

Iowa rural hospitals seek lifeline

With increasing financial pressures and stagnant Medicaid reimbursement rates, Iowa hospitals are facing dire straits.



Ayrton Breckenridge/The Daily Iowan

Phlebotomist Ashlynn Woollums draws Andrea Mathes' blood at the Knoxville Hospital and Clinics in Knoxville, Iowa, on March 14.

Liam Halawith
Politics Editor

Among the hills of the Mississippi River valley in the southeastern tip of Iowa lies the quaint city of Keokuk. The town of just under 10,000 residents is one of many rural communities that has lost a core service — its community hospital.

In October 2022, Blessing Health Keokuk closed its doors to inpatient and emergency room care while keeping its family medicine clinic open.

Officials at the 71-bed hospital said it wasn't getting enough business to sustain operations at the facility that it bought in March of 2021 — just a year and nine months before it closed its doors.

According to data collected by the National Center for Healthcare Quality and Payment Reform, Blessing Health's Keokuk facility was in the red, spending 13

pital 18 miles away and a 30-minute drive in Fort Madison, many residents are worried help might not be available in time if an emergency strikes. There are no other

“We've always had a hospital here. If you had any problems, you were capable of getting to a facility within a couple minutes.”

— Keokuk Mayor Kathie Mahoney

percent more than expected revenue in its last year of operation.

Keokuk Mayor Kathie Mahoney told *The Daily Iowan* that after the facility closed, residents worried about accessibility to care when needed. With the closest hos-

emergency care facilities in Keokuk city limits.

“We've always had a hospital here,” Mahoney said. “If you had any problems, you were capable of getting to a facility within a couple of minutes.”

In addition to the hospital closing, Lee County emergency medical services, the ambulance service for the entire county, has limited resources. With only two or three ambulances operating during any given time and longer transport times because of the hospital closure, Mahoney worries some residents might have to wait longer for emergency care.

For the time being, Mahoney said, the Keokuk Fire Department provides emergency care if an ambulance isn't available in time but is unable to transport patients.

Mahoney said Lee County is looking into purchasing a fourth ambulance to increase emergency medical response availability and decrease wait times for emergency care.

Lee County first responders did not respond to a request for comment.

Recently, the Keokuk community has opened its arms to Insight Healthcare and signed a letter of intent to acquire the hospital from Blessing Health. The company signed a letter of intent in January, Mahoney said.

Blessing Health Keokuk isn't the only rural hospital facing financial pressures, and Keokuk isn't the only small town in America that has lost its community hospital.

According to data from the National Center for Healthcare Quality and Payment Reform, 188 rural hospitals have closed their doors nationwide since 2005, and 220 are at immediate risk of closing. Rural hospitals are classified by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services and serve communities designated rural by the U.S. Census.

In Iowa, Blessing Health Keokuk is the only rural hospital to close since 2005, but 24 percent of rural hospitals in the state are at risk of closing, two of which are at immediate risk of closure.

Rural hospitals face financial pressures as Medicaid rates remain stagnant

Iowa Hospital Association President and CEO Chris Mitchell said stagnant Medicaid reimbursement rates are hurting rural hospitals and leaving them in financial jeopardy. As legislators attempt

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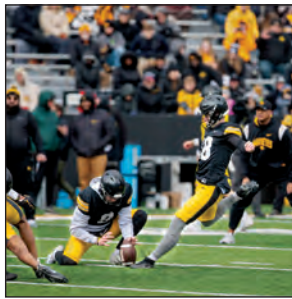
INSIDE



A look inside Iowa City's Coffee Emporium

The new downtown cafe Coffee Emporium moved into The High Ground Cafe's space this month.

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Staying focused

Kicker Drew Stevens and punter/holder Tory Taylor are increasing their chemistry after learning the operations of the special teams unit in 2022.

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ONLINE

Body believed to be Cristian Martinez found in Iowa River

A couple discovered a body in the Iowa River Saturday believed to be Cristian Martinez, 20, of Muscatine.

DITV

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Clark prompts \$66,000 in food pantry donations

The national player of the year Caitlin Clark helped raise over \$66,000 in a partnership with the Coralville Food Pantry.



Daniel McGregor-Huyer/The Daily Iowan

Iowa guard Caitlin Clark poses for a photo with Marlie Willems, 10, during a charity event at the Coralville Food Pantry on April 21.

Cooper Worth and Archie Wagner

Iowa women's basketball guard and National Player of the Year Caitlin Clark is teaming up with a Johnson County food pantry to raise money for residents facing food insecurity.

When the Iowa women's basketball team was making its historic run in the NCAA Tournament in March, the Coralville Food Pantry teamed up with Clark to help raise \$22,000 for the organization.

The goal was quickly surpassed as the Iowa women's team made national news by leading

the Hawkeyes to its first national championship appearance. Clark has now helped the pantry raise over \$66,000 for those facing food insecurity, with all donations made to the pantry matched dollar-for-dollar by Green State Credit Union in Iowa City.

Coralville Community Food Pantry Executive Director John Boller said the organization has benefited from all the exposure the women's basketball team has received over the last few months, with donations coming in from across the U.S. and even overseas in the United King-

PANTRY | Page 2

UI Pride Alliance Center finds new home

The Melrose Avenue location is set to open fall 2023.

Archie Wagner
News Reporter

The University of Iowa Pride Alliance Center will open its new location at 601 Melrose Ave. this fall after having its initial location closed.

Originally, the Pride Alliance Center operated out of 125 Grand Ave. Court before a temporary closure and a move to the Iowa Memorial Union. The news of the move comes after the state Board of Regents approved the university's request to raze the Grand Avenue Court building.

Pride Alliance Center Coordinator Emma Welch said the center was informed about the university's construction plan for razing the previous Pride Alliance Center building and how it would impact its operations.

“The university had identified another house for the Pride Alliance Center in acknowledging that we've operated out of a house, and so to keep the Pride Alliance Center as a legacy center, the university identified another house on the west side of campus,” Welch said.

The new location will keep the symbolic red door from the previous location.

“The red door has become, for many students who frequent the pride house, an iconic staple of the Pride Alliance Center,” Welch said. “Especially with the imagery of National Coming Out Day, doors are relatively important in our community.”

Additionally, Welch said students will be able to help choose the design and décor for the home, including the col-

MELROSE | Page 2

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Iowa guard Connor McCaffery takes a photo of Caitlin Clark during a charity event at the Coralville Community Food Pantry on April 21.

PANTRY

Continued from Front

dom and the United Arab Emirates.

"To be able to have an infusion of these really generous funds coming from all over the world made an immense impact on the work that we're doing," Boller said.

