

may 2026

ecia spotlight

School Districts Receive \$1.25 MM

Thanks to a recent Iowa Department of Education 21st Century Community Learning Center (21CCLC) grant award, Andrew and Easton Vally Community School Districts (CSD) are expanding their successful out-of-school program to include Delwood CSD.

Andrew CSD has successfully operated a 21CCLC program for 10 consecutive years, branded the Leader Education After School Program (LEAP). Easton Valley joined LEAP in 2021–22 and this recent application expands the program to Delwood Elementary.

LEAP provides free before-school, after-school, and summer programming at all three sites, including academic support, enrichment, leadership development, USDA-approved snacks, physical activities, family literacy events, and transportation in summer. Community partners provide experiences like going to museums, hiking at and learning about nearby nature areas, cooking classes, simple banking lessons, and other various field trips or community partner visits.

Affordable school-age childcare is extremely limited. Brandon Kirchhoff, Andrew Principal said, “LEAP provides students with many opportunities they would not experience otherwise. Without the program, many students would go home and play video games and wait for their parents to get home from work. The LEAP program provides students a safe place to explore new activities, learning, experiences, and places. A huge program success is relationships with peers. Especially for some of our students who have autism. They have been able to experience some things and learn how to behave in groups at different places. This has opened the door to the parents being willing to take their children to more places outside of their home, knowing they now know how to act in these social environments.”

The 21st Century Community Learning Centers grant provides Title IV, Part B funds to start or expand quality out-of-school time programs offered before school, after school and during academic breaks. School districts must have a free and reduced lunch rate of 40% or more to be eligible.

Marla Quinn, ECIA Grants and Municipal Coordinator, wrote the successful grant application. For more information on the 21CCLC grant, email Marla at mquinn@ecia.org.



Image source: Andrew CSD

Students learning about prairie grass at the Hurstville Interpretive Center in Jackson County.

Tipton Receives \$1.5+MM Grant

The City of Tipton is getting a Department of Energy award through the Iowa Economic Development Authority (IEDA) that will strengthen the city's grid and recovery time when dealing with weather related outages. The \$1,529,427 IEDA Iowa Grid Resilience Fund award will help pay for the following:

- Converting 4,300 feet of overhead (OH) electric distribution lines to underground (UG) in a tree-populated area prone to weather-related outages.
- Automating and upgrading Generator #1, including improvements to its cooling system, fuel system, and electrical panel.

The total project cost is \$1,897,827. The project team is meeting and hopes to begin construction in late 2026, early 2027.

ECIA's Project Specialist, Amanda Dupont wrote the successful application. Please contact Amanda at adupont@ecia.org if you have any questions about this project or if your city may have a project that fits this fund.



Image source: KCRG Our Town Tipton

The Iowa Grid Resilience Fund supports efforts to improve the all-hazards resilience of the electric grid and reduce the frequency and duration of outages. The program provides grants to eligible entities to address current and future resilience.

CDBG Grants due August 17



Image source: JCEA, Downtown Maquoketa

The following three Community Development Block Grants were originally due in September and are now due August 17th, 2026, at 11:59 PM. Click on the links in the titles below to see if your City may have an eligible project. If so, Contact Amanda Dupont at adupont@ecia.org for more information about regulations.

[Community Facilities & Services](#)

[Commercial Building Facades](#)

[Housing Upper Story Conversion](#)

