The Iowa County Magazine



October 2026

Cybersecurity Awareness Month


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The Iowa County

October 2026 * *Volume 55, Number 9*

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Iowa State Association of Counties

ISAC's Mission:
To promote effective and responsible county government for the people of Iowa.

ISAC's Vision:
To be the principal, authoritative source of representation, information and services for and about county government in Iowa.

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Meet ISAC's New Director of Government Relations

Hello! My name is Emily Schwickerath, and I recently joined ISAC as the new Director of Government Relations. I'm excited to join the Government Relations Team as we commit to a new chapter in how we partner with state and federal officials as an association.



Emily Schwickerath
ISAC Director of Government Relations
eschwickerath@iowacounties.org

I grew up on a farm in Northeast Iowa's Chickasaw County and currently reside in Story County with my husband and golden retriever. My first encounter with county government was a lively discussion at the dinner table about which gravel roads in the county were prioritized and which bridges on our farm-to-market roads were most important.

I say this and envision a few chuckles and eye rolls, but growing up in a rural community, these were the county services and concerns that impacted my family the most. We knew most of the folks on the Board of Supervisors, and my parents seemed to know everyone who worked at the courthouse. Even our county assessor regularly umped my high school softball games.

I think this is the epitome of county government and the key principle behind ISAC's Behind the 99-Campaign slogan: neighbors serving neighbors. Government exists to serve its people, but at the local level this means serving those we see at church, classmates we graduated with, and our friends and family.

Before joining ISAC, I worked for seven years for Congressman Randy Feenstra. And before that, I worked in various capacities in state politics, but primarily for former Senate Majority Leader Jack Whitver. My background includes local, state, and federal campaign politics, as well as working in official office capacities.

I'd be remiss if I didn't further detail my time with Congressman Feenstra. As his District Director, I oversaw his Iowa operation and served as the conduit between constituents in Iowa and his Washington, D.C. office. The Congressman was a city administrator and county treasurer before his election to state and federal office, but he never forgot his tenure in local government. It was a priority for him that our office regularly engaged with county government and created partnerships to provide solutions to challenges brought to our attention.

As District Director, I learned directly from county officials about the challenges Iowa counties face. Harrison County Supervisors highlighted the unfunded mandate requiring counties to cover inmates' health care. Marshall County showed me how grants and government partnerships can make infrastructure improvements possible for economic development. Carroll County demonstrated what emergency services can achieve through collaboration, and Boone County brought courthouse furniture needs to my attention. I still have much to learn, but I bring a foundation of county knowledge directly shaped by ISAC's members.

I also understand that our counties face growing demands with fewer resources. New mandates, changing population trends, increasing inflation, and deteriorating civil discourse make county service especially challenging—perhaps more than at any time since Iowa's first counties were incorporated in 1834.

Let's be frank: the last few years at the Statehouse have been a challenge. However, Iowa will soon see a new U.S Senator and House delegation. We will have a new governor and numerous new legislators. Committee assignments will shuffle. New chairs will hold the gavels. The 92nd General Assembly provides the perfect opportunity to revise ISAC's approach to government relations.

Meet ISAC's New Director of Government Relations

The ISAC Government Relations Team has a new approach that will focus on building relationships, committing to partnerships, and refocusing on the issues of greatest impact to county government. My goal is for county government to have a seat at the table to ensure our members' voices are heard.

As the saying goes, the definition of insanity is doing the same thing repeatedly and expecting a different result. As we change our approach to working with state and federal officials, I ask our members to bring an open mindset and give our team a chance to move in a new direction. Our end goals remain the same, but the road to get there may look different.

My last thought is very dear to my heart. It's easy to see our nation's civil discourse is eroding. Threats against government officials are increasing. It's disheartening and against what I believe everything America stands for. I want to be clear and set the tone and expectation I have for our government relations team and our members from the start: ISAC's Government Relations Team is committed to professional, respectful, and honest dialogue.

Building relationships with legislators is a two-way street. If we expect legislators to give county government a fair voice in the process, we must be willing to begin a new chapter with them. Just as counties want calm, respectful dialogue from their constituents, we must exemplify the same to our state and federal leaders, even when we disagree.

I look forward to meeting and working with you all. Please reach out anytime. We are all neighbors serving neighbors, let's work towards a better Iowa together.

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The Smartest Cybersecurity Investment: Planning Ahead



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County leaders are often called on to make decisions that will affect their communities for years to come. When budgets are tight, every investment must be carefully evaluated. County leaders are responsible for balancing many priorities while ensuring essential services remain available to the public. In this environment, technology and cybersecurity investments are best viewed not simply as expenses, but as strategic investments in operational continuity, efficiency, and long-term success.

