

# 2025 CONFERENCE & ANNUAL MEETING

242 8th Avenue West, Cresco, Iowa 52136

ASSOCIATION OF  
**IOWA FAIRS**

*Serving Iowa Fairs Since 1907*

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The Holiday Inn Airport in Des Moines served as the host facility of the Association of Iowa Fairs 2025 Conference and Annual Meeting. The Conference was held on December 11 to 14. Representatives from the 106 fairs in Iowa and of the 134 associate members converged onto the Conference Center for a weekend of learning, sharing and fun.

As in past Conferences this year's event enjoyed strong involvement with final attendance for the Conference had 1,234 people registered for the event and again saw higher than normal meal reservations.

New at the Conference this year was a 'mixer' held on Thursday evening. It featured two interactive games with *Belt It Out Bingo* and *Majority Rules*. Those attending enjoyed a fun and very entertaining evening.



The Conference got underway on Friday morning with the opening business meeting of the Association, followed by several workshops and idea-sharing discussions.

Workshops that were featured on Friday afternoon included:

- 'Conference Newcomer', led by Tom Barnes (AIF)
- 'Food Service Guidelines', led by Julie Kraling (Food and Consumer Safety Bureau, Iowa Dept. of Inspections & Appeals)
- 'Alcohol Licensing & Sales', led by Nate Bayer, Tiffiney Brown, Chuck Crabtree, Kevan Irvine & Spencer Morehouse (Iowa Alcoholic Beverages Division)
- 'Coverage Considerations for Fairs', led by Megan Hirst and Kim Rasko (ICAP - Iowa Community Assurance Pool Program)
- 'Social & Charitable Gambling', led by Dan Horner (Iowa Department of Inspections & Appeals)
- 'Oversight of Your Fairs' Banking Records', led by Selina Johnson, (Office of the Auditor, State of Iowa)
- 'Safe Starts At Your Fair', led by Andrew Hennefent, DVM, MPH, DACVPM and Dr Molly Lee, DVM, MPH, DACVPM (State Public Health Department)
- 'What's On Your Mind', led by Danny Olson (AIF)

The 'Honky-Tonk Happy Hour' was held Friday late afternoon prior to the Awards Banquet. Three AIF associate members who hosted this fun event included Grandstand Concerts, Spectrum Weather Insurance and Thunder & Lightning Productions.

The annual Awards Banquet was held Friday evening for members of the Association. Honors presented at the Banquet included the "Fairman of the Year", the "Leo Overland Memorial Showman of the Year" and recognizing the Fairs that received the AIF's "Blue Ribbon Fair" award for 2025. In addition, the 2025 Hall of Fame inductees and recipients of the AIF's scholarship were also recognized at the Awards Banquet.

After the Awards Banquet Friday evening the popular live entertainment showcase was held. In addition, a reception was held for Randy Brown, who retired from the Iowa State Fair Board after many years of service.



The Saturday morning keynote address featured Ian Hill and his 'You Make THE Difference' initiative. Ian shared his thoughts on how Fairs can use his initiative as an important tool to help all Fairs deal with the changing world today, and how to better prepare for the future of Fairs. As in past Conferences, the keynote address was a Conference highlight presented to a standing room only crowd.

Abby Jaeger (Great Jones County Fair) hosted a social and networking event focused on IAFE's Young Professionals. The late Saturday afternoon social proved to be popular as a sizable number of younger fair board members were in attendance. All enjoyed refreshments and snacks, while networking with others.

Saturday was filled with workshops and events. Saturday workshops included:

- 'Livestock Updates', led by Dr. Jeff Kaisand, State Veterinarian, and Celine Beggs-Shoemaker, ISU 4-H Animal Science Specialist
- 'Build a Social Media Strategy', led by Chris Snyder, Professor at Drake University
- 'Fair Secretary/Manager Workshop', led by Ashley Fitzgerald, Boone County Fair
- 'Building the Event from the Ground Up', led by Jason Brown & John Christie, Bobby Baker Entertainment
- 'Three In One', led by Amanda Weber (AIF)
- 'Ensuring Safety at Your County Fair', led by Randy Jones, Iowa State Fair Police
- 'Bricks, Mortar & Major Gifts', led by Kelsie Meyers, Muscatine County Fair
- 'From Corndogs to Coverage', led by Andrew Vandepopulier with Haas & Wilkerson Insurance, and Robert Holmes with Spectrum Weather Insurance
- 'Driving Revenue with Mobile Bites', led by Steve Meek, Pottawattamie County Fair
- 'Harvesting Happiness', led by Dave Shinker (AIF)

Saturday evening featured the extremely popular "Social A'Fair and Auction".

This event included a social and a food menu that complimented the event theme "Pirates of the Fairabean". Many of the attendees dressed up to the theme. The Social A'Fair and Auction was attended by over 700 Association members.

