

Award

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Burt is a sixth-generation farmer working on the family farm in Marshall County where he grows corn and soybeans and raises hogs and cattle, alongside his parents, his wife, Karen, and their one-year-old daughter, Rachel.

Burt is also a graduate of the Ag Leaders Institute and the current Marshall County Farm Bureau President.

However, his plan after studying at Iowa State was to get away from the family farm for a few years and find employment elsewhere before returning.

On the night of the 2013 Super Bowl, however, there was perhaps a bit of divine intervention.

The Dodge Ram commercial that featured Paul Harvey's narration of his "So God Made A Farmer" speech struck a chord with Burt, who hadn't previously heard Harvey's speech, which was initially published in a syndicated column in 1986.

"After I saw that, I thought about how it was Sunday night, and I'd wake up tomorrow and leave the farm to go travel somewhere two hours away for a different job," Burt said. "I realized that I needed to be back home on the farm, working with my dad."

Burt's influence on agriculture goes beyond the family farm.

As the county president, he delivers presentations to students at area schools, like at a recent career day for GMG.

"I think it's surprising more and more kids are involved in agriculture, often without realizing it," Burt said, citing gardening and taking care of animals as an entryway to agriculture. "It's all about putting a face to what is being done on the farm. There's a lot of different hats you can wear as a farmer, too. You can be good at working with tractors or good with finance."

As part of the award, each winner is given a \$2,000 grant to designate to a non-profit of their choice. Burt opted to contribute his grant toward the Seeds of Hope Foundation, an organization that assists young farm families struggling with long-term,

life-threatening illnesses.

Burt met the foundation's organizer, Justine Stevenson, while they were at Iowa State, and got to know her and her late husband, Chasen — whom the foundation is dedicated to — through the Farm Bureau's young farmer events.

Chasen passed away in November 2018 after battling kidney cancer and Burt had previously raised funds for Chasen and his family through a "Ride for Chasen Stevenson" bicycle-riding fundraiser.

"The foundation does a great job with a lot of those hidden costs that go with medical expenses," Burt said. "Insurance, lost wages, hotels, travel expenses, it adds up."

On that subject, Burt sees increasing costs as one of the mounting challenges that farmers face today, whether it's inputs or interest rates on operating loans.

Beyond that, farming draws on the wait for that next much-needed rain.

"All farmers are eternal optimists hoping for that next rain," Burt said. "We plant corn and soybeans in the dry dirt hoping the good lord will give us rain and good weather."

Burt was also lauded for his conservation efforts, including grassed waterways, Conservation Reserve Program acres and the use of technology to apply precise fertilizer amounts.

"It's your own business and you can improve it however you want," Burt said. "You may get a record crop one year and then you're looking to next year on how you can improve it. That's what farming's all about, just trying to get better every year, every day."

It's not all profits though — it's about tradition, and family.

"There's sacrifices you make in a busy season, ... some days it's a lot of weight being a sixth-generation farmer," Burt said. "But I can say that I can eat lunch with my family every day, have dinner with my family every night, and don't have to travel unless I want to. ... And you wake up every morning knowing you're working with family and doing something your family has been doing for over 150 years."



T-R PHOTO BY ROBERT MAHARRY

A crew works to remove debris after a badly damaged building at the southwest corner of Main and Center streets was knocked down in the summer of 2022. The city has worked to demolish several properties in the aftermath of the 2018 tornado.

Downtown

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or myself who weren't here during that disaster allows us to bring the perspective and not relying on the disaster as the rationale for why we aren't, but instead using the drive and energy of new leadership to say "Well, what can we be?"

Citing the two organizations' new shared office space in the old Hopkins building at 34. W. Main St., which was made possible through a revitalization project completed by Janell Carter and Cutler Developments, as an example — as well as Jeff Simms' building at 26 E. Main St. — Hall hopes other fledgling entrepreneurs will be inspired to take a chance on opening a business downtown after renovations are finished.

