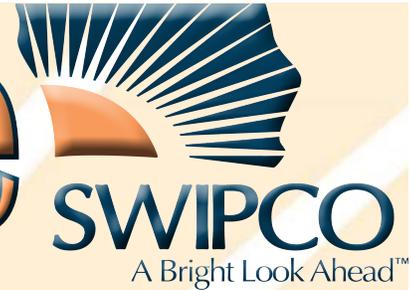


# The Update



November 2022

Serving the Counties of Cass, Fremont, Harrison, Montgomery, Mills, Page, Pottawattamie, and Shelby

## Grassley and Ernst Congratulate SWIPCO

On October 27, 2022, staff, leaders, and media gathered to celebrate the amazing SWIPCO/SWITA staff who work tirelessly to improve the lives of southwest Iowans. Following in person remarks by Senator Chuck Grassley and a video message from Senator Joni Ernst, Scott Raeker, Executive Director of The Robert D. and Billie Ray Center at Drake University, presented the 2022 Business/Organization of Character award based on how the organization met the Six Pillars of CHARACTER COUNTS!: trustworthiness, respect, responsibility, fairness, caring, and good citizenship.



Senator Grassley and Scott Raeker, Character Counts Executive Director present award to SWIPCO/SWITA Staff at event

“I do not know of a more caring and devoted staff who work hard every day as a team to help our neighbors in southwest Iowa,” said SWIPCO Executive Director John McCurdy. “This award is a wonderful recognition of that shared spirit of service, and we’re humbled to be recognized in this way.”

SWIPCO was the singular winner of the Business/Organization of Character award across the state for 2022 and it is an incredible honor to be chosen from all the nominations received. Nominations are submitted by individuals and groups from across the entire state of Iowa. Since 2005, the Ray Center has recognized more than 150 Iowans for showing good character. Senator Chuck Grassley attended and recognized staff for this achievement and spoke about his support of the Character Counts! program and all it does for the community, especially our youth.

In honoring SWIPCO, the Ray Center noted SWITA transit professionals’ support of volunteers and stakeholders including Cass County Wellness Program Coordinator Brigham Hoegh, the City of Atlantic, and the local Food Policy Council to deliver meals to homebound community members at the height of the COVID-19 pandemic—all while continuing to operate as the sole public transit provider in southwest Iowa. Over a period of 40 weeks between spring 2020 and summer 2021, SWITA drivers and volunteers supplied food approximately 2,800 times. “When the rest of the world shut down, SWITA buses kept running,” said Transit Director Mark Lander. “Our drivers stepped up and helped get the job done.”

SWIPCO was also recognized based on its support for the southwest Iowa towns devastated by 2019 floods, which caused billions of dollars in property damage. SWIPCO’s efforts brought a combined \$90 million grant package to the region, resulting in the region’s largest investment in new homebuilding in at least a generation.

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### Waubonsie Mental Health Center Receives \$100,000 Grant

SWIPCO staff recently worked to secure a \$100,000 Impact Grant for the Waubonsie Mental Health Center (WMHC). WMHC is an accredited, non-profit community mental health center established in 1982 to serve the residents of Fremont, Montgomery, and Page Counties. WMHC is fortunate to have a spacious office building in Clarinda as well as satellite locations in Red Oak and Shenandoah. But anyone who is familiar with the history of WMHC will know that the main office in Clarinda used to be the doctors' offices for the Clarinda Hospital. As such, it is laid out with many separate office spaces. This arrangement is great for many things, but none of the offices are big enough to accommodate more than 6-8 people. This works very well for therapy sessions and one-on-one consultations. However, larger group meetings cannot be accommodated. As built the Clarinda office has a very large and open basement space, measuring close to 7,200 square feet. Originally, this space was used by the Clarinda Hospital as storage space, particularly for medical files.



*Waubonsie Mental Health Basement Open Space Before Conversion*

The grant project will take advantage of this unused space and make it accessible and functional by adding an exterior entrance, wheelchair lift, partition of some of the space for offices and storage, restrooms, create a kitchen space, and an ample meeting area. This space is served by parking adjacent to the building and by having its own accessible entrance will allow for day activities that won't interfere with the normal functions of the offices above and will allow for convenient after hours use, again without having to access the offices above. The estimated \$100,000 cost of this renovation is a fraction of the

cost it would take to build a standalone structure of similar size and utilizes already existing support infrastructure, such as parking, that would otherwise need to be created. Now that funds have been secured, renovations are under way and SWIPCO continues to work with WMHC on additional needs as they arise.

