## Welcome!

Welcome to the 2025 Iowa Rural Summit, where we're turning up the volume on rural innovation, collaboration, and action! Whether you're a returning attendee or joining us for the first time, we're thrilled to have you here as part of this powerful gathering of leaders, visionaries, and changemakers.

Like any great song, strong rural communities are built on harmony—a mix of voices, perspectives, and expertise all coming together to create something meaningful. This year's Summit is designed to strike the right chord on the challenges and opportunities facing rural Iowa, from workforce development and housing to entrepreneurship and placemaking. Over the next few days, you'll have the opportunity to tune into expert insights, fine-tune your strategies, and collaborate with others who are working to compose a bright future for their communities.

### Hitting the Right Notes: What We've Been Up To

The Iowa Rural Development Council (IRDC) has been working behind the scenes to help rural Iowa hit all the right notes when it comes to economic development, leadership, and collaboration. Through our Power of Connection grant, supported in part by ITC Midwest, we've helped communities strengthen local partnerships and develop creative solutions to improve infrastructure, connectivity, and community vitality.

We continue to support rural entrepreneurs and small businesses through the Rural Business Initiative, funded by Wells Fargo, ensuring that businesses in small towns have the resources they need to grow and succeed. Meanwhile, our Leadership Exchange and Bootcamp programs have been instrumental in developing the next generation of rural leaders—providing opportunities for collaboration, learning, and mentorship across Iowa. At the heart of our work is a simple belief: rural Iowa is worth investing in, and it thrives when we work together. That's why we continue to convene leaders, connect ideas, and find new ways to keep our communities strong.



### Making Music Together

As you move through the Summit, we encourage you to make connections, share your stories, and collaborate with others who are part of this growing movement. Think of this event as a jam session—an opportunity to bring your ideas, learn from others, and create something greater than the sum of its parts. Whether you're leading the chorus on major initiatives, discovering new opportunities to harmonize with partners, or looking for fresh inspiration to remix your community's approach, we hope this Summit leaves you energized and ready to take action.

Thank you for being part of this incredible network of rural leaders. Let's make some music together and create a future that's a chart-topping success!

Enjoy the Summit!

*The Iowa Rural Summit Planning Team*



# The Location

## Gateway Hotel & Conference Center

For the fourth year in a row, the Iowa Rural Summit has returned to Ames and the Gateway Hotel & Conference Center! Located in the heart of Ames, Iowa – an easy walk from the campus of ISU and just 30 miles from downtown Des Moines.



## Keynote Speakers



Kiley Miller  
Senior Data Center Services  
Specialist, **Alliant Energy**



Dave Williams  
Performance Strategist, **ISG**



Debi Durham  
Director, **IEDA | IFA**



Lt. Governor Chris  
Cournoyer  
**State of Iowa**

## Wednesday, April 9th

10:00 AM - 3:00 PM

**2025 Collaborative Housing Symposium:  
Foundations for a Stronger Iowa**  
Registration required through ISU Extension & Outreach.

4:00 - 5:30 PM

**Resource Connections Forum**  
Meet with providers, explore funding, and discover programs to support rural development.

5:00 - 7:00 PM

**Welcome Reception**  
Sponsored by the Bill Menner Group & DMACC  
*Live Music: James Tutson Rollback*

## Thursday, April 10th

7:30 - 9:00 AM

**Registration & Breakfast**  
Continental Breakfast - Garden Room

9:00 - 9:30 AM

**Conference Welcome**  
Mark Reinig, Chair, Iowa Rural Development Council Diamond Sponsor Remarks: Erin Olson-Douglas, ISU Extension & Outreach

9:30 - 10:20 AM

*Rolling to Where It's Rocking: A Rural Road Trip*  
Kiley Miller, Alliant Energy

10:20 - 10:40 AM

**20 Questions in 20 Minutes:  
*What Do We Need from this Summit?***  
Emcees: Kiley Miller & James Hoelscher, IRDC Board of Directors

