



# RED OAK ALUMNI NEWSLETTER

THE *Heart* OF SOUTHWEST IOWA

By the Red Oak Heritage Foundation

Volume 2 | Issue 4 | December 2023



Kyle attended Iowa State University in 1992 and received a degree in landscape architecture in 1997. He joined a small group as the 3rd hire. Now he is the Vice-President, and a Principle/Partner of OJB Landscape Architecture and head of the San Diego office. A company that now has offices in Houston, Philadelphia, Boston, Houston, Dallas, Denver and of course San Diego.

We are all hearing the accolades about the Eugene Leahy Mall renovation. Kyle, representing OJB, was the principal designer and engineer of that huge project. A Red Oak connection to the new mall that we all will visit and experience in wonder and awe.

Recently, Kyle led the Omaha Riverfront Revitalization project that transformed about 90 acres of the Missouri Waterfront into several unique public parks. The landscape encourages interacting with the natural environment and the architecture.

Kyle continues to advance while innovating the field of landscape architecture by connecting communities with nature.

Overtime Kyle has incorporated plant ecologies and holistic properties when designing landscapes. Utilizing the technical knowledge and landscape designs for the Brochstein Pavilion at Rice University, The Park at Lakeshore East in Chicago, and the Myriad Botanical Gardens in Oklahoma City.

## ALUMNI SPOTLIGHT

Red Oak Alumni Kyle Fiddelke  
Image from ojb.com

Kyle Fiddelke grew up in Red Oak and went to Red Oak schools from 5th grade until his junior year. His parents moved to north central Iowa for his senior year but has always called Red Oak his home. His core friends from high school are in Red Oak and he still returns for alumni reunions.



The Riverfront, City of Omaha  
Image from ojb.com



Gene Leahy Mall, City of Omaha  
Image from ojb.com

# RED OAK BUSINESS SPOTLIGHT

## RED OAK GREENHOUSES INC. : GROWING FLOWERS FOR OVER 140 YEARS

Written by: Denny Bloom



Not many Businesses can last for 144 years, but Red Oak Greenhouses has been a big part of the Red Oak Community since it was formed in 1879. Not only has it survived, but it has grown from a small floral shop to one of the largest Wholesale Greenhouses in the Country with over a million square feet of structure.

All products are grown in Red Oak and distributed as far away as Denver to the West; Houston to the South; Minneapolis to the North and Chicago to the East. The Company has a significant percentage of the live good plant business in the Midwest. If you travel to or live in a major city in the Midwest, chances are you will find plants produced in Red Oak by the Red Oak Greenhouses.

The Company is one of the major employers of Red Oak with over 100 Employees. 80% of its ownership and management group are Red Oak Graduates who were born and reared in Red Oak. The management team is as follows.

- Russell Johnson: President
- Dennis Bloom: Class of 1966 -  
Vice President
- Bryce Johnson: Class of 1994 -  
Head of Production Department
- Mark Johnson: Class of 1996 -  
Head of Sales Department
- Jordan Johnson: Class of 1998 -  
Head of Transportation Department

The Company has been involved with every Red Oak Community project literally over the last 60 years, providing both leadership and financial support. Bryce Johnson is now President of the Red Oak Community School Board. Dennis Bloom (now back to Denny) is Chairman of the Red Oak Heritage Foundation and Chairman of the Montgomery County Hospital Foundation. He is also the past Chairman of the Montgomery County Development Corporation, the Red Oak Industrial Foundation, and the Red Oak Country Club. In addition, Denny was the Montgomery County Attorney for many years.

The Company has been part of the town of Red Oak for most of the existence of the town itself and is part of the very fiber of Red Oak. From a Historic standpoint, the Company was founded the same year (1979) as the Houghton State Bank; before the Courthouse was built and while the town was still named Red Oak Junction (Junction dropped in 1901). In the late 1800's a Packing Plant, Brewery, Cannery, Flower Mill, and a Brick & Tile Company all were started and ran by hardy hard-working Entrepreneurs. None of them survive as operating businesses today. Although the Greenhouse now owns the building that once housed the Cannery.

The Company is somewhat living proof that to be successful over a long period of time, you need to have a great deal of patience and do the ordinary everyday thing exceptionally well. Growing flowers is a very ordinary mundane thing, and the Company intends to continue to do that ordinary thing exceptionally well for a long time to come.



