



First Friday News & Views

Monthly Newsletter of the *First Friday Breakfast Club, Inc.*



October 2021

Volume 26

Issue 10

Next Meeting

October 1

7:00 a.m.



Meeting Location

**Hoyt Sherman Place
15th & Woodland
Des Moines**



October Speaker

**Jeff Rufus
Byrd**



FFBC Website

ffbciaowa.org



On the Road Again

by Byron Huff, Board President

Many people dream of travel as part of their vacation plans or as something they would enjoy in retirement. Jim and I have never been big travelers in that we do not seek a destination every year. The majority of time when we travel has been to see friends and family, which has taken us to Palm Springs, where friends spend the winter, and to Rapid City, South Dakota, where friends moved to. We also have friends who permanently moved to Puerto Vallarta about six years ago; we hope to have a second home there at some point to have a warm destination when Iowa winters get to be too long.

We have friends who were going to Woodward to camp, and they invited us up to enjoy the evening. We quickly decided we needed something to camp in which would allow us to stay with our friends and take our bikes along where we could ride the High Trestle Trail with them and stay overnight.

We started searching in August 2020, but quickly found out there was a shortage of motorhomes due to the pandemic. We looked at a motorhome and thought it might be what we wanted, but we wanted to consult with our friends who already have one. After only one hour, we called back to tell the dealer we would buy it, only to be told it was sold. I started searching online for motorhomes and accidentally came upon one that looked like it would work, even though it was a little bigger than what we really wanted. I called the dealer and told him we wanted to buy it and would put a deposit on it sight unseen.

The dealer was in rural Iowa near Colfax on a rock road, built on what had been a family farm that still existed along with the dealership. We took our friend along to help us, but we just looked at it and said we would take it without even driving it. We were more fearful of losing this one to another buyer than worrying about what we really wanted.

We went camping in Woodward almost every weekend with our friends, and the motorhome served us well, but I hated the setup that included trying to level it on the gravel lots that were not at all level. Our camping came to an abrupt end when we had an early freeze in October 2020. Our motorhome was at the dealer for warranty work when I called to tell them it would need to be winterized quickly as it had a full tank of water.

After picking it up and taking it to our storage space on the south side, I decided to research having a leveling system installed. I found the system I wanted



[continued on page 2]

that could be installed in White Pigeon, Michigan. Jim and I made our road trip in the motorhome to White Pigeon on Sunday, November 22, staying in a hotel (the motorhome was winterized and I didn't want to fill it with water only to have it winterized again when we returned) for an early installation on Monday. Spending several thousand dollars did not seem like much to alleviate my frustration setting up for camp.

That trip taught us some things we did not like about the motorhome; the real deal breaker was that Jim thought the front passenger seat was too cramped, and he said he would not ride up front with me. That made me decide that we needed to look for another motorhome that offered a better seat for him.

I found a slightly used motorhome in Perry, Iowa, that was a class "A" which means the motorhome was built on top of a powertrain, and the front seating was far more comfortable. Our first motorhome was a class "C" which is short for cut-a-way chassis where you see the front of a truck with the chassis sitting on it with a bunk you could see above the truck front.

This new motorhome was also significantly bigger going from our original 28 feet in the class "C" to 37 feet in the class "A." We are enjoying the extra space even if it is far more than we need. We have pocket doors that separate the master bath from the bedroom and from the living area along with another half bath.

We just took our longest camping trip yet this past weekend, traveling to the Rustic Barn Campground a few miles from Dubuque in rural Wisconsin. Two of our friends rode with us in our motorhome, and two other friends drove their motorhome. We had a wonderful time and also discovered some things that we like and dislike about our latest vehicle. The moral of the story is to do more research before buying anything.



Thanks to **Don Jones** for introducing **Edith Crawford**, our September speaker. Thanks to **David Cotton** for managing our website and to **Nicholas Williams** for managing all of our Microsoft IT infrastructure. Thanks to **Wade Petersen** for his work as our newsletter editor. *Thank you to all our contributors to the newsletter!*

The **deadline** for the **November newsletter** will be **October 25**. If you have something on your mind to share, type it up and email it to Wade (wadecpetersen@gmail.com) by the copy deadline.