10:40 - 11:00 AM

**Networking Break &  
Meet the Vendors**



## Thursday, April 10th

11:00 AM - NOON

### Breakout Session 01

**North Room:** Driving Growth Through Outdoor Recreation  
**Central Room:** *With a Little Help From My Friends:* Uniting for Regional Prosperity  
**South Room:** *All I Have to do is Dream:* The Power and Impact of Iowa's Creative Sector

12:15 - 1:20 PM

### Lunch - Building Community Through Music

Emcees David Schmitz & Jon Berg, Iowa Arts Council  
*Live Music: The Ramsey Family Singers*

1:30 - 2:30 PM

### Breakout Session 02

**North Room:** Pathways to Leadership for the Next Generation  
**Central Room:** *Unwritten:* Creating our Rural Narrative  
**South Room:** *We Won't Back Down:* Rural Iowa's Disaster Response and Recovery

2:30 - 2:45 PM

### Networking Break & Meet the Vendors

2:45 - 3:45 PM

### Population Cohort Breakout 03

North Room: Under 2,500 Central Room: 2,501-5,000 South Room: 5,001-10,000 Meadow Room: 10,000+

3:45 - 5:00 PM

### Meet the Vendors & Hotel Check-In

5:00 - 6:30 PM

### Rural Recognition Reception

The Rand Fisher Rural Leadership Awards Ceremony Awards Sponsored by IADG Foundation Live Music: The Ramsey Family Singers

6:30 - 8:00 PM

### Dinner on Your Own

8:00 PM

### Optional: Iowa-ish Trivia!

The IowaStater Restaurant & Bar



## Friday, April 11th

7:30 - 8:30 AM

### Registration & Breakfast

Full Breakfast - Garden Room  
Breakfast Sponsored by ITC Midwest  
Diamond Sponsor Remarks: Troy Weary, ITC Midwest

8:30 - 8:45 AM

### Welcome Remarks

Madison Burke, Chair Elect, Iowa Rural Development Council  
Platinum Sponsor Remarks: Nathan Katzer, Farm Bureau  
Lt. Governor Chris Cournoyer

8:45 - 9:45 AM

### *We Can Work it Out: Navigating Civil Discourse*

Dave Williams, Performance Strategist

9:45 - 10:15 AM

### Networking Break & Meet the Vendors

10:15 - 11:00 AM

### 45 Ideas in 45 Minutes

Emcees: Madison Burke & Jim Thompson, IRDC Board of Directors Sponsored by Wellmark  
Diamond Sponsor Remarks: Laura Jackson, Wellmark

11:00 - 11:50 AM

### Driving Growth: IEDA|IFA Director Debi Durham on Rural Opportunities & Challenges

Interviewed by Brittany Morales, IRDC Board of Directors  
Sponsored by Wellmark

11:50 AM - NOON

### Closing Messages, Passport Drawing & Adjournment

Bill Menner, Executive Director, Iowa Rural Development Council  
Madison Burke, Chair Elect, Iowa Rural Development Council



# Breakout Sessions

## Driving Growth Through Outdoor Recreation

### North Room

Moderator: Benji Nichols, Decorah Parks & Rec Commission

- Brad Mormann, Jones County Conservation
- Aaron Burnett, City of Mason City
- Luke Hoffman, Iowa Bicycle Coalition

Outdoor recreation is more than just bike trails—it's a powerful economic driver that attracts visitors, enhances quality of life, and fuels local investment. From water trails and singletrack to bikepacking, gravel racing, fly fishing, trail running, snow sports, and ATV/UTV parks, communities across Iowa are leveraging diverse outdoor assets to drive growth. Learn from experts and local leaders about how these amenities can transform rural economies and create lasting impact.

## *With a Little Help From My Friends:* Uniting for Regional Prosperity

### Central Room

Moderator: James Hoelscher, UNI Institute for Decision Making

- Greg Piklapp, Ames Regional Economic Alliance
- Shalimar Mazetis, Advance Southwest Iowa Corporation
- Emily Benjamin, Lee County Economic Development

In today's rapidly changing economic landscape, collaboration among economic developers is essential to foster sustainable growth and uplift our regions. This session brings together economic developers from diverse backgrounds to share insights, strategies, and best practices aimed at driving collective economic development.