Boller said after the NCAA officially implemented its name, image, and likeness policy in July 2021, which allowed college athletes to receive compensation for endorsements and sponsorships, he reached out to Clark to see if there were opportunities for the pantry to work with her.

"Caitlin was just coming off a stellar freshman year, so we reached out to her uncle, who is overseeing her business operations, and chatted for several months about some sort of partnership, which they were really excited to pursue," he said.

Clark first partnered with the pantry in spring 2022 to raise over \$23,000 and encouraged community members to donate toiletry products like shampoo, soap, and toilet paper, which Boller said

the pantry struggles to keep in stock.

"We exceeded our goal last year to raise \$22,000 in honor of her No. 22 jersey," he said. "We exceeded that in year one, and this year, we have crushed that goal, which is really exciting."

Clark appeared at the final in-person donation event on Friday at the pantry's new location at 804 13th Ave., where dozens of community members attended to donate items and get a picture with the women's basketball star.

While mingling with fans, Clark said it was special to see how much

New location of the Coralville Community Food Pantry



Infographic by Jami Martin-Trainor

nity rallying around this place and wanting to give back I think is really the coolest part."

Coralville resident Maggie Willems attend-

Willems said she told her daughter that she had a surprise for her when she picked her up from school earlier in the day.

"I said, 'You're going to get to meet someone, who would you most like to meet in this world?' and her response was, 'Caitlin Clark,'" Willems said.

Moving forward, Boller said with the success of this year's fundraiser, the pantry is looking forward to continuing partnering with Clark and other UI athletes.

"Caitlin was our first one, and I feel like this has opened the door to all sorts of opportunities in the future, which we're excited about," he said.

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The entire community rallying around this place and wanting to give back I think is really the coolest part.

— Iowa women's basketball guard Caitlin Clark

the fundraiser has grown since last year's campaign.

"We did this last year in their old building, and now they've been able to move over to their new building, which has been cool to be a part of," Clark said. "The entire commu-

ed the event with her 10-year-old daughter. Willems said it was their first time visiting the pantry.

"It seems like a great combination to donate and meet someone that we're both really excited to see," Willems said.

MELROSE

Continued from Front

or palette of the building and its rooms.

"I'm excited that we'll have an opportunity to make this space what we have learned from our campus community that they need," she said.

Welch said the Pride Alliance Center is working with campus contractors to create a sidewalk ramp and add railings to increase accessibility to the building.

"In this new space, I'm hopeful we'll have more space so that folks can comfortably be in there for student org meetings and programming," she said.

Paras Bassuk, a UI second-year student, was first introduced to the

Pride Alliance Center by attending its programming during their first semester on campus.

"I met so many people through that that have stuck with me in various ways, and it felt like a kind of natural progression to work there because it was a place I wanted to spend more time in and have more reasons to attend," Bassuk said.

At the end of their freshman year, Bassuk applied for a job at the Pride Alliance Center and was excited when they received the position as a programming assistant, they said.

While the first semester provided opportunities for learning everyday operations at the center, they said the second semester was different than

anyone expected.

"We closed a week in because of mice," Bassuk said. "There was a mouse infestation over winter break because it got cold, and the mice needed a place to stay."

Bassuk said the mouse issue was challenging to face, and the staff at the Pride Alliance Center did much of the maintenance and recovery from the infestation.

"We kind of quickly realized it was bad beyond the scope of what we as a student staff could really take care of, and in the process realized it was also kind of beyond the scope of what the university was willing to take care of," Bassuk said.

In the move to the IMU, Bassuk said, the Pride Alliance Center has been able to retain people who already regularly engaged, but it has been harder to reach new people with a less visible location.

"We are really looking forward to what will happen with the new place, but it definitely has been sad," they said.

Bassuk said the excitement for the new house is underscored by the knowledge that not only is the former location not going to be the Pride House anymore but it is also going to

be demolished.

"Although it doesn't have legal historic status that protects it from being demolished, it is a building that has a history," Bassuk said. "It was established in 2003, so it's been around as long as I've been alive, which is history enough for me."

Bassuk said when the Pride Alliance Center was closed temporarily, one of the community's first questions was if the Queer Trans Clothing Closet — often called the QT Closet — would continue running.

"One big change that I think we're still trying to figure out how to navigate is that one of the things that was most significantly damaged in the mouse infestation was the QT Closet," Bassuk said. "The closet had thousands of garments, and unfortunately, the majority of those clothes were deemed not recoverable by the risk assessment that we got from the university."

Welch said the Pride Alliance Center will host clothing drives once the center moves into its new location.

The community support for the QT Closet has been inspiring, Welch said.

"We've had folks on campus and offices who have reached out even without knowing that a good chunk of our QT closet stock has been negatively impacted by this maintenance issue we've had," Welch said.

UI first-year student Nia Garcea is a member of the All In Living Learning Community and first learned about the Pride Alliance Center from their resident assistant.

Garcea said they visited the Pride House at the start of the year but hasn't seen the Pride Lounge location in the IMU.

"It's nice having something that is clearly like, 'We like the gays,' especially in a red state like Iowa," Garcea said.

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New location of UI Pride Alliance Center



Infographic by Jami Martin-Trainor



Matt Sindt/The Daily Iowan

The new Pride Alliance Center is seen on Melrose Avenue in Iowa City on March 12.

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HOSPITALS

Continued from Front

to steady the financial headwinds for rural hospitals, Medicaid reimbursement rate increases have not gained bipartisan support.

Most of Iowa's rural hospitals are losing money on providing patient care, but some hospitals remain financially afloat because of local tax levies and federal grants, according to the National Center for Healthcare Quality and Payment Reform. More than 9 percent of Iowa hospitals are operating in the red, according to the CHQPR.

Mitchell said stagnant Medicaid and Medicare payment rates to hospitals are affecting their ability to stay in the black on operating costs. Iowa's Medicaid reimbursement rates for providers haven't increased in a decade, Mitchell said.

Mitchell said 10 percent of Iowa hospitals have unsustainable operating margins, where the total cost of patient care is more than the amount of revenue from insurance payments.

According to Kaiser Health, 20 percent of Iowans are covered by the state's Medicaid program.

The stagnation of Medicaid reimbursement rates is coupled with rising costs increased financial stress on Iowa's hospitals. Approximately 61 percent of Iowa hospitals operate with a negative patient services margin, meaning they lose money on providing care, Mitchell said.

The Iowa Department of Health and Human Services announced in March that it would begin reevaluating Medicaid enrollees in the state and requiring them to reapply to keep services after this practice was paused because of COVID-19. Under the new program, 100,000 Iowans will be eventually unenrolled from the state's Medicaid system, leaving many without insurance, according to *The Des Moines Register*.