A special thank-you to those FFBC members and friends who have chosen to designate FFBC through the **Donor Direct** program of **United Way**. The contributions through United Way are tax deductible. Those who have chosen this means of supporting FFBC have gone to the trouble of completing their United Way campaign worksheet by designating FFBC as the beneficiary of their generosity. FFBC is an eligible recipient of such funding designations.



United Way

Thanks also to all those **Amazon shoppers** who designate FFBC as the beneficiary when shopping **smile.amazon.com**. Your shopping with smile.amazon.com means that a small contribution to FFBC will be made with every purchase. Proverbial, found money.



Our fundraising efforts are ongoing to fund our scholarship program. To date we have raised over **\$450,000** for scholarships that are awarded to Iowa high school seniors who have done remarkable, courageous things to reduce homophobia and teach about LGBTQ issues in their schools and communities. Please consider a tax-deductible **contribution online** or by sending a check.

Please consider a **tax-exempt testamentary gift**. Our first legacy gift to the FFBC scholarship program came from **Cliff Paulsen** to the tune of over **\$67,000!** Contact **Byron Huff** for details or with questions.



Thinning Their Own Herd

by Jonathan Wilson

The COVID-19 pandemic has devolved into, essentially, a pandemic among the unvaccinated. More than 95% of deaths from COVID-19 are of unvaccinated people. About 27% of new hospitalizations are among young children who are not yet eligible for vaccination.

Vaccination is **THE** answer to curbing the spread of this virus. So far, the existing vaccines are effective against the original COVID-19, as well as the highly transmissible Delta, Lambda, and Mu variants. Curbing the spread of these variants is key to minimizing more, and potentially more contagious and lethal, variants. Masks and social distancing are additional tools at our disposal for curbing the spread.

Those are the facts; like them or not. We are not helpless in this challenge to public health and our economy. It is within our collective capacity to do what is already known to help overcome the challenge.

Unfortunately, whether to get vaccinated, wear a mask, and socially distance have been politicized, largely thanks to the ex-president and his sycophants, including Iowa's Republican governor. Governor Reynolds and the Republican-controlled legislature have forcefully resisted mandating vaccination and masks. She has justified this by expressing confidence that Iowans would "do the right thing," i.e. getting vaccinated and wearing masks. That claim is hollow and demonstrably mistaken.

The governor herself went to the Iowa State Fair and didn't wear a mask. The same goes for Iowa Republican Senator Charles Grassley. I went to the Iowa State Fair when there were more than 117,000 people in attendance. I was fully vaccinated and wearing a mask the whole time that I was there. For the whole day, I saw only **19** other masked attendees. That's a shocking .016239% of attendees. I didn't see everyone there that day, but I saw a lot of them. If that wasn't a super spreader event, there's no such thing as a super spreader event.

Video footage of the most recent University of Iowa and Iowa State football games showed large crowds and almost no masks. Two more super spreader events. I've been to the grocery store in Bloomfield, Iowa; Cantril, Iowa; and Des Moines, Iowa; and have seen very few others "doing the right thing."



The unvaccinated are dropping like flies, notably including influencers who have scoffed at the importance or efficacy of vaccinations. A California church member chose not to trust Dr. Anthony Fauci, and chose, instead, to trust his interpretation of the Bible. He was unvaccinated and died of COVID. A young father in Las Vegas was fearful of side effects from the vaccine. He was unvaccinated and died of COVID, leaving a grieving widow and little kids to fend for themselves. A Republican official in Texas posted on social media his disdain for the vaccine. He was unvaccinated and died of COVID. Radio host Dick Farley from West Palm Beach, Florida, downplayed the danger of the virus. He was unvaccinated and died of COVID. And Philip Valentine, a conservative radio host in Nashville, Tennessee, was a vaccine doubter. He was unvaccinated and died of COVID.

Some have wrongheadedly claimed that refusing vaccination, masking, and social distancing, is merely the exercise of personal freedom. I certainly agree that people have the freedom *not* to do the right thing -- so long as the decision and adverse consequences impact only them. When the exercise of personal freedom adversely impacts others, however, the freedom must, and should be, circumscribed, whether we're talking about vaccinations, masks, obeying speed limits, stopping at red lights and stop signs, and myriad other areas of our lives together.