## *All I Have to do is Dream:* The Power and Impact of Iowa's Creative Sector

### South Room

Moderator: Matthew McIver, McIver Communications

- Zack Jones, Art Church
- Danielle Stowell, Wicked River Event Production
- Arnold (SoProfound) Chirimika, Intentionally Daring

In 2024 the Iowa Arts Council launched Create In Iowa, a look at Iowa's creative sector. Interviews, conversations and surveys were held with over 500 people, both in the arts and leaders in other sectors. This session will review the findings, particularly the impact of the creative sector on rural Iowa, as well as hear from those working throughout the state to build community through the arts.



## Breakout Sessions

### Pathways to Leadership for the Next Generation

**North Room** Moderator: Raelynne Risser,  
City of Corning

- Becca Bixler, City of Inwood
- Josh Randall, Bauman's Clothing,  
City of Mount Vernon
- Eric Meeter, Pressed, City of Spencer

Succession planning is a vital communities face the challenges of aging leadership and changing demographics, the need to inspire and equip the next generation has never been more critical. This panel discussion will potentially aim to address the unique challenges and opportunities rural Iowa faces regarding succession planning, exploring strategies to ensure a seamless transition of leadership and vitality in their communities.

---

### *Unwritten* - Creating our Rural Narrative

**Central Room**

Moderator: Shelly Greving, Em3rge  
Marketing

- Theresa Hildreth, Calhoun County  
Economic Development Corporation
- Sadie Kleppe, Summit Grove, City of  
Stuart
- Jessie Shiels, Vision Atlantic

Every community has a story—how you frame it shapes its future. In this session, panelists will share how their communities discovered or rediscovered their identity, internally defined their narrative, and are now leveraging it to attract residents, businesses, and investment. Learn how to craft and share a compelling rural story that drives growth and engagement.

---

### *We Won't Back Down:* Rural Iowa's Disaster Response and Recovery

**South Room**

Moderator: Bethany Wilcoxon, McClure

- Dave Miller, City of Rock Valley
- Sven Peterson, City of Perry
- Chris Luhring, City of Parkersburg

From floods to tornadoes, rural communities must be prepared to respond and rebuild when disaster strikes. This session will cover key strategies for disaster preparedness, response coordination, and long-term recovery, with insights from experts and communities that have navigated crises firsthand. Learn best practices, funding opportunities, and proactive steps to strengthen your community's resilience before the next disaster hits.

# IOWA RURAL // SUMMIT 2025

---

PLATINUM/PRESENTING SPONSOR



---

DIAMOND SPONSORS

IOWA STATE UNIVERSITY  
Extension and Outreach



---

GOLD SPONSOR



---

SILVER SPONSORS



---

BRONZE SPONSORS

CASEYS  
DMACC  
IOWA BANKERS ASSOCIATION  
IOWA AMERICAN WATER

ORIGIN HOMES  
UNI INSTITUTE FOR  
DECISION MAKING  
ALLIANT ENERGY

## Meet the Musicians



### James Tutson Rollback

Iowa City's James Tutson and his 5 siblings were the entirety of the church choir growing up. He was raised singing southern gospel every Sunday in a tiny chapel in front of a 10 person congregation. This heritage of soul music permeates his vocal stylings and anchors his songwriting even as he crafts his current work telling stories of the modern world and his life journey. He is known for emotive/"raw" vocal performances, tight musical arrangements, and resonant songwriting, which has been described as a "gift for exploring the intersection between joy and sorrow".

James' career has taken him to local backyards, dive bars, theater stages, music festivals, and NBC's The Voice. James was named one of the 2023 National endowment for the arts, Iowa Fellows and has had the privilege of performing with great artists like Lake Street Dive, The Dip, The War and Treaty, Marc Broussard, Joanna Connor, Jordy Searcy, and more. He has recorded seven studio albums including his most recent "Fool For You".