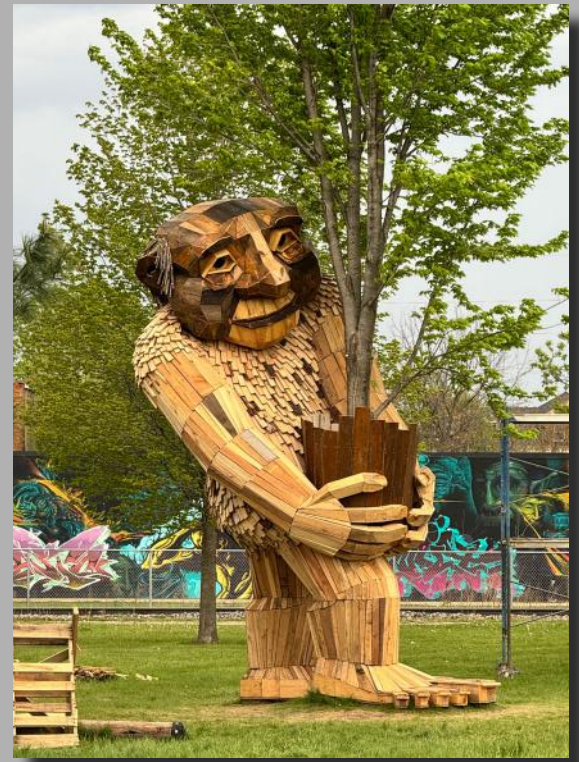
Clinton has New Unique Visitors

Four giant trolls landed in Clinton in April and one is at the Sawmill Museum. The museum applied for and received an ECIA Brownfield Assessment and Planning Technical Assistance grant. ECIA is working with the museum on a site re-visioning plan and environmental assessments for the 12 acres currently owned by the museum. The re-visioning plan involves relocation of the Sawmill Museum, and renovation of the museum into an event center, outdoor experience, and amphitheater. This includes creating an inviting, fun space for visitors to see Helmut, the troll (pictured), enjoy the Mississippi River, and visit the Sawmill Museum.

The trolls were designed and created by Danish artist Thomas Dambo and community volunteers using reclaimed wood and recycled materials. Helmut is getting comfortable in his new home at the museum.

Visitors from all over have been making their way nonstop to Clinton, seeking out the trolls. The community has really embraced it. Students painted troll footprints by the museum and numerous businesses and restaurants have created troll merchandise or food experiences.

For more information on the trolls, visit <https://www.growclinton.com/>. For more information about ECIA's Brownfields Program, contact Dawn Danielson at ddanielson@ecia.org.



West Branch Partners with UI on 17 Projects

During the 2025/2026 academic year, West Branch participated in the Iowa Initiative for Sustainable Communities (IISC), the University of Iowa's foremost engagement program connecting Iowa communities with faculty and students to advance shared goals.

Working closely with community leaders and residents, more than 125 UI faculty and students from a wide range of disciplines completed 17 community projects, from long range planning, to mapping the city's tree canopy, to documenting community history through film.

Students made the most of West Branch's proximity to Iowa City with multiple site visits to gather project-specific data and deepen their understanding of the community context. Visits included participating in community events to solicit resident input like the Homecoming Football Game and Trick or Treat on Main as well as interviews with key stakeholders including City and school district officials.

On May 7th, there were final presentations by seven project teams from the School of Planning and Public Affairs and the Department of Civil & Environmental Engineering on the following:

Housing Needs Assessment & Policy Toolkit

Capital Improvement Plan & Fiscal Policy

Utility Expansion and Replacement Study

West Branch Comprehensive Plan 2050

Leveraging Historic Assets & Historic Preservation Plan

Truck Rerouting Engineering & Design

Downtown Streetscaping Engineering & Design

A complete list of projects can be found [here](#).

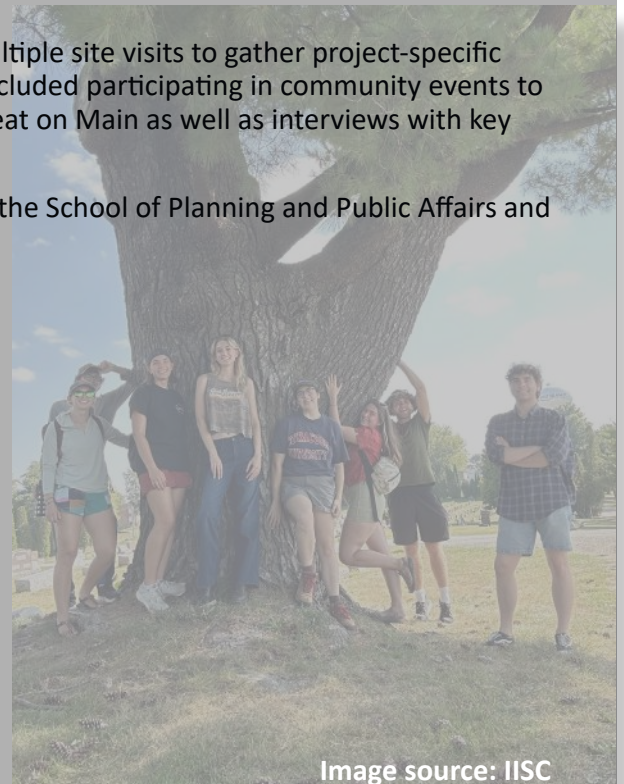


Image source: IISC

A Message from Homes for Iowa

Homes for Iowa (HFI) is a 501c3 nonprofit organization that has been working to train offenders, reduce recidivism, and benefit lowans since 2019. HFI trains offenders in building trades by giving them practical experience in building houses. Each house is built at the Newton Correctional Release Facility (NCRF) and delivered directly onto the foundation of the buyer's lot. The money from each sale pays for the training.