Plan for Technology's Full Lifecycle

It's no secret that Iowa counties are facing significant budget challenges today. Legislative changes, rising costs, and limited resources make it difficult to prioritize funding. We've heard these concerns from counties across Iowa, and ISAC remains committed to supporting counties through advocacy, guidance, and cost-effective services that help reduce pressure on local budgets.

One of the smartest ways counties can prepare for the future is by developing sustainable technology budgets. When creating a three- to five-year plan, it's important to account for the full lifecycle of technology investments. The initial purchase is only one part of the cost. Maintenance agreements, software subscriptions, security services, replacement schedules, and staff time required to support systems all play an important role in the long-term success of technology investments.

Every technology purchase includes an ongoing commitment. Software must be updated, security patches must be applied, and hardware will eventually reach the end of its useful life. Laptop and desktop computers typically require replacement every three to five years, while servers and network equipment often require replacement every five to seven years. Planning for these expenses in advance and staggering replacement cycles can help counties avoid unexpected costs and reduce budget spikes.

Plan for Operational Disruptions

Effective planning does not always require large financial investments. Some of the most valuable preparedness activities focus on understanding how county services would continue during unexpected disruptions.

Programs such as the Iowa Cyber Resilience Initiative (ICRI) and the Cyber Incident Management Exercise (CIME) operational continuity exercises provide eligible Iowa political subdivisions with no-cost opportunities to evaluate operational resilience. These exercises help participants identify essential services, understand technology dependencies, document critical processes, and develop practical continuity strategies.

More Than a Tabletop Exercise

Most cyber exercises focus on how to respond to an incident and recover impacted technology systems. The Cyber Incident Management Exercise (CIME) takes a different approach. It asks: How do we keep serving our community while the technology is down?

CIME brings together county leadership, department heads, frontline staff, communications, finance, public safety, and IT to work through a realistic disruption scenario.

The exercise helps organizations think through priorities, available resources, operational impacts, and the decisions that would need to be made during a prolonged technology outage. The result is a clearer understanding of how the organization can continue operating when normal technology isn't available.

Led by Iowa State University, the Iowa Cyber Resilience Initiative (ICRI) provides no-cost training and resources that help Iowa communities strengthen operational resilience.

Learn More: https://www.news.iastate.edu/news/free-training-focuses-maintaining-essential-services-during-cyberattack

Rather than waiting for a cyber incident, system failure, or prolonged outage to force difficult decisions, counties can use these exercises to identify priorities, establish workarounds, and create operational continuity playbooks before they are needed. The result is greater preparedness and a clearer understanding of how to maintain critical services during challenging circumstances.

Manage Risk Before Problems Occur

County leaders regularly make investments designed to reduce uncertainty and support reliable operations. Technology and cybersecurity planning should be viewed through the same lens.

Not every technology system presents the same level of risk. Some systems play a greater role in protecting county operations and therefore require careful attention to maintenance and replacement schedules. A firewall, for example, serves as a primary line of defense against threats originating from the internet. However, that protection is significantly reduced when the device is no longer supported by the manufacturer or when required security subscriptions have expired.

No organization can eliminate every risk. However, proactive planning allows counties to reduce vulnerabilities, prioritize limited resources, and address potential problems before they become emergencies. The goal is not perfection. The goal is making informed decisions that strengthen resilience and reduce the likelihood of disruptions.

Reliable technology also supports something equally important: public trust. County governments manage important records and provide services residents depend on every day. When counties invest in secure and dependable technology, they are investing in the protection of public resources and the continued confidence of the communities they serve.

Strengthen Your Human Firewall with NINJIO

Technology systems can block many cyber threats, but employees remain one of the most frequent targets for attackers. That's why ISAC offers NINJIO, an engaging cybersecurity awareness training platform designed to help organizations build a stronger security culture.

Unlike traditional training programs, NINJIO delivers short, story-driven videos based on real-world cyber incidents. Each episode highlights common threats faced by counties such as phishing, business email compromise, ransomware, social engineering, and data protection risks, followed by practical lessons employees can immediately apply in their daily work.

Cybersecurity is not just an IT responsibility. Every employee plays a role in protecting county systems, sensitive information, and public trust. NINJIO helps make security awareness practical, memorable, and accessible for staff at all technical skill levels.

ISAC members can learn more about NINJIO and other cybersecurity services by contacting the TSB Team.

