



RED OAK ALUMNI NEWSLETTER

THE *Heart* OF SOUTHWEST IOWA

By the Red Oak Heritage Foundation

Volume 3 | Issue 2 | July 2024



ALUMNI SPOTLIGHT

Red Oak Alumni Rebecca Butler

Written by: Larry Brandstetter

Image from Rebecca Butler

When Rebecca (Becky) Butler, ROHS class of 1981, was a student at Red Oak High School, her peers and her teachers watched her growth as a positive leader inside and outside of the classroom and saw a young woman whom others would look to for a path forward. This was a class with strong leadership coming from several of the young women.

Becky, and her brother Dan, class of '82 grew up in a family of retail entrepreneurs. Richard, '58 and JoAnn Berggren Butler, '58 owned and operated the Sears Catalog store located on the east side of the Square for 25 years from 1968 to 1993 when Sears closed all "catalog" stores.

Becky remembers, "We were fortunate to grow up surrounded by caring people with a belief in hard work and taking care of your neighbors."

Working at the store was not an option as was an emphasis on strong academic rigor and involvement in extra-curricular activities. Music, speech, and theatre stand out as well as being a piano student of Yva Works.

When Rebecca was a student at Drake University, her peers and the faculty noted her leadership and were appreciative of the forward-thinking insights she expressed and developed as a young woman whom others would look to and want to join.

Rebecca graduated from Drake in 1985 Summa Cum Laude with a Bachelor of Science in Business Administration with majors in Marketing and Human Resources Management. She was awarded the Oreon E. Scott Distinguished Service Award as the outstanding graduating senior at Drake for her leadership and service to the university.

Rebecca's 32 year career with global computing and software giant IBM grew into a Senior Executive position built on leadership as a team builder, planner of innovation along with high level communication and messaging.

Rebecca became a global market leader for IBM Cognitive Process Transformation which included a range of services across consulting, business process operations and enabling technologies based on IBM Watson. She ended her career as Director of Global Marketing for IBM's consulting business responsible for global marketing strategy and demand generation. She concurrently served five years as Senior State Executive for IBM in Iowa. This role focused on employee community engagement and government relations.

In 2017, as she retired from IBM, Rebecca Butler Mona was elected President-Elect of Optimist International, one of the world's largest service organizations. She served as President during the 2018-19 Optimist International Centennial year followed by Past President/ Board Chair in 2019-20. The membership benefited from her strong and advanced skills as a leader, planner, and communicator with a collective innovative vision to move the organization forward. They also saw her desire to be a collaborator as well creating strong initiatives with peer civic organizations Kiwanis, Lions and Rotary.

ALUMNI SPOTLIGHT CONTINUED

Her time during and after as President, was punctuated by the way she involved her family in efforts to grow and invigorate the Junior Optimist program. Daughter Amanda and son Alex as well as her husband Mike traveled extensively with Rebecca promoting programs for younger students with ties to Optimist clubs across the US, Canada, Caribbean, and other countries. Her time in business and with Optimist International has taken her to over 30 countries.

Even after all her leadership in strategy and marketing, innovation, team building, community betterment and business transformation, Becky is still involved in bringing opportunities for self-betterment and change to people

as an independent coach of health and wellness.

Throughout all of her extensive and time consuming efforts at a high level of leadership, she managed, as many women are called on to do these days, the very tough and difficult task of threading that needle between work, volunteer time and family.

A proud Iowan, Becky attributes her core values to her “roots” growing up in Red Oak – learning the importance of making a positive impact in schools, work and community, while centering life on family. That balance of career, volunteer and family is one her greatest achievements, and she points to her family as truly her greatest joy in life.

RED OAK BUSINESS SPOTLIGHT

BILLINGS & MENSEN LAW FIRM: SHIRLEY BILLINGS

Written by: Montgomery County YMCA

Image from Shirley Billings



You can find Shirley Billings at 111 E Reed St. at the Billings Mensen Law Offices and soon to move across the street. She has been working there for many years. She is an outstanding paralegal and does a lot of tax work for the offices. She loves working with the public and really doesn't have a time frame for retirement.

The Heritage Club Hall of Fame member is chosen each year by the YMCA Endowment Committee to honor someone for commitment to building not only the Y for today, but also into the future.

This year's recipient was Shirley Billings. Shirley was ready to retire from some of her committees in the community, so the YMCA wanted to bestow upon her the honor to join the ranks of the Heritage Club Hall of fame.

