NEWSLETTER

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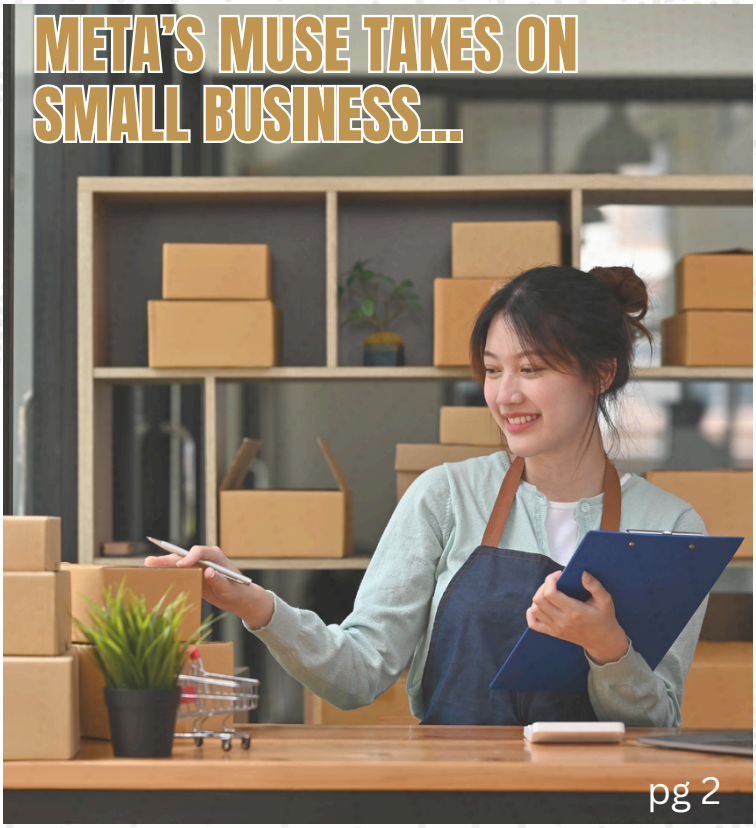
2026 OCCUPATION ACCELERATION BEST YET

25 SEP Juniors & Seniors joined us for a ½ day of sales pitches/public speaking, mock interviews and business professionals talking about their journeys to success on September 22nd. Such an opportunity to invest in our future leaders.



FIRST RESPONDER'S LUNCHEON DELIVERS ON GRATITUDE

The Altoona Chamber and our many grateful business partners held the 5th Annual First Responder's Luncheon October 7th and served just under 100 people with an awesome baked potato bar with bbq toppings from Jethro's, sides from HyVee, cookies from Jimmy John's and pie from Fareway. Our Members sent in touching "thank you" videos and we were motivated and moved by Chris Barr's opening and prayer. We get to work with some of the best people...



TOP NEWS

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Tech News This Week: Muse Takes On Small Business And McDonalds Leans Into AI By Gene Marks, Contributor

Meta Expands Muse AI Agent for Small Businesses

Meta's AI agent Muse has made an impressive debut since its September 8th launch. Now – and not surprisingly – Meta has announced its expanding Muse specifically for small business. Per Meta, usage will be mostly free but subscription plans will be available for extra features. Muse connects with tools including Shopify, Asana, Stripe, Canva, Zoom, Dropbox and many others. Intuit officially announced that its QuickBooks connector is live on Muse allowing customers to ask financial questions or request actions conversationally – and Muse will consult QuickBooks to provide the financial intelligence or perform specific tasks. With these updates, Meta is giving other AI platforms a run for their money and according to a report from TheVerge, OpenAI just introduced "Dots" – a new type of always-on AI assistant the company says "can do nearly anything through connected apps. According to the article, Dots is OpenAI's response to Muse. Powered by its GPT-6 Astra, users communicate with a Dot through a messaging-style interface or by voice through ChatGPT on web, desktop and mobile. Dot learns users' preferences overtime and OpenAI presents the various sophisticated functions Dot is capable of. (Source: Reuters; Intuit; The Verge)

Why this is important for your small business:

The age of the personal AI assistant is here and, with a growing list of integrations, these tools will allow the smallest of companies to do more work with their existing staff, or even less. Job fears? I think these tools will encourage more people to become entrepreneurs and become less reliant on employers.

OpenAI Expands ChatGPT's Plug-Ins with App-Like Interfaces and Automations

At its DevDay 2026 event, OpenAI announced its expanding ChatGPT's plugins which will allow developers to give their plug-ins a dedicated home in the ChatGPT sidebar and create interactive panels where people can use the connected software without leaving their ChatGPT conversation. (Source: TechCrunch)

Why this is important for your small business:

According to OpenAI, developers can also add specialized file viewers supporting their applications' file formats. Existing plug-ins already connect ChatGPT with services such as Slack, SharePoint, Airtable and Google Drive. The company added that a new tool called Plugin Creator and making it easier for developers to build and discover plug-ins; plus an improved system for ranking and recommendations in the plug-in directory. All of these tools will allow your developers to get more done faster.