"(It's) hopefully gonna give courage to more business owners or more folks that are sitting on the sidelines that are saying 'Hey, I wanna own a building downtown. I wanna leave a legacy downtown. I wanna revitalize a space into something incredible.' We'll hopefully draw them in and get them to say yes to doing more down here," Hall said. "We've got some incredible business mix downtown right now from large employers that allow for some really strong daytime traffic in our downtown. What I'm really excited to see is continuing to bolster that nighttime traffic that's built in — so the upper story residential — that will just give more courage to more business owners to say yes to opening a small business downtown but then also to staying open longer hours because there's gonna be more traffic at all times of day."

And while there's plenty of cause for optimism, they're well aware the process won't come without challenges. Several buildings damaged beyond repair have been demolished — including at prime locations like the southwest intersection of Center and Main Street and at Main and First Street — but local leaders must now find the developers and contractors willing to invest the capital in constructing something new to take their place. Additionally, several downtown buildings remain vacant and will require major improvements before a business could open.

"Right now, we do have some buildings that are vacant, and they need some TLC and some love. And those buildings, some of them are being touched with the downtown revitalization grant," Millizer said. "The other ones, we're hoping to move those building owners to sell those buildings or make those buildings vital so that they can be utilized for the downtown."

Millizer added that she frequently receives calls from prospective business owners inquiring about downtown space, and she commended the city for taking possession of some vacant buildings that will eventually be put out for bid, although she later added that the pandemic and the closure of the courthouse created even more challenges for properties tied up in litigation at the time.

"It's important that we are recruiting businesses that complement the current businesses that we have, and the best way to recruit new businesses as well, or a piece of it, is to retain the businesses that we have and really support them," she said.

Since the city adopted the 90-page Downtown Master Plan and the Downtown Implementation Plan, leaders have solicited community input on what the residents and businesspeople of Marshalltown would like the district to look like in the future, and the results of the Main Street Market Analysis were recently revealed.

According to Millizer, some of the top needs include a coffee shop (a new one should be opened by the end of the summer), men's and women's clothing stores and niche entertainment options like ax-throwing and arcade bars. One of the most interesting findings was that the biggest point of pride downtown is the now reopened courthouse, and Hall was thankful for county leadership past and present having the courage to maintain the classic design instead of opting to rebuild what would ultimately be a more cookie cutter modern structure.

"The Main Street Market Analysis is a really great tool for not only ensuring that the pulse of what folks are looking for kind of mirrors what a lot of us are already thinking, but (it) also works to get folks about what can be so that when those stores come, they can say 'Oh, I remember giving that input before,'" Hall said. "And it just helps endear themselves back to the community because they feel like they have ownership in something that happened, or maybe it'll inspire them to become an entrepreneur because they'll have seen the results of the survey they remember taking and say 'Hey, I've been having that idea for months. Why don't I just take that step?'"

For all of these dreams to be realized, the city must also provide the infrastructure to support them, which is a main reason visitors to downtown currently see State Street torn up and shut down to traffic as part of a major overhaul. Main Street is up next, with construction expected to begin in late 2024 or early 2025, and the reconstruction of both major roadways is estimated to cost

around \$30 million in all.

Public Works Director Heather Thomas explained that the upgrades will include storm, sanitary and water along with the streets and sidewalks that will provide for "amenity zones" with aesthetically pleasing benches, bike racks, trash cans, landscaping and potentially some creative placemaking, wayfinding signs and artistic elements.

"We're hoping that that facelift of downtown invites more pedestrians to come out and enjoy downtown, spend time downtown and make it a little more walkable and not so much, you know, drive to a store, shop at that one store, hop back in their car and then leave," Thomas said. "They're trying to make an environment that is more walkable. You may stop at one store (to) pick up a piece of clothing, stop at another (to) grab a dessert and kind of spend time downtown."

During discussions about replacing some of the city's water mains last year, it was mentioned that some were well over 100 years old, and as Thomas put it, while potential business owners may not know that when they're exploring potential sites, aged infrastructure almost always has a higher chance of failing and causing problems down the road.

City Planner Hector Hernandez-Morales, a 2018 MHS graduate, was about a month away from heading off to Iowa State when the tornado damaged his family's home, and he said visiting major European cities helped him to realize just how important a vibrant, pedestrian-friendly downtown district is to the vitality of a community.

