BUSINESS BRIEF

NOVEMBER/DECEMBER 2026

OWATONNA AREA CHAMBER OF COMMERCE

Chamber Kicks off Work Experience Grants for Business



Recent OHS graduates shared their workforce experiences at the Statewide Career-Connected Learning Community of Practice held in Owatonna. The students began working at Central Farm Services, Federated Insurance, CDI International, and MJ Hydrostatics while in high school and are still employed at those businesses 2-5 years later.

The Chamber Foundation is excited to share a grant opportunity for businesses. The Work Experience Grants are funded through seed money by the Sharon & Harvey West Foundation, the Profinium Non-Profit Give Back program, and a yearly commitment from the Chamber Ambassadors. The Chamber Foundation also was just awarded a $15,000 grant from the CLA Foundation to support the Work Experience Grants.

What are Work Experience Grants?

Any member business is eligible to complete a short 1-page application to bring a high school student in to work and gain experience at your business. The grant covers up to $15/hour for 160 hours of work. Placements will focus on high-demand industries such as manufacturing, healthcare, skilled trades, and technology. Students will be recruited through partnerships with Owatonna High School and Workforce Development Inc., while employers will provide structured, skill-based experiences.

Grant information and applications can be found at **Owatonna.org/workforce/work-experience-grants**

Bosch, Chamber Partnership Connects Business and Students



The Bosch Community Fund recently announced a $14,000 award to the Owatonna Area Chamber Foundation to support Made in Owatonna Days and a newer program called Field Days. The combination of these two programs allows the SteeleCoWorks initiative to provide 400 students opportunities during the school year to get out of the classroom to see what careers look like in this region.

Made in Owatonna Days is a long-standing program that three times each school year busses students from OHS, Choice Academy, Medford and Blooming Prairie High Schools to learn directly about local careers.

Field Days are a new addition through Owatonna High School's career navigators, Brian Coleman and Missy Koch. These days take entire classrooms to sites across southern MN in healthcare, construction, technology and more.

Thank you to Bosch Community Fund for the partnership!

Check out Chamber Annual Dinner Details on Page 7

THE IMPACT of Place

What Can We Take Away from 5 Candidate Forums?

At the time you read this, the election is over and the winners have been named. The candidates worked hard to get their message out. We're proud of the work, in partnership with the Owatonna Rotary Clubs, to have hosted five forums featuring School Board, City Council (x2), State Representatives, and County Commissioner. Based on the in-person numbers and the viewers online, we know that thousands of citizens learned about the candidates from the forums and had an educated opinion at the polls. Now the hard work begins for the newly elected candidates as each government entity has its challenges to tackle.



Data Centers Hot Debate this Election *Written by Brad Meier*



Somehow data centers moved to the top of the election topic list this year. The debate has turned into talking points. Let's be real about this. A data center is an economic development project, but the size and scope all depend on what can be possible for land, power and water. For the last three months, Christian Fenstermacher, general manager at Owatonna Public Utilities, has been outlining all the factors that would need to be discussed before even considering a project.

Right now, through my work with Owatonna Partners for Economic Development, I can safely say there is not a data center project looking at Owatonna. That day could come though, and we should be open to consider it.

'Listen to the People' vs. 'Doing What I Think Is Best for the Community'

Written by Brad Meier

A popular answer at this year's candidate forums was that the candidate will 'listen to the people' when making decisions. This sounds good, but it breaks down quickly in reality. Listening to the people often means hearing very different perspectives on the same issue. It may mean the people talking to you are both for and against an issue.

Ultimately, the hard work of being an elected official is listening, being informed, and then making the decision you believe is best. The people who disagree with your decision will say you're not listening. There often is no easy answer, and we elected you to make the difficult decisions.



Owatonna Construction Activity Approaches $57 Million Through September



The Ascend South project was the largest development valuation ($15.4M) in 2026. The project anticipates completion next year.

Owatonna continues to see significant investment in residential and commercial development, with nearly $57 million in construction activity reported through September 2026, according to the City of Owatonna Building Inspection Department. The city has issued 1,466 building permits so far this year, compared to 1,599 during the same period in 2025, when construction activity totaled $58.9 million. Commercial and industrial projects continue to lead the way, accounting for more than $37 million in construction value this year.

Housing construction is one area showing increased activity. Through September, permits for 16 new single-family homes were issued, compared to 11 during the same period last year, representing a 57% increase in construction value. An additional $1.93 million in duplex and apartment construction has also been permitted.