"That is a direct result of the lack of reimbursement from the three major payers [Medicaid, Medicare, and private insurance]," Mitchell said. "When hospitals are facing these sorts of [financial] pressures, there's not a whole lot of levers they have to pull."

Lawmakers seek lifeline for rural hospitals

The Iowa Legislature has worked to address the financial pressure that rural hospitals face, though some say policymakers' solutions haven't gone far enough to give the facilities the lifelines they need to stay open.

Iowa Gov. Kim Reynolds signed Senate File 75 into law on March 28 and established a state licensure process allowing certain hospitals to receive a Rural Emergency Hospital designation. Hospitals with this designation would have to cease inpatient care and surgical procedures. Under the license, the hospital would not be able to provide care for a patient longer than 24 hours.

The designation would increase the reimbursement rate for the care given to Medicare patients and a flat payment for facility costs from the Centers for Medicaid and Medicare Services.



Ayrton Breckenridge/The Daily Iowan

Brent Hoehns talks with a patient at the Knoxville Hospital and Clinics in Knoxville, Iowa, on March 14. Hoehns has been a doctor for 28 years and sees the benefits of working in a smaller hospital. "It's big enough that you can have eight or 10 partners, but small enough that you get to know the administration. You get a lot more say in how things are run than if you're one of a thousand physicians in a system," Hoehns said.

Rural Emergency Hospital designations were established by the federal government under legislation spearheaded by Iowa's senior Republican U.S. Sen. Chuck Grassley in December 2020.

Grassley lobbied the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services to implement and finalize regulations so that rural hospitals can benefit from the designation. Regulations were finalized by the federal government in November 2022.

Grassley, having grown up in rural Iowa, said the designation allows hospitals to adapt and continue serving their communities in an outpatient capacity as they face financial struggles.

Iowa Sen. Janet Petersen, D-Des Moines, argued the Senate should go one step further and increase Medicaid reimbursement rates for Rural Emergency Hospitals and Critical Access Hospitals. Critical Access Hospitals are determined by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services and serve rural areas providing critical lifelines to rural communities. CAHs can become Rural Emergency Hospitals by downsizing and stopping inpatient care.

While the federal legislation championed by Grassley increased Medicare reimbursement rates, Medicaid reimbursement rates — which are controlled by the state — have remained stagnant for over a decade.

Iowa Democrats want to increase the state's share of costs in maintaining rural hospitals by boosting Medicaid reimbursement rates, but Republicans voted against the measure Petersen introduced to raise those rates.

"If we want to save rural health care, we need to fund rural health care," Petersen said during floor debate in the Iowa Senate on Feb. 15. "Iowa should put skin in the game to keep our community hospitals open."

During the debate on the bill, state Sen. Mark

Costello, R-Imogene, said the federal government will increase payments to these hospitals. However, the federal government only sets Medicare reimbursement rates, and states administer, pay, and set the reimbursement rates, while states for Medicaid services.

SF 75, introduced by Sen. Jeff Reichman, a Republican born and raised in Keokuk, passed unanimously on the Senate floor and was signed into law in March.

Rural ambulance services left to fill gaps

When rural hospitals close, emergency medical services providers are left to carry the burden. With the majority of Iowa's ambulance services run by volunteer departments, this can leave some rural patients without critical access to care.

According to a 2019 report by the Iowa Department of Public Health, 75 percent of Iowa's emergency medical service providers are volunteers.

With Rural Emergency Hospital designations, Petersen said during floor debate on the bill in February that she worries patients who require a transfer to a larger facility might be stuck with a hefty ambulance bill, or the ambulance service might have to pick up the cost.

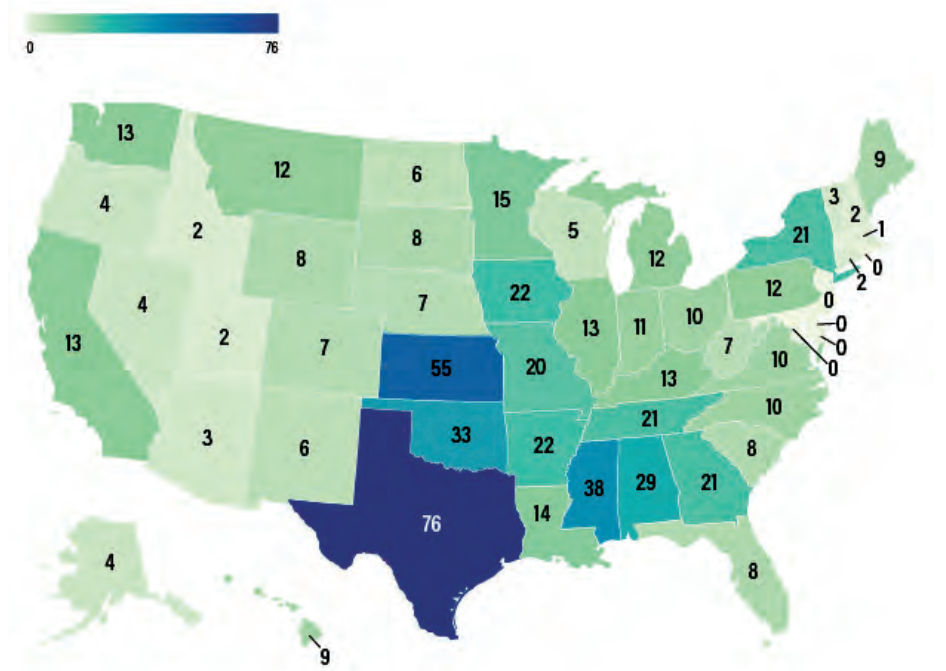
Petersen said Lee County's ambulance service saw an increase of 60 minutes in average transport time and an increase of \$750,000 in spending in the county's general fund since the hospital in Keokuk closed its doors.

Low Medicaid reimbursement rates and lack of coverage for transfers from one hospital to another are to blame for the spike in spending because the ambulance service has had to make up the difference, Petersen said.

She introduced an amendment that would increase Medicaid reimbursement rates for ambulance providers transporting a patient from a rural facility to a larger inpatient facility. But the amendment failed on par-

Number of rural hospitals at risk of closure by state

Rural hospitals across the U.S. are facing increasing financial pressures due to stagnating payment rates from Medicaid and Medicare. Almost 30 percent of rural hospitals are at risk of closure nationwide.



