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Zero Waste Reserve on Friday, Nov. 14, in Bettendorf.

Katelyn Metzger

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How AI is supercharging America's demand for energy



MARK GRYWACHESKI

Economy

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

Electricity is the lifeblood of our economy. It powers our factories, lights up our homes and businesses and provides the spark that moves our transportation system.

This year, according to the U.S. Energy Information Administration, the U.S. is expected to consume a record-high 4,200 billion kilowatt-hours of electricity. Most of our nation's electricity (42%) is fueled by natural gas. This is followed by nuclear power (19%), renewables (22%) – such as wind, solar and hydropower – and coal (16%). All fossil fuels, which include natural gas and coal, account for 60% of our total electricity consumption.

But the amount of electricity America consumes is expected to quickly surge. According to global consulting firm ICF International, U.S. electricity demand is expected to grow by 25% by 2030 and 78% by 2050. For perspective, between 2005-20, America's average annual increase in electricity use was just 0.1%. So, what is driving this sudden surge in demand?

Experts point to the rapid growth of data centers used to support AI technology. AI data centers are highly specialized facilities built to support complex AI workloads such as machine learning, image generators and large language models used to understand, generate and translate human languages. At the core of these AI data centers are hundreds of thousands of high-performance microchips – typically graphics processing units (GPUs) and AI accelerators – that work in parallel to optimize AI models and algorithms. All this high-performance computing, however, requires a tremendous amount of energy.

There are hundreds of AI data centers spread out across the U.S. Many of these use electricity in amounts comparable to entire cities. For example, Colorado-based Vantage Data Centers is currently developing one of the largest AI data centers ever to be built. Once completed, the \$25 billion facility in Shackelford County, Texas, will utilize 1.4 gigawatts of electricity. Just one gigawatt of electricity is

enough to power a city of roughly one million people.

The growing demand for electricity has already started to strain existing, and often aging, local electrical grids. To address this issue, AI hyperscalers such as Microsoft, Alphabet (Google), Amazon and Meta (Facebook) have started taking their future electricity needs into their own hands. Microsoft, Alphabet and Amazon have already partnered with energy companies to develop modular nuclear facilities. A modular nuclear reactor is a factory-built and standardized reactor that is much smaller in size and output than a traditional nuclear facility. Additional nuclear modules can be installed to scale output as needed as their electricity demand grows. Other hyperscalers, like Meta, have also signed large purchase agreements of electricity with energy companies to ensure a steady supply of electricity to their AI data centers.

AI has quickly become a powerful force. Though still in its relative infancy, the world is already seeing tremendous advancements in science, engineering, research & development, medicine and finance, among many other fields. But all those advancements brought about by AI require a massive amount of technology. And for now, at least, all that technology is fueled by an equally massive amount of electricity.

U.S. electricity demand growth

Source: ICF International

0.1%
per year
2005-20

25%
by 2030

78%
by 2050

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3 signs of organizational dysfunctionality and how to fix it

ANDREA BELK OLSON

We all have worked for dysfunctional companies at one time or another. Most of the time, we view them through the lens of people — whether it be domineering bosses, hostile work environments or sweat-shop-like circumstances. However, there are three common behaviors that can permeate a company and create dysfunction, even if the people and teams are the nicest on the planet.

1. DECISIONS DRAG ON FOR MONTHS

I have witnessed talented people leave companies because they couldn't handle the lack of deliberate decision-making anymore. Many got tired of internal corporate bickering, self-sabotaging, and snail-paced decision-making, so they left.

Why does this happen? Sometimes it's culture, where the organization is highly risk-averse, and seeks knowledge perfection before pulling the trigger, rather than encouraging experimentation. Sometimes it's power plays.

How to fix it? Put decision-making into three categories. First, those decisions that can be made independently. Second, those that need another look, whether from a peer or superior, that impact another area of the organization. Third, those that are big investments, long-term or major changes. Then act on those categorizations accordingly.

2. SO MANY MEETINGS

There are endless meetings. Many meetings are for show rather than function. Meetings tend to be 95% talk and 5% action. Most of the time, a bulk of attendees really don't need to be there. Other times, it's a case where even if a decision is made, it gets cycled back through in subsequent meetings because a real decision hasn't yet been made.

Why does this happen? Oftentimes, companies want to ensure no one department feels isolated or excluded, so it becomes an "everyone attends" meeting. Alternatively, some meetings have such exclusivity, decisions are made with a select group of people, and the other meetings are really designed to sell the pre-made decision to the remainder.

How to fix it? Most companies believe there are too many meetings and try to limit the frequency or days when meetings can occur. However, it's not the frequency, but the function. Instead, for every meeting, determine the one thing that needs to be accomplished up front, and don't end the meeting until it's achieved. This forces efficiency, as well as transparency.

3. HURRY UP AND WAIT (AKA NEW IDEA KILLING)

Some initiatives are urgent. Others are not. Yet, many times, organizations push something quickly through the pipeline, only to get to a point where everything comes to a grinding halt. This cycle can happen many times over the course of a year or more. Frequently, when the initiative restarts, the old work is scrapped, and things start from scratch.

Why does this happen? In most instances, moving a new idea forward quickly is intended to build momentum and buy-in, where if given enough traction, no one will step up to squash it. But someone does. And you can't restart with the same premise because it now has a stigma. Other times, the idea grows to a point where it becomes a major initiative and is quickly halted because other people need to make the go/no-go decision on it.

How to fix it? Begin with fleshing out the idea on paper, identifying where the perceived roadblocks will be. More importantly, outline what the initiative will deliver — focusing on the outcome, not the idea. Identify folks who are influential and who will back you. Then,

"I have witnessed talented people leave companies because they couldn't handle the lack of deliberate decision-making anymore."

- Andrea Belk Olson

identify what fears (whether legitimate or not) the final decision-makers will have and determine how you'll address them, understanding these perceptions are often primarily based on emotion rather than logic. Lastly, give them a visual — whether it be a mockup, prototype, or physical concept to see, rather than words on a PPT — to make the idea tangible.

There's no way to fully eliminate dysfunction in an organization, but you can start to chip away at it. This requires dedication, focus, consistency, and most importantly, honesty. Stop justifying things as unchangeable, and start acting, even if in your own department or area. Habits take time to break, and if you've been doing these behaviors for decades, they won't change overnight.

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.



