

AREA & STATE

AMBASSADORS FIND, VISIT SERENITEA



Ambassadors visited SereniTea Co. on Tuesday to celebrate the business's grand opening and ribbon cutting. Tristen Thilges, SereniTea owner, opened up the shop in mid-December and said she is excited to be a part of the Spencer community, which she was inspired by after the 2024 flood. SereniTea offers energy teas, dirty alanis, protein iced coffee, snacks, merchandise and more. She is also on the Spencer Chamber Gift Card program. Congrats to Tristen and welcome to the community. (Photo submitted)

EGGS & ISSUES

continued from 1A

ordered their release Jan. 31. The Department of Homeland Security said in a statement that "ICE did not target or arrest a child."

Rowley, also a Spirit Lake Republican, encouraged compliance with law enforcement while acknowledging that immigration enforcement is "not pretty."

"I never understood how we tolerated the open borders," he said. "We want to go back to those people who weren't vetted. That's the whole purpose of it."

PROPERTY RIGHTS DEBATE CONTINUES

Legislators fielded a question about eminent domain legislation, tied to carbon capture pipelines.

Evans said that an amendment to SF 2067 failed to eliminate the use of eminent domain for private pipeline projects. He cited the U.S. Constitution and the 2024 Republican Party platform, which both oppose using eminent domain to transfer property from one private owner to another.

"I don't think this project meets the requirements for eminent domain," Evans said.

Rowley voted against the initial amendment but supported the bill as amended to keep negotiations moving.

"If we don't move this — in its form now or with some changes — the discussion may be dead again," Rowley said. "I don't think anyone wants to see that."

Jones invoked House Rule 76, which bars members from voting on legislation that would bene-

fit them financially. Her family's property could be affected by the proposed pipelines.

"Since the end of the 2025 legislative session, both my in-laws passed away," Jones said. "My husband and his sisters are navigating the legalities of the farm transition."

Wills said he has voted to protect property rights for five years, but acknowledged lawmakers face an impasse.

"Nobody in this entire state is going to be happy with the solution we find," Wills said.

TAX RELIEF REMAINS PRIORITY

Residents pushed legislators on property tax reform and the state's flat income tax.

Sherri Shadow, another Spencer citizen, questioned whether the 3.8% flat tax places too much burden on lower-income Iowans.

Evans noted Iowa ranks among the top 10 states for highest property taxes.

"We're literally taxing some elderly folks and fixed income people out of their homes right now," Evans said.

Wills defended the state's fiscal approach, saying Iowa maintains \$3.6 billion in reserves despite planned budget deficits.

"Last year, we made more revenue and income tax than we lost," Wills said. "Income tax went up, it increased in revenue despite us cutting our income tax in half."

CONCERNS OVER FASCISM?

Constituents raised a question about fascism, authoritarianism, and what the assembled leaders

"plan on doing professionally to prevent it."

One Spencer citizen cited a recent leadership conference that used President Donald Trump as "an example of an authoritarian leadership style," and referenced bills to annex counties from Minnesota and Illinois into Iowa.

This references a 2025 proposal made by Iowa Se. Mike Bousset, who suggested Iowa should purchase, or annex, nine southern Minnesota counties to expand its border. The proposal was dubbed "Make Minnesota Iowa Again." Supporters argue that the land was historically part of the Iowa territory, and so the annexation "only makes sense."

Wills said that he "opposes fascism" and pointed to the "Liberities Legacy" initiative in the Iowa House, where legislators discuss significant moments in American history each week.

"We have to remain vigilant and make sure those things don't happen in our country," Wills said.

Rowley challenged the question, noting that fascism isn't exclusive to any political ideology.

"Fascism is authoritarianism that goes to great ends to control dictatorship and take control," Rowley said. "We live in a democratic republic. You have representatives you elect, you work together, you resist, you hold to the constitution."

Rowley referenced the brown shirts of Nazi Germany, who "went around intimidating Jews and a lot of people."

"They would beat people in the

streets and create havoc and chaos. They wanted to intimidate and be violent."

When constituents raised the argument that ICE "has been doing the same thing," their comments were shot down.

Rowley blamed groups like antifa for the "chaos in Minneapolis," referencing the riots following the death of George Floyd in May 2020.

"We talked about a lot of groups out there," Rowley said. "Thirty people were killed, billions of dollars in damages done, and that's an anti-fascist group. The proof is in the pudding. The actions they take. When was the last time Republicans rioted? Excluding Jan. 6."

Evans cited American military history fighting fascist nations in World War II and communists in Korea and Vietnam.

"We have a supreme law of the land," Evans said. "It's my intent to follow that constitution and abide by that oath when it's not popular."

Jones said she prides herself on working across the aisle, noting she had recently texted with the House minority leader, Rep. Brian Meyer, a Des Moines Democrat, about eminent domain.

"Just because we have healthy debate doesn't mean we're fascist," Jones said. "We all are friends. We're Iowans."

The Spencer Chamber of Commerce hosts Eggs and Issues forums through April. All sessions are held from 9-10:30 a.m. in the council chambers of Spencer City Hall. The next session is Saturday, Feb. 21.

15th free Family Fest finishes February



Families across Northwest Iowa are invited to attend the 15th Annual Family Fest on Saturday, Feb. 28, from 9 a.m. to 1 p.m. at the Clay County Regional Events Center.

The event is free to attend and offers a morning packed with hands-on activities, learning opportunities, and family fun for all ages.

Family Fest has become a beloved community tradition over the past 15 years, bringing families together to play, explore and connect with local organizations. The event features interactive exhibits, imaginative play spaces and educational experiences designed to engage children while encouraging quality family time.

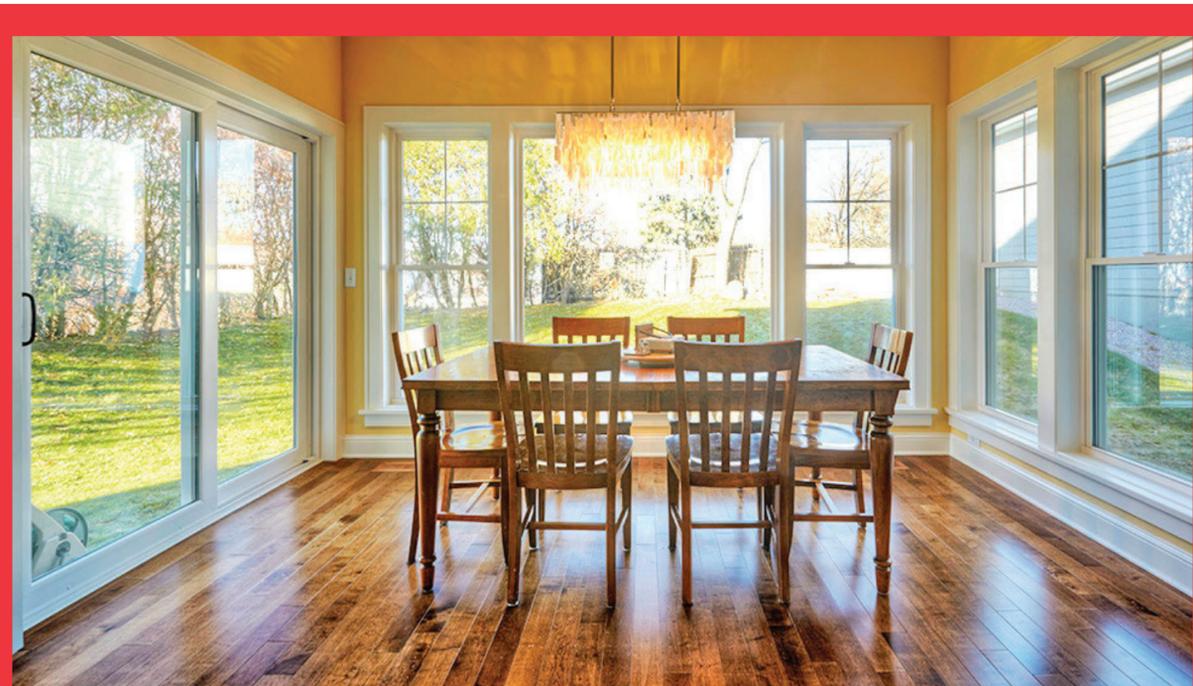
Family Fest offers a variety of hands-on activities and interactive exhibits from local organizations, including the Spencer Family YMCA, Spencer Hospital, and other community partners. Children will also have the opportunity to meet local first responders at Safety City, sponsored by Spencer Municipal Utilities, with representatives from the Clay Coun-

ty Sheriff's Office, Spencer Fire Department and Spencer Police Department on site.

Families can also enjoy Tiny Town, sponsored by Community State Bank, an imaginative play space for young children; a Reading Nook hosted by Spencer Public Library and Spencer Reads; a Kids Zone with engaging activities; and booths from local nonprofits and vendors highlighting community resources.

A limited number of vendor booth spaces are still available for businesses and organizations interested in participating in Family Fest. Those interested can contact Stacey Meyer, event services director, at 712-580-3000 or events@claycountyfair.com for more information.

Sponsorship opportunities are also available. Sponsors receive recognition and on-site acknowledgments, along with the opportunity to host a 10-by-10-foot booth at the event. Customized sponsorship packages may be available. To learn more, contact Brent Burns, partnership director, at 712-580-3000 or brent@claycountyfair.com.



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Rides

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Notice is hereby given that the Regional Transit Authority dba RIDES Board of Directors will conduct their regular business meeting on **Thursday, February 19, 2026**. The meeting will be held at the **Regional Transit Authority Office, 522 10th Avenue East, Spencer, IA**. The meeting will start at 10:30 a.m.

The Regional Transit Authority (RTA) RIDES Board of Directors Meeting is open to all individuals regardless of disability. Any person with a disability requiring a reasonable accommodation to participate in a Board of Directors Meeting should contact the RTA Office at (800) 358-5037 at least three business days prior to the Board of Directors Meeting.

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