Learn More: https://www.iowacounties.org/programs/tsb/

Measure Success Through Reliability

One of the unique challenges of cybersecurity and technology planning is that success is often invisible.
Success may mean that county services remain available during a disruption. It may mean public records stay protected, employees continue working without interruption, or a technology issue is detected and resolved before staff or residents ever notice it. In many cases, the most successful technology investments are the ones that prevent problems from occurring in the first place. The return on investment is reflected in continuity, reliability, and confidence that county government can continue serving its community regardless of the challenges it faces.

Invest in Your Future

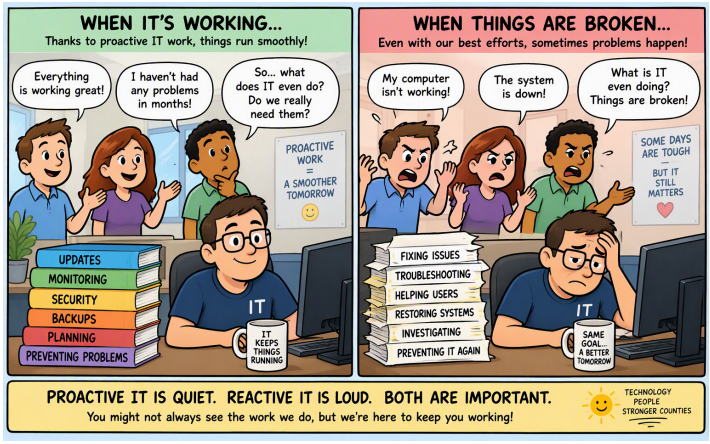
Technology touches nearly every aspect of county government. From maintaining land records and processing payroll to supporting emergency services, elections, permitting, and tax collection, county operations depend on technology every day.

When systems function as expected, most people never notice the technology working behind the scenes. Reliable service can easily be taken for granted. Yet, dependable technology does not happen by accident. It is the result of thoughtful planning, regular maintenance, and ongoing investment.

The Smartest Cybersecurity Investment: Planning Ahead

Ultimately, cybersecurity is not simply a technology issue; it is also a budgeting, risk management, and leadership issue. When resources are limited, counties must focus investments where they reduce the greatest risk, particularly by replacing unsupported and end-of-life systems that no longer receive security updates.

Planning ahead is one of the smartest cybersecurity investments an organization can make. Counties that budget for technology lifecycle costs, prepare for operational disruptions, and proactively manage risk are better positioned to safeguard essential services, protect public resources, and maintain the trust of the communities they serve.



Using AI Responsibly and Effectively in County Government

Artificial intelligence (AI) presents Iowa counties with a real opportunity. It can help employees draft clearer communications, summarize lengthy documents, organize information, create training materials, and reduce time spent on repetitive administrative work. For counties facing limited staffing and budgets, those benefits should not be ignored.

The challenge is not deciding whether counties should use AI. Employees are already encountering AI in search engines, office software, online services, and many county specific applications. The more important question is: How can counties use AI effectively while protecting information, complying with legal requirements, and maintaining public trust?

The answer is not to prohibit AI. It is to establish reasonable guardrails that allow responsible use.



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Begin with Appropriate Use Cases

Many county tasks are well suited for AI, particularly when they involve public, generic, or fictitious information. An auditor's office might use AI to develop an outline for a presentation explaining the county budget. A county engineer could turn already-public project details into a plain-language construction notice. Human resources might improve the wording of a general job posting. An assessor, recorder, or treasurer could draft frequently asked questions using information already published on the county website.

Other appropriate uses include:

- Brainstorming newsletter or social media topics.
- Summarizing publicly available legislation or guidance.
- Drafting meeting agendas or presentation outlines.
- Improving the readability or tone of an email.
- Creating fictitious examples for employee training.
- Developing a first draft of a general policy or procedure.
- Reorganizing public information into a more accessible format.

These uses can save time, but AI should produce a starting point, not a final product that hasn't been reviewed first. Employees must remain responsible for verifying facts, calculations, citations, dates, and conclusions before using AI-generated material for county business or public dissemination.

Match the Tool to the Data

Responsible AI use begins with understanding the information being entered. Public information carries much less risk than information about a resident, employee, investigation, health condition, cybersecurity incident, or internal county operation. A helpful approach is to classify proposed AI use into three general categories:

- **Low risk:** Public, generic, deidentified, or fictitious information used for brainstorming, drafting, formatting, or summarization.
- **Moderate risk:** Internal county information used within a county-approved enterprise AI platform that has appropriate administrative, contractual, and security protections.
- **High risk:** Regulated, confidential, legally-sensitive, security-sensitive, or mission-critical information. This may include Criminal Justice Information (CJI), Protected Health Information (PHI), personnel records, legal communications, payment information, passwords, system configurations, and incident-response material.

