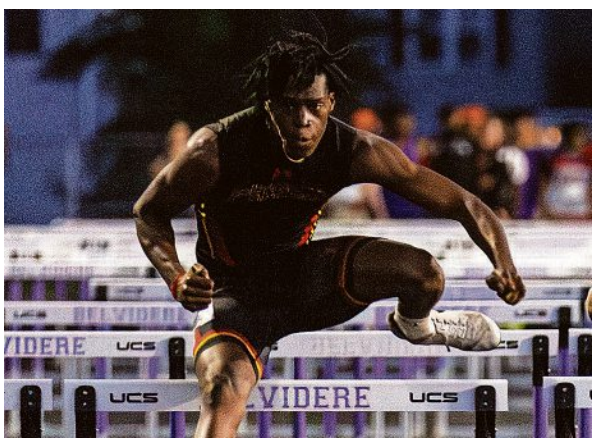

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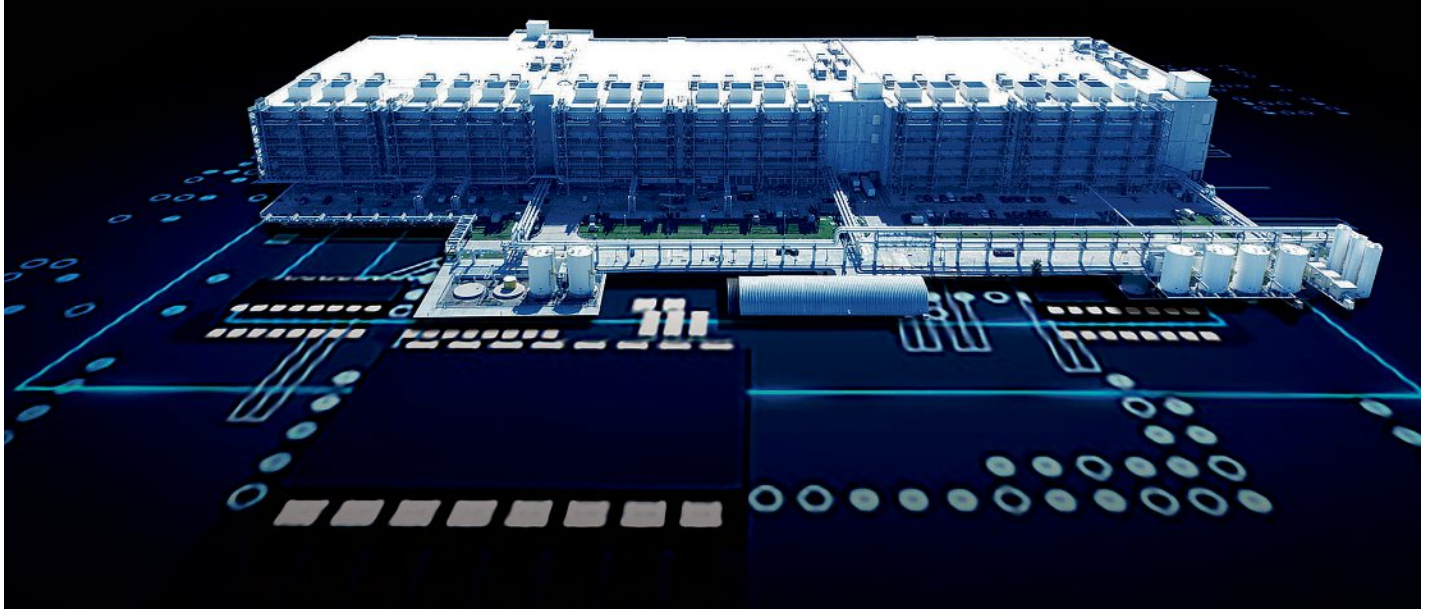
DATA CENTERS: BENEFITS & BURDENS

PROCESSING THE IMPACT



20 years in, how data centers changed one town's economy



Byron McCauley
Columnist
USA TODAY NETWORK – MICHIGAN

COUNCIL BLUFFS, Iowa –

When the folks from Big Data eye your town for a hyperscale data center, read their lips when they start talking impact, numbers and benefits.

• Nearly two decades ago, Council Bluffs made a starter deal with Google: tax advantages in exchange for economic investment in the form of 200 permanent, good-paying jobs and millions in tax revenue. In 2007, Google announced an initial $600 million hyperscale data center on the site of the city's only remaining drive-in movie theater that had operated since 1950. The original building was 100,000 square feet when it opened. **See DATA CENTERS, Page 7A**

More online

Scan the QR code for the full three-part series, videos, photos, polls, previous coverage and more about the impact of data centers on local communities.

PHOTO PROVIDED BY REESE STRICKLAND, GRAPHIC BY GETTYIMAGES AND ROBIN FERGUSON

2026 Excalibur, Excelsior finalists announced

Nida Tazeen
Rockford Register Star
USA TODAY NETWORK

Finalists for the 2026 Excalibur and Excelsior Awards, recognizing community service across northern Illinois, have been announced.

Excalibur finalists are Penny Wirtjes, Phil Rada and Kathy Kwiat-Hess.

Excelsior finalists are the Greg Lindmark Foundation, Superhero Center for Autism and Rockford Park District.

The Excalibur Award recognizes an individual for excellence in community service and has been presented since 1971. The Excelsior Award, established in 1979, recognizes an organization for its commitment to serving others.

"The Excalibur and Excelsior Awards recognize people and organizations who give their time, talent, and resources to improve the lives of others," said James Patterson, