

# 2025 Annual Report

CORALVILLE • IOWA CITY • NORTH LIBERTY • UNIVERSITY HEIGHTS • JOHNSON COUNTY

## Intentional Community Engagement



Iowa City



North Liberty



Coralville

After recovering from an all-hands-on-deck undertaking in 2024 that dispersed 100 6-foot-tall Herky statues across the community and raised \$95 thousand for area schools, 2025 was a bit more typical for Think Iowa City – if typical means welcoming more than 93,300 visitors for 69-plus events, hosting 10 high school championships, securing a new \$4 million fund for event organizers statewide, and booking dozens more events for 2026, many for the first time.

In 2025, Think Iowa City joined Greater Iowa City in campaigning for a 1-percent local option sales tax that passed with 84 percent voter approval in Iowa City, 85 percent approval in Coralville, and 77 percent in North Liberty – generating funds for affordable housing

initiatives in Iowa City, a new recreation center in Coralville, and a new fire station in North Liberty.

“Nick Pfeiffer on our team co-led campaign communications and Stacey Houseman, Coralville resident, led the Coralville campaign. To pass LOST by 85 percent is significant,” Think Iowa City President Josh Schamberger said.

The new 109,700-square-foot Coralville Rec Center planned east of the existing facility in S.T. Morrison Park will include three gyms, an elevated track, spa, and three pools – including a competition pool with spectator seating.

“The new recreation center that Coralville is moving forward with is going to be significant in our ability to attract more swimming and diving events,” Schamberger said, highlighting the com-

munity’s explosion in popularity as a host for athletic events and championships.

“It’s fair to say these days, we pick up the phone more than then we make calls,” Schamberger said about Iowa City Area Sports Commission bookings that in 2025 offered an economic impact above \$16 million and the social benefit of community vibrancy, uniting locals and visitors in support of athletes across all sports and levels.

“It’s gotten to the point of really having myself and Nick Kaeding, our senior VP of admin here, questioning what our ceiling is and really what our capacity is in terms of, when are there really open weekends and opportunities for us to do more?” he said. “We’ve created that big of a workload.”





“I am proud to reflect on a year defined by measurable growth, strategic collaboration, and an unwavering commitment to enhancing our community’s quality of life through tourism, sports, and placemaking.”

*Jake Moore, FY26 Board Chair*

## FROM THE BOARD CHAIR



For every

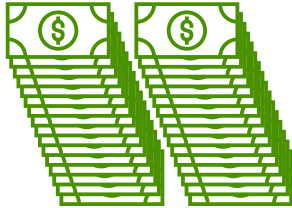
**\$1.00**

in hotel/motel tax received

staff efforts generated a

**\$31.62**

return to the broader community



Visitor spending of

**\$478M**

Food & beverage **\$122M**

Transportation **\$112M**

Lodging **\$98M**

Retail **\$81M**

Recreation **\$65M**

generates

**\$714M**

in economic impact and

**\$104M**

in state & local taxes

Each Johnson County household would need to pay an additional

**\$1,645**

annually to replace the taxes contributed by our visitors.

The momentum built in 2024 carried strongly into 2025, marking another stand-out year for the hospitality and tourism industry across Iowa City, Coralville, North Liberty, University Heights, and all of Johnson County. As Board Chair, I am proud to reflect on a year defined by measurable growth, strategic collaboration, and an unwavering commitment to enhancing our community’s quality of life through tourism, sports, and placemaking.

Demand for overnight lodging increased an average of 3.2% per month over the previous year—an impressive achievement that significantly outperformed the state’s overall stagnant demand for rooms. This sustained increase in visitation translated into \$478 million in domestic travel expenditures within Johnson County, representing a 4.18% year-over-year growth. These visitor-generated dollars play a vital role in strengthening our local economy, supporting jobs, fueling small businesses, and providing meaningful tax relief to residents by offsetting the cost of public services and infrastructure.

