



**GREATER  
BURLINGTON  
PARTNERSHIP**

**2025**

# **ANNUAL REPORT**

**Greater Burlington Partnership**

610 N 4th St, Suite 200  
Burlington, Iowa 52601

[GreaterBurlington.com](http://GreaterBurlington.com)

those whose generous foresight  
made this vision possible.



**2025 Board Chairs:** *Kathy Bentz*, The Busted Cup Brewhouse ; *Sara Huston*, Great River Entertainment, LLC  
*Tina McCulloch*, Big River Resources, LLC ; *Craig Smith*, Sterzing Food Company



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# A Letter from the PRESIDENT & CEO

By nearly every measure, 2025 was a year of momentum, discipline, and renewed optimism for Greater Burlington and the region we proudly serve. As we look back on the accomplishments of the past year, it is evident that our strength comes from a shared belief among business leaders, local governments, educators, workers, and residents that our future is ours to build.

The Partnership structure continues to be a model that many communities attempt to replicate. The ability of multiple organizations to share a unified vision, leverage operational efficiencies, and align strategically around economic growth remains one of Greater Burlington's greatest advantages. It is a system that works because we work together, and because our investors hold us to high expectations year after year.

This report provides a transparent overview of the performance indicators, program activity, and strategic progress made across each division in 2025. The work is complex, often behind the scenes, and sometimes difficult to quantify in a single statistic. Yet the outcomes are real, measurable, and impactful. Our goal is always the same: deploy the right resources, at the right time, in the right way, to achieve the right results.

Fiscal responsibility continues to be a point of pride for the organization. Our annual independent audit once again affirmed the integrity of our financial management. The board of directors' commitment to disciplined monthly financial review ensures that every dollar entrusted to us by our stakeholders delivers value back into the community.

Greater Burlington continues to be a place where leaders believe that if the work is worth doing, then we will do it. The community's willingness to reinvest, reinvent, and reimagine has fueled major wins in recent decades, and that spirit is alive and well today.

Whether addressing workforce challenges, supporting major employers, revitalizing downtown, improving quality of life amenities, or preparing the next generation of leaders, the Partnership remains steadfast in its mission to strengthen the region for decades to come.

The work before us is ambitious and essential. Achieving our goals will require continued partnership, bold thinking, and a willingness to evolve. I am honored to serve as President & CEO of the Greater Burlington Partnership and to work alongside leaders who are deeply committed to this region's success. Thank you for your trust, your engagement, and your belief in what we can achieve together.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Amy O'Brien". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

President & CEO  
Greater Burlington Partnership

# GREATER BURLINGTON DIVISION MISSION STATEMENTS



## Chamber of Commerce

The Chamber of Commerce is a membership-based association of businesses, professional leaders and individuals working together to promote economic growth, employment opportunities, government advocacy, excellence in education, and quality of life.



## Economic Development

The Economic Development division exists to add and retain jobs and grow the tax base of Des Moines County.



## Convention & Visitors Bureau

The Greater Burlington Convention & Visitors Bureau is dedicated to marketing and promoting the Greater Burlington community as a premier destination to both leisure and business travelers.



## Downtown Partners, Inc.

Downtown Partners, Inc. is a volunteer-driven Main Street Program established to preserve and revitalize Downtown Burlington while improving the quality of life for the community.

# ABOUT US



## GREATER BURLINGTON PARTNERSHIP

Greater Burlington Partnership serves as the umbrella organization for the Chamber of Commerce, Economic Development, Convention and Visitors Bureau, and Downtown Partners, Inc. While each division operates with its own mission, all share a unified vision: to ensure Greater Burlington continues to grow as a regional center for commerce, industry, education, health care, entertainment, and culture—making it a great place to live and work. The Partnership collaborates across its divisions to develop resources and initiatives that support local schools, businesses, workforce development, and the broader community.



Community Concierge newcomers:

5

Leader Lab

(In Partnership with Better Culture)

Mindset Leadership Program: 22 Participants in its first year!