Following the Social A'Fair and Auction the 'President's Reception' was held, hosted by 2025 AIF Board President Mary Bolton and her family.

Sunday morning started out with a church service dedicated to deceased fair board members and fair volunteers in Iowa, followed by the popular "Fairman's Breakfast". The Sunday morning speaker featured Ian Hill. In his presentation Ian continued his 'You Make THE Difference' initiative that was the focus of his keynote address on Saturday morning. His presentation to the capacity crowd proved to be a great way to end the 2025 Conference.

Business meetings held during the Conference included the Association's Annual Meeting, the Iowa State Agricultural Society Annual Meeting, Carnival Owners' meeting, Iowa Horse Racing Association meeting, Iowa Foundation for Agriculture Advancement meeting and AIF Associate Members' meeting.



## Hall of Fame Inductee

*Burton Prunty, Wayne County Fair*



## Fairman of the Year

*Wayne Lynch, Boone County Fair*



## Hall of Fame Inductee

*John Keeney, Warren County Fair*



## Showman of the Year

*Spectrum Weather Insurance*

*Robert & Teresa Holmes, Kearney, MO*



# ANOTHER GREAT AUCTION!

The annual auction on Saturday evening featured 143 items donated from member fairs and associates. The proceeds from the auction are used for expenses that are incurred by the Association in its efforts to help grow and benefit the fair industry in Iowa.

*This year the auction raised \$38,301.00.*

*Thanks to all who supported the auction!!*



## AIF SCHOLARSHIPS AWARDED

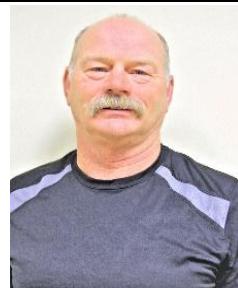


Jana Harms (left) of Sheffield and Isabell Olsasky (center) of Milo were each awarded a \$1,000 college scholarship, courtesy of the Association of Iowa Fairs. The presentation of the scholarships was done at the Awards Banquet.

*Congratulations to Jana & Isabell!*



## 2026 AIF District Directors



Steve Voss - NW



Amanda Weber - NW



Jon Baltes - NC



Ann Schuster - NE



Mark Troester - NE



Ashley Fitzgerald - NC



Mary Bolton - SW



Danny Olson - SW



Roger Iverson - SC



Sherry James - SC



Dave Shinker - SE



Kurt Dallmeyer - SE

## 2026 AIF Board

*President Mark*

*Troester (right)*

*presents Mary Bolton*

*(left) with a plaque  
recognizing her*

*leadership as the AIF*

*Board President in*

*2025.*



## AIF LEGISLATIVE SOCIAL

Wednesday, April 8, 2026 11:30 a.m. to 1:30 p.m.

Iowa State Capitol, East Rotunda, 1<sup>st</sup> Floor.

This Social is a time to meet with our State Legislators to discuss state funding of our Fairs and other legislation that is beneficial to the fair industry in Iowa. All fair folks are invited to attend this special event. Your help is needed as you are asked to contact your legislators and ask their support on all the legislation the Association sponsors.

## you make THE DIFFERENCE

The Association of Iowa Fairs (AIF) is proud to announce that our state has been awarded a grant to bring the *You Make THE Difference* National Initiative to Iowa. This

groundbreaking program was officially launched at the 2026 AIF Conference, equipping fair boards and volunteers across the state with powerful tools, training, and inspiration to meet the challenges facing fairs today.

### *What is You Make THE Difference?*

At its heart, *You Make THE Difference* is about people. Created and led by award-winning humanitarian Ian Hill, the initiative exists because rural communities and fairs are facing real headwinds: aging leadership, fewer volunteers, and increasing demands with limited resources. Hill believes in the future of fairs, and the communities they serve rest not in distant institutions, but in everyday people who roll up their sleeves and say yes when their towns need them most.

The program provides practical strategies to recruit and inspire volunteers, strengthen leadership, and build long-term sustainability. It combines high-energy, face-to-face sessions with an innovative digital follow-up system that keeps support and resources flowing long after the workshop ends.

### *What the Grant Provides*

Thanks to this grant, Iowa will receive the full benefits of the *You Make THE Difference* program at no cost to the AIF or its member fairs. The grant includes:

- ✓ A statewide training tour that will bring in-person workshops directly to fair boards across Washington.
- ✓ Access to a digital training platform and mobile app with videos, guides, and on-demand tools for ongoing support.
- ✓ Featured training sessions at the 2026 AIF Conference, delivered by Ian Hill himself.

This blended approach ensures fairs receive immediate, hands-on training and long-term reinforcement to sustain new practices and ideas.

### *Why It Matters for Iowa*

Fairs in Iowa are more than events. They are vital community institutions, part of the cultural fabric of our state that showcase agriculture, provide opportunities for youth, and bring generations together. Yet many fairs are facing challenges in volunteer recruitment, financial pressures, and leadership fatigue.



