

INSIGHTS.
GROWTH.
COMMUNITY.

Featuring:

**CAREERS BEYOND
THE SPOTLIGHT**

College theater students
build varied skillsets

**MUSICIANS OF
TOMORROW**

Symphony teaches music
to the community

**DRESSING
THE SHOW**

Building actors' wardrobes
to sell the show

SETTING THE STAGE

INSIDE THE QUAD-CITIES' ENTERTAINMENT INDUSTRY

FALL 2026

Thank you

SEE YOU NEXT YEAR AT THE
QUAD CITY BANK & TRUST RIVERFRONT POPS

August 21, 2027

**For over 30 years, Quad City Bank & Trust has been
a community bank committed to supporting
organizations where our employees live and work.**

QCBT is pleased to support the Quad City Symphony
Orchestra and the valuable work they do by *extending
our sponsorship of the Riverfront Pops through 2031!*



qcbt.bank



INSIGHTS.
GROWTH.
COMMUNITY.

ON THE COVER

FALL 2026 // VOLUME 8, ISSUE 3

Quad-City Times President: Rob Cravaritis

Editor: Analisa Trofimuk

Photographer: Katelyn Metzger

Designer: Chelsea Liske

ADVISORY BOARD

Mara Downing, Vice President of Global Brand
Management and Corporate Communications
Deere & Co.

Molly Foley, Chief Marketing Officer
IMEG Corp.

Dave Heller, Owner
QC River Bandits

Dave Herrell, President and CEO
Visit Quad-Cities

Johnna Kerres, Associate Director
for Marketing and Communications
Eastern Iowa Community Colleges

Kent Pilcher, President and Owner
Estes Construction

Peter Tokar III, President and CEO
Quad-Cities Chamber of Commerce

Jim Watts, President and CEO
RIA Federal Credit Union

To advertise in QCT Biz,
call us at 563-383-2224 or email
at advertising@qctimes.com.

To subscribe to QCT Biz,
visit qctimes.com/insight



Copyright Quad-City Times 2026. All rights reserved. Reproduction
or use of editorial or graphic content without permission is prohibited.



Rik Edgar poses next to
just a handful of his concert
credential lanyards in his
office at Vibrant Arena
at the Mark on Tuesday,
July 21, in Moline.

Katelyn Metzger

- 4** From the expert
Hear from our resident financial expert
- 6** Know your real organization
How every company is really two organizations
- 9** From the stage to careers
Quad-Cities college theater programs
build lifelong skills
- 16** Raise the curtain
Symphony orchestra's education program
brings music to all
- 25** Crafting actors' characters
How costume designers build stage presence
- 28** Bringing arena expertise
New executive director went from fan
to arena leader
- 36** Building the hometown scene
Sean Moeller provides local venues for rising acts

The cost of the 2026 back-to-class shopping season



MARK GRYWACHESKI

Economy

Mark Grywacheski is an expert in financial markets and economic analysis and is an investment adviser with Quad-Cities Investment Group, Davenport.

As the summer holiday season comes to an end, millions of American families ready their children for the upcoming school year. For parents, it can elicit an array of emotions. Some may shed a few tears as their children hop aboard the local school bus. Others, however, may rejoice and break into song, shouting the words to George Michael's hit song "Freedom!". As they say, to each their own.

The back-to-class season is one of the retail industry's largest shopping events, second only to the November-December holiday shopping season. The annual shopping extravaganza encompasses both back-to-school spending (for kids in grades K-12) as well as back-to-college spending.

This year, the National Retail Federation (NRF) expects U.S. consumers to spend \$43.3 billion on back-to-school shopping for their K-12 children. This is up \$3.9 billion (9.9%) from last year's

total of \$39.4 billion. Likewise, back-to-college spending is expected to reach \$103.5 billion, up a massive \$14.7 billion (16.6%) from last year's total of \$88.8 billion.

On average, the NRF expects each family to spend \$863.86 on back-to-school items for their K-12 children. Among their top purchases, shoppers will spend an average of \$293.11 on electronics/computer equipment, \$250.29 on clothing and accessories, \$174.01 on shoes and \$146.45 on school supplies.

College students and their families are expected to spend even more (\$1,437.79) for the upcoming school year. College shoppers will focus their spending dollars on electronics/computer equipment (\$341.95), dorm or apartment furnishings (\$194) and clothing and accessories (\$182.39).

The NRF highlights a number of trends it's seeing among shoppers this back-to-class season. First, the NRF cites that consumers continue to start their back-to-class shopping much earlier. Sixty-two percent say they started their shopping in July. Likewise, nearly a third (32%) actually started their shopping in June. The NRF suggests this is due to shoppers taking advantage of major June sales events such as Amazon Prime Day, Walmart Deals and Target Circle Deal Days.

One of the biggest summer shopping events was Prime Day,

the national four-day shopping blitz that offers consumers significant online savings. This year Prime Day was held on June 23-26. Amazon moved its Prime Day event (usually held in July) to June, in part, to better capture the ongoing trend of early back-to-class shopping.

For Amazon, the strategy appears to have paid off. Though Amazon doesn't publicly disclose its Prime Day sales figures, Adobe Analytics reports U.S. retailers tallied a record-high \$26.4 billion in online sales during these four days, up 9.3% from last year. Adobe Analytics also reports Prime Day online discounts for electronics and apparel both peaked at 24% off the regular listed price.

Another trend the NRF cites is that many households have been strategically spreading out their back-to-class spending. This allows families time to search out and capture money-saving deals and to allow them to spread out their household budget. In fact, 47% of shoppers say they will purchase only the initial essentials and then replenish supplies as needed throughout the year.

Being flexible and navigating the vast array of deals and promotions can help save a lot of money. But try and stick to your budget. Remember, the November-December holiday shopping season is right around the corner.

2026 back-to-school spending



Source: National Retail Federation

Disclaimer: Opinions expressed herein are subject to change without notice. Any prices or quotations contained herein are indicative only and do not constitute an offer to buy or sell any securities at any given price. Information has been obtained from sources considered reliable, but we do not guarantee that the material presented is accurate or that it provides a complete description of the securities, markets or developments mentioned. Quad-Cities Investment Group LLC is a registered investment adviser with the U.S. Securities Exchange Commission.

Leaders in **engineering** and **planning.**

LET'S GET YOU THERE.

IMEG has built a global reputation for engineering high-performance buildings and infrastructure using forward-thinking solutions. We believe that together we create positive outcomes for people, communities, and our planet.

- 100+ Locations Nationwide
- 3,400+ Team Members / 250 Local
- QC Headquartered
- Full-Service Engineering & Surveying
- Building Design & Infrastructure
- Sustainability & Energy Solutions
- Consulting & Advisory Services



IMEGCORP.COM



Adobe North Tower, San Jose, CA

2025 Structural Engineers Association of Northern California Structural Engineering Excellence Award of Merit

Modern Steel 2026 magazine featured project

The company on your dashboard isn't the one you run

Every organization is actually two — the polished version leaders review, and the real one employees live in. The gap between them is permanent. Pretending it isn't is what gets expensive.

ANDREA BELK OLSON

I was in a board meeting recently where the CEO was presenting the company's transformation plan. The directors nodded along, asked a few good questions, and moved to the next agenda item satisfied they understood the state of the business.

They didn't. Not because anyone lied, and not because the numbers were fabricated. They didn't understand the state of the business because the version of the company on those slides and the version being lived by the people doing the actual work were two different organizations. The board was governing one of them. The employees were surviving the other.

This is the two-organizations problem, and nearly every company has it. There is the reported organization — the one

that appears in dashboards and quarterly reviews, tidy and quantified. And there is the real organization — the one with the workaround nobody documented, the process everyone circumvents, the customer who's one bad interaction away from leaving, and the talented employee who has already mentally resigned but hasn't told anyone yet. Leaders spend their days managing the first. Their results are determined by the second.

THE GAP IS BUILT IN, NOT BROKEN IN

It's tempting to treat this as a failure of honesty, communication, or management. It isn't. The gap between the reported company and the real one is structural. It is manufactured, predictably and continuously, by the ordinary architecture of how organizations move information.

Consider what happens to a piece of bad news as it travels upward. A frontline employee notices a problem and mentions

it to a supervisor. The supervisor, not wanting to escalate something that might still resolve itself, files it as a minor concern. Their manager, summarizing a dozen such concerns for a director, turns it into a single yellow flag. The director, preparing for a review where everyone else is reporting green, decides it isn't material enough to raise. By the time the information reaches the top (if it arrives at all) the red has been quietly smoothed into green, one well-intentioned hop at a time.

No one in that chain is being deceptive. Each person is doing something deeply human: managing how they're perceived, avoiding the cost of being the bearer of bad news, and assuming the problem is smaller than it might be. Our tendency to overweight favorable information and discount the unfavorable is called optimism bias, and it operates at every level of a hierarchy. Layer it across the reporting structure of an organization, add incentives that reward looking good over being candid, and factor in leadership tenure (the longer someone sits at the top, the more carefully curated the information that reaches them) and the gap is guaranteed.

I watched this play out at a regional company whose dashboard showed one of its largest accounts as healthy and growing. On paper, it was a model relationship. In reality, the account team had been absorbing escalating complaints for months, quietly patching problems to keep the numbers intact, because surfacing the trouble felt riskier than managing it. The reported organization said "growing."

"Our tendency to overweight favorable information and discount the unfavorable is called optimism bias, and it operates at every level of a hierarchy."

- Andrea Belk Olson

The real organization was one bad quarter from losing the customer entirely.

Leadership found out when the client left.

The employees most attuned to the real organization are often your best people. And they are frequently the first to leave. A high performer who watches leadership make decisions based on a reality they know to be false concludes that the people steering the company can't see it.

That's a confidence problem. They stop believing the organization can correct itself, because they've watched the correcting mechanism fail again and again. So they don't argue. They don't file another report that gets rounded up into nothing. They update their résumé. And because the exit interview is itself part of the reported organization, the real reason gets recorded as "pursuing a new opportunity," and leadership learns nothing from the departure that should have alarmed them most.

YOU CANNOT CLOSE THE GAP. YOU CAN GOVERN IT.

A leader's first instinct is to try and eliminate the gap, demanding unfiltered truth, flattening the structure, and mandating radical transparency. It won't work, because the gap is structural. As long as you have layers, incentives, and human beings managing their own reputations, you will run two organizations. The goal is not to merge them. The goal is to govern both at once, deliberately and continuously.

This starts with going where the dashboard can't. The information that survives the trip upward is the information that was safe to send. The truth you need is the truth that didn't make the presentation, which means you have to go get it yourself. Spend unstructured time with people several layers down,

"As long as you have layers, incentives, and human beings managing their own reputations, you will run two organizations."

- Andrea Belk Olson

not to inspect but to listen. Watch the actual work happen. Treat a surprising data point as a reason to investigate rather than an anomaly to explain away.

It also requires changing what gets rewarded. In most organizations, the person who surfaces a problem early is experienced as a source of friction, while the person who keeps things looking green is experienced as a strong performer. As long as that's true, your best information will keep dying on its way up. When candor is genuinely safe, where everyone's rewarded for surfacing reality instead of protecting appearances, the smoothing slows, because people no longer pay a personal price for honesty.

And this requires separating two questions: "Are we hitting the target?" and "What is actually happening?" Ask a single team to answer both and it will always privilege the first, because that's the one people are graded on. But your real organization needs a path where describing a problem accurately is the entire job.

A leadership team can have perfect clarity about its priorities and still steer straight into a wall, if the conditions it's

reasoning about belong to the organization on the dashboard rather than the one on the ground. Success doesn't happen by pushing direction down through the layers. It comes from building the channels that carry unfiltered truth back up so that the decisions you make are decisions about the company you actually have, not the one you'd prefer to be looking at.

