

# Teachers and cooks give back through Elliott Test Kitchen

**SARAH TOMKINSON**  
BURLINGTON HAWK EYE

FORT MADISON, Ia. — Growing up in Sri Lanka, Kumar Wickramasingha was exposed to an education culture not seen in the United States. Instead of having children go to school, many made their way to education centers to work on advancing their skills in specific areas.

“You see billboards for different teachers. One will be promoting one for math and another history,” Wickramasingha said.

When he made his way to the U.S. in 1986 and stayed in Fort Madison, he noticed rather quickly the same educational atmosphere wasn’t to be found here. But he was thankful to be associated with people who wanted to make sure he got an education. He lived with Jean and George Alton, and they made sure he got the education he wanted to receive while in the U.S.

“They knew I wanted to get an education, so they took me to South-eastern Community College, where I learned English and took more classes,” he said.

The Hawk Eye reports that Wickramasingha went on to a career in culinary arts, owning Alpha’s on the Riverfront in Fort Madison before taking a job with Sunnybrook Senior Living.

Over the years, he still noticed no place for children to go after school to study outside of the library or the children’s own homes. About a year ago, he decided to change that by bringing together education and his love for food.

“This community has given me so many opportunities, I wanted to give something back,” Wickramasingha said.

He discussed his idea with Fort Madison high school teachers Brent Zirkel and Andrew Troxel, and the idea for the Elliott Test Kitchen was born. The Test Kitchen Education foundation was formed to start collecting donations to get the program up and running, and a board overseas it. The test kitchen is named after James T. Elliott IV, who was a successful businessman who taught mathematics early in his career. He donated enough money to make the test kitchen possible in Fort Madison.

The three worked on creating an area for students to go to after school to get help with their homework and studies, while also learning basic cooking skills.

“I’m a passionate person, so when he told me about this I was for it. We have amazing young people, and I wanted to give them a place to shine,” Zirkel said.

In October, they opened the kitchen to be that place for junior- and senior-high school students in the Fort Madison, Holy Trinity and Central Lee schools.

“This is meant to be a safe haven where students go to learn about cooking and get homework done,” Wickramasingha said.

Wickramasingha is in charge of the food side, while Zirkel and Troxel plan the education side. The two teachers have rounded up more than 30 area teachers to come in rotation to help students with their homework and class prep.

“I’ve been overseas, and I’ve seen places like

this in other countries. We saw a need for this in our community,” Zirkel said.

Applications to be part of the program are available through the counseling offices at each school. Once those are submitted and approved, students can start signing up for nights to attend.

The students follow a routine when they come in. They arrive at about 3:30 p.m., and for the first half hour, they decompress from school in the area set up to feel like a kitchen and living room. Music is played, and a relaxed environment is created. At 4 p.m., the music is turned off and the students start to work on homework, class projects, or ACT or SAT prep.

“We’ve also signed up for a program called MOOC, where high school students can try out college level courses,” Zirkel said.

The program signs up people to take the ACT their junior or senior year. Wickramasingha learned fewer than 30 students at Fort Madison High school in their junior and senior years have taken the ACT to get into college.

Currently, the program sees five to 10 students a night, but the organizers are hoping to someday cater to 15 students nightly. Students signed up for the program don’t have to attend every day. In fact, Troxel encourages people to look online for the rotation of teacher volunteers on the program’s website at tkef.org.

“We have a system that shows when certain teachers will be here, so if you know you need help in social studies, you can sign up for the days the social studies teachers will be here,” Troxel said.

When a student is admitted into the program, they’ll be given a password to access the scheduling section of the website. From there, students can sign up for days to attend and have 24 hours to cancel any session they signed up for. “We know they have a lot going on in their lives,” Troxel said.

While Troxel, Zirkel and Wickramasingha have been working on the project the longest, the volunteers and donations are what is making it possible.

Fred Knoch, a volunteer cook for the program, sees the test kitchen as a way to give back.

“It gives the kids a little exposure to cooking, and it’s a safe environment,” Knoch said.



JAYCIE GORDON, FRED KNOCH, MERCEE DOTY  
JEFF BROWN, BURLINGTON HAWK EYE/PA

Jaycie Gordon, left, 14, Fred Knoch, middle, and Mercedee Doty, 15, prepare food for dinner at the Elliott Test Kitchen in Fort Madison. The Elliott Test Kitchen is where students can go after school to learn about food and get help with homework.

