

*Keep Iowa  
Beautiful*<sup>®</sup>  
KEEP AMERICA BEAUTIFUL AFFILIATE

February 2026 Newsletter



*Photo Credit: "Heaven with a Zip Code," Scott Hoag, DeWitt  
1st Place Hometown Pride & 1st Place Best of Show in the  
[16th Annual keep Iowa Beautiful Photography Contest Submission](#)*

## **Iowa is Beautiful!**

Though covered in snow today, this February, we are looking ahead to spring and celebrating the beauty of Iowa!

We are announcing the winners of our annual Keep Iowa Beautiful Photography Contest, highlighting photos that show how visually stunning our state is.

We wrapped up the application process for our Paint Iowa Beautiful program and now have the honor of reviewing applications geared at beautifying our state through a fresh coat of paint!

Lastly, we are officially launching our annual Pick-Up Iowa program. Through this litter clean-up initiative, residents just like you are showing up for Iowa's parks, downtowns and more! Read more about how to host an event below!

We hope you will join us in Keeping Iowa Beautiful this spring!

**With gratitude,**

**The Keep Iowa Beautiful Team**



## Host a Pick-Up Iowa Event



Be part of a movement in Iowa, showing up for our state through cleaning up our streets, rivers, and public spaces!

Keep Iowa Beautiful is calling on Iowans to help achieve our statewide goal of 2,500 volunteers to clean up 2,500 bags of litter across the state this spring.



**What is Pick-Up Iowa?** An annual effort to pick up litter across the state of Iowa through a series of locally organized pick-up events, Pick-Up Iowa is part of Keep America Beautiful's Great American Cleanup, the nation's largest community improvement program.

**Who can participate?** Anyone! You can host a Pick-Up Iowa event...Just grab your friends, neighbors, coworkers, classmates, etc. and pick an area to pick up litter!



**Where do I hold my event?** Anywhere! Common sites to pick up litter include Iowa's roadsides, neighborhoods, streets, school grounds, parks, or streams.

**When do I hold my event?** Anytime!

Schedule your Pick-Up Iowa event between April 1st and June 30th, 2026, at a date and time that works for your group!

**How do I sign up?** Registration is easy! Just click the link below and register your event!



[Register Your Pick-Up Iowa Event NOW!](#)

## Announcing the Winners of the 16th Annual Keep Iowa Beautiful Photography Contest!

Thank you to all of the talented photographers who entered our annual photo contest! This year's competition was incredibly strong, with over 550



photos submitted—each one capturing the beauty of Iowa in a unique way. While only a few could be selected as winners, we truly appreciate every participant's creativity and passion for showcasing our great state. Your photos continue to inspire and remind us why keeping Iowa beautiful is so important.

Check out the 1st place category winners below!



**Iowa Landscape**

"Juniper Tree overlooking Fall Colors along the Mississippi"

Suhaib Khan, Glendale Heights, IL



**Iowa Water**

"Ice Fishing"

Silas Clough, Zwingle



**Iowa Wildlife**

"Great Blue Heron Shakes off the Morning Dew"

Peyton Renning, Des Moines



**Iowans in Action**

"Crawling through the Corn"

Dave LaBelle, Dyersville



**NEW Youth Winner!**

"Driftless Falls"

Zane Raza, West Des Moines



**Hometown Pride**

"Heaven with a Zip Code"  
(taken in Lost Nation)

Scott Hoag, DeWitt



**Iowa Cities**

"Glitter City"

Scott Hoag, DeWitt

**View a complete list of winners at the bottom of the newsletter and check out all of the 16th Annual Photo Contest winning photos at our website!**

### [16th Annual Photo Contest Winners](#)

## **Artistic Partnership**

### **Maquoketa Mural**

The Maquoketa Art Experience recently completed a mural, thanks to a grant partnership with Keep Iowa Beautiful and Keep America Beautiful (KAB).

The mural was completed on the outside walls of the city's 4-sided trash enclosure. They involved a local artist, as well as local high school students! The students were able to be involved in the project from start to finish, teaching them not only about art but about project management and community pride!

The Maquoketa Art Experience mural was made possible by a grant from KAB as part of their Greatest American Cleanup initiative. Keep Iowa Beautiful partnered with KAB to bring this grant money to an Iowa community. We hope to see more partnerships like this in the future!



## #HometownPride Highlights



### Grants Galore!

Many Hometown Pride Communities were awarded various grants recently!  
Read about two grant recipients below.

In January, Gilmore City (pictured, top), Havelock (pictured, bottom), Laurens and Plover were awarded grants from the Pocahontas County Foundation to complete community projects. From a new pergola to city and highway signs to a park shelter house with bathrooms, the grants from PCF will help improve these communities as well as many others that were awarded a grant last month!





Peosta was recently awarded a \$50,000 grant from the T-Mobile Hometown Grant Program for the construction of a new multi-purpose pavilion in Kelly Oaks Park.

This project will expand opportunities for accessible recreation, education, and community gatherings—all while preserving the park's natural ecosystem.

