

# Telling Your Story: Strategies for Local Governments to Amplify Their Message

Aaron Young, Indianola Cori Burbach, Dubuque

Handouts and presentations are available in the event app.



### Telling Your Story:

Strategies for Local Governments to Amplify Their Message

September 18, 2025

### This slidedeck might look a little disjointed!

#### How To Do It

- > Publish every announcement to a linkable page. Your URL never changes.
- > Create platform-native video cutdowns that direct users back to that page.
- > Send segmented email with one primary call-to-action.
- > Mirror critical updates across official channels.
- > Pin posts and keep timestamps visible.



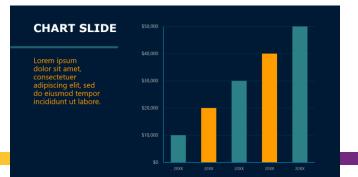
Use the dark blue as a primary color, with other colors as an accent. Copy and paste the HEX, CMYK, or RGB codes below.

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#328186	#F15B22	#D7DF23	#19478D
C:80 M:34 Y:44 K:7	C:0 M:80 Y:100 K:0	C:20 M:0 Y:100 K:0	C:100 M:83 Y:13 K:2
R:50 G:129 B:134	R:241 G:91 B:34	R:215 G:223 B:35	R:25 G:71 B:141

Download the following fonts for use. If you run into installation errors, contact Information Services

TITLES: SOFIA PRO BOLD - ALL CAPS SUB-TITLES: SOFIA PRO CONDENSED BOLD - ALL CAPS Informal Sub-Head: Fira Sans Semibold Formal Sub-Head: Lora Bold Informal Text Body Copy: Fira Sans Book Formal Text Body Copy: Lora







### **About Aaron Young**

- Graduated from Simpson College (Class of 2014)
- After Simpson: Journalist, Des Moines Register
- ➤ And Then: Communications Specialist, West Des Moines Community Schools
- > And Then: Creative Strategist, Bing Bang
- To Today: Communications Manager, City of Indianola





















Posted: May 04, 2012

#### Storm shut out Dubuque, clinch tournament berth















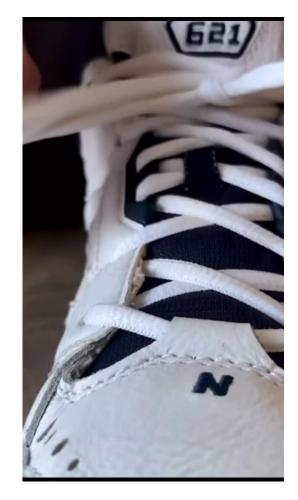


















### About Cori Burbach

- Assistant City Manager, City of Dubuque
- IaCMA Board Past-President
- ICMA Incoming Board Member
- Local government experience in Iowa, Wisconsin, Delaware, Pennsylvania



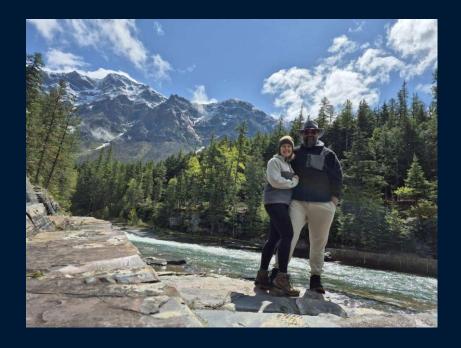
















### How Do I Explain What "Storytelling" Means?

#### **Engagement with a purpose.**

Storytelling matters.

- People connect with stories, not reports.
- Builds trust, transparency and relatability.
- Helps control the narrative in any type of situation.



### Four Core Storytelling Strategies

- 1. Humanize
- 2. Simplify
- 3. Visualize
- 4. Localize

"But how do I think like a journalist?"



### **DELIVERING DUBUQUE**

#### Delivering Dubuque with Mayor Cavanagh

Play all

Discover how investments grow into change. "Delivering Dubuque" is a video series that takes a look at meaningful investments and initiatives that are bringing about positive change in our...