Born and raised in Red Oak, Shirley grew up on 10 acres where Acorn Acres now sits. In visiting Shirley about her life and accomplishments, she shares that at the time she was growing up, that part of town was neither town nor country, but it was country enough to lack streetlights which made for sometimes a frightening walk to town. She met her husband, LaVon Billings one summer when he was home from college and she worked at Jerry's Park and Eat, a new “dine in your vehicle” locale, which was south of where Burger King now sits. Shirley can tell you many stories of the changes in the downtown area and the different homes around the community. On March 23, 1958, Shirley was united in marriage to LaVon Billings.

LaVon finished college and after a brief time in Omaha, he moved his law practice to Red Oak where Shirley worked with him as a paralegal.

Shirley has been fully immersed in the community of Red Oak all her life graduating from Red Oak High School in 1956 and was baptized, confirmed and married in the Bethlehem Lutheran Church when it was on Reed Street between 5th and 6th streets until it burned in 1959 and the new church rebuilt where it currently stands east of Chautauqua Park. She is still a member today. LaVon passed away in 2004, but Shirley has continued her commitment to family, community and her job.

Through the years, she has served on numerous boards

BUSINESS SPOTLIGHT CONTINUED

and committees including the Red Oak Chamber Board on the finance committee, the Red Oak historical preservation committee since 2008 and was appointed to the downtown urban renewal board as historical committee representative.

She was President of the YMCA Board of Directors for many, many years. She was on the Mystery Drop committee since the event's inception and was a judge that first year, waiting all night for the mystery "drop" to arrive!

She has also helped us at the Y with our fun birthday week each year in October where we celebrate our Y's birthday by contributing college gift bags for member drawings – one for Iowa State and one for University of Iowa – even when she's a Creighton fan!

Before Covid she did a lot of walking at the YMCA but things changed for her after that. She ponders how life and people change but we must always keep rolling along with moving forward. Shirley still works at Billings and Mensen Law Firm and manages Billings Apartments. In fact, for an example of one of her days, she lets the carpet installers into one of her

apartments, carpenters for any type of remodeling, shows the apartments, writes up leases, goes to the post office and other errands, all before arriving at work at 8 a.m.!

Shirley can be found at most of the home games for the Creighton Bluejays. She is a devoted fan and has held season tickets for many years. Then, weekends, beginning in the springtime of the year, you can find her heading to the Ozarks where they have had a lake home since 1967. She is very active in the Homeowners Association for her neighborhood. And of course, it wouldn't be Shirley if she wasn't involved there too. Towards fall, they button up the house and shut it down till the next year. That is one of her favorite things to do with family. Making memories with her son Scott, daughter-in-law, Molly, and grandchildren, Nicholas, Elizabeth and William is what life is all about and truly makes her life wonderful!

Thank you, Shirley, for your involvement in the community and you are truly an amazing person.

RED OAK MIDDLE SCHOOL 1917 LOFT RENOVATIONS PREVIEW

Written by: Larry Brandstetter

A preview of an article coming in the October edition. Whether you called this building the High School, the Junior High, or the Middle School, coming this fall 25 families will call it "home". Lots of photos will reveal what the classrooms looked like when you called this school your home away from home and what those classrooms will look like as a 1, 2, or 3 bedroom apartments.



Red Oak Middle School 1917 Loft Renovation Project, Photo by Larry Brandstetter

RED OAK PUBLIC SCHOOLS

Written by: Mark Erickson, Activities Director

RED OAK ACTIVITIES - JULY 2024

The Red Oak School District Activities Department is proud to highlight our students, participants, and athletes from our winter seasons! Our coaches, directors, and sponsors strive to instill positive character qualities within our programs. Our activities department would like to publicly thank our alumni, businesses, and entire community for their ongoing support! Please read the exciting news about our programs and students below.

SPRING AND SUMMER SPORTS AWARDS

Fourteen of our senior participants earned Hawkeye Ten Conference All Academic recognition by earning a 3.5 GPA or above throughout their high school career. Those participants were Jaydin Lindsay (softball), Joselyn McCunn (softball), Abigail Johnson (tennis), Elaine Klepinger (tennis), Merced Ramirez (tennis and softball), Hailey Rydberg (tennis), Grace Wingfield (tennis), Kayden Wingfield (tennis), Kaysie Kells (girls soccer and softball), Ty Jenkins (boys soccer), Joshua LeRette (boys soccer and tennis), Bryton Bergren (boys track), Cyrus Mensen (boys track and boys golf), and Max DeVries (tennis).

Merced Ramirez, Joselyn McCunn, and Jaydin Lindsay earned Academic All-State recognition by meeting at least two of the following criteria: ACT Composite Score of 27 or higher, Cumulative GPA of 3.75 or higher, and/or Top 20% of their school's senior class.