High-risk data should not be entered into an AI system unless the specific platform, configuration, contract, and proposed use have been reviewed and approved. An employee should never assume that an AI service is appropriate merely because the county purchased a subscription.

Maintaining CJIS and HIPAA Compliance
Counties can remain compliant and still use AI, but compliance must be evaluated for the entire use case rather than the product name alone.

The FBI's Criminal Justice Information Services (CJIS) Security Policy establishes protections throughout the lifecycle of CJI, including its creation, transmission, storage, viewing, modification, dissemination, and destruction. A sheriff's office should not paste criminal histories, investigative information, dispatch records, reports, or information obtained through criminal justice systems into an AI service unless that environment and the intended use have been specifically approved.

The same principle applies to PHI. County public health departments, ambulance services, and other HIPAA-covered operations should not enter identifiable health information into a consumer AI tool. A paid account by itself does not establish that a service is appropriate for PHI.

The county must consider the vendor's safeguards, contractual obligations, data retention, access controls, permitted uses, and whether an appropriate business associate agreement is in place. When information is deidentified, counties should follow recognized requirements rather than assuming that removing a name is sufficient.

When employees are uncertain, the correct response is to stop and consult IT, the county attorney, the county privacy or compliance officer, or another designated reviewer.

Free AI vs. Paid AI
Free AI tools can be useful for low-risk work involving public, generic, or fictitious information. However, consumer AI accounts may not provide the administrative controls, audit capabilities, contractual protections, or data-management options needed for county information.

Paid enterprise platforms may provide stronger identity management, administrative oversight, contractual commitments, and protections against customer data being used to train public models. Even so, "paid" does not automatically mean "approved for all county data."

Before approving an AI platform, counties should understand:

- What information the provider collects and retains.
- Whether prompts and uploaded files are used for model training.
- Who can access the information.
- Whether identity and access can be centrally managed.
- What auditing and retention controls are available.
- Whether the service can meet the county's regulatory and contractual obligations.

The right question is not, "Do we have a paid license?" It is, "Has this tool been approved for this data and this purpose?"

AI-Generated Applications Require Extra Caution

AI coding tools can build impressive-looking applications very quickly. That speed can also create false confidence. An application may function correctly during a demonstration while still containing weak authentication, exposed credentials, excessive permissions, insecure database access, vulnerable dependencies, inadequate logging, or missing input validation.

This becomes especially dangerous when the person directing the AI cannot read or maintain the code it creates. If nobody understands how an application authenticates users, protects data, installs security updates, manages dependencies, or recovers from failure, the county has created a system it cannot responsibly support.

AI-generated code should not be considered secure simply because it looks professional or works in a test environment. Even Anthropic's automated security-review documentation warns that its review action is not hardened against prompt-injection attacks and the generated code should be reviewed by a trained security professional before making an application publicly available.

The National Institute of Standards and Technology (NIST) recommends applying secure software-development practices throughout the software lifecycle to reduce vulnerabilities and address their underlying causes. AI-generated applications used within a county need qualified code review, security testing, vulnerability scanning, documentation, change control, backup planning, and ongoing maintenance before they are placed into production.

Responsible Use Is the Goal

Counties do not need to choose between innovation and compliance. They can use AI responsibly by approving appropriate tools, classifying data, training employees, maintaining human oversight, and establishing a review process for higher-risk uses.

Counties should work to adopt an AI policy that emphasizes human oversight and assigns responsibility to employees for reviewing and approving AI-assisted work, especially in legal, financial, cybersecurity, software-development, employment, and public-facing activities.

AI can be an effective assistant, but it should not become an unaccountable decision-maker, an unofficial storage system, or an unsupervised software developer. With the proper guardrails, Iowa counties can take advantage of AI while continuing to protect county systems and public information.

Introducing the ILR Notification System

For many Iowans, buying a home is one of the biggest investments they will ever make. As awareness of title and identity fraud grows, that investment can feel more vulnerable. Iowa homeowners and business owners are asking how they can stay informed about unexpected recording activity that could affect their property, and Iowa County Recorders are hearing those concerns firsthand.

In response, Iowa Land Records is excited to introduce the **ILR Notification System**, a new free service that gives Iowa property owners another way to stay informed about recording activity that may affect their property. Users can create notifications for individual or business names and receive an email when a newly recorded document matches the name and county criteria they have selected to monitor. **The ILR Notification System is currently undergoing final preparations and testing before becoming available to the public.**

The new service is built on the ILR Search platform, where users can search public real estate records by name. The ILR Notification System takes that service a step further by allowing users to save the names and counties they want to monitor and receive an email when a newly recorded document matches their selected criteria.