The return on investment achieved through Think Iowa City’s work continues to be exceptional. For every \$1 in hotel/motel tax received, staff efforts generated a \$31.62 return to the broader community. In 2025 alone, the team serviced 56 groups representing 80,390 attendees, producing \$22.3 million in direct spending. These conferences, meetings, and events—paired with another remarkable year from the Iowa City Area Sports Commission—were key drivers behind much of the record-breaking growth experienced throughout the county.

Beyond the numbers, 2025 was also a year of meaningful progress in advancing community betterment. Through authentic placemaking initiatives and intentional community engagement, the Think Iowa City team worked to ensure that tourism growth aligns with resident priorities and reflects the unique character of our communities. These efforts help create welcoming, vibrant places that visitors enjoy and residents are proud to call home—places that support long-term economic vitality rather than short-term gains.

This annual report offers a closer look at the breadth and depth of that work, from destination marketing and sales to sports tourism, community partnerships, and quality-of-life investments. I encourage you to take time to review it and gain a deeper understanding of the dedication, creativity, and professionalism the staff at Think Iowa City and the Iowa City Area Sports Commission bring to their mission every day.

On behalf of the Board, thank you to our partners, stakeholders, elected officials, and community members for your continued trust and support. Please feel free to contact me, Josh, or any member of his team to learn more about how we are working together to make the Iowa City area an even better place to live, work, and play

Jake Moore  
FY26 Board Chair



“We’ve continued to jump in with both feet.”

*Josh Schamberger, President*

Six years after COVID forced the community into lockdown and a team of local leaders and organizations – including those with Think Iowa City – convened around the Better Together 2030 initiative, Schamberger said, “We’ve continued to jump in with both feet” on the five-pillar plan.

“It’s a major initiative,” he said.

Focused on championing the community’s natural environment, maintaining vibrant neighborhoods, sustaining connection, the economy, and social services, the collaborative in 2025 celebrated “notable progress,” including on its environmental and connectivity pillars.

The City of Iowa City, for starters, began community input sessions and surveys on the Burlington Street bridge replacement project. It aimed at reimagining the east-west connection—with Think Iowa City leading the advocacy for improved river safety, access to the river’s edge, and paddle boat passageway, in service of Better Together 2030’s goal to make the Iowa River a signature attraction. It is the start of a several year process to improve this section of the river.



Brown Deer Tee Tee, Coralville



Burlington Street Dam & Bridge Rendering

# Innovative Sales and Marketing

## WHAT THE DESTINATION HAS TO OFFER

For Think Iowa City’s sales and marketing team, 2025 was a year of transition – having hired Anna Haney as sales and servicing coordinator in December 2024.

“A big part of the year was really focusing on investing in that new position and making sure that Anna really got immersed into what destination sales are,” Vice President of Sales Stacey Houseman said. “She traveled with me to all of our trade shows just to build her experience, get her feet wet, and now we’ve put her in a position where she’s going to be able to start being a lot more autonomous in her efforts, traveling on her own.”

An important part of the team’s marketing efforts involves face-to-face interaction with planners – prioritizing relationship-building in establishing the Iowa City-Coralville community as a destination location for events, conferences, and meetings.

With that in mind, Think Iowa City in August hosted a familiarization tour – or “fam” – flying in planners from across the country for a 2.5-day tour showcasing the best the area has to offer.

“Not only do we send them to our meeting spaces, but we really curate a very unique experience in our destination while they’re here,” Houseman said. “We did an event in downtown Iowa City where we hired an aerial silk artist to perform right in the middle of the pedestrian mall.”

Think Iowa City also commissioned a local poet to write a poem about Iowa City and read it aloud, “which really pulled into the university of literature and our writing ties.”

During the visit, different area dignitaries turned out – including the mayor.

“So just making people feel very VIP,” Houseman said, “and really showing people what sets us apart.”

The tour showcased different business districts – like Downtown Iowa City and Iowa River Landing in Coralville.



“Once you get people to Iowa City, they have some clarity as to, ‘Oh my gosh. It’s just so amazing. I didn’t know you had this.’”

