

10 YEARS OF THE REGISTER'S PEOPLE TO WATCH



2020: Michael Penniman



2020: Elizabeth Burns-Thompson



2015: Brian Ferentz



2016: Tony Lemmo



2021: Zakariyah Hill



2019: Mindi Callison

Where are they now?

Des Moines Register | USA TODAY NETWORK

In 2011, the Des Moines Register launched what has since become an annual year-end tradition: profiling a set of People to Watch in the coming year — individuals who are likely to make a difference in the lives of their fellow Iowans, or who could be on the verge of noteworthy accomplishments. ● To mark 10 years of People to Watch, Des Moines Register staff writers revisited people they wrote about to see what has happened to them since. ● **Turn to Pages 4-5A for their stories.**



2017: Erin Miller



2021: Suzan Erem



2011: David Carlyle



2018: Renee Hardman



2017: Mike Hadden



2014: Keaton McKinney



2020: Ras Smith



2021: Susan Johnston



2021: Charlotte Bailey



2020: Barwaq Aden

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Barwaqo Aden

**West Des Moines
People to Watch year:
2020**

What made her notable: Aden was a dedicated worker with Nisaa African Family Services, a Des Moines group that serves African immigrant survivors of domestic violence and sexual assault. Aden also helped fellow Somali immigrants adapting to life in Iowa.

What she's done since: Despite the barriers of the COVID-19 pandemic, Aden continues to help Somalis with English translation and still assists from time to time with English classes for new speakers of the language.

Recently, she advocated for a Somali student who she said was being racially profiled in school. She is beginning to work with other leaders in the community on how to combat racism and increase cultural understanding in schools across the metro. She hopes to approach school districts with suggestions early this year.

"We've got to change the culture of schools," she said.

Aden is now a parent herself, with a 15-month-old daughter.

"She's learning 'up' and 'down.' She's going on the dining table, the bed, she's very energetic" Aden said.

— Andrea Sahouri



Charlotte Bailey

**Iowa City
People to Watch year:
2021**

What made her notable: Bailey has been a driving force behind Iowa's girls wrestling movement. Her daughter, Jasmine, was a successful wrestler from Iowa City West who went on to wrestle in college and at the senior level.

Bailey wanted the same opportunities for other girls. She has helped tournaments across the state add girls divisions, so girls could wrestle other girls instead of boys. That led to the forming of the Iowa girls state wrestling championships, hosted by the Iowa Wrestling Coaches and Officials Association.

What she's done since: Bailey has continued her dialogue with the Iowa Wrestling Coaches and Officials Associ-

ation, the Iowa High School Athletic Association and the Iowa Girls' High School Athletic Union to facilitate the continued growth of girls wrestling. More than 1,000 girls will wrestle statewide during the 2021-22 season, and the girls athletic union recently hired Erin Kirtley as an associate director in charge of special projects — "specifically helping with emerging sports," she said, "which includes (girls) wrestling." With Bailey's help, over 50 schools have committed to sponsoring and supporting a girls wrestling program, which has triggered Kirtley and the girls athletic union to begin planning to offer girls wrestling as an official, sanctioned sport.

"Terry Steiner (USA Wrestling's top women's coach) has said, 'If you believe in all the things wrestling teaches, why would you want to teach it to only half the population?'" Bailey told the Des Moines Register in December 2020.

— Cody Goodwin



Elizabeth Burns-Thompson

**Altoona
People to Watch year:
2020**

What made her notable: In 2020, Burns-Thompson worked as manager of corporate affairs for Renewable Energy Group, the largest producer of biodiesel in North America, and was entering her first term as an Altoona City Council member.

What she's done since: In July, Burns-Thompson began a new job as vice president of government and public affairs for Navigator CO2, a company seeking to build a pipeline that will move carbon dioxide captured from ethanol, fertilizer and other agricultural industrial plants in Iowa, Illinois, Nebraska, Minnesota and South Dakota. Upon reaching South Dakota, the carbon dioxide will be sequestered deep underground.

Burns-Thompson, who grew up on a family farm in eastern Iowa, said she has enjoyed the opportunity to grow professionally while remaining in Iowa and in the field of agriculture.

"It's kind of neat to be right on the cutting edge of that, to look at how do we reduce that carbon footprint of some of the industries that are critical to this state and important to me, personally," she said. "How do you make sure that those industries are viable and compet-

itive for not just years to come, but for decades to come?"

Burns-Thompson also is entering her third year on the Altoona City Council. She said she has been excited to be part of the city's push to increase its public outreach and engagement, including hiring a communications staff member.

— Ian Richardson



Mindi Callison

**Ames
People to Watch year:
2019**

What made her notable: Callison is founder and executive director of Bailing Out Benji, an anti-puppy mill education and advocacy organization. After almost a decade as a preschool teacher by day and a protester of derelict, delinquent, large dog-breeding facilities by night, Callison received a grant in late 2018 that let her work full time on Bailing Out Benji. A longtime blog featuring dog breeder inspection reports, Bailing Out Benji moved offline that year and franchised chapters across the country to advocate for legislation on the local and state levels.

What she's done since: Bailing Out Benji is now the nation's largest database of so-called puppy mills and pet stores that sell their puppies, connecting what it characterizes as bad breeders in 35 states to more than 400 stores. Its publicly available research has helped in the passage of at least 100 state bills or local ordinances. In Iowa, Bailing Out Benji assisted the Department of Agriculture in updating administrative rules governing commercial breeding of dogs to make the industry more humane, and worked with legislators to increase the criminal penalties for animal torture. In 2021, Callison secured another grant allowing her to hire a second full-time employee.