## Meet the Musicians



### The Ramsey Family Singers

#### From Service to Community, with Music at the Heart

Theo and Bonnie Ramsey's journey together began as Air Force musicians, performing across the United States and sharing the story of the Air Force through high-energy shows. As members of the USAF's Band of the Golden West and USAF's Band of Mid-America, they performed a wide range of genres—everything from jazz, rock & roll classics, salsa to patriotic anthems—and

represented the excellence, precision, and innovation of the Air Force.

After Theo's 20 years of service, the Ramseys decided to return to Bonnie's cherished home state of Iowa, where they raised their two children, Greenly (17) and Cruz (14). It was there, in their rural community, that they saw an opportunity to serve in a new way.

When the local grocery store went up for sale, the Ramseys—who had long enjoyed visiting and imagining the potential of grocery stores during their Air Force travels—decided to invest in their community. They purchased the store and opened Ramsey's Market, breathing new life into the small-town retail scene.

Four years later, Ramsey's Market has expanded to include an ACE Hardware store next door and Fresh out of the Box, a delivery service that brings groceries and hardware to food deserts across Southwest Iowa. As they celebrate 10 years of business this year, music still remains at the heart of the Ramsey family's life.

Their daughter, Greenly, has become a standout talent, earning multiple honors as an Iowa Music Vocalist All-Stater. She was also selected to be part of the prestigious 2025 Iowa Ambassadors of Music, a group that will tour Europe this summer to perform and represent Iowa's finest musical talent. Greenly plans to pursue a career in music after her high school graduation in 2026. Her brother, Cruz, shares her love for music and has been selected for honor bands, where he showcases his trombone talents. As a freshman, Cruz is excited to continue growing in music and explore new opportunities.

As a family, the Ramseys continue to bond over their shared love for music, from impromptu family musicals to lively conversations about their day. As they take the stage at the Iowa Rural Summit 2025, they are excited to share their story—of service, community, and the incredible power of music—with others.

## Speakers



### **Lt. Governor Chris Cournoyer**

Chris Gearhart Cournoyer is the 48th Lieutenant Governor of Iowa, appointed by Governor Kim Reynolds in December 2024. Previously, she represented Clinton, Jackson, and Scott counties in the Iowa Senate, where she led technology policy and consumer data protection efforts. With a background in technology and artificial intelligence, she worked at Andersen Consulting before launching her own web development business. A former school board president and STEM advocate, she remains engaged in education as a robotics and coding teacher. Lt. Governor Cournoyer is also a former reserve sheriff's deputy, active community volunteer, and proud mother of four.



### **Debi Durham**

Debi Durham serves as the Director of both the Iowa Finance Authority and the Economic Development Authority. She was named to the position by Governor Kim Reynolds in January 2019. Durham was first appointed to lead IEDA in 2011 and during her tenure has turned the agency into a successful public-private partnership, landed billion-dollar economic development projects for Iowa and has worked tirelessly on expanding trade and investment opportunities for the state. She prides herself on building coalitions, supporting new ventures and strengthening the state's industries and communities. Prior to joining IEDA, Durham served as president of the Siouxland Chamber of Commerce.



### **Kiley Miller**

Kiley Miller is a Senior Data Center Services Specialist for Alliant Energy, previously serving as Senior Community and Economic Development Manager. His background includes leading economic development organizations in Iowa, serving as President & CEO of Trees Forever, working as a journalist, and serving in the U.S. Army. A frequent speaker on economic and community development, he lives in Shueyville with his wife, Carry, and their family. They also have an unreasonably adorable sheepadoodle named El Mago.



### **Dave Williams**

Dave Williams has an accomplished background of equipping leaders with the tools to facilitate and retain high performing teams. He has 5 years of experience as a Mental Performance Coach (Contractor) with the U.S. Army and was a former Cognitive Performance Coach (Contractor) with the U.S. Air Force, Mental Skills Coach for the New York Mets, and Mental Performance Coach for the Cleveland Guardians. He also holds a Master's degree in Sport & Performance Psychology from Minnesota State University-Mankato. He currently resides in Mankato, MN with his wife Kasey, and two children.