*Stacey Houseman, Vice President of Sales and Event Experience*

**BOOKED EVENTS THAT OCCURRED IN 2025:**

**\$18,620,822**

in direct economic impact

**65+**

groups serviced

**93,333+**

attendees

7 hosted buyer shows attended in 2025, meeting over 260 planners across the country.

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**NON-SPORT FUTURE EVENTS BOOKED IN 2025:**

36 groups

26 Events

15,300 Attendees

16,1687 Room Nights

\$10,501,699 Direct Economic Impact

“And then we took them on a really extensive agritourism tour, which included our partners at Cedar Ridge and Calyx Lavender Farm and Walker Homestead,” she said. “Giving people the opportunity to see all the different possibilities the destination has to offer.”

All of it takes a lot of time and effort – including recruiting the planners and getting them here.

“Once you get people to Iowa City, they have some clarity as to, ‘Oh my gosh, it’s just so amazing.’ Or ‘I didn’t know you had this.’ But getting from that point of, ‘Hey, do you want to come to Iowa?’ to actually getting them to fly into CID is a pretty laborious process.”

Houseman said the payoff is worth it, netting bookings and referrals for years to come. Take the National Criminal Defense

College events Think Iowa City landed for several years – amounting to 8,000 hotel room nights.

“That’s probably the biggest that I’ve ever secured,” Houseman said about the 2025 win, beating out Indianapolis. “So that was pretty incredible. Winning against a larger major metro is really kind of a testament to our investment in making sure that we’re getting stuff across the finish line.”

And 2026 promises to be just as busy for the sales team, according to Schamberger.

“This past 12 months going into this next six to seven months is our high-water mark for conferences and meetings,” he said. “That business is very strong and 2026 and the next eight months is going to bring some of the biggest conferences we’ve ever been afforded.”

## BRAND REFRESH

Think Iowa City’s efforts to communicate those wins and upcoming events while continuing to market the area got a brand refresh in 2025 – including a new logo, color scheme, and website.

“It had been a number of years,” Schamberger said. “And this whole new fresh look ... it’s been received incredibly well.”

Monica Nieves Hirsch, vice president of marketing and communication, led the update efforts – tapping a marketing agency to help make Think Iowa City’s look feel more like the community it serves and represents.

“So we talked about colors, we talked about fonts, we talked about important things to our community, like arts and culture and diversity and the University of Iowa,” Hirsch said.

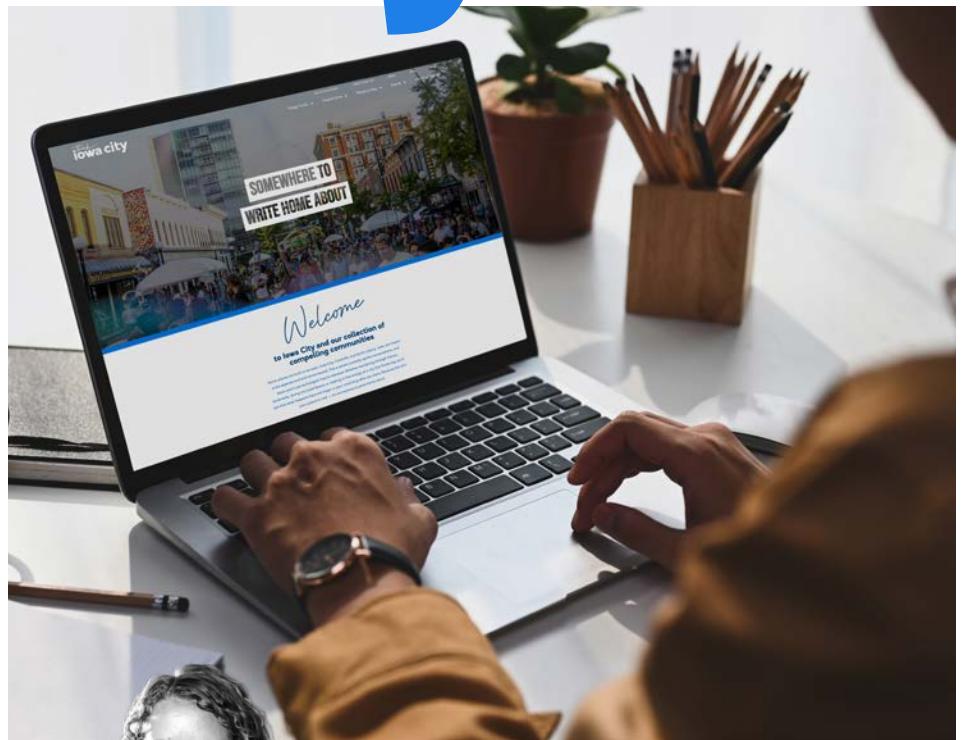
After narrowing it down to three concepts, Hirsch said they landed on one with bright colors – like the sunsets of an Iowa summer.