"Ultimately, we can't rescue one dog from one bad breeder and make an impact on the industry as a whole. We have to advocate for more education and push legislators to make meaningful changes so that we no longer have to rescue dogs from what are licensed and inspected breeding facilities," she said.

— Courtney Crowder



David Carlyle

**Ames
People to Watch year:
2011**

What made him notable: Carlyle was a family physician heavily involved in efforts to improve the health care system, including by using public and private health insurance programs to cover Iowans who previously lacked health insurance. He helped lead discussions at the Iowa Statehouse and the U.S. Capitol.

What he's done since: Carlyle, 66, still practices medicine at the McFarland Clinic in Ames and serves as medical director for Mary Greeley Medical Center's hospice program. He also serves on several health policy committees, including for the Iowa Academy of Family Physicians and the Iowa Medical Society.

After he retires in 2023, he plans to write a book about CoOpportunity Health, a health insurance cooperative for which he was an unpaid adviser. The Iowa-based co-op was formed under the Affordable Care Act and provided health insurance to 120,000 Iowans and Nebraskans, but it collapsed in 2015. Carlyle blames the failure on a lack of promised support from the federal government.

"I was proud of what we did," he said. "We just got submarined."

— Tony Leys



Suzan Erem

**West Branch
People to Watch year:
2021**

What made her notable: Erem is the founder and executive director of the Sustainable Iowa Land Trust, which protects farmland and makes it available for new or underserved farmers to lease or buy at a discount. The group protected about 1,130 acres through land donations or conservation easements.

The group, which goes by the acronym SILT, sought to raise \$3 million to

protect farms around 10 Iowa cities and towns over a decade through its Circle Our Cities Initiative, circling urban areas with farms producing fruit, vegetables and meat. About 90% of Iowa's food comes from outside the state, and SILT aimed to provide locally grown, healthy food as an alternative.

What she's done since: SILT raised \$570,000 over the past year for Circle Our Cities. It wants to establish new farms in Polk, Linn, Dubuque and Johnson counties and it plans to ask state and county officials for a share of American Rescue Plan Act funds for improving water quality. Here's how it would work: Small farmers would buy or lease land along Iowa's rivers and streams to grow food and raise livestock while building farmable buffers planted with flowers and fruit or nut trees and shrubs that can filter runoff from fertilizers and chemicals used to raise commodity crops.

Owners would sell the land or receive rent payments while potentially tapping into state and federal tax and conservation programs.

"The idea is, how many farms can we get near our urban areas that will impact the amount of fresh healthy food that's available,?" said Erem. "And wouldn't it be great if it also secured the soil and improved our water quality?"

— Donnelle Eller



Brian Ferentz

**Iowa City
People to Watch year:
2015**

What made him notable: Then a fourth-year offensive line coach and 32-year-old son of Hawkeye head coach Kirk Ferentz, he was seen as a rising member of the Iowa football coaching staff — and even a potential successor to his father.

What he's done since: About 13 months after he was profiled, Brian Ferentz became the third offensive coordinator to work under his father, replacing Greg Davis after the 2016 football season. He went on to call one of the greatest games of his career, a 55-24 shellacking of third-ranked Ohio State, in his first season as offensive coordinator.

Ferentz is now five years into the job, and the Hawkeyes have had bowl success in that span. But Ferentz has come under fire for a couple of reasons. No. 1, he and former strength coach Chris Doyle remain defendants in a racial-bias lawsuit brought by a group of former Hawkeye players. No. 2, Iowa's offense ranked 123rd out of 130 FBS teams this past season. Still, the Hawkeyes won the Big Ten West Division and 10 games, the 10th 10-win season in program history. But the Hawkeyes fell short 20-17 in the Citrus Bowl. Kirk Ferentz said afterward, "Obviously we have to score more points, and we are well aware of that."

Brian Ferentz, now 38, remains a polarizing figure in the Iowa program.

— Chad Leistikow



Mike Hadden

**Indianola
People to Watch year:
2017**

What made him notable: Hadden, then the director of athletic training at Simpson College, was embarking on an effort to prove that a simple sideline saliva test could help determine whether someone had suffered a concussion. The tests would also be used as a benchmark for knowing when it was safe for the athlete to resume competing.

What he's done since: Hadden has left Simpson and is in sales for a company providing ambulance services and medical devices. The initial findings of his research, conducted in partnership with Harvard, are due to appear in the journal Brain Research in February or March.

Hadden knows that the sample size involved is likely not large enough to be deemed conclusive. He is hoping that the research paper sparks an interest in someone else with more money who can finance a larger look at whether two proteins present in saliva can truly be used to diagnose concussions. He still believes that to be the case.

In the meantime, he remains driven to research amyotrophic lateral sclerosis, the disease that claimed his niece Alex Hermsstad at age 17. In 2020, Alex's twin sister, Jacl, also died of ALS, but not before doctors in New York devised a drug named after her (Jaclifusen) that seemed to show some promise.

"Some days, I guess, are worse than others," Hadden said. "I still am completely devoted to this brain research. The use of our study can still be used in other diseases. That's the reason I really, really want this to work for concussions. I'm still excited about it. We just don't have the resources right now to do the study that we want."

— Mark Emmert

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