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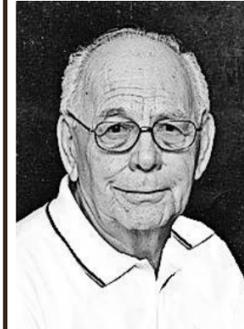
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Name	City	Funeral Home	Name	City	Funeral Home
Coles, Laurie	Des Moines	Hamilton's	Medici, Rose	Carney	Ankeny Memorial
Fogarty, Timothy	Urbandale	Caldwell Parrish	Singleton, Robert	Des Moines	Hamilton's
McDonald, Irene	Urbandale	Merle Hay	Thomas, Alfred	Blue Eye, MO	Hamilton's

### ROBERT LEE "BOB" SINGLETON

Des Moines



Robert Lee "Bob" Singleton passed away on Monday, December 21, 2015 at Mercy Hospice in Johnston surrounded by the love of his family. Bob was born on June 28, 1931 in Hartford, Ia. to Fern (Wells) and Roy Singleton.

Bob served his country bravely in the U.S. Marines Corp during the Korean Conflict. He married Mary Lou Kirchner on June 8, 1956 and together they were blessed with 3 children. Bob worked for 26 years for Braniff Airways and later retired from Knapp Properties, where he served as head of maintenance. He was a long time member of Bloomfield United Methodist Church. Bob never missed the grandkids sporting events. He enjoyed working on cars, golfing and gardening. He loved wintering in Arizona with his lovely wife and their many friends. Most of all Bob cherished his family and he will be greatly missed.

Those left to honor his memory are his loving wife of 59 1/2 years, Mary Lou; three children, Richard (Tamara), Cynthia (Dave) Koenig and Christyn (Craig) Briar; grandchildren, Brandon and Brittany Singleton, Benjamin and Nicholas Koenig, Jessica (Chad) Siedsma and Jamie Briar; great-grandchildren, Gavin Briar, Lucas Siedsma and baby boy Siedsma; siblings, Julia (Skip) Spoon, Lloyd (Dixie) Singleton and Burnetta (Max) Malone; and other loving family and friends.

He was preceded in death by his parents and his brother, Roy, Jr. and a sister in infancy.

Funeral services will be held at 11:00 a.m. on Saturday, December 26, 2015 at Bloomfield United Methodist Church, 5930 Indianola Ave. in Des Moines, Iowa. Family will greet friends an hour prior to the service. He will be laid to rest at Iowa Veterans' Cemetery in Van Meter, Iowa on Monday, December 28, 2015 at 11:00 a.m. all who have the desire to attend are welcome.

In lieu of flowers, memorial contributions may be directed to Mercy Cancer Center in Bob's memory.

The family would like to express their heartfelt appreciation to Dr. Philip Colletier and the MCCRO staff, Dr. Brian Freeman and staff, Mercy Infusion Center nurses, Mercy 8 South Oncology staff, the staff at Mercy Home Care, Mercy Home Hospice and Mercy Hospice Johnston for their loving care and support.

"Bob was happiest with dirt under his fingernails!"  
On-line condolences may be expressed at [www.HamiltonsFuneralHome.com](http://www.HamiltonsFuneralHome.com)

### ROSE MEDICI CARNEY



Rose (Bisignano) Medici, 88, of Carney passed away December 22, 2015.

A funeral mass will be held 10:00 a.m., Monday December 28, 2015 at All Saints Catholic Church (650 NE 52nd Ave, Dsm). A visitation will be held 3 - 6:00 p.m., Sunday, December 27th, at the Ankeny Memorial Chapel (4208 N Ankeny Blvd).  
Rose was born February 12, 1927 in Terravechia, Italy. In 1936 her family moved to the United States, and settled on the south side of Des Moines. She graduated from Des Moines Technical High School, and then married Charlie Medici August 10, 1946. They made their home in Carney, Iowa, and together they owned Rosie's Tap, in Carney for 33 years. After selling the bar she went to work for Polk County Civil Service Commission for 20 years.

Rose was a charter member of the Boline -Manfredi VFW women's Auxiliary, a member of the Vittoria Lodge, and a member of All Saints Catholic Church.

She enjoyed bingo and trips to the casino, the Iowa Hawkeyes, and traveling—especially her trip to Italy.