Red Oak Greenhouse Inc.

# RED OAK PUBLIC SCHOOLS

Written by: Mark Erickson



2023 Red Oak Football Team

## FALL & WINTER 2023

The Red Oak School District Activities Department is proud to highlight our students, participants, and athletes from our fall and 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.

## FALL SPORTS AWARDS

Since our last article, we have learned of many awards earned by our fall participants. 13 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 involved in cross-country, football, football cheerleading, and volleyball - Kaysie Kells, Elaine Klepinger, Joselyn McCunn, Ty Jenkins, Joshua LeRette, Bennett Stickland, Tyler Beeson, Bryton Bergren, Cyrus Mensen, Olivia Bozwell, Merced Ramirez, Hailey Rydberg, and Cloie Bruce. The cross country girls team led the fall group with a combined 3.85 GPA.

Seven of our junior and senior football players earned the honor of representing Red Oak on the All-District Football Academic Team - Seniors Bryton Bergren, Cyrus Mensen, and Tyler Beeson. Juniors Brayden Sifford, Landon Gigstad, Kadyn Riibe, and Tyler Sandholm

Nine of our Red Oak football players earned All-District honors. First Team Offense: Adam Baier - RB, First Team Defense: Nolan Perrien - DL, Second Team Offense: Bennett Johnson - OL, Brayden Sifford - Utility, Second Team Defense: Jack Schmadeke - LB, Baz Clear - LB, Brandon Hernandez - DB, Honorable Mention - Peyton Echternach - OL, Ethan Fouts - OL, Tyler Myers - WR, Bryton Bergren - DB.

Four volleyball players earned All Hawkeye Ten Conference recognition. First Team: Merced Ramirez - S/OPP, Second Team: Nicole Bond - L, Honorable Mention: Marley Grey - OH, Jocelyn O'Neal - MH.



## BAND

This past October, the Red Oak Tiger marching band completed a great competitive marching season. Taking a 3rd placement in parade at the Southwest Iowa Band Jamboree kicked off the season. The Tiger Marching band received a third place ranking at the Prelims event in Glenwood, narrowly missing a finals placement, the band would go on to receive a Division I rating at IHSMA state Marching band and took a 4th place finish at the Mid-Iowa Band Championships in Ankeny Iowa.

Will Pollock represented Red Oak in the Southwest Iowa Middle School Honor band this past November 10th in Atlantic. We have 19 high school students auditioning for the Southwest Iowa Honor Band early this December.

## VOCAL

The ROHS Vocal Music Department has had an exciting Fall. We had 9 students audition for the Iowa All State Chorus, Senior Connor Knight was accepted into the chorus and will perform at the Iowa All State Festival on November 18 at Hilton Coliseum at Iowa State University.

We had 4 students selected for the 2023 Opus Honor Choir, freshmen Anna Butz, Gillian Heim, Ethan Strunk, and alternate Liah Wemhoff. They will perform at CY Stephens Auditorium on Iowa State's Campus on Thursday, November 16 at 4:00 PM.

The ROHS Vocal Music Department had a Fall Concert on Thursday, October 26 where we sang folk songs and songs of the wild west. We also enjoyed getting to perform for the Montgomery County Court of Honors Annual Veteran's Day Assembly. We currently have over 100 students involved in vocal music grades 9-12.

We are currently rehearsing for our December Concert on Saturday, December 16, which will feature all of our choirs and bands. Minningsingers will close the concert that evening with our traditional "Fruitcake". We always invite the Minningsinger alumni up to the stage to join us for this crazy tradition.



Red Oak Opus Honor Choir.

Anna Butz, Gilliam Heim, Ethan Strunk, Liah Wemhoff

## PLAY/MUSICAL

Our high school fall play, "Our Town!" was well attended. We have very talented students in our drama department that led some of our audience members to tears at the end of the play! Our students and directors went above and beyond in their preparation and performance!

## WINTER SPORTS

Our junior high and high school winter sports programs (boys and girls bowling, boys and girls basketball, and boys and girls wrestling) are off to a great start. We will provide a summary of their seasons in the next newsletter article.

## 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 goes 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](mailto:ericksonm@redoakschools.org) or 712-623-6610.