**Upcoming grant deadlines:**

- Quarterly water/sewer CDBG: January 1, April 1, July 1, and October 1, 2023
- Community Facilities CDBG—open until funds are gone
- Theater Community Catalyst CDBG—pre application due December 15, 2022
- Iowa West Foundation
 

o Letter of inquiry due	o Grant application due
January 1, 2023	January 15, 2023
May 1, 2023	May 15, 2023
September 1, 2023	September 15, 2023
- Community Attraction and Tourism—January 15, 2023
- Catalyst—pre applications due January 27, 2023
- Wellmark Foundation Grants—early spring
- RPA 13 TAP (Cass, Fremont, Montgomery, and Page)—due around March (dependent on State)
- RPA 13 STBG (Cass, Fremont, Montgomery, and Page)—January 27, 2023

## Birthdays & Anniversaries



**Sandy Hansen**  
Grants Specialist III  
Birthday Month November



**Dee Holtz**  
Administrative Assistant  
4 Years of Service



**Kristine Stokes**  
Community Development Specialist  
2 Years of Service

# TRANSIT TALK

Kristen Templeton  
Transit Coordinator

SWITA conducted bus evacuation drills in November, in an effort to make sure that young riders understand and know what to do in case of an emergency. These drills were conducted in Atlantic, Harlan, Glenwood, and Red Oak and all riders and drivers did a wonderful job.



# STAFF MEMBER SPOTLIGHT

The Southwest Iowa Planning Council (SWIPCO) welcomes Mary Auten to our staff in the role of Grants Specialist. At SWIPCO grants specialists ensure that complex rules established by state and federal funding agencies are followed to maximize the impact of investments in our communities, reduce the administrative burden on our member communities, and increase the likelihood of future funding into our region.

“I have spent most of my career doing work that many other companies can do, and I am excited for the opportunity to fulfill a specific need for our communities that helps people and communities directly,” said Auten. “I understand how important it is to maintain compliance with programs and regulations, and I am happy I get to help people and our southwest Iowa communities thrive by using the skills I have gained throughout my career.”

Auten lives in Casey, Iowa. She is a graduate of Coon Rapids high school and completed her degree through William Penn University. She spent most of her career working in banking and insurance and most recently she was with Wells Fargo home mortgage.



“Almost all of the programs that we work with at SWIPCO come with an enormous amount of rules attached. They should, because they are public funds. But, they can be hard for our communities to follow, so it’s great when you can add someone like Mary to your team who has a wealth of experience working on complex administrative problems, with a great attention to detail, and also the passion for the region that you’ve got to have to be successful in this type of work.” SWIPCO Executive Director John McCurdy said.

# Driver Spotlight - Dean Driskell

Dean Driskell drives a bus for Southwest Iowa Transit Agency (SWITA) in Clarinda. Dean drives 2 times a day, 3 days per week, taking individuals to and from Nishna Productions, then takes one passenger home from work in the afternoon, and he also drives when needed for special trips and medical transportation trips. Drivers like Dean are vital to rural communities as they allow people to get around when they otherwise would have no access to transportation on their own.

SWITA serves eight counties in southwest Iowa and has 100 vehicles and 70 drivers. SWITA has special routes for disabled individuals who need to attend day habilitation services or work. The agency has work routes that transport workers to employers such as OSI and Monogram Foods. It also offers medical transportation, student transportation, has a summer fun bus, and provides a range of other transportation services. SWITA buses are ADA accessible, and service is open to everyone.

“I enjoy my passengers and getting them where they need to go is important to them and me,” Dean said. “My passengers all know me by name and seem genuinely happy to see me when I pick them up. It gives me a sense of purpose and a good reason to get going in the morning and although I enjoy being home, I was getting bored and am happy to be back to work doing something important.”

