

Glenwood real estate agent honored

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5 graduate from Law Enforcement Academy

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Tuesday, January 21, 2025

WHERE YOUR STORY LIVES

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RURAL GROCERY STORES

‘SURVIVE AND THRIVE’



ANDREW SMITH, THE NONPAREIL

Angelyn Wang, an employee of the Center for Rural Affairs, selects produce for purchasing at One Farm Market during a Southwest Iowa rural grocery tour on Friday, Jan. 17, 2024.

4 Southwest Iowa grocers find ways to remain relevant to their customers

ANDREW SMITH
Council Bluffs Nonpareil

Mulholland Grocery in Malvern traces its roots back to 1875.

It operated as a dry goods department store owned by Tom Mulholland’s great-grandfather. The business would later find success transitioning into a grocery store after World War I.

Tom Mulholland worked at the store for his father throughout his youth and for 10 years after attending meat cutting school.

Before purchasing Mulholland’s in 2008, which had since been sold out of the family, Tom spent 20 years managing the meat department at Wohlner’s Neighborhood Grocery in Omaha, which closed in late September after more than a century in

operation. The owners of Wohlner’s retired.

Deborah Solie, senior project associate at the Center for Rural Affairs, said communities often lose grocery stores when transitions in ownership fail.

“Sometimes it takes time to get your books ready to open up and show a potential seller,” Solie said. “What you do on a daily basis may not be what’s the best way to communicate to a potential buyer ... so you got to make sure everything’s in order.”

The Center for Rural Affairs offers technical assistance to grocers, supports ownership transitions, facilitates a mini-grants program and advocates for pro-grocer — and pro-grower — legislation, ensuring communities have access to quality food.

A bus tour Friday led by Solie and the Center for Rural Affairs through Malvern, Logan and Neola helped prospective grocers, members of non-profits, main street representatives and others understand how different grocers survive and evolve to meet community needs.

Decline in rural grocery stores, quality

“When I was young, there were four grocery stores here in town,” Mulholland said. “As people started commuting, driving more, than just like every small town, things changed and pretty soon Mulholland was the only one that was left.”

Please see **GROCERS**, Page A2

Motherhood my ‘greatest dream in life’

When I was a child, my Mimi had special designations for each of us grandkids. Her angel, her sweetheart ... and me, her princess.

She made birthdays special, carting us off for a day full of one-on-one fun — donuts from Jim and Connie’s Blair Bakery (arguably the best morning pastries in the state of Nebraska), lunch at Pizza Hut, a trip to the bookstore or a movie perhaps. One year, a handful of small gifts littering the back seat of her car — wrapped in newspaper, of course — she allowed me to open one gift every hour after guessing what it might be.



RACHEL GEORGE

Other holidays were special, too. She had a different Christmas sweater for every day in December, or pretty darn close anyway. Without fail, she made life fun.

Mimi was the picture of a loving grandmother. And as I age, I have often aspired to be a grandmother of her caliber one day — even though I had no children of my own.

Oftentimes, I worried that motherhood wasn’t in the cards for me at all.

All this to say: you haven’t seen me around lately and there’s a good reason for that.

On Oct. 15, 2024, I realized my greatest dream in life: I became a mother.

Hazel Rae Hotz was born at 6:51 p.m. at 22.5 inches long, weighing 8 pounds 12 ounces and with a full head of hair that’s only gotten better with time.

Ten long “piano” fingers, two tiny feet. At the risk of being cheesy, they say perfection is unattainable but somehow it grew within my body.

I’ve spent the past three months getting to know my own little princess — the most beautiful baby girl, the biggest blessing I’ve ever received.

The first time my “I love you” was met with her smile, it was the greatest thing that ever happened to me. Truly, each subsequent smile has been the same.

Hazel prefers contact naps; she loves car rides and her binky. She’s happy when we sing to her — even mom, whose offkey pitch would cause anyone else to cover their ears. She loves watching our dogs play and she likes to try talking to her Gigi and Nana.

Please see **GEORGE**, Page A2

Our Community Reads picks announced

SCOTT STEWART
Council Bluffs Nonpareil

A community shares common interests, whether its members live in close proximity or are scattered throughout society.