#### Delivering Dubuque | Parks & : Recreation

City of Dubuque Government 103 views • 5 months ago CC



#### Delivering Dubuque | Restoring Commercial Air...

City of Dubuque Government 389 views • 10 months ago CC



### Delivering Dubuque | Housing & Community Development

City of Dubuque Government 169 views • 1 year ago CC



#### Delivering Dubuque: City Services

City of Dubuque Government 950 views • 2 years ago CC



#### Delivering Dubuque: Tipper Carts

City of Dubuque Government 415 views • 2 years ago CC



#### Delivering Dubuque: Dubuque

City of Dubuque Government 278 views • 2 years ago



City of Dubuque YouTube channel > <a href="https://www.youtube.com/c/CityofDubuqueGovernment">https://www.youtube.com/c/CityofDubuqueGovernment</a> What does local government do? > <a href="https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GulimOghbjg">https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GulimOghbjg</a>

#### Our City at Work Play all

MEANINGFUL WORK THAT SUPPORTS THE COMMUNITY Whether at City Hall or out on city streets, City of Dubuque employees serve our residents, businesses, and visitors every day. Here,...



#### Water Distribution Crew | Marty Kearney

City of Dubuque Government 69 views • 1 year ago

CC



City of Dubuque Government 148 views • 1 year ago

CC



#### Dave Weis | Community Resource Officer

City of Dubuque Government 268 views • 2 years ago



#### Ava Jorin | Community Resource Officer

City of Dubuque Government 253 views · 2 years ago



#### Merrill Crawford | Pool Laborer

City of Dubuque G 252 views • 2 year CC







Animal adventures: Dubuque animal control officer cares for creatures in crisis

Flanagan transfers the cat into a clean cage with food and water at Dubuque Regional Humane Society.

#### Animal adventures: Dubuque animal control officer cares for creatures in crisis

BY ERIK HOGSTROM, erik.hogstrom@thmedia.com Feb 26, 2023 Updated Apr 1, 2024





Buy Now



#### **TIMELINESS**

Is this relevant now?

#### **TRENDS**

Is this representative of greater patterns and behaviors?

# SIX QUALITIES OF NEWSWORTHY

CONTENT

#### **NOVELTY**

Has something like this ever happened before?

#### **FAME**

Do a lot of people know who/what this is about?

#### LOCALIZATION

Is this happening near me?

#### SIGNIFICANCE

Does this impact a lot of people?



#### **City of Indianola Strategic Priorities**



**OUR WELCOMING HOMETOWN:** The City of Indianola will provide exceptional city services and facilities that enhance the quality of life for our residents. We will focus on investing in modern and sustainable infrastructure and technology to ensure seamless delivery of city services. Our ultimate goal is to create a welcoming community, with housing options to fit every need, second to none, in terms of livability, comfort and satisfaction.



**THRIVING HUB OF ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT & INNOVATION:** We will cultivate a thriving business community that promotes economic growth and prosperity for our city. By leveraging our city's unique strengths and resources, we will create an environment that encourages business growth and investment.



**RESOURCE OPTIMIZATION:** Through efficient and effective utilization of the city's financial, human and material resources we will empower our teams to achieve our strategic goals and objectives, building a more resilient, dynamic, and sustainable city that meets the needs of all our residents and stakeholders.



**PROTECT & PROMOTE PUBLIC HEALTH AND SAFETY:** We place ensuring the safety and well-being of our citizens, staff, and visitors as a top priority, and we are committed to protecting it every day. By prioritizing safety and well-being, we create a secure, inclusive, and prosperous city for everyone.



### Thinking Like a Journalist

- Determine best method(s) of content creation/distribution.
- > Ask questions.
  - Who cares? Why now? What's the impact?
- > Translate projects into humancentered narratives.
- Focus on people, conflict and resolution.
- Always apply the 5Ws and H.
  - ➤ Who? What? When? Where? Why? How?
- Build/sustain trust and experiment.



### Think Of It This Way...

### "Local news makes folks feel informed, which makes them more active citizens, which makes their communities vibrant."

–Kim Kleman Executive Director, Report for America



### **Meet Residents Where They Already Get Info**

#### > Go digital-first, mobile-first.

In 2024, 86% of U.S. adults at least sometimes get news on a phone, computer or tablet, and 58% prefer digital devices.

#### > Use social as a news pathway.

- > 54% of U.S. adults at least sometimes get news from social media.
- Carry your stories natively to official platforms, and link back to a single source-of-truth page, like your official City website.