# Breakout Speakers

## **Emily Benjamin**



Emily Benjamin, President & CEO of Lee County Economic Development Group, is a visionary leader dedicated to fostering economic growth. With expertise in workforce development, business retention, and strategic partnerships, she is driving LCEDG's 2025–2029 goals of creating 400 jobs and generating \$150 million in capital investment. Emily leads initiatives to strengthen the business climate, enhance infrastructure, and position Lee County as a hub of opportunity.

## **Becca Bixler**



Becca Bixler received her bachelor's degree in psychology from the University of Iowa in 2007 and a Masters of Social Work degree from the University of Denver in 2009. She is a Licensed Independent Social Worker in the state of Iowa and has experience in hospice, brain injury rehabilitation and counseling. She currently works full time for the Veterans Health Administration in the Office of Connected Care as a Program Analyst but has held a variety of positions since she joined the VA in 2015. She was elected to City Council in Inwood, Iowa in November of 2015. She served two 4-year terms on City Council prior to being elected Mayor in November 2023.

## **Aaron Burnett**



Aaron is an experienced City Administrator with 20 years of combined local government and federal government experience. He is an International City/County Management Association Credentialed Manager and Master of Public Administration graduate from University of Nebraska Omaha. His blend of experience and education facilitates the effective exercise of governance at all levels with a particular focus on rural development. This effective leadership has produced innovative and award-winning projects in a diversity of areas including housing, recreation, and main street development. Aaron is the recipient of 2 of the highest recognitions from the Iowa City/County Management Association. (City Manager of the Year, 2017; Program of the Year, 2020)

## **Arnold (SoProfound) Chirimika**



Arnold Chirimika, is a seasoned media personality, documentarian, and poet with nearly a decade of experience in radio and content production. As the founder and director of Intentionally Daring, a strategic communication company, he assists businesses in crafting compelling narratives and connecting with their target audiences.

# Breakout Speakers

## **Shelly Greving, Em3rge Marketing**



Shelly Greving is a strategic marketing professional passionate about revitalizing rural Iowa. With experience in brand development, community revitalization, and non-traditional marketing and fundraising, she works alongside rural leaders and entrepreneurs to identify innovative ways to move their communities forward. Having lived in seven communities across the state and collaborated with all 99 counties in her previous role with the Iowa 4-H program, Shelly brings a unique perspective and deep understanding of rural challenges and opportunities. As the founder of Emerge Marketing Solutions, she helps communities and businesses attract new audiences, maximize their potential, and create lasting impact.

## **Theresa Hildreth**



Theresa Hildreth became Executive Director of Calhoun County Economic Development Corp. in June 2023. She has a diverse background in marketing, government, coaching, community development, and event planning, including serving as an Iowa Senate clerk for ten legislative sessions. Originally from O'Brien County, she later earned a mass communications degree from Iowa Central Community College. She and her husband, Tom, have lived in Calhoun County since 1987, where their family runs Martin Hildreth Company, Inc., a 70-year-old underground utility business in Rockwell City.

## **James Hoelscher**



As Associate Director for IDM, James provides consultation to rural/urban community and economic development organizations undertaking strategic planning related to entrepreneurship, business retention, industry recruitment, community-wide planning, marketing, tourism, and organizational structure. He coordinates UNI's Economic Development Administration University Center and is the Director of the Heartland Economic Development Course. James is a Certified Economic Developer (CEcD), is a member of the International Economic Development Council, and holds a Master's Degree in Public Policy. He serves on the executive committees of the Professional Developers of Iowa and Iowa Rural Development Council, as well as a taskforce member of the Iowa Governor's Empower Rural Iowa Initiative.

## **Luke Hoffman**



Luke Hoffman is the Executive Director of the Iowa Bicycle Coalition. Luke is an Iowa native and has his undergraduate degree in Political Science from University of Nebraska at Omaha as well as his Masters in Public Administration with a focus in Public Policy also from UNO. Prior to joining the Coalition, he served as the Executive Director of Iowa Rivers Revival and helped run the Polk County Water & Land Legacy campaign to pass a conservation bond referendum. He currently lives in downtown Des Moines and is a member of the Tall Dog Bike Club.