Two of our students performed well at the state track meet in May. Jocelyn O'Neal was 16th with a personal record of 26.58 in 200 meter dash, 12th in the 400 meter dash with a personal record of 1:00.02, and jumped 16-03 to place 14th.



Braden Sifford was 19th in the 200 meter dash clocking in at 22.81. He ran 11.30 in the 100 meter dash finals to earn 5th place, and he finished 20th in the 400 meter dash with a time of 51.95.

One softball player earned All Hawkeye Ten Conference recognition. Jaydin Lindsay was named to the Honorable Mention Team.

Cale Hall received 2nd Team All District recognition for baseball. His teammate, Brett Erickson, received 2nd Team All District and 2nd Team All Conference recognition.

ATHLETIC BOOSTERS, MUSIC BOOSTERS, FFA ALUMNI AND SUPPORTERS

Our activities department is blessed with the amazing support of our Red Oak Athletic Boosters, Red Oak Music Boosters, and the FFA Alumni and Supporters. The groups help raise funds and volunteer for our activities programs. Without these amazing people, our students would not have the funds to purchase items for their programs. The work they do also go toward providing opportunities for students to be involved in ways that would not be otherwise possible. If anyone is interested in donating time, money, and/or wants to learn more about how to support these groups, please contact Activities Director Mark Erickson at ericksonm@redoakschools.org or 712-623-6610.



MONTGOMERY COUNTY HISTORICAL SOCIETY

VOICES FROM THE PAST

Written by: Dave Mcfarland

Mr. R Watkins told of his memories of early Red Oak. He pointed out how the 'Red Oak Express' started out being printed in Quincy over in Adams County for the first year (1867). Webster Eaton was the publisher. Reverend W.W. Merritt, E. P. Milner, and W. A. Harding were some of the first subscribers. It was moved to Red Oak Junction the following year to the second story of a building on the northwest corner of the Red Oak Junction square.

Eaton had gotten the inspiration to start the newspaper one day as he got off the stage coach, at we now know as 4th and Coolbaugh Street. He overheard Jason Packard and W.W. Merritt talking about needing to post tax notices in a newspaper, most likely at Glenwood.

Watkins had some special memories of Webster Eaton; he and Webster formed a partnership in a "sort of barber shop." Business was actually carried out in the print shop of the newspaper, when not busy. Eaton was pretty good at giving a shave and Milner could give a descent hair cut. He related that they started out giving their services for free. They soon became quite busy and realized they need to profit some way from their grooming endeavors. So they began charging the outrageous sum of one cigar for a shave and haircut.

Watkins also told of how there was only a few stores on the Square. This was about the time they move the court house from Frankfort to the Junction (January 1866). Watkins' father-in-law was running a saw mill on the river at that time and Watkins related that he help make runners for the move. The runners were cut about six to eight inches thick to support the weight of the court house. He also helped with the move.

The court house was jacked up and placed on those runners. Then eighteen yoke of oxen were hitched to the court house and the move began. However, it began to rain, turning to sleet, and then to heavy snow. It became so cold that the move had to be halted.



Watkins told of delivering mail and the 'good roads' of the time. Often a road was no more than two ruts cut into the grounds and how sometimes two ruts were even ploughed so you could tell where the road was and not get lost on the open prairie.

He told of making money by buying corn, hauling it to Council Bluffs and selling it. Land was cheap, land just east of Eighth Street sold for ten dollars an acre, but money was hard to come by. Besides everybody thought a man, who paid those prices for brush land was crazy back then.

Watkins would some ten years on would help build one of the first wood frame country schools. As civilization came and government became more organized they began organizing school districts. The plan was that every four section (square miles) of the county would have a school and no child would have to walk more than a mile to school. The plan did not always work out, often due to a lack of people.

Pittsburg #8 was organized about three miles south Red Oak Junction. The records have been lost or were never written down, but sometime around 1870 or 1871 it was constructed. It was built of northern yellow pine. The trees were fell in Minnesota and Wisconsin. The logs were rafted down to Burlington, Iowa by way of the Mississippi River. There they were cut and milled there and then the lumber was shipped to Red Oak on the just completed Burlington Missouri Railroad. Ironically, the Pittsburg School was one of the first wood-framed schools built in county and it will be the last one-room school to be operated in Montgomery County.

But this not the end of the story for the Pittsburg School. The spring of 2024 paid witness to the moving of the

MONTGOMERY COUNTY HISTORICAL SOCIETY CONTINUED

school to the Montgomery County History Center, where it is going to see restoration work and see it opened up and used as a community resource.