“Yellow is in there to tie it back to the university,” she said. “And it goes really well with our other community partners, like Greater Iowa City and the Downtown District. We just really feel like it freshened up what Think Iowa City means, and we’re really proud to show it off.”

Regarding the website, Hirsch said she wanted to make it more user friendly – as that’s “the number one way people interact with Think Iowa City.”

“So we really changed the user experience and leaned in,” she said.

And usership data indicates the update worked – with website usership up 10 percent in 2025 over 2024, topping 216,700 users. Across all its website and social media accounts, Hirsch tallied 6.8 million impressions in 2025 with an audience size of 44,814 – marking a nearly 8 percent increase.



“We just really feel like it freshened up what Think Iowa City means, and we’re really proud to show it off.”

*Monica Nieves Hirsch, Vice President of Marketing & Communications*

<p><b>264,719</b> website users, <b>increase of 9.73%</b> over 2024</p>	<p>Across all social media platforms, all accounts:</p> <p><b>6,830,561</b> impressions</p> <p><b>136,369</b> engagement</p> <p><b>2,671</b> clicks</p> <p><b>44,814 audience size</b> 7.7% increase</p>
<p><b>3,386,028</b> Facebook impressions</p>	<p><b>15,319</b> Instagram engagements <b>15.4% increase</b></p>

# Authentic Placemaking

## TRAILS, STAGES, AND FAIRGROUNDS

**S**quaring with Better Together 2030’s environmental pillar is a new University Heights-University of Iowa land-grant agreement announced in November 2025 to develop a trail system on 36 acres of forested land north of Melrose Avenue — near the Finkbine commuter lot.

With planning help from Think Iowa City, the project will include both paved and unpaved trails, multiple overlooks, and connections to other nearby trails.

“I helped with their visioning of that trail project, and we as an organization have invested some dollars into developing the plan with them,” Nick Pfeiffer, Think Iowa City vice president of public affairs, said. “It will be another attractive feature within our bicycling infrastructure here in Johnson County, and so we’ve taken a

leadership role to help University Heights get that plan developed.”

Think Iowa City also played a role in helping the City of North Liberty land a \$900,000 Community Attraction and Tourism grant in 2023 in support of its “Next Stage” project to expand and develop its Centennial Park – which in October 2025 saw completion of its first phase.

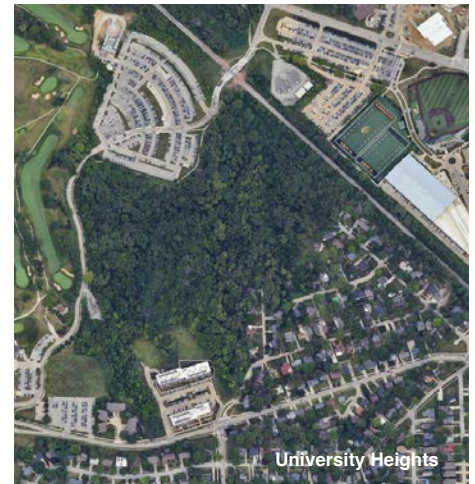
The full \$16.4 million park expansion offers an event hall, amphitheater, splash pad, pavilion, and plaza. The first phase included the debut of a 13,000-square-foot HyVee Center and 2,700-square-foot amphitheater.