While overall construction activity is slightly below last year's pace, the numbers reflect continued private investment in Owatonna. These investments are important indicators of confidence in our community and help support Owatonna's long-term economic growth.

Give the Gift of Shopping Local with Chamber Bucks



Looking for a meaningful way to recognize your employees this holiday season? Chamber Bucks make it easy to show your appreciation while supporting the local businesses that make our community thrive. Available in $5, $10 and $25 increments, these gift certificates may be redeemed at any Chamber member business, giving recipients plenty of ways to shop, dine and explore Owatonna.

Purchase Chamber Bucks by calling 507-451-7970, emailing mrobbins@owatonna.org, visiting the Chamber office at 120 South Oak Avenue or shopping online at owatonna.org.

Give a gift that keeps your dollars close to home!

OWATONNA AREA CHAMBER OF COMMERCE

BOARD OF DIRECTORS 2026

Oscar Mazariego, Chair
American Family Insurance – Oscar Mazariego Agency

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SPOTLIGHT MEMBER | WENGER CORPORATION



Wenger CORPORATION

Wenger · J.R. CLANCY · GEARBOSS · creative conners · LUTEfish · TSC TEXAS SCENIC COMPANY

Enabling and Inspiring Great Performances

Wenger's roots run deep in Owatonna. Founded here in 1946 by Harry Wenger, then a band director in the local schools, the company has grown to become a world leader in providing innovative, high-quality products and solutions for music education, performing arts and athletic facilities.

A recent example of Wenger's capabilities is on display at Owatonna High School, which opened in 2023, where Wenger provided specialized equipment and furnishings. In the Harry Wenger Music Suite, Wenger provided custom staging, choral risers, posture chairs, music stands, instrument storage cabinets, music library systems, and classroom equipment, all designed to create a welcoming and organized space for both students and teachers.

Student performers can showcase their hard work in the state-of-the-art Wenger Performing Arts Center, which includes a custom Diva® Acoustical Shell for a superior concert experience, and J.R. Clancy rigging and controls systems, giving students hands-on experience with both manual and automated rigging.

In the OHS team rooms, Wenger provided durable AirPro® lockers in Owatonna Husky blue, promoting team unity while ensuring sanitation, security, and organization. Our GearBoss® high-density storage solutions make it easy to keep the athletic equipment in order and maximize space.



At Wenger, we're proud to support our community with quality products that make a difference, at Owatonna High School, as well as at other facilities across the country and around the world.



The company's success and longevity are a credit to its team members who strive daily to deliver on Wenger's core values: **M**otivation, **U**nity, **S**uccess, **I**nnovation, and **C**ustomer Commitment. *(These values spell out "music", highlighting the original spark that ignited the company.)*

Wenger's 600+ employees are a wealth of skills and product knowledge. We believe in fostering creativity and innovation on every team and encourage collaboration on new ideas to improve our processes and better serve our customers. Through our annual United Way fundraiser, company-wide blood drives, charity motorcycle rides, mentorship programs, and many other community events and sponsorships, Wenger employees are committed to the Owatonna community.

After nearly 80 years in business, Wenger looks to the future with optimism and a renewed dedication to enriching lives by enabling and inspiring great performances in music education, performing arts and athletics.

You can find out more about Wenger Corporation on our website WengerCorp.com, or follow us on social media. You can contact us at (507)455-4100 and find a new career with Wenger at WengerCorp.com/careers.

Make the Holidays Matter: Give Local, Gather Local, Celebrate Owatonna

The holiday season is a meaningful opportunity to support Owatonna businesses while creating lasting memories with family and friends. From locally inspired gifts to hometown holiday traditions, the choices we make help strengthen our retailers, restaurants, attractions and hospitality businesses.

Give a Gift That Tells an Owatonna Story

The best gifts create memories and connections. This holiday season, showcase Owatonna through locally made products, Steele County favorites, Owatonna-branded merchandise and experiences that celebrate our community.

Create a gift basket featuring local foods and handmade goods, give a gift certificate to a favorite restaurant or shop, or share an experience such as an art class, wine tasting or local adventure.

Whether shopping for family, friends, employees or clients, local gifts offer more than something to unwrap. They support the people behind our businesses and share a little hometown pride with every recipient.

4 Ways to Make an Impact When Planning for the Holidays

- Purchase gifts locally
- Reserve a table at a hometown restaurant
- Book a gathering space for your holiday party
- Recommend a local hotel.

Every purchase and reservation helps strengthen Owatonna's business community while creating traditions worth repeating.