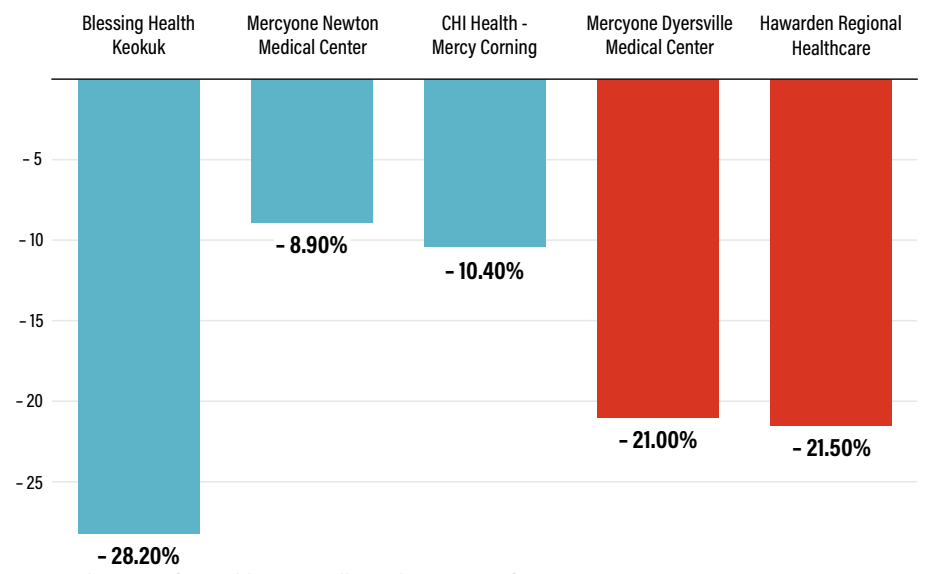
Source: The Center for Health Care Quality and Payment Reform

Infographic by Bri Brown

In the red: five Iowa hospitals at risk of closure

Over half of Iowa's rural hospitals lose money on patient care, and five Iowa hospitals have total negative margins that put them at risk of closure.

*The numbers presented below are the total patient services margins, and the red bars represent hospitals at risk of immediate closure.



Source: The Center for Health Care Quality and Payment Reform

Infographic by Bri Brown

ty lines, 15-33, with Democrats in favor.

"There are 17 to 21 rural hospitals [in Iowa] that could find themselves in the same circumstances that they're facing in Lee County," Petersen said. "If [a patient is] covered by Medicaid, Medicaid would pick up the cost of taking them by ambulance to a hospital where they can get the care they need and not have the cost of that hospital ride dumped on an Iowa family or dumped on property taxpayers."

Experts: Creative solutions could help hospitals

As rural health care struggles to cope with financial pressures and some communities face losing access to vital health care resources, Keith Muller, the director of the Rural Policy Research Institute's Center for Health Policy Analysis and University of Iowa professor of Health Management and Policy, said hospitals are using innovative financial strategies to stay afloat.

Muller said rural hospitals are reducing the number of services they provide and joining coalitions to spread out financial risk and impacts

across multiple hospitals.

"So many [rural hospitals] have adopted or adapted by changing their service mix, by getting involved in regional networks doing other things that actually have improved their financial condition," Muller said.

Telehealth also might be part of the solution to continued access to care.

During COVID-19, telehealth, video, or phone call appointments with health care professionals helped patients continue to access primary care when face-to-face appointments were not possible due to the efforts to curb the spread of the virus.

Telehealth didn't fade with the pandemic; it flourished as a way for providers to connect with patients wherever they are.

Whitney Zahnd, a University of Iowa assistant professor of health management and policy, said telehealth is an innovative way to connect with rural patients and solve staffing shortages in rural hospitals, which many hospitals face on top of financial pressures.

Zahnd said the use of remote physician care is becoming increasing-

ly popular. She said that larger, more urban hospitals in the state can help smaller rural facilities by consulting with physicians and patients via video conferencing to elevate the level of care offered at that facility.

"Those are a couple of examples on the hospital side that can help ensure that patients get the care they need and help prevent unnecessary transfers if they can get the care they need in the hospital they're currently in," Zahnd said.

Additionally, the expansion of the duties of some health care providers, such as physician assistants and advanced nurse practitioners, would help mend the health care worker shortage and create easier access to care for rural patients, Zahnd said.

"Expanding the scope of practice [for these providers] would allow for nurse practitioners and physician assistants to practice a little more independently with less oversight from physicians," Zahnd said. "And those kinds of practitioners really provide a lot of care in rural areas."

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Ayrton Breckenridge/The Daily Iowan

Assistant Director of Louisa County Ambulance Service Dan Conry drives an ambulance in Columbus Junction, Iowa, on March 24.

Opinions

COLUMN

Trans students aren't an academic debate

Transgender students and community members deserve to feel safe in Iowa City.



Yasmina Sahir
Opinions Columnist

Transgender people deserve to feel safe at the University of Iowa and in Iowa City. They deserve autonomy over their bodies and lives and shouldn't have to tolerate hateful remarks and opinions that invalidate their experiences.

As an ally, I attended a protest to support transgender community members that coincided with Matt Walsh's transphobic lecture on April 19. Being aware of the privileges I held in that space as a cisgender woman, I was shaking at remarks from lecture attendees in the Iowa Memorial Union who yelled they wanted to sterilize or harm us in other ways.

Articles have already been written about Walsh's presentations, but I felt something was lacking from these discussions: the voices of transgender and LGBTQ+ students who are being forced into debates on their existence and validity.

At the protest, I heard stories about instances that

left people terrified of what the night might turn into. Even with threats of harm, Walsh's lecture continued as planned.

But these threats did not stop a community from coming together with support from their allies. In the middle of Hubbard Park and Madison Street, people danced and chanted through the night. As the sounds of band instruments filled the air, I felt a bit of renewed hope for a better tomorrow.

UI graduate student Amanda Moy attended the protest as an ally of the LGBTQ+ community.

"It's important to take a stand because trans people deserve empathy, compassion, and rights," Moy said. "I lost my brother because of transphobia, and I don't want anyone else to experience that."

UI third-year student Vicki Thiruthani said as a transgender individual that it is frustrating that students had to protest Walsh's visit in the first place.

"The UI allows these things to happen. Allowing this behavior shows that the UI sides with Young Americans for Freedom." Thiruthani said, "[The] UI will continue to fund YAF and allow them on campus while we continue to feel unsafe."

Hannah Johnson, a



Protesters draw with chalk during a demonstration against conservative commentator Matt Walsh in Hubbard Park on April 19.

fourth-year UI student, co-authored one petition against the lecture.

"I thought Iowa City was a safe space when I moved here," Johnson said. "People in my hometown are filled with hatred and close-mindedness, and I want nothing more than for young students in town to see what the UI student body cares about."

Several Change.org peti-

tions against Walsh's visit circulated and collected thousands of signatures.