“All those things continue to be key in terms of placemaking,” Schamberger said, highlighting an upcoming effort to refresh the Johnson County Fairgrounds.

“That has been a tired property that needs some love, and we’re trying to find ways of providing them the information they need in order to sustain, but also develop out different uses for that really im-

portant attractor for the Iowa City area,” he said. “There are many other opportunities out there at the fairgrounds, and it’s pretty underutilized at this point.”

Think Iowa City has taken the lead and is co-funding a study to identify best fairground uses going forward, according to Schamberger.



University Heights



Johnson County Fairgrounds



North Liberty

## TOURISM GRANT

After advocating for three years for a bill to provide tourism funding for major events across Iowa, Think Iowa City in 2025 celebrated a victory in the passage of the “Sports Wagering Receipts Act.”

The bill creates an “Iowa Major Events and Tourism Program” under the Iowa Economic Development Authority – designating funding for eligible entities wanting to host events that generate large audiences and significant publicity “and have a measurable economic impact to the state.”

Event organizers can apply for funding from a pot of \$4 million – generated from sports betting.

“On our third attempt – three years now we’ve been trying to get some legislation written for major events tourism funding – and at the 11th hour we were able to get it through,” Schamberger said. “And there’s now a \$4 million fund that was set aside from gaming revenues that affords communities in Iowa the opportunity to go after and for the state to have an investment into major events.”

As vice president of public affairs for Think Iowa City, Pfeiffer joined Schamberger in helping to write and revise the legislation – before taking to the capital speak on its behalf.

“So that was a major win,” Pfeiffer said. “That was a big win for the state.”

For Think Iowa City, the grant funding could help support upcoming events like the 2026 Senior Pan American Championships – set for May 7–10 in Coralville’s Xtream Arena – or the Savannah Bananas’ visit to Kinnick Stadium on July 3 and 4.

“Those are the types of things that we’re going to be able to go after,” Pfeiffer said.



North Liberty



Iowa City

### Think Iowa City Community Grants include:

- |   |   |                              |
|---|---|------------------------------|
| 8-BitFest                               | “This is Iowa”  | Coralville Asian Festival    |
| Coralville 4th Fest                     | FIRST Tech Challenge Iowa Championship                                    | Jack Splat                   |
| City Park Basketball Court Extravaganza | Free Summer Shakespeare   | Iowa City Latino Fest        |
| Taylor Swift Cover Band                 | Iowa City Expo for Comics and Real Eclectic Alternative Media (ICE CREAM) | Mic Check Poetry Fest 2025   |
| Grave Rave                              | Summer of the Arts  | Bike-In Beats                |
| Northside Saturday Nights               | Floodwater Comedy Festival  | Unity Exchange               |
| Abby Jimenez Author Visit               | Little Village’s 25th Anniversary Celebration                             | ReFocus Film Festival        |
| Iowa City Book Festival                 |   | 5th Street Social            |
| Family Folk Machine presents            |   | Wings & Wild Things Festival |



“Placemaking transforms spaces into vibrant destinations, fostering community pride, enhancing tourism, and creating opportunities for further development.”

*Nick Pfeiffer, Vice President of Public Affairs*

# Iowa City Area Sports Commission



The Iowa City-Coralville community has firmly established itself as an athletics hub and annual host of bigtime events and fan favorites thanks to the Iowa City Area Sports Commission – landing a growing list of high school state championships, national and international wrestling competitions, and regional tournaments and showcases – including frisbee golf, ballet, and bowling events.

“It’s kind of gotten to a point now where business sort of flows to us,” Luke Eustice, director of the Iowa City Area Sports Commission, said.

And for every event the commission lands, the larger community benefits.

“Volleyball generates a \$3.5 million dollar economic impact,” Eustice said, highlighting ways the sports commission gauges both measurable and intangible benefits. “Do the hotels feel as though it was a successful event? How do the restaurants feel?”

“We do a lot of communicating with them, ‘Were you guys busy?’ ‘What did you guys think?’ And their excitement for events helps us gage going forward.”