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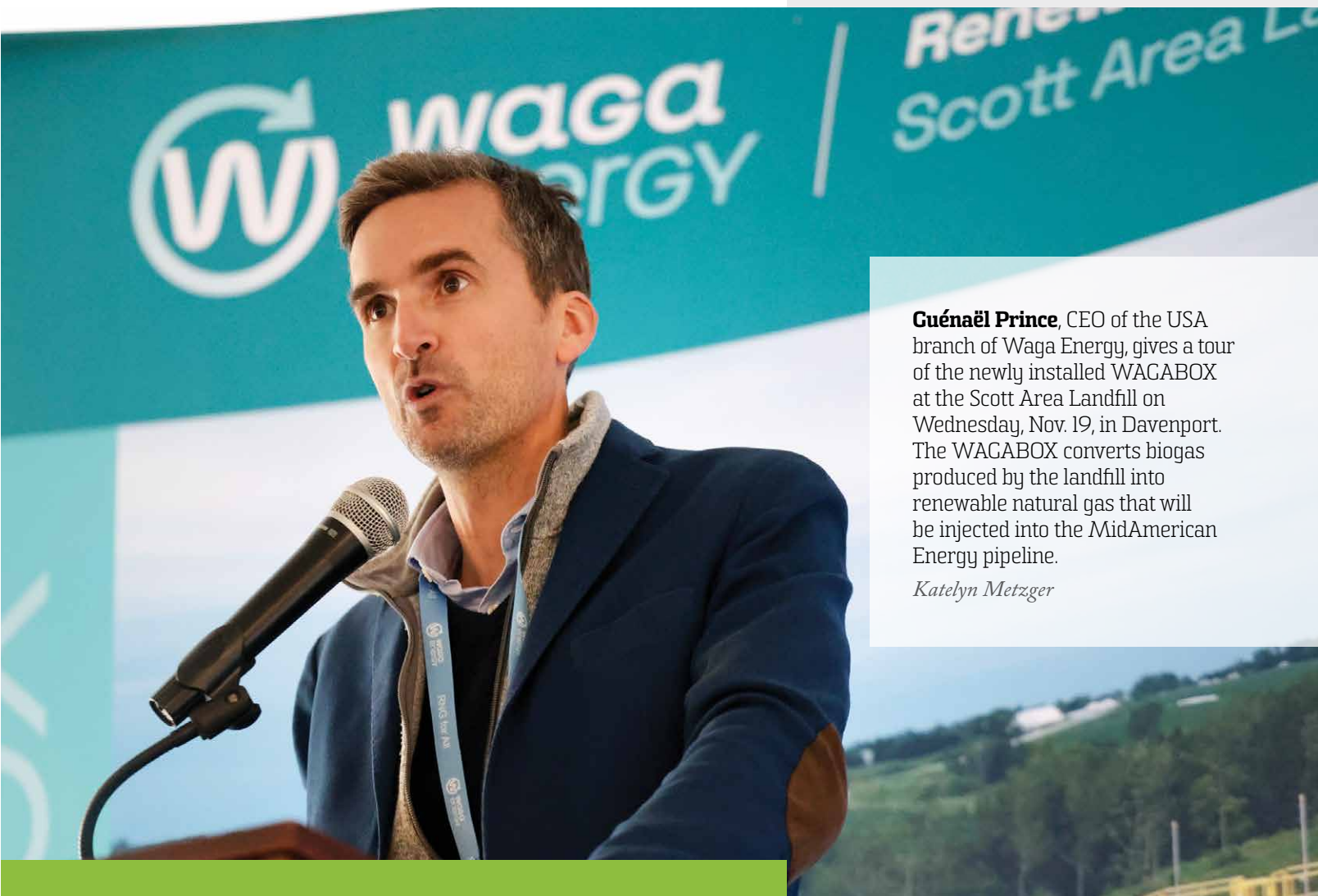
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Guénaél Prince, CEO of the USA branch of Waga Energy, gives a tour of the newly installed WAGABOX at the Scott Area Landfill on Wednesday, Nov. 19, in Davenport. The WAGABOX converts biogas produced by the landfill into renewable natural gas that will be injected into the MidAmerican Energy pipeline.

Katelyn Metzger

Garbage to green:

Waste Commission of Scott County becomes latest landfill gas project in Iowa

GRETCHEN TESKE

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The words "landfill" and "innovation" don't normally go together, but the Waste Commission of Scott County is looking to change that.

During a ribbon cutting in November, Scott County's landfill celebrated becoming the eighth landfill gas project in Iowa.

The gas that naturally comes out of the landfill is a mixture of methane and carbon dioxide, commonly referred to as biogas. Using Waga Energy's WAGABOX technology, Scott County will now be able to upgrade landfill gas into renewable natural gas, or RNG, that is injected directly into the MidAmerican Energy pipeline, instead of being released into the atmosphere.



The patented design created by French company Waga Energy separates methane from air gases through cryogenic distillation.

Katelyn Metzger

Bryce Stalcup, executive director of the Waste Commission of Scott County, said the ball has been rolling on this project for about two years. Waga Energy, a global leader in landfill gas-to-RNG reached out to the landfill directly to get the project started.

"We did reuse this gas many years ago, partnering with Linwood Mining and Minerals Corporation, but it didn't make sense anymore to use that gas in the mines," he said. "So, we looked for multiple years to find a partner that could reuse that gas for something else and we

weren't able to find anything that made financial sense."

That's when Waga stepped in, Stalcup said, and Linwood stepped up. Linwood Mining owns the property the landfill sits on.

"(Waga) approached us and they had the first system that we had ever seen

"We've got this resource here, that, until now, we haven't been taking the best advantage of and now we're taking the waste and turning it into renewable fuel." – Patrick Serfass



Waga Energy and Scott County officials participate in a ribbon cutting of the new, state-of-the-art renewable natural gas facility at the Scott Area Landfill on Wednesday, Nov. 19, in Davenport.

Katelyn Metzger

that was able to take a landfill our size, capture that gas and then utilize it for the pipeline," Stalcup said.

Stalcup said the landfill's job is to take the waste it has and create diversion programs to dispose of it, whether that be recycling or repurposing the material.

"Unfortunately there's waste that we just can't recycle or divert and it has to go somewhere," he said. "When we can then capture the gases that waste breaks down and get that use out of it, that's the best thing possible for the environment."

Stalcup said the process starts with the waste being put into what are referred to as landfill cells — engineered areas that are completely contained, covered and compacted. The Waste Commission of Scott County has about 600 acres of land,

but uses about 60 acres specifically for the landfill.

The landfill cells, which are part of the overall landfill, are typically a few acres, he said. They are completely surrounded by very thick plastic and compacted clay with a variety of engineering systems and gas lines connected.

When the waste breaks down, it naturally produces methane gas. Pipes inside the cells capture the gas and take it to the WAGABOX, where the gas is cleaned and injected back into the natural gas pipeline.

Guénaél Prince, director in the United States for Waga Energy, said medium-sized landfills are what his company specializes in. It's the same technology used by largescale sites, but scaled down to fit the size and needs of the smaller landfills that exist in the world.

The box itself is a couple of metal containers arranged in an L shape on the landfill property. From the outside

they look like metal shipping containers, surrounded by tall gas tanks.

Inside, they are a series of pipes and systems that can all be monitored remotely. The equipment inside the boxes picks up when the gas from the landfill cells gets piped in.

Prince said the biogas that landfills create is a mixture of methane and carbon dioxide plus air intrusion. That intrusion brings in different pollutants that need to be purified out.

Waga's technology uses polymeric membranes to get rid of the carbon dioxide, and some oxygen, the gas goes through a cryogenic distillation process at -250 degrees Fahrenheit, then separates the methane from nitrogen and the remaining oxygen.

The process produces a methane that is 98% pure, Prince said.

From an environmental perspective, Patrick Serfass, executive director of the American Biogas Council, said the



**The gas
produced in
Scott County
alone will
fuel about
4,000 homes
annually.**

advancement in technology is allowing for a reduction in emissions and an increase in energy produced.

"If we're not doing this, then methane emissions are going into the atmosphere and that's not great," he said. "We've got this resource here, that, until now, we haven't been taking the best advantage of and now we're taking the waste and turning it into renewable fuel."

There are approximately 2,500 biogas systems in the country, capturing 1.4 million cubic feet of gas that would not have been captured otherwise, Serfass said. The Scott County facility is capturing 1,000 cubic feet that otherwise would have gone into the atmosphere.

Since the project went online Oct. 7, the gas is now available to fuel vehicles, homes and any other way natural gas is used. Awareness for renewable resources is increasing, Serfass said, but so is awareness of the economic side of the projects.