The *You Make THE Difference* initiative is designed to meet these needs head-on. By equipping local boards with practical tools and ongoing support, the program helps ensure fairs remain strong, resilient, and relevant for decades to come. This isn't just about sustaining fairs; it's about empowering the people who make them possible.

### *Looking Ahead*

The official kickoff at the 2026 AIF Conference was just the beginning. From there, the statewide training tour and digital tools will help every fair board strengthen leadership, inspire volunteers, and create lasting community impact.

Iowa has a proud tradition of fairs, and this grant is an investment in their future. Together, with *You Make THE Difference*, we can honor that tradition while building the capacity to thrive in the 21st century.

To learn more, visit [www.youmakethedifference.com](http://www.youmakethedifference.com).

This grant is made possible through the generous support of Fairs.com.

## Thank-You Thank-You Thank-You

To the following for sponsoring snacks, refreshments & coffee breaks.

Conference Badge Lanyards Provided by Etix

Action Theater/Impact Pro Wrestling - Artists & Attractions

Bobby Baker Entertainment - Evans United Shows

Grandstand Concerts - Iowa Communities Assurance Pool (ICAP)

Iowa Monster Arm Wrestling - Luehrs' Ideal Rides

Next Generation Shows - Prairie Event Supply - Scott Amusements

Spectrum Weather & Specialty Insurance - Variety Attractions

## MESSAGES IN A BOTTLE

In the spirit of the theme for the Social A'Fair, *Pirates of the Fairabean*, Amanda Weber (AIF Board member) put message bottles in several locations of the Conference Center. Conference attendees were asked to share some positive thoughts by writing them on a sheet of paper and placing the message in one of the bottles.

Following is list of some of the messages received:

- *I'm so happy you're here – Just have fun!!*
- *Thursday mixer was a lot of fun! (several messages received on this)*
- *Put God 1<sup>st</sup> in everything you do. He will not guide you in the wrong direction but on the right path – Blessings...*
- *Be The Light!*
- *Be the type of leader you want to follow...*
- *Fair friends are the best friends!*
- *Proud to stand with fair friends who keep traditions alive and communities connected.*

## ASSOCIATION BOARD ELECTIONS

### *Mark Troester Elected AIF Board President*

2026 Officers of the Association Board of Directors were elected at the Board's organizational meeting held on Sunday afternoon of the AIF Conference.

Mark Troester of St. Olaf was elected as the 2026 President of the Board. Ann Schuster of Peosta will serve as the Board's 1<sup>st</sup> Vice President and Roger Iverson of Grinnell will be the Board's 2<sup>nd</sup> Vice President. The immediate Past President of the Board is Mary Bolton of Emerson.

In addition to Board Officer elections, Tom & Sue Barnes of Cresco were retained by the Board as the AIF's Executive Director and Executive Secretary/Treasurer.



AIF District Director elections were held at the fall district meetings and ratified at the AIF's Annual Meeting held during the Conference. Elected to the AIF Board for a 2-year term include Amanda Weber of Sac City in Sac County (NW District), Ashley Fitzgerald of Boone in Boone County (NC District), Mark Troester of St. Olaf in Clayton County (NE District), Mary Bolton of Emerson in Mills County (SW District), Sherry James of Perry in Dallas County (SC District) and Dave Shinker of Stanwood in Cedar County (SE District).

### *Iowa State Fair Board Elections*

Iowa State Fair Board directors were elected during the State Agricultural Society meeting, held during the Conference.

Those elected as Directors to the Board include Darwin Gaudian of Primghar (NW District), Alan Brown of Hampton (NC District), John Harms of Monticello (NE District), CW Thomas of Guthrie Center (SW District), Roger Iverson of Grinnell (SC District), and Curtis Claeys of Grand Mound (SE District).

Curt Claeys was elected as President of the Iowa State Fair Board for 2026. Deb Zumbach will serve as Vice President and Jo Reynolds will be the Board Treasurer.

Jeremy Parsons is the CEO/Manager of the Iowa State Fair.



2025  
Blue Ribbon Award

*Northwest District*

CALHOUN  
COUNTY FAIR

*Rockwell City*

2025  
Blue Ribbon  
Award

*North Central  
District*

WRIGHT  
COUNTY FAIR  
*Eagle Grove*



2025  
Blue Ribbon  
Award

*Northeast District*

BIG FOUR  
FAIR  
*Nashua*

2025  
Blue Ribbon Award

*Southwest District*

**PAGE  
COUNTY FAIR**

*Clarinda*



2025  
Blue Ribbon Award

*Southeast District*

**IOWA COUNTY  
FAIR**

*Marengo*

2025  
Blue Ribbon Award

*South Central District*

**RINGGOLD  
COUNTY FAIR**

*Mount Ayr*