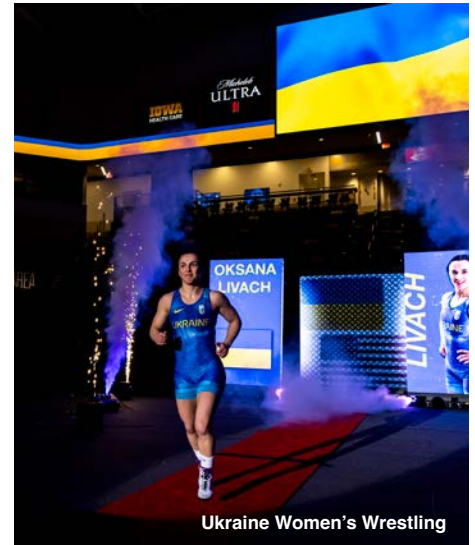
Some of 2025’s Sports Commission highlights include events booked for 2026, like the Missouri Valley Conference women’s basketball tournament, the inaugural NCAA Women’s Wrestling National Championship, and the Senior Pan-American Wrestling Championships. All of these events will be held in Xtream Arena in Coralville in 2026 for the first time.

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The inaugural IGHSAU girls state wrestling duals tournament also will be held at the arena in 2026. And Iowa City landed the Savannah Bananas at Kinnick Stadium over the July 4th holiday.

“The Savannah Bananas was another really big win,” Schamberger said. “They put that out for bid all over the nation. There probably wasn’t a stadium that didn’t bid. So for us to be afforded the opportunity amongst eight stadiums for 2026 is a big opportunity.”

The selection, of course, might have been obvious—given the level of local



interest in the exhibition barnstorming baseball team that plays a looser style of baseball known as “banana ball.”

“They knew what they were doing,” Schamberger said. “It was recently announced that we were second to only Boise State in terms of lottery ticket requests – 110,000 people submitted their name for tickets.”



**2025 EVENTS**

- Soldier Salute
- Solon Spartan Bullseye Tournament
- IGHSAU Girl's Wrestling State Championship
- IHSAA State Wrestling Dual Team Tournament
- IHSAA State Swimming Meet
- Summit League Men's and Women's Swim and Dive Championships
- Junior Heartlander Hockey Tournament
- Iowa Swimming Age Group Short Course Championship
- 2025 National Collegiate Women's Wrestling Championships
- Special Olympics Mid-Winter Tournament
- Middle School State Championship Basketball
- Universal Ballet Competition Semi Finals
- Vicious Circle Disc Golf Challenge #11
- Armbruster Open
- Sugar Cubed Marathon
- IHSAA Boys State Singles and Doubles Tennis
- IHSAA Boys State Team Tennis
- IGHSAU Girls State Singles and Doubles Tennis
- IGHSAU Girls State Golf
- Splash Out Hunger Invitational
- Varsity UDA/UCA High School Cheer and Dance Competition
- Sweet Sugar Bottom Open #12
- Block Party 7s Rugby
- Core4
- Altaier Farm Classic #3
- Iowa 7v7 Football State Tournament
- Elite Sword Experience
- Fall IGHSAU Girls State Singles and Doubles Tennis
- Who's Number One
- Regional PBA Bowldogs Cup
- IGHSAU Girls State Volleyball State Championship
- A3 Midwest Challenge
- Iowa Chase Regatta
- IGHSAU Girls State Swimming and Diving Championships
- Dan Gable Donnybrook
- Ukraine vs USA Women's Wrestling Friendly Dual

**SPORTS COMMISSION IN 2025**

Supported  
**36 events**  
 and produced  
**\$16.1M**  
 of economic impact.



Middle School State Basketball



The Sword Experience, Iowa City

**ADMINISTRATION AND OPERATIONS**

Greasing the wheels and tightening the screws behind every event, bid, advocacy campaign, and in-house project are Nick Kaeding and Ashley Smith – who work tirelessly behind the scenes and prefer to keep it that way.