There are 605 landfills across the United States that are capturing gas and turning it into renewable energy, he said. Scott County marks the eighth one in Iowa, but there are 27 other landfills in the state

that could be doing the same thing.

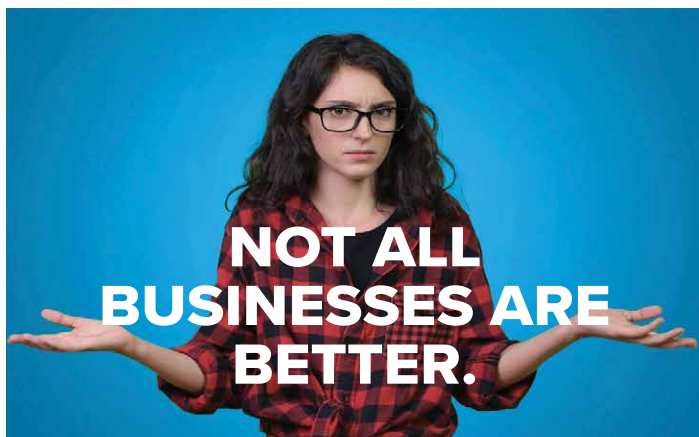
"What's driving the interest for those next 27 landfills in Iowa to be able to capture the gas and beneficially do something for it, I hope, is partially awareness of the environment, but also an economic opportunity," he said. "Now that you're producing gas that can be used in the pipeline, you can sell it."

Serfass said support for these kinds of projects can be hard to find, but that's only because people don't understand it. The council has previously surveyed Americans across the United States and found only 37% of people were supportive of the initiative.

After explaining to them what the process is like, he said, the favorability for biogas systems jumped up to 87%. The country has room for many more projects of this kind, he said, and communities can benefit from them immediately.

The gas produced in Scott County alone will fuel about 4,000 homes annually, Stalcup said.

"Before that was just gas that we were capturing and flaring," he said. "We're required by EPA to capture the gas but



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Guénaél Prince, CEO of the USA branch of Waga Energy, gives a tour of the newly installed WAGABOX at the Scott Area Landfill on Wednesday, Nov. 19, in Davenport. The WAGABOX converts biogas produced by the landfill into renewable natural gas that will be injected into the MidAmerican Energy pipeline.

Katelyn Metzger

we would literally just burn it off because that's what we were required to do. Instead of just burning it, it's being sent to that pipeline and we are able to reuse it within our community with both electric and gas power."

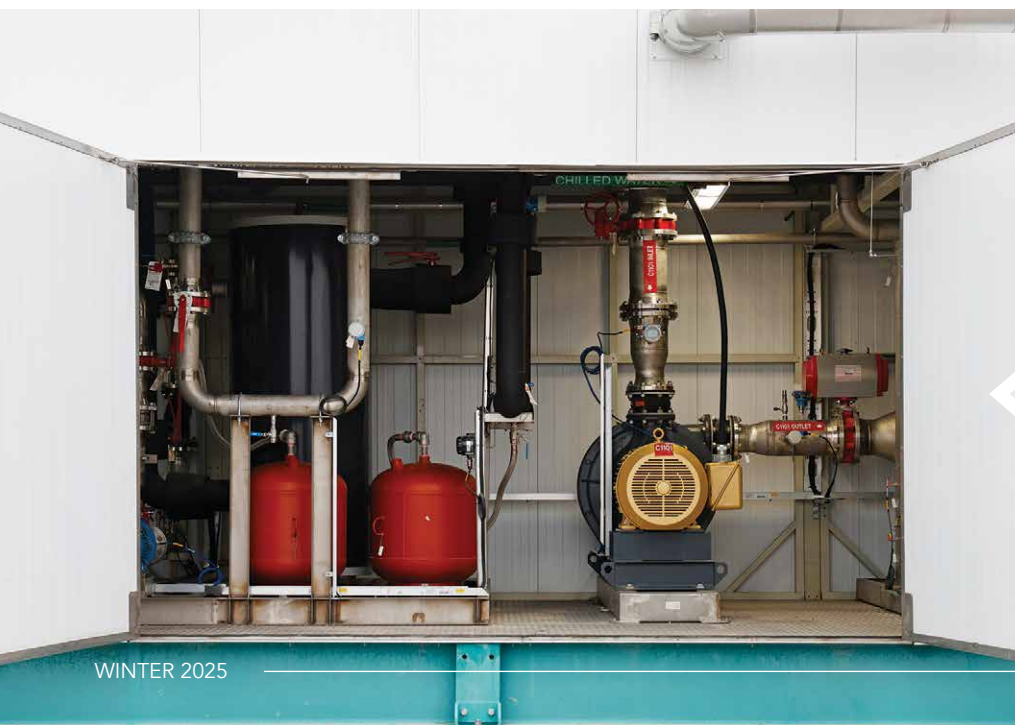
Awareness for the environment, especially when it comes to renewable energy, continues to be extremely important,

Stalcup said. Recently, the efforts to increase access to renewable resources have been at the forefront, a nice change in pace.

"Thirty years ago you probably wouldn't have looked at a landfill and thought, 'These people are trying to be environmentally friendly,' but really, we're trying to create facilities to take everything that you can out of the landfill," he said.

The technology to convert the gas has existed for a while, but only on a large scale for giant landfills in highly populous cities like Chicago, where it makes financial sense to invest in something of that size. For landfills of Scott County's size, there wasn't a solution that made financial sense until Waga stepped in with new technology, he said.

"We're not a giant landfill, we're a midsize landfill. We only produce certain amounts of gas where a large landfill produces a lot more," he said. "It's an economies of scale thing: the more gas you have you can put it into the pipeline. They can sell it to that pipeline, MidAmerican Energy in our case, and get a return on their investment."



A look inside the newly installed WAGABOX at the Scott Area Landfill on Wednesday, Nov. 19, in Davenport.

Katelyn Metzger

It makes sense for large landfills to invest, he said, but in the past, Scott County's medium-sized landfill did not produce enough gas for an investor to come in and invest. With the new technology specifically designed for landfills of this size, all the numbers added up, Stalcup said.

The WAGABOX at the Waste Commission of Scott County is just the second installment the company has made in the United States, after one at Waga's United States headquarters in Philadelphia. Based in France, Waga has several other installations globally.

Stalcup said leadership spoke with other communities using the technology before it was installed in Scott County, and so far, so good.

"There's no one that says they want to go back, because why not use a resource that we have. Landfills are here and they're going to be here for a while," he said. "There's going to be waste, but we can get use out of it and we're proud to do that."



A look at the Waga Energy renewable natural gas unit at the Scott Area Landfill on Wednesday, Nov. 19, in Davenport.

Katelyn Metzger

"Thirty years ago you probably wouldn't have looked at a landfill and thought, 'These people are trying to be environmentally friendly,' but really, we're trying to create facilities to take everything that you can out of the landfill."

– Bryce Stalcup

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Eric Waldman poses for a photo among the solar panels on Zimmerman Honda's rooftop on Wednesday, Oct. 29, in Moline. The 690 panels, two inverters and optimizer were installed in late 2023.

Katelyn Metzger

From the roof to the road:

Zimmerman Honda utilizes solar energy to power community

GRETCHEN TESKE

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Zimmerman Honda sells cars rain or shine, but sunny days are especially beneficial for the dealership.

On top of Zimmerman's building at 7030 44th Ave. in Moline are hundreds of solar panels that help the dealership stay energy efficient. Detail Operations Manager Eric Waldman said the decision

to go solar was in the works for some time before the array went live in March 2023.