# MONTGOMERY COUNTY FAMILY YMCA

Montgomery County Family YMCA Press Release



**FOR YOUTH DEVELOPMENT®  
FOR HEALTHY LIVING  
FOR SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY**

The Montgomery County Family YMCA became open to 24-Hour Access on Monday, August 21st after the Y's Annual Clean Week. Following a months'- long process of adapting the doors to card access, installation of more cameras, and retrofitting doors the Y was able to offer this premium service to members. Sign-up began the week of August 7th.

Access includes use of the Wilson Gymnasium on the 1st floor as well as the Bulkeley Wellness Center and the Houghton State Bank Track on the 2nd floor and all the fitness equipment located in those places. For safety reasons the building is monitored and areas such as the Carder Tennis Center, locker rooms, showers, and pool are closed.

The price for the premium service of 24-Hour Access is an additional fee monthly for Members who are age 18 and above. Non-members are not able to access the facility after normal business hours.



Montgomery County Family YMCA  
Toddler Time Water Class

Executive Director Carrie Shalters noted, "We were very excited to offer 24-Hour access. We do our best to listen and respond to our members when they have a need or request and hope by moving to 24-Hour access, we will give more folks the opportunity to use the Y during hours that better fit their schedules."

To date, we have well over 100 signed up for this new feature and are using it regularly and expect to see more added in the future.

Another new feature to the YMCA is the Toddler Time. A free program to members with locally accessible fun and safe activities that promote socialization. Monday mornings from 10 – 11 a.m. the 1-hour long classes are geared towards 6 months to 4-year-olds and include alternating water and gym classes. One adult can accompany up to 2 children. Parents, grandparents, guardians, or other family member adults are welcome to chaperone. Non-Members can participate with a one-time fee or purchase of a punch card that offers the 6th day FREE!

Aquatics Director Macy Reeves, who supervises the program, recently commented after the Halloween Party, "We are so glad this program is going well and that we're able to serve families in this way."

For more information about these and other programs, visit our website at [www.mcyymca.com](http://www.mcyymca.com), call us at 712-623-2161, or stop by the Front Desk.



Montgomery County Family YMCA  
Halloween Party Trick or Treat

# MONTGOMERY COUNTY HISTORY CENTER

Written by: Dave McFarland



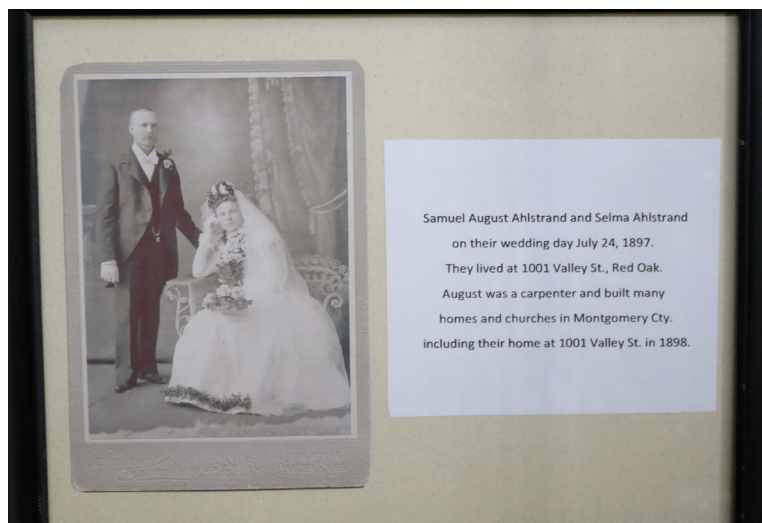
## NOT SO OLD STUFF!

One might think that history and the business of running a museum is all about old, dusty relics that remind us of times long past. But there is another side to it. One of the things is current, exciting, and rewarding.

I had a lady visit the History Center recently and while looking around she found a vintage photograph. It turns out the photo was of the carpenter, who had built her house years ago. We enjoyed presenting her with a copy of the photo.

I might have left out often timely. With the anniversary of Pearl Harbor just a matter of a few days away. I had a family member, who as a mere teenager was at Pearl Harbor within hours of the event, so it has special meaning to me. So, what should happen. I was at a meeting and a good friend and strong supporter of the History Center presented me with a piece of a Japanese fighter plane. Not only a timely artifact, but a symbol of the connections we find in our pursuits.