Thank you to the Red Oak Express for providing background information for this article.



Pittsburg School relocation to the Montgomery County History Center
Photo by Montgomery County Historical Society

RED OAK COMMUNITY HEART & SOUL

Written by: Samantha Williams, Project Coordinator



Red Oak Community Heart & Soul continues to provide a resident-driven process that is planning for the future of Red Oak. Our volunteers have been busy with community interviews and setting up activities around the Red Oak community to find out more about what we love about Red Oak and thoughts about the future of Red Oak.

In April we held our first Youth Pizza and Board Game Night at Pizza Ranch for fun activities, food, and asked the youth what activities they would like to have in Red Oak. In May we provided food and drinks for the Red Oak High School 2024 Graduating Senior Breakfast event.

Over the past few months, we have been connecting with several local industries for Treat Days to provide treats, activities, and information about Red Oak Heart & Soul.

The information and stories collected from the community will be reviewed to

ensure all demographics in the Red Oak community have been reached. Red Oak Heart & Soul volunteers will identify action items from the gathered information. The action items will be presented this fall to the Red Oak community, the Red Oak City Council, and the Montgomery County Board of Supervisors.

If you would like to get involved or learn more, there are many opportunities to volunteer, donate, or help spread the word. Please visit our website at www.roheartsoul.org or send us a message on Facebook or Instagram at roheartsoul.



Red Oak High School Senior Breakfast. Red Oak Community Heart & Soul Volunteer Evon Carlson & Red Oak Mayor Shawna Silvius.
Photo by Janis Bowden

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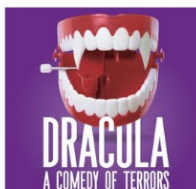
Who Hijacked My Fairytale?
A Theatrical Production
by Kelly Swanson
September 7 (7:30pm) &
September 8 (2:30pm), 2024



Puppy Pals—LIVE
Comedic Stunt Dog Show
February 23, 2025 (2:30pm)

Dracula A Comedy of Terrors
Community Theatre Production
October 2024

11 (7:30pm), 12 (7:30pm), 13 (2:30pm),
18 (7:30pm), 19 (7:30pm), 20 (2:30pm)



Lloyd McCarter
& The Honky Tonk Revival
March 8, 2025 (7:30pm)



Joni Mitchell Tribute
Featuring Carol Montag
March 22, 2025 (7:30pm)



Rock 4 Vets
Benefit Concert
November 16, 2024 (7:30pm)

Prancer
Community Theatre Production
December 2024

13 (7:30pm), 14 (7:30pm), 15 (2:30pm),
20 (7:30pm), 21 (7:30pm), 22 (2:30pm)



The Wilson's
Comedy Showcase
Lee Hardin & Kari Jones
April 5, 2025 (7:30pm)



Joseph Hall's
Elvis Rock 'n Remember
Elvis Presley Tribute Artist
January 11, 2025 (7:30pm)



An Evening of Mediumship
with Psychic Medium
Stacie Bannon
April 26, 2025 (7:30pm)

An Evening with Carol Burnett
Community Theatre Production
January 2025

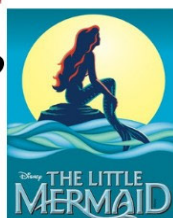
24(7:30pm), 25(7:30pm), & 26(2:30pm)



Dan Bern
Iowa Rock 'n Roll Hall of Fame
Singer-Songwriter
May 3, 2025 (7:30pm)



Marvila Ortega & Martín Guerrero
Latin Music Concert
February 15, 2025 (7:30pm)



Disney's The Little Mermaid
Community Theatre Production
June 2025

13 (7:30pm), 14 (7:30pm), 15 (2:30pm),
20 (7:30pm), 21 (7:30pm), 22 (2:30pm)

FOR TICKETS: WWW.WILSONARTSCENTER.ORG OR CALL 712-623-3183
300 COMMERCE DRIVE, RED OAK, IOWA 51566

RED OAK ALUMNI NEWSLETTER

Thank you for following the Red Oak Alumni Newsletter!
Be on the lookout for the next issue coming out in Fall 2024.

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Want to catch up on past Red Oak Alumni Newsletters?
Visit the [Red Oak Alumni Newsletter](#) webpage!

WE WANT TO HEAR FROM YOU!

Do you have any ideas or suggestions for articles you want to see in the Red Oak Alumni Newsletter? Or do you have a candidate for our Alumni Spotlight? We want to hear from you! Send us an email at, redoakiowa.alumni.newsletter@gmail.com

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Thank you for your continued support!



Red Oak Water Tower, Photo by Hawthorn Digital Studios



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