(Source: <u>Pew Research Center, September 2024</u>)

### Meet Residents Where They Already Get Info (Continued)

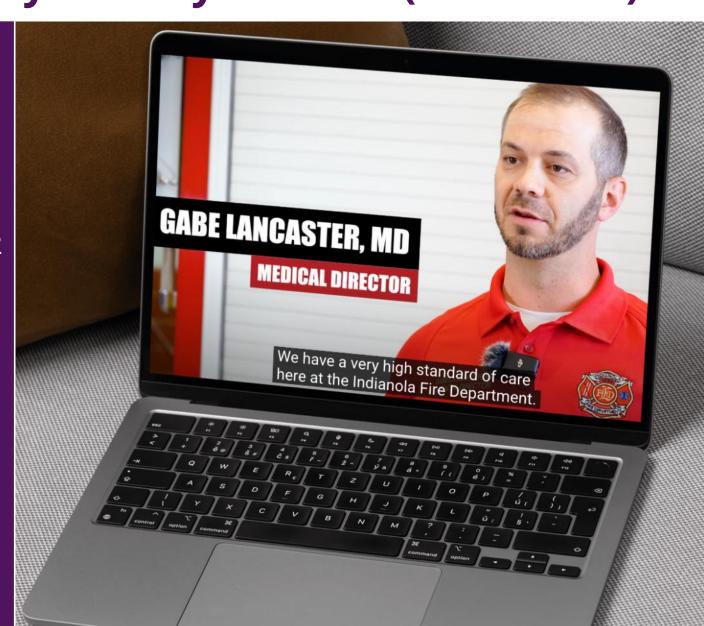
#### > Email still drives action.

- ➤ Government emails have a median open rate of approximately 34%, with state and local emails averaging around 35%.
- The click rate is about 8%, and the 90-day engagement rate is roughly 62 percent.
- Citizens will act when content is relevant and segmented.

#### Video lives on platforms.

- Most news video consumption happens on platforms, not publisher sites.
- Plan vertical/short formats with captions in addition to horizontal.

(Source: <u>Public Communications Benchmark Report 2024, Granicus</u>) (Source: Reuters Institute Digital News Report 2024, Reuters)





Mikaela Tully, Laboratory Supervisor at Dubuque's Water & Resource Recovery Center, and the City's team work behind the scenes to keep Dubuque's water clean. They ensure wastewater is properly treated and drinking water is safe-all while protecting our environment.

It's the kind of work you don't think about, but we all rely on every day... See more





#### Mikaela Tully | Lab Supervisor

163 views • 7 months ago

"We do the work that nobody thinks about that makes our city great."

Mikaela Tully, Laboratory Supervisor at Dubuque's Water & Resource Recovery Center, and the City's team ensure the water that leaves Dubuque is clean, safe, and meets environmental standards. From testing wastewater to to monitoring drinking ... READ MORE

#### Industrial Pretreatment

Odor Control

Fats, Oils and Grease (FOG) Program

WRRC Tour

Home > Government > City Departments > Water & Resource Recovery Center

#### **Water & Resource Recovery Center**



When water and "other stuff" go down the drain in Dubuque, it ends up at the Water & Resource Recovery Center (WRRC), which processes an average of 7 million gallons of wastewater per day.

#### What is Wastewater?

While most people think of wastewater as only sanitary sewage, wastewater comes from many sources, including homes, businesses, schools, and industries. This includes water from showers, sinks, dishwashers, laundries, car washes, hospitals, and food processing operations, and this is just scratching the surface.

According to the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (U.S. EPA), the average American produces 100 gallons of wastewater each day-that's nearly 1,600 glasses of water or almost two full bathtubs!

#### What happens at the WRRC?

Pure-oxygen biological treatment is used to clean the wastewater. Then, anaerobic digesters use helpful bacteria to convert sludge, the solid matter, into fertilizer for farm fields. Approximately 15.5 tons of fertilizer are produced per day. That's an average of 8 semi loads per week of useful material created instead of being burned.

The anaerobic digestion process produces methane gas. The gas is captured, cleaned, and burned to power turbines that generate electricity. The heat and electricity produced through this process is used to heat and power the WRRC. Currently, the facility produces enough electricity to power approximately 360



