

BUSINESS BRIEF

MARCH/APRIL 2025



OWATONNA
AREA CHAMBER OF COMMERCE

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT Update

Brad Meier, President/CEO

Aire Development: A New Era for Owatonna's Eastern Expansion



The Aire development marks a new look for Owatonna's Eastern expansion efforts and the enhancement of the intersection of Bixby Road and School Street. Revitalization of this corner begins with the removal of the underutilized Modern Aire Motel, laying the groundwork for a dynamic, clean, and safe corridor. This transformation fosters connectivity from 26th Street to the new Owatonna High School and future developments that will continue to enhance the vibrancy of Owatonna.

Aire will be a four-story multi-family complex featuring an attractive assortment of 73 units, totaling over 81,000 square feet of living space. Residents will enjoy heated drive-under garages, ample off-street parking, expansive outdoor green space, and accessibility to walking and bike paths. Additional amenities include a fitness center, a large lounge and gathering room, and a welcoming lobby with a coffee bar and seating area. The project begins this spring.

New Honda Dealership Targets September Opening

Marthaler Honda is relocating from Albert Lea to Owatonna, with a new dealership under construction at 26th Street NW and State Avenue. The 22,812-square-foot facility will feature 16 state-of-the-art service bays, including multiple EV charging stations. The service shop will be fully air conditioned.

General Manager Chris Knutson is anticipating the dealership will open sometime in September if construction stays on its current pace.



Hands-On Learning with Flexible Automated Assembly Cell at Riverland Community College

Riverland Community College in Owatonna, MN, is taking industrial training to the next level with its state-of-the-art Flexible Automated Assembly Cell (FAAC). This advanced system simulates a real-world industrial assembly process, giving students the chance to work with the technology behind automated production lines.

This innovative equipment was made possible through a direct appropriation received by the Owatonna Chamber from the Minnesota Legislature, highlighting the community's commitment to advancing education and workforce development and will be ready for students fall semester 2025.

The FAAC is designed to assemble different components of a turning mechanism, offering students hands-on experience in a controlled, educational setting. Trainees will interact with robotic arms, automated machinery, and cutting-edge vision systems, learning how each part of the assembly process is coordinated to ensure precision and efficiency.





What is Owatonna's ability to fill convention space? If we built a facility, could we fill it consistently?

Back in 2007, when the former Heritage Halls building (new Christian Family Church) next to Cabela's was for sale, the Tourism Advisory Board took the step to study convention space needs. Though that study did not convince us to purchase that building, it has been a good source of information on recent projects. Despite its age, the document has informed current projects in the community.

With a generous donation, the Chamber is updating this study. The new document will be available to anyone in the community who is interested in reading it. The study should be done this summer and will help with future projects that include convention type space.

MN Legislature Discussing Workplace Mandates

The 2025 legislature has one main job, pass a new 2-year budget. The new regulations affecting business practices, such as mandating paid family and medical leave, implementing earned sick and safe time policies, and banning non-compete agreements are being looked at for changes. There is a push to delay implementation of Paid Family Leave for 1 year to ensure a proper roll out, something the Chamber supports. The mandate will be paid by payroll tax rate of 0.88%. Employers contribute a minimum of 50% of the premium, but can pay up to 100%.



Ascend Riverfront: As Phase 1 Opens, Next Phase Coming to Life

At the recent Chamber Growth breakfast, one of the project developers of Ascend, Darrin Stadheim said demolition could start late this summer on the next phase of the riverfront development. Ascend is the new multiuse project on Oak Avenue downtown on the Straight River. Phase 2 will be the next block to the south and will be a similar building, just smaller. It will start at Vine Street and go south to the city parking lot next to Firestone on Oak Avenue.



AMBASSADOR Update

Jensen is Ambassador of the Year

Each year Chamber ambassadors earn points for attending new member visits, events, and conducting retention visits. The ambassador who earns the most points receives the 'Wayne Starman Ambassador of the Year Award'. The 2024 winner is Vicki Jensen, Jensen Agency!

Vicki was recognized at the Chamber Annual Dinner for her work.



Ambassadors Host Event to Support Scholarship, Chamber Building

Chamber Ambassadors recently held the Golden Opportunity Dinner to raise dollars for the Ted G. Ringhofer scholarship and to support building improvements at the Chamber office. The event offers opportunities to win great prizes and Chamber Dollars!



EVENT Update

Director of Events in Dancing with the Stars

Good Luck Julia Seykora who is dancing with Annie Harman to support Healthy Seniors of Steele County! The event is Saturday, April 5 at 6 PM at the Owatonna High School Wenger Performing Arts Center.



OWATONNA
AREA CHAMBER OF COMMERCE

BOARD OF DIRECTORS
2025

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RE/MAX Venture

Syd Briggs, Past Chair
Steele Waseca-Cooperative Electric

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Mazariego Agency

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Federated Insurance

Christy Tryhus
Riverland Community College

Free on-line customer service training available for all Minnesota residents

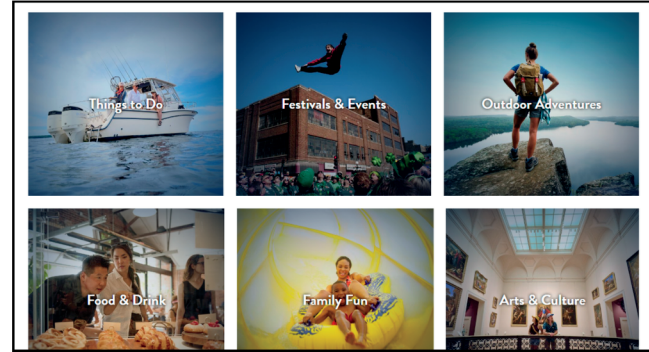
Exceptional customer service is paramount, as it directly impacts visitor satisfaction and repeat business. Owatonna, with its focus on warm hospitality and community pride, understands that every positive interaction reinforces our reputation as a welcoming destination, encouraging visitors to "go the extra mile" and share their memorable experiences. This free online customer service training helps you take it to the next level.



- learn at your own pace – customer service training program.
- free of charge for Minnesota residents.
- mobile-friendly program provides frontline workers with basic skill-level customer service training.
- upon completing the program, you will receive a certificate of completion and a LinkedIn badge.

The 2023 Minnesota legislative session appropriated funds to create the online customer service training program. This program is a collaborative effort between the UMN Tourism Center, Hospitality Minnesota, Department of Employment and Economic Development, and Explore Minnesota.

List your event or business on ExploreMinnesota.com to increase visitor exposure



EXPLORE **m** MINNESOTA

Explore Minnesota offers a platform to help get the word out beyond our typical reach about your tourism related business or event. Two advantages of listing include:

- Increased Visibility:** Listing events on ExploreMinnesota.com, the state's official tourism site, significantly expands your reach to active travel seekers.
- Enhanced Credibility and Promotion:** Feature your events on the state platform for added credibility and valuable promotional support via Explore Minnesota's marketing channels.

To learn more about this resource contact Glenda Smith: gsmith@owatonna.org.

Two tradeshow at the Four Seasons Centre kick off spring and bring over 10,000 attendees to Owatonna annually in March

NORTH AMERICAN FARM POWER SHOW
FOUR SEASONS CENTRE
 STEELE COUNTY FAIRGROUNDS
 OWATONNA, MINNESOTA
MARCH 20 21 22
FREE ADMISSION AND PARKING

THURSDAY 9AM TO 5PM
 FRIDAY 9AM TO 5PM
 SATURDAY 9AM TO 4PM

DAILY GRAND PRIZES

SPONSORED BY
Linder Farm Network
MINERS Outdoor & Rec

Produced by **Trade Shows** PO Box 1067, Austin MN 55912 800-347-5225 tradeshow.com

2025 HOME AND RECREATION SHOW
MARCH 28-30
 FOUR SEASONS CENTER | STEELE CO FAIRGROUNDS

FRIDAY 3 pm - 7 pm
 SATURDAY 9 am - 5 pm
 SUNDAY 11 am - 3 pm

Something for Everyone!

FREE ADMISSION • PRIZES & GIVEAWAYS

New digital coupon pass to launch this spring

Sign up by March 10!

Capture new customers and build your customer list, while enjoying easy offer updates and cross-promotion to Owatonna's happenings.

Owatonna's digital Savings Passport, a mobile coupon book, reaches visitors via welcome bags, tours, hotels, and events, driving traffic to your business with exclusive deals. Contact Glenda Smith a gsmith@owatonna.org to participate.



“Community First: The Growth and Innovation of KOWZ Media”



For over 40 years, Blooming Prairie Farm Radio, known locally as KOWZ Media, has championed the power of local radio. It all started when Lynn Ketelsen launched the Linder Farm Network in Willmar, Minnesota. Later, in 1996, he and John Linder built KOWZ FM (100.9 FM) in Owatonna, eventually expanding to include KRUE (92.1 FM) and a KFAN affiliate station, KFOV (1170 AM/106.3 FM). Thanks to strong community support, the network grew, adding stations in Rochester and Fairmont. In 2018, Lynn and David Linder merged their markets, bringing Mankato and Marshall—and eventually Willmar—into the fold.



Today, KOWZ Media is part of a group managing 23 stations across Minnesota, with a strong digital presence and major events like the upcoming 24th annual KOWZ & KRUE Home and Rec Show in March. Lynn Ketelsen continues as the “Voice of Minnesota Agriculture” on the Linder Farm Network, while managing partners Matt Ketelsen, David Linder, and David Legault help guide the company’s growth. Locally, Matthew Hughes and Jessy Grove lead daily operations, building connections within the community and supporting the businesses that drive its success.



KOWZ Media has a proud legacy, but its future is even brighter. With expanded investments in videography, digital advertising, and social media management, it has evolved into a full-service media company ready to meet the demands of the modern landscape. As a free, always-available medium, radio remains a trusted source for local, regional, and national information. Community has always been at the heart of our success—especially in Owatonna, where strong business relationships and local support have helped KOWZ Media thrive.

Downtown Owatonna: Balancing Challenges and Embracing Opportunities



Downtown Owatonna has seen exciting growth and revitalization in recent years, but with progress comes the need to address ongoing challenges and seize new opportunities for improvement.

As downtown becomes a more popular destination, parking remains a concern for both visitors and business owners. The ongoing Vine Street Parking Lot project is a critical step toward addressing this issue, offering additional spaces to ease congestion and improve accessibility. Clear signage, updated maps of available public parking, and better communication about alternative parking options will also help make the area more welcoming for everyone. A reminder to downtown business owners and employees – please park your vehicles in designated parking lots for long-term parking. Leave the spaces in front of your business, and your neighbor’s business, available for customers.

A thriving downtown requires a healthy mix of retail, dining, entertainment, and service options. Several new dining establishments are set to open soon, expanding culinary choices, and drawing in food lovers from southern Minnesota and beyond. The Ascend Project – Phase 1 is completed, except for Olmsted Medical, who

will be finishing out their part of the building this summer. West Bank, Mineral Springs Brewery, and the Ascend Apartments are reaping the benefits of new and larger spaces. Look for Phase 2 to start soon!

To keep the downtown area vibrant for future generations, attracting younger demographics is essential. Expanding entertainment options—like live music events, pop-up markets, and social spaces—can help create a dynamic atmosphere. Collaborations with local schools, Owatonna Area Business Development Center, and tech-friendly businesses could also introduce fresh perspectives and encourage younger residents to stay engaged with their community. Complementing these developments are gathering spaces (new and established). Areas designed for relaxation, community events, and social connection. These spaces will make Downtown Owatonna a true destination for both residents and visitors.



As Downtown Owatonna continues to grow, balancing these elements will be key to ensuring a vibrant, inclusive, and sustainable future for everyone.