# Breakout Speakers

## **Zack Jones**



While living in Arizona Zack Jones pursued his dream to become a full time artist/painter. He mentored under Mexican artist, Sergio Ladron de Guevara in Cave Creek. Sergio taught the young aspiring artist to paint with love and meaning. Inspired by this, Zack Jones moved back to his hometown Malvern, Iowa to pursue a full time live workspace.

## **Sadie Kleppe**



Sadie Kleppe is co-owner of The Stuart Scoop (an ice cream & pizza shop) and Summit Grove (an events & entertainment venue), both located in downtown Stuart, IA. She attended Iowa State University to study architecture and practiced as an architect in Des Moines for 9 years before transitioning into entrepreneurship with her husband, Trevor Kleppe. Together, they own & manage multifamily apartment complexes in western Iowa along with their two brick & mortar businesses in Stuart, IA. In addition to being a business owner and community builder, Sadie is a blessed mama to four children ages 8 to 2 years old.

## **Chris Luhring**



Chris Luhring began his public service in 1998 as a volunteer EMT while in college. He later joined the Parkersburg Police Department, becoming Chief of Police in 2004, and played a key role in the city's recovery after the 2008 EF-5 tornado. In 2009, he transitioned to City Administrator while continuing to support EMS and law enforcement. A recognized speaker on disaster preparedness, he has shared his experiences nationwide. Chris and his wife, Elicia, live in Parkersburg with their seven children.

## **Shalimar Mazetis**



Shalimar Mazetis is the Manager of Rural Development at Advance Southwest Iowa Corporation, where she supports business growth and economic vitality in rural Pottawattamie County. With a background in Industrial/Organizational Psychology, she has extensive experience in training, consulting, and economic development. A graduate of the OU Economic Development Institute, Shalimar also serves on multiple boards, including the Governor's Empower Rural Iowa Initiative, the National Rural Economic Development Association, and the Professional Developers of Iowa. Outside of work, she enjoys glamping with her family and giving back to her community.

## **Matthew McIver**



Matthew McIver is a communications strategist, writer, and arts leader with a passion for storytelling and community engagement. As the founder of McIver Communications, he helps organizations craft compelling narratives that inspire action. With a background in nonprofit leadership, theater, and education, he brings a unique blend of creativity and strategic insight to his work.



# Breakout Speakers

## **Eric Meeter**



Eric is an entrepreneur in Spencer, Iowa, husband to his wife Kristen, and dad to his 2-year-old daughter Elliotte. Eric and Kristen are the owners of Pressed Studio + Store (an inspirational gift and women's and children's fashion boutique), The Loft by Pressed (a rentable photo, video, and podcast studio), and the Retreat at Pressed (a furnished apartment rental above their downtown shop). Most recently he joined forces with his dad, Greg, to take on the renovation of a downtown building that experienced a fire in January of 2023. Eric is passionate about creating and enjoying well-crafted things, enriching his community, and being a present husband and father.

## **Dave Miller**



David Miller has been Rock Valley's Development Director since 2014, leading economic growth, community development, and disaster recovery efforts. Previously, he held roles as Chamber Director, Zoning Administrator, and Recreation Director, following a career as an entrepreneur. Under his leadership, Rock Valley has grown 25% since 2010, fueled by a strong entrepreneurial ecosystem and a thriving downtown. A graduate of Northwest Iowa Community College and Ouedi, he is also a Certified Business Retention and Expansion Coordinator. David enjoys the outdoors, youth activities, and making memories with his wife, Lindsey, and their two children.

## **Brittany Morales**



Brittany Morales is an experienced economic and community development professional, and as a rural Iowa native, she is passionate about providing communities with the tools they need to facilitate positive change. As a Development Strategist for ISG, Inc., Brittany works with community and business leaders across Iowa to conceptualize, design and implement initiatives that strengthen local economic and social vitality. Brittany's passion for rural development extends to her service on the Iowa Rural Development Council Executive Board, Keep Iowa Beautiful Board, and America's Cultivation Corridor Board. Brittany holds a degree from the University of Northern Iowa and is a certified Economic Development Finance Professional. Outside of her professional life, she enjoys spending time outdoors and creating lasting memories with her husband and their three young children.

