

2025 Impact Report



Together, Shaping the Future.

The NIACC Pappajohn Center is the expert in rural business innovation and success.

We're growing Iowa's entrepreneurial culture through grade school initiatives, college and community programs, and business training and development.

Entrepreneur and Business Support

**33**

NEW BUSINESS STARTS

**169**

JOBS CREATED

**\$32,950**

SEED MONEY AWARDED TO CLIENTS

**\$11,899,086**

TOTAL CAPITAL INFUSION

**407**

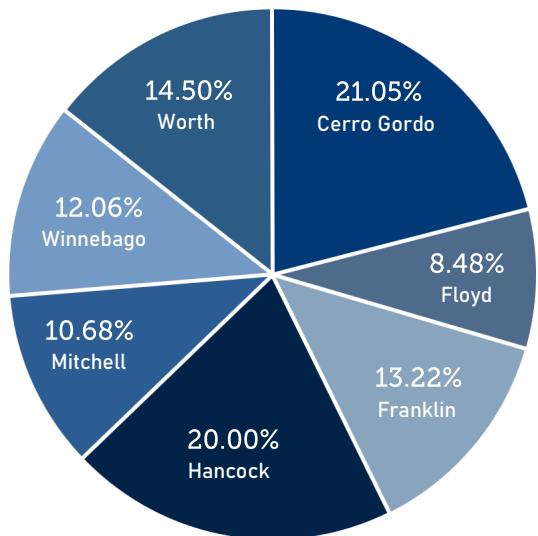
CLIENTS COUNSELED

1745

COUNSELING HOURS



CLIENTS COUNSELED PER CAPITA



OF CLIENTS COUNSELED PER COUNTY

County	Population	Clients Counseled
Cerro Gordo	43,127	185
Floyd	15,627	27
Franklin	10,019	27
Hancock	10,795	44
Mitchell	10,565	23
Winnebago	10,579	26
Worth	7,443	22

Entrepreneurship Education



16

BUSINESS PROGRAMS & WORKSHOPS



213

ATTENDEES



24

MENTORS

PROGRAMS & WORKSHOPS

- Venture School
- Business Succession Planning
- Business Essentials
- Marketing Essentials
- Financial Essentials
- HR Fundamentals
- SSBCI Lending

North Iowa Entrepreneur Billie Asmus Lands Deal on ABC's Shark Tank

Billie Asmus of Hampton, IA founded Repaint Studios as an environmentally conscious response to DIY paint waste. Billie began her entrepreneurial journey with the NIACC John Pappajohn Entrepreneurial Center in Fall 2021, participating in the Mason City cohort of the University of Iowa's Venture School, a seven-week entrepreneurial training program. In Venture School, she conducted extensive customer discovery, refined her business model, and accessed key resources that helped her transition from a handmade prototype to a market-ready product. Billie worked closely with the Pappajohn Center to convert her idea into reality, and utilized the NIACC Innovation Space to further prototype and test her initial designs.

Billie Asmus appeared on the October 8, 2025 episode of ABC's *Shark Tank*, where she presented her company's flagship product, The Repaint Tray. The Repaint Tray is a reusable silicone paint tray system designed to eliminate single-use plastic liners and reduce waste in the painting process. Her innovative design and steady growth trajectory, plus her confident pitch and compelling story, impressed the Sharks, leading to an investment offer of \$250,000 for 15% equity from Barbara Corcoran and Chip and Joanna Gaines. Filming for *Shark Tank* provided Billie with a unique opportunity to showcase Iowa innovation on a national platform. "Iowa has such a strong entrepreneurial spirit, and I wanted to show that big ideas can come from small towns," Billie said. "Innovation can thrive here in the Midwest, and anything is possible when rural entrepreneurs have access to resources, mentorship, and the right people who believe in their ideas."