Bring Your Holiday Traditions to Owatonna

Hosting family and friends is another way to make a local impact. Plan a holiday visit around Small Business Saturday, the Main Street Lighted Parade and Christmas in the Village. Add downtown shopping, a meal at a local restaurant, a visit to a favorite attraction or a meaningful worship service to complete the experience.

Owatonna offers gathering spaces for everything from intimate family dinners to larger holiday celebrations, along with hotel and lodging options for overnight guests. Encourage your guests to stay awhile, explore local businesses and experience the traditions that make our community special.

There's no better time to support local than the holiday season!

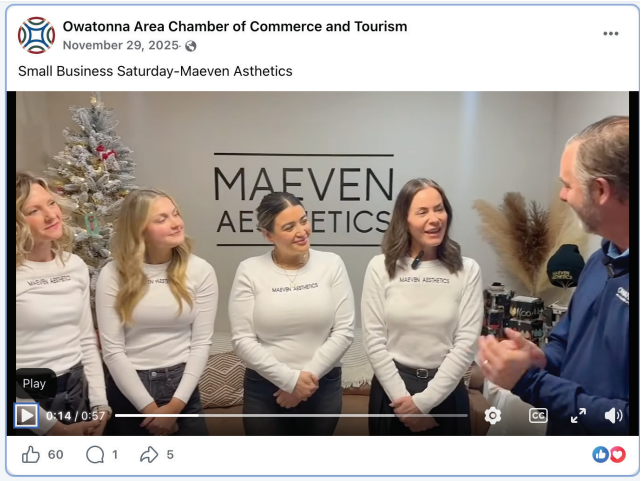


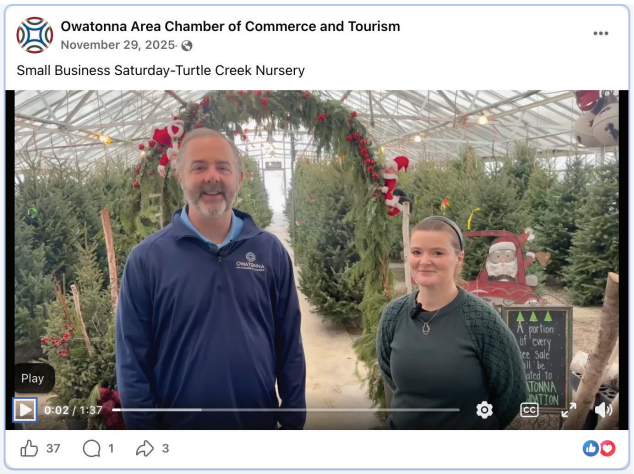
The Girltime Getaways inspired the creation of Owatonna's Fall Downtown Sip & Shop series

Girltime Getaways is a group tour operator, who plans national and international tours out of St. Cloud. Their group brought over 200 visitors to Owatonna over four weekends, making their final Saturday stop in Owatonna each weekend to enjoy shopping, dining, and evening entertainment. Each week our downtown businesses opened their doors for a few extra hours to welcome these groups, and the ladies brought great energy to our downtown! Thanks to all those businesses who gave a few extra hours of their time each Saturday, to help make Owatonna a great place to visit! Owatonna also regularly sees group tours enjoy our Step Back in Time Tour, which includes the History Center, the Orphanage Museum, and National Farmers Bank. Group tours are great ways to showcase Owatonna and welcome newcomers to our community!



When We Shop Small, We Help Owatonna Grow Strong







Just a few of the many Chamber member businesses visited last year on Small Business Saturday.

Every year, as the holiday shopping season begins, communities across the country come together to celebrate Small Business Saturday. It's a day dedicated to supporting locally owned businesses and recognizing the important role they play in making our communities unique, vibrant, and strong.

When we shop at a locally owned business, our dollars do more than purchase a product or service. They help support the people who live and work right here in Owatonna. Local businesses employ community members, pay local taxes, support area organizations, and often reinvest in the community that supports them. Their success is closely connected to the success of Owatonna itself. When local businesses thrive, the entire community benefits.

One of the greatest advantages of shopping small is discovering the character and personality that local businesses bring to our community. Owatonna's locally owned shops, restaurants, service providers, and independent businesses offer opportunities that can't always be found through an online shopping cart: personal connections, unique products, experiences shaped by the people behind the business. Supporting them helps preserve the individuality and hometown spirit that make our community special.

Small Business Saturday is an excellent reminder to shop local, but supporting our locally owned businesses doesn't have to end when the day is over. As community members, business owners, or local employees, when we make shopping locally a regular habit, we help create a stronger, more resilient business community.