There is an inverse equation involved; the higher the vaccination rate, the lower the number of deaths. Conversely, the lower the vaccination rate, the higher the number of hospitalizations and deaths.



Now get this. The vaccination rate in every county won by Biden in the presidential election is 12% higher than the counties won by the ex-president. The Republican base, that is clinging to the big lie that the presidential election was fraudulent, is thinning their own herd. Darwin is hard at work.

October Speaker



Jeff Rufus Byrd



Jeff Rufus Byrd is a performance and video artist who has exhibited in major cities across the United States as well as in Canada, Finland, Germany, Switzerland, Poland, Columbia, Mexico, Italy, China, Cuba, and the United Kingdom. Born in the deep South, Byrd was a first-generation college student at the University of Alabama. His mother cried when she learned that he planned to major in art. He earned a graduate degree at the University of Florida.

His art explores the relationship between reality and fiction. Through the use of masks and costumes, Byrd assumes fake identities to examine gender and power.

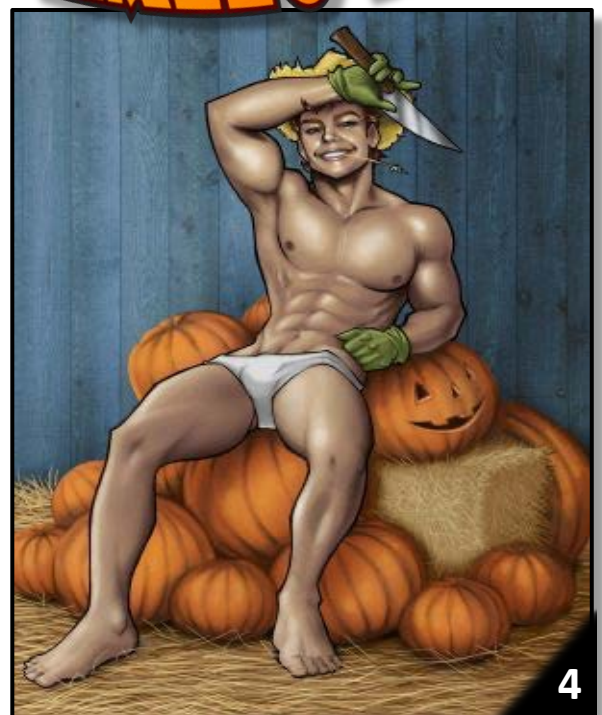
Byrd has taught at the University of Northern Iowa for the past 32 years. He was Head of the Department of Art for the past 15 years before returning to the classroom and studio in August, when he also changed his name.

FFBC October In-Person Meeting Guidelines

We strongly recommend that members or guests who decide to attend in person should be vaccinated for the safety of all. Board member Gary Moore stated it best, "Individual choices have community consequences. In regard to our community, state, and country's Delta variant pandemic spread, we encourage all who attend to have had their Covid vaccinations and wear their masks as appropriate during our meetings."

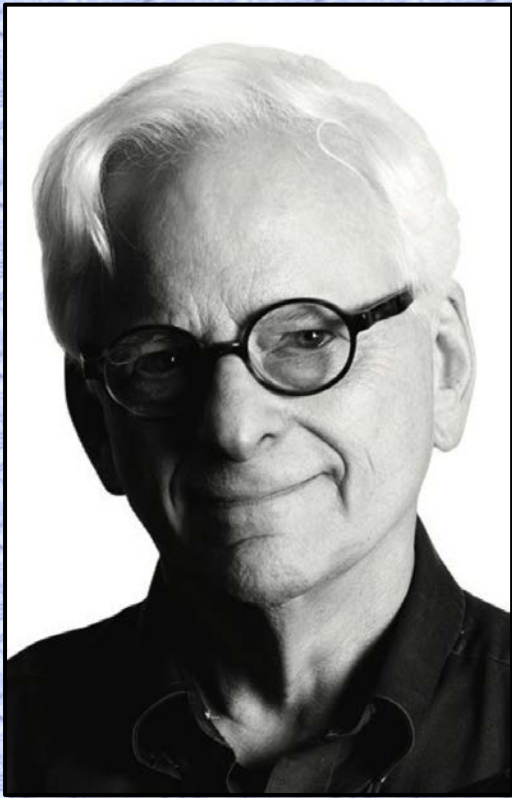
We also will require that all participants wear a mask when not eating. We will reduce the number of chairs at various tables to provide for some social distancing. Wearing a mask will also be required as you move through the food line (we will work to distance members while in line). If any member goes through the food line a second time, we ask that a clean plate is used.