The idea had been tossed around a few times, with various sales representatives coming by to discuss the idea. With the federal government and the state of Illinois offering incentives, the time seemed right, Waldman said.

The Illinois Shines program specifically was a big pull, he said, because it allowed Zimmerman to sell solar renewable energy credits back to the power company.

In Illinois, utilities must purchase the credits to meet their obligation to supply a certain amount of power from renewable energy projects to comply with the Illinois Renewable Portfolio Standard, according to Energy Equity Illinois. The RPS is a policy designed to increase the development and use of renewable energy sources for electricity generation.

"It wasn't just the financial savings that made it make sense as a business decision, but it was the community impact," Waldman

Eagle Point Solar from Dubuque, Iowa, installed the panels within four days.

Katelyn Metzger

said. "We know as electric cars become a bigger things as time goes forward, those (energy) needs are going to increase. We just wanted to participate in that. It was one of those things that makes business sense, and because it's for the planet and good for the community that we decided to proceed, as far as being energy efficient."

The solar panels might have been the latest step toward efficiency for Zimmerman, but the dealership has been practicing good habits for years, said chief compliance officer James Craig. When the company built its current building in Moline, efficiency was at the forefront.

The dealership has been around since 1952, originally opening in Moline. Ten years later, it moved to Rock Island, where it stayed for decades. In late 2011, owner Mark Zimmerman announced plans to move back to Moline, to the location at 7030 44th Ave.

In addition to ensuring there are separate containers for garbage and recyclable materials, Zimmerman switched over to all LED bulbs a few years ago. But efficiency was in mind even as the new building was being constructed.

The building was specifically designed to have heated floors from the used oil collected in the service department. When cars are brought in for repairs, the used oil goes into a separate bin that is stored up for winter to help warm up the building, and the sidewalks surrounding it.

"That oil goes all the way up front, inside and underneath the building and heats our floors inside and the outside pad," he said. "If we would have snow or ice out there, we turn the outside pads on and that waste oil is used to heat it out there, instead of water."

With the building itself being nearly 40,000 square feet, keeping it energy efficient is a tall order. But its size also makes it the perfect place for solar panels, effectively raising Zimmerman's energy efficiency levels.



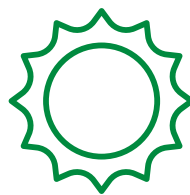
After making the decision to go with solar, Waldman said, the first step was to meet with the power company, MidAmerican, and sign agreements for the new array. Before the panels could be installed, he said, MidAmerican had to install its own equipment to make sure the solar panels were connected to the company's grid.

With approval from MidAmerican, the panels were ready to be installed. All 690 panels and two inverters were installed on the roof and ready to go in less than a week, Waldman said.

"And then we flipped the switch a little bit after that," he said.

The panels themselves weigh about 40 pounds apiece and are about 65 inches long by 39 inches wide. They require no batteries and are built to sustain strong winds, hail and storm damage.

At Zimmerman, the panels are arranged in rows and tilted up, allowing for workers to get in between them if necessary. On the ground, rows of cables are bunched together and covered by metal piping to protect them from the elements.



Most of the time, especially in the summer when the sun is out most, the only thing Zimmerman is responsible for is the \$120 a month connection fee.



A view of Zimmerman Honda's parking lot and roof.

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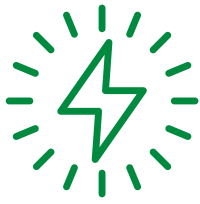
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**Zimmerman's
system was
designed
to cover
98.6% of the
company's need.**

The solar panels work by collecting energy from the sun, which is then transferred to the two inverters on the corner of the roof. Those inverters take the solar energy and convert it into actual energy that is then transferred into the grid.

Waldman said they also have optimizers installed, which help diagnose where a problem is, if one were to occur. Without the optimizers, workers would have to unplug each panel one by one to find the problem, he said.

Inside the building, workers don't notice a single change. That's by design, Waldman said.

"That's mainly because the electricity from the panels are not going into the building, they're going into the grid," he said. "So it really doesn't impact what we do here one iota."

Two inverters, which convert the sunlight into electricity, were installed next to the solar panels.

Katelyn Metzger

Even in the event of a storm, he said, there's no concern about damage.

"If anything, they provide protection for our roof because then it's going to take the brunt of everything and not the roof," he said.

With the power generated going directly into the grid, the financial contributions are immediate. On the bill, Waldman said, it shows the power generated by the solar panels and below that the power going out — or used by Zimmerman.

"The difference between those two is what they bill you on," he said. "You see on your bill how much power you put into the system (because) the meter works both ways. That way we know exactly how much the solar produced and how much we're responsible to pay for."

Most of the time, especially in the summer when the sun is out most, the only thing Zimmerman is responsible for is the \$120 a month connection fee, Waldman said. The panels and the power are virtually paying for themselves.

Zimmerman's system was designed to cover 98.6% of the company's need, Waldman said, but that number is cyclical throughout the year because logistically, the panels produce a lot more in the summer than they do in the winter, he said.

Everything is monitored by Zimmerman, Eagle Point Solar and MidAmerican, Craig said. In the lobby at Zimmerman

is a large TV that shows customers how much solar is being generated in real time.

Craig said the end goal is to produce as much power as the building consumes, to be at a net zero. The more power they can put back into the grid, he said, the less MidAmerican has to worry about over producing from other sources.

Being aware of how much power the dealership consumes was a key factor in deciding to go with solar, Waldman said. As a Honda dealership, Zimmerman was preparing for a new line of electric cars that would inevitably require the dealership to use even more power for the required charging stations.

"We assumed that our electric costs would drastically increase over time, so (the solar) was something to try to offset those costs that we were looking at from a business perspective as we were investing," Waldman said.

With the panels having a lifespan of 30 years and them presently covering about 80% of Zimmerman's cost, the company is looking to have the investment paid off in about 12 years, which leaves 18 years of savings on the table, Waldman said.

It's a great payoff, considering the initial investment is fairly hefty and needs to be paid in full. Waldman said he feels that upfront cost is what scares most companies away, but the return in investment is worth it in the end for both the business and the community.



Speaking from a dealership perspective, Waldman said if the U.S. ever gets to the point of 50% of cars being electric, the country does not produce enough power to charge them all. The power capacity needs to increase, and installing solar panels to help produce more power definitely helps.

Craig added the maintenance on the panels is at a minimum because Eagle Point Solar is constantly monitoring. It's been nearly three years since the panels were installed, and so far, they have had only one minor issue.

The company was able to identify and fix the issue quickly without disturbing the business side of Zimmerman or the rest of the array. That peace of mind is a big motivator to take on a project like this, Waldman said, but he also encouraged other business owners to look at the stability solar panels can provide.

Power is something every business needs and by paying less in power bills every month, it allows for flexibility to invest in other things, he said. And it allows for an investment in the company's future, as well as the community's.

"When people know that you've been here for a while and you're planning on being here for a while because you're making these investments, it truly is a community investment because that power goes to the community."

– Eric Waldman

"If you're looking at it from a business perspective, capital is a real thing and it's really hard to quantify but I think that's something that you can't underestimate: how much that means to be a member of the community," Waldman said. "When

people know that you've been here for a while and you're planning on being here for a while because you're making these investments, it truly is a community investment because that power goes to the community."

The panels, which have a 30-year lifespan, will start paying for themselves around the 12th year.