# WORKFORCE INITIATIVES

Teacher Expo

**575** DMC Educators in Attendance

Career Exploration Events

**412** 5th Graders Attended

Community Leaders in the Classroom

**532** 8th Grade Students

IEDA Talent Attraction

**1** Newcomer moved to Greater Burlington

High School Job Shadow Placements

**112**

Transfr VR Career Exploration Headsets

Total Users: **1113**

Top 3 Careers Explored: 1. Chef, 2. Carpenter, 3. Firefighter

Intern Connection Program

**32** Interns in 2025

**2** Intern Events

Manufacturers Appreciation Luncheon

Students in attendance to network with businesses and

manufacturers: **19** juniors and seniors from BHS and WBHS

Total Event Attendance: **110**



**GREATER BURLINGTON  
CHAMBER of COMMERCE**  
A DIVISION OF THE GREATER BURLINGTON PARTNERSHIP

## 2025 OFFICERS

**Chair**

**Craig Smith,**  
Sterzing Food Company

**Chair-Elect**

**Kyle Gugeler,**  
Standard of Beaverdale

**Treasurer**

**Jeff Ebbing**  
Southeastern Community College

**Past Chair**

**Melinda Bickel,**  
Bickel's Cycling & Fitness

## BOARD OF DIRECTORS

**Melinda Bickel**

Bickel's Cycling & Fitness

**Ann Brotherson**

Serving it Safe with Ann LLC

**Jeff Burkhart**

MidwestOne Bank

**Brenda Clements**

American Ordnance, LLC

**Crystal Cole**

Two Rivers Bank & Trust

**Tony Diewold**

Klingner & Associates, P.C.

**Jeff Ebbing**

Southeastern Community College

**Kyle Gugeler**

Standard of Beaverdale

**Jim Jennison**

The Drake, LLC

**Marty Mogk**

Burlington Black Water, LLC

**Wayne Riniker**

Westland Mall

**Melissa Schwenker**

Ruhl&Ruhl Realtors

**Craig Smith**

Sterzing Food Company

**Rochelle Swanner**

Lunning Chapel, Inc.

**Michael Yost**

Great River Health

## APPOINTED

**Michael Ash**

Southeastern Community College

**Jason Wester**

West Burlington Independent

School District

**Chad Bird**

City of Burlington

**Tom Broeker**

Des Moines County Board of Supervisors

**Adam Magliari**

Mediapolis Community School District

**Gregg Mandsager**

City of West Burlington

**Rob Scott**

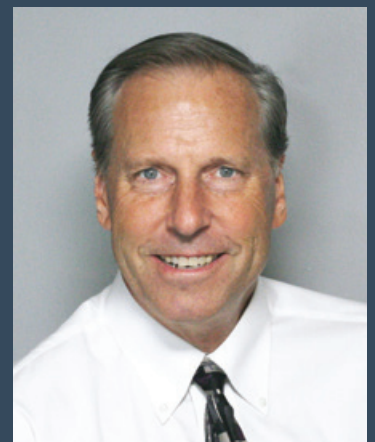
Burlington Community School District

**Patrick Wallace**

Danville Community School District

## BY THE NUMBERS

- **37** new members
- **28** ribbon cuttings
- **208** Business Retention and Expansion (BRE) visits
- **113** Average attendance at Business After Hours events
- **236** participants in Greater Burlington Leadership program has graduated since inception
- **98.8%** Member retention rate



Chamber of Commerce, Chair  
**Craig Smith**, Sterzing Food Company

## Accomplishments

**Welcoming New Talent:** Enhanced the newcomer booklet to present a comprehensive picture of Greater Burlington and all Des Moines County communities. This resource helps individuals and families confidently choose our region by highlighting local communities, school districts, and quality-of-life assets.

**Growing Leaders:** Continued investment in leadership development through Greater Burlington Leadership. The 2024 - 2025 class included 19 participants from diverse business sectors, strengthening cross-industry connections and bringing the program's total alumni to 236 since its inception.

**Delivering Member Value:** Demonstrated strong return on membership through a 98.8 percent retention rate in 2024. This performance exceeds the 85 percent industry benchmark, surpasses the Chamber's 90 percent goal, and reflects nearly a 10 percent year-over-year increase.