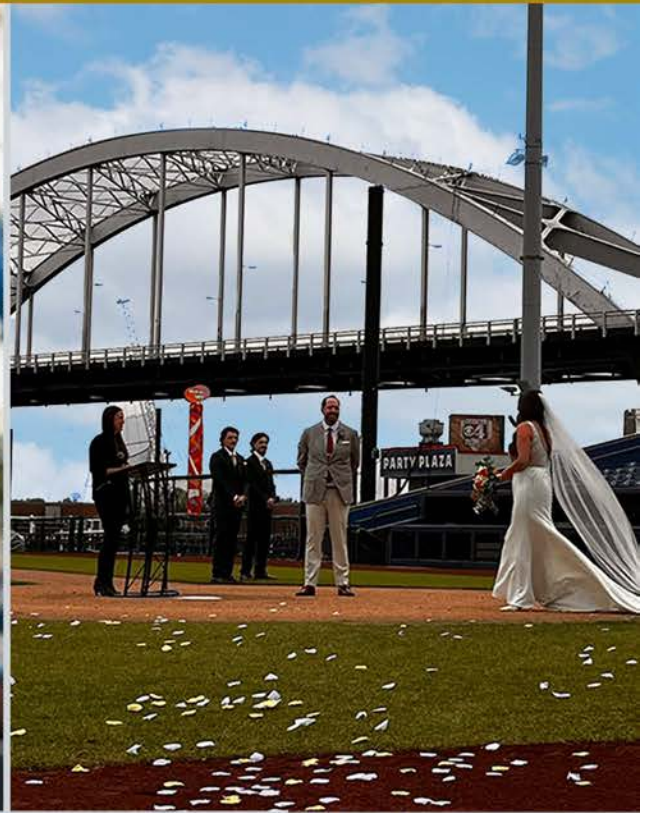
The company on your dashboard is easier to look at. It's far more flattering than the one your people clock into every morning. But it isn't the company you run, and it never was. The leaders who pull ahead aren't the ones with the best results on paper. They're the ones who never let themselves forget there's a second organization out there, the real one, and who go looking for it before it comes looking for them.



Andrea Belk Olson is the CEO of Pragmadik, a strategic change agency, serving multi-billion-dollar companies. She is a 3x published author, contributor to Harvard Business Review, INC magazine, Entrepreneur Magazine, World Economic Forum, a TEDx Speaker, and a SCORE Subject Matter Expert. She is also an instructor/coach for the University of Iowa's Entrepreneurial programs.

SPECIAL EVENTS

AT MODERN WOODMEN PARK



FOR MORE INFORMATION, CONTACT:
HUNTER@RIVERBANDITS.COM
(563) 324-3000

**NOW BOOKING FOR
2026 AND 2027!**
209 S GAINES ST | DAVENPORT, IA

Michael Turczynski, Augustana College professor and technical director, has been teaching at the school since 2021.

Cesar Toscano



Setting the stage:

Quad-Cities college theater programs teach wide array of career skills

CESAR TOSCANO

ctoscano@qctimes.com

Not everyone from a theater undergraduate program becomes an actor. Some graduates instead transfer the skills they learned in theater to a more traditional career.

Communication, creativity and public speaking are only a few of the transferrable skills that theater majors can take with them in any career. These skills can take them to jobs as varied as teachers, directors, designers and marketers.

But theater graduates can still pursue their passions and find fulfilling jobs in theater. Actors are what most people think, but there are a variety of positions that help make the show run.

The Quad-Cities have no shortage of opportunities for students to pursue an education in theater. Augustana College in Rock Island has a major and St. Ambrose University in Davenport has a minor program.

In addition, there are theaters where students can audition and learn under professionals across the Quad-Cities. These include Circa '21 in Rock Island, The Black Box theater in Moline, The Spotlight in Moline and others.



Communication, creativity and public speaking are only a few of the transferrable skills that theater majors can take with them in any career.

AUGUSTANA PREPS STUDENTS FOR THEATER CAREERS BEYOND ACTING

Theater and other art industries are sometimes perceived as risky career paths, but Augustana College professor and technical director Michael Turczynski disagrees.

Augustana College in Rock Island offers a theater degree and stages shows throughout the academic year. The major is split into separate concentrations: theater history, performance acting, musical theater, design and technology and generalist.

Careers in this industry are competitive, but there is a wide variety of jobs for theater major graduates to pursue. Aside from actors, Turczynski mentioned technicians, producers, directors, costume designers, ticket sellers, theater managers and more.

J.P.Morgan WEALTH MANAGEMENT

Leverage the expertise and global reach of J.P. Morgan

As a client, you'll receive a personalized strategy that evolves with the market—and your life. By combining an understanding of your finances and goals with the strengths of J.P. Morgan, your advisor will create a custom plan made to work for you.



Michael J. Brady, CFP®, CFA®

Managing Director
Private Client Advisor

501 15th Street
Moline, IL 61265
309.757.8480

michael.j.brady@jpmorgan.com

Forbes/SHOOK
Top Wealth Advisors Best-In-State
2025, 2024

Connect with us
jpmorgan.com/michael-brady

CFP Board owns the marks CFP®, CERTIFIED FINANCIAL PLANNER® in the U.S.

Certified Divorce Financial Analyst® is a registered trademark owned by the Institute for Divorce Financial Analysts®.

Forbes/SHOOK Top Wealth Advisors Best-In State (04/08/25, data as of 06/30/24); (04/03/24, data as of 06/30/23); Ratings may not guarantee future success or results. Fee paid to rating provider for advertisement materials after rating announced. Methodology here: jpmorgan.com/award-disclosures

J.P. Morgan Wealth Management is a business of JPMorgan Chase & Co., which offers investment products and services through **J.P. Morgan Securities LLC (JPMS)**, a registered broker-dealer and investment adviser, member FINRA and SIPC. Insurance products are made available through Chase Insurance Agency, Inc. (CIA), a licensed insurance agency, doing business as Chase Insurance Agency Services, Inc. in Florida. Certain custody and other services are provided by JPMorgan Chase Bank, N.A. (JPMCB). JPMS, CIA and JPMCB are affiliated companies under the common control of JPMorgan Chase & Co. Products not available in all states.

INVESTMENT AND INSURANCE PRODUCTS:
• NOT A DEPOSIT • NOT FDIC INSURED
• NOT INSURED BY ANY FEDERAL
GOVERNMENT AGENCY • NO BANK GUARANTEE
• MAY LOSE VALUE

©2025 JPMorgan Chase & Co. All rights reserved.



Augustana College's costume room, where students design and construct outfits and attire for the stage, shown on Aug. 5, 2026.

Cesar Toscano

"Acting is what everyone thinks of when they think of theater, right? Because that's what you go and see," he said. "That's why you pay the ticket. You go and see the people on stage singing and dancing, and we all clap for them. And without them, we wouldn't really have much of an industry. But there's a lot of support that has to go into that side of the world. When you think of what it takes to just put on a singular play, say you have a cast of 10 actors. Someone has to make all of the costumes for those 10 actors, and that's going to be more than one singular person."

Turczynski said the pipeline from actor to tech and other theater departments is "his whole recruiting model," and he has seen great technicians discover their passions through it. Turczynski himself was originally an actor but fell in love with being behind the stage after giving it a try.

"I figured out I can do both," Turczynski said. "One can pay my bills, and the other can be this passion project for me to still expand my artistic creativity, but still pay the bills in the same time. And then I kept being a tech and kept being a technician, and it has led to a very fruitful career for me for now, so it's nice to then be able to translate those stories down to my students and see them take similar paths."



Augustana College's scene shop is where faculty and students create props and other production items, shown here Aug. 5, 2026.

Cesar Toscano



A technician earns an average of \$22 and \$28 per hour for non-unionized and unionized positions, respectively, according to a survey conducted by theater Communications Group.

Technician work can be more consistent than acting roles and can pay well, Turczynski said. A technician earns an average of \$22 and \$28 per hour for non-unionized and unionized positions, respectively, according to a survey conducted by Theatre Communications Group.

"The consistency of the paycheck is nice, as all economy things are right now. It's rough out there, and the arts are especially hurting," Turczynski said. "... For every actor on stage, there's 10 technicians behind him in some way, shape or form, so there is more opportunity for employment simply based off of numbers. We need more technicians than we need performers, and so it is technically a less saturated job market."

Acting can be a difficult career path. However, Turczynski still wants his students to pursue acting if it's their passion.

"It's not to say it's not a grind. It's not to say that it's not incredibly hard. They're going to stand in lines for auditions for hours. They're going to spend days not getting callbacks," Turczynski said. "... There's a lot of rejection in the industry, but it is still a feasible path to take. Again, if you're willing to continue to explore your options and keep your mind open to more opportunities than the narrowed vision of 'I want to be on Broadway.'"

"Making it" doesn't define whether somebody is an actor. Turczynski said he has friends who are professional actors, but "no one would pull them off the street and tell them who they are."

"They have consistently worked Broadway, Off Broadway, the theater circuit of New York, just by being good, and some of that's luck and some of that's skill, but there are lots of opportunities that still exist outside of the glitz of Broadway or the Hollywood films," Turczynski said.

In addition to the common outlets for actors, there are independent movie and regional theater circuits across the country. In Rock Island, Circa '21 fills around 100 actor roles in a season, Turczynski said. Summer theater festivals also hire recent graduates and students, providing some early-career experience.

Graduates such as Debo Balogun, class of 2017, have worked in numerous theater companies and TV productions in Chicago.

If a graduate doesn't pursue theater, they usually pursue professions where they can use the design skills they learned; examples include museums and amusement parks.

"Everything that you could have been taught at some point usually has grounds in some side of theater," Turczynski said. "I look at that going in the opposite

direction of as you come out of theater, you have the world at your fingertips in a lot of ways because you come out as a well-rounded, well-skilled individual to be able to choose your path into what is exciting to you."

STUDENTS STRENGTHEN LIFE SKILLS WITH ST. AMBROSE THEATER PROGRAM

St. Ambrose doesn't offer a theater degree, but does have a theater department that provides classes, shows and scholarships. The major was cut during the start of the COVID pandemic.

Dan Hale, professor and head of the theater program, said the program looks different from what it did five years ago but is still very much alive.



The Brunner Theatre Center at Augustana College, where the college hosts its theatre shows and classes, shown on Aug. 5, 2026.

Cesar Toscano

An actor performs during Augustana College's dress rehearsal of "The Mousetrap" at Brunner Theatre Center on Tuesday, Nov. 11, 2025, in Rock Island.

Katelyn Metzger



BRAND AVE. STUDIOS CONTENT

Royal Neighbors of America® life insurance protects individuals and families while supporting communities

Sponsored content by Amy Lynch, Brand Ave. Studios contributing writer

As the United States marks its 250th birthday this summer, the concept of independence is top of mind for many Americans. For Quad Cities-based Royal Neighbors of America, it's been a guiding principle since the organization's founding more than 130 years ago. Today, the organization continues to advance economic security, strengthen communities and create opportunities for future generations through its member programs that include life insurance offerings and annuity products.

Life insurance can offer customers peace of mind in knowing that their beneficiaries will be taken care of financially after the policy holder passes on. Royal Neighbors takes the model one step further, providing what it calls "Insurance with a DifferenceSM." Royal Neighbors even offers a general membership that doesn't require purchase of insurance or an annuity. Focused on supporting the local community, these general memberships offer programs such as discounts on prescriptions and health screenings and organized volunteerism backed by Royal Neighbors grants and support.

Based on their belief that strong women lead to strong communities, Marie Kirkland and eight of her female contemporaries banded together to create Royal Neighbors of America in Council Bluffs, Iowa, back in 1895. The early mission of Royal Neighbors was four-fold: protecting families, uplifting communities, empowering women, and creating opportunities for members to serve and support each other.

Women at that time enjoyed only limited financial freedoms and were often unable to obtain life insurance policies. Even today, women may face challenges in securing coverage due to the often-underestimated value of their family caregiving responsibilities, certain gender-specific medical conditions and other factors that may affect underwriting decisions.

Royal Neighbors was one of the first organizations in America that allowed women to achieve this goal. Although the establishment didn't set out to serve women exclusively, its mission to expand access to financial protections for underserved audiences had powerful



advantages for women and children of the era.