Katelyn Metzger

COVERED WITH CONFIDENCE

INSURANCE INSIGHTS FROM MISSISSIPPI VALLEY SURGERY CENTER

Navigating insurance coverage and health care costs can feel overwhelming, but Mississippi Valley Surgery Center (MVSC) makes the process simple. Serving patients from eastern Iowa and western Illinois, MVSC accepts all major insurance plans – including United-Healthcare, Blue Cross Blue Shield, Aetna, Cigna, Medicare and more – and is dedicated to providing clear, accurate information so patients know exactly what to expect.

We spoke with Kristine Stark, Director of Business Operations at MVSC, to answer some common patient questions and share how the center ensures clarity around insurance coverage every step of the way.

Q: Which insurance plans are accepted at MVSC?

A: MVSC works with all major insurance carriers in Iowa. Our goal is to make it easy for patients to have access to the care they need without worrying about whether their insurance will be accepted.

Q: How does MVSC help patients better understand their insurance benefits?

A: We have specialists on staff who are trained to walk patients through their benefits, explain estimates

and answer questions about out-of-pocket costs. We want patients to feel confident that there will be no surprises when it comes to payment.

Q: How does the insurance verification process work at MVSC?

A: When a procedure is scheduled, the doctor's office provides us with the patient's insurance information and anticipated surgical procedures. We then verify coverage to ensure all necessary pre-authorizations are in place. If any issues arise, we contact the doctor's office or the insurance company to resolve them. In some cases, we may reach out to the patient directly to confirm details.

During the verification process, we confirm the patient's benefit coverage and provide an estimate of any upfront cost share that may be the patient's responsibility. Receiving estimates quickly allows patients to plan ahead, budget for out-of-pocket expenses and avoid surprises on the day of their procedure.

Q: How are costs determined for patients?

A: Costs vary depending on the patient's specific insurance coverage and the procedure being performed. Some may have out-of-pocket costs

such as a copay, while others may have a deductible or coinsurance on top of that. The MVSC team helps break down each component so patients understand exactly what to expect. Benefits can differ from one plan to another, so there's no one-size-fits-all cost. That's why our team takes the time to walk patients through their personal estimate – so they feel prepared financially before their procedure.

Q: How do surgery center costs compare to hospitals?

A: Surgery centers like MVSC are reimbursed approximately 50 cents on the dollar compared to hospitals, which often results in smaller patient cost shares. In other words, patients usually pay less for procedures at MVSC than they would at a hospital, while still receiving the same expert care in a comfortable outpatient setting.

Q: What payment options are available for patients?

A: MVSC offers Care Credit, a line of credit that patients can qualify for online in minutes. Care Credit allows patients to spread payments over six, 12 or 18 months with deferred interest options. This gives patients flexibility to manage their care costs without paying the full amount upfront.

Q: What should patients do if they feel overwhelmed by insurance information?

A: We encourage patients to reach out to their insurance companies or to MVSC. Every insurance card has a member number to connect you with a benefits specialist. At MVSC, our staff is also available to help you understand how your benefits apply and what costs to expect. Our goal is to make the process clear and stress free so patients can focus on their health and recovery.

To learn more about MVSC, visit mvhealth.net.

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Inside EICC's Workforce Forum

How employers are helping design the future of workforce education



**Eastern Iowa
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JOHNNA KERRES

Associate Director for Marketing and Communications, EICC

When it comes to preparing the region's workforce for the future, Eastern Iowa Community Colleges (EICC) is doing something simple, and powerful: it's listening.

At the college's first regional Business and Industry Forum this fall, leaders from manufacturing, construction, and corporate sectors gathered to have a conversation. What emerged was a shared understanding the region's success depends on strong, ongoing partnerships between education and industry, and a collective commitment to build those bridges together.

Earlier this year, EICC surveyed employers to identify workforce gaps, training priorities, and leadership needs across the region. Ashlee Spannagel, EICC's Vice Chancellor for Workforce Development, said the forum that followed the survey was held to deepen work already underway.

"It's a privilege to have business and industry partners engage in a dialogue with us," Spannagel said. "This is work we've always taken seriously, and the survey and forum were a chance to listen more deeply and align our next steps with what employers need most."

Listening First

For Bobbi Jo Cox, Director of Human Resources at McCarthy-Bush Corporation, the opportunity to be heard is what stood out most.

"EICC could come to us and say, 'Here's our solution,'" she said. "But if you didn't ask us what the problem was, we'd be working toward different goals. Having those questions asked is so important."

McCarthy-Bush, based in the Quad Cities, includes several construction, manufacturing, and mining companies employing more than 500 people at peak season. The organization regularly partners with EICC for safety and

leadership training, and to secure Iowa's 260E and 260F workforce training grants.

Still, Cox said time remains the biggest challenge in reskilling and upskilling employees. "You have to keep the business running while you train," she said. "That's why I was really excited to hear about bringing training on site."

Spannagel said such feedback is helping EICC refine its approach.

"Time and shift coverage are the two biggest barriers to training," she said. "That's why we're expanding on-site opportunities, building our bench of subject matter experts, and working directly with companies to develop training plans that fit their operations."

Meeting Businesses Where They Are

For Michael Peters, Business Unit Manager at Clinton-based JT Cullen, the forum demonstrated how much can be accomplished when businesses and educators connect.

"We've worked with the Clinton campus before, talking with students about our company and the skills we're looking for," Peters said. "Being able to take what we learned today and apply it directly with our workforce is exciting."

Like many manufacturers, JT Cullen faces the challenge of balancing training with production schedules. "We're very project-focused," Peters said. "Pulling people away for training can be tough. But what we heard today were ideas that make it easier, like customized training or having EICC instructors come on-site."

Spannagel said flexibility has always been central to EICC's workforce mission, and now it's being expanded.

"We want every company, no matter its size, to have access to affordable, effective training," she said. "For smaller employers, that might mean strategically placing open-enrollment courses that allow just a few employees to participate. For others, it might mean bringing our instructors right into the workplace."

EICC is also leveraging facilities across the district to broaden access to technical skill training, ensuring innovation and accessibility go hand in hand.

Shared Challenges, Shared Solutions

From leadership training to technical skills, forum participants expressed common needs, and a willingness to collaborate.

"Everything I put on the survey was listed on that board," Cox said. "It made me feel good that other companies are facing the same issues. It's nice to know we're not alone."

Spannagel said that kind of connection is what EICC wants to foster.

"Employers have told us how valuable it is to learn from one another," she said. "We're committed to bringing industry partners together when there are shared needs. Together, we can provide solutions that are more meaningful and cost-effective than if we were working with one company at a time."

Building the Future, Together

EICC has long worked with local employers to strengthen the region's workforce, from customized training delivered directly on-site to leadership cohorts and grant-supported initiatives that help companies upskill their teams.

The insights from the survey and forum, Spannagel said, reaffirm and refocus that work.

"Our team will use the survey and forum feedback to shape programming," she said. "We've listened, now it's time to act."

Action includes expanding technical training, leadership development, and what Cox calls "human skills" – communication, collaboration, and problem-solving – which still remain essential in the age of automation.

"When our people grow, our companies grow, and so does our community," said Carol Reynolds, Vice President of Human Resources at Kent Worldwide, a longtime EICC partner. "That's what makes this work so important."

As EICC evolves alongside its partners, Spannagel said the goal is clear: build stronger programs and stronger partnerships to spark the next era of growth and innovation in Eastern Iowa.

