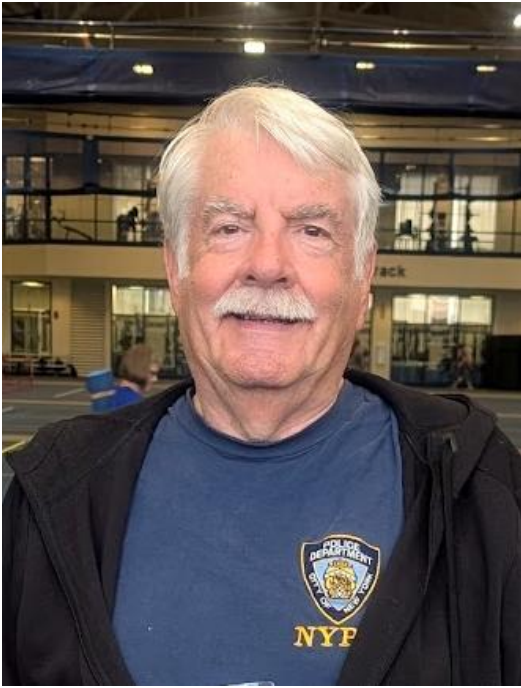


# SWELL LETTER

## January 2026 Volume 6, Issue 1

### Meet our new SWELL members.

#### Rob Apel



At 75, Rob Apel knows a thing or two about building things that last. A lifelong entrepreneur and community leader, Rob has spent his career shaping the local landscape. He served as the Market President of Liberty Bank (2003–2008) and led the Chamber of Commerce during a pivotal era (1983–1988). Additionally, his entrepreneurial spirit led him to help start and run two successful businesses.

However, Rob's most famous claim to fame involves a certain cornfield. With a collaborative spirit and a lot of help from the community, Rob played a key role in bringing the movie *Field of Dreams* to Dyersville—a project that changed the town forever.

On the home front, Rob and his wife Chris—a Professor of Speech Communication at Loras College for 30 years—are celebrating nearly 53 years of marriage. Currently waiting (patiently!) on the Swell list for over two years, Rob is looking forward to the next chapter. Until then, he keeps busy with Chris and their two cats, Ranger and Bennett.

#### Vicki and Chip Bishop



After dedicated careers as teachers for the Dubuque Community School District (DCSD), Vicki and Chip decided that retirement was the perfect time for a new adventure. Following Vicki's retirement in 2018, the couple opened a winery in the Sherrill area, trading lesson plans for grapevines.

Life outside of the winery is just as full. They are the proud parents of two grown daughters, Briana and Caitlin, who both live locally. The family recently celebrated a wonderful milestone: on November 15th, Briana welcomed their third grandchild!

Although they are new to SWELL and their experiences have just begun, Vicki and Chip were delighted by the warm welcome they've received and look forward to meeting more members.



## Mr. Christmas



Dale Errthum grew up in a family where Christmas was a full-time, themed event, like a continuous, joyous holiday party. His relatives have a tradition of gathering at a hotel the night before Christmas, where they embrace a new holiday theme each year, once even merging the South's festive spirit with Christmas during a Mardi Gras theme, complete with Christmas beads and southern-style hats. Dale was truly born into this fun-filled, vibrant Christmas world. It wasn't until a few years ago I noticed him fully embodied his Mr. Christmas persona at the Heritage Center. At a showing of "A Christmas Carol," he made a memorable entrance by sitting next to his wife, Joanne, completely transformed into the Grinch: bright green face, green tights, green hands, all under a Santa hat and coat. This was the moment his "Mr. Christmas" side became public to me, though he's been living this life for a while. When asked what it's like being married to "Mr. Christmas" after 47 years, Joanne said she's quite used to it. She sees a parallel between his extravagant Christmas side and his professional life: while he loves the costumes (like her favorite, the Buff Muscular Santa Onesie), he is also a meticulous handyman who takes great pride in finishing his work with high quality—a dedicated, busy craftsman, much like another famous figure in a red suit at the North Pole. Dale accumulated most of his extensive collection of costumes and decorations, which are now quite large, from St. Vincent de Paul and generous clients. Joanne notes that while he can be quiet when you first meet him, he clearly likes attention when he shows off his costumes and then "turns into Mr. Christmas."







--Gary





## A Warm Embrace from The Texas Tenors



Dashing into the Heritage Center, we shed the frigid December air for an evening of heartwarming music delivered by the phenomenal Texas Tenors. Marcus Collins, JC Fisher, and John Hagen instantly warmed our spirits with their perfect harmony and sincerity. A particularly moving moment arrived when the audience rose for a stirring salute to U.S. veterans, their spouses, parents, and grandparents. As flags waved, the Tenors launched into Lee Greenwood's iconic "God Bless the U.S.A.," hitting that spine-

tingling high note—"Proud to be An American, God Bless the U.S.A."—that brought a lump to every throat. They masterfully blended classic Christmas tunes, soulful gospel, and their own original songs, making the time simply fly by. Transfixed by these three warm and caring singers, two of whom hail from Iowa, we quickly forgot the cold winter night outside. Surrounded by the Tenors' own families and a house packed with appreciative music lovers, 44 SWELL members felt especially grateful for choosing to attend this splendid show. If you are seeking truly captivating entertainment, The Texas Tenors are an absolute must-see.

--Gary



## A Record-Breaking Holiday Celebration

The holiday spirit was undeniable as last-minute counts pushed our numbers to a spectacular new height! We celebrated a record-breaking class with an all-time high attendance of **152**, upping the previous record of 148 and marking the largest turnout in 38 years.



