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On the cover

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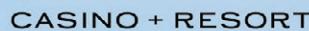
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# WELCOME

## FROM THE CHAMBER PRESIDENT /CEO



**W**elcome to the Spring 2026 edition of Chamber Quarterly. Spring is a season of growth, renewal and fresh energy — and it’s the perfect time to reflect on the power of giving back. In this issue of CQ, we’re shining a light on the incredible work of local nonprofits and the important role they play in strengthening the Dubuque region.

Nonprofits are more than service providers — they are problem-solvers, advocates and partners in building a community where people and businesses can thrive. Their work supports our neighbors, addresses real challenges and helps create the quality of life that makes this region such a special place to live and work.

In this issue, you’ll learn what drives these organizations, who they serve and the impact they make every day. You’ll also see where challenges exist — and where the business community can step in through partnerships, volunteering, sponsorships and creative collaboration.

At the Chamber, we believe a strong community and a strong economy go hand in hand. When businesses and nonprofits work together, the ripple effect benefits us all.

We hope this issue inspires you to connect, get involved and consider how you can be part of the Power of Giving — this spring and all year long.

Warm regards,

Molly Grover  
President & CEO  
Dubuque Area Chamber of Commerce





# *Welcome* New Members



9/17/2025



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9/22/2025



9/23/2025

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10/29/2025



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11/10/2025



11/18/2025

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11/25/2025



12/4/2025



12/16/2025

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1/5/2026



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1/5/2026



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A group of several hands of different skin tones are raised and positioned to form a circle around the central text. The hands are open, palms facing inward. In the background, a woman with blonde hair wearing a green shirt is smiling, though she is out of focus.

# THE POWER OF GIVING

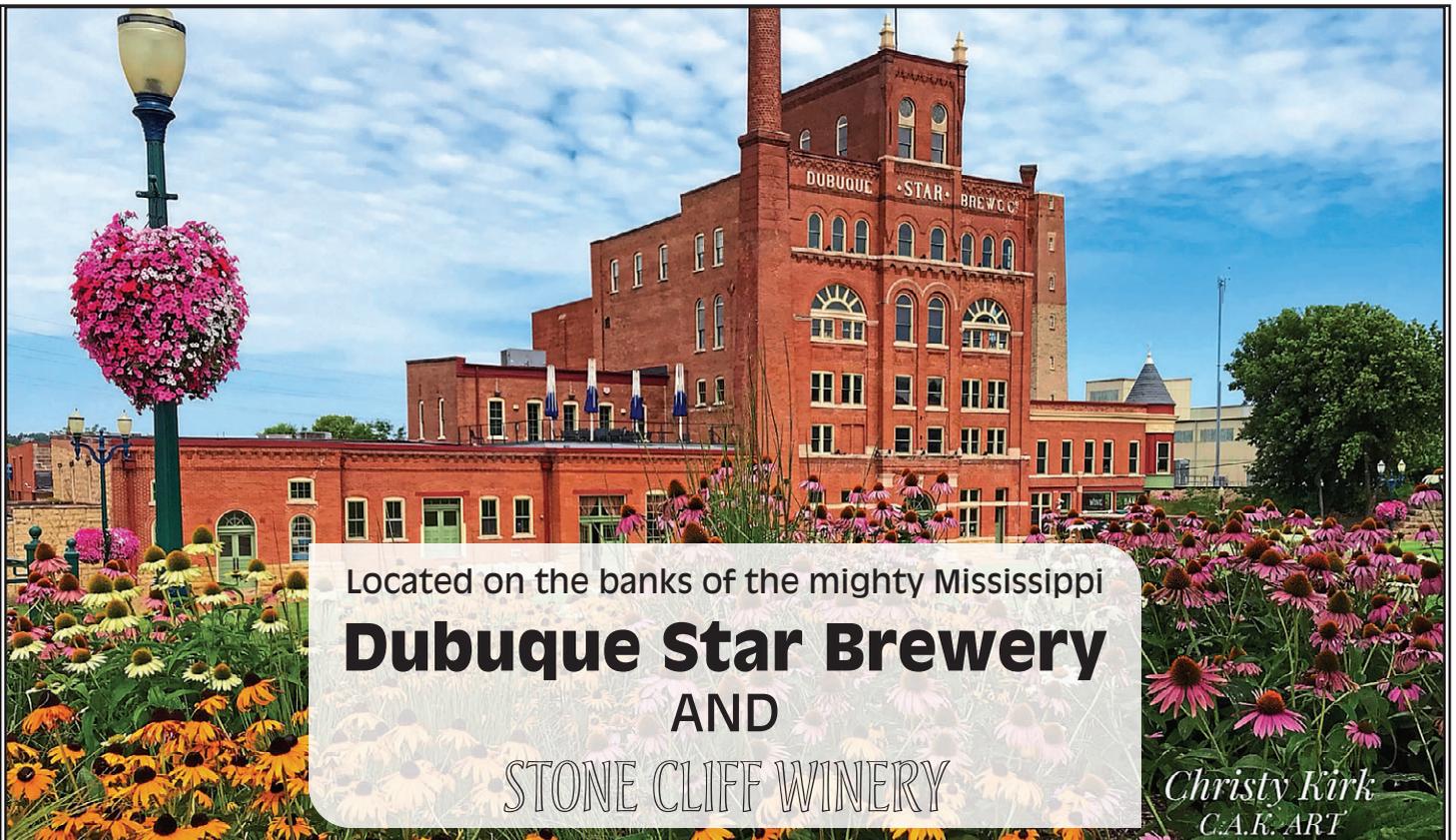
BY DAN RUSSO





Like a well-trained pianist launching sweet melodies through a concert hall, local nonprofit organizations send the beauty of generosity throughout the greater Dubuque community. While it might be impossible to gauge the full power of giving through charity, those who work for these organizations often get to witness aspects of it up close. One example occurred at this year's Centrally Rooted holiday recital.

The nonprofit promotes positive brain health through creative expression. This often involves providing music lessons to children. The youth often perform at the annual show.



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“A student with special needs, who was deeply anxious about performing, walked on stage visibly nervous and tearful,” said Callie Mescher-FitzGerald, founder and executive director of Centrally Rooted. “Sitting beside him at the piano, his teacher patiently guided him through breathing exercises, reminded him that he was prepared and stayed calmly present as he worked through ‘Jingle Bells.’ He persevered through the fear.

“By the time he finished, a smile spread across his face — and the entire audience rose in a standing ovation,” she said. “That moment captures why our mission exists. We are not only teaching music; we are helping young people expand their comfort zones, grow in confidence, and conquer fears in a safe and supportive space.”

### Nonprofits are central

Operating out of a building on Central Avenue that is full of keyboards, drum sets and other instruments, Centrally Rooted builds “confidence, resilience and belonging through music education and performance.”

“We currently serve 150 active students in private music lessons and employ 21 teachers across disciplines,” said Mescher-FitzGerald, who started the organization in 2021. Beyond private instruction, we reach families through our Mindful Musicians program, an interactive caregiver-and-child music experience focused on early development and connection. In total, more than 250 families are directly impacted through our Mindful Musicians programming. This number does not include the additional youth reached through



Callie Mescher-FitzGerald is the founder of Centrally Rooted.

outreach partnerships at the Boys & Girls Club, Dream Center, Holy Family Schools and Dubuque Montessori School.”

The nonprofit strives to break down the barrier cost can create. This past year, they awarded approximately \$3,000 per month in scholarships to families who could not otherwise afford programming and expanded teaching staff to meet increasing enrollment. Aside from direct donations, Centrally Rooted also relies on unconventional fundraising efforts. On May 2, Kyle FitzGerald and Elissa Meadows will be dancing on behalf of Centrally Rooted at the Dubuque Area Chamber of Commerce’s

Dancing with the Stars event.