Survey Results Highlight Regional Training Priorities

EICC data reveals workforce challenges, skill gaps, and shared opportunities

EICC's 2025 Workforce Training and Development Survey captured the voices of 87 employers across Eastern Iowa – from manufacturing and healthcare to logistics, construction, and public service. The results confirmed what many business leaders expressed during the Business and Industry Forum: while industries may differ, the workforce challenges they face are strikingly similar.

Leadership Tops the List

Across nearly every sector, leadership development ranked as the No. 1 training priority. Employers said developing people, especially first-line supervisors and team leads, is essential for retention and long-term growth. Skills in demand include:

- ▶ **Problem-solving and critical thinking**, identified as immediate needs by most respondents.
- ▶ **Time management and prioritization**, crucial as teams juggle production and training demands.
- ▶ **Coaching and mentoring**, cited as vital for succession planning.
- ▶ **Employment law for supervisors**, flagged as a key compliance concern.

Industry-Specific Priorities

The survey also identified sector-specific workforce training needs:

- ▶ **Healthcare:** CPR/BLS, phlebotomy, pharmacy technician training, and certified nurse aides.
- ▶ **Maintenance & Reliability:** Preventive maintenance and process control fundamentals.
- ▶ **Machining & Welding:** CNC machining, manual machining fabrication, and robotic welding.
- ▶ **Transportation & Logistics:** CDL-A and CDL-B certifications, DOT Hazmat, and driver testing.
- ▶ **Quality & Process Improvement:** Lean, Six Sigma, and ISO auditing.

Safety Remains a Top Priority

Even as industries evolve, one constant remains: safety. Businesses consistently ranked safety training as a top need, including:

- ▶ OSHA 10/30 certification
- ▶ Forklift and powered industrial truck training
- ▶ Lockout/tagout (LOTO) procedures
- ▶ CPR, First Aid, and hazard communication

Time Is the Biggest Barrier

Nearly 91% of employers said time was the biggest obstacle to training employees, far outpacing cost (44%) or shift coverage (47%). To overcome these challenges, employers recommended:

- ▶ Onsite training
- ▶ Modular formats
- ▶ Evening or off-shift options

Emerging Workforce Shifts

Employers believe there will be significant change in the next two years, and a high demand for:

- ▶ Automation and mechatronics
- ▶ AI and data analytics
- ▶ Succession planning to offset generational turnover

Urgent Needs in Skilled Trades and Technology

The survey revealed a widening skills gap in technical and trades fields, with employers emphasizing that strong fundamentals remain the backbone of operations. Top needs include:

- ▶ Preventive maintenance and hydraulics troubleshooting
- ▶ CNC machining, manual machining, and welding
- ▶ Print reading, measurement, and mechanical drives



Without these foundational skills, employers warned, operations slow down. At the same time, employers are looking to the future. Many anticipate rapid growth in AI, data analytics, robotics, and automation, reflecting the region's increasing adoption of Industry 4.0 technologies.



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Founder and owner **Kelsey Pisel** poses in the Zero Waste Reserve storefront on Friday, Nov. 14, in Bettendorf. The sustainable store focuses on bringing home and body products to the Quad-Cities area without the plastic waste.

Katelyn Metzger





Reduce, Reuse, Reserve:

Bettendorf store
encourages sustainable
shopping

GRETCHEN TESKE

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Kelsey Pisel is on a mission to help sustain her community.

Her store, Zero Waste Reserve at 5015 Competition Drive in Bettendorf, has been around for about two-and-a-half years, but started closer to home.

Literally.

"We weren't sure how to how the Quad-Cities would take our type of business. It's a new idea for a lot of people," Pisel said. "So our business started out of our house. That was 2022, and then we slowly got into farmers markets and TV features. That was a nice way to help grow, too, kind of exposure here and there."

The Pisels started their eco-friendly business about two-and-a-half years ago out of their home in Bettendorf. They have since opened a storefront at 5051 Competition Drive in Bettendorf.

Katelyn Metzger



Pisel's shop reflects its name in that all products are designed to be purchased in bulk and in reusable containers, minimizing the amount of waste the products have when finished. Everything from shampoo to body lotion to laundry detergent to dish fluid to oven or toilet cleaner and even toothpaste can be purchased in Pisel's store.

Customers are encouraged to bring in their own containers, like a Mason jar, and fill them with as much or as little of the products offered as they want. The jars are then weighed and the customers pay by the ounce for the goods.

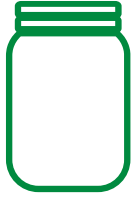
For customers who don't have a jar, Pisel offers a recycling program where customers can purchase one of hers. She said the idea came from a reflection of her own life and research into the recycling process.

"I've always been really observant about the recycling process and what goes in the trash versus recycling, so it's already, kind of like built into my DNA," she said. "I was very interested in it, and then (after) doing some research I discovered that recycling is not the answer."

"When it comes to eco-friendly, that's ultimately better for us as well, because our makers are very conscious about what goes into our environment."

— Kelsey Pisel

Products for sale at Zero Waste Reserve on Friday, Nov. 14, in Bettendorf. Products range from beauty and body to home and cleaning. *Katelyn Metzger*



Customers are encouraged to bring in their own containers, like a Mason jar, and fill them with as much or as little of the products offered as they want.

She grew concerned about the lack of efficiency in recycling and found a better alternative in reuse and zero waste.

With the decision made to start the store out of her home, Pisel then had to get creative with her marketing strategies. Social media helped with the growth, she said, but friends and family who were the core customers at the beginning helped her sustain the business.

"We were making local deliveries to people who were doing online orders and my husband let me convert our living room into a makeshift shop. I was even open on Sundays," she said.

Her store is now open six days a week and closed on Mondays. Even the products inside the containers are eco-friendly, she said, because it helps both the client and the community.

"When it comes to eco-friendly, that's ultimately better for us as well, because our makers are very conscious about what goes into our environment," she said.

"What gets washed off our bodies gets washed down the drain into the environment. It really goes hand in hand, but all of our products are better for us and better for the planet, both when it comes to ingredients and packaging."

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Zero Waste Reserve keeps track of how many plastic containers are diverted from a landfill. Pisel does the math herself and updates the board each week.

Katelyn Metzger



Pisel is part of a zero-waste store owners group and shares ideas with other like-minded shop owners, but also uses her own expertise to choose which products to stock. That translates to helping customers, too, she said.

For the majority of first time customers, their initial visit to the store is purely educational, she said. It can be overwhelming to see the amount of swaps available and she wants to allow customers to take in all the sustainable options, ask questions and think about what swaps they're able to make.

Customers can bring in their own containers to put their products in or use Zero Waste Reserve's jars. Products are priced by weight.

Katelyn Metzger

"We always encourage people use up what you have, because if you take home a bunch of dish soap from us and throw your other container away, that's not sustainable at all," she said. "So we say use up what you have. Once you run out, come back, and we'll start there. But a lot of people slowly make little swaps at a time."

Those small swaps have added up over time, and Pisel has kept track. On one of the walls of her shop, she keeps a running count of all the plastic containers customers have saved from the landfill, just by using reusable containers.

"It's tedious, but I pick one day a week where I go through our transactions and I know everyone who's come to refill, so those all count when they're not getting a new container and they use their own ... but I also count things that come in zero packaging like shampoo and conditioner bars," she said.

"We always encourage people use up what you have, because if you take home a bunch of dish soap from us and throw your other container away, that's not sustainable at all."

– Kelsey Pisel



Zero Waste Reserve owner and founder Kelsey Pisel fills a container of hand soap for a customer on Friday, Nov. 14, in Bettendorf.