Water Testing

Pollution Prevention

Facility Upgrade

Staff Directory

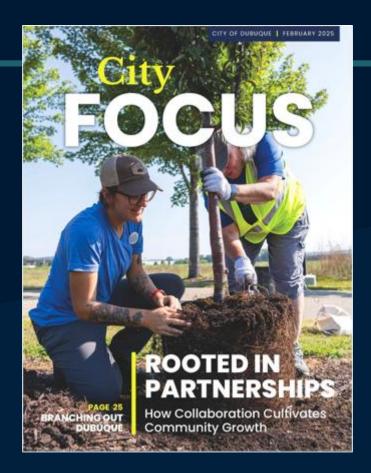
#### **Quick Links**

- Iowa Department of Na Resources
- State Hygienic Laborate
- · USEPA

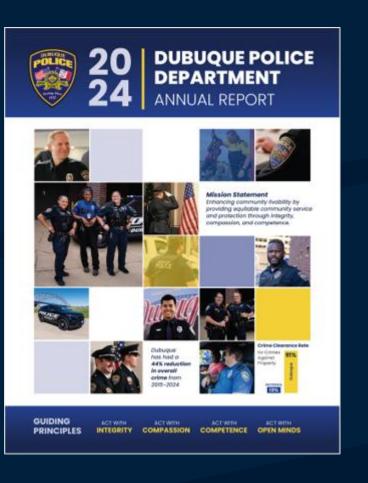
View All Links



### THE RIGHT PLACE FOR PRINT









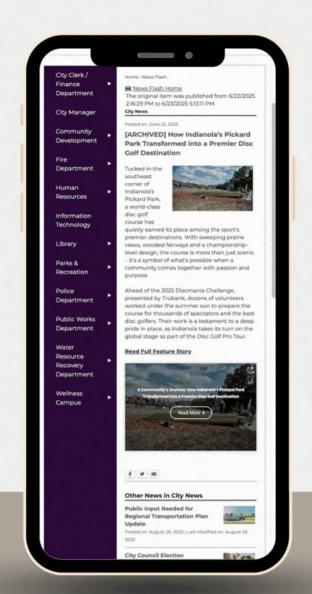
### How To Do It

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### Write Like A Journalist (Because The Majority Scan)

- Always lead with impactful headlines and key visuals.
- Use short paragraphs, bulleted lists and micro-content, like pull quotes or bold text.
- Present critical information "above the fold" for mobile users.
- > Expect residents to skim before they dive right in.



### How To Do It

- > Start with impact in the first 2-3 sentences.
  - ➤ What changes for me? When? Where?
- ➤ **Format:** Problem → City Action → What to Do → What's Next
- Include a fact box (budget, timeline, neighborhoods), one human quote and one visual (photo, map, chart).
- > Add alternative text, transcripts/captions and descriptive links.
  - "View Paving Map" not "Click Here."



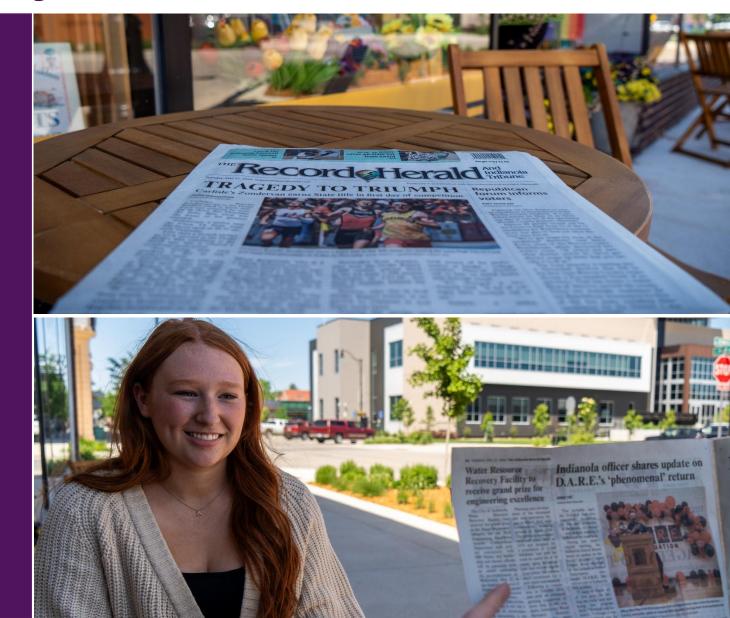
### **How To Do It (Continued)**

- > Follow AP style and organizational brand standards, but write like how a resident would search.
  - ➤ Use natural, everyday terms in titles and headers. No jargon!
- > Structure with headings and subheadings.
- ➤ Optimize with featured and related resources.
- ➤ Link internally.
  - > Helps both search engine optimization (SEO) and users navigate.
- > Write clear page titles and meta descriptions.
  - > This is what shows in search results; newer content will bump old information lower in rankings.



### **Work Productively With Journalists**

- Message reach can be amplified.
- Credibility can be earned.
- > Relationships can be built.
- > Crisis communications can be accelerated.
- > Reputation can be protected.



### How To Do It

### > Be proactive, not reactive.

- ➤ Don't wait until a crisis. Pitch human-interest stories regularly.
- > Share visuals; reporters may have no time to shoot their own.

### > Offer people and not just data.

- > Numbers are important, but human voices even better.
- Coordinate subject matter experts who can personalize the story and drive impactful messaging.