The notification gives users an opportunity to review new recording activity in a timely manner and determine whether anything needs further attention. While a match does not necessarily indicate fraudulent activity, it can help bring unexpected recording activity to the user's attention. The ILR Notification System also demonstrates what continued investment in Iowa's shared land records technology can make possible.

"Iowa Recorders collaborate statewide through Iowa Land Records. This system enables us to pool resources for services including a statewide database, a statewide e-recording platform, and now a statewide notification system. This service reflects what county recorders do best: working locally, collaborating statewide, and finding practical ways to better serve Iowans." — Jamie Stargell, Adams County Recorder

This shared approach provides a statewide notification system at no cost to its users and eliminates the need for individual counties to purchase or maintain separate notification tools. By integrating the ILR Notification System into the existing statewide infrastructure that already supports Iowa's land records, the service can provide a consistent and accessible resource for property owners across the state.

Simple to Set Up. Free to Use.
Once available, ILR Search users can access the ILR Notification System through a free Iowa Land Records Search account. Once signed in, users can create a notification profile, choose the names and counties they want to monitor, and receive an email when a newly recorded document matches their entered profile criteria. There is no charge to create an Iowa Land Records Search account, search for records, view documents, or access the new ILR Notification System.

For counties, the ILR Notification System provides a new resource when constituents have questions or concerns about their property records. Iowa County Recorders remain an important local resource for understanding recorded documents, while the new statewide service gives residents another way to stay connected to those records.

We invite you to learn more about the ILR Notification System and follow Iowa Land Records for updates as the new service becomes available.

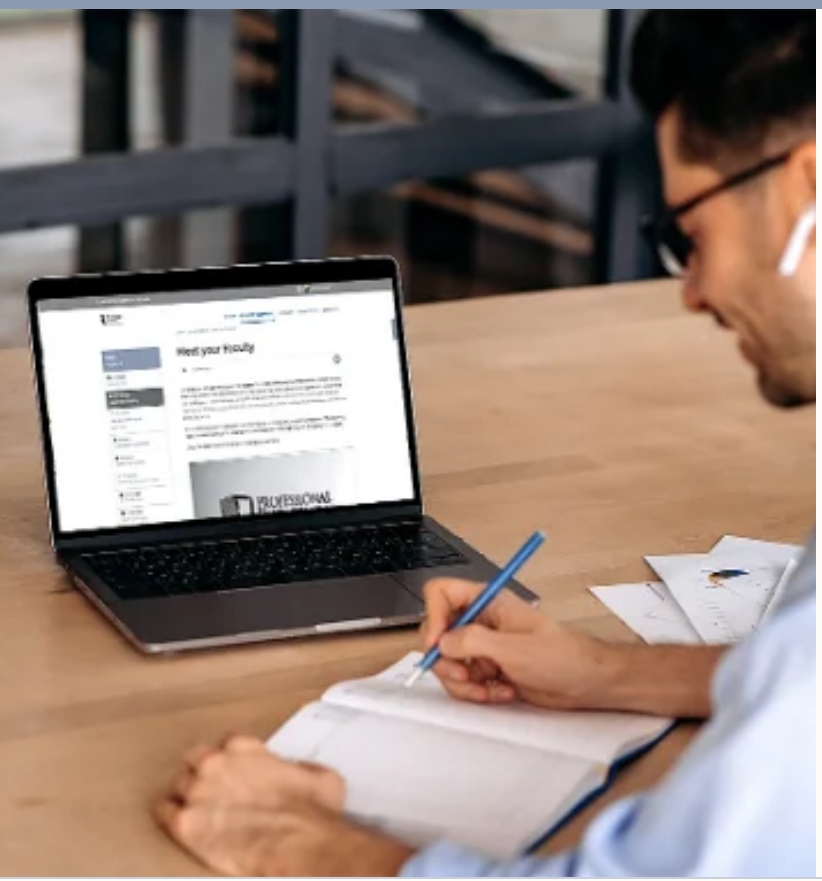
Scan the QR code or visit iowalandrecords.org/resources/property-notification to stay up to date and learn more.

COHORT STARTS
NOVEMBER 2, 2026

NACo Artificial Intelligence Leadership Academy

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Luke Afeman
Professional Development Academy
lukea@pdaleadership.com

2026-2027 Calendar

November 2026
18-19 ISAC Board of Directors Meeting (ISAC Office)

December 2026
2 County Budgeting Webinar - NCO Series (Zoom)
2-4 80th Annual Iowa County Engineers Conference (Veterans Memorial Community Choice Credit Union Convention Center, Des Moines)

January 2027
7-8 New County Officer's School (The Meadows Event and Conference Center)
14 ISAC Open Meetings/Open Records Online Training (Zoom)
28 Statewide Supervisors Meeting (Embassy Suites Des Moines Downtown)

February 2027
17 ISAC Open Meetings/Open Records Online Training (Zoom)
19-23 NACo Legislative Conference (Washington, D.C.)