If your business is located in the Main Street District and you would like a visit from me on Shop Small Saturday, November 28, for a Facebook Live video, let me know!

EVENTS Update
Julia Seykora, Director of Events

Annual Dinner -The Impact of Place

Friday, January 29, 2027
5:30 - 8:30 PM
Owatonna Country Club

The Impact of Place. Why People Come. Why They Stay. Why it Matters.

Sponsor the Chamber's Biggest Event!

Thank you for supporting our Annual Dinner. Sponsorships are now open for our signature event. Join us in making a lasting impact—commit today!

OWATONNA AREA CHAMBER OF COMMERCE PRESENTS

THE IMPACT of Place

Dip for a Cause: A Dipping Good Time for United Way!

Wednesday, December 16 from 11:00 AM - 1:00 PM
Chamber Conference Room | 120 S Oak Ave

Who makes the best dip in town? You decide! Who will win bragging rights?

Join us for a tasty fundraiser featuring an assortment of local contestants' dips—from savory classics to creative concoctions and sweet treats. Sample the entries, cast your vote for your favorite, and enjoy a fun gathering in support of United Way.

Wish to have your office involved? To enter, email Julia Seykora at jseykora@owatonna.org.

Come hungry, bring a friend, and help us make a difference, one dip at a time!



CALENDAR OF EVENTS

CHAMBER GROWTH BREAKFAST
Housing: Building for Our Future
Thursday, November 12 *(Note that the November breakfast is on the 2nd Tuesday, NOT the 3rd.)*
7:30 - 9:00 AM
Location: Torey's Event Space

BUSINESS AFTER HOURS
Fresh Connections at
Hy-Vee Owatonna
Tuesday, November 24
5:30 - 7:00 PM
Location: Owatonna Hy-Vee

BUSINESS AFTER HOURS
A Night at the Club: Great Food, Great Company & KOWZ/KRUE!
Tuesday, December 15
5:30 - 7:00 PM
Location: Owatonna Country Club

Y-PRO NETWORKING LUNCH AND LEARN
Wednesday, November 18
12:00 - 1:00 PM
Location: TBD

CHAMBER GROWTH BREAKFAST
What's Ahead: Legislative Preview
Thursday, December 17
7:30 - 9:00 AM
Location: Torey's Event Space

WELCOME NEW MEMBERS

7 BREW COFFEE
Hannah Stoutner
661 W Bridge Street, Owatonna
info@7brew.com
(479) 358-9274

BLUEBIRD CLEANING COMPANY LLC
Amber Sikel
66561 120th Avenue,
Claremont, MN 55924
ambyrose@gmail.com
(507) 456-5220

MARTIN MARIETTA MATERIALS, INC.
Jim Flaaen
1478 NW 26th Street, Owatonna
jim.flaaen@martinmarietta.com
(651) 728-3075

OLMSTED MEDICAL CENTER - OWATONNA AMBULATORY SURGERY CENTER
210 North Oak Ave Suite 110, Owatonna
(507) 935-5601

OLMSTED MEDICAL CENTER - OWATONNA PODIATRY
225 Cedardale Drive SE, Owatonna
(507) 451-5950

ON POINT AWARDS, LLC
Ryan Fischer
420 N Cedar, Owatonna
onpointawardsmn@gmail.com
(507) 599-6680

RAND RECOVERY HOMES, LLC
Rebecca Rand
865 25th St NE, Owatonna
rebecca@randrecoveryhomes.com
(507) 456-3215

TRALO COMPANIES
Josh Ihlenfeld
3525 N. County Road 45, Owatonna
joshi@traloinc.com
(507) 446-8633

Upcoming Office Closings for the Holiday Season

With heartfelt thanks for your continued support, we wish you peace, joy, and prosperity in the year ahead. Below are the upcoming dates the Chamber office will be closed to allow our team to enjoy time with family and friends.

Thanksgiving: November 26 and November 27
Christmas Eve: December 24 – closing at noon
Christmas Day: December 25
New Year's Eve: December 31 – closing at noon
New Year's Day: January 1, 2027

CHAMBER PACK DEADLINE

Supply 550 copies of your promotional insert for January/February mailing; $150 by **December 23rd.**

OWATONNA AREA CHAMBER OF COMMERCE

120 South Oak Ave | Owatonna, MN | owatonna.org
P: 507.451.7970| E: oacct@owatonna.org
Hours: Monday–Friday, 8 AM–5 PM

Riverland COMMUNITY COLLEGE
Success Starts Here.
www.riverland.edu

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