She will be remembered for her quick wit, sense of humor, and "spunkiness".

Rose is survived by her 2 daughters, Mary Kay (Mike) Madden, Michelle (Chris) Mahlstadt, 3 grandchildren, Julie (Dale) Howard, Michael Madden (Rachel), and Christopher Mahlstadt, several great-grandchildren, and several nieces and nephews.

She was preceded in death by her husband Charlie, 2 brothers, and 1 sister.

In lieu of flowers, memorials may be made to St. Jude Children's Hospital.

Online at [www.MemorialServicesOfIowa.com](http://www.MemorialServicesOfIowa.com)



### ALFRED "GLEN" THOMAS

Blue Eye, MO

Alfred "Glen" Thomas was born February 3, 1928 in Missouri Valley, Iowa to Alfred and Nellie Thomas. He passed away Sunday, December 20, 2015 at Cox Medical Center in Branson, MO at the age of 87.

Glen was a resident of Missouri Valley, IA and the Des Moines area for many years. He served in the US Marine Corps from 1946 - 1947 at worked as Weatherization Coordinator for Polk County.

He is survived by his wife, Elladean and his daughters, Cindy Skillman and Martina Nelson. Grandchildren, Willie Nelson, Jenny Manser, Tiffany Skillman, and Nikki Skillman. Great grandchildren, Payton Nelson, Kole Manser, Brook Manser, Cade Nelson, Kenzie Nelson and Emma Manser.

He was preceded in death by his parents, first wife, Mary Thomas and brothers Don and Howard.

There will be a graveside committal service Monday, December 28th at 10 a.m. at Glendale Cemetery in Des Moines.

Condolences may be expressed at [www.HamiltonsFuneralHome.com](http://www.HamiltonsFuneralHome.com).

### TIMOTHY FOGARTY

Urbandale



Timothy Paul Fogarty, 54, passed away on Wednesday, December 23, 2015. Please join us Sunday, December 27 at Caldwell Parrish Funeral Home & Crematory in Urbandale, IA for a visitation from 4 to 6 p.m. with a "time of remembering" at 5:30 p.m. A graveside service will be held at 9:30 a.m., Monday, December 28 at the Iowa Veterans Cemetery, Adel, IA.

Tim, who was born on September 18, 1961, is the son of Robert J. and Eileen R. Fogarty of West Des Moines, IA. He is survived by his parents; sisters, Laura Fogarty Hannam (David) of Adel, IA, Amy Bea Fogarty of West Des Moines, IA and brother, Sean P. Fogarty of Chicago, IL.

The family would like to express their sincere gratitude to his caregivers and all the staff at Mosaic with whom he spent so many years.

Memorial contributions may be made to Mosaic, 11141 Aurora Ave., Urbandale, IA 50322. Online condolences may be expressed at [www.caldwell-parrish.com](http://www.caldwell-parrish.com)



### IRENE MCDONALD

Urbandale



Irene W. McDonald, 91, of Urbandale passed away peacefully on December 21, 2015 surrounded by her family. A memorial service will be held on Monday, December 28, 2015 at 11:00 A.M. at Merle Hay Funeral Home in Des Moines.

Irene was born on April 29, 1924 in Albia, Iowa. She enjoyed playing Bingo and bowling. Irene loved spending time with her family.

Irene is survived by her children, Michael (Janice) McDonald of Oakland, CA, Tom (Mary) McDonald of Pleasant Hill, and Patty McDonald of Urbandale; 11 grandchildren; and 14 great grandchildren. She was preceded in death by her husband, John McDonald; daughter, Maureen Willey; sister, Lucille Konagel; and brother, Eugene Glaspie.

In lieu of flowers, memorial contributions may be made to Make-A-Wish Foundation.

### MERLE HAY FUNERAL

### LURIE M. COLES

Des Moines



Laurie Marie Coles, 63, passed away surrounded by her family and friends Monday, December 21, 2015, at Taylor House Hospice in Des Moines after a short battle with cancer.

Visitation will be held from 12:00 to 2:30 p.m., with funeral service at 2:30 p.m., Saturday, December 26, 2015, at Hamilton's Funeral Home, 605 Lyon Street, Des Moines.

Memorial contributions may be directed to the family. Condolences may be expressed at [www.HamiltonsFuneralHome.com](http://www.HamiltonsFuneralHome.com).