The organization's headquarters moved to Rock Island, Illinois, in 1927, where they've remained since, staffed by dedicated employees who continue to build upon the creators' original vision. These days, Royal Neighbors serves nearly 300,000 members of diverse backgrounds across the country.

In addition to its portfolio of life insurance and annuity products, Royal Neighbors Community Chapters encourage members to get involved in their own communities by participating in local volunteer opportunities and philanthropic projects. Efforts range from charity fundraising and food giveaways to supporting our nation's veterans.

In Rock Island, Royal Neighbors members have served free meals with St. Joseph's Parish. The Viola, Illinois, chapter has teamed up with United Methodist Church to sew handmade quilts for donations. Davenport, Iowa, members formed Tapestry Farms to plant vegetable gardens to help feed refugee families. The more volunteer activity Royal Neighbors chapters generate, the more funding they become eligible to receive from the parent organization to continue their

local impact.

Royal Neighbors' Beneficial Membership is part of all of the organization's financial products. General Membership is available to approved applicants age 15 and up with a \$20 annual fee (anyone under 15 can apply for Youth General Membership with no yearly charge).

To learn more about Royal Neighbors of America, go to royalneighbors.org.

Royal Neighbors of America® (NAIC #57657), licensed in all states and the District of Columbia, except AL, AK, HI, LA, MA, NH, NY. Membership and qualification required, products and contractual provisions and limitations may vary by state. Guarantees are based on the claims-paying ability of Royal Neighbors of America. Not a deposit, intended to be held long-term.

QCT2026-W009 Rev. 7-2026

This content is for informational purposes only and should not be construed as financial advice. Please consult a finance professional for financial advice. The views, thoughts and opinions expressed in this content belong solely to the advertiser and do not represent the views of Brand Ave. Studios or its parent company.

This content was produced by Brand Ave. Studios. The news and editorial departments had no role in its creation or display.

Brand Ave. Studios connects advertisers with a targeted audience through compelling content programs, from concept to production and distribution. For more information contact sales@brandavestudios.com.

"With us, you are also learning from day one how to use our state-of-the-art theater equipment and our industry-standard sound and lighting programs and performing on our stages. There's no wait period. You can audition right away. You can participate in our monthly variety show right away. So, day one, we want your help. We want to get your hands dirty," Hale said.

Fall production for St. Ambrose will begin with a newly renovated black box theater. The venue also provides open mic opportunities for students to express themselves and get their names out there.

With a lack of degree focus, the program has seen students from different interests and disciplines, which has made it "stronger because they're bringing all their varied skills to our stage," Hale said.

Some students will use those skills for the stage after college, but most use them in a wide variety of fields. Theater teaches and enhances universal skills that can be used in other fields, such as creativity, imagination, communication, public speaking and interpersonal management, Hale said.

"Most of our students at Ambrose that

have training in theater are planning to go be an engineer or to be a psychologist or to be a teacher," he said. "These skills that you learn in theater and in the arts in general, the ability to see a problem and think creatively for solutions, to be innovative, that's the world we, theater, live in every day."

Some graduates continue to go into theater, bringing their skills to Circa '21, the Spotlight Theatre in Moline and venues across the nation.

Asked why students would pursue the performing arts rather than other industries, Hale asked, "What is your money for?"

"The arts are what makes life worth living," he said. "I don't know if the argument is that you can't make enough or that you can't make as much in theater as you can in another profession; we're going to lose that argument because it's true, but there might be more to consider than just the balance on the spreadsheet at the end of the day."

"The arts are what makes life worth living."

- Dan Hale

Trust is the foundation of every strong community.

BBB helps consumers find businesses they can trust and helps trustworthy businesses stand apart. When integrity leads the way, everyone wins.

Look for the BBB Accreditation Seal, the sign of a trusted business. Ready to demonstrate your commitment to trust?

Become BBB Accredited.

Trust, Built Locally.

Built on trust.

Grounded in Communities.



THE SIGN OF A BETTER BUSINESS.
BBB.org

**BBB, Greater Iowa
(515) 243-8137
Info@dm.bbb.org**



Pay the Smarter Way

Tap your card or device to pay instantly.
Simple, secure banking with R.I.A.

Join Today



**Relationships.
Integrity.
Action.**

Insured by NCUA

Growing young musicians:

Quad City Symphony Orchestra expands educational programs, and with it, youth artistry

NINA BAKER

nbaker@qctimes.com

For decades, the Quad City Symphony Orchestra has supported the region's young musicians through its robust educational programs.

The nonprofit pours hundreds of thousands of dollars into group lessons, student discounts, youth ensembles, private lessons, school visits and concerts. Though students pay for many of these programs, many students receive substantial financial aid that slashes the cost substantially. Other programs are free.

In 1958, the then Tri-City Symphony Orchestra created the Tri-City Symphony Youth Orchestra, an ensemble for exceptional young performers in Davenport, Rock Island, Moline and surrounding cities. The Quad City Symphony Orchestra is one of the 20 oldest symphonies in the country, and the youth ensemble was one of earlier youth symphonies in the United States.

Hisham Bravo Groover, assistant conductor of the Quad City Symphony

Orchestra and music director of the Quad City Symphony Youth Ensembles, described the symphony's education arm as "inundated" with support from symphony leadership. That is not always true with symphony orchestras, he said.

Even though the symphony already serves hundreds of students, there are hundreds more in the Quad-Cities who could benefit from music education.

"We believe in the power of music and music education, and we want to provide that to as many students as possible," Groover said. "We can't let up on growing because we can't get complacent with the number that we have."

Today, about 350 students, which includes adult learners, receive private lessons in woodwinds, percussion, brass, string, voice or piano. That figure is a milestone that just keeps growing, according to Chelsea Sammons, director of education and community engagement.

About one-fourth of those students receive financial aid. The symphony distributed \$70,000 in aid this year, with the highest-need recipients paying just \$4 for a 30-minute lesson.



Forty-four instructors provide lessons in the Quad-Cities and outlying towns. Many of these lessons take place inside the symphony's office in downtown Davenport, a two-story brick building that was once a Jesse Hawley's Super Service Station. Students fill every room in the building, except the finance office. Even executive director Brian Baxter's office becomes a lesson room Monday through Thursday.

"If you're here after 3 o'clock, you are not in silence," Sammons said.



Sammons, herself an oboe instructor, has directed the symphony's growing education programs since 2022. She manages the symphony's group lessons, youth ensembles, student discounts, Musicians in the Schools program, the yearly Symphony Day event and the many private lessons.

According to The Cultural Trust, which provides funding to the symphony as a legacy partner, the Quad City Symphony Orchestra reached a total of 42,940 K-12 students in 2025.

Director of Education and Community Engagement **Chelsea Sammons** poses next to the Quad City Arts mural on the back wall of the Robert A. and Patricia K. Hanson Symphonic Arts Center on Tuesday, Aug. 11, in Davenport. She also leads oboe classes for the private lesson program.

Katelyn Metzger

Outside the private lesson program, more than 6,500 fourth and fifth graders from every public and private school in the wider Quad-Cities see the Quad City

Symphony Orchestra perform each year on Symphony Day. Students pay nothing, and for many, it is their first experience seeing a symphony orchestra perform.

The symphony distributed \$70,000 in aid this year, with the highest-need recipients paying just \$4 for a 30-minute lesson.

The Quad City Symphony Orchestra also provides free violins to a small number of second and third grade students at Thomas Jefferson, Earl Hanson and Frances Willard Elementary Schools in the Rock Island-Milan School District. Those students are a part of the symphony's Group Lesson program, where students receive group instruction from professional violinists. Students receive two years of group lessons and then receive private lessons at \$4 a lesson.

"It's our commitment to support them until they're 18 on their violin," Sammons said.

The symphony has an open budget for programming through Musicians in the Schools. Educators can request one or more symphony musicians to visit their school and perform their music, give a lesson or talk about their career. Visits vary from all-school assemblies to one-on-one special instruction with specific students.

Student groups also receive free admission to all Masterworks concerts, and family members pay just \$5 for tickets. Sammons said about 1,300 students received free tickets for the 2025-26 Masterworks season.

'THE STUDENT AS THE FOCAL POINT'

Since 1990, the Quad City Symphony Orchestra has created three ensembles in addition to the original Youth Symphony Orchestra. These are the Youth Philharmonic Orchestra, Concert Orchestra and Prelude Strings. Students from age 7 to 18 can join the ensembles, which each demand a different level of skill.

Groover joined the Quad City Symphony Orchestra in 2024. During the academic year, Groover plans rehearsals, selects music and conducts the two most-skilled ensembles: the Youth Symphony Orchestra and the Youth Philharmonic. He works to ensure his selection of music and his instruction is appropriate for their level.

Together instructor **Chelsea Sammons** and **Jackson Weeks** play an oboe duet at the Robert A. and Patricia K. Hanson Symphonic Arts Center on Wednesday, Aug. 19, in Davenport.

Katelyn Metzger



Jackson Weeks, 17, plays his oboe during a QCSO private lesson at the Robert A. and Patricia K. Hanson Symphonic Arts Center on Wednesday, Aug. 19, in Davenport.

Katelyn Metzger



Groover, who has extensive experience conducting professional symphonies in Minnesota and Colorado, said conducting a youth ensemble requires prioritizing students and making decisions to develop them as growing musicians.

"When you're programming, or thinking about rehearsals or performance opportunities, you think of the student as the focal point of everything," Groover said.

More than 240 students play in the ensembles. Students pay tuition, which covers 40% of their experience, and the rest is subsidized through grants, sponsorships and donors. Like with private lessons, the symphony offers substantial financial aid.

"We believe in the power of music and music education, and we want to provide that to as many students as possible."

– Hisham Bravo Groover

BANKING BUILT FOR MOMENTUM. SOLUTIONS DESIGNED FOR CONTROL.

In today's fast-paced business environment, you need more than a bank account. You need a **financial partner** who helps you stay ahead.

Whether you're managing day-to-day liquidity, optimizing working capital, or accelerating receivables, our **Treasury Management Solutions** put you in control of every dollar.



Your Business. Your Growth. Our expertise. Because **Together We Can.**



american
bank & trust

TOGETHER
WE CAN.