#### > Build a media kit.

 Maintain an always-updated digital folder with fact sheets, photos and B-roll, logos and brand guidelines.

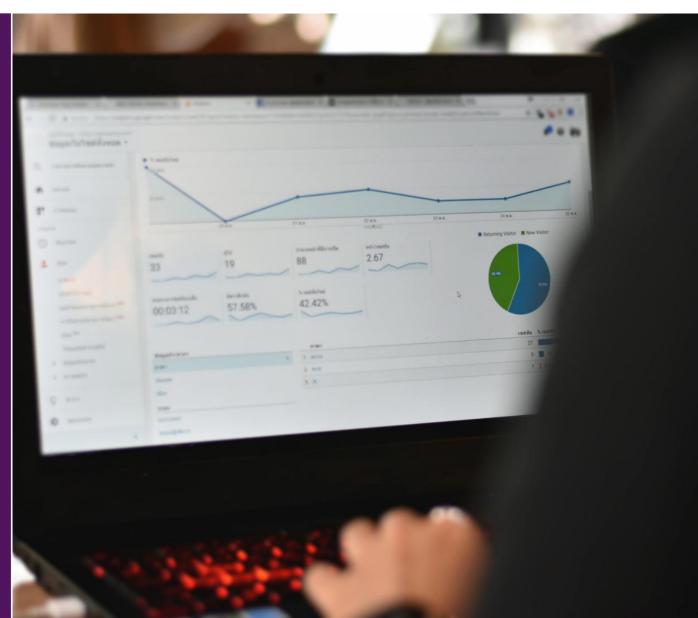
### Measure What Matters (And Iterate)

#### > Review Analytics Regularly.

- Look at which pages people visit most often and how long they stay.
- Notice where they drop off. That may mean information is unclear or hard to find.
- Use search data (what users type into your site's search bar) to uncover gaps and new content needs.

#### Monitor Social Media Engagement.

- Pay attention to interactions, shares, comments, saves and clicks – not just impressions.
- Watch for patterns: What topics spark questions, what formats drive traffic and what posts fall flat.



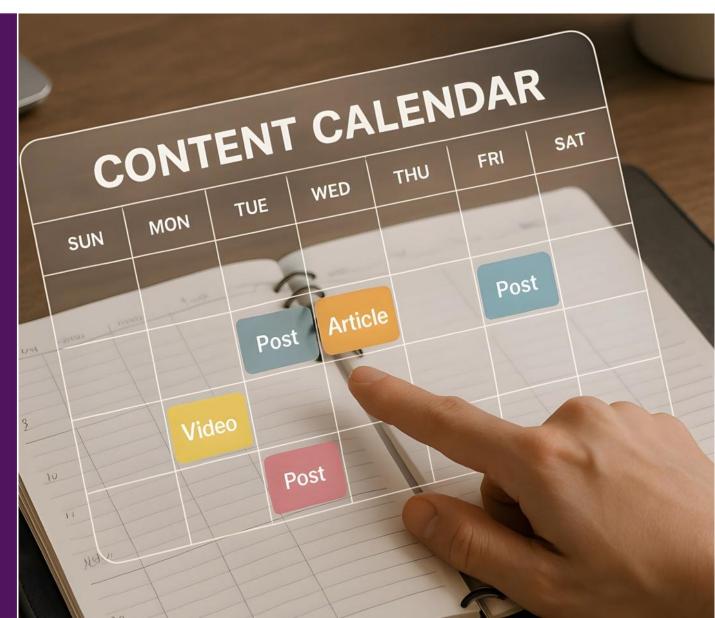
### Measure What Matters (And Iterate)

#### > Take a Balanced Approach.

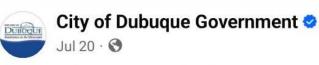
- Don't get caught up in vanity metrics. Big numbers don't necessarily reflect impact.
- Instead, focus on whether your content is reaching the right people and driving them to take the intended action.

#### Learn, Test and Adapt.

- Use what you learn to shape your next story. Try new formats, adjust tone or simplify language.
- Compare month-to-month performance to track progress.
- ➤ Treat as a cycle: Post → Review → Adjust → Improve.







Looking for a color refresh? Check out the 2025 City of Dubuque Pantone™ color palette!