With continued mentorship from the Pappajohn SBDC Center, Billie has successfully navigated multiple stages of business development, earning several recognitions along the way including First Place in the 2024 John Pappajohn Iowa Entrepreneurial Venture Competition and Winner of the 2024 Iowa InnoVenture Challenge. Today, Repaint Studios products are available in Lowe's, Home Depot, and ACE Hardware stores nationwide and online.



Billie Asmus with Chip Gaines on ABC's *Shark Tank*

Entrepreneur Showcase

Hallie Erdahl Brings Bridal Elegance to Clear Lake, IA

In 2025, Hallie Erdahl founded Georgette, a bridal atelier providing a luxury experience at accessible prices. The business reflects Hallie's lifelong passion for fashion and elegance. "As a woman interested in fashion," she said, "I want access to the best possible and I want to make sure other women have that access as well." Hallie works with bridal boutiques across the Midwest to source sample gowns in sizes 8-26, only selecting dresses in pristine condition. Many of the gowns come from designers retailing between \$4,000-\$8,000 and are sold at Georgette for 20%-80% off the original price. Rather than investing immediately in a brick and mortar retail location, Georgette began with a pop-up model. Hallie is a graduate of the Spring 2025 Venture School cohort at NIACC, and she credits the program with helping her shape her vision of a luxury business supported by a lean startup model with low overhead and a strong financial plan. Hallie's vision is well on its way to being realized. She competed at the June 2025 Venture School Launch Day Competition at EntreFest, Iowa's foremost entrepreneur conference. Georgette opened its first permanent location in Clear Lake in December 2025, furthering Hallie's ambitious and visionary plans for accessible bridal luxury in North Iowa.

Lori Finch Transforms Gluten-Free Access in North Iowa

Lori Finch, founder of Gabby's Gluten Free Goods, turned a personal challenge into a business that provides high-quality gluten-free baked goods to customers across North Iowa. After she was diagnosed with celiac disease, Lori found that options for gluten-free treats were limited and rarely delicious. A lifelong baker, Lori began experimenting in her own kitchen and cracked the code to create gluten-free desserts that have the taste and texture customers have been longing for. What started as a passion project soon became a business that now supplies gluten-free products to coffee shops and other businesses across North Iowa. Gabby's Gluten Free Goods is a dedicated gluten-free bakery, licensed by the Iowa Department of Inspections and Appeals. Lori focuses on wholesale distribution rather than operating a retail storefront, allowing her to provide fresh, high-quality gluten-free baked goods to local businesses where customers can access them directly. Lori is a graduate of the Spring 2023 Venture School cohort at NIACC, and used the program to develop strategies for scaling production, improving efficiency, and adapting to customer demand. Lori is an entrepreneur who knows the value of persistence and is focused on mastering the foundations of her business and thoughtfully expanding to ensure Gabby's Gluten Free Goods serves its customers what they need.

Christensen Jewelry Invests in the Future

Kian Gibson of Hampton, IA graduated from the prestigious GoldmanSachs 10,000 Small Businesses program as a member of the Spring 2025 cohort. Kian is a jeweler at Christensen Jewelry, a family-owned company that offers fine jewelry, gemstones and diamonds, giftware, watches, gold and silver bullion, and design and repair services. Christensen Jewelry was founded in 1960 in Hampton, IA. Kian enrolled in the 10,000 Small Business Program to polish the entrepreneurial skills needed to join the family business. The GoldmanSachs 10,000 Small Businesses program is an intensive multi-week training where small business owners connect with a network of peers, receive one-on-one business advice from experienced mentors, and learn valuable skills to help grow their business. Business owners learn about access to financial capital and practical business skills, including negotiations, employee management, and marketing. The program is designed to equip business owners and their key employees with the tools to identify opportunities for growth and implement forward-thinking innovations. Kian said, "The GoldmanSachs program gave me foundational knowledge to ask the right questions. It gave me a better perspective of what I need to pay attention to in order to run my business successfully. I met so many peers in the group and I now have a vast network of support for the future." Kian's training with the GoldmanSachs 10,000 Small Businesses is one example of how North Iowa businesses are ensuring their business legacy: by investing in the next generation.

