www.westerniowaadvantage.com ■ info@westerniowadvantage.com ■ 712.792.9914
PO Box 768, Carroll, Iowa 51401 November 2026

Western Iowa Advantage is a collaborative group of economic development officials in Audubon, Calhoun, Carroll, Crawford, Greene, Ida, and Sac Counties.

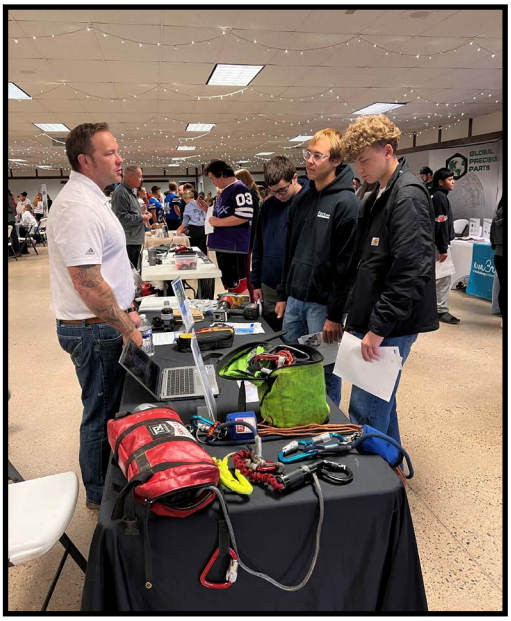
ACED Hosts Career Day

Audubon County Economic Development hosted their 5th annual Career Day at the Agri-Hall on October 2, 2026. Students and companies had great engagement by playing BINGO, participating in demonstrations (visual and interactive), and having quality interactions and discussions with employers.

Two hundred fifty students from Audubon High School, Exira-EHK High School, Coon Rapids-Bayard High School, CAM High School, and Glidden Ralston High School.

Twenty-four local and regional businesses participated - highlighting what their companies do, career paths, and opportunities that are available to students through internships, tours, job shadowing, etc. Thank you to the following businesses for joining us for Career Day: Landus, AMVC Management Services, AMVC Veterinary Services, Global Precision Parts, DMACC, Rasmussen, Nelson & Wonio PLC, Audubon County Secondary Roads, Audubon County Sheriff, R&J Wegner Trucking Inc, Puck Enterprises, INC, Full Spectrum Print & Design, Van Wall Equipment, KJAN, Audubon ISU Extension, MidAmerican Energy, Agriland FS, Audubon County Memorial Hospital, APEX, Iowa State Patrol, Pro-Ag Engineering, Universal Aerial Solutions, Southwest Iowa Real Estate, Emerge Marketing Solutions, and Nextera Energy.

ACED is proud to host this annual event that showcases a variety of businesses, career opportunities, and introduces the future workforce to the opportunities found in rural Western Iowa.



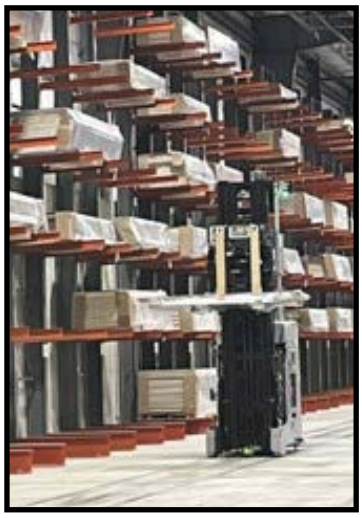




WIAD Partners Tour VT Industries

WIAD partners and Director Debi Durham had the opportunity to tour the new expanded facility at VT Industries headquarters located in Holstein. The expansion that began in Spring 2024 adds an impressive 175,000 square feet to VT's production footprint, making it the largest addition in the company's history. "The completion of this expansion marks a proud moment for VT Industries and the Holstein community," said Aaron Clausen, Co-President. It's a testament to our forward-focused vision for the company, the hard work of our team, and the strength of our partnerships." Ryan Clausen, Co-President explains, "With the recent leadership transition and our 70th anniversary, 2026 has provided continued momentum and a renewed focus on innovation to continue to serve our customers." VT Industries serves as North-America's leader in the commercial wood door industry built on the cornerstones of quality, service, and innovation.







Financing, Business Transitions, & Growth Workshop Held

Western Iowa Advantage partners hosted a workshop at the Audubon Recreation Center for accountants, bankers, and business owners to learn about resources supporting business growth and continuity planning in rural communities. The event drew attendees from across northwest Iowa. Speakers included Stacy Mullinex of Advance Iowa, Audra Fisher of the SBDC and IEDA SSBCI, Anne McMahon of the Iowa Economic Development Authority; and Steve Cruse and Justus Robeson of Iowa Business Growth.





Careful planning is vital to business financing, transitions, and growth. Although 79% of business owners plan to exit their businesses within the next 10 years, only 17% have a written succession plan. Western Iowa Advantage provides timely educational events that advance business and community development throughout the region.





From a Small, Iowa Fire Station to Global BBQ Fame



The whole thing started out in the kitchen of a fire station in Wall Lake, Iowa.

In 1976, L.D. "Cookie" Cook had a killer recipe for his signature sauce, but nowhere to make it. So talked to local firemen, struck a deal, and started simmering about 100 gallons of his sauce every week, right in their kitchen.

Word spread. Demand grew. And in the 1980s, Duane "Speed" Herrig, so nicknamed in honor of his love of auto racing, bought the company.

To beef up the bottom line, Speed would throw bottles of the sauce into his auto parts delivery truck and sell them to folks on his route, including local grocery stores.