Mae Harriman Hingtgen + 100

2 comments 9 shares





Comment





### Website Analytics (January 1-August 6)

#### **City of Indianola Website**

Overall Page Views

351,479
(1.70%)
2024: 345,649
(17.13%)
from 2023

Active Users

107,158
(8.9%)

2024: 117,622
(1.85%)
from 2023

Average Engagement

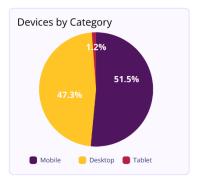
55 seconds
(13.73%)

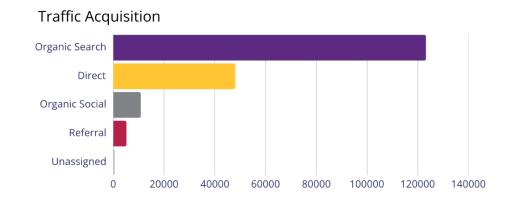
2024: 48 sec
(10.59%)
from 2023

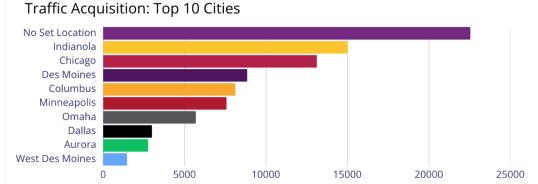
Event Count

1,436,955
(15.54%)

2024: 1,186,025
(16.8%)
from 2023





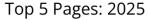


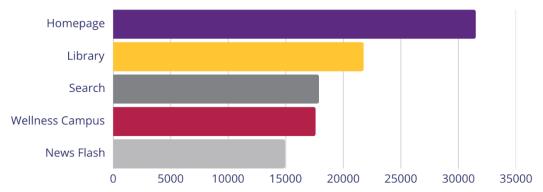
(Source: Google Analytics)



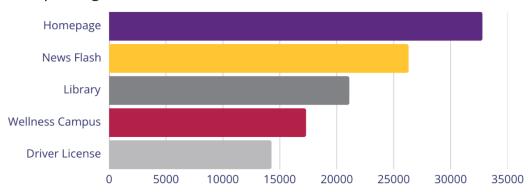
### Website Analytics (January 1-August 6)

#### **City of Indianola Website**

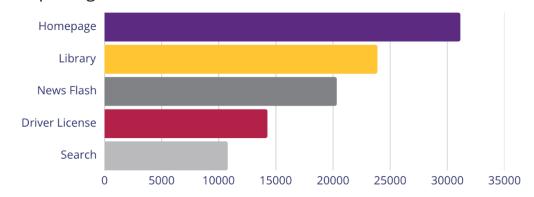




Top 5 Pages: 2024



Top 5 Pages: 2023

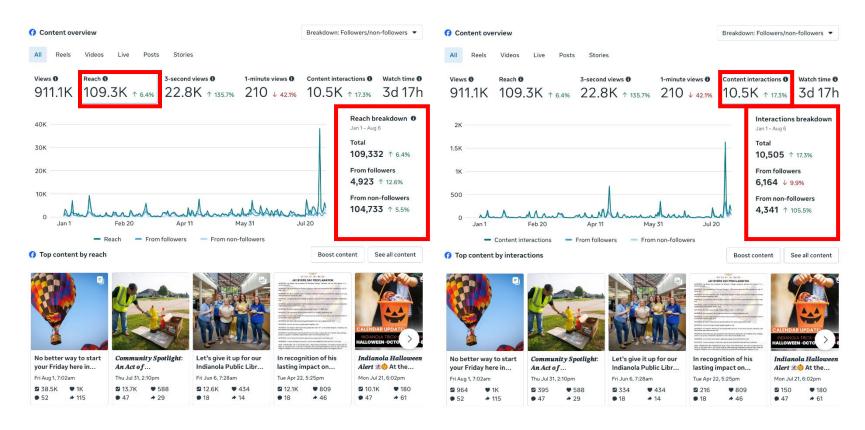


(Source: Google Analytics)



### Social Media Analytics (January 1-August 6)

#### **City of Indianola Facebook**



(Sources: Meta for Business, Hootsuite)



### **Social Media Analytics**

(September 5, 2022-September 4, 2023 vs. September 5, 2023-September 4, 2024)



The number of people who like your Page.



The number of people who had content from your Page or about your Page enter their screen. (Posts, check-ins, etc.)



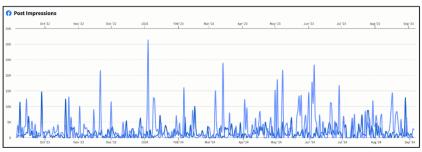
The number of people who liked, commented, shared or performed any type of click on any content from your Page, as a % of the number of people who saw it.