March 2027
10 ISAC Legislative Reception (Hilton Des Moines Downtown)
11-12 ISAC Spring Conference (Veterans Memorial Community Choice Credit Union Convention Center, Des Moines)
25 ISAC Open Meetings/Open Records Online Training (Zoom)

June 2027
16 ISAC Scholarship Golf Fundraiser (Toad Valley Golf Course, Pleasant Hill)

July 2027
17-20 NACo Annual Conference (Chatham County/Savannah, GA)

August 2027
25-27 ISAC Annual Conference (Veterans Memorial Community Choice Credit Union Convention Center, Des Moines)

If you have any questions about the meetings listed above or would like to add an affiliate meeting to the ISAC calendar, please contact Kelsey Sebern at ksebern@iowacounties.org.

2026 ISAC Preferred Vendors

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County Risk Management Services, Inc. representing IMWCA
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Community State Bank
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Iowa Communities Assurance Pool (ICAP)
Iowa Public Agency Investment Trust (IPAIT)

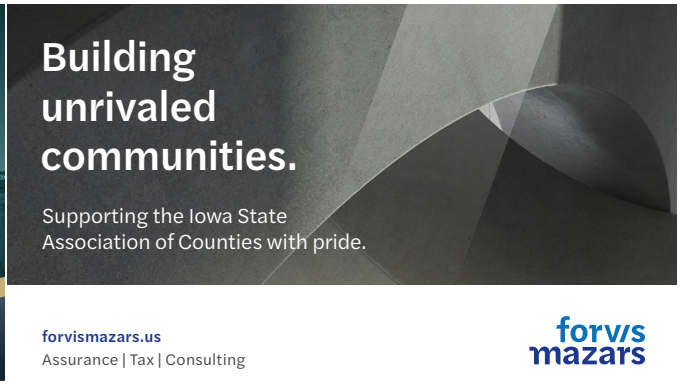
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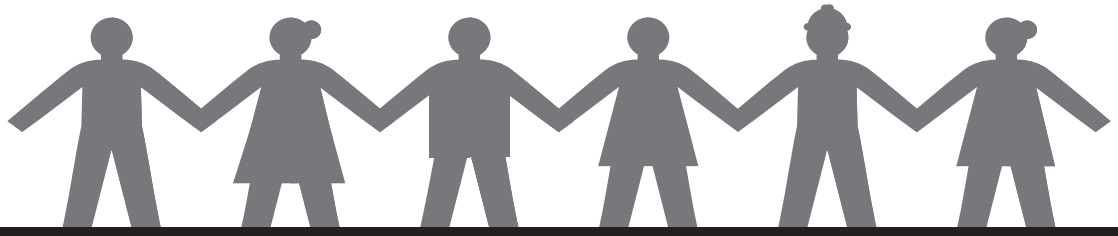
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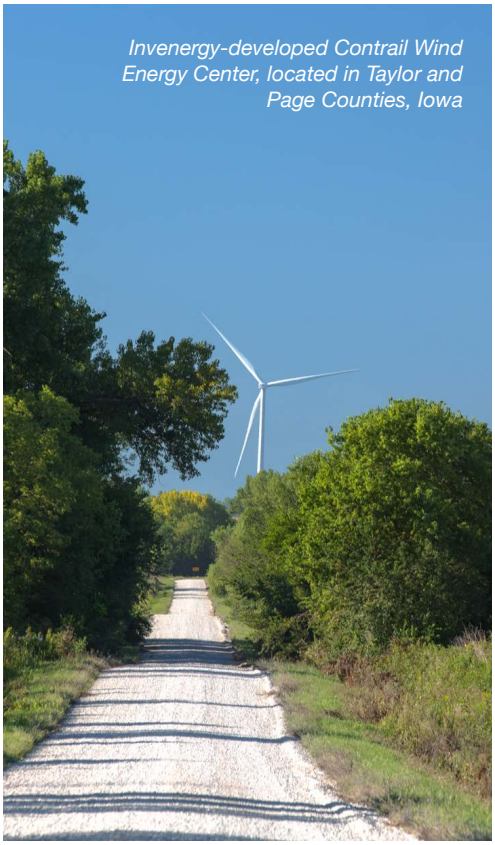
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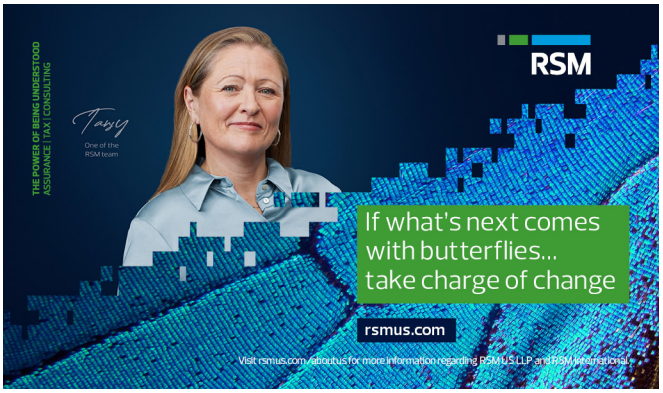
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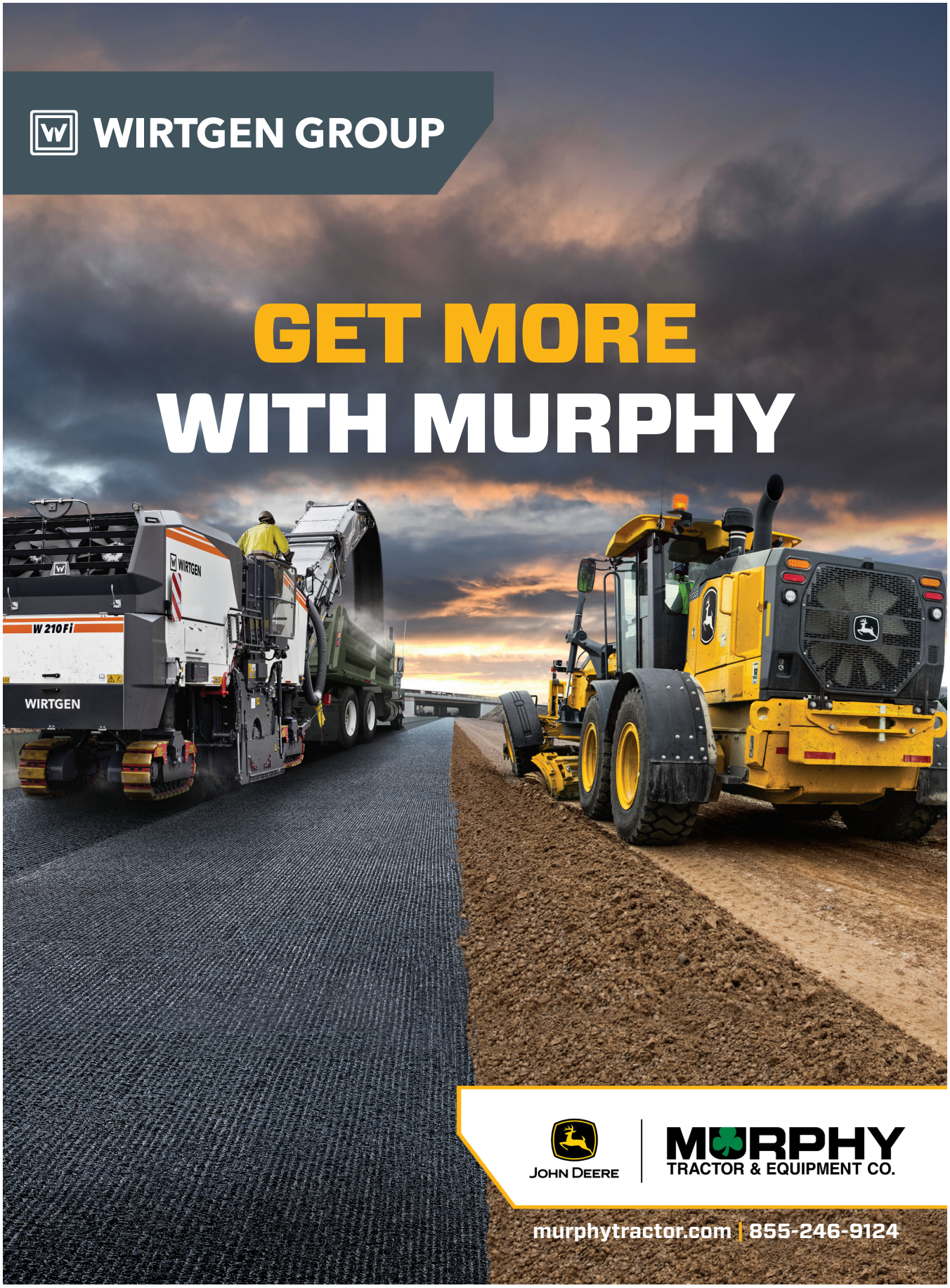
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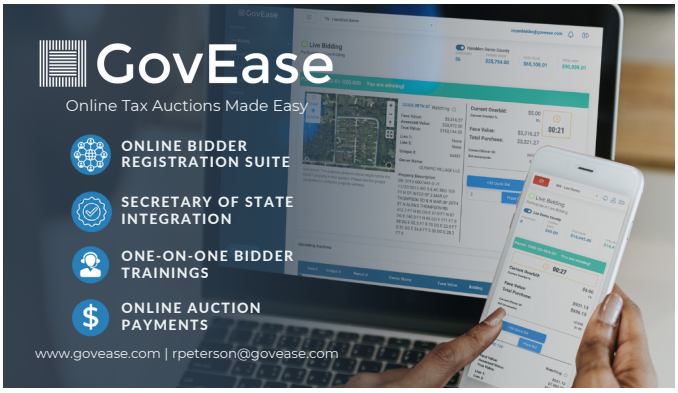
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Waterloo Fiber System — City of Waterloo
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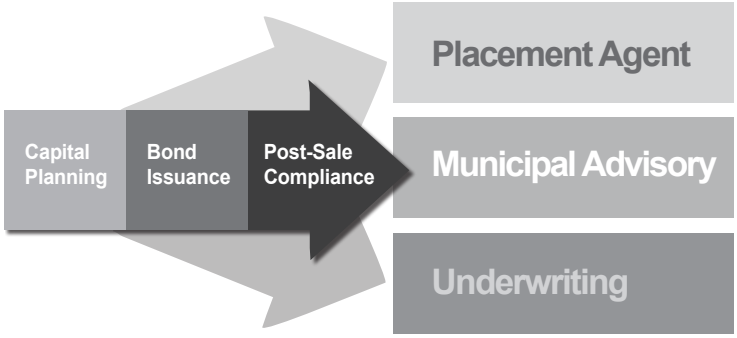