Dean has been driving for SWITA for 6 years. Dean lives in Clarinda with his wife of 48 years and enjoys spending time working on his hobby of restoring old vehicles during his free time. Dean and his wife raised 4 children in Clarinda, and he shared that he is now a proud grandfather of 11 and has 1 great grandchild. Dean is a Vietnam Vet and native of Southern Missouri who came to visit a friend from Clarinda after the war and liked the area so much he ended up staying. Dean worked as a truck driver and then managed the Ready Mix plant in Clarinda until his retirement. Dean shared that after he retired, he was tired of sitting at home and wanted to work again so he decided to try driving for SWITA. “6 years later and I happily go to work in my bus and enjoy helping people get to where they need to go” shared Dean.



Dean's bus is very recognizable as behind his seat, he proudly displays artwork from a friend. One drawing of a SWITA bus with cartoon characters and another drawing of Dean's F100 truck that he restored. Dean said that he is happy to share these drawings with his passengers and hopes that everyone can enjoy the SWITA bus picture as he is very proud of his friend's work and that it displays his bus.

SWITA operates vehicles early and late, pending vehicle and driver availability. If you find yourself in need of transportation for any reason, you can contact SWITA by calling 712-243-2518 or 1-800-842-8065 or get more information at [www.swita.com](http://www.swita.com).

## Demolition Program

Southwest Iowa Housing Trust Fund (SWIHTF) is accepting applications for its Demolition Program for projects in Cass, Fremont, Harrison, Mills, Montgomery, Page, and Shelby Counties.

The Demolition program is designed to assist cities with the cost of demolition of blighted, residential properties. SWIHTF will pay 50% of the cost, or a maximum of \$15,000 for demolition of city owned properties.

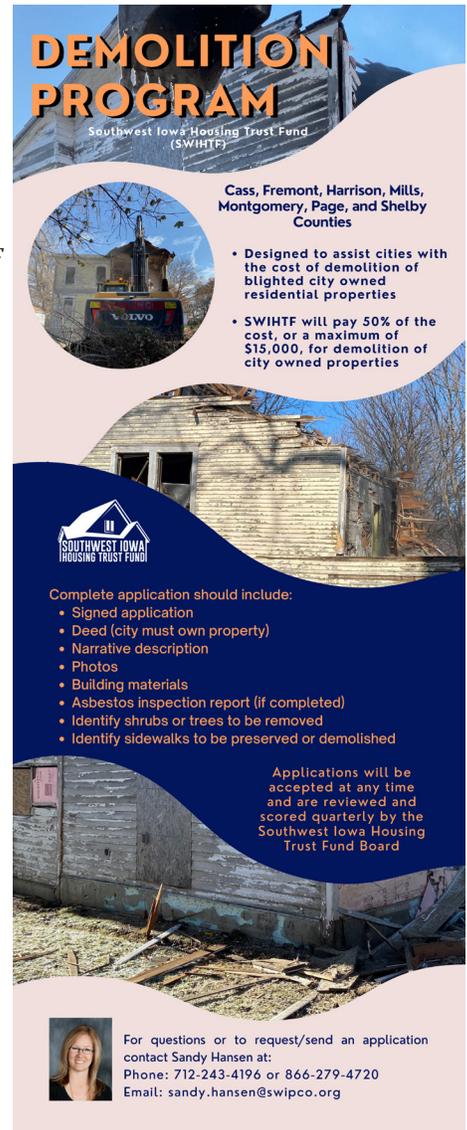
Applications will be accepted at any time and are reviewed and scored quarterly by the Southwest Iowa Housing Trust Fund Board. A complete application should include:

- Signed application
- Deed (City MUST own property)
- Narrative description
- Photos
- Building material
- Asbestos Inspection Report (if completed)
- Identify shrubs or trees to be removed
- Identify sidewalks to be preserved or demolished

To be eligible for funds, the project must fit within the eligible criteria and will be scored on the following:

- If the city utilized the grant last year
- If asbestos inspection has been completed
- Condition of the building/collapse
- Inherent danger of the property
- Impact on the neighborhood
- Plans for the space after the demolition

For questions or to request/send an application, please contact Sandy Hansen at 712-243-4196 / 866-279-4720 or [sandy.hansen@swipco.org](mailto:sandy.hansen@swipco.org).