"Our feelings and demands were shared with UI leadership and had 4,000 signatures," UI fourth-year student Tess Paxon said. "The answer was clear. They would not be sending love to the queer and trans communities. The absence of an answer speaks louder than any message UI could

have sent."

Free speech is not the issue here. Safety for trans students, staff, and Iowa City residents is what should matter most. Silence from the UI is a clear choice to uphold ideologies that harm anyone who falls outside the identity binaries our society has created.

Danielle Jackson, a UI third-year student who is

transgender, said it is important to make sure everyone has a voice.

"When groups get silenced, that's when they get discriminated against," Jackson said. "We need to speak out to make sure we aren't silenced or eradicated. People need to hear us and see that we're here. We exist."

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COLUMN

Why you should scroll past TikTok

I deleted TikTok after three years. This is my verdict on the app.



Sophia Meador
Opinions Editor

For years, I spent mindless hours scrolling TikTok.

In March, I deleted the app because I needed to refocus my time on other things. Initially, I thought this would be an impossible challenge. Now, I can say with certainty that I'm better off without the app.

Recent Congressional hearings raised alarms of concern for users across the country. Regardless of what Congress ultimately

decides, we should all use this time as an opportunity to elevate the impact TikTok — and other social media platforms — has on our daily lives.

I first downloaded TikTok a month before the world went into lockdown in March 2020. Initially, my feed was full of other young people experiencing the lockdown. This included videos of frothy whipped coffee, Megan Thee Stallion dances, and the infamous Tiger King.

During this lonely time, TikTok was one source that made me feel connected with the world. As time went on, the app didn't fulfill this purpose anymore.

After a long day, there was nothing I wanted more than to go home

and scroll on TikTok. The hours I spent on the app decimated my attention span. It got to the point where watching television or reading an entire article felt draining. Although the app is addicting, being on it felt unfulfilling.

My experience with TikTok is not unique.

Teenagers across the country are addicted to TikTok. A report by Pew Research Center found 67 percent of teenagers are on the app. Of that percentage, 17 percent reported using the app almost constantly.

Younger demographics are not the only culprits of excessive social media usage. Adults in the U.S. spend an average of 123 minutes per day on Face-

book, TikTok, Instagram, and Twitter, according to Statista.

Even with a platform of more than 150 million Americans, excessive time spent on TikTok can feel isolating. Watching friends and strangers broadcast their lives does not help one get a sense of their own. The addictiveness of TikTok can easily bring users into isolation and self-doubt.

The app also promotes negative mindsets in vulnerable populations. A report by the Center for Countering Hate found that the app was recommending content tied to eating disorders and self-harm to 13-year-old girls within 30 minutes of joining the platform. Depres-

sion in teens has almost doubled since the mass growth of social media, according to the Substance Abuse and Mental Services Administration.

Another looming concern for large social media platforms like TikTok includes the proliferation of altered content. The app is a hot spot for misleading edits, fake news stories, and deep fakes of public figures. Videos are all given the same airtime, meaning it can be difficult to distinguish what is real.

As much as I criticize TikTok, I do believe this app offers a great outlet for content creators. TikTok has allowed a platform — and even income — for artists, comedians, musicians, and chefs. This app caters

to many communities like the one I found during the pandemic.

Social media has a positive contribution to society, and it's here to stay. That's why we should all reconsider how TikTok and social media apps alike impact our daily lives.

It's too easy to suggest monitoring your time on TikTok and scrolling platforms. Unless you have amazing willpower, it would be best for your sake to delete these mind-consuming apps for good.

I was afraid deleting TikTok would make me miss out on new trends and gossip. But after deleting the app, I've come to realize that TikTok is not reality.

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COLUMN

Video games are art

Triple-A video game companies exploit players and dismiss the medium's potential, but video games are capable of artistic expression.



Chris Klepach
Opinions Columnist

Over the years, video games went from a 1958 experiment to a \$195 billion industry.

But currently, the video game industry problematically undermines the value of videogames as art. Blockbuster gaming franchises like Call of Duty, FIFA, and NBA2K use monetization systems

that are less for the player's enjoyment and more to empty wallets with randomized cosmetics.

Recent installments in video games contain monetization techniques such as randomized payouts of virtual cosmetics, or packs, that players receive through purchase or repetitive gameplay.

Video games as a medium are greater than that.

When one imagines video games as an art form, you may think of video games like the critically acclaimed, highest-selling video game Minecraft.

However, video games can be works of art them-

selves, even when they aren't an outlet for others to be creative.

Video game developers have to create art or hire artist to give visual and audio representations for the player. Much of a video game's identity can come from its art style and soundscape.

Many video games also come with a written or visual story to provide context for what is happening. Game design is the process of configuring how the player interacts with the world of that story. This itself can be put to creative use.

My favorite example of the creativity expressed

in video games is Strange Scaffold's 2021 release Space Warlord Organ Trading Simulator. It is an indie game that was developed and published outside of the mainstream market.

In this game, you play within a sci-fi universe buying and selling various organs for a profit in a world represented through a monochromatic green interface and pink beating organs on an animation loop.

In the middle of gameplay, the music goes to a high tempo as the player scrambles to buy items before the game does. Organs themselves are represented as '90s-esque pre-rendered gifs, while the rest of the

game uses pixel art to represent text and characters.

It is a satire by nature, putting players in the position of an exploitative organ seller and offering players multiple endings to lengthen the experience.

My experience in video games has been personal. Video games have become a favorite pastime for my family and me. When I was younger, my father had a Nintendo Entertainment System console that we would play Super Mario Bros. and Dr. Mario World on.

I have been intrigued with them ever since, going as far as to develop my own in a high school class. I saw

firsthand how labor-intensive it is.

Many assets of a videogame must be prepared in advance and to cooperate with the programming. It is challenging to determine what sounds can be attractive to a player, what colors work for an interface, and how the gameplay meshes with the graphics.

To see video games as just data is like calling a painting just dye on paper. A video game can take on many forms and is unique in its ability to be interactive, which transcends it above movies, sculptures, and drawings.

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A look inside Iowa City's Coffee Emporium

Coffee Emporium, which already has stores in Coralville and Cedar Rapids, recently took over High Ground Cafe's former space.

Hannah Lipski
News Reporter

Almost a month after opening, the Coffee Emporium on Iowa City's Northside is seeing an influx of customers.

The new shop opened April 4 in what was once High Ground Cafe at 301 E. Market St., four days after the shop's internal remodel began.

Abby Ochs, owner of Coffee Emporium, said she started the process of buying the location around October 2022. Ochs said she reached out to the former owner of High Ground Cafe with intent to buy the space.