Fast forward forty years and Cookies BBQ is still family owned and operated by Speed and he and his late wife, Judy's sons Jeff and Bryan, daughter Janene, and several grandkids. It's a family affair that brings joy as well as the occasional headache, but either way, it makes the days a lot of fun.

They also employ part and full-timers out of their 125,000 sq. ft building in Wall Lake, population 755, whipping up a catalogue of internationally beloved sauces whose very names cause mouths to water: Tangy Mustard BBQ, Sweet Hickory, and Korean BBQ.

And don't forget the t-shirts, aprons, salsa, and a brand new line of seasonings, all of which ship out to fans in 34 states and two countries including servicemen and women in the Middle East to customers in South Africa, the Ukraine, and Thailand.

The Grandaddy of Midwest BBQ Sauce Makers

So loyal are Cookie's aficionados that they even cooked up a BBQ Fan Club.

With the click of a mouse, customers from around the globe sign up for Cookie's Sauce Squad, where they get first dibs on recipes and notes from the test kitchen for things like buffalo chicken dip, double smoked ham, BBQ chicken chopped salad and signature smoked ribs. They also get the inside scoop on events, unadvertised promotions and regular giveaways.

A BBQ sauce fan club? Well, why not? It's kinda hard to resist. Almost as hard as trying to resist visiting the Rib Wagon as it rolls throughout the Midwest, making stops at the state fair, local grocery stores, and community events, with grills and smokers in tow.



After all, the sauces' accolades have scored first place honors at the National Barbecue Association Awards of Excellence Competition and scored the "Best Sauce on the Planet" award for its Western Style Bar BBQ Sauce from American Royal Barbecue Contest.

They even catapulted Speed into both the National Barbecue Hall of Fame and the Iowa Barbecue Society Hall of Fame, giving him the moniker of grandaddy of Midwest BBQ sauce makers.

"It feels great," he said. "I've enjoyed working with the Iowa BBQ Society in getting October designated as BBQ Month with a proclamation from our Governor at that time."

Continued on page 4

BBQ Fame continued from page 3

In between writing cookbooks, Speed generously contributes to a variety of worthy causes including the Salvation Army, Urban Dreams, New Hope Village, Camp Courageous, and Camp High Hopes, often putting the Rib Wagon into fundraising mode.

"We all need to pay rent for the space we occupy on this earth," he said.

Proud to Support Western Iowa Makers

Western Iowa Advantage is proud to support Cookie's BBQ as one of the many talented makers who choose to grow their business and support our local economy.

Whether you're looking to expand operations or have always dreamed of opening your own business, we'd love to hear from you. Call us at 712.792.9914 or email info@westerniowaadvantage.com to discover more about our financing programs, incentives, and the resources to help turn that vision into reality.

November 10-13
Sioux City, IA

12+ topics covered by industry leaders to help you answer questions llke:

- *"Will my idea work?"*
- *"How do I get my business funded?"*
- *"Should I start or buy a business?"*
- *"How can I stand out from my competitors?"*
- *"What creates an innovative culture?"*
- *"How do I start manufacturing my product?"*
- *and more*

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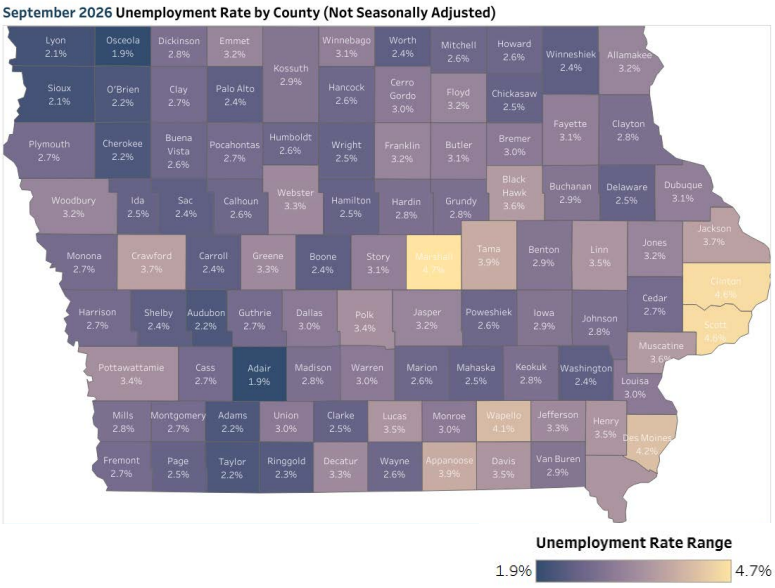
Western Iowa Advantage Region and State of Iowa See Small Decreases in Unemployment Rate in September 2026

The Western Iowa Advantage Region's monthly unemployment rate (not seasonally adjusted) was 2.8 percent in September 2026 up from 2.6 percent in September 2025, according to figures released from Iowa Workforce Development. Iowa's unemployment rate was 3.2 percent in September 2026 up slightly from 3.1 percent in September 2025. The U.S. unemployment rate was 4.0 percent in September 2026. Total employment in the region decreased to 40,240 in September 2026 from 40,380 in September 2025.

Western Iowa Advantage tracks various economic indicators in Audubon, Calhoun, Carroll, Crawford, Greene, Ida, and Sac Counties in Iowa, including employment trends.

County unemployment rates in the region for September 2026:

- Audubon 2.2%
- Calhoun 2.6%
- Carroll 2.4%
- Crawford 3.7%
- Greene 3.3%
- Ida 2.5%
- Sac 2.4%



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