Member FDIC

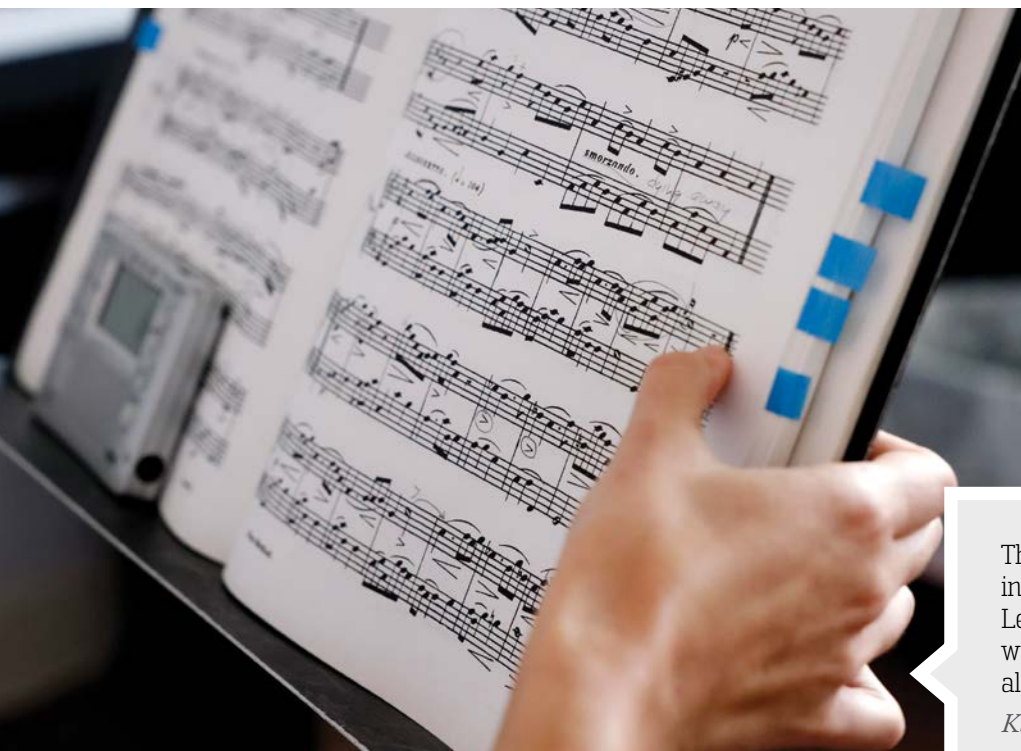
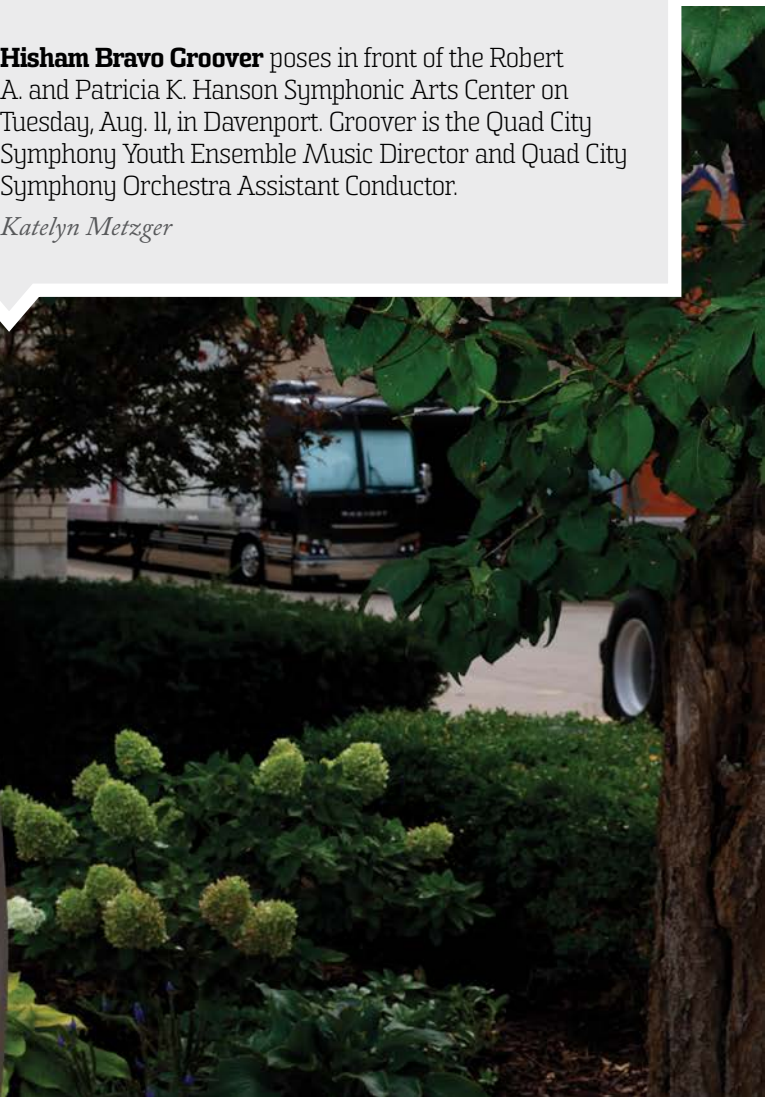


Compatible with all Treasury Management Solutions, our **Core Business Checking** account offers **no minimum balance** to open or maintain, **no monthly fees**, and up to **750 monthly transactions for free**. Contact us or visit www.GoAmBank.com/Business to learn more.



Hisham Bravo Groover poses in front of the Robert A. and Patricia K. Hanson Symphonic Arts Center on Tuesday, Aug. 11, in Davenport. Groover is the Quad City Symphony Youth Ensemble Music Director and Quad City Symphony Orchestra Assistant Conductor.

Katelyn Metzger



Groover said it is difficult to track the number of Quad City Symphony Youth Ensemble students who become professional musicians. But he said symphony staff do not view that as their goal.

"I'm trying to help students realize what a beautiful world and privilege it is to come together and make music. And it's even nicer when those students who don't want to make music use that experience to inform their decisions as they become leaders in business owning, or maybe teachers in school," Groover said.

There are about 40 instructors participating in the Quad City Symphony Orchestra's Private Lesson Program, offering lessons on brass, woodwind, and stringed instruments. QCSO also offers piano and voice lessons.

Katelyn Metzger

(Top Right) Private lesson instructor **David Cyzak** teaches an oboe lesson to **Madison Pondell** at the Robert A. and Patricia K. Hanson Symphonic Arts Center on Wednesday, Aug. 19, in Davenport. (Bottom Right) **Rowan Schutte's** reflection can be seen in a mirror during a bassoon private lesson with instructor **Matthew Kowalczyk** at the Robert A. and Patricia K. Hanson Symphonic Arts Center on Wednesday, Aug. 19, in Davenport.

Katelyn Metzger

BUILDING HARMONY

In July, the Quad City Symphony Orchestra, in partnership with St. Ambrose University, presented a plan to the Scott County Board of Supervisors to fundraise for a \$24 million performance and rehearsal building in downtown Davenport. The 30,000 square-foot space would have a 500-seat concert hall that could be split into two large rehearsal spaces. Multiple classrooms would surround the performance space for music lessons. The symphony has asked for grant support from the county and has had private donors pledge to support for the venture.

The new space will house many of the symphony's private lessons and the youth ensemble rehearsals. Events like Symphony Day, and full Masterworks concerts with the professional orchestra, will continue to be held at the Adler Theatre.

Sammons said the youth ensembles rehearse at high school auditoriums, usually at Bettendorf High School and Pleasant Valley High School, using the school's chairs and stands.

"We bring a box, and that's our youth orchestra," Sammons said.

Sammons said symphony staff believe having their own space can better serve the students by giving staff more artistic freedom. If, for example, conductors wanted students to divide into impromptu sectionals, they may not be able to do so if they do not have additional rooms rented.

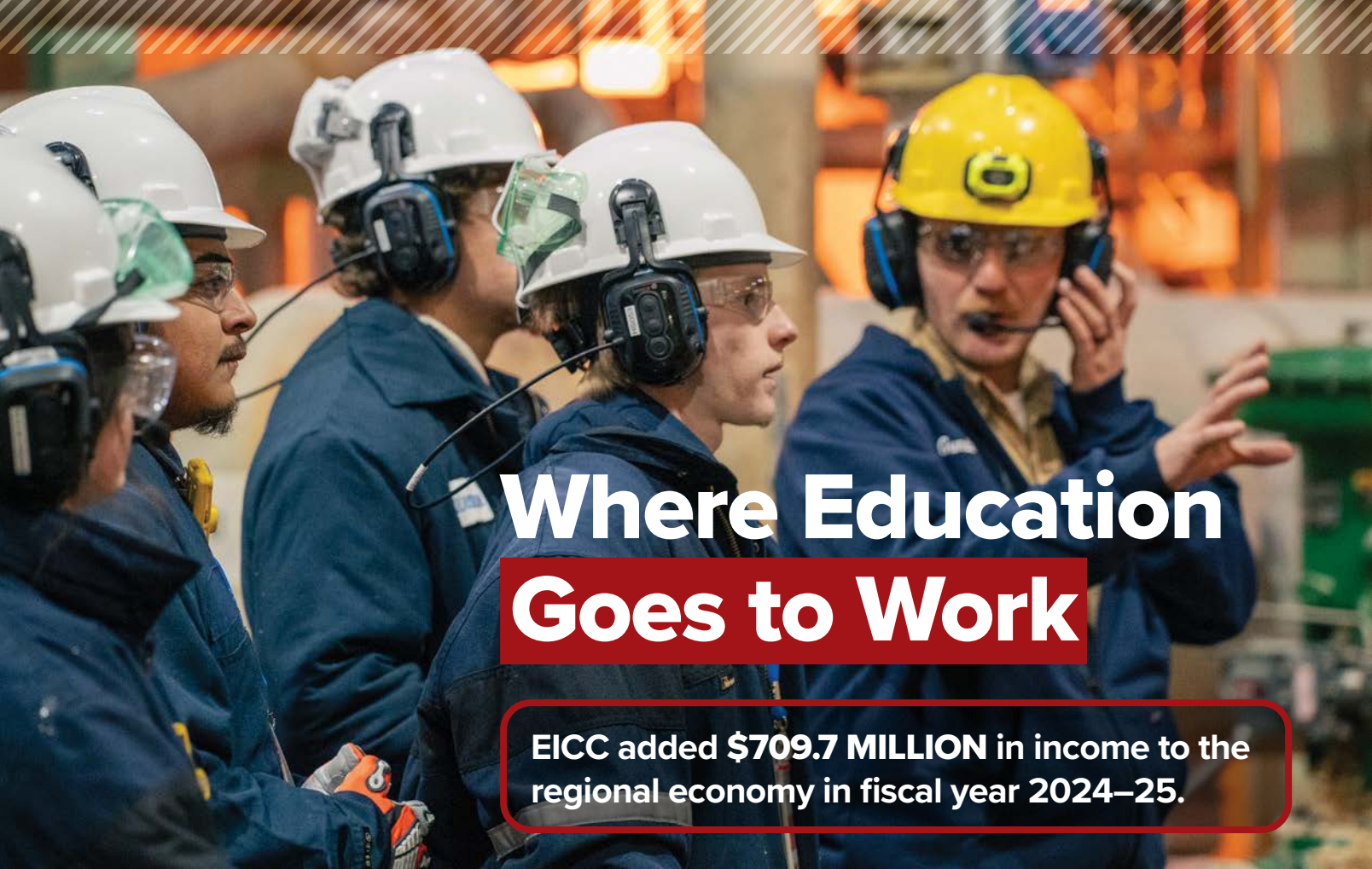
Outside the ensembles, symphony staff could expand other educational programs. Sammons named violin group classes for very young students and summer camps as examples.

"There's just so many things we could dream up," she said.



"I'm trying to help students realize what a beautiful world and privilege it is to come together and make music."

– Hisham Bravo Groover



Where Education Goes to Work

EICC added \$709.7 MILLION in income to the regional economy in fiscal year 2024–25.



Eastern Iowa Community Colleges



Learn more about the Economic Impact Study at eicc.edu/impact

ADVERTORIAL

A welder steps onto the production floor. A nurse starts a shift. An IT specialist solves a problem before it becomes a bigger one.

A new economic impact study conducted by Lightcast found that Eastern Iowa Community Colleges (EICC) added \$709.7 million in income to the regional economy in fiscal year 2024–25. The analysis covers EICC’s six-county service region: Cedar, Clinton, Jackson, Louisa, Muscatine, and Scott.

In fiscal year 2024–25, former students generated \$651.6 million in added income for the regional economy, roughly 92% of the college’s total economic impact. Their increased skills and productivity supported the equivalent of 8,179 jobs.

“What stands out is where the majority of this impact comes from,” said EICC Chancellor Bryan Renfro, PhD. “It’s former students going to work, using what they learned, and bringing those skills into businesses and organizations across the region. When people become better at what they do, their employers

benefit, too. That’s how education becomes economic impact.”

And most of those students stay close to home. Lightcast estimates that 86% of former students remain in the six-county region after leaving EICC. Another 3% remain elsewhere in Iowa.

Lightcast’s analysis captures both sides of that equation. Former students increase their earning potential through the knowledge and skills they gained at EICC. Their increased productivity also creates additional value for the businesses that employ them.

“Businesses can invest in new technology, new equipment, and new ideas, but they still need people with the skills to put those investments to work. That’s why workforce development and economic development are so closely connected,” Renfro said.

The effects reach across the regional economy, including health care, manufacturing, retail, construction, finance, professional and technical services, transportation, hospitality, and other industries.

