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Mason City Named All-Star Community

Mason City was named a 2026 All-Star Community by the Iowa League of Cities for its River City Riverwalk and Waterfront District. The city will be recognized at an Awards Banquet at the League's Annual Conference & Exhibit, held in Bettendorf from September 23-25.

The All-Star Community Award is the most prestigious honor given by the League to cities. Entries are judged by a panel of former city officials and others familiar with municipal government. Judges determine winners based on innovative efforts in areas such as urban renewal, development, preservation, collaborative efforts or quality of life improvements. Mason City was one of three of Iowa's 940 cities to garner such recognition.

Mason City has transformed a once-overgrown and underutilized stretch of Willow Creek into the River City Riverwalk and Bill Schickel Plaza, a vibrant public space that blends nature, art and architecture while supporting the continued revitalization of downtown. Opened in June 2025, the project has converted a dormant area into a welcoming destination where residents and visitors can walk, gather and experience the community's rich cultural and architectural heritage.

The Riverwalk features accessible trails, native landscaping, public art and educational elements inspired by Mason City's Prairie School architectural legacy. At its center is *Harmony in Light*, a striking laser-cut stainless steel sculpture by internationally renowned artists Serge Beaulieu and Yelen Filipchuk of HYBYCOZO Studios. The plaza also honors former Mayor Bill Schickel, recognizing his decades of service and commitment to the community. Together, these features create a unique public space that celebrates creativity, history and the natural beauty of Willow Creek.

Strategically located within Mason City's Downtown Cultural and Entertainment District, the Riverwalk enhances connections between nearby housing, entertainment venues, parks and future hotel and convention facilities. The project provides new recreational, educational and economic opportunities while encouraging outdoor activity and community engagement. By reimagining the waterfront as a place for art, learning and connection, the River City Riverwalk has quickly become a signature destination and a symbol of Mason City's continued investment in a vibrant, livable downtown.

The Iowa League of Cities congratulates Mason City on this remarkable achievement. This year's other All-Star Community Award winners are West Branch and Story City.

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The Iowa League of Cities is the oldest, continuously operating municipal league in the country. Founded in 1898, the League is a not-for-profit organization that serves as the unified voice for cities, providing advocacy, training and guidance to the cities of Iowa.