Katelyn Metzger

Products sold at Zero Waste Reserve are either packaged in glass or paper and only using plastic minimally.

Katelyn Metzger



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(Above) Wool dryer balls for sale at Zero Waste Reserve on Friday, Nov. 14, in Bettendorf. (Right) Owner Kelsey Pisel talks about Zero Waste Reserve's eco-friendly practices on Friday, Nov. 14, in Bettendorf.

Katelyn Metzger

A couple years in, and the community is responding well to the idea that the number of containers saved continues to increase, Pisel said. The Zero Waste Reserve even has an online store where customers can order or check out products before they come in.

Looking ahead, Pisel said, the goal is keep up the sustainability and eco-friendly efforts. Minds are slowly changing about preserving the world we live in, she said, and that is a huge help.

"People want to make a difference," Pisel said. "I think people are looking for positivity when it comes to their lifestyle and just the world in general, and I think we offer that here."



"I think people are looking for positivity when it comes to their lifestyle and just the world in general, and I think we offer that here." – Kelsey Pisel

Stella Sawmill

KATELYN METZGER

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Stella Sawmill owners Angie and Nick DeVolder have been working with locals to salvage trees for milling. This prevents waste by using felled trees that might otherwise end up in landfills. It also lowers the demand for killing trees to produce lumber.

While Stella Sawmill does not cut down trees themselves, they will move and transport it back to the sawmill. Sometimes due to a disease or metal in the tree, the DeVolders cannot take in every tree. The couple would love to work with more families by helping them preserve sentimental trees from their land. To learn more about salvaging a tree, visit stellasawmill.com.



1. Owners Angie and Nick DeVolder pose for a portrait at Stella Sawmill on Thursday, Nov. 6, in Milan. The couple focuses on salvaging wood sustainably to make their products. **2.** Stella Sawmill employee Calvin Talbott squares off an elm tree trunk before cutting it into slabs on Thursday, Nov. 6, in Milan. The most popular sized slab that the sawmill sells is the 5/4 cut. **3.** About 80-90% of the timber used by Stella Sawmill is salvaged from tree companies, local municipalities and private homeowners. Only when the sawmill runs out a certain species, will it pay for wood to process. **4.** Angie DeVolder shows off a cookie, also known as a tree round, at Stella Sawmill on Thursday, Nov. 6, in Milan. Cookies are cross sections off a tree trunk that are popular with artists and woodworkers.

5. Stella Sawmill is located at 850 Second Avenue West in Milan. The showroom is open Wednesday through Friday from 9 a.m. to 4 p.m. and Saturday from 9 a.m. to noon. **6.** The DeVolders started milling for fun back in 2020. In 2022, the couple bought a kiln and opened their business, just as the only other local sawmill was closing down. The couple have since purchased a second kiln and sawmill. **7.** Firewood made from scraps from milling sit in bins at Stella Sawmill on Thursday, Nov. 6, in Milan. Firewood is the sawmill's newest product, offering the wood in both kiln-dried or naturally dried pieces. **8.** A look at Stella Sawmill on Thursday, Nov. 6, in Milan.







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9. Angie DeVolder shows off unique finds for sell in the Stella Sawmill showroom on Thursday, Nov. 6, in Milan. **10.** Slabs of wood sit under an outbuilding at Stella Sawmill to naturally dry out on Thursday, Nov. 6, in Milan. The DeVolders have discovered that air drying the freshly cut wood before using the kiln helps to prevent cracking within the slab. Drying time depends on the species of the wood and thickness, estimating an inch per year. **11.** Stella Sawmill on Thursday, Nov. 6, in Milan. **12.** Large cookies cut from older trees at Stella Sawmill on Thursday, Nov. 6, in Milan



13. A look at Stella Sawmill's vacuum kiln on Thursday, Nov. 6, in Milan. 14. Nick DeVolder looks over a log ready to be cut at Stella Sawmill on Thursday, Nov. 6, in Milan. Because trees rest before they are milled, the end grain of the logs are sealed with a wax-like substance to reduce cracking.

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River Action employees transfer rain barrels from a truck to storage on Thursday, April 17, in Davenport. The environmental organization received 100 plastic barrels that were previously used in Italy to hold olive oil and will be reused by selling them for the Retain the Rain program. *Katelyn Metzger*



River Action keeps the focus on the water through community education

GRETCHEN TESKE
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Kathy Wine came to Davenport for a teaching job, but ended up with a much larger classroom than she ever expected.

Originally from Lake City, Iowa, Wine moved to Davenport for a teaching job, but found her true calling in environmental activism. As the executive director of River Action, Inc., Wine advocates for conservation and utilization of the Mississippi River that divides the Quad-Cities physically, but unites them communally.



Hundreds of kayakers float towards Centennial Bridge during Floatzilla on Saturday, Aug. 16, in Rock Island. *Katelyn Metzger*

"I grew up on a farm. Maybe it's because that was landlocked that when I landed here and the river was here I was like, 'Oh my gosh. I'm a goner,'" she said with a laugh.

River Action, celebrating its 41st anniversary in 2025, has its office in downtown Davenport, facing the river it represents. The organization takes on education, flood mitigation and planning and in-ground projects to name a few, she said.

"We've never lobbied in Des Moines or Springfield, but we do realize we have a voice. When we have an audience, whether it's on the education programs, whether it's our conference, which is all about the river and all the aspects of its resiliency, when we have an audience, we are advocates and we try to turn the public into advocates as well," she said. "(We want them) to become stewards and to become informed citizens that go out and vote and understand the policies."

All that advocacy work started in 1984 when three women — Wine, Paddy Blackman and Priscilla Parkhurst — banded together for a project called Year of the River. Commissioned by the Quad Cities Chamber, the goal was to help Quad-Cities businesses think about embracing the natural resource in front of them.

The trio planned 12 months of activities, which began on the Rock Island Arsenal in the Mississippi River. The community was invited onto the island where they were offered scopes to view the eagles and chili and hot chocolate to keep warm.

"Then we followed it up with tons of things during the year. At the end of the year, we decided we needed to know how well we did, and so we took over the Mel Foster Real Estate office, 34 phones, and we created a questionnaire as scientific as we knew how to do," Wine said.



Now, the Quad-Cities has 60 miles of paved riverfront bike trails. But, there's still more work to do to connect trails

"We're meant to be a catalyst. We come up with ideas and a lot of them have been through collaboration at conferences. When we hear what other cities are doing, we say, 'If they can do it, why can't we?'" – Kathy Wine

They created a survey and began calling "random numbers from the phone book." When it was all said and done, 84% of those who answered said they had done something involving the water during the Year of the River and 86% of people knew what the Year of the River event was.

"We decided we were on to something here and we should keep this going," Wine said.

The next year, in 1985, they began Ride the River, an annual Father's Day bike ride along the riverfront trails. At the time, only two miles of the Quad-Cities riverfront, the Ben Butterworth Parkway in Moline, had a defined trail.

Wine said the group knew they wouldn't be able to raise enough money with their event to build all the trails the Quad-Cities needed, but what they could do was advocate.

"The idea was now you see what you could have if we built it," she said. "All the funding that we raised was because we were three volunteers who said, 'We will put all this funding to go to the cities and to the police departments to put it on. You can have the money, we'll divide it up. You just have to earmark it for bike trails.' So that's what we did."

Wine said River Action alone was never able to pay for much of the trail, but the seed was planted. River Action members continued to advocate for the trails, emailing participants to let them know when city council meetings were being held and encouraged them to show up and let the councils know they wanted these trails.