**Reframing Member Value:** Shifted the Chamber's approach from traditional return on investment to value on investment across membership and sponsorship opportunities. This focus highlights meaningful engagement, visibility, and connection, helping members better understand the broader impact of their investment.

2025 was a year of transition and growth for the Greater Burlington Partnership. Organizational changes have made the Partnership more effective and vibrant. In finance, Crystal Jolin's expertise has strengthened accounting and operations. New executive directors Melissa Jones (Chamber) and Taylor Collins (Economic Development) quickly adapted, bringing strong leadership and communication skills. The biggest transition was hiring a new President & CEO, Amy O'Brien. With local roots, extensive accounting experience, and HR expertise, Amy has brought stability and wisdom, setting the stage for a bright future.

We also extend deep appreciation to our tenured staff—the “anchors” who stayed steady and supported the organization through these changes. It should be noted that Downtown Partners Inc, the Convention and Visitors Bureau, along with the Marketing and Communications arena all experienced an incredible 2025.

- Craig Smith



## 2025 OFFICERS

- |   |   |
|---|---|
| <b>Chair</b><br>Tina McCulloch,<br>Big River Resources, LLC         | <b>Treasurer</b><br>Gary Hoyer,<br>Great River Entertainment, LLC |
| <b>Chair - Elect</b><br>Bryan Bross,<br>Klingner & Associates, P.C. | <b>Past Chair</b><br>Bob Huffman,<br>Huffman's Farm & Home        |

## BOARD OF DIRECTORS

- |  |  |
|--|--|
| Eric Benne<br>Two Rivers Bank & Trust<br>Bryan Bross<br>Klingner & Associates, P.C.<br>Jeff Brotherson<br>F&M Bank & Trust<br>Gary Hoyer<br>Great River Entertainment, LLC<br>Bob Huffman<br>Huffman's Farm & Home<br>Brock Ita<br>Connection Bank<br>Stephanie Kozlowski<br>Kozlowski Law Group<br>Donna Mann<br>Mann's McDonald's L.C. | Braden Manning<br>CNH Industrial America, LLC<br>Dr. Michael McCoy<br>Great River Health System<br>Tina McCulloch<br>Big River Resources, LLC<br>Kevin Mueller<br>KPI Concepts, LLC<br>Ryan Nagrocki<br>Midwest Realty Group<br>Chris Smith<br>Carl A. Nelson & Company<br>Stevan Vukceovich<br>Silgan Containers<br>Paul Zaugg<br>SG Construction |
|--|--|



Economic Development, Chair  
*Tina McCulloch*, Big River Resources, LLC



It has been an honor and privilege to serve as Chairman of the Economic Development Board this past year. The experience brought me even closer to the incredible work being done by volunteers and investors across our community. Grow Greater Burlington truly lives up to its name—fostering job creation, community development, and continued investment in our region. During my time as Chairman, I witnessed the strength of our GGB Board, the dedication of our partnership staff, and the resilience of our community, along with the trust and commitment of our investors to keep growing Greater Burlington. This year, we celebrated exciting milestones such as Wald Foods establishing its home in West Burlington, Western Smokehouse Partners expanding once again, and the kickoff of a \$635 Million modernization at the Iowa Army Ammunition Plant. We also continue to focus on developing more sites to support future business growth. The GGB Board is made up of passionate business and community leaders who are deeply invested in the success and vitality of our area. It has truly been a privilege to serve alongside such impactful individuals and to see the growth and momentum we've achieved together.

- Tina McCulloch

## BY THE NUMBERS

*(Partnering for the future year to date.)*

- **\$71** Million in total investment
  - \$20 Million - Wald Family Foods
  - \$16 Million - Amazon
  - \$12 Million - Western Smokehouse Partners
  - \$10 Million - Uptown Village
  - \$9 Million - IAAAP
  - \$4 Million - Silgan
- **308** New Jobs Created 2024 to Date
  - 100 Jobs Created at Amazon
  - 80 Jobs Created at Western Smokehouse Partners
  - 50 Jobs Created at IAAAP
  - 70 Jobs Created at Wald Family Foods
  - 8 Jobs Created at Silgan



## Accomplishments

### **Wald Family Foods' Bold Step Forward**

In 2025, Wald Family Foods invested \$20 million to repurpose Burlington's former Aldi distribution center into a gluten-free, private-label food production facility. The plant is expected to employ more than 100 associates by the end of 2026, strengthening the region's growing food manufacturing sector.