Kian Gibson of
Christensen Jewelry



Student Successes

NIACC Student Caleb Renner Wins Top Prize at 2025 Pappajohn Student Entrepreneurial Venture Competition

In April 2025, NIACC student Caleb Renner was named one of the top three winners and Received a \$5,000 prize at the John Pappajohn Student Entrepreneurial Venture Competition. At 22, Caleb invented the AgriNet, a ground-breaking replacement for traditional bin sweeps, designed to automatically unload grain bins without requiring farmers to enter during the load-out process, saving not only time but farmers' lives and limbs. Caleb is a fifth-generation farmer and was inspired by his firsthand experience of the dangers of grain bin-related incidents—his grandfather is missing three fingers from a bin sweep accident. Caleb debuted his invention at the 2023 Everyday Entrepreneur Pitch Competition. He then enrolled in Venture School to develop his go-to-market plan, and went on to win Third Place at the 2024 Venture School Launch Day Competition. Since then, Caleb has filed two provisional patents, established a C-Corp (Renner Ag Solutions), conducted two full-scale prototype tests, secured \$50,000 in funding from the Iowa Economic Development Authority, competed in seven pitch competitions (winning four), and partnered with a professional engineering firm to refine his product design. Caleb has worked closely with the NIACC Pappajohn Center through his entrepreneurial journey. His vision of a safer and more sustainable ag industry is poised to make an Impact not only in Iowa, but also change lives globally.

Caleb Renner pitches his invention, the AgriNet, at a pitch competition



IDEA Camp Inspires Middle School Students to Innovate

In 2025, the NIACC John Pappajohn Center introduced a transformative new program to its roster of youth entrepreneurial outreach. IDEA (Innovation, Discovery, Entrepreneurship & Achievement) Camp is designed for 6th, 7th, and 8th grade students and brings hands-on entrepreneurial learning to middle schoolers across North Iowa. The inaugural IDEA Camp was held on Presidents Day, February 17, 2025, drawing 28 students from 12 schools across the region. After the success of the inaugural IDEA Camp, three additional IDEA Camp events were held in Summer 2025, offering even more students the opportunity to explore entrepreneurship in an engaging, supportive environment.

At IDEA Camp, students engaged in interactive activities that guided them through the key stages of business creation, from brainstorming ideas to developing business models and pitching to a panel of judges. Students learned foundational entrepreneurial concepts of creative ideations, value proposition development, identifying target markets, basic marketing

strategies, and simple financial projections. Each student completed a Business Model Canvas, wrote an executive summary, and ultimately presented a formal pitch with pitch deck to a panel of judges. IDEA Camp represents an investment in the next generation of innovators, problem solvers, and leaders. Raegan Hanson, NIACC Pappajohn Center Youth Entrepreneurship Coordinator, said "This is the only program of its kind in North Iowa. When young minds learn to think like entrepreneurs, they build the skills and confidence to redefine what's possible and shape the future." Teaching the entrepreneurial mindset drives innovation, fuels economic growth, and empowers the next generation to turn bold ideas into lasting impact. By integrating experiential learning with real business tools and frameworks, IDEA Camp is equipping middle school students with the skills, confidence, and entrepreneurial mindset needed to shape their futures and contribute to a thriving regional economy.



Ashley Page of the NIACC Pappajohn Center with an IDEA Camp student

Student Entrepreneurship

719

43

\$11,000

STUDENTS IMPACTED

EVENTS

SEED MONEY & SCHOLARSHIPS AWARDED

NOVA Club

NOVA (Next-Gen, Opportunity, Venture & Action) is NIACC's student-led organization with a focus on entrepreneurship, leadership, and career development. NOVA combines the NIACC chapters of the Collegiate Entrepreneurs Organization and Business Professionals of America into a single group where students of all majors and career paths have the opportunity to build real-world skills, practice entrepreneurship, and compete in activities like the Everyday Entrepreneur Pitch Competition.