"I knew he was a single shop owner, and oftentimes, when you've owned a shop for over five years, there can be that potential of burnout," Ochs said.

Originally, Ochs said she was looking at real estate around the corner from High Ground Cafe. Instead of purchasing that space, Ochs said she did not want to be a competitor to High Ground and decided to ask if the owner was open to her taking the space over.

Ochs has owned the Coffee Emporium brand for just over two years, purchasing the brand's location in Cedar Rapids



Michael Martin, lead barista at Coffee Emporium in Iowa City, takes a customer's order on Wednesday, April 12. Coffee Emporium, formerly High Ground Cafe, recently underwent a name change due to new ownership.

Emily Nyberg/The Daily Iowan

in late 2020, which has since transitioned to a new company and owner.

"There's two very different cultures between Cedar Rapids and, like, the Coralville, Iowa City area," Ochs said.

The Coffee Emporium also has a location in Coralville, which opened in 2021. The brand is planning to open another location in Tiffin on May 7.

Ochs said she feels that Iowa City better matches the culture and mindset that a place like Coffee Emporium needs. She said she wanted to open a business in a college town.

"We want to kind of be able to be that place, that one stop location where everyone feels welcome and comfortable, and that is very much the atmosphere

that is there in Iowa City," Ochs said.

Moving forward, Coffee Emporium will include different food options than High Ground offered, including a breakfast menu and coffee cocktails, pending a liquor license.

All 13 employees who were working at High Ground Cafe when Ochs purchased it decided to stay for the transition and rebranding.

Branden White, a barista at Coffee Emporium, said it is nice to have the job still after working at High Ground on and off for three years, and he likes Ochs as an employer.

Since the transition, White said there has

been a slight increase in customers. The two shops are similar and the main difference is the food menu, but the new name is also bringing back older customers who might have been deterred from going to High Ground.

"We've been bringing in some customers that refused to actually come in when Wes was the owner because they didn't like Wes," White said.

While some employees are happy with the changes, other Iowa City community members were dismayed to find out about the rebranding. Bridget Dieden, a University of Iowa first-year student, found out about the tran-

sition in one of her acting classes.

"I was furious," Dieden said, "That's literally my favorite coffee shop in Iowa City. I would go there all of the time."

Additionally, Dieden said she was upset to find out that a \$30 gift card she received for High Ground could no longer be used. She said she felt that there was not any type of notice given to the Iowa City community about this transition and rebranding, and she really liked the vibes of High Ground Cafe.

"I'm kind of appalled to hear that they've painted it blue," Dieden said.

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Location of Coffee Emporium



Locator Map by Jami Martin-Trainer

The Daily Break

The New York Times
Crossword

Puzzle solutions on page 2

Edited by Will Shortz No. 0320

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ACROSS

- 1 Important skill in an awkward interaction
- 5 Pearly ____ (entrance to heaven)
- 10 Org. overseeing Rx's
- 13 "Here comes trouble ..."
- 14 Cured slice on a deli tray
- 15 Place to lay a napkin
- 16 Ice cream dessert served in a boat
- 18 Address ending in .com or .edu, e.g.
- 19 Vegan version of a classic brunch dish
- 21 Basic country dance
- 24 Bird symbolizing the arrival of spring
- 25 Vietnam's capital
- 26 "M*A*S*H" eatery
- 29 "Peepers" that makes no sound
- 30 Podcasting partner, e.g.
- 33 Pushing the envelope, so to speak
- 34 Citrusy cocktail garnish
- 36 Lofty spot for K-I-S-S-I-N-G, in a schoolyard taunt
- 39 "Count me in!"
- 40 What the fish said when it swam into a concrete wall, per an old joke
- 43 Witty banter
- 45 Euphemism for an expletive, with "the"
- 47 Love to bits
- 48 Neighbors of flutists, in an orchestra
- 50 Sweet spiral pastry topped with icing
- 54 Hit the ____ (go to bed)

- 55 Not pay for a meal at a restaurant ... or a hint to each half of 16-, 19-, 34- and 50-Across
- 59 Durable wood that's softer than oak
- 60 Numerous beyond calculation
- 61 Big name in dry-erase markers
- 62 Stubborn animal
- 63 Lowly workers
- 64 Cut the crop?

DOWN

- 1 Big ice cream container
- 2 "Eureka!"
- 3 Pro's opposite
- 4 "Oh, really?"
- 5 Fill one's tank
- 6 Mountains where St. Bernards were originally bred
- 7 Soft mineral powder
- 8 Kuwaiti ruler
- 9 Instruments for Ravi and Anoushka Shankar
- 10 Misspoke a line, e.g.
- 11 "Honey" or "sugar" alternative
- 12 Galore
- 14 Out of danger
- 17 Catch sight of

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FOOTBALL

Continued from Page 8

have two guys performing nicely.”

In similar conditions last April, Stevens and Blom struggled to get the ball through the uprights. The pair, who were in an open competition for the starting kicker spot, went a combined 50 percent on field goal attempts, and Stevens missed all of his attempts over 40 yards.

Blom started the 2022 season as the Hawkeyes' kicker, but he went 1-for-3 over two games — including a missed field goal in the final seconds of Iowa's 10-7 loss to Iowa State.

Stevens took over kicking duties in the third game of the season, going 16-of-18 over the final 11 games of 2022.

Coming into 2023, Stevens said he's gained 10 pounds to have a stronger kick. While his increased range comes from his weight gain, he also attributes his improvement to confidence.

“A difference between this year and last year is the confidence I've had in my operation,” Stevens said. “Because now I know what to expect for my operation. Having good operation from your teammates also builds your confidence, and, like, I'm much more confident this

year, was last year.

“I feel like in order to be a successful kicker, you have to have confidence,” Stevens added. “Because if you're, like, nervous to go out for a kick, like that's already working against you.”

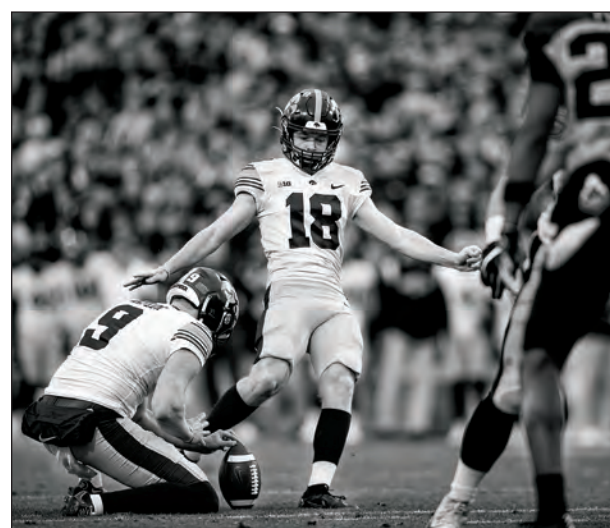
This year, Stevens is also going into his second season working with punter Tory Taylor as his holder.