This procedure is not just for the safety of our members, but out of respect for the safety of our speaker and food providers.



DSM Magazine 2021 LGBTQ+ Legacy Leader Awards Honors

John Schmacker



*Photo and article from
DSM Magazine.*

Other 2021 Honorees:

Tim Hickman
Eugenia Kutsch-Stanton
Randy Mayer
Elle Wyant
Dr. Kyle Christason

LGBTQ rights that some Gen Zs and millennials may take for granted didn't emerge from a vacuum. They began with trailblazing activists like Des Moines native **John Schmacker**. Every time an LGBTQ person's sexual orientation is protected in the city of Des Moines, Schmacker is the person to thank.

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In the late 1990s, then-Mayor Preston Daniels appointed Schmacker, now 78, to the Des Moines Human Rights Commission. He successfully led the effort to expand the city's protected rights to a broader ordinance that included sexual preference. "It's true that younger members of the LGBTQ community don't always realize they're riding on someone else's shoulders every time they walk down the sidewalk holding hands or gather outside a gay bar without fear of being spit upon," Schmacker reflects.

Things weren't so easy for him growing up. "The hard part was not coming out to my family. It's hard work staying in the closet," he says. Before the Stonewall uprising in New York's Greenwich Village on June 28, 1969, "You were either in the closet or 'known.' There was no 'out' before then," he explains.

During the AIDS epidemic, he served on the Governor's Task Force on AIDS, starting with its creation in 1987 by then-Gov. Robert Ray. The goal was to help Iowa develop an appropriate, compassionate response to the crisis. He also has served as president of the Gay Coalition of Des Moines and as president of the Gay and Lesbian Resource Center. His many contributions to advancing LGBTQ equality include serving on the boards of the Iowa Pride Network, the Iowa Pride Center, and the Des Moines Gay Men's Chorus.

In fact, Schmacker founded the chorus. "I was noticing gay men's choral groups forming in other cities, so I got a group from Des Moines together around the piano in my basement. That's where it started," he says with a laugh. That was in the early 1980s. "At the time, the other members sadly did not want 'gay' in the name of the group," he recalls. After the choral group's first iteration dissolved, Schmacker relaunched the organization, this time with "gay" proudly in its name. It's celebrating its 20th anniversary this year.

A CPA and graduate of Iowa State University, Schmacker began his career in accounting and finance after the Navy, where he served during the Vietnam War aboard an aircraft carrier in the Gulf of Tonkin. He visited his first gay bar while drydocked in San Francisco on June 28, 1969—the same day as the Stonewall riots in New York City. He associates that infamous day with his coming out, though it would be later, in the late '70s, in Iowa. "It still wasn't safe to be out in Iowa in the 1970s," he says.

His professional life includes having worked as a senior financial consultant for the American Red Cross, the chief financial officer for the Iowa chapter of the Red Cross, and controller for the Iowa Democratic Party. He's also offered his expertise pro bono, serving as treasurer of several nonprofits.

But he views his teaching experiences as his greatest accomplishments. He was a frequent speaker to college students and to Iowa classroom teachers and principals and also led marriage equality debates at Drake University and at Buena Vista University in Storm Lake.

Even though some of those teaching experiences were 20 years ago, Schmacker was thanked as recently as this summer by someone who'd been in attendance.

"We change people's minds one brain at a time," Schmacker says. "Even with as much progress as we've made, we are always one vote and one Supreme Court decision away from having our rights taken away from us."