We are always adding to our collections of artifacts here at the Center, things from the past, yet these are artifacts of today. The History Center sometimes finds itself dealing with some challenging issues. Sometimes almost funny and at other times just plain puzzling.

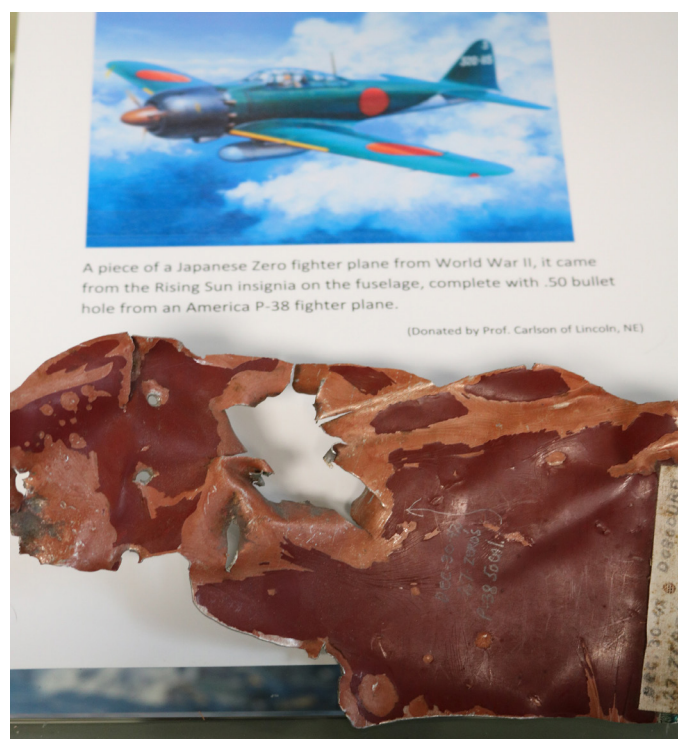


Samuel August Ahlstrand and Selma Ahlstrand on their wedding day July 24, 1897. They lived at 1001 Valley St., Red Oak. August was a carpenter and built many homes and churches in Montgomery Cty. including their home at 1001 Valley St. in 1898.

Montgomery County History Center, Samuel August Ahlstrand and Selma Ahlstrand on their wedding day July 24, 1897. August was a carpenter in Montgomery County.

We had a lap blanket just donated. Something from the 'horse and buggy days', a way to try and stay warm, utilitarian. More than that, this time. It seems a gentleman from here in Red Oak had a favorite horse, Tony. He was so attached to Tony that when the horse died, he could not part with him. It came to pass that Tony became the lap blanket and found a way to remain nearby. This is an artifact that gets you some strange looks when viewed.

We here at the Center often become involved in events that not only help others, but they also present rewards to us as participants. A fundraiser was organized recently to help with a project at Red Oak's Evergreen Cemetery. I got to portray Thomas D. Murphy and present a biographic on him. It came to pass that we had his granddaughter participate. True to the character I was portraying, I got to introduce her as my granddaughter. I not sure if the audience enjoyed it any more than I did and I think granddaughter found it pretty memorable.



A piece of a Japanese Zero fighter plane from World War II, it came from the Rising Sun insignia on the fuselage, complete with .50 bullet hole from an America P-38 fighter plane.

(Donated by Prof. Carlson of Lincoln, NE)

Montgomery County History Center, Piece of a Japanese Fighter Plane

More recently, I received first an email and then a phone call from a lady in Oregon. It seems she purchased an old quilt via the internet. She proceeded to tell me how fascinated she had become by the quilt and was on a quest to learn about its origin. It was a friendship quilt from Red Oak. To be more precise, it was from the First Baptist Church in Red Oak.

We had some interesting conversations, and she became convinced it was her duty and pleasure to see it come home. So, she packed it up and mail it to our doorstep. She refused any offers reimbursement and said the intrinsic reward she felt outweighed any financial sum.

I do not know if I have the words to express the feelings that you get from experiences like these. For me, history becomes here and now and deeply rewarding. Things become artifacts of my today.