Colesburg Hometown Pride received a \$5,000 grant from the Foundation of Cornerstone Communities AND a \$5,000 grant from the RJ McElroy Trust to update playground equipment at one of their city parks!



[Learn more about Hometown Pride Communities](#)

**Grant Opportunity Due May 1<sup>st</sup>**

**Iowa Grocery Industry Association - Build with Bags!**



Applications are open for the Iowa Grocery Industry's 'Build with Bags' grant, which offers funding to public parks and schools for the purchase of park furniture and playground equipment made from recycled plastic shopping bags.



The grant is part of the Iowa Grocery Industry's larger efforts to decrease plastic in landfills or as litter and increase demand for recycled plastic products.

If you think your community could benefit from a grant like this, we encourage you to apply! Grants are due on May 1st.

The Build with Bags Program is a cooperative effort of the [Iowa Grocery Industry Association](#), [Keep Iowa Beautiful](#), the [Iowa Department of Natural Resources](#), [Metro Waste Authority](#), and [Plastic Recycling of Iowa Falls](#).

**[Apply for Build with Bags Today!](#)**



## **16th Annual Photo Contest Winners**



### **Robert D. Ray Best of Show Awards**

- 1st Place: “Heaven with a Zip Code,” Scott Hoag of DeWitt
- 2nd Place: “Juniper Tree overlooking Fall Colors along the Mississippi,” Suhaib Khan of Glendale Heights, IL
- 3rd Place: “Great Blue Heron Shakes off the Morning Dew,” Peyton Renning of Des Moines

### **Iowa Cities Awards**

- 1st Place: “Glitter City,” Scott Hoag of DeWitt
- 2nd Place: “Davenport, Iowa,” Brian Abeling of West Des Moines
- 3rd Place: “Madison County Courthouse,” Morgan Weaver of Afton
- Honorable Mention: “Children Watch Fireworks in the Snow in Ankeny,” Lee Navin of Ankeny

### **Iowa Landscape Awards**

- 1st Place: “Juniper Tree overlooking Fall Colors along the Mississippi,” Suhaib Khan of Glendale Heights, IL
- 2nd Place: “The Best Campsite in Iowa,” Cody Davis of Grinnell
- 3rd Place: “Sunset over Farmland,” Sharon Scarff of Wayland
- Honorable Mention: “Wired for an Iowa Winter,” Harlen Persinger of Grundy Center
- Honorable Mention: "Gassing Up," Scott Hoag of DeWitt

### **Iowa Water Awards**

- 1st Place: “Ice Fishing,” Silas Clough of Zwingle
- 2nd Place: “Lake Dreams,” William Beardsley of Spirit Lake
- 3rd Place: “Dock to Serenity,” William Beardsley of Spirit Lake
- Honorable Mention: “Pikes Peak State Park overlooking the Mississippi River,” Brian Abeling of West Des Moines

### **Iowa Wildlife Awards**

- 1st Place: “Great Blue Heron Shakes off the Morning Dew,” Peyton Renning of Des Moines
- 2nd Place: “Red Fox Kit Backlit,” Jim Rose of Mason City
- 3rd Place: “Screech,” Sharon Scarff of Wayland
- Honorable Mention: “The World of the Northern Saw-whet,” Cody Davis of Grinnell
- Honorable Mention: “Young Buck, Late Summer,” Justin Cox of Iowa City

### **Iowans in Action Awards**

- 1st Place: “Crawling through the Corn,” Dave LaBelle of Dyersville
- 2nd Place: “On the Move!,” Sharon Scarff of Wayland
- 3rd Place: “The Agony of Defeat,” Scott Hoag of DeWitt
- Honorable Mention: “Hoover Blacksmith,” Jesse Streinz of West Branch
- Honorable Mention: “Smoky Job,” Will Hilsabeck of Peterson

### **Hometown Pride Awards**

- 1st Place: “Heaven with a Zip Code,” Scott Hoag of DeWitt (photo taken in Lost Nation)
- 2nd Place: “Life at Your Own Pace,” Scott Hoag of DeWitt (photo taken in Shellsburg)

- 3rd Place: “Nite Glow in Indianola, Iowa,” Brian Abeling of West Des Moines (photo taken in Indianola)
- Honorable Mention: “Holly Learning how to Plow with a Team of Horses,” Deb O'Brien of Jewell (photo taken in Albert City)

### Youth Winner

- "Driftless Falls," Zane Raza of West Des Moines

### Public Favorite Award

- “Glitter City,” Scott Hoag of DeWitt

### Your Support Matters!



From painting the state beautiful to instilling civic pride in our communities, the programs we provide are thanks to donations from supporters like you!

Consider giving to Keep Iowa Beautiful to help us continue our work improving Iowa communities!

[Donate to Support Iowa Communities](#)

## NEW Mailing Address & Phone Number



### Keep Iowa Beautiful

PO Box 1056

Johnston, IA 50131

[www.KeepIowaBeautiful.com](http://www.KeepIowaBeautiful.com)



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