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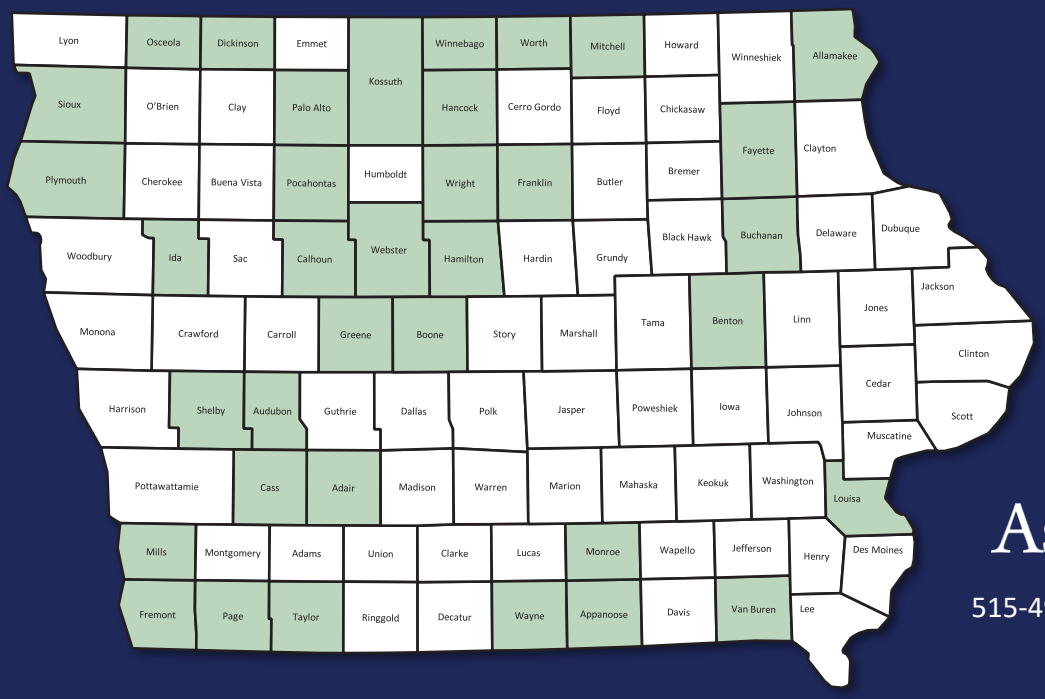
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