Montgomery County History Center, Friendship Quilt from the First Baptist Church in Red Oak.

## RED OAK COMMUNITY HEART & SOUL

Written by: Cynthia Bangston

Red Oak Community Heart & Soul (ROCH&S) is moving right along!

We recently met on September 23rd for our Phase 2 Training. Phase 2 explores ways to build and strengthen community connections. It's about discovering what our community cares about, and then how to use that to build a vision for the future based on what matters most. We met at the Fiveone8 located at 518 N 4th Street, Red Oak. Our coach, Michelle Wodtke Franks, led us through a listening exercise where we learned that we hear and process information differently from one another and how our own perceptions can influence what we hear. As we process the data we receive from our question forms, it is important for us to keep the speaker's point of view in mind.

At the Phase 2 Training, we decided to create a brief questionnaire and send it out to as many people as possible. Even if you may no longer live in Red Oak, we are interested in hearing your thoughts. Perhaps you've thought about moving back to Red Oak someday. If that's the case, please share with us what some of the deciding factors might be.



If you're viewing this electronically, simply click on link below. You can also access the survey on our Facebook page and website listed below.

<https://forms.gle/N7sinq8atML1bfcJ6>

ROCH&S is using the Red Oak School District as our base geographical area to include more voices in this process, both young and old. The vision we create today will directly impact the future of our youth in the community. Our goal is to have a minimum of 680 responses – 10% of the population of the school district. As of November 9th, we are nearly halfway there.

Additionally, we would appreciate your support by liking our Facebook and Instagram page, @roheartsoul, and sharing with your friends. If you're interested in learning more, or would like to volunteer to help, visit our website at [roheartsoul.org](http://roheartsoul.org).

# RED OAK ALUMNI NEWSLETTER

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

Follow the link and share with others to join the [Red Oak Alumni Network](#) and receive the Red Oak Alumni Newsletter quarterly!

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

## WE WANT TO HEAR FROM YOU!

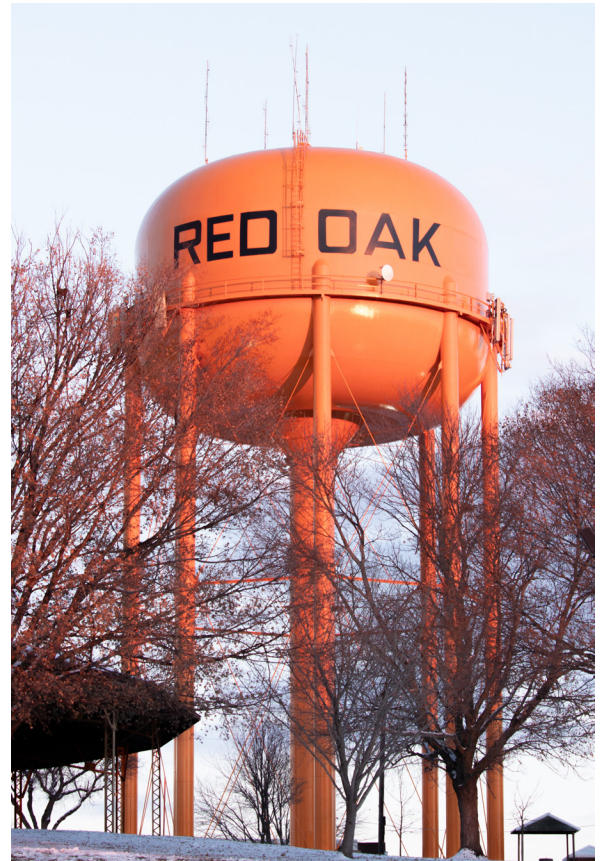
Do you have any ideas or suggestions for articles you want to see in the Red Oak Alumni Newsletter? Or do you have a candidate for our Alumni Spotlight? We want to hear from you! Send us an email at, [redoakiowa.alumni.newsletter@gmail.com](mailto:redoakiowa.alumni.newsletter@gmail.com)

## SUPPORT FUTURE NEWSLETTERS

We are passionate about keeping the Red Oak alumni up to date about our community.

If you would like to help support future newsletters, like this one, [make a donation today.](#)

Thank you for your continued support!



Red Oak Water Tower, Photo by Hawthorn Digital Studios



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