### **IAAAP's Modernization Milestone**

The Iowa Army Ammunition Plant reached a historic milestone with a \$635 million contract to construct the Future Artillery Complex. This advanced facility will use automation and robotics to produce up to 36,000 artillery shells per month, generating construction jobs in the short term and long-term roles in manufacturing, engineering, and operations—reaffirming IAAAP's role as a major economic anchor.

### **Western Smokehouse Partners' Continued Commitment**

Western Smokehouse Partners expanded its Greater Burlington operations with a \$15 – 18 million investment, adding approximately 100 jobs. The expansion increases production capacity by at least 30% and further diversifies the region's manufacturing base through premium meat snack production.

### **Revitalize Roosevelt**

In 2025, the Greater Burlington Partnership joined the Highway 61 Coalition, Des Moines County, and the Cities of Burlington and West Burlington to begin redevelopment planning for the Roosevelt Corridor of Highway 61. Snyder & Associates was hired to develop a plan for presentation to Iowa's Transportation Commission in 2026. Community input was gathered through public meetings in September and November 2025, leading to a consensus plan approved in December. The coalition will continue working with the DOT District 5 office ahead of the 2026 presentation in Fort Madison in April.

### **Collaborating with Lee County**

Strengthened our region's talent pipeline by collaborating with Lee County Economic Development Group to regionalize workforce development efforts, aligning employers, educators, and partners around shared workforce needs and solutions.