### DEMOLITION PROGRAM

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Cass, Fremont, Harrison, Mills, Montgomery, Page, and Shelby Counties

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Phone: 712-243-4196 or 866-279-4720  
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## SWIPCO Receives NADO 2022 Impact Award

Southwest Iowa Planning Council (SWIPCO), which provides grant writing and administration services to its member communities in Cass, Fremont, Harrison, Mills, Montgomery, Page, Pottawattamie, and Shelby Counties, has received a 2022 Aliceann Wohlbruck Impact Award from the National Association of Development Organizations (NADO) for the Post-Disaster Transformational Housing Development. SWIPCO was recognized based on its support for the southwest Iowa towns devastated by the 2019 floods. SWIPCO secured \$90 million in federal flood recovery funds through the Iowa Economic Development Authority (IEDA) Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) Disaster Recovery programs for southwest Iowa communities including Glenwood, Hamburg, Logan, Malvern, Missouri Valley, Modale, Tabor, and Woodbine. These funds are being used for property acquisition, new housing construction, and infrastructure development for new housing. As a part of the grants, more than 100 housing units damaged in the 2019 floods have already been demolished and more than 250 new housing units are being built in these impacted communities.



# From the Desk of the Executive Director...

**John McCurdy**  
Executive Director

It's good to be needed. Currently SWIPCO and SWITA staff are working on more projects, providing more services, and meeting more needs than ever. Because of that, if you've had the pleasure to visit our offices in Atlantic in the last few years you'll know we are packed to the gills—our windowless “conference room” has 5 workstations in it. Although we are creative and flexible with some staff working from home and several hybrid arrangements, we still need a certain amount of space to function. After evaluating several different options, including leasing space and several alternative layouts, we have landed on a plan to build a 60'x30' addition onto the east side of our building. After bidding it out twice to try and bring costs down in this crazy construction market, we are excited to move ahead with board approval for construction over the next year with Building Crafts from Red Oak as the prime contractor.

This new addition will be primarily open office space for the planning and housing teams. The transit office was renovated in 2021. The project will then give us our conference room back: we have not been able to host meetings, hold board meetings, or even get all of the staff together onsite in over two years. There are many positives to this construction project and we're excited to invest back into not just our home base city of Atlantic, but ensure that we have the proper space for the long term support of our whole region. The addition will be complete by the fall of 2023.



*Rendering of the SWIPCO main office with planned addition*

There is a lot going on in South-west Iowa. This is a great place to be! As we've noted, we're going through record growth and investment in our region. But, as always, we exist for our member communities and if there is a need or an area that we aren't paying enough attention to, please feel free to contact me with ideas, suggestions, problems, or concerns. (712) 243-4196 [john.mccurdy@swipco.org](mailto:john.mccurdy@swipco.org)

## SWIPCO STAFF

**John McCurdy, AICP**  
Executive Director

**Mark Lander**  
Transit Director

**Karen Mauer**  
Administrative Services Director

**Rhonda Oliphant**  
Finance Manager

**Daurine Petersen**  
Human Resources Coordinator

**Kersten Abild**  
Transit Scheduler II

**Ann Anstey**  
Grants Specialist II

**Mary Auten**  
Grants Specialist I

**Michael Ballinger**  
Maintenance Assistant

**Dani Briggs**  
Planning Technician II

**Tracy Clark**  
Transit Scheduler III

**Tammy DeBord**  
Grants Specialist III

**Mark Hansen**  
Fleet Mechanic

**Sandy Hansen**  
Grants Specialist III

**Ashley Hayes**  
Community Development Specialist

**Dee Holtz**  
Administrative Assistant

**Mindy Jensen**  
Communications Coordinator

**Cindy Johnson**  
Transit Scheduler I

**Aaron Koontz**  
Grants Specialist I

**Matthew Lee**  
Building Inspector II

**Christy Pederson**  
Transit Reporting Coordinator

**Nicole Rhodes**  
Grants Specialist II

**Phil Richter**  
Building Inspector I

**Kristen Templeton**  
Transit Coordinator

**Kristine Stokes, AICP**  
Community Development Specialist

**Teresa Wright**  
Finance Specialist