Feelings of connectedness and togetherness come through action that shares those interests and creates a sense of belonging.

Reading and discussion are both powerful tools for forging community ties, and both are central to the Council Bluffs Public Library’s annual Our Community Reads campaign. The theme for 2025 is “Found Community.”

“This year’s theme focuses on the cultures within our community and how we discover what connects us all through traditions and common experiences,” according to a library news release.

The program’s selections for this year are:

■ “Remarkably Bright Creatures,” the debut novel from Shelby Van Pelt that explores friendship through an unlikely connection with a curmudgeonly giant octopus in an aquarium.

■ “Invisible,” a youth graphic novel by author Christina Diaz Gonzalez and illustrator Gabriela Epstein that follows five very different students performing community service.

■ “My Kingdom of Darkness,” the first installment in the “Pets Rule!” childrens series from author Susan Tan and illustrator Wendy Tan Shiao Wei about a rescued Chihuahua.

“Our Community Reads brings us together as a community through reading,” Antonia Krupicka-Smith, director of the Council Bluffs Public Library, said in the release.

Krupicka-Smith said this year’s books “focus on connections and communities that are found in not typical ways.”

“We’ll be introduced to various cultures, traditions and perspectives that will help us to learn to accept our community members,” Krupicka-Smith said. “With our public and school-focused events, we will engage all ages in our community in thinking about what communities we have found and are a part of here in Council Bluffs.”

Please see **READ**, Page A2



JOE SHEARER, THE NONPAREIL

People walk past an informative water exhibit during the Water Fest celebration — the kickoff celebration for last year’s Our Community Reads — at the Council Bluffs Public Library on Saturday, March 9, 2024.

Inside

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Puzzles	A6	National	B1		

Weather

Cold, breezy in the p.m.
High 16 • Low 13
FORECAST • A8



Grocers

From A1

Malvern — in that sense — isn’t unique. Between 1990 and 2015, 34.7% of local chain and 42.7% of single location grocery stores in rural counties were shuttered, according to the USDA. Dollar stores and supercenters saw incredible growth during the same period.

National dollar stores have been shown to disproportionately hurt sales, employment figures and the presence of independent grocery stores in rural compared to urban areas. Each category suffers a greater, continuous, negative impact when a dollar store threatens an independent grocery store in a rural setting.

While Mulholland Grocery was being rebuilt following a totally destructive fire in December 2021, Malvern residents were left with a Dollar General and a Casey’s General Store as their sole sources for food in town.

“That hurts their diets also, because they’re buying so many more processed foods, canned foods, box foods, things that have a higher sodium content,” Mulholland said. “The elderly people especially, they didn’t want to drive, or couldn’t drive, to Glenwood, to Council Bluffs, to Red Oak, whatever it was.”

Mulholland said people may only go shopping once a month because of those reasons.

“That means that they don’t have fresh items, and they’re relying more on things out of their cupboard or their freezer,” Mulholland said.

Promoting niche products

Other than providing the staples, Mulholland has found success through his well-tended meat counter. Since reopening, he’s sold over 300 pounds of ham salad and 800 pounds of ham loaf. Some even drive hours each year to purchase his Swedish potato sausage, Mulholland said.

“Any small-town grocery store has to have a niche that brings people in,” Mulholland said. “When I can get them to come in for these things, and then pick up the other things, that’s what allows us to survive and to thrive.”

The allure of signature items allows Mulholland to have lower profit margins — and set lower prices — on everyday items like a head of lettuce or gallon of milk.

He says business posts on Face-



ANDREW SMITH, THE NONPAREIL

Dion Pitt, owner of Logan Super Foods, speaks answers questions asked by those on a tour of rural grocery stores in Southwest Iowa on Friday, Jan. 17, 2024.

book can reach thousands of potential customers beyond Malvern’s borders, and he’s gotten to travel to Washington, D.C., for Meta’s Leaders Network events. The 2023 documentary short film “They Came From All Over,” commissioned by Meta, shows the impact of Mulholland’s business and the community’s reaction to the 2021 fire.