Youth Entrepreneurial Academy (YEA)

YEA is a week-long summer experience for North Iowa high school students, where they discover the entrepreneurial mindset, learn from local business experts, and transform their interests and strengths into a business plan. The academy concludes with a Pitch Competition where students can compete for seed money to invest in their business. Every student receives a \$500 NIACC scholarship. YEA is generously sponsored by the John K. & Luise V. Hanson Family Foundation.

\$2,000

PRIZE MONEY AWARDED

Pappajohn Student Venture Competition

Three teams of NIACC students competed at the John Pappajohn Student Entrepreneurial Venture Competition in April 2025. Josh Hanson (American Rustguard) and Christopher Madsen with David Roman & Ethan Kudej (Blast Off Power Washers) were awarded Honorable Mention prizes of \$500. Caleb Renner (Renner Ag Solutions) was awarded the top prize of \$5,000. The competition was founded by John Pappajohn to help student entrepreneurs pursue their business dreams while at college.

Entrepreneur for a Day (E4D)

Entrepreneur for a Day introduces 5th grade students to the fundamental principles of entrepreneurship, including business planning and financial literacy. In this two-session program, students put these lessons into action by creating their own business and running it for a day, implementing new skills from budgeting to bank loans, from manufacturing to marketing. In 2025, 3D pens and tablets were incorporated into E4D's prototyping segment, with the support of a technology grant from the TeamQuest Foundation of Clear Lake.

5 10

COUNTIES SCHOOLS

517
STUDENTS

Marketing Impact

Website: Providing Access to Resources

16,686 **19,072** **35,965**

UNIQUE WEBSITE USERS BROWSING SESSIONS UNIQUE PAGE VIEWS

Email: Communicating with Purpose

37 **56,448** **29%** 

EMAIL CAMPAIGNS EMAIL RECIPIENTS OPEN RATE

Video: Telling Our Local Stories

2025's Featured Videos:

February 2025 Entrepreneur of the Month: Billie Asmus, Repaint Studios

April 2025 Entrepreneur of the Month: Casey Schilling, K2 Enterprises

August 2025 Entrepreneur of the Month: Jared Doerfler, Hanna Golf

October 2025 Entrepreneur of the Month: Steve Strasheim, Twisted River Farm

Scan to watch!



Social Media: Connecting & Amplifying

 **180** **94,825** **1,896**

POSTS TOTAL POST IMPRESSIONS FOLLOWERS

 **160** **22,526** **392**

POSTS TOTAL POST IMPRESSIONS FOLLOWERS



John Pappajohn

1928-2023

A self-made entrepreneur, visionary philanthropist, and generous champion of Iowa students, John Pappajohn used his success in the business world to make the greater world a better place.

Born in Greece, John immigrated to the United States with his mother at the age of nine months. He graduated from the University of Iowa, taking six years to do so because he alternated going to college with his two brothers—two would work while the other attended classes. John often said he learned the value of hard work early growing up in Mason City. After selling his insurance company in 1969, he used the funds to start his own venture capital fund, Equity Dynamics. The firm grew rapidly and has been involved in over 100 startups.

In 1996, John launched the John Pappajohn Entrepreneurial Centers housed at North Iowa Area Community College, the University of Iowa, Iowa State University, University of Northern Iowa, & Drake University.

His goal was to revive the entrepreneurial spirit in Iowa and make Iowa the most entrepreneurial state in America.



"Since I was a child, I dreamed of things I wanted to do. I wanted to make money and give it to others. I dreamed of helping people."

— John Pappajohn

The NIACC Pappajohn Center Team



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The Pappajohn Center seeks to elevate the quality of life in North Iowa by fostering economic growth, enriching student and stakeholder experiences, ensuring organizational excellence, and cultivating collaborative partnerships to address educational and economic development needs.

VISIT OUR
WEBSITE



UPCOMING
EVENTS



REQUEST
COUNSELING



CONTACT US

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