

## NFMC Conference 2024 Welcome speech given by Lucinda Lear on June 12, 2024

Welcome to the heartland of America—Iowa—its name in native tongue means Beautiful Land, so welcome to the beautiful land known as Iowa!

As we gather this week, we are reminded of the rich tapestry of history, culture, and opportunity that Iowa proudly embodies. Iowa—from “A Great Place to Grow” to “Fields of Opportunities” our state mottos have reflected our values of hard work, resilience, and community spirit.

Our nickname is the Tall Corn state -- we are the country’s leading producer of corn, and you can even fill your gas tank with corn from Iowa--ethanol. Our favorite colors are the green and gold of John Deere tractors built right here in the Quad-cities. We’re also known as the Hawkeye state—maybe you’ve heard of the University of Iowa Hawkeyes Women’s Basketball team and #22? But Caitlin Clark is not our only athlete—Iowa has produced over 20 Olympic athletes including one from my hometown, Waterloo—wrestling gold medalist Dan Gable. But we’ve also given football, Kurt Warner, gymnastics, Shawn Johnson, Master’s Tournament winner, Zach Johnson, and track star, Lolo Jones.

We are a state of innovators and pioneers, where bold ideas are nurtured and creativity flourishes. It was Otto Rohwedder of Davenport who invented the first single-loaf bread slicing machine. The world’s first electronic digital computer was built on the campus of Iowa State in 1939.

Our vibrant arts and culture scene have given rise to heroes and icons. From jazz to Broadway Iowa is the birthplace of great musicians and music legends, Glenn Miller, Bix Beiderbecke, Andy Williams, and opera star and 2010 NFMC Presidential Citation Award winner, Simon Estes. The day the music died was when we lost Buddy Holly, Richie Valens and the Big Bopper near Clear Lake, IA after their final gig at the Surf Ballroom.

You can visit the home of Wyatt Erp in Pella, or John Wayne’s birthplace in Winterset. Grant Wood created his famous American Gothic painting at a house near here in Eldon, IA. We’ve produced an American president, Herbert Hoover, and a military family of heroes that changed the policy of brothers serving together on the same Navy ship—the 5 fighting Sullivan brothers from Waterloo.

Why we even have fictional characters from Iowa—Radar O’Riley of M.A.S.H. and James Francis Ryan in *Saving Private Ryan* both hailed from Iowa. Even Miss Piggy, who grew up in Keystone, IA (although most of our pigs don’t look quite that nice or even make it as long as she has). And as any true Trekkie can tell you, if you stick around long enough you can visit the FUTURE birthplace of Captain James T. Kirk who will be born in Riverside, IA in the year 2228. If you are novel readers, you may have

encountered *The Bridges of Madison County* or *Sleeping with The Enemy*, both books set in Iowa and written by Iowaans, Robert Waller and Nancy Price.

Iowa was the setting for native son, Meredith Wilson's *Music Man* and Rodgers and Hammerstein's show, *State Fair* is set at Iowa's State Fair. Our state fair is a great state fair famous for the mobile "food-on-a-stick". The saying, "If you can find it at the fair, you can find it on a stick" is true in Iowa. From pork chops to caprese salad (perhaps with Iowa Maytag cheese) to PB & J you can get almost 70 different foods on a stick (and most of them fried or with bacon.) Come back in August and try it!

But perhaps what truly sets Iowa apart is the warmth and hospitality of its people. You might ask, what's it like to grow up in Iowa? Well, I can tell you because I did. Here, neighbors still look out for one another, and a friendly smile and a helping hand are never far away. It's the neighborhood BBQ's with everyone going driveway to driveway and enjoying a game of Cornhole. It's a college kid who jokingly tweeted he needs beer money and ends up raising 3.15 million for children and families. It's taking a break in a Big Ten football game to turn around and wave at the children in the nearby children's hospital that can't come out and play. It's casseroles showing up on your front door when you're in the hospital or mourning a death. And it's about a second-grade girl who never gave up on her dream of playing in the WNBA and chose an Iowa University to help make her dreams come true. In Iowa, we believe in the power of community, and we know that together, we can overcome any challenge and achieve remarkable things.

So, as you explore all that Iowa and the Quad-Cities have to offer, I encourage you to immerse yourself in the spirit of our state. May your time here be filled with unforgettable experiences, cherished memories, and the warm hospitality that defines our great state.

Welcome to Iowa, a place where Fields of Opportunities abound and the Freedom to Flourish encouraged.