# GREATER BURLINGTON CONVENTION & VISITORS BUREAU

A DIVISION OF THE GREATER BURLINGTON PARTNERSHIP

## 2025 OFFICERS

### Chair

Sara Huston, Great River Entertainment, LLC

### Chair-Elect

Tim Lundgren, Farm Bureau Financial Services - Tim Lundgren

## STEERING COMMITTEE

### Sheena Abbott

Health Fitness - Southeast Iowa  
Regional Medical Center

### Madison Hand

Hampton Inn & Suites

### Sara Huston

Great River Entertainment, LLC

### Courtney Johnson

Martini's Grille

### John Kemp

KCPS Radio 1150 AM

### Tim Lundgren

Farm Bureau Financial Services -

Tim Lundgren

### Colton Overton

Des Moines County Historical Society

### Jim Priebe

Burlington Municipal Band Foundation

### APPOINTED

### John Johnson

City of West Burlington

### Kay Weiss

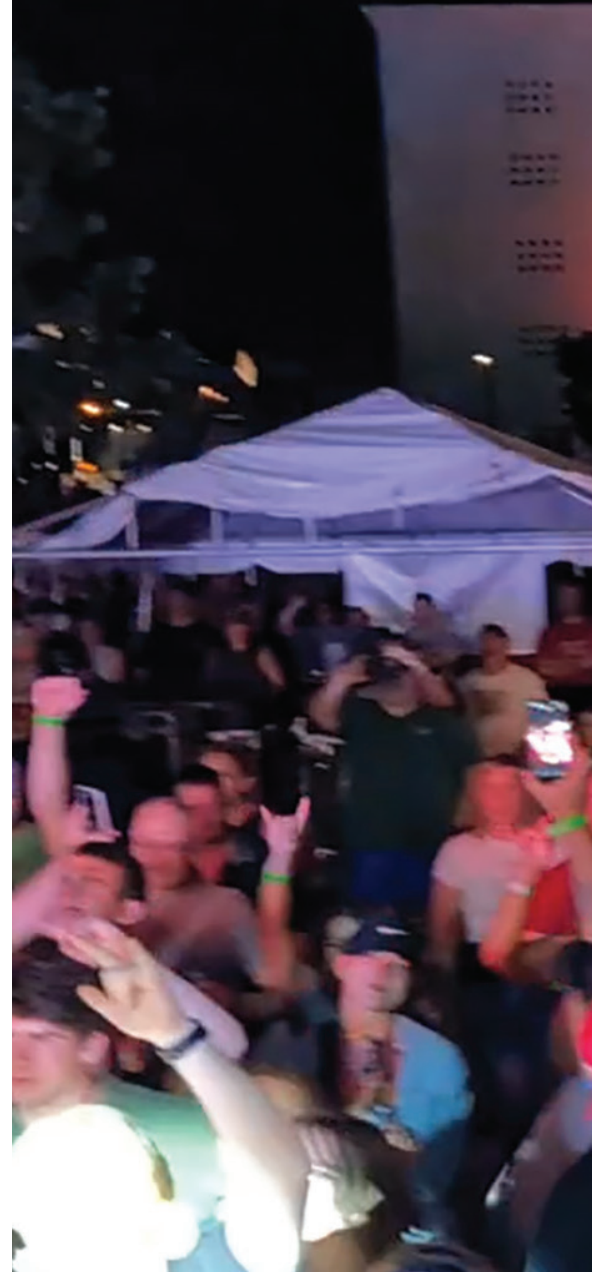
City of Burlington

## BY THE NUMBERS

**Tourism economic impact** - Tourism in Des Moines County generated over **\$175** million, generating over **\$28** million in state and local taxes

**Ad campaigns impressions** - Further expanded the reach of digital marketing campaigns, resulting in over **\$4** million impressions, doubling 2024 results

**Port of Burlington Welcome Center gross sales growth** - Increased gross sales by **4.0%** at the Port of Burlington Welcome Center through a broader merchandise selection



Convention & Visitors Bureau, Chair  
**Sara Huston**, Great River Entertainment, LLC

## Accomplishments

**New website** - Contracted McDaniels Marketing to create a stand-alone website dedicated to Greater Burlington Tourism. Began site outline and content curation with target deliverable of Q1 or early-Q2 2026.

**New events** - Strongly supported the inaugural Burlington River Days and Burlington Jazz Festival events through financial sponsorships. Burlington River Days drew an estimated 12k visitors, with 36% coming from outside Burlington/West Burlington.

**First of its kind “relocation ad campaign” for West Burlington** - Created an ad campaign focused on population growth as tourism incentive - a first for Greater Burlington. Utilizing YouTube pre-roll ads, targeted west/central Illinoisans with campaign encouraging residents to consider West Burlington as a relocation destination.

**Big Muddy’s** - With Des Moines County Conservation, furthered the advancement of the project aimed at resurrecting the former Big Muddy’s building into a significant tourism attraction, including contracting a flood-mitigation feasibility study and exploring funding option.

**Viking Mississippi** - Hosted over 2,200 Viking guests, despite four out of a scheduled ten dockings being cancelled due to high river levels.

**Weekly events boosted / Facebook page growth** - Promoted weekly events in Greater Burlington via paid Facebook ads resulting in an estimated 54% YOY growth in Visit Burlington Iowa page visits.

In 2025, the Convention and Visitors Bureau continued to enhance Greater Burlington as a vibrant destination. Highlights included the inaugural Burlington River Days, drawing over 12,000 visitors, and the Burlington Jazz Festival, featuring 12 bands and more than 80 musicians. The CVB also launched its first tourism-by-relocation campaign, promoting West Burlington to Illinois residents, while ongoing promotion of Fun City reinforced the region as a top family destination. These efforts strengthened community engagement, supported the local economy, and further established Greater Burlington as a premier regional destination.

- Sara Huston



## 2025 OFFICERS

### Chair

Kathy Bentz  
The Busted Cup Brewhouse

### Chair - Elect

Stephanie Brakeville  
Klingner and Associates, P.C.

### Past Chair

Todd Ackerman  
World Insurance Associates, LLC

### Treasurer

Brandon Kipp  
Two Rivers Bank & Trust

## BOARD OF DIRECTORS

### Todd Ackerman

World Insurance Associates, LLC

### Kathy Bentz

The Busted Cup Brewhouse

### Stephanie Brakeville

Klingner and Associates, P.C.