The scale is significant. EICC’s \$709.7 million impact in fiscal year 2024–25

“When people build their careers here, the value stays here. They earn here, spend here, and bring their experience back to work every day.”

Bryan Renfro, PhD,
EICC Chancellor

equaled about 3.3% of the six-county region's gross regional product. That activity supported an estimated 9,036 jobs, or one out of every 22 jobs in the region.

Some of that impact begins while students are still in college.

EICC's operations contributed \$41.4 million to the regional economy in fiscal year 2024–25. Spending by students who relocated to the region to attend EICC, along with local students who otherwise would have left the area for college, added another \$16.8 million.

The alumni impact alone is more than 11 times the combined impact of college operations and student spending.

The economic value of education is

not confined to tuition paid, buildings constructed, supplies purchased, or dollars spent near a campus, Renfro said.

“When people build their careers here, the value stays here. They earn here, spend here, and bring their experience back to work every day. Employers retain talent, families gain stability, and the region becomes stronger,” he added.

The Lightcast report measures the result in millions of dollars and thousands of jobs. But the source is much simpler: a person learns something new and puts it to work.

It's the economic footprint of what people do with their education once they go to work.

What an EICC Education Adds Up To

The economic impact starts with students, and the value of an EICC education can continue throughout a lifetime.

\$498,500 MORE

The estimated additional earnings of an average EICC associate degree graduate over a working lifetime compared with someone with a high school diploma or equivalent.

19.4% ANNUAL RETURN

The average annual rate of return for students investing in an EICC education.

11,468 CREDIT STUDENTS

served by EICC in fiscal year 2024–25.

10,789 NONCREDIT STUDENTS

served through workforce training, continuing education and other noncredit learning.

22% CAME FROM OUTSIDE THE REGION

Nearly one in four credit students came to EICC from beyond the six-county service area – bringing new people, spending and talent.

For Students. For Employers. For Our Region.

EICC is helping build the workforce our region needs – one student, one employee, and one opportunity at a time.



FOR EMPLOYERS

From customized training and leadership development to safety, advanced manufacturing and industry-specific programs, EICC works with businesses to build skills, strengthen teams and respond to changing workforce needs. eicc.edu/workforce



FOR FUTURE EMPLOYEES

Career and technical programs prepare students for in-demand careers in health care, manufacturing, skilled trades, transportation, technology and more, with hands-on learning designed for the workplace. eicc.edu/cte



FOR THE NEXT STEP

Students can also start at EICC and transfer on, building a strong academic foundation while preparing for what comes next. eicc.edu/transfer

THE POWER TO PERFORM

BUSINESS INTERNET

**1 Gig[†] | \$99.99^{*} / Month | 2-YEAR
PRICE LOCK**

**WiFi Powered by eero Included | Built-In Data Security
24/7 Live Local Support | Commitment Free
Simple Transparent Pricing**

**MEDIACOMSM
BUSINESS**

CALL TODAY 800-479-2091



[Scan to Learn More!](#)

*One-time/other costs: Advertised price is for package that includes Internet 1 Gig, modem, Data Security and WiFi powered by eero 7 for the stated promotional period and does not include one-time installation fee (currently \$149.95) or monthly taxes. Price starts at \$99.99/month for the first 2 years and increase \$20/month each year up to \$159.99/month; thereafter, then-current standard rate for the package will apply. Standard rates are subject to change. †Advertised Speed: Advertised speeds are for a wired connection. Actual speeds may vary and are not guaranteed, see mediacombusiness.com/speed-factors. General Terms; Trademarks. Offer open only to new business subscribers, cannot be combined with other offers, may be changed, discontinued or terminated any time without notice; is not transferable; and is subject to law. Billing is monthly in advance. Subscription continues and automatically renews each month until canceled. Cancel any time. All trademarks, logos, and brands are the property of their respective owners. © 2026 Mediacom Communications Corporation. All Rights Reserved.



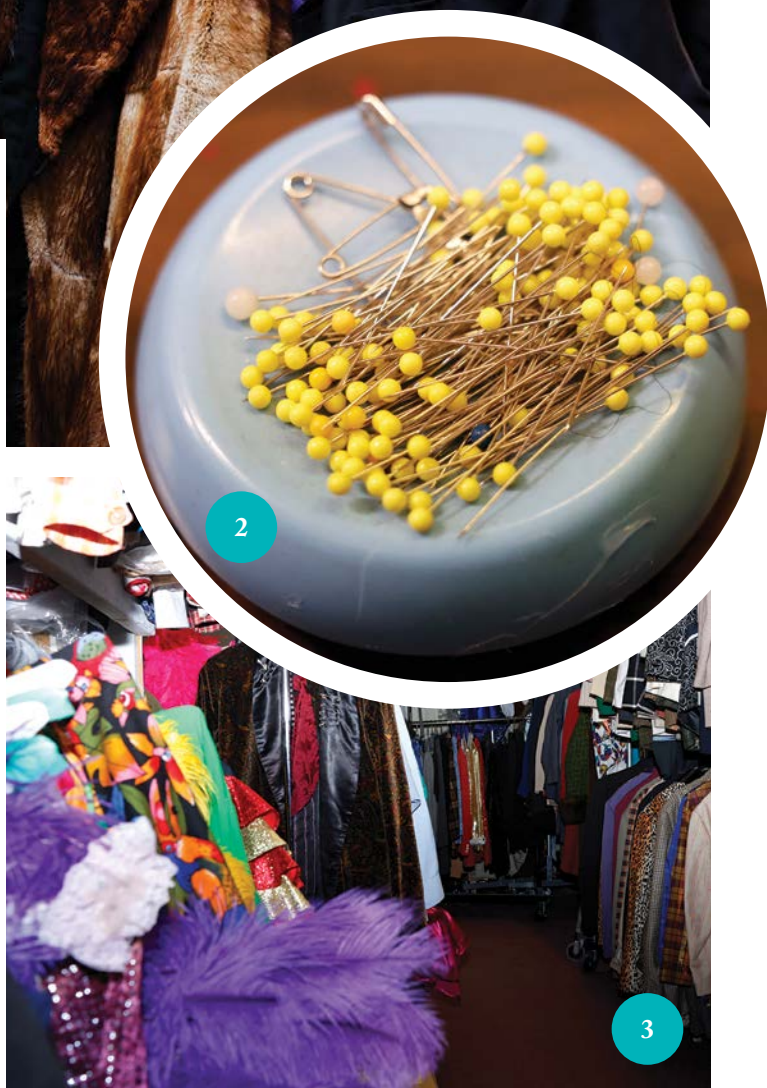
Creating a costume

KATELYN METZGER

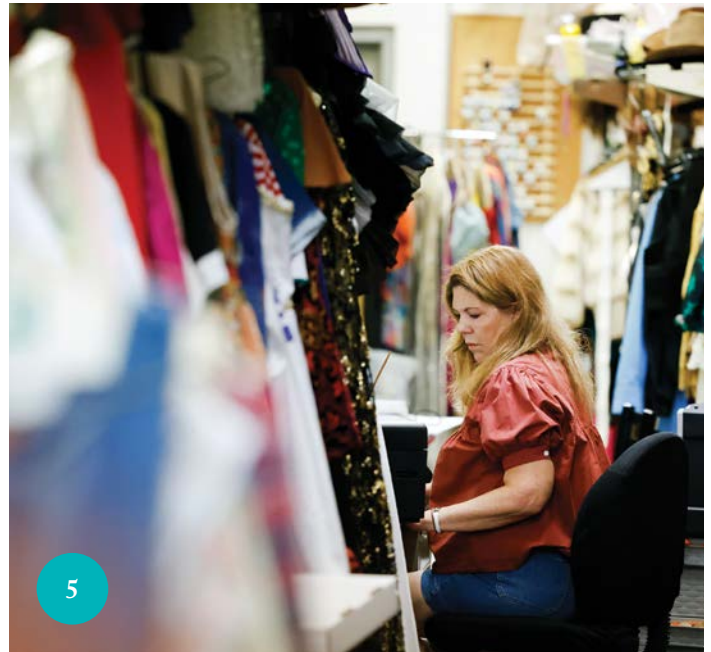
kmetzger@qctimes.com

An actor's costume is used to build a character, depicting their personality and circumstances without the use of dialog. Discussions among the costume designer, director and actor help move the process along, creating ideas for how a character will show up.

The costume designers at Circa '21 Dinner Playhouse, and its sister stage, the Speakeasy, use the costume room to create each actors' wardrobe from scratch often reusing articles of clothing from past plays or sew a piece from scratch.



1. Costume designer Jeanne Hickey Nugent shows off coats that will be used in Circa '21 Dinner Playhouse's upcoming musical, "Rock of Ages," on Tuesday, Aug. 18, in Rock Island. Hickey Nugent has about 25 years of experience as a costume designer working on movie sets and with live performers. **2.** Sewing pins sit in a pile on a desk in the Circa '21 Dinner Playhouse costume room on Tuesday, Aug. 18, in Rock Island. After an actor gets the role of a character, they are asked to send body measurements to the designer. Since actors are often from out of town, designers rely on the measurements to create their costume. Adjustments and alterations will be made once they are in town for the performance season. **3.** "Rock of Ages" costume designer Jeanne Hickey Nugent believes that costuming is one of the most important ways that the actor becomes the character. "You can see the actors getting excited during the fitting and start to become the character," she said.



4. While actors do their own hair and makeup, wigs are sometimes used to enhance a character's hair. Costume designer Jeanne Hickey Nugent will print and tape photos to actors' dressing room mirror to help inspire them while they are getting ready for their live performance. 5. "Rock of Ages" costume designer Jeanne Hickey Nugent works at her desk in the Circa '21 costume room on Tuesday, Aug. 18, in Rock Island. The designer will find inspiration by researching and creating vision boards in Google Docs dedicated to each character.

Business Loans & Equipment Leases

Contact us today for competitive pricing, experienced lenders, and quick loan decisions from a local lender, providing community banking since 1890.

BankORION



Scan to
meet our
lending team



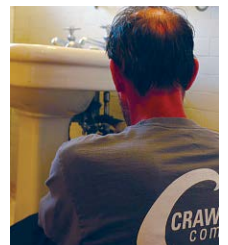
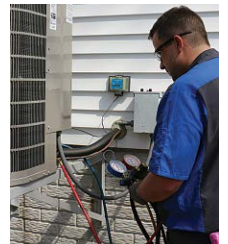
Member FDIC LENDER
www.bankorion.com



Keeping the QC Cool Since 1952

**Residential, Commercial
and Industrial:**

-  **Heating**
-  **Cooling**
-  **Plumbing**
-  **Electrical**



309-788-4573
crawford-company.com



6. A wig for the Cowardly Lion in "The Wizard of Oz" sits in a dressing room countertop at Circa '21 Dinner Playhouse on Tuesday, Aug. 18, in Rock Island. **7.** Necklaces hang from a wall in the Circa '21 Dinner Playhouse costume closet on Tuesday, Aug. 18, in Rock Island. The dinner theater and its sister stage, the Speakeasy, not only fills the large costume room with clothing, accessories and wigs, but they also rent and fill and storage space and a 40-foot-long shipping container. **8.** Colorful petticoats hang from the Circa '21 Playhouse Dinner costume room ceiling. Once the director and costume designer for a show are hired, the vision for each character is discussed on how to amplify the characters personality. The costume designer will mock up several ideas for each character, giving the director an option to choose which they like the best, with some actors also giving input based on how they believe their character should be portrayed. **9.** Director of Audience Development Brett Hitchcock is reflected in a dressing room mirror at Circa '21 Dinner Playhouse on Tuesday, Aug. 18, in Rock Island. Hitchcock mentioned that the dinner theater's costume designer makes or alters most of the costumes, as they rarely rent costumes. **10.** Makeup brushes and a green nose belonging to the Wicked Witch of the West sits in a dressing room at Circa '21 Dinner Playhouse on Tuesday, Aug. 18, in Rock Island.

Ready to rock:

Vibrant Arena at the Mark's executive director talks professional journey, plans for future

GRETCHEN TESKE

gteske@qctimes.com

Rik Edgar is a kind of collector.

The new executive director of Vibrant Arena at the Mark, 1201 River Drive in Moline, has an office full of memorabilia he has collected during his years in the industry. There are Funko Pop! figures on cabinets, signed posters on the walls and a few sports pieces that show his passion for his beloved Seattle Seahawks.

Growing up in Myrtle Beach, he found the Seahawks a strange NFL team to gravitate toward. But after writing to the franchise's first quarterback, Jim Zorn, and hearing back from him, he remained a loyal fan for the rest of his life.

That was the start of Edgar's career in collecting memories. Before long, he added collecting music, too.

"It goes back to when I was 10 years old, and I used to listen to Casey Kasem on the radio, and I would write down the countdown," he said.

When Edgar was a kid, the radio station held a contest where they played a song from multiple decades, and listeners were supposed to write down the names of the songs and send them in on a postcard.

"This was when I was 11 years old, and I actually won the contest," Edgar said. "So I show up and they go, 'Well, you don't have an ID.'"

He was able to prove who he was anyway and took home a prize of albums with America's Top 40 hits of the week.

"So, that locks you in," he said with a smile.

A love of music and albums stayed with him through high school, when he started a job at a local record store. Also an avid sports fan, Edgar landed a job at Coastal Carolina University as "the world's worst baseball information director."

It may not have been the best fit for someone who struggles with spelling, he said, but it did help land a new role at the University of South Carolina, where he worked with coaches, breaking down film for various sporting teams.

"Then I totally got out of that and did stuff that had nothing to do with what I was going to do the rest of my life," he said. But, in a way, it did. Edgar says the best job he ever had was waiting tables. Not for the money, but for the lesson it taught him.



Rik Edgar poses next to just a handful of his concert credential lanyards in his office at Vibrant Arena at the Mark on Tuesday, July 21, in Moline.

Katelyn Metzger



Executive Director **Rik Edgar** poses outside of Vibrant Arena at the Mark on Tuesday, July 21, in Moline.

Katelyn Metzger

"When you're not on your game, you feel it in your wallet. So you learn how to pick yourself up when things aren't going the best," he said. "So, I did all these things, and then was kind of a lost puppy in my early 30s."

Along the way, his heart told him to go back to music — his first love. But it wasn't so easy to get started.

At the time, he said the pathway into the business was difficult, and employment at larger venues was often dependent on

connections. With no such luck, Edgar found himself working instead for a children's cancer center.

The job paid well enough, but it wasn't fulfilling. Then one day, the encouragement he needed literally flashed before his eyes.

"It was very vivid to me, at the bottom right of my screen," he said. "It was one of those moments you never forget. I had this little thing that would flash with the dates. I had the flashing going on, and I was like, 'I'm really watching my life tick away,'" he said.

Edgar reached out to his sports contacts and picked up a side gig working at a box office for minimum wage. He started asking around for other job opportunities, but with college students nearby who could do the job for a lower price, there wasn't a way to earn a livable wage at his current position.

Unless he was willing to move.

"So, I thought we were going to move to somewhere on the coast, and then they go, 'What do you think of Des Moines, Iowa?' And I had to pull out a map," he said.

A born, raised and self-described "East Coast kid," Edgar, his wife and their 1-year-old daughter moved to the Midwest, where he took a 40% pay cut to work with the overnight changeover crew. In that job, he helped flip the arena from hosting a concert to being ready to host a football game the next day.



Edgar says the best job he ever had was waiting tables. Not for the money, but for the lesson it taught him.

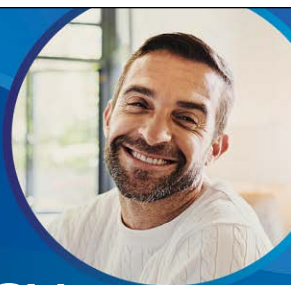
The work was brutal, he said, with 12- to 14-hour work days happening 10-12 days in a row. He didn't earn a lot of money, but the skills helped him climb the ladder to other jobs.

There was a six-year stint in Wisconsin, three years in West Virginia and finally

Peoria, Illinois, where he worked for the last eight years.

"Each time, it was to get into a little bit bigger market and to learn a little more," he said. "And then the Peoria gig, I'm really proud of what we did there."

ADVANCED CATARACT TECHNOLOGY



The Light Adjustable Lens is the only lens that allows your surgeon to customize your vision after your procedure.

Reduce or eliminate your need for glasses with this FDA-approved technology, available at Eye Surgeons.

Schedule your cataract consultation to find out if this is the right lens option for you.



Eye Surgeons Associates

Medical • Surgical • Optical

Providing Your Best Vision For Life

(563) 323-2020 | (309) 793-2020 | ESAEYECARE.COM

"So, I thought we were going to move to somewhere on the coast, and then they go, 'What do you think of Des Moines, Iowa?' And I had to pull out a map."

– Rik Edgar

When Edgar took over as the general manager for the Peoria Civic Center in 2018, the venue was doing about \$8 million in ticket sales. By the end of his tenure, the venue was looking at nearly \$17 million in ticket sales and had multiplied the number of events by two or three, he said.

When Edgar took over as the general manager for the Peoria Civic Center in 2018, the venue was doing about \$8 million in ticket sales. By the end of his tenure, the venue was looking at nearly \$17 million in ticket sales and had multiplied the number of events by two or three, he said.

"It became a very busy, active building. I actually thought that was my forever job,

but then this opportunity came about," he said.

In Peoria, the venue was a multiplex: a theater, arena and convention center all in one. It was a job where he was constantly moving, he said, and was tasked with helping build up its potential.

In Moline, the potential was already realized, he said. The venue just needed an extra push.

"My job has primarily been, up to now, a fixer. I go into an account that needs fixing. That's not the case here," he said. "I walked in, and I went ... 'You know, it's like you guys have a winning recipe. You just need a little sauce on the top. You need to change it up just a little bit so it's more of a tweak, versus a repair.'"

Edgar said part of that is reminding staff that guests are coming to Vibrant

TOP LAWYERS

IL QUAD CITIES AREA

BASED UPON A SURVEY OF THEIR PEERS



These **LEADING LAWYERS** have been recommended by their peers to be among the **TOP LAWYERS** in Illinois.

Reynolds M. Everett Jr.	Barash & Everett LLC	Galva	309.932.2001	Agriculture; Trust/Will/Estate
Paul L. Mangieri	Barash & Everett LLC	Galesburg	309.341.6010	Comm Lit; Criminal Def: Felonies/Misdemeanors; PI: General; PI: Transportation; Workers' Comp
John W. Robertson	Barash & Everett LLC	Galesburg	309.341.6010	Civil Appellate; Commercial Litigation; Insurance/Ins Coverage/Reinsurance; PI Defense: General
John F. Doak	Katz Nowinski PC	Moline	309.797.3000	Civil Rights/Constitutional; Employment: Employee; ADR: Employment
Howard E. Zimmerle	Zimmerle Law	Moline	309.581.5336	Personal Injury: General; Workers' Compensation

These **EMERGING LAWYERS** have been recommended by their peers to be among the **TOP LAWYERS** in Illinois who are age 40 or younger OR who have been admitted to the practice of law for 10 or fewer years.

Zachary L. Lessard	Barash & Everett LLC	Kewanee	309.852.5555	Close/Private Held Business; Family; Trust/Will/Estate
--------------------	----------------------	---------	--------------	--

Leading LawyersSM
Find a better lawyer, fasterSM

emerging lawyersSM
on a fast track to the topSM

A lawyer CANNOT buy the distinction of Leading or Emerging Lawyer. The distinction was earned by being among those lawyers most often recommended by their peers. For a full description of our research process, a complete list of all Leading or Emerging Lawyers, and to view profiles of the lawyers listed on this page, go to

www.LeadngLawyers.com

A Division of Law Bulletin Media—est. 1854



A look at the new color changing lights on Vibrant Arena.

Katelyn Metzger

Arena of their own choice. And if the arena is where they choose to spend their money, staff have a responsibility to ensure that the experience is top-tier.

"When you come in the door to see Luke Bryan or Journey, you're coming with the expectation of having a good time," Edgar said. "Our job is just to facilitate that, and so culturally, our goal is to make it warm, comfortable, inviting, and hopefully, you go back with a memory

because you never know. Dave Grohl says it best: 'You never know when there's a kid who spent his week's allowance to have that seat in the last row in the balcony.'"

Edgar officially started his new position at Vibrant in July and was settling into his new role at the time of the interview. Getting to know the arena and the people who work inside of it were among his top priorities.

"The venue usually takes on the personality, a little bit, of the leadership

team, and I have a different kind of leadership team," he said. "I believe I work for my directors. My directors work for my managers. My managers work for the front office staff. The ushers don't work for me. I work for them."

With the change in leadership, Edgar said, there were a few things he noticed off the bat, but those small tweaks were handled quickly, considering the speed at which Edgar got to work. In the first three weeks of employment, he reached a verbal agreement with the hockey team, solidified the arena's Pepsi contract and pulled off two sold-out shows.

Country music star Ella Langley is booked to play Vibrant Arena in late September. The show sold out so quickly that it shut down the Ticketmaster website for a bit, Edgar said.

By the time her show concludes, Langley will be the third highest-grossing concert in the venue's history. Paul McCartney is in second place, and Morgan Wallen is the highest-grossing artist.

Moving forward, Edgar said the goal is to continue raising the bar at Vibrant. The demand is there, he said, and when the venue does well, the whole community benefits.

"I believe I work for my directors. My directors work for my managers. My managers work for the front office staff. The ushers don't work for me. I work for them."

– Rik Edgar



Executive Director **Rik Edgar** poses at a conference table his new office at Vibrant Arena at the Mark on Tuesday, July 21, in Moline. Edgar, who made the move from Peoria, assumed his new position in July.

Katelyn Metzger

MILAN BLACKTOP INC.
309-787-6099

est. 1989

Serving the

Commercial Entire Residential

Quad-Cities

Quality Work at Affordable Prices

MILAN BLACKTOP INC.
309-787-6099

16325 Rt. 67, Milan, IL
(309)787-6099

QCCCO
QUAD CITY COIN CO.

ALEXANDER W. CURRAN
CEO/Coin Evaluation Officer

2395 Tech Drive, Suite 1 | alex@qccoin.com
Bettendorf, IA 52722 | 563-332-9189

WWW.QCCOIN.COM

THINKING ABOUT INVESTING? We buy and sell Gold Silver and Platinum. Stop by to learn how easy it is.

NEED CASH? Bring in your unwanted jewelry, sterling flatware, or pile of old coins and currency. \$\$\$

LOOKING FOR A HOBBY Great investment for you and your family.

DOWN SIZING? Let us give you a verbal appraisal.

Quad City Coin Family owned business since 1978. Stop by and Meet Alex Curran.

2395 Tech Drive, Bettendorf Iowa
563-332-9189 www.qccoin.com

Tues-Friday 10-3 pm

"The intent in a venue like ours and a community like this is we are the economic epicenter of the downtown. It's pretty obvious when we're open with good content, the downtown feels the economic impact," he said. "Our goals are to do the right kind of content that not only satisfies the locals but brings people from other zip codes."

Data from the Luke Bryan concert in July showed 40% of ticket sales came from within the Quad-Cities area. That means 60% of concert goers traveled to Moline for the show. Additionally, Edgar said that 17% of those concertgoers came from competing markets, such as Peoria or Cedar Rapids, to see the show.

"We saw folks in those outlying areas that have their own arenas were coming to our venue," he said. "So part of that (goal) is we want to put on things that encourage people to come downtown."

Edgar said his style is to "live emotion, but manage by data," when it comes to deciding what acts to bring in. He's been in the business so long that he has a feel for things, he said, but still relies on market research.

"Our goals are to do the right kind of content that not only satisfies the locals but brings people from other zip codes."

