

The Update

September 2026

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



SWIPCO Celebrates Accomplishments and Partners at Annual Meeting and Awards



Nominees and Winners of Ron Kohn Servant Leadership Award (L-R): SWIPCO Executive Director John Mc-Curdy, Cassandra Wilson, Josph Jaworski, Joanne Kohn, Gary McClarnon, Richard Crouch

WALNUT- Southwest Iowa Planning Council (SWIPCO) hosted members, staff, and supporters for their Annual Meeting and Awards on Thursday, September 24th at the Walnut Community Center in Walnut. The gathering included partnership awards, annual report presentation, and the announcement of two Ron Kohn Servant Leadership Award winners.

SWIPCO celebrated another successful year of impact on Southwest Iowa. In Fiscal Year 2026, SWIPCO helped member communities and counties bring in nearly \$2.5 million worth of new grant funds, completed 3 major projects that included \$4.9 million worth of grant investment, rehabilitat-

ed 51 homes through 5 different funding programs, completed over 573 inspections, tackled numerous plans and codes, worked on numerous regional plans, amongst other impacts. Southwest Iowa Transit Agency provided 517,710 rides in FY26 getting residents to work, school, medical appointments, shopping, and more.

The Ron Kohn Servant Leadership Award was created to Continued..

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Annual Meeting and Awards Continued....

shine a light on leaders that go above and beyond to serve the people of the region. The award honors the legacy of the late Ron Kohn who was a Glenwood educator, Mayor, and Mills County Supervisor that led with tremendous selflessness. Five individuals were nominated for the award this year: Silver City Mayor Joseph Jaworski, President of the Hamburg Colonial Theatre Erica Stephens, Silver City City Clerk Cassandra Wilson, Mills County Supervisor Richard Crouch, and Clarinda City Manager Gary McClarnon. Each nominee was recognized for their work and ultimately two very deserving winners were selected, Gary McClarnon and Richard Crouch.

Gary McClarnon has spent more than two decades as the City Manager for the City of Clarinda and his leadership has played a pivotal role in improving infrastructure, fostering economic development, maintaining sound fiscal management, and improving the quality of life for Clarinda residents. Under his leadership the City of Clarinda has completed millions of dollars in public improvement projects, often multi-million within the same year.

Richard Crouch was first elected to the Mills County Board of Supervisors in 2002 and is currently finishing his sixth term. Since 2019 he has served as the NACo Board Representative for the Iowa State Association of Counties, carrying Mills County's voice to the national stage. Richard has been a strong force behind housing, broadband, disaster recovery, and economic development initiatives. Crouch has also been a dedicated volunteer for many organizations and activities throughout the region, including sixty years on the chain gang for Glenwood High School varsity football games.

SWIPCO also presented five Continued..



Clarinda City Manager Gary McClarnon (Right) receiving the Ron Kohn Servant Leadership Award from SWIPCO Executive Director John McCurdy



Mills County Supervisor Richard Crouch (Right) receiving the Ron Kohn Servant Leadership Award from SWIPCO Executive Director John McCurdy

Annual Meeting and Awards Continued....

partnership awards to individuals and organizations that aided successful impacts on SWIPCO and the Region.

Ashley Williams for her exceptional leadership and initiative as part of the Cass Health Occupational Health team to develop and implement job specific physical tests for SWIPCO/SWITA to ensure that employees can safely perform the tasks of their jobs, which helps improve workplace safety and the safety of the general public.

Kevin Benell, Benell Enterprises, for his team's work on numerous housing rehabilitation projects throughout seven counties. Kevin and his team have been valuable partners in helping Southwest Iowans in need get the home repairs that improve their quality of life and allow them to stay in their homes.



SWIPCO Partnership Award (L-R): SWIPCO Executive Director John McCurdy, Ashley Williams

Travis Remmert, Travis Systems, for his help with providing vital software that helps SWIPCO and the Southwest Iowa Housing Trust Fund operate our housing programs. Travis has always been quick to respond to calls for assistance and tailored solutions directly to SWIPCO's needs.



SWIPCO Partnership Award (L-R): SWIPCO Executive Director John McCurdy, Kevin Benell - Benell Enterprises, SWIPCO Building Inspector Matthew Lee

Harry Adams, Mayor of Hamburg, for his valuable leadership as mayor of Hamburg post-flood, including finishing multiple complex federal grants and moving others forward even against extraordinary challenges.

Jennie Edmundson Hospital Foundation and CHI Health Foundation for their partnership on a new transportation program for SWITA called "SWI-Ride". This program aims to help those with a transportation barrier make it to medical and other appointments that are critical to the clients' quality of life.

Continued..

Annual Meeting and Awards Continued...



SWIPCO Partnership Award (L-R): SWIPCO Executive Director John McCurdy; Amber Quigley, CHI Health Foundation; Tara Slevin, Jennie Edmundson Hospital Foundation; SWITA Transit Director Mark Lander

SWIPCO is proud of another successful year of helping the region thrive and moving forward. SWIPCO, founded in 1975, is a council of governments serving eight counties in Southwest Iowa with public transportation, community development, and housing assistance. Counties served are Cass, Fremont, Harrison, Mills, Montgomery, Page, Pottawattamie, and Shelby.

SWIPCO is an equal opportunity employer, provider, and lender.



SWIPCO Partnership Award (L-R): SWIPCO Executive Director John McCurdy, Harry Adams

Play Haven Breaks Ground on New Child Care Facility in Walnut



Play Haven Groundbreaking Ceremony on September 29, 2026

WALNUT- Officials with Play Haven Child Care celebrated a groundbreaking on the renovation of their new facility on Tuesday, September 29, 2026. A wing of the Peace Haven Retirement Home in Walnut is being renovated to house a child care facility to serve residents of the area. Representatives with the Play Haven Child Care Committee, Peace Haven, The Charles E. Lakin Foundation, SWIPCO, the City of Walnut, TS Construction, and HGM Associates were on hand to celebrate construction beginning on the project.