## **Brad Mormann**



Brad grew up in the countryside of Northeast Iowa spending much of his time outdoors tending to the family farm, fishing, and hunting. As Director of Jones County Conservation for the past 12 years, he has been involved in several projects and critical partnerships to expand both the number and diversity of public lands and local natural resources. Major projects have included Central Park Lake restoration and access, hard surface trail expansions, water trail improvements on the Maquoketa River, and over 900 acres of public land acquisitions. Brad emphasizes the importance of strong collaboration in many local and regional partners for the success of these

# Breakout Speakers

## Benji Nichols



Benji Nichols is a Decorah "boomerang" and half of Inspire(d) Media with his wife and business partner Aryn Henning Nichols. Growing up in NE Iowa gave him a great love of the outdoors and the many recreational amenities available (Nor-Ski, anyone?). Nichols began mountain biking on Decorah's trails in the early 1990s and participated in many years of the Decorah Time Trials - one of Iowa's first and longest running MTB races. He is a long time member of DHPT (Decorah Human Powered Trails) and is currently serving in his 4th year as an elected Decorah Park Rec Commission member. He loves learning how other communities approach the challenges, opportunities, successes, and economic opportunities of the Outdoor Recreation Economy.



## Sven Peterson

Sven Peterson has served as City Administrator for Perry for over a decade, leading efforts in economic development, public art, housing, and sustainability. A seventh-generation Perry resident, he has championed energy efficiency, stormwater projects, and renewable energy, making city operations 100% powered by renewables. He holds degrees from Iowa State and Drake University. Outside of work, Sven enjoys camping, the outdoors, and tending his family's pumpkin farm with his wife and two sons.



## Greg Pıklapp

Greg Pıklapp is the Director of Economic Development Outreach and Government Relations for the Ames Regional Economic Alliance. In this role, he works with the Story County Board of Supervisors and its ten rural communities in economic development and special project initiatives, while also overseeing government policy at the local, state, and federal levels across the entire region.



## Josh Randall

Josh Randall and his wife Olivia are the proud owners of Bauman and Company, a cherished Mount Vernon staple since 1909. As a full-service men's store, Bauman's has outfitted generations with everything from everyday essentials to tailored suits, ensuring men of all shapes and sizes look and feel their best. A true cornerstone of the community, Bauman's has been a place where personal service and quality go hand in hand for over a century. When the Randalls took the reins in 2019, they became the fourth owners of this respected establishment and expanded its offerings by adding a thoughtfully curated women's department. In 2021, Bauman's earned the prestigious Open 4 Business Grant from Iowa Economic Development, allowing them to enhance their store with a modern point-of-sale system and the addition of a dedicated shoe department. Josh and Olivia, along with their three children, are proud to call Mount Vernon home and continue Bauman's legacy of style, service, and community.

# Breakout Speakers

## Raelynn Risser



Raelynn Risser is the Executive Director for Economic Development in Adams County, where she brings her bright and spunky personality to the forefront of community engagement. With a deep passion for community service and collaboration, Raelynn is dedicated to fostering partnerships that enhance the livability and vibrancy of her community. Her leadership is characterized by innovative solutions and a commitment to making Adams County an incredible place for all its residents. Raelynn's energetic approach and vision for economic growth ensure that the community continues to thrive and evolve in meaningful ways.

## Jessie Shiels



Jessie Shiels is the Business Development Manager at Em3rge Marketing Solutions, where she helps organizations grow through strategic marketing and storytelling. An Iowa State alum with experience in corporate, agency, and small business settings, Jessie co-founded SHIFT ATL in 2019 to spark grassroots revitalization in Atlantic, Iowa. She also helped launch Vision Atlantic, a nonprofit leading major community development efforts. Jessie lives on a farm near Atlantic with her husband, three boys, and a lively bunch of animals, and is passionate about supporting rural communities.