– Rik Edgar

"Right now, I'm listening to the market," he said. "Obviously, there is a stellar history of country (music here). I'm a little more rock-and-roll, and so I'm trying to figure out what shows make sense. In the three weeks, we've confirmed three shows that haven't announced yet, and some of them are in different genres than have normally played here."

The shows will be announced after Labor Day, he said, but setting up Vibrant for the future is what that groundwork is all about. Edgar said he wants the staff,

show selection and atmosphere to be just as "vibrant" as the name suggests, and to provide a place where others can create memories that turn them into lifetime fans.

"I think (Vibrant Arena) is the thing that gets everybody in the Quad-Cities excited," he said. "It's where you get to see things that no one else does. ... One thing that makes us special is we do something nobody else in a 50-mile radius can do. So, we're just going to lean into that, and hopefully we bring some cool stuff."



VOTED BEST OF THE QC!

#1 NEW CAR DEALERSHIP #1 SERVICE DEPARTMENT
#1 CUSTOMER SERVICE #1 TIRE STORE
#1 TRUCK STORE #1 LUXURY DEALERSHIP



★★★★★ Google 4.8 Rating
HIGHEST AUTO DEALER RATING
IN THE QUAD CITIES



3700 16th St Moline IL
309-762-5397
KeyAutoMall.com



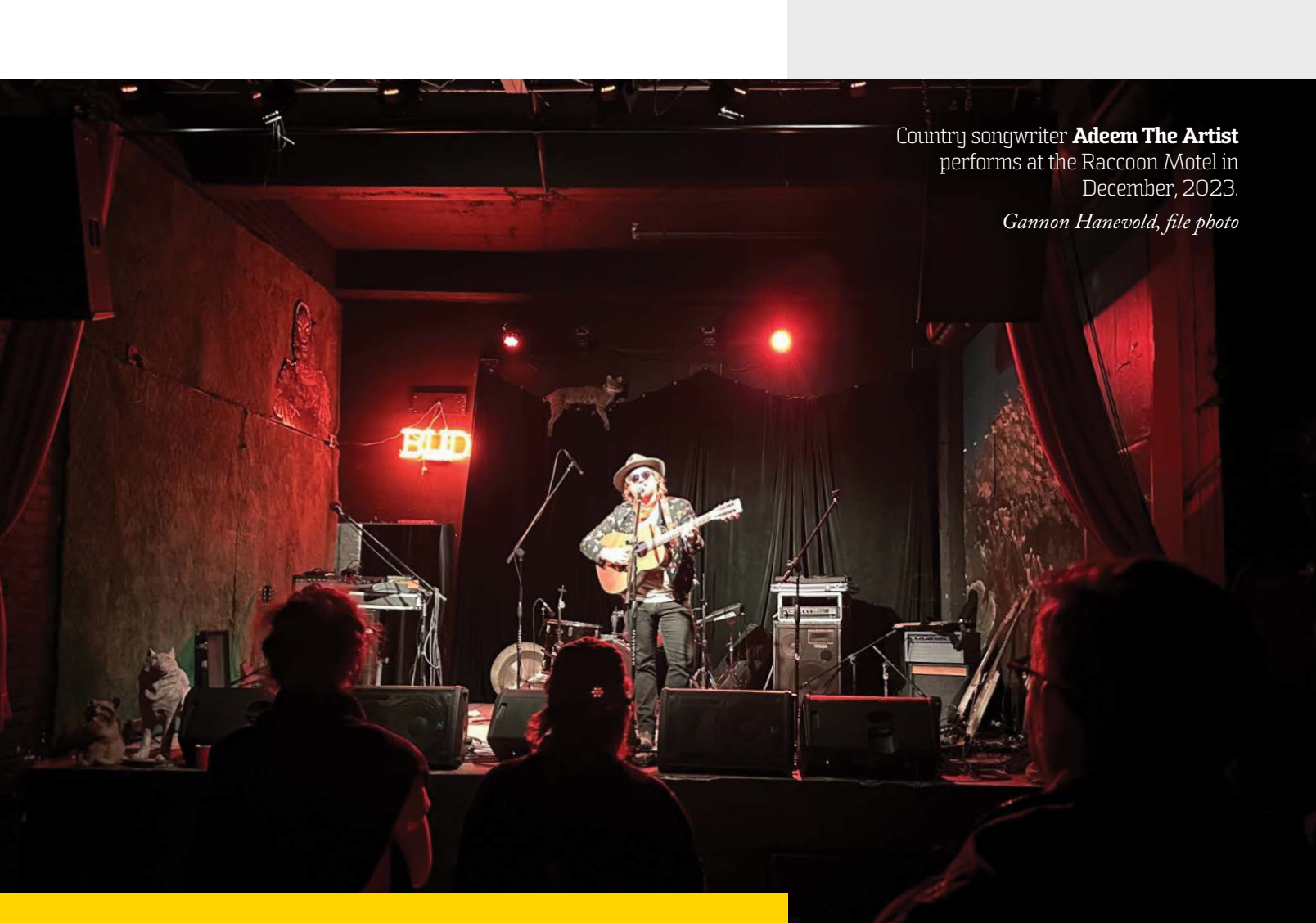
3921 W River Dr Davenport, IA
563-362-4011
CourtesyFordqc.com



Jeep

625 W Kimberly Rd, Davenport, IA
563-391-8300
KimberlyCarCity.com

*Key Auto has 4.8 Rating & Best New Car, Service Dept., Customer Service for Auto, Tire Store. Kimberly BMW Best Luxury, Courtesy Ford Best Truck Store.



Country songwriter **Adeem The Artist** performs at the Raccoon Motel in December, 2023.

Gannon Hanevold, file photo

No place like home:

Sean Moeller brings his favorite music to his hometown

GRETCHEN TESKE

gteske@qctimes.com

Sean Moeller does not take recommendations.

In a small bar in Davenport's West End, Moeller kept one hand on a book and the other on a Modelo — lime in. Another empty bottle sits beside it, with the lime resting at the bottom.

The book, he said, was recommended by a friend. But he wasn't really enjoying it. He just wanted to give it a chance.

Typically, Moeller doesn't take recommendations. They never seem to live up to the hype, he said.

It's why he strays from making them. Instead, he introduces people to music by artists they may not have heard of yet. Moeller has built a career on finding up-and-coming artists and introducing them to the world, whether that's through a music studio he started in his 20s or a concert venue he opened in his 40s.

That knack for finding something worth hearing has taken Moeller through several projects over the years. But almost all of them have shared the same home: the Quad-Cities area.

The Davenport native has lived nearly his entire life in the Quad-Cities, save for the few years he was at the University of Iowa. He never wanted to leave, he said, and the one time he did, he came right back.

"I didn't have any real reason to go anywhere else. I think here kind of rules," he said. "I mean, I've been lots of places, and there aren't many other places I'd rather be. I don't even think I had to make a decision. It's just kind of like this is where I came back to after I graduated from Iowa, and I didn't even look at jobs anywhere else," he said.

After graduation, Moeller scored a full-time job at the Quad-City Times in Davenport; his long-time employer.

"I started answering phones in the sports department, my junior year in high school, and then after my first semester at Iowa, they let me start writing, and so I would just come back on breaks in the summer and just work for the paper, and then I graduated, and you know, just was one of the staffers."

As one of the staffers, Moeller worked the sports and entertainment beats.

"I kind of weaseled my way into getting to preview and review concerts. That's kind of what lead to starting Daytrotter and doing all of this stuff," he said with a shrug.

As Moeller spoke, Kid Rock's 'All Summer Long' blared over the speakers in the bar. But unlike the song lyrics, it wasn't summertime in northern Michigan that changed the trajectory of Moeller's life.

Moeller has built a career on finding up-and-coming artists and introducing them to the world, whether that's through a music studio he started in his 20s or a concert venue he opened in his 40s.

It was February in Rock Island, in a small studio above Huckleberry's Pizza. It was either 2004 or 2006 — one of those two, he said.

A friend of his, Pat Stolley, had a recording studio there, and Moeller had an idea.

"I asked him if he wanted to work on a crazy little hobby, and the next week we were kind of recording people and just

putting it up on the internet," he said. "Just here we go. Here's your website."

It was the early days of the internet, Moeller said, and the idea was simple: Record artists as they rolled through the Quad-Cities and put their music online. At that time, most people with online music blogs were reviewing music, but original content uploads were rare.

Andrew Dismukes of "Saturday Night Live" performs at the Racoon Motel in Davenport on Sunday, July 12, 2026. Dismukes performed a 45-minute comedy set to a crowd of more than 70 people.

Nina Baker





Sean Moeller poses for a photo in 2018 ahead of the opening of the Rust Belt in East Moline.

Quad-City Times File Photo

"Nobody was really creating media or something audio or visual, and putting it on the internet and thinking it could be anything," he said. "We were just before the scroll, before the feed. It was a way to garner some attention for something that was novel back then."

They coined their studio Daytrotter and saw acts before they hit it big.

Moeller himself was fresh out of college, in his early 20s, when the project started. But there was no weird tension when he reached out to bands to ask if they wanted to play. For the most part, they were all the same age.

"If you're trying to be a band, if you aren't starting to do it at 18, 19 years old, you probably waited too long," he said.

"I mean, most of the people that we were inviting in were kind of peers. I don't think anybody looked (down) at us that way."

Daytrotter slowly gained steam, and people outside of the music business started to notice. That included Moeller's editor at his day job with the paper.

"I think we all saw the writing on the wall," Moeller said. "I got pulled into the office and (the editor) was like, 'Yeah, it seems like that's kind of doing well.'"

That was in the summer, Moeller said, and being on the sports desk, the paper was gearing up for the fall sports season. It seemed like Moeller's schedule was getting busier and busier with Daytrotter, and his nights were about to fill up fast as a reporter.

"It's not like I wasn't doing my job at The Times, he was just kind of like, 'Now would be a good time for us to get somebody different if you want to go do this,' and I was like, 'Yeah, that sounds really good actually,'" Moeller said. "So I got mutually let go."

Moeller said he didn't take it hard at all. The timing was right, and so was his editor — Moeller wanted to focus on Daytrotter more and see where it could lead him.

Turns out, it led to new adventures in new spaces. In 2009, Moeller opened up Codfish Hollow Barnstormers in Maquoketa, Iowa.

The venue is quintessential Iowa entertainment: music in a barn where guests bring their own blankets and chairs. About a 45-minute drive north of Davenport, Maquoketa seems like a random choice.



**In his 10 years
with the studio,
Daytrotter hosted
6,000 studio
sessions of
touring bands.**

But not to Moeller.

"It's the coolest barn," he said. "They're easy people to work with. I was able to talk them into kicking all the hay bales out of there and just making it a venue. I don't know that I could have found too many people willing to do that, but they were happy to do it. So that's why Maquoketa."

In 2016, Moeller decided to leave Daytrotter. In his 10 years with the studio, Daytrotter hosted 6,000 studio sessions of touring bands, mostly at a space above Huckleberry's Pizza. Daytrotter moved operations to Davenport in October 2015, where the team unveiled a new concert venue downtown and later hosted its first multi-day mega festival, Daytrotter Downs.

It was starting to become something he did rather than something he was passionate about, he said. That's when he knew it was time to walk away.

For about a year, he said, Codfish was his focus. But in 2017, 2018, somewhere in there, Moeller decided to open a music venue of his own.

He called it the Triple Whiskey Bar and Raccoon Motel and put it at 304 E. Third St. in Davenport; a tiny building that was once a gas station decades before. Moeller closed the venue in 2019, staying tight-lipped about the reason.

"It didn't work out," he said plainly, twisting the now-empty Modelo bottle in his hand.

At the same time, Moeller was already cooking up another idea in East Moline. An old warehouse, which was about to be torn down, could be the perfect place to hold even bigger concerts in his home community.

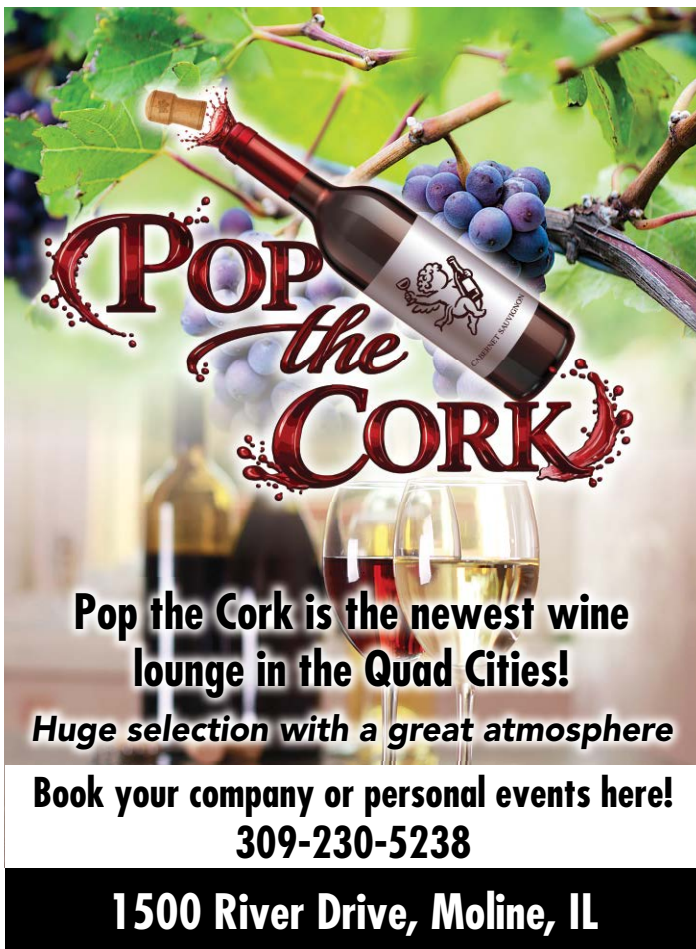
He called it the Rust Belt, a name inspired by the building's rustic, industrial feel. It opened in 2019 with Moeller as the booking manager of the 30,000-square-foot building with a 4,000-person capacity.

Just as quickly as the building opened, the COVID-19 pandemic sneaked in. During that first year, Moeller said, he started to realize audiences in the thousands just weren't his thing.

"It's really not that much fun to deal with bigger shows," he said. "It felt way less personal. I mean, even if we got really great people to come there, it was a lot of headache."

"It's really not that much fun to deal with bigger shows. It felt way less personal."

– Sean Moeller



POP the CORK

Pop the Cork is the newest wine lounge in the Quad Cities!

Huge selection with a great atmosphere

Book your company or personal events here!

309-230-5238

1500 River Drive, Moline, IL



DuTrac
Community Credit Union
Real. Life. Banking.

Grow your business with DuTrac.

Small business is the lifeblood of any community. Continue down the path of profitability with DuTrac's tailored business tools and services.

- Investment property loans
- Commercial real estate loans
- Lines of credit
- Equipment & vehicle loans
- Business credit cards
- Business checking and savings
- Business Money Market Account
- Certificates of Deposit

Contact us to learn more!



JEFF WALLER
Commercial Lending Manager
jwaller@dutrac.org
563.635.7410



DENNIS NARANJO
Commercial Lender
dnaranjo@dutrac.org
563.635.7411

DuTrac.org



Moeller said he was happy the venue opened and stands by the decision. It just turned out that the intimacy of smaller venues is what he was looking for.

Maybe not back to the studio above a small pizza shop, but also not another barn in a rural town. It was time to give the Raccoon Motel one more shot.

"In a way, it was kind of getting back a little bit more to what we were trying to do with Raccoon One," he said. "Expanding it a little bit, giving it a better shot to succeed."

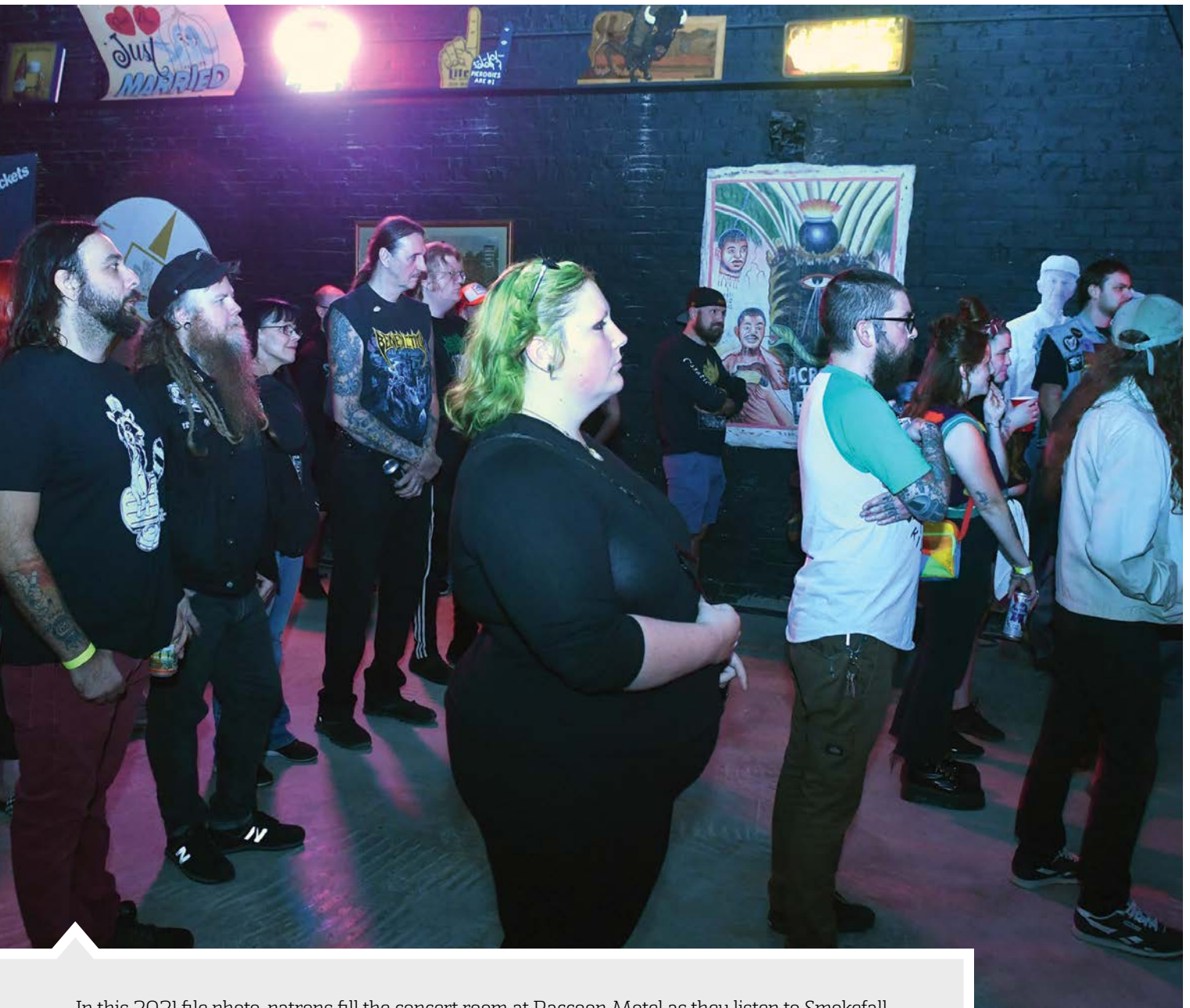
This new version of the Raccoon Motel went in at 315 E. Second St. in Davenport; a much larger space than the original, but still cozy with a 200-person capacity. At the time, moving into Second Street was a bit risky.

That section of Davenport's downtown flooded the year before, and many of the existing businesses closed. But slowly, the area built itself back and is now home to a distillery, vintage clothing and record shop, boutique movie theater, brewery, cigar lounge, restaurants and other retail shops.

The Raccoon Motel, however, is easily the most eccentric stop on the block.

Inside, the walls are covered in neon signs, framed art, a velvet painting of Willie Nelson, a chain-smoking fox, a Farrah Fawcett poster, a pull-tab machine — and those are just at the front bar. To get into the venue itself, concertgoers pull open two massive green, shag-carpeted doors where even more eccentric decor awaits.

"I didn't have to come up with anything. That's just the way my brain is, literally. The cluttered space, that's my brain," he said.



In this 2021 file photo, patrons fill the concert room at Raccoon Motel as they listen to Smokefall.

Gary L. Krambeck, file photo

The idea of a cookie-cutter space with a handful of things hanging on a wall just doesn't register, he said. And for the musicians he brings in, it doesn't register for them either.

"It's one of those things where I think almost every musician that comes into that space immediately feels at home," he said. "They feel this is comfortable, this isn't a sterile environment, we can be ourselves, we can do whatever we do, and it's going to be received non-coldly. I think there's a warmth to the stuff. I think there's a warmth to the decorations, and there's a warmth to just the feeling of the room that sets people at ease and makes them, maybe, put on a better show."

Putting artists at ease is really the priority, Moeller said. He wants them to come in, take one look around and know the Raccoon Motel is the place they can put on a show that was even better than the one they performed the night before.

"You take the money, or anything else out of it, I think you can walk in and say, 'Oh. This is gonna be better than last night,' for whatever reason," he said.

"It's one of those things where I think almost every musician that comes into that space immediately feels at home."

– Sean Moeller

The touring artists that come through the Raccoon Motel are typically eccentric, not quite on the charts yet and a bit under the radar. Moeller wants it that way.

Remember — he doesn't do recommendations.

"I read this line the other day, and it said, 'I don't ask you where you get your money. Don't ask me where I get my

books.' And I think, maybe, that's as good of an explanation (as I can give)," he said. "In the same way I'm constantly looking for other things to put on the wall, I'm constantly looking for new things to inspire me. It's like when I find a band that seems like they're doing something that other people aren't doing. It makes me happy. I don't like run-of-the-mill stuff."



Owner. Manager.
HR Department.
You do it all.



Let us make benefits **easy.**

SharingHealthySmiles.com | 888-337-5160

Moeller isn't looking to give recommendations either. He's just trying to find artists before they get big and bring them in to entertain his community.

"I have a really long track record of finding people before anybody else knew who they were," he said. "And it doesn't have to be a bragging point, but other people weren't giving people chances. And not that my chance led to more chances, but it's certainly been..." he trailed off, a smirk on his face.

The book he was recommended still sat on the table with a playing card sticking out of it: a makeshift bookmark. The book was now accompanied by two empty Modelo bottles.

Moeller isn't one for recommendations, but he took a chance on that book. He asks the same of concertgoers who come to the Motel: they don't need his recommendation — just a willingness to take a chance on what he's hearing, too.



Iowa shoegaze band **Blist Her** performs at the Raccoon Motel in 2024.

Gannon Hanevold, file photo

Quad Cities Leader in People Transportation



BUSINESS +
CORPORATE



WEDDINGS +
SPECIAL EVENTS



AIRPORT
TRANSPORTATION



ATHLETICS
(COLLEGE + HIGH SCHOOL)



Experience a Touch of Class

WITH OUR PROFESSIONALLY CHAUFFEURED DRIVERS

Our Fleet includes:

EXECUTIVE COACH BUSES, MERCEDES SPRINTER LIMOUSINES,
BUSINESS CLASS VANS & LUXURY SUVs

Reserve a Vehicle: 309.799.8891 | ActIITransportation.com



Entering a new era

Estes helped transform a long-vacant historic theater into a destination where entertainment, dinner and cocktails are creating new memories.

After more than a decade of disuse, the venue is contributing new activity and economic vitality to its surrounding neighborhood. Estes helped the owner meet requirements for \$1.75 million in state and federal historic tax credits, turning an empty building into a thriving business and live entertainment destination.



DAVENPORT | GALESBURG | DES MOINES
estesconstruction.com | 563.322.7301

Theatre at



Black Hawk College