Play Haven Child Care Committee representative Lydia Holtz spoke at the SWIPCO Annual Meeting and Awards recently to discuss the need for the project and how they've gotten the process moved along this far.

The total project cost is expected to be \$1,030,000 and other funding includes a \$500,000 grant from the Lakin Foundation. SWIPCO aided the Play Haven Committee with obtaining a \$600,000 Community Development Block Grant from the Iowa Economic Development Association to make the project a reality. Play Haven has been doing fundraisers and collecting local donations to help cover the remaining



Play Haven Continued...

amount needed to complete the project.

Obtaining childcare is a challenge in the region and this facility will be a big help to area residents looking for the service. Currently, a single in-home daycare provider exists in Walnut to serve a population that is estimated to have 85 children under the age of ten. That's just the need within town. The Iowa Child Care Resource and Referral, a state-run organization focused on connecting families with quality childcare, shows that Pottawattamie County is facing a severe shortage of approximately 6,942 childcare slots to meet demand.

The new Play Haven facility in Walnut is designed to serve up to 60 children.

Demolition and remodeling has just begun on the facility and the contractor is hopeful to have work done in December. Play Haven has some families already on the waiting list and are starting to get more interest with the construction started. Haven Baker has been hired as the Executive Director of the facility and has already started the onboarding and training process. They hope to potentially get the facility open in January if the timeline stays as expected.



Work on one of the new rooms at Play Haven

Birthdays & Anniversaries



Teresa Wright

Finance Specialist
20 Years of Service



Tammy DeBord

Community Development Grants Manager
Birthday Month



Julie Hays

Transit Scheduler I
3 Years of Service



Mark Hansen

Fleet Mechanic
18 Years of Service



Ann Anstey

Housing Programs Coordinator
9 Years of Service

Upcoming Grant

Information:

- Iowans Create Community Mural Program
October 28, 2026
- Wastewater & Drinking Water Treatment Financial Assistance
November
- Community Catalyst
Pre-Apps Due in January
- Small Business Energy Audit Program
May 1, 2029 (Ongoing, first-come basis until funds exhausted)
- EDA Public Works Program
Ongoing
- FEMA Hazard Mitigation Grant Program
Ongoing
- T-Mobile Hometown Grant
Quarterly
- IDNR Food Storage Capacity Grant
Ongoing

From the Desk of the Executive Director

John McCurdy

September is always when we hold our annual meeting and is our chance to take stock of a busy year. Last year was more of a gala event because it was a celebration of our 50th anniversary. This year was a bit smaller scale but no less important and we are blessed with incredible partners.

In the fast-paced world that we live in it's easy to be overwhelmed with the next task and preparing for what comes next. In an organization as diverse as SWIPCO, which encompasses everything from building water towers to hiring transit drivers, there is always something going on and a deadline or goal to hit. But that makes taking a moment to recognize the year that has gone before us and the people that are so important to the success of the organization all the more important.

This year it was a great honor to continue the mission that was started last year of honoring local government officials with the Ron Kohn Servant Leadership Award. This is a highlight of my year having worked with Ron and being able to then continue his legacy in this small way by recognizing those local elected officials and/or government employees that go above and beyond to serve their communities and the wider Southwest Iowa region. Like any award, the Ron Kohn continues to evolve and an important distinction of the two awardees this year, Richard Crouch and Gary McClarnon, are that both have dedicated their long and impactful careers to servant leadership. I strongly encourage anyone reading this to start thinking now about those people in your community that make things work, those people who say "yes" when someone needs to step forward to lead a project and in doing so, lift up others around them to higher service. You don't need to have ever met Ron Kohn to know that we have these servant leaders all throughout Southwest Iowa and it is our hope that over time we will be able to appropriately recognize those people with the Ron Kohn award—so keep that in your mind for next year and nominate someone from your area!

We are fortunate at SWIPCO/SWITA and the Southwest Iowa Housing Trust Fund to have outstanding board members and staff. Our board members sometimes don't realize the wide diversity of programs and scope that this organization has—and that they then are called upon in their roles to help guide. Thank you so much for being engaged advocates and supporters of our mission to improve the lives of everyone in Southwest Iowa. Likewise, none of this happens without the dedication and hard work of the staff. At any given moment around 100 people are on this team and are spread out across all of the 8 counties we serve. Thank you to all and here's to another outstanding year.

SWIPCO STAFF

John McCurdy, AICP
Executive Director

Mark Lander
Transit Director

Daurine Petersen
Administrative Services Director

Rhonda Brown
Finance Manager

Brandie McFarland
Human Resources Specialist

Kersten Abild
Transit Scheduler II

Ann Anstey
Housing Programs Coordinator

Mary Auten
Grants Specialist I

Michael Ballinger
Safety Coordinator

Barb Boggs
Grants Specialist I

Dani Briggs
Planning Manager

Tracy Clark
Transit Scheduler III

Tammy DeBord
Community Development Grants Manager

Mark Hansen
Fleet Mechanic

Julie Hays
Transit Scheduler I

Noah Hirayama
Community Development Specialist I

Dee Holtz
Administrative Assistant

Matthew Lee
Building Inspector II

Chris Parks
Communications Coordinator

Nicole Rhodes
Grants Specialist II

Phil Richter
Building Inspector I

Kyle Rock
Maintenance Assistant

Kristen Templeton
Transit Operations Manager

Teresa Wright
Finance Specialist