McDonald's Turns to AI for Drive-Thru, Inventory Management, Order Accuracy

McDonald's just announced a major update in its deployment of AI. "ArchIQ" is a new AI-powered operating system that unifies drive-thru AI, inventory management, equipment monitoring and order-accuracy technology into one system. Key developments include Archy – the AI voice-ordering system for drive-thru orders taken in English and Spanish. According to CIO Brian Rice, Archy performs above 90 percent accuracy and is expected to free up 50 employee labor hours. Bluetooth Low Energy tags will allow restaurants to monitor inventory in real time rather than having employees manually count products. Connected equipment and computer vision will monitor operations and equipment. McDonald's says this could result in a 50 percent improvement in equipment and menu item availability at each restaurant which Rice describes as "unprecedented." Executives have yet to confirm a date for complete rollout of ArchIQ but it's a major development in the corporation's Next strategy – an $8.5 billion modernization plan. (Source: Restaurant Dive)

Why this is important for your small business:

Ultimately this technology will make its way to smaller, independently owned restaurants. But I think we all know that there will be quite a few bumps along the way so let's let the bigwigs at McDonalds use their resources to figure this out beforehand.

LinkedIn's CEO on How AI is Reshaping Hiring

LinkedIn CEO Dan Shapero detailed the company's plan to help resolve hiring mismatches, the *Wall Street Journal* reported. According to Shapero, the number of resumes submitted by job seekers has increased 30 percent since the pandemic – contributing to the challenges recruiters have in figuring out which candidates have the skills required for a job. "It's gotten harder and harder for employers to know who can actually do the job anymore," Shapero explained. The company's newly announced Hiring Assistant 2 is an AI recruiting agent designed to identify promising candidates, evaluate their fit for specific positions and bring relevant information about applicants together for recruiters. "We can move from a search based on what you said to a search based on what you meant," Shapero said. The Hiring Assistant not only adds stronger reasoning and personalization capabilities, but it's also designed to manage the growing volume of applications. (Source: Wall Street Journal)



Key Positive Stats & Indicators for Iowa Businesses

1. **High Business Sentiment & Capital Investment Growth**
According to the Iowa Business Council's (IBC) Economic Outlook Survey: (Quad Cities Business Journal)

• Capital Spending Expectations: Increased by +3.21 points (rising to 67.10), reflecting strong corporate commitment to business expansion, facility upgrades, and equipment investment heading into Q4.

• Sales Outlook: Expectations remain remarkably elevated with an index score of 71.05 (a score above 50 signifies expansion and positive momentum). (Iowa Business Council)

Overall Economic Outlook: Maintained a healthy expansionary rating above 60, signaling sustained optimism across IBC companies that operate in all 99 counties. (Quad Cities Business Journal).

2. Lower Tax Burden for Business Owners
3.8% Flat Income Tax Implementation: A major competitive shift taking full effect is Iowa's lower single-rate flat individual income tax (3.8%). For pass-through entities (LLCs, S-Corporations, sole proprietorships), this significantly reduces state tax burdens, improving cash flow and disposable income heading into year-end tax planning. (Bleeding Heartland)

3. Solid State GDP Expansion
Real GDP Growth: State economic reports show Iowa's Real GDP expanding by 2.58% year-over-year heading into recent quarters. (Iowa Department of Revenue)
Manufacturing Strength: Manufacturing continues to drive productivity and wage gains —employing over 216,000 Iowans (approx. 14% of the workforce) and contributing over $35 billion to state GDP, outpacing national productivity trends. (Common Sense Institute)

4. Supply Chain & Sector-Wide Economic Footprint
Agri-Business & Manufacturing Interconnectivity: Broader supply chain analysis shows that Iowa's foundational agricultural and manufacturing sectors continue to strongly support auxiliary industries: Supports 44.9% of transportation & warehousing employment. Supports 42.6% of wholesale trade employment. Supports 27.1% of real estate and 18.4% of retail trade activity.(Common Sense Institute)

Strategic Summary for Q4 Planning

Increased Local Cash Flow: Tax reductions mean business owners retain more earnings, providing flexibility for year-end bonuses, capital purchases, or reinvestment.

Expansionary Sales Environment: Consumer and B2B demand indicators remain above historic mid-points, supporting Q4 retail, service, and holiday market initiative.

IT'S TIME TO RENEW YOUR MEMBERSHIP!

Renewing Your Membership

Renewing your Altoona Area Chamber of Commerce membership is a direct investment in the growth, visibility, and economic vitality of both your business and our local community. Your continued partnership fuels high-impact community events, supports local economic development initiatives, and ensures our business district has a strong, unified voice. Staying connected strengthens the regional economy while keeping Altoona a thriving, vibrant place to live, work, and do business.

Beyond advocacy, membership provides direct access to high-value resources designed to help your organization succeed. From targeted marketing channels and promotional platforms that amplify your brand reach to specialized workshops, leadership events, and professional development programs, the Chamber equips you with the tools, insights, and connections needed to keep your business moving forward.

PRESIDENT'S CLUB

Thank you for your generous support!