WELCOME NEW MEMBERS



AARON GUZMAN PHOTOGRAPHY

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PAWS 4 FUN DOG TRAINING, LLC

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BRAVO ZULU HOUSE

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COLORS & GLASS, INC.

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HOMESTEAD HOSPICE HOUSE, INC.

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Aracely.valencia@tvoc.org



OWATONNA FAMILY THRIFT

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owatonnafamilythrift@gmail.com



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OWATONNA HOSPITAL AUXILIARY

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Debrabuck31@gmail.com

EVENTS Update

By Julia Seykora, Events Director

Want to Keep Your Young Employees?

Get them connected through Y-Pro. Plug into the community with other young professionals with so many opportunities to love where you LIVE, WORK & PLAY! Lunch and Learns, Social events, fitness and outdoor activities, and community engagements. Are you a young professional looking to take your career to the next level? Do you want to learn from experienced mentors who have been where you are and can help guide you towards success?



Look no further than our new Young Professionals Mentorship series. This three-part series is designed exclusively for young professionals who are eager to learn and grow in their careers. You will have a chance to get up close and personal and spend time talking to prominent leaders of our community. Each session will be 90 minutes, and lunch will be provided

CALENDAR OF EVENTS

Chamber 101

March 7
8:30 – 9:30 AM
Location: Ringhofer Conference Center,
120 South Oak, Owatonna
Sponsored by: Farmers Insurance, D. Strand Agency, Inc.



BUSINESS *after* HOURS

CHAMBER GROWTH BREAKFAST SERIES

March 20
7:30 – 9:00 AM
Location: Torey's Restaurant & Bar,
208 N. Cedar AVE, Owatonna (Event center)

BUSINESS AFTER HOURS

March 25
5:30 – 7:00 PM
Sponsor(s): Owatonna Arts Center
and Little Theatre of Owatonna
Location: 435 Garden View Lane, Owatonna



Congratulations to Owatonna Art's Center on their 50 Year Celebration

CHAMBER GROWTH BREAKFAST SERIES

April 17
7:30 – 9:00 AM
Location: Torey's Restaurant & Bar (Event Center)
208 N. Cedar, Owatonna

BUSINESS AFTER HOURS

April 22
5:30 – 7:00 PM
Sponsor(s): Souba Greenhouse,
4003 Crane Creek Road, Owatonna



Young Professionals Present: Mentorship Series

When: Tuesday, March 18 11:30AM – 1:00PM
& Tuesday, April 22 11:30am - 1:00pm
Where: Owatonna Public Library

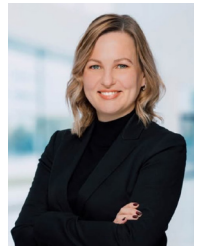
Are you a young professional looking to take your career to the next level? Do you want to learn from experienced mentors who have been where you are and can help guide you towards success? Look no further than our Young Professionals Mentorship series. This three-part series is designed exclusively for young professionals who are eager to learn and grow in their careers. You will have a chance to get up close and personal and spend time talking to prominent leaders of our community. Each session will be 90 minutes, and lunch will be provided.



Bill Cronin,
Vice President,
Director - P&C
Support Services,
Federated
Insurance;
President/Co-
Owner, Mineral
Springs Brewery



Matt Jessop,
Mayor of
Owatonna;
Store Manager,
Owatonna Shoe



Simone Tenschert,
Vice President
Operations
Owatonna, Bosch
Automotive
Aftermarket
Solutions LLC,
Owatonna

CHAMBER PACK DEADLINE

Supply 550 copies of your promotional insert by for May/ June mailing; \$150 by **April 28th.**

The Owatonna Chamber of Commerce and Tourism will be **closing at noon on Friday, April 18th for Good Friday.**



OWATONNA
AREA CHAMBER OF COMMERCE

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Hours: Monday–Friday, 8 AM–5 PM



Business Brief is published by the Owatonna Area Chamber of Commerce & Tourism

Riverland
COMMUNITY COLLEGE
Success
Starts **Here.**
www.riverland.edu