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L.G.B.T.Q.
LEGACY LEADER AWARDS

A Lesson in Alzheimer's

by Gary Moore

Edith C. Crawford, a dedicated volunteer and second-term board member at the Greater Iowa Chapter of the Alzheimer's Association, located in West Des Moines, provided an overview of this horrific disease to the First Friday Breakfast Club for September. Edith is a widow, a mother of two, a grandmother of seven, and a great-grandmother.

Edith has had family experiences with Alzheimer's and dementia, having cared for her mother, and having a sister and brother who suffer with dementia. Edith used a well-organized slide and video presentation that provided a general overview of Alzheimer's including how it is just one of a wide range of dementias.

Among the more salient information was a discussion on populations at a higher risk. Hispanics are about 1.5 times as likely as whites to develop Alzheimer's and other dementias. African Americans are almost twice as likely to develop the disease, and almost two thirds of those living with Alzheimer's are women.

Although Alzheimer's is not a part of normal aging, after the age of 65, the risk of Alzheimer's doubles every five years to the point at 85 years of age, 32% of the population have some level of involvement with Alzheimer's. Another significant risk factor is family history.

Although aging may affect short-term memory, concern rises when memory starts affecting everyday living skills, organizing time, confusion with time and space, as well as many other signs. Edith recalled a personal experience with her mother where family had unplugged the stove to prevent her mother from cooking, which had become dangerous for her. Her mother took some chicken out of the refrigerator, and unable to cook it, wanted to return the chicken to the frig. Following a strange smell, family found the chicken in a closet.

For this writer, who has an extensive family history of dementia on my mother's side, the importance of discussing with friends and family what you would prefer for managing your life and who you would want to do that, should problems start to occur, is an important consideration.

The Alzheimer's Association has a myriad of reliable information and services to offer to a person suffering from dementia as well as for family and caregivers. Early diagnosis and intervention with medication can slow the progression of the disease (not prevent it). One needs to run towards knowledge and not fear the journey. That knowledge can help ensure your wishes guide those who may have to follow through on your desires.



September Speaker

September Speaker:
Edith Crawford



Deb Madison-Levi with
FFBC September Speaker Edith Crawford

Resources:

Online: alz.org

Phone: 800.272.3900

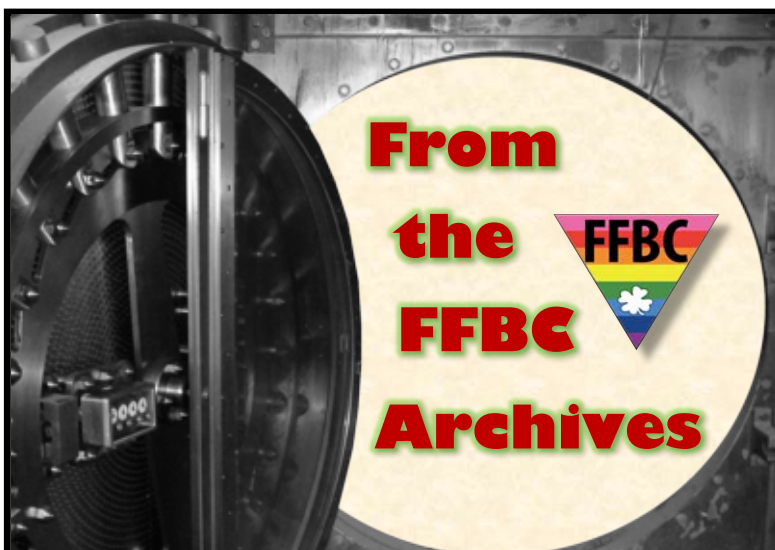
alzheimer's  association



September Meeting Photo Gallery



Photos by
Gary Moore
&
David
Cotton



5 Years Ago: October 2016

* Jonathan wrote about the Star-Spangled Banner and the controversy that was sparked by Colin Kaepernick taking a knee during an NFL game. Jonathan concluded that most people miss the significance that the anthem ends in a question, one which we should reflect on and answer every time we hear it.

* Bruce Carr wrote about the September speaker, Jack Schuler, the first openly transgender public school teacher in Iowa.

* Steve Person's review of Peter Ackroyd's book *Venice: Pure City* made him nostalgic for his visit to Venice, a city of beauty and civility.