“Demand for programming continues to increase, and we are working intentionally to build infrastructure that supports long-term sustainability,” Callie Mescher-FitzGerald said. “Tuition alone does not cover the full cost of high-quality, accessible arts education — especially when we are committed to maintaining a robust scholarship program. Scaling responsibly while preserving excellence and accessibility is our current challenge.”

Centrally Rooted seeks support through event sponsorships, direct donations to its scholarship fund and other means. “When we invest in environments that encourage kindness, confidence, empathy, and grace, the return extends far beyond music lessons,” Mescher-FitzGerald said.

### No Place Like Home

Opening Doors Dubuque is another nonprofit organization that uses the power of giving to improve quality of life in the region. It was founded in the late 1990s when six Catholic women’s religious communities sought to address pressing housing needs for women and children. They partnered with other religious organizations, the private sector and city government to turn an unused convent into a shelter.

“Opening Doors provides safe shelter, supportive housing, and individualized case management for women and their children experiencing homelessness,” said Jessica Schlader, Opening Doors’ executive director. “Our mission is rooted in dignity, safety, and empowerment, meeting people where they are and walking alongside them as they work toward stability, healing, and



A class at Centrally Rooted.



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Opening Doors residents Shakch (left), with her daughters; and Ebony, with her sons.



A Holy Family schools donation drive for Opening Doors.

self-sufficiency.”

In the past year, the charity has provided over 12,800 nights of safe shelter for 184 women and their children and responded to an average of 64 calls per month, according to Schlader.

“We serve women and their children as they navigate homelessness,” she said. “Since 2000, we have served over 5,000 women and their children, each starting their journey at the Teresa Shelter with some residents able to move into the Maria House (transitional housing for up to two years) and eventually the Francis Apartments (our permanent supportive housing program). These women represent a wide range of lived experiences, including poverty, brain health disorders, loss of a job or underemployment, loss of a partner, rising rent or utility costs without a corresponding rise in income, financial abuse, living paycheck to paycheck, then receiving an unexpected expense, substance use and other crises that disrupt stability.”

Limited space is the most persistent challenge for Opening Doors. The staff is forced to turn away women daily because of a lack of capacity.

“Our team is working diligently to pro-

vide timely, trauma-informed support for women and children in crisis, even as calls for help rise, affordable housing remains scarce, and operational costs continue to increase,” Schlader said.

Community support makes a difference. Individuals and business representatives can tour the facilities, volunteer, and donate requested items. The women served can use help with employment opportunities. Opening Doors is more than just a shelter, insists Schlader.

“We are a place of hope, safety, and new beginnings,” she said. “Every interaction, donation, and partnership helps ensure that women and children in our community are not navigating crises alone, and we are deeply grateful for the community that stands beside them. No one is immune from the circumstances that bring women to Opening Doors.”

### Finding a United Way

Poverty is a complicated problem caused by a variety of factors. There are a cornucopia of nonprofits addressing different aspects of it. The aim of the United Way of Dubuque Area Tri-States is to see the big picture and facilitate a unified response.

“United Way brings people and resour-

es together to tackle poverty in ways no single organization can do alone,” said Danielle Leibfried, the nonprofit’s president and CEO. “We study our community’s greatest needs, raise funds locally and strategically invest those dollars into trusted programs that work together — rather than in isolation — to help local people who are struggling. By coordinating efforts around issues like food insecurity, homelessness and brain health, United Way helps ensure help is available when and where it’s needed most — and that community dollars are used wisely for lasting local impact.”

The local United Way serves a 10-county tri-state region that includes Iowa: Dubuque, Delaware, Jackson, Clayton and parts of Fayette and Allamakee counties. Wisconsin: Parts of Grant and Lafayette counties. Illinois: Parts of Jo Daviess and Carroll counties.

