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6/8/2005
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GUEST EDITORIAL

# Trip confirms that Iowa communities are the best

*By Lt. Governor Sally Pederson*

Throughout my trips across Iowa I've always come away from the experiences reaffirmed in my own faith in the people of this great state.

Each community can boast of strong-willed, passionate citizens who believe in the unique and authentic worth of their community. To see Iowans investing themselves into efforts that support and enhance their community's intrinsic wealth always assures me that Iowa is in good hands when local leaders step forward.

My most recent trip is a tour across the state to kick off the Governor's exciting "Great Places" initiative, which promises to package together state resources into competitive grants to communities, neighborhoods, districts or regions aspiring to cultivate the qualities that make their area a special place to live, work, play and raise a family.

Once again, I've been greeted by community members who find greatness just beyond their front porch. The first Great Places forum was held at the Surf Ballroom in Clear Lake where more than 200 enthusiastic people attended.

I visited forums in Spencer, Dubuque, Pella, Cedar Falls and Muscatine where I was greeted by crowds of supporters who felt strongly about the livelihood of their great places. These people are proud of their great places and have a vision to preserve and capitalize on them.

The "Great Places" initiative makes state government a true partner with communities at the local level. In the past, a dream for cultivating a local great place could only be built piece by piece using the resources of an array of government programs. Such a task can be daunting for even the most bureaucratically-versed community member.

The "Great Places" initiative brings together the resources of state government into a one-stop shop for Iowans with bold, innovative ideas. Rather than manipulating the local vision to fit our programs, we have synchronized the state resources to fit the local vision.

These great places will provide a unique sense of place, engaging experiences, rich social fabric, a vital economy, pleasing environment, strong foundation and creative culture.

What I love most about this initiative, is that it inspires bold thought and creativity to the already established greatness of our places. Governor Vilsack and I appointed a Great Places Citizen Advisory Board that will select three pilot Great Places by October. These places will undoubtedly hold special sentiment with their community members. But by pooling together our resources, we can build these places up to the level that they retain and attract young people, educated workers, business development, entrepreneurs, families and retirees.

By streamlining financial and technical resources, the state is breaking through the red tape and working to bring the best assistance to Iowa's local leaders.

If you are interested in learning more about Iowa's Great Places initiative you can visit www.culturalaffairs.org/greatplaces or call the Department of Cultural Affairs at 515-281-7471.