### Joe DeJesus

Downtown Property Owner

### Lavonne Fogle

Farmers Savings Bank

### Tomi Hagan

Great River Health

### Tom Burch

F&M Bank & Trust

### Brittany Jacobs

Burlington Public Library

### Brandon Kipp

Two River Bank & Trust

### John Mercer

Midwest Realty

### Monica Myers

Ruhl&Ruhl Realtors

### Elizabeth Pappas

Art Center of Burlington

### Mercedes Ponce

Titan Broadcasting & Digital Group

### Suann Wells

The Beancounter

Coffeehouse & Drinkery

### APPOINTED

### Chad Bird

City of Burlington

### Lynda Graham-Murray

City Council



Downtown Partners, Inc., Chair

*Kathy Bentz*, The Busted Cup Brewhouse, LLC



Downtown Burlington kept its momentum strong in 2025, with seven new businesses opening, two expanding, and 15 new residential units adding energy to the district.

We launched Downtown Deets, a new resource to keep businesses and Chamber members informed, and our Block Captains program strengthened communication and connections across downtown.

Investments topped \$15 million, three new murals enhanced the Cultural & Entertainment District, and events drew over 60,000 attendees, including the debut of Jazz Fest and Burlington River Days.

It's been a year of growth, creativity, and community pride—Downtown Burlington remains the place to eat, shop, and celebrate. Burlington. It's Happening!

- Kathy Bentz



## BY THE NUMBERS

- **7** new businesses opened in Downtown Burlington
- **2** businesses expanded into larger locations
- **15** new residential units added to the district
- **\$15** million+ invested in the Downtown district
- **3** new murals, contributing to Downtown's growing arts identity
- **3** blade sign grants awarded for business visibility
- **60,000** plus attendees were drawn from DPI events
- **1,000** new followers to the Downtown Burlington Facebook page



# Accomplishments

## **Creative Places Exchange Host**

Downtown Partners, Inc. welcomed 100 leaders from across Iowa for the State's Creative Places Exchange, exploring how creative placemaking drives economic development, strengthens community identity, and activates public spaces.

## **Alleyway Activation and Public Art Expansion**

DPI advanced alleyway enhancements with new art and began preparations for lighting installation, supporting long-term goals for a more inviting, walkable, and visually engaging downtown. Three new art installations were added in 2025, continuing Burlington's momentum as a Cultural and Entertainment District.

## **Holiday Décor Improvements**

With community and sponsor support, DPI fundraised for new holiday décor, including illuminated snowflakes on Jefferson and Main Street, enhancing Downtown's seasonal charm.

## **Block Captains Program Year One**

The Block Captains program celebrated its first anniversary, improving communication among businesses, supporting retention, and fostering shared stewardship across the district.

## **Launch of the Downtown App**

DPI introduced the Downtown Burlington App to showcase "What's Happening," highlighting businesses, events, itineraries, and the district's growing Creative and Entertainment identity.

## **Professional Development for Small Businesses**

Three Downtown Deets trainings provided entrepreneurs and retailers with professional development on Main Street Iowa support, SEO and digital presence, and cybersecurity best practices.

## **Support for New Downtown Events**

DPI promoted and supported two new Cultural and Entertainment District events—Burlington Jazz Fest and Burlington River Days—bringing fresh audiences and energy Downtown.

# MEET THE STAFF



**Taylor Collins**  
Executive Director  
Economic Development



**Kaylea Felland**  
Convention & Visitors Bureau  
Program Coordinator



**Chris Gram**  
Executive Director  
Convention & Visitors Bureau



**Mac Holford**  
Events Manager



**Crystal Jolin**  
Director of Finance



**Melissa Jones**  
Executive Director  
Chamber of Commerce



**Brenda Levitt**  
Graphic Designer



**Amy Moyner**  
Executive Director  
Downtown Partners, Inc.



**Amy O'Brien**  
President & CEO



**Dustin Roth**  
Director of  
Marketing & Communications



**Telisha Van Rycke**  
Regional Director  
of Workforce Innovation



**Pam Wright**  
Office Manager




**GREATER BURLINGTON  
PARTNERSHIP**

 610 N 4th St, Ste 200  
Burlington, IA 52601

 319-752-6365

 [info@greaterburlington.com](mailto:info@greaterburlington.com)

 [GreaterBurlington.com](http://GreaterBurlington.com)



 SCAN ME