"Our Downtown Master Plan for Marshalltown includes a lot of what our residents want, and we're slowly but surely working towards that," Hernandez-Morales said. "I would appreciate having more walkability, feeling safe downtown, not being too worried about any cars getting in the way and making it safer for biking and pedestrians."

He's also hopeful that once a new city administrator and housing and community development director are hired, progress will resume on redeveloping brownfields lots and bringing in mixed-use commercial projects. Although he's barely over a year into the job and currently working without a direct supervisor, Hernandez-Morales is confident about the future of the community where he grew up and returned to after obtaining his degree.

"It's gonna take a lot of commitment and involvement from our community members and a lot of government support, too. If there's a change we need to do, like an amendment or a zoning

amendment, we'll have to get full support from our council members and also our community members and let them know we're working toward our Downtown Master Plan," he said.

Echoing a major aspect of recent Chamber banquet speaker Jeff Siegler's keynote address — and paraphrasing what has seemingly become Hall's catchphrase, "It's another great day in Marshalltown" — Millizer expressed optimism that the revitalization process will allow residents and leaders to develop "what they want" instead of simply accepting the way things are.

"We deserve great things here in Marshalltown. We deserve to have places where we feel comfortable in, that are beautiful, and we deserve to shop at places that serve our needs and all of that. We deserve great things. We don't have to settle for mediocre," she said. "We have opportunities to increase our quality of life, and I think that everybody's really focused on that."

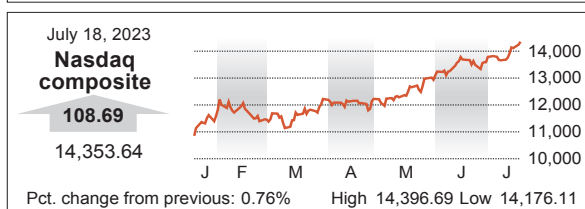
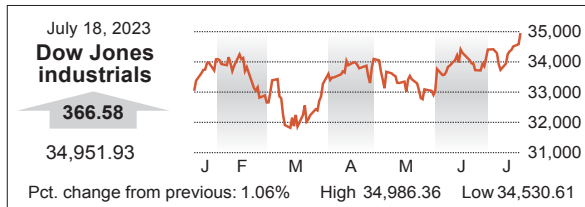
Hall shared similar thoughts and challenged residents, business owners and local officials to think big as they map out the future.

"If we take those resources and we invest them into what we know will be beautiful and what will be great for the community, the longevity of those will outlive all of us, and that sense of pride and investment in the community will continue to strengthen," he said. "As we navigate these tough times for our community and for our city and hope to strive forward, it's gonna take investment that is gonna make people uncomfortable at times, but if we do it, we know that the point of pride and the sense of community and that recognition that we deserve great things is there."

And while anyone who was in Marshalltown on that day five years ago likely wishes it would've hit anywhere but here, the tornado has, in some ways, created a golden opportunity to replace the rubble and destruction with something better that will last for generations.

"I don't know that without the tornado, the revitalization that we're doing downtown, including taking some of these older buildings down, making green spaces, making pocket park type areas, making additional properties available for interested developers that want to bring additional momentum downtown, I don't think that would've happened," Thomas said. "Unfortunately, the tornado was a disaster, but it's really provided an opportunity for the city to take that, move forward and improve downtown much further than what it would've been without the tornado."

A DAY ON WALL STREET



Local Grains

The prices paid for cash grain in central Iowa at the close of trade on July 18, 2023.

Corn: \$5.84 – 5.99 Soybeans: \$14.55 – 14.60

Wall Street's AI frenzy and strong bank profits send stocks higher

NEW YORK — Wall Street's frenzy around artificial intelligence helped pushed stocks to their best level in more than 15 months. The S&P 500 rose 0.7 percent Tuesday to its highest finish since early April 2022. The Dow added 366 points, or 1.1 percent, and the Nasdaq composite climbed 0.8 percent. Microsoft was the biggest force pushing the S&P 500 higher with a 4 percent gain after announcing the pricing for some artificial-intelligence services. Stocks in the financial industry also drove the market higher after reporting stronger profits for the spring than expected. Charles Schwab, Bank of America and Morgan Stanley all rallied more than 4 percent.