10 Years Ago: October 2011

* Ponderings from Jonathan centered on a newspaper article about a guy who had six fingers on each hand and six toes on each foot. Jonathan made the connection among this person, a four-leaf clover, two-dollar bills, and gay children of God: they all exist; they are completely authentic, valid, and —normal. Most people don't have six fingers on each hand; most clover has three leaves; two-dollar bills are not the customary currency in use today, and gay children of God are a minority demographic. But, so what?

* The September speaker, Dr. Dwight Watson, Dean of the College of Education at the University of Northern Iowa in Cedar Falls, was described by columnist Bruce Carr as someone who, after growing up closeted, finds great joy and promise in the pop culture of today's teenagers, and Dr. Watson quoted enthusiastically several songs by such artists as Lady Gaga to prove his point.

15 Years Ago: October 2006

* In his article "Of Ends and Means and Terrorists," Jonathan addresses President George W. Bush's desire for greater latitude about how prisoners in United States custody are treated. As justification, President Bush claimed that he is merely doing his job of "protecting" American citizens. Jonathan described this as a classic example of trying to justify the means by restating a supposedly laudable objective. It is an attempt to justify the means by a restatement of the end being pursued. This is the same argument as that of a terrorist.

* Bruce Carr wrote about September speaker, Dr. Nancy Sebring, the superintendent of Des Moines Public Schools.

* Steve Person, in his "From the Editor" section, commented on the inappropriate placement of some public art in Des Moines.



When You Are Old

William Butler Yeats

When you are old and grey and full of sleep,
And nodding by the fire, take down this book,
And slowly read, and dream of the soft look
Your eyes had once, and of their shadows deep;

How many loved your moments of glad grace,
And loved your beauty with love false or true,
But one man loved the pilgrim soul in you,
And loved the sorrows of your changing face;

And bending down beside the glowing bars,
Murmur, a little sadly, how Love fled
And paced upon the mountains overhead
And hid his face amid a crowd of stars.

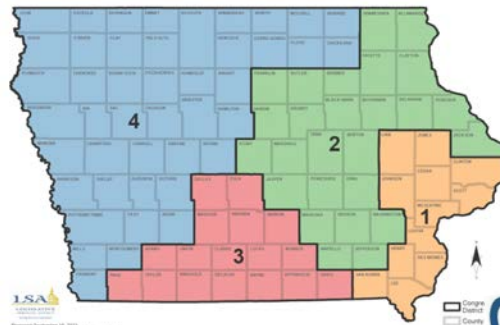


Iowa's Reputation as Fair and Sensible on the Line in Redistricting

by Ryan Crane, FFBC Vice President

Many Iowans may not know - or may have only begun to learn - that our procedure of drawing district maps is one of the fairest and most nonpartisan of all 50 states. This will be put to the test as the legislature gathers for a special session this month. "Gerrymandering" has a 200+ year history, dating all the way back to Governor Gerry of Massachusetts in 1812. The partisan scribbles on a map at that time resembled a salamander. And that is where the name comes from.

PROPOSED PLAN 1: IOWA CONGRESSIONAL DISTRICTS
To be effective beginning with the election in 2022 for the 118th General Assembly



Gerrymandering



Fast forward to 2021, and we still find ourselves un-gerrymandered here in Iowa...for now. That's because the nonpartisan Legislative Services Agency (LSA) has to draw maps fairly and has done so since they updated the rules in 1968. The statute reads that "districts [must] be convenient and contiguous, preserve the integrity of political subdivisions like counties and cities, and to the extent consistent with other requirements, reasonably compact." Up to three maps can be presented. In 2001, the legislature voted for the second map. In 2011, the legislature voted for the first map. For the last 53 years, under Democratic and Republican control, the legislature has plainly accepted one of the three maps every time.

I am hopeful that Republicans will do the right thing, but I am not convinced. We will soon learn if the Party of Trump will blow up nearly 60 years of precedent and rewrite the rules.