The HFI board reviews pricing each June and in past years there has typically been a modest increase. Orders placed before July 1 will lock in current pricing. Securing pricing now can help provide greater certainty for your project budgeting.

Current pricing from HFI website:

- Three-bedroom (1200 SF): \$108,000
- Two-bedroom (1200 SF): \$108,000
- Two-bedroom one bath (1000 SF): \$98,000

Each plan requires a deposit of 10%. Plan availability differs based on house model.

Submitting an order in the coming weeks helps secure your place in the 2026 production schedule.

With a typical build timeline of approximately six months, this is less about year-end delivery and more about ensuring alignment with your broader project timeline and planning needs.

HFI is expanding its building site, with work slated to be completed this summer, which will nearly double capacity from 24 homes built in a year to 45. This expansion will position HFI to meet the growing housing demand across the state.

The impact behind Homes for Iowa speaks volumes; nearly 700 trainees having come through the program and 159 homes delivered since 2020. Does your community need housing and have lots available?

Visit <https://www.homesforia.com/> to help continue that momentum.



Image source: ECICOG

Lead Staff Present in DC



Kim Glaser and Liz Kemp (pictured presenting), Project Specialists in the ECIA Community and Economic Development department, both presented at the National Office of Lead Hazard Control and Healthy Homes Program Manager School held April 27th- 30th in Washington DC.

With over 40+ years of combined expertise and experience, they are true problem solvers and leaders for the challenging work with these programs. They presented to over 500 attendees and shared their insights on “Financial Grants Management” and “Navigating Rural and Urban Communities” respectively. Thank you for all of your hard work and dedication!

Best Wishes!

Two long-time ECIA housing department employees are retiring this spring and summer. Leonard O'Connell, Maintenance Technician, retired after 20 years of service to ECIA on May 21. Michelle Huseman, Family Support Specialist, will be retiring after 38 years of service to ECIA on July 31. The following is reflection of their time at ECIA.

What did you enjoy most about your work?

LO: Working at the elderly sites. They were the most appreciative. One elderly lady started crying when I told her I was leaving.

MH: Definitely the people. I am privileged to have worked the majority of years in two departments helping individuals with their goals of achieving independence.

In the Housing Department, working with primarily elderly and disabled individuals assisting them with their efforts to live independently and age in place.

In the Employment/Training department, with young parents to assist them in their efforts to become economically independent of public assistance.

What was your biggest career accomplishment or challenge?

LO: The certifications that the position required came pretty easy. As far as challenges, nothing really phases me.

MH: Completing my college degree while working full time was both my biggest challenge and career accomplishment.

What are you most looking forward to in retirement?

LO: We've got 23 baby calves on the way, so I'll be busy with that. We also have 17 horses that we ride around on the farm and take them to horse camps and ride with friends.

MH: Spending more time with family and friends, and in a new part time role with Clarity Clinic.

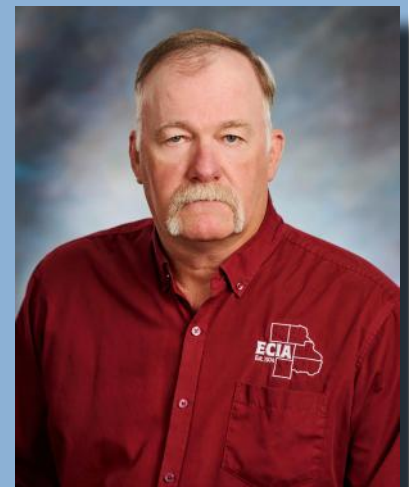
Where is the first place you want to travel?

LO: Out west to Wyoming to the mountains.

MH: I really enjoy South Texas.



Michelle - Huge Cubs fan, shown here with fellow coworker Cubs fans after they won the World Series in 2016.



Leonard - Really nice guy and probably the only time seen without a hat. :)

ECIA Anniversaries April - May



Michelle Schnier
39 years



Marla Quinn
24 years



Gail Kuhl
22 years



Mindy Wiley
21 years



Stacie Scott
17 years



Christine Mergen
17 years



Dylan Michels
9 years

Well
done!



Shelby Eipperle
7 years



Dan LoBianco
4 years



Kyle Finke
4 years

NAHRO Award honoree

At the Iowa NAHRO Conference held in April, Mindy Wiley (pictured above), Housing and Grants Program Specialist in the ECIA Housing Department, was recognized with the Jack Paetz Friend of NAHRO Award. This award is given to the person or organization that has furthered the goals of NAHRO in an outstanding and unusual manner. Mindy was the chair of the IA NAHRO professional development committee and spent a lot of time and energy preparing for the conference. Congratulations to Mindy on a successful conference and the award!



East Central Intergovernmental Association

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