## Danielle Stowell



Danielle Stowell grew up in Gilbert, Iowa, a small town outside of Ames. She holds a BA from Loras College, MBA from Clarke University, and is a graduate of the Goldman Sachs 10KSB program. After working in the events industry for 10 years, Danielle started Wicked River Event Production, a company that builds unique, temporary, shared experiences by providing event planning services that help people gather in meaningful ways -- from private dinners and weddings to community festivals, nonprofit fundraisers, and more. She is also a local foods and arts advocate who can frequently be found enjoying a farmers' market or gallery opening. Danielle began volunteering at Codfish Hollow Barnstormers over ten years ago, and recently joined the venue's concert production team. She currently lives in Dubuque with her two Ghostbusting cats, Dr. Peter Venkman & Janine Melnitz.

## Bethany Wilcoxon



A seasoned community development professional, Bethany Wilcoxon has built her career with the guiding principle of building community with the community, most recently as Senior Advisor at McClure. In this role, Bethany develops and guides cross-discipline planning opportunities that enhance the quality of life in communities. Bethany previously served as Capital Crossroads Director and as a planner at the Des Moines Area MPO, where she led the development of The Tomorrow Plan. Originally from Atlantic and a graduate of ISU's Community and Regional Planning program, Bethany's passion for the community carries over to her volunteer activities. Over the years, she'd been involved with the Dean's Advancement Council for Iowa State University's College of Design, the Clive Community Foundation, the Great Outdoors Foundation, and the Drake Neighborhood Association board, among others. Bethany



# IOWA RURAL

## // SUMMIT 2025

## IRDC Board of Directors



**Chair**  
Mark Reinig  
ISU Extension & Outreach



**Chair Elect**  
Madison Burke  
Bolton & Menk



**Secretary**  
Brittany Morales  
ISG



**Treasurer**  
Carla Eysink  
Marion County  
Development Commission



Amy Kuhlers  
IEDA



Ashley Thompson  
United Way Story  
County



Bruce Nuzum  
Iowa Area  
Development Group



Dave Duncan  
Iowa  
Communications  
Alliance



Erin Olson-Douglas  
ISU Extension &  
Outreach



James Hoelscher  
UNI Institute for  
Decision Making



Jim Thompson  
IEDA



Kiley Miller  
Alliant Energy



Kim Didier  
DMACC



Liesl Seabert  
UNI Institute for  
Decision Making



Lisa Kremer  
Buchanan County  
Economic Alliance



Nathan Katzer  
Farm Bureau



Robin Bostrom  
IEDA



Theresa Hildreth  
Calhoun County  
Economic Development



Troy Weary  
ITC Midwest



**Executive Director**  
Bill Menner



# IOWA RURAL SUMMIT 2025

## Summit Committee

Committee Chair - Liesl Seabert, UNI  
Institute for Decision Making  
Amy Kuhlert, Iowa Economic  
Development Authority  
Benji Nichols, Inspired Media  
Bill Menner, Iowa Rural Development  
Council  
Brittany Morales, ISG  
Emily Starnes, Villages of Van Buren  
Jason Neises, Great Dubuque Community  
Foundation

Jenna Ramsey, City of Stanton  
Jim Thompson, Iowa Economic  
Development Authority  
Levi Lefebure, ABI  
Mark Reinig, ISU Extension & Outreach  
Robin Bostrom, Empower Rural Iowa  
Shalimar Mazetis, Advance Southwest Iowa  
Corporation

## Save-the-Date!

Mark your calendars for the 2026 Iowa Rural Summit on April 8-10 at the Grand River Center in Dubuque! Join rural leaders, economic development professionals, and community advocates for three days of inspiration, collaboration, and action along the Mississippi River. Stay tuned for details on sessions, speakers, and special events.



Interested in planning  
next year's event? Join  
the Summit Committee!  
Contact Bill Menner for  
more information -  
[director@iowardc.org](mailto:director@iowardc.org)