**Future Speaker
Announced**

November 1

**Steve
Karlin**

LGBTQ Workplace Culture Summit

by Maddie Rocha Smith

We're excited to host our fifth annual **LGBTQ Workplace Culture Summit** that kicks off on Wednesday, November 3. Over four sessions, we'll be joined by experts who will provide insight and resources for employers looking to cultivate safe and inclusive workplaces.

Attendees will learn more about the LGBTQ community, how to create more inclusive policies, ways to attract and retain LGBTQ talent, and the importance of going beyond waving a Pride flag in June to taking actionable steps to create meaningful change in your workplace. You can purchase all four sessions as a package or individually. If you have any questions, please feel free to reach out to our event coordinator, Maddie, at maddie@Oneiowa.org.

**one
iowa**



Polk County Adopts Climate Action Plan

by Supervisor Matt McCoy
Polk County, 5th District



Polk County took important steps to reduce our carbon footprint by 90% of our current levels by 2040. This plan will require Polk County to conduct an audit of all of our facilities, which is more than 25 separate buildings, to determine how to reduce our energy usage and overall consumption. This will require substantial investment in wind, solar, and energy efficient HVAC systems and overall lighting modifications. The return on investment will be realized within ten years.

As most of you know, the Biden Administration has established new fuel standards and is requiring U.S. auto manufacturers and importers to achieve a 50% electrified vehicle fleet sales by 2030. When I began at Polk County in 2019, I was surprised to learn that we have not invested in either electric or hybrid vehicles, and one of my objectives will be to create a full electric fleet by 2030. As part of our effort of becoming more efficient, we also must help individuals in our community who are low-income or renters. These citizens, who often pay the highest utility bills because of inefficient heating and lighting systems, can



share in equity by creating refundable credits that can be applied to rent through vouchers to the landlords for strategic investment in energy-saving appliances, insulation, and overall weatherization, including HVAC systems. This is a new concept that has not been done in Iowa but is being done around the United States and encourages the landlords to make the investment by giving them the funds to do it. We must ensure that the funds apply to the renter and not go directly to the landlords' pocketbooks.

We must treat this planet as our highest priority, recognizing that acting locally, while thinking globally, is our best way to save it.



Autumn



The Green Knight

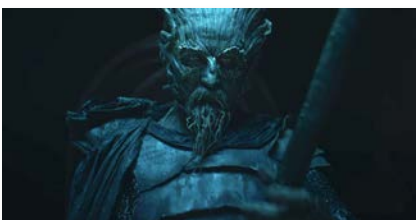
A Movie Review by Mark Turnage

A film inspired by one of King Arthur's knights may conjure scenes of jousting on horseback and feats of bravery, but director David Lowery's *The Green Knight* is a cerebral, haunting tale of a knight confronting his own mortality, owning the consequences of his actions, and surviving his own spiritual crucible with his honor intact.

Lowery immediately contrasts the prototypical idea of a chivalrous knight by meeting Sir Gawain (pronounced "GAH-win," played by a phenomenal Dev Patel) naked at a brothel, awoken by his mistress (Alicia Vikander) with a bucket of mop water. As we follow Gawain through the brothel and back home over foggy, snowy rows of thatched-roof houses to an imposing castle, we get the sense that he's somewhat aimless—he doesn't take his mother's talk of knighthood seriously. He should, because in Lowery's adaptation of the medieval folk tale, his mother is also King Arthur's estranged sister, sorceress and often-nemesis Morgan le Fay (Sarita Choudhury). Lowery seems like he's setting her up as the big bad at the start, but this is a feint: Gawain's inner demons are the real villains of this story. After being noticed and recognized by King Arthur (Sean Harris) at a royal banquet—much to his surprise, and maybe with a strong magical "push" from his mother—a monstrous tree-like creature on horseback crashes King Arthur's party and challenges anyone there to land a blow on him with their sword, if he may do the same in return. Arthur, who is too old and frail to wield Excalibur, asks his knights who among them will step forward, and Gawain seizes his opportunity to prove himself. Seeing this supernatural challenger as a threat, Gawain strikes brutally, severing the Green Knight's head from his body. As you might imagine, the now-headless Green Knight thinks this is hilarious, picks up his head, and taunts Gawain before he leaves, saying one year later, he will return the same cut to his neck. It would be tempting to portray Gawain as a fearless, preordained hero of destiny, but we see the anxiety and dread that one brave choice has earned him. King Arthur himself must compel Gawain into honoring his word with the Green Knight, and reluctantly, Gawain accepts. It's the opening 20 minutes of the film, and we too are doubting with Gawain his chances of survival as he sets off on his journey.