“All the things that people don’t really think about when you see a splashy event,” said Kaeding, who’s been Think Iowa City’s senior vice president of finance and administration since 2007. “Somebody has to write the checks and review the contracts with the arena and things like that. So we certainly do have a hand in those things, just not really a noticeable hand.”

When Think Iowa City is bidding for bigger events – like Pan Ams and Savannah Bananas – Kaeding acts as a kind of budgetary watchdog for his organization.

“It’s making sure the numbers that get thrown around are going to be doable,” he said, “and we’re not getting out over our skis financially.”

When the events actually arrive and Think Iowa City’s team clicks into an “all-hands-on-deck” operation, Kaeding and Smith help with operational needs.

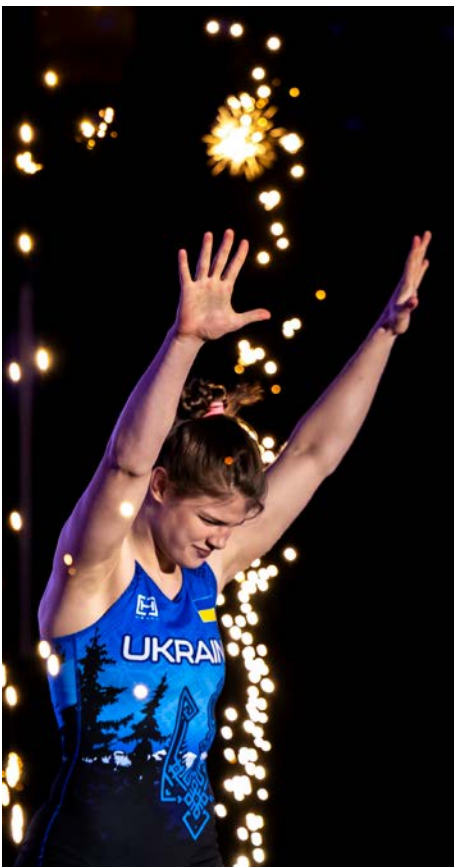
“We’re down at the arena, helping scan tickets and putting up the fence and rolling the mats,” Smith said. “Making sure that the athletes get the fire and the flames, and telling them when it’s their turn to run out on the finals mats.”

When it comes to Think Iowa City’s advocacy and campaign efforts at the local and state level – Kaeding said he’s stepped up, serving as treasurer for the LOST committee in 2025.

Looking ahead to 2026, Kaeding said he expects Think Iowa City to apply for grant funding now available from the \$4 million pot the Legislature created in 2025.

“So administratively, that’s kind of exciting,” Kaeding said, “the opportunity to get some pretty large state grants to help fund big events for our community.”

# Shots from 2025





## BEHIND THE CAMERA

Digital Media Manager, Joseph Cress, is the ace up the sleeve of Think Iowa City and the Iowa City Area Sports Commission. His award-winning photography is picked up by news media across the country such as the *New York Post*, *Sports Illustrated*, *USA Today*, Fox Sports, and NBC News. Additionally, Joseph has been the deft hand controlling the video boards and pyrotechnics at Iowa City Area Sports Commission events at Xtream Arena that have made those events such a memorable experience for the athletes and fans. “Joseph is a terrific asset for our entire community,” said Josh Schamberger, President.



**Joseph Cress**  
Digital Media  
Manager



**Monica Nieves Hirsch**  
Vice President  
of Marketing &  
Communications



**Anna Haney**  
Sales & Servicing  
Coordinator



**Nick Pfeiffer**  
Vice President of  
Public Affairs



**Stacey Houseman**  
Vice President  
of Sales & Event  
Experience



**Josh Schamberger**  
President



**Donna Jondle**  
Visitor Services  
Assistant



**Ashley Smith**  
Operations &  
Servicing Manager



**Nick Kaeding**  
Senior Vice  
President of Finance  
& Administration



**Angie Jordan**  
Administrative  
Services Coordinator



**Luke Eustice**  
Director



**Laney Fitzpatrick**  
Sports Development  
Manager



**Kylee Stock**  
Director of Events

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