Gold

Adventureland Resort
Altoona Living Magazine
Bank Iowa
Bankers Trust Company
Bass Pro Shops
Burger Shed
City of Altoona
Fairfield Inn & Suites
First Interstate Bank
Heart of America Group
Honda Altoona
Hyatt Place Altoona
HyVee Food Store
Johnny's Italian Steakhouse
Meta Altoona Data Center
Outlets of Des Moines
Polk County Board of Supervisors
Prairie Meadows Racetrack & Casino
Skinner Law Office PC
Vision Bank
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Silver

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JC Toland Painting
Jethro's BBQ & Jake's Smokehouse Steaks
Neumann Brothers Inc.
On Time Professionals
Perkins Restaurant & Bakery
R & B Auto Glass
Robinson, Inc.
Snyder & Associates
Ted's Body Shop
Turner Construction
Truman's Automotive & ADAS Calibrations



Twila Shreves, Altoona Chamber President

From the President...

Four years ago, I decided to take a meaningful step forward during a time of personal transition. Having been recently widowed, I was looking for purposeful ways to keep busy and even more connected to my community. Serving on and being more involved with the Altoona Chamber board had been in the back of my mind for a few years, so I decided to put my name in when applications opened.

While I have served on a nonprofit board for over twenty years, stepping into an active Chamber board was a completely fresh experience. I was excited to get to know the other board members, dive into collaboration, and bring fresh ideas to build upon the Chamber's strong foundation. I didn't entirely know what to expect and encountered a few surprises, however, the true highlight has been the genuine joy of getting to know my fellow board members—deepening old friendships and forming wonderful new ones.

As a small (or micro)-business owner in retail, I know how vital it is to have a distinct voice representing our unique needs on the board. I have consistently used my time to advocate for the small and independent shops that give our community its character. I always knew Altoona had a highly active Chamber, but it wasn't until I looked at the backside of operations—the intricate details and budgets—that I truly realized just how hard this organization works.

Altoona is entirely about its people; it is a loyal community of neighbors, friends, and customers. Serving as president this past year allowed me to intentionally rearrange my schedule at my store so I could attend events I had never been able to participate in before. Seeing our exceptional networking and local events through the eyes of the board president has made me immensely proud. Thank you for allowing me to serve and speak on behalf of the Chamber this year. As I step down and into the role of past-president, I leave the board in fantastic hands with Gina, and I cannot wait to see what the future holds for the Altoona Chamber and our community.



THE SCOOP

More of Our People....



515 A Team



Meta/Altoona Data Center



On Time Professionals

Want your business image featured on The Scoop? Call Us!

November 2026

2 - DUES RENEWALS MAILED OUT TODAY! Save time and a stamp and renew online at altoonachamber.org
3 - Perk Before Work, 7:30am at Communication Innovators NEW LOCATION, 4905 Hubbell Ave., Ste. 2, DSM
3 - ELECTION DAY - Get out & VOTE!
4 - Ribbon Cutting Ceremony, Noon, Altoona Public Works Facility, 1511 17th Ave SW, Altoona
5 - Connections Committee Meeting, 12:00pm at Burger Shed - COME JOIN OUR AMBASSADOR SQUAD!
6 - Membership Appreciation Breakfast, 8:30am-10:00am at AJ's at Prairie Meadows. RSVP's required - altoonachamber.org.
9 - Retailer's Council meeting, 9:00am at Best Day Coffee
11 - Veteran's Day Breakfast at HyVee; Veteran's Day lunch at Prairie Meadows
12 - Business 101: How to Host a Successful Internship with the DSM Partnership, 12:00pm at the Townsend Community Center, 6615 NE 41st Ave. FREE working lunch. BYOL. RSVP online.
12 - Twelve Days til Small Business Saturday PROMO begins - make sure to send your promotions in to Kennedy@altoonachamber.org.
16 - Cultivate Altoona/Economic Development Committee meeting, 12:00pm at Red Anchor Buffet.
26 & 27 - Chamber office CLOSED for Thanksgiving Holiday!
28 - Small Business Saturday!! Shop Small - SHOP LOCAL!
28 - Christmas in Olde Town, 2:00pm - 4:30pm
**2027 Sponsorship meetings begin this month! Call in to set up your day and time!

December 2026

NO COMMITTEE MEETINGS IN DECEMBER!
1 - Perk Before Work, 7:30am at Eagle Homes, 504 1st Ave. S
3 - Altoona Board of Director's Strategic Planning Retreat, 8:30am - 12:30pm at The Haines Room, Olde Town
10 - Business 101: Protecting Your Business from Wire & ACH Fraud with Vision Bank at 12:00pm at the Townsend Community Center, 6615 NE 41st Ave. FREE working lunch! BYOL! RSVP online.
23 - January 4 - Chamber office CLOSED FOR HOLIDAY BREAK!

Member Appreciation

BREAKFAST

FRI., NOVEMBER 6TH | 8:30AM

THANK YOU for being such wonderful partners! RSVP online at altoonachamber.org/events or by email to melissahorton@altoonachamber.org

AJ'S AT PRAIRIE MEADOWS RACETRACK & CASINO
1 PRAIRIE MEADOWS DR.,
ALTOONA