It's important to note that *The Green Knight* has the pacing of a fantasy epic far more than an action/adventure film—while there are certainly thrilling moments, the central conflicts are more often psychological or supernatural in nature. Yet the pacing of the film is methodical, and despite clocking in at just over two hours, the storytelling doesn't feel sluggish or bland, largely in part due to Lowery's narrative choices that are left open to interpretation. Nature itself is also a character through the film's gorgeous cinematography, from the characterization of the Green Knight itself to the wild and often dangerous people and environments that Gawain must contend with in order to keep his appointment. Yet the movie doesn't shy away from eroticism either, especially when it comes to making its lead character an object of lust.

The Green Knight could be oversimplified as a meandering integrity test of its main character, but to do so would shortchange the unique storytelling and visual style of its subject matter, packed with enough dream logic and symbolism to make repeat viewings worthwhile. See this trippy knight's tale and enjoy the ride.



***The Green Knight* is available
for streaming on HBO Max.**



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Philip and Alexander: Kings and Conquerors

by Adrian
Goldsworthy

A Book Review by Steve Person

Without a doubt, writing a biographical history of these two famous warriors had to be one of great difficulty. Events that occurred over 2500 years ago and with very few reliable sources to consult, this author faced a monumental challenge. There is no question that King Philip of Macedonia and his even more famous son, King Alexander the Great, lived and changed the world they inhabited. Adrian Goldsworthy, however, crafted a credible and extremely readable text of these two leaders. The author's exhaustive research contests some of the ancient writings as more fiction than fact since many historians of that time felt it more important to flatter and cajole a war lord leader than report actual happenings.

Philip ruled with force, and as Goldsworthy points out, actually felt prouder of his diplomatic accomplishments than of his stunning successes in battle. When Philip gained the kingship of Macedonia, it was a backward and unimportant land that squabbled with its neighbors. Philip, however, put in place an army and a battle plan that proved to be unstoppable. He not only expanded Macedonia's territory, but he also gave the ancient world new forms of battle.

As one learns of events in the fourth century B.C., it behooves the reader not to judge these ancients through the lens of the twenty-first century. To be sure, both Philip and Alexander lived in violent times, and both claimed the lives of thousands of people and subjected thousands more to a life of slavery and debasement. Kings and nobles led lives of luxury when not engaged in warfare. Both Philip and Alexander married multiple wives and engaged in homosexual conduct with boys who would later become their soldiers. Such behavior was considered natural and respectable.

Goldsworthy points out that because of Alexander's widespread success in defeating the Persian Empire and expansion into India, more attention was paid to him than to his father by ancient scribes. However, the author maintains that Alexander built on Philip's gains and would likely never have achieved what he did without his father's exploits. Philip met an expected end when one of his bodyguards—a young man Philip earlier had sexual relations with and who felt betrayed by Philip—killed the king during a celebration festival.

At just age 21, Alexander cemented his hold on the kingship of Macedonia after his father's murder. He immediately began his conquest of the huge Persian Empire led by Darius III. The Persian Empire was more a federation of disparate countries and cultures than a cohesive entity. Its vast wealth and territory actually hindered it from becoming the ruler of the ancient world. Alexander, determined to even the score of the defeated Greeks in the fifth century B.C., brought Darius and his family to bitter defeat with just a few years of fighting. From there he pushed eastward into India, conquering cities and establishing others, renaming them after himself much as Philip had done before him. His vast expansion also turned out to be impractical for governing. Alexander's physical stamina and heroics in battle made him a well-revered leader. A few days before his invasion of the Arabian Peninsula, he fell ill and died. He was just 32 years old. He had no adult heir, and his conquests eventually dissipated into tribal skirmishes.

Goldsworthy is an able writer, and I look forward to reading his book about Hadrian's Wall.