Taylor, the 2020 Big Ten Punter of the Year, is going into his fourth season as the Hawkeyes' punter. He started as Stevens' holder for extra point and field goal attempts in 2022, taking over for former Hawkeye Ryan Gerstlitz.

Taylor, Stevens, and long snapper Luke Elkin were all learning the ropes of the Hawkeyes' field goal unit last season. Now, the established trio is bringing more experience and confidence into the 2023 season.

“Last year was a big steppingstone for me,” Taylor said. “I'd only punted a ball in a game before last year, but to hold as well. And I really enjoy holding because it's another opportunity to get on the field. And usually when you're out there holding, it's for points, so we really emphasize that a lot, too.”

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Jerod Ringwald/The Daily Iowan
Iowa kicker Drew Stevens kicks a field goal during a football game between Iowa and Purdue at Ross-Ade Stadium in West Lafayette, Ind., on Nov. 5, 2022. The Hawkeyes defeated the Boilermakers, 24-3.

PRACTICE

Continued from Page 8

and Reno, Nevada, native was more concerned with health and cohesion than his open practice performance.

“Most important thing is by the end of spring we can all be healthy for camp,” McNamara said. “But overall, for guys that have been participating, we've got to do nothing but get better ... really the chemistry has grown all across the offense and the team, whether it's the O-line or even me with the wide receivers.”

Iowa's other Big Ten quarterback transfer, Deacon Hill from Wisconsin, got some reps against a full defense. The Santa Barbara, California, native didn't find the end zone at first, but he connected with sophomore tight

end Addison Ostrenga for a 29-yard gain along the hash marks late in the practice.

The Hawkeye quarterback's next highlight play came when he rolled to his left and completed a toss to running back Leshon Williams in the end zone. Even though Williams hit the griddy in celebration, the play was called back because of an offensive penalty.

Hill originally committed to Fordham following his transfer from Wisconsin last winter. But after his switch to Iowa, Hill said he's embracing gradual progress.

“You just got to walk in every day and be like, ‘OK, what can I get better at today?’ And, you know, that's been my mindset throughout spring ball,” Hill said. “You know, whether it's confirming a read, confirming the pro-

tection, whatever I can do to get better, that's what I'm focusing on this spring.”

Quarterback Joe Labas, off his first start for the Hawkeyes in the Music City Bowl, returned to Kinnick, where he put on quite the show in last season's spring practice.

After going 7-for-12 for 93 yards on April 23, 2022, Labas again turned heads this year with a 48-yard touchdown bomb to sophomore running back Max White. After converting a third down to junior tight end Luke Lachey, the Brecksville, Ohio, native hit a leaping Friedrichsen for an impressive reception and a 21-yard gain for the offense.

Similar to Iowa's other quarterbacks, Labas' highs were sobered by poor execution. After overthrowing a wide-open receiver for a would-be

touchdown, Labas sailed two passes out of the end zone and was intercepted in one of the final plays of practice.

However, Labas still sees confidence in the quarterback room.

“[McNamara and Hill] are new, I've only had one start, and haven't played in Kinnick,” Labas said. “You know, confidence might be like, ‘What do you mean?’ But, you know, we really are confident about what we do, and we're clicking together with the playbook and clicking together as a unit.”

In his post-practice press conference, Iowa head coach Kirk Ferentz said “it's not a debate” that McNamara will be the starter come Week 1 but added that, as of Saturday, Hill would be the No. 2.

Even with all the hype around McNamara, fans

shouldn't see him as a savior to the offense just yet. He's still clearly limited and, outside of the TE group, doesn't exactly have a world-class group of pass-catchers around him. He's clearly the No. 1, but he's not close to his peak.

As for Hill and Labas, those two are neck-and-neck for the backup job but are still prone to mistakes. Hill's larger frame at 6-foot-3 and 230 pounds makes him an intriguing look, but he never saw the field with the Badgers.

But please, don't overreact. It's only April anyway. There were still trash cans on the field.

Injury report

Iowa had multiple offensive linemen who didn't participate in practice, including Michael

Myslinski, Connor Colby, Mason Richman, and Daijon Parker.

On the other side of the ball, defensive linemen Logan Lee, Yahya Black, and Noah Shannon were on the sidelines.

Besides holding on kicks, receiver Nico Ragaini also did not play. Fellow wideouts Seth Anderson and Jacob Bostick also sat out.

Kicking turnaround

After a rather horrendous performance in last spring's open practice, the Hawkeye kickers flipped the script in windy on-field conditions.

Placekickers Aaron Blom and Drew Stevens went a combined 8-for-8 on field goal attempts, including multiple past 40 yards.

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GRAVES

Continued from Page 8

omore Jeremiah Pittman more snaps this spring alongside junior and vocal leader Deontae Craig.

“[Graves] is a beast,” Craig said. “This is my first time really getting a long time playing with him, getting a feel for his moves and what he likes up front. It makes me excited to

know that there are guys out there at every spot up front that are going to make plays when their number is called. He's just one of those great people we have in that room.”

Head coach Kirk Ferentz said Pittman has been one of the most improved players from last season and expects him to be in the mix for playing time in 2023.

Graves was one of eight

true freshmen to see action in 2022, racking up 15 total tackles, six tackles for loss, and three sacks.

Playing time last season helped build Graves' confidence, but he said most of the progress he's made is from his work in the off-season.

He came in four or five times a week in the winter, and defensive line coach Kelvin Bell gave him a list of stuff to work on such

as pass rush fundamentals and getting separation for 45 minutes to an hour. Graves said these drills helped him develop better field vision and anticipation.

Graves added he's about the same weight he was at the end of last season but feels bigger and stronger. He attributed this growth to spending more time in the weight room and committing to his nutrition.

“Basically the only way to do it is stuff my face,” Graves said. “I mean, they feed us three meals every day, and we have black cards too so we can get healthy food. It's all healthy — it's just a lot. But you get used to it after a while. It just takes some discipline. More in the weight room after last season as well.”

Graves said he still has a lot to improve on but

thinks his hard work is starting to pay off and hopes to showcase his skills in Kinnick this fall.

“Aaron is a guy who played well last year,” Ferentz said. “Now in year two, he's really moving forward. He just goes so hard. It's unusual for a guy that young to have that kind of tempo. That's just how he's wired. It's every day.”

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HAWKEYE UPDATES



Iowa Swarm partners with Papa Johns

The Iowa Swarm Collective announced Thursday that it is partnering with Papa Johns Pizza of Iowa to bring name, image, and likeness opportunities to Iowa men's and women's basketball teams.

Iowa Swarm works with Hawkeye Athletics and the football, men's basketball, and women's basketball teams for NIL openings. It helps to facilitate compensating partnerships between nonprofits, charities, and student-athletes.

Matt Donaldson, the Papa Johns Pizza of Iowa director of operations, worked directly with the Iowa Swarm and basketball teams to make a partnership.

"Our women's basketball program is honored and thrilled by the support being provided by Matt Donaldson and Papa Johns Pizza of Iowa," head women's basketball coach Lisa Bluder said in a statement. "It is an exciting time for our student-athletes to be engaged in communities across the state largely thanks to support like this. Our women are excited to build new relationships and grow the partnership with Papa Johns!"

In this partnership, Papa Johns will sponsor men's and women's basketball student-athletes to do meet and greets and social media campaigns. The Hawkeyes will also participate in Pizza with a Purpose, which focuses on giving back to the community.

"Our program is very appreciative of Matt Donaldson and Papa John's of Iowa for their generous support," head men's basketball coach Fran McCaffery said in a statement. "Their commitment will provide numerous opportunities for our men's basketball student-athletes. We look forward to a great relationship between Papa Johns of Iowa and our program."



Fran McCaffery



Clark contributes to children's hospital

Former Hawkeye tight end Dallas Clark made a \$101,000 donation to the University of Iowa Stead Family Children's Hospital on Saturday morning using proceeds from an Ironman Championship he competed in last October in Kona, Hawaii.

Clark competed in the championship because of an exemption from the Ironman Foundation, which helps raise money to contribute to organizations around the world.

Clark raced the Ironman, which is a 2.4-mile swim, 112-mile bike ride, and 26.2 mile run, in 13 hours and 50 minutes.

He will also make the same \$101,000 donation to the Peyton Manning Children's Hospital in Indianapolis. Clark played for the Indianapolis Colts from 2003-11.

"The entire process, from training and learning how to swim a long distance in the ocean after being raised in Iowa was a challenge that I embraced," Clark said in a statement. "I absolutely loved the Ironman family and environment. It was very inspiring to train and compete with the other athletes."

"The Ironman Foundation is a phenomenal organization. The idea of raising money for these two incredible hospitals played a large part in my motivation and journey. I became stronger mentally and physically through this preparation and competition, and I pray this money helps a child become stronger through their journey."

QUOTE OF THE DAY

"There's something to be said for doing it."

— Head coach Kirk Ferentz on quarterback Cade McNamara's resume.

STAT OF THE DAY

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— Newcomers to Iowa football that went through spring practice.

Staying focused

After learning the operations of the special teams unit in 2022, kicker Drew Stevens and punter/holder Tory Taylor are building their chemistry as a unit.



Iowa kicker Drew Stevens prepares to kick a field goal during a spring football practice at the Kinnick Stadium on Saturday.

Cody Blissett/The Daily Iowan

Chloe Peterson Sports Editor

Sophomore kicker Drew Stevens was laser-focused throughout Iowa football's spring practice.

Last season, Stevens was going through his first season as a member of the Iowa football team. In ad-

dition to showcasing his kicking skills for the first time, Stevens had to get to know his teammates, learn the operations of the Iowa football program, and get used to college classes.

This year, all he had to think about was improving his kicks.

"Last year, I was really just learning, like, how they operate and things like that," Stevens said. "And now I know how they operate. So, I can just focus on doing what I can do right."

At Iowa's open spring practice on Saturday, which featured windy

and cold conditions, both Stevens and backup Aaron Blom made all of their field goal attempts — a large improvement from the Hawkeyes' final spring practice of 2022.

"Last year at this time, I don't know if we've seen a worse place-kicking exhibition over the course

of the spring," head coach Kirk Ferentz said. "This spring has been a flip; both those guys have done a great job. Drew played really well for us. Aaron had a good spring, as well. Last year we weren't sure we had anybody. Now, we

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COLUMN

Don't overreact to spring practice

While Iowa's three QB's put on a show on Saturday, incoming Pregame Editor Matt McGowan cautions fans to remember it was just a practice.



Iowa head coach Kirk Ferentz talks with the team after a spring football practice at the Kinnick Stadium on Saturday.

Ayrton Breckenridge/The Daily Iowan

Matt McGowan Sports Reporter

One of the telltale signs of spring in Iowa City is the sight of yellow trash cans lining the field of Kinnick Stadium. Every April, the Iowa football team gives fans a chance to watch practice. Thankfully, they still let the media in the press box to observe the 90-minute session.

Fortunately, those trash cans didn't see much play-

ing time, as the new trio of Hawkeye quarterbacks took reps against actual defenders for a majority of practice. Still recovering from a November 2022 surgery on his right knee, Michigan transfer Cade McNamara saw no 11-on-11 action as quarterback. But he did throw his first touchdown at Kinnick during seven-on-seven play.

With his squad within the 20-yard line and facing the north end zone, McNamara

threw a pass that smacked a defender in the chest. The ball then ricocheted into the waiting arms of freshman receiver Graham Friedrichsen for a score.

McNamara went on to throw more touchdowns during the period, but he also threw an interception to junior defensive back Jermari Harris. In his postgame media availability session, the senior

Graves, D-line making strides

Sophomore Aaron Graves was one of eight true freshmen to see action in 2022, and he's now looking to become Iowa's next staunch pass rusher.



Iowa defensive lineman Aaron Graves tackles Purdue running back Devin Mockobee during a football game between Iowa and Purdue at Ross-Ade Stadium in West Lafayette, Ind., on Nov. 5, 2022. The Hawkeyes defeated the Boilermakers, 24-3.

Kenna Roering Sports Reporter

Iowa football defensive lineman Aaron Graves has big shoes to fill in 2023.

Following the departure of potential first-round NFL Draft pick Lukas Van Ness, Graves is looking to become Iowa's next staunch pass rusher.

"I mean, we see [Van Ness] redshirt, and then he's going to be a first-round pick," Graves said following spring practice at Kinnick Stadium on Saturday. "That's really inspiring to me because of where I'm starting and where I think I can be. It's very good to look up to a guy like that."

Even with the departure of Van Ness, the defensive line is one of the deepest positions on Iowa's squad and has been reloaded year after year under defensive coordinator Phil Parker. Graves emphasized the importance of the Hawkeyes' defensive line depth and how rotating allows them to stay fresh on the field.

Defensive linemen Joe Evans, Noah Shannon, Yahya Black, and Logan Lee did not see much action during spring practice but are expected to be ready to go this fall.

Their absence has given Graves and soph-

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