Danelle Myer, owner of One Farm Market in Logan, also knows a thing or two about selling her locally sourced goods to an audience — marketing was her longtime career before she went all in on her family’s farm. Myer, who loves to tell a story, swears by the power of a Facebook post.

“I will literally post toffee ... I’ve had toffee for two months, and it’s kind of been sitting there, and then I do a post,” Myer said. “If I think it will be a traffic driver and/or a niche filler, then yeah, it’s worth making less money off of those things.”

By telling a personal story about a product, Myer’s been able to get people in the door to check out an item with lower profit margins — hoping they’ll shop around and purchase a locally made candle or assemble a basket of produce.

She posts often to One Farm’s Facebook page which has about 5,300 followers.

Buying and selling through food hubs

Myer quit her marketing job at Lauritzen Gardens in Omaha to join an apprenticeship program at the University of California, Santa Cruz in 2010, imagining it could

catapult her to a farm in Belize or into a management role at a large farmer’s market.

Just weeks in, she left to go home, start her farm and feed people.

“Your body is your biggest tool,” Myer said. “In the fall of 2010, I moved into my parents’ basement and lived with them for a year.

Started farming and selling goods at farmers markets and through wholesale avenues.

Before she started One Farm Market, Myer sold to Farmtable Procurement and Delivery, a Harlan-based food hub that distributes food from local farmers. Now, she buys from Farmtable and others to supplement vegetables from her own farm with milk, eggs, meat and other products.

“It’s kind of like a little bit of everything, but our produce, we’ve always grown organically,” Myer said. “Even if we source from other people, we want it to be organic because we think our customers expect that.”

Each week, producers with Farmtable can list what products will be ready for sale, and Farmtable customers — primarily restaurants, stores, food banks and individual people — can order from each, together.

Offering variety and service to a small community

Despite One Farm Market’s close proximity to Logan Super Foods, both Myer and Super Foods Owner Dion Pitt recognize a mutually beneficial relationship.



ANDREW SMITH, THE NONPAREIL

A sign asks “What is local?” inside One Farm Market in Logan on Friday, Jan. 17, 2024.

“I honestly, genuinely, believe that we complement each other,” Myer said. “I have customers come in and they say, ‘I’m coming here to see what you have in terms of fresh produce or whatever it is, before I run into the grocery store, and then I’m going to supplement there, or I’m going to get a few things here, and then go get the bulk of my groceries there,’ and then vice versa.”

“I don’t feel like it’s competition at all. It’s unique items, and she does a great job,” Pitt said. “All the businesses in town try to work together ... we get along great, help each other out where we can.”

Logan Super Foods is, by all measures, a classic grocery store. It’s not small — around 15,000 square feet — but it’s definitely not massive. The store has many aisles, around 30 employees and a deli counter serving fried shrimp, pork tenderloin sandwiches, chicken tenders and many sides.

“The deli is a very big success for Logan,” Pitt said. “We have the bakery and the and the tap room now ... but for a couple years now we haven’t had a restaurant in town, so lunchtime here is very busy.

In Neola, the Blue Cow Market opened in 2014 as part of an effort to keep a grocery store in town. Small yet packed, owner Ron Barrier and store manager Nicole Schneckloth see a potential future in carrying healthier options.

“My kids and my wife are label readers. They really pay attention to what’s in the foods, Barrier said. “They want to kind of see if we can get a little health section going and see how that works.”

While convenience an access to popular energy drinks has lured in a young crowd, Schneckloth said she enjoys delivering groceries to several elderly and home-bound customers.

Schneckloth agreed that customers still desire a clean and friendly atmosphere, compared to those of some supercenters.

“Everybody always comments about how clean it is and how nice it is, and everybody wants to come into a place that’s tidy and neat,” Schneckloth said.

Challenges and aid

The Center for Rural affairs also advocates for and helps draft legislation, such as Iowa House File 59, which would appropriate \$2 million in state funds for granting to small or independent grocers. A similar failed to gain lasting support in the Iowa Senate last year, which Kelsey Willardson, a policy associate at the Center for Rural Affairs, hopes to change.