The number of times any content from or about your Page was displayed on a person's screen. (Posts, ads, feed stories, etc.)



The number of posts published to your Page during the time frame.



The number of times content you published during the time frame was displayed on a person's screen. Content includes statuses, photos, links, videos, etc.



The number of clicks on links in posts published that did not generate a feed story. (Links, photos, videos, etc.)



The number of times people watched videos published for at least 3 seconds.



The number of times people clicked to view photos in posts published.

(Source: Hootsuite)













### **Types of Content**



City of Indianola #thinkindianolafirst

Published by Aaron Young ② · January 4 · §

We stand with you, Perry.





#### City of Indianola #thinkindianolafirst

Published by Aaron Young ② · November 21, 2023 · ③

The City of Indianola is delighted to announce the successful completion of the first phase of the East Hillcrest Reconstruction Project, paving the way for its timely reopening and ensuring safer travel experience through winter conditions. Beginning today, November 21, 2023, East Hillcrest Avenue is open to thru traffic. We appreciate the patience, flexibility and understanding of our community as we accomplish this project milestone!

Drive with confidence on our improved infrastructure and stay tuned for further enhancements as we gear up for Phase 2 of construction next spring.





### **Types of Content (Continued)**



City of Indianola, Iowa - Government is in Indianola.

Published by Aaron Young ② · August 1 at 9:02 AM · ③

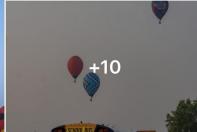
No better way to start your Friday in Indianola!

Here are some of our photos and video chasing the balloons during this morning's National Balloon Classic flight. Did you catch any? Let's see yours!









See insights Create ad

**10** 40

City of Indianola #thinkindianolafirst

Published by Aaron Young

- May 14 - €

Award Winner! 🥈

The City of Indianola's Water Resource Recovery Facility has been awarded the grand prize in the Water/Wastewater category for the 2024 Engineering Excellence Awards Competition. It will be accepted at the American Council of Engineering Companies of Iowa's awards banquet on Wednesday, May 22, in West Des Moines.

Read full announcement: https://www.indianolaiowa.gov/CivicAlerts.aspx?AID=2047

Our Water Resource Recovery Department tirelessly oversees the new plant, seven lift stations, 50-plus pumps, a vast network of sewer mains covering 93 miles throughout Indianola and 2,100 manholes. Department staff also perform routine Jet/Vac truck maintenance, sewer camera inspections and lab testing of the wastewater before and after treatment to ensure compliance throughout all facets of the operation is met.

Get a behind-the-scenes look by watching the video []



See insights and ads

2 comments 3 shares

**Boost post** 

END ANCEA

City of Indianola, Iowa - Government is with Indianola Municipal Utilities and Indianola Fire Department.

Published by Aaron Young @ - July 31 at 4:10 PM - @

Community Spotlight: An Act of Volunteerism in Indianola

Have you started to see those bright, freshly painted fire hydrants around town? There's a heartwarming story behind them.

Rick Miller has been a proud Indianola resident for nearly seven years and a steadfast supporter of public safety. Living with Parkinson's disease, and with public service woven into the fabric of his DNA, he finds joy in giving back to the community, it also keeps him active and busy.

For a few years, Miller has refreshed the paint on the fire hydrant near his home. Recently, while traveling around his neighborhood and throughout Indianola, he noticed other hydrants that needed some TLC. That's when Miller reached out to the Water Department at Indianola Municipal Utilities as well as the Indianola Fire Department, offering to volunteer.

IMU supplied the paint, and with the collective support of all, Miller has begun painting hydrants near West Henderson Avenue and North V Street. "I'll do this for as long as I can go. ...A lot of this is not just for the community – it's for me," he said, providing additional context about his life with Parkinson's.

These hydrants are crucial for our firefighters, helping them quickly find water sources at any hour. And in a city where every bit of help counts, Miller's efforts are truly appreciated and show us all that one person can make a huge impact.

So, when you see a freshly painted hydrant, make sure to check first that the paint is dry. But more importantly: Remember this story and the amazing spirit of volunteerism that makes our community special.

Let's all be inspired to give back in our own ways.



See insights and ads Boost post

00 338 29 comments 29 shares

### **Types of Content (Continued)**

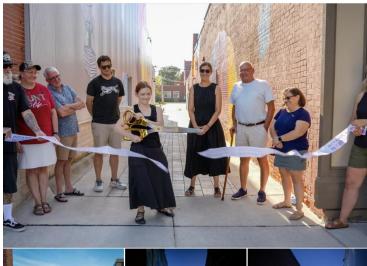
City of Indianola, Iowa - Government is at Indianola Main Street.