Just as we were completing our exercises, the room filled with cheer as Mr. and Mrs. Santa Claus made a grand appearance. The crowd burst into a joyous rendition of "Here Comes Santa Claus" as Santa hailed us from the upper balcony. The fun continued with a spirited Christmas hat contest, where contestants paraded along the track to collect their competition numbers. SWELL gathered around to get a close-up view and pick their favorites while Lisa carefully tallied the votes. Taking a brief pause from handing out peppermint candy canes, Mr. and Mrs. Claus presented the top three winners with their prizes, capping off a truly merry event.

**Third Beth Brown**



**Second Claudette Bees**



**First Lulu Cox**







This year's holiday celebration was truly spectacular, highlighted by an amazing display of creative hats that brought the wonders of Christmas to life! It was inspiring to witness the competitive spirit of our SWELL members, who put in so much hard work to create their masterpieces. The entire class had the opportunity to vote on their favorite, making the event even more engaging. A huge thank you goes to **Gene and Wanda Pfab** (our very own Mr. and Mrs. Santa Claus) for their festive presence, to **Lisa** for diligently tallying all the votes, **Karen Knepper** for the photos and video and to all of you for making this record-breaking SWELL class with your participation. Looking ahead, we are already excited about next year, where we plan to switch things up with a homemade Christmas shirt or sweater decorating contest!

--Gary





## Video of Festive Hat Walkers

<https://mail.google.com/mail/u/0?ui=2&ik=a574fe7af7&attid=0.1&permmsgid=msg-f:1851609120810243750&th=19b23caf64c496a6&view=att&disp=safe&realattid=19b23ca5f89f3a798531&zw>

### An Age-Old Problem: Who Is 'Elderly'?

Many of us can vividly remember our 40th birthday, often marked by black balloons, cards joking about our decline, and "so-called" friends claiming we were finally "over the hill." During my time teaching at Loras College, students and faculty even posted signs around campus announcing that Gary Wittman was officially an old man. While we kid about 40 being old, the definition of "elderly" has shifted dramatically over time; in 1956, a *Washington Post* article actually labeled a 40-year-old man as elderly. Today, the term is increasingly defined not by chronological age, but by how one feels and what one is capable of doing. Media outlets still struggle with this definition, as seen when a 69-year-old is called elderly in *The New York Times* or a 70-year-old in the *Philadelphia Metro*. When NPR used the term for a 71-year-old midwife, readers pushed back, arguing that someone delivering babies at that age is anything

but elderly. As Michael Vuolo from *Slate* notes, the word often carries a connotation of being feeble and dependent—a description that certainly doesn't fit the members of SWELL.

We are proving more and more that you are as young as your abilities. Can an "elderly" person hold a plank for 60 seconds, stand on one leg in the Golden Rooster or Praying Mantis poses, or walk with smooth, strong strides around the CRWC track? At SWELL, we see these feats regularly: Don and Wilma Sanders performed 25 minutes of floor exercises and dynamic movements at ages 92 and 95, and Mary Shannahan holds a three-minute plank at 80.

Furthermore, Ginny Rauch and Nancy Cooper even reversed their osteoporosis through our program, surprising their doctors. This is backed by Harvard Health Publishing, which explains that strength training builds both muscle and bone mass, specifically targeting the hips, spine, and wrists to prevent fractures and falls. By lifting with every muscle and stretching, members like 93-year-old Joane Cadwell and 90-year-old Darlean Sabers continue to perform floor exercises alongside everyone else.

The philosophy at SWELL is to use a safety net: do everything you can at your own pace without overdoing it, but also without "babying" yourself. Over time, as you become stronger, more flexible, and more energetic, you should push yourself just a little bit harder. Even if you aren't doing them yet, it is eventually time to start the floor exercises, which are specifically designed to support the skeletal system and stretch the spine to prevent back pain. Our long-term members, even those who have been coming for decades, all make it to the floor. Ultimately, if you stop participating in these challenges, you might truly become "elderly." However, since our 90-plus-year-old members do everything, they remain young and are anything but elderly. It might be harder at 90, but taking the easy way out is not the best path; at SWELL, we emphasize doing what you can and leaving excuses to the elderly.

--Gary

**Holiday CRWC closed dates Special events not listed I will announce these times and dates.**

**New Year's Eve December 31, 2025 - Wednesday**

**New Year's January 1, 2026 – Thursday**

**Day after New Years's January 2, -Friday**

▪ **Mon., Jan 19, 2026, Martin Luther King Jr. Day**

▪ **Fri., April 3, 2026**

▪ **Mo., May 25, 2026**

**Daily Hours For SWELL**

**SWELL starts walking at 7:45 am on most Fridays because of the Clark College track team rental. We can walk outside until 7:45 am on Friday until the track is open.**

**Exercise class 8:00 am to 9:00 am**

**SWELL walking after class 9:00 am to 9:45 am**

**Early walkers can walk in CRWC unless there are other rentals, University events, team's rentals and Holiday hours when students are on break. We can start at 7:45 am when this happens.**

**THE STAFF**

**Editor..... Gary**

**Feature Writer ..... Gary**

**Photos by..... Karen Knepper**

**Biography Submitted by ..... Rob Apel**

**Biography Submitted by ..... Vicki and Chip Bishop**

**Thanks to those who submitted wonderful articles to our SWELL newsletter**