“Representative Lohse, who is in the rural part of Polk County, wanted to introduce a program to benefit rural groceries, because he used to own a rural grocery store himself,” Willardson said. “This was very important subject for him.”

In the absence of the larger bill, the Iowa Economic Development Authority created the Rural Innovation Grant — a \$275,000 pot — from which Mulholland Grocery received more than \$1,000 to purchase electronic displays.

Willardson asked bus tour attendees to reach out to their state lawmakers to encourage them to introduce a companion bill in the senate.



Hazel Hotz is shown at 2 weeks old. COURTESY KATIE LARGENT PHOTOGRAPHY

George

From A1

At 3 months, she’s grabbing everything — her toys, Mom’s hair and Dad’s hand.

She’s well versed in Elvis — whose hairstyle hers often mirrors, a favorite of her great grandmother. Originally, I planned to read the entire Harry Potter series to her during maternity leave; we’ve read half of the first book so far.

Time is fleeting. She’s looked like at least three different people since the day we brought her home.

We’ve already celebrated her first Halloween, first Thanksgiving and first Christmas — as well as her father’s continued sobriety.

It’s all pretty typical for a baby, but ask my Facebook friends — each new skill, each milestone is profound.

My mom’s favorite baby shower gift to give is a book — “On the Night You Were Born” by Nancy Tillman.

Spoiler alert — the book ends with a beautiful message:

“Heaven blew every trumpet and played every horn on the

wonderful, marvelous night you were born.”

It’s so perfect I cried the first time I read it to Hazel.

I have a feeling those tears will return on her first birthday. And her second. And her sixteenth.

Looking ahead, it’s hard to imagine everything there is to look forward to. It’s hard not to be afraid of missing anything.

But I’m excited to be Mama. Maybe someday I’ll be Mimi, too. Either way, my heart is fuller than it was. Fuller than I knew it could be. And I’m excited to share my joy with all of you.

Read

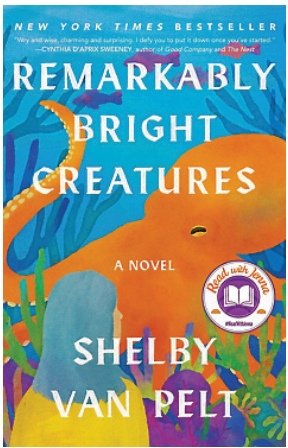
From A1

Our Community Reads is sponsored by the Council Bluffs Public Library Foundation in conjunction with organizations from around the community. The annual campaign aims to foster community discussion, awareness and action.

Residents are encouraged to read one of the selections and participate in events planned for March and April. The kick-off event, Culture Fest, will be Saturday, March 8. The library asks patrons to use Beanstack to participate in the Our Community Reads challenge starting March 1.

Digital copies of the books are available through the library as e-books or audio-books. Physical copies can be found on the library’s shelves, with more copies of “Remarkably Bright Creatures” available for check-out for three weeks at the library’s reference desk.

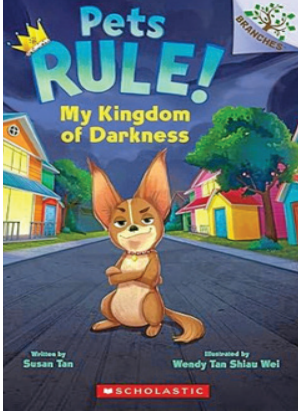
Van Pelt will visit the community on Thursday, April 10, at 6:30 p.m. at the library. The two youth authors will speak to students in Council



Bluffs in April.

The Iowa West Foundation provided a grant to the Council Bluffs Library Foundation to provide every second grader with a copy of “My Kingdom of Darkness” and every sixth grader a copy of “Invisible.” The visits and book distributions will be held in the Council Bluffs and St. Albert schools as well as Titan Hill Intermediate School. Lewis Central Middle School was unable to participate this year due to scheduling conflicts, according to the library.

Two community discussions of “Remarkably Bright Creatures” are planned at the



library for noon on Tuesday, March 18, and 6:30 p.m. on Monday, March 24.

Find more information on Our Community Reads at councilbluffslibrary.org/ocr.

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