Published by Aaron Young ② · August 16 at 9:14 PM · Indianola · ③

\* #IlluminateIndianola is HERE! \*

Earlier today, the Indianola Public Arts Commission, Brayo Greater Des Moines and artist Lori Hepner officially unveiled this exciting new project on the Indianola Downtown Square. The alleyway between 111 and 115 N Buxton Street has been transformed with colorful murals and vibrant lighting, creating a space that shines both day and night.

Be sure to stop by and experience it for yourself! It may even become your new favorite photo









See insights and ads Boost post

City of Indianola, Iowa - Government

Published by Aaron Young ② · April 22 · ③

In recognition of his lasting impact on Indianola, Simpson College and the Greater Des Moines region, Mayor Steve Richardson has officially proclaimed Friday, April 25, 2025, as Jay Byers Day in Indianola – as shared during the April 21 Indianola City Council meeting.

Let us remember Jay's passion, kindness and drive to build a brighter future, and let's keep that spirit alive in all we do for our community.



#### JAY BYERS DAY PROCLAMATION

/HEREAS, Jay Byers had a passion for Simpson College, Indianola, and the Des Moines Metr

/HEREAS, Jay graduated from Simpson College in 1993 and became their 25th president on July 3'

/HEREAS, Mr. Byers created a plan to transform Simpson College and unite the college commun

/HEREAS, Jay previously served as the president and CEO of the Greater Des Moines Partnership HEREAS, under his leadership, the Partnership became one of the largest and renowned Chamb

rganizations in the United States; and

/HEREAS, Mr. Byers passed away unexpectedly on April 17, 2025; and

/HEREAS, Jay was known for his transformative and visionary leadership; and

/HEREAS, he was a pillar of the community who built others up, and inspired and energized the

/HEREAS, Mr. Byers influenced and guided leaders from many organizations; and

/HEREAS, his love of music brought people together; and

/HEREAS, his impact is felt beyond the people that knew him, to the entire Simpson, Indianola, at

/HEREAS, those that knew Jay described him as innovative, passionate, kind, selfless, bold, strateositive, supportive, influential, inspirational, and a true servant leader; and

/HEREAS, we will miss his kindness, generosity, guidance and mentorship; and

/HEREAS, it was a privilege to know him, and we were blessed to have had him in our lives.

OW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED, that I, Mayor Steve Richardson, do hereby proclaim April 2 025, as Jay Byers Day in the City of Indianola, and encourage everyone to carry on Jay's vision impson College and our community by taking his big ideas and tackling them together as one.

The Rechardon

110 N. FIRST STREET . PO BOX 255 . INDIANOLA, IOWA 50125 . PHOME: (515) 561-5410 . WWW.INDIANOLAIDWA.GOV



See insights and ads

Boost post

46 shares

Simpson College and 167 others



Published by Aaron Young . April 21 .

We are thrilled to announce that Jacob Meshke, current deputy city manager for the City of Brookings, South Dakota, has been named the next city manager for the City of Indianola following the adoption and approval of an employment agreement tonight, Monday, April 21, at the Indianola City Council's regular meeting.

Meshke will begin his new role May 28.

Read the full announcement: https://www.indianolaiowa.gov/CivicAlerts.aspx?AID=2189





continue building a community for all citizens. -INDIANOLA MAYOR STEVE RICHARDSON

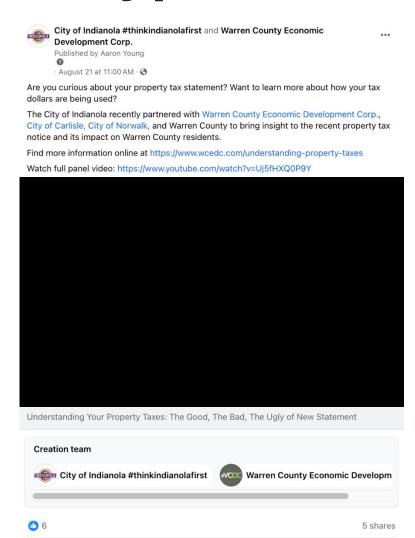
See insights and ads

**Boost post** 

-INCOMING CITY MANAGER JACOB MESHKE



### **Types of Content (Continued)**



Comment

Share

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### ACCESS LATEST EDITION





### **Closing Thought...**

## "Good stories are not written. They are rewritten."

-Phyllis Whitney