(Right) A rain barrel in action as it collects storm water during a downpour at River Action in Davenport. The 60-gallon barrels collect water that normally would be adding runoff to the Mississippi River that can be used for watering lawns and gardens. *Katelyn Metzger*





CULTURAL INVESTMENT

The renovation of the Aledo Opera House established a cultural anchor for downtown and strengthened ongoing reinvestment. Estes combined modern performance needs with the preservation of historic character to create a venue where music, art and community life thrive.

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Floatzilla kayakers float through the Mississippi River Lock and Dam No. 15 on Saturday, Aug. 16, in Rock Island. *Katelyn Metzger*

Now, the Quad-Cities has 60 miles of paved riverfront bike trails. But, there's still more work to do to connect trails, Wine said.

River Action has continued its advocacy over the years by establishing new initiatives practically every year and applying for grants to help upkeep the community. Wine credits that to having an intelligent and energetic staff who supply positive ideas and hard work to get results.

A big win River Action has had over the years, she said, is the Channel Cat Water Taxi, started in 1995. The taxi has four ports in the Quad-Cities, two on the Illinois side and two on the Iowa side.

The taxi picks up guests and transports them across the river to various ports, utilizing the river as its own highway.

Wine got the idea after attending a conference in Baltimore, which had a similar concept. When she presented it to the River Action board of directors, she told them they had secured a \$25,000 grant to study if something like this would be feasible in the Quad-Cities.

"So my board member said, 'Well, we could do that. And then at the end we would have a study, and it would be on the shelf, and it would say you do have the ability to go ahead or you don't. Or, you could spend it on a boat and try it and see if it works,'" Wine said. "And if in the end it doesn't, you can sell it. If it does work, you're off and running. So we did that."

After a couple of years, the Channel Cat was handed off to MetroLINK, which provides bus service in the Illinois Quad-Cities. The Channel Cat is still running 30 years later, operating from Memorial Day weekend to Labor Day weekend, as long as weather allows.

Wine said getting the taxi started and then handing it off was best for River Action, and the community, because her organization was never meant to be a business.

"We're meant to be a catalyst. We come up with ideas and a lot of them have been through collaboration at conferences.



When we hear what other cities are doing, we say, 'If they can do it, why can't we?'" she said. "That's always been our attitude from the very beginning."

Wine said collaborations are a big part of the success story and how River Action has been able to accomplish all that it has, but big projects require big patience. Something her team excels in, Wine said, is being able to see the next step in the process and not get bogged down by the wait-and-see process.

"I guess it's more the idea that you don't get discouraged if you know what

the next step is, and we always knew what the next step was so we'd take it," she said. "That keeps you from getting into despair."

Funding is always an issue, she said, so projects have to be done in phases. A big project River Action is working on now is First Bridge, a re-creation of a single 254-foot span of the first railroad bridge to cross the Mississippi River in 1856.

The bridge would create a safe recreational trail crossing point and be a key connection to the existing riverfront bike and pedestrian trails on either side of the river, Wine said.

So far, \$1.2 million in private funding has been raised, but River Action needs public funding to continue the project and is working on going after it. The project was launched about six years ago, Wine said, but has hit various snags along the way.

The process has been slow, she said, but is still ongoing.

Another big project underway for River Action is to get every town in the Quad-Cities region registered in the Community Rating System with the Federal Emergency Management Agency. CRS gives each community a rating based on the floodplain practices in the area.

In turn, Wine said, the rating can help bring down flood insurance costs for residents. The only trick is getting the town enrolled in the program.

"In the process, we found out three of the entities in the Quad-Cities were in the system: Davenport, Moline and Rock Island County," she said. "(But) we have 13 communities that aren't, so we went to getting an intern with the sole duty of getting trained at FEMA and CRS."

Gianna Zampogna is a senior at Augustana College in Rock Island and the intern for River Action, Inc. In her role, she said, she has been meeting with various city officials to put together the needed documents — the CRS manual is 600 pages alone, she said — to help the cities submit to FEMA for credit.

"We look at criteria like what we need to present to FEMA and we comb through the documents," Zampogna said. "Whether that's me looking through public records or reaching out to the city administrator to look at permit records ... it's a lot of collaboration with city officials to make a good application to present to FEMA, making sure we're getting all of the credit that we can get, and hopefully getting a larger reduction on flood insurance."

Work for the community is central to River Action's mission, but so is community involvement. Activities along the riverfront are integral to that, Wine said, with a popular one being the senior golf cart tour.

"Our senior golf cart tour gets about 1,000 seniors out every year that aren't generally walking or biking the bike trails, but we have them on the trails with speakers that are professionals, or public officials," she said.

The speakers explain the local landmarks and how money was spent to create what they are seeing. Wine said it's a win-win for everyone: River Action gets people outside and enjoying the natural resources and attendees get to leave as informed citizens.

"That's another way of education is getting people engaged," she said.

River Action puts out a quarterly publication, "eddy Magazine," and an extensive email list that keeps the public informed. It's a task Wine takes seriously and is passionate about, even 41 years in to heading up the organization. It's what keeps her motivated to keep going and advocating for the river, she said.

"I always had a vision on what the river could be, and what the Quad-Cities could be if we were more inclined to have good design, good policies if we ever had setbacks due to flooding, good programs and events on the river where everybody is celebrating it," she said. "Those are things that keep you going. If you can just imagine what it would be like, and again, if you know what the next step might be, you can keep yourself motivated."

In 2025, River Action started its next step with the Getting Back to Our Roots campaign, a prairie planting initiative designed to reintroduce native prairie plants that once made up the vast majority of the Iowa and Illinois landscapes, said programs manager James Lasher.

"Today, there's less than 0.01% of the original prairie that existed here, so we



A big project River Action is working on now is First Bridge, a re-creation of a single 254-foot span of the first railroad bridge to cross the Mississippi River in 1856.

wanted to reintroduce that aspect of our local pride here in the Quad-Cities and invest in our relationship with that ecosystem that defines this Iowa, Illinois area," he said.

Lasher said River Action provided native prairie seeds to 15 different parks and preserves in the greater Quad-Cities region. In total, more than 32 acres of prairie were planted in those 15 parks thanks to the initiative.

It's differences like those that add up overtime, Wine said, and that have kept her motivated 41 years in. When she came to the Quad-Cities, her goal was to teach English.

She ended up teaching a much different audience on a much different topic.

But, she kept education at the forefront. And River Action has decades of success to prove it.

"I'm a theater/speech teacher, so I always feel like the show must go on," she said.

"I certainly have had that mindset and in creating theater, you're making something out of nothing a lot of times. I feel like we do that here, too."

"Today, there's less than 0.01% of the original prairie that existed here, so we wanted to reintroduce that aspect of our local pride here in the Quad-Cities." – James Lasher

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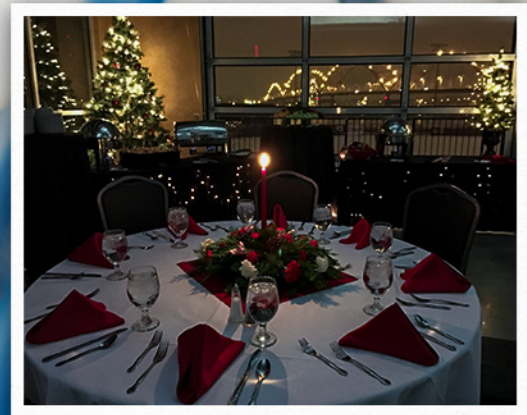
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