“One way we provide these services in our area is by investing in local programs that impact poverty,” Leibfried said. “Currently, we fund 35 local programs that offer resources for those in need. These programs have been vetted by a team of UW volunteers and staff and each program reports collectively on shared outcomes



LEFT: Funded partners, United Way board and committee members and UW staff, celebrate reaching the annual goal of raising \$1.2 million. Pictured are Andy Wickam (back row, from left), Megan Ruiz, Brock Renbarger, TJ Wagner, Lauren Siegwert (front row, from left), Dary Dolphin, Sue Ellis, Katie Hensley, Beth McGorry and Danielle Leibfried. RIGHT: The United Way meeting with funded partners.



twice a year.”

The United Way is dependent on individual and business donations. Businesses also can get involved by holding drives for needed materials like diapers, books, clothing and hygiene products. United Way supports volunteers and created a volunteer portal.

“VolunteerDBQ is a site that helps connect community volunteers with meaningful volunteer experiences, streamlining the process of getting interested people involved to assist the nonprofit sector,” Leibfried said. “We manage this volunteer portal in partnership with the City of Dubuque. Our 211 Information and Referral line is a multi-lingual line used to help community members find the resources they need. Of the nearly 1,200 calls that came in last year, the top five requests were for resources related to housing, utilities, meals, health care and family support.”

United Way is coping with a decrease in financial support



**Katie Wiedemann (left), United Way’s vice president of development and Danielle Leibfried, president and CEO of United Way of Dubuque Area Tri-States.**

of its community impact fund. Much of the money used to be obtained through workplaces that participate in giving.

“Since 2020, our area has seen a significant decline in the number of businesses participating in workplace giving,” Leibfried said. “Additionally, those who do offer the oppor-

tunity, may not offer payroll deduction or may open up giving to hundreds of local nonprofits. Less giving through workplace campaigns has meant that United Way has had to get creative in strategizing to fundraise for the ever-growing communities’ greatest needs.”

To adjust, United Way has

increasingly relied on special events like its popular Over the Edge event, where people repel down a building in downtown Dubuque to raise funds. Even if someone can’t give money, there are other ways to be a part of the power of giving through United Way.

“While our coverage area is large, and we impact nearly 50,000 lives each year through our work, we only have four employees in our office,” Leibfried said. “That means that our staff are incredible, of course, but also that we rely on hundreds of hours of volunteers, from our board of directors to committee members and others helping at events. Even if you don’t volunteer for United Way, you can still help the organization by being a strong United Way advocate. You can share about our community needs, our system to vet and monitor local programs, and our strong work around volunteerism.”



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Executive Director Jason Henkel is pictured standing on a course with ramps and other features for skateboarders and BMX bikes that the staff and clients built.

# NEW KID ON THE BLOCK

## *OAS Foundation*

BY DAN RUSSO

**A**t the headquarters of Olliewood Action Sports on a recent Friday night, a teenager on a BMX bike pedaled furiously through the indoor skate park before launching off a ramp and propelling himself high into the air. He made it as close to shining lights hanging from the ceiling as he could before dropping down and sticking a landing.



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<sup>1</sup>National Library of Medicine. Retrieved on Jan. 27, 2026 Introduction - Interventions To Decrease Hospital Length of Stay - NCBI Bookshelf.

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As he talked about the history of the nonprofit foundation, Jason Henkel, OAS's executive director, watched the young people in motion approvingly. Across a giant room, inside the industrial style metal frame building in Dubuque, a group of younger boys on scooters took turns going down a half pipe. There were some stumbles and falls, but nobody batted an eye. Teaching people how to deal with failure is a big part of the organization's reason for being — "to help people reach their full potential, especially kids," Henkel said.

"We have taught people from 2 years old to 67 years old," he said. "You get comfortable with failure and use it to achieve your goals. This is a place where you can fail and overcome fear."

On its website, the OAS foundation describes the purpose for Olliewood Skate Park, its skate shop and other efforts: "... our collective mission is to utilize action sports as a powerful platform for fostering a growth mindset and empowering individuals to overcome challenges, embrace resilience, and unlock their full potential."

OAS Instructors give lessons regular members and walk-ins at their home-base. They also lead programs in the community. The name "Olliewood" for the facility and the foundation comes, in part, from a skateboarding move. During an ollie, a board appears to be stuck to a rider's feet while he or she flies in the air. At the heart of the OAS operation is the skate shop attached to the indoor park which sells merchandise and equipment, a lot of it locally made. Proceeds help fuel the nonprofit. Miranda Thomas, the foundation's program director, was behind the shop's counter recently using a machine to finish hats with the Olliewood logo on them.

"I just started skateboarding eight years ago," Thomas said. "I came here. Every Tuesday, we do a girls' night which is really popping off right now."

Action sports like skateboarding and BMX biking require the development of courage and tenacity, qualities which Henkel, a former professional BMX biker, believes are badly needed today.

"Your brain is telling you this isn't safe and your body is telling you not to do this, but you want to do it," Henkel said. "OAS provides a way for people to overcome fears in a safe place."

The Dubuque native left the city for a while to pursue his BMX, but then came back and realized "everything I wanted



**Program Manager Miranda is seen making a hat with the Olliewood logo on it — one of the items they sell in the shop.**

was already here."

Olliewood is the only indoor skate park of its kind within 185 miles, Henkel said, and it has hosts thousands of visitors per year. People have come from 42 states and three countries. The largest demographic the foundation serves is ages 13-18. This includes a dedicated core of locals. The teens themselves had the idea to expand OAS's service by initiating outreach at a local high school, Henkel said. The OAS foundation also is in the initial stages of creating a presence in Pittsburgh, Penn., and other cities in the nation, according to Henkel.

"The biggest (challenge) right now is having the organizational capacity. We understand the need and the impact," he said.

The origin of the OAS foundation started more than a decade earlier, when a group of skaters began building ramps and other elements inside a local warehouse. In 2015, one of the group started Olliewood in its current location as a for profit venture. The current nonprofit foundation was formed after a re-structuring three years ago, Henkel said. Everything in the facility is built by OAS and its users. The atmosphere is gritty and experimentation with new designs and

elements on the courses is encouraged.

"We are 100 percent DIY," Henkel said. "If you want it, you need to build it. You need to figure out how to do things."

Creation is part of the mission. Inside OAS headquarters the walls are filled with colorful art from local artists — partly the result of a collaboration with the Dubuque Area Arts Collective. The venue hosts concerts and other gatherings.

"We're trying to remove the stigma of skateboarding and other forms of free expression," Henkel said.

An outdoor course is situated near the headquarters, which was made through a partnership with Tri-State Mountain Bike Riders. Members of OAS foundation also aided Kids in Dubuque Skate and the city of Dubuque with the construction and upkeep of Flora Skate Park, an outdoor facility. Henkel and Thomas agree that the aspirational nature of action sports is great for people, especially the young. Although tricks or jumps may not always go as planned, trying to exceed limits bears fruit regardless.

"If you shoot for the moon, even if you miss, you'll land among the stars," Thomas said, echoing a famous quote often attributed to Norman Vincent Peale, a pastor and author known for his dedication to positive thinking.

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# BEEN AROUND THE BLOCK

## *Hills & Dales*

BY DAN RUSSO

In 1973, a mother founded Hills & Dales to care for her disabled son who had serious disabilities. In the decades since Elaine Barwick's vision became a reality, this non-profit's depth of service and scope has expanded at a phenomenal pace. Whether it's helping a person with a disability find a job or providing around-the-clock care, the charity has continued to adapt to meet the needs of the families who rely on it.



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“We currently support more than 270 individuals ranging from infancy through adulthood,” said Deanne Althoff, mission advancement and community relations director for Hills & Dales. “The majority of those we serve live with intellectual and developmental disabilities and may also have significant medical needs. Clients and residents come from over 26 counties across Iowa.”

The charity’s impact can be as meaningful as it is comprehensive. Those living in Dubuque might see Hills & Dales clients making an impact through their jobs or having fun when their caregivers take groups of clients out for a sunny stroll on Dubuque’s Mississippi Riverwalk or to a local jump park. These publicly visible activities are only one aspect of what Hills & Dales does.

“Our services in Dubuque include a 24/7 residential center, with nursing support, supported community living, supported employment, autism services offering applied behavior analysis therapy, the developmental and behavioral health clinic and both childcare and childcare medical programs,” Althoff said. “We provide support alongside children, adults and families at many stages of life, helping to foster independence, stability and inclusion.”

One in four adults in the United States (28.7%) has a disability, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. The federal agency defines as disability as “any condition of the body or mind (impairment) that makes it more difficult for the person with the condition to do certain activities (activity limitation) and interact with the world around them (participation restrictions).” Hills & Dales has been striving to meet the growing need to serve the need locally. The past year has featured major developments.

“We opened the developmental and behavioral health clinic, increasing access to specialized services for individuals with autism and developmental disabilities in our region,” Althoff said. “This expansion helps reduce barriers and wait times, while ensuring families can access quality care closer to home. Additionally, we recently opened a new residential duplex designed to support children with behavioral needs and in need of 24-hour support to live within a community setting. This project allows children to live in a home environment while receiving the structured support they need, furthering our commitment to community-based care and inclusion.”

Taking care of those with serious



disabilities requires a caring workforce. One of the ways Hills & Dales makes a mark is as an employer. The agency is one of the largest nonprofit employers in the Dubuque area, with more than 450 dedicated employees. Hills & Dales “not only delivers compassionate, high-quality care but also contributes significantly to the local economy,” according to Althoff.

The mission of the charity is “to build meaningful lives for individuals with disabilities by offering services that support the whole person.” The endeavor comes with a series of obstacles, including financial ones.

“Like many nonprofit healthcare and human service organizations, sustainable funding remains one of our greatest challenges,” said Jack Mescher, Hills & Dales CEO. “Medicaid reimbursement rates have not kept pace with the rising costs of staffing and specialized medical support. Recruiting and retaining qualified professionals, especially nurses and direct support professionals, also continues to be competitive. Stable funding

is critical to maintaining quality services and meeting the expanding needs of individuals and families across Iowa.”

Businesses and individuals can help with donations, but also through advocacy that will “ensure sustainable funding for essential services.” Additionally, partnerships that create employment opportunities for individuals with disabilities are essential, Althoff said.

“If your business is looking for additional employees, visit [hillsdales.org](https://hillsdales.org) to learn more about our Supported Employment program or connect with Kara Huss, Community Services Director, at [khuss@hillsdales.org](mailto:khuss@hillsdales.org),” she said.

Supporters of the nonprofit believe generations of work has led to high trust in Hills & Dales to provide a diverse array of services.

“We are deeply rooted in this community — as a service provider, an employer and a partner — and we are committed to helping Dubuque remain a place where everyone has the opportunity to live a meaningful life,” Althoff said.

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**Salvation Army Store**  
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**MIRA Aesthetics & Wellness**  
Ribbon cutting date: 12/11/25



**Dubuque County 911 Emergency Communications Center**  
Ribbon cutting date: 11/6/25



**Club Car Wash JFK**  
Ribbon cutting date: 11/14/25

# RIBBON CUTTINGS



**Kwik Star**  
Ribbon cutting date: 1/15/26



**Caravel Autism Health**  
Ribbon cutting date: 11/13/25



**Slager Appliances**  
Ribbon cutting date: 10/29/25



**Laughing Crab**  
Ribbon cutting date: 1/20/26

# RIBBON CUTTINGS

**Fox Hills  
Apartments  
groundbreaking**  
Ribbon cutting date:  
9/30/25



**J & J Pool,  
Spa &  
Billiards**  
Ribbon cutting  
date: 11/14/25

**The Key  
Hotel**  
Ribbon cutting  
date: 1/6/26



# RIBBON CUTTINGS



**Crescent Community Health Center  
Dental Department**  
Ribbon cutting date: 10/16/25



**Five Flags**  
Ribbon cutting date: 10/23/25



**Fountain of Youth Transition House**  
Ribbon cutting date: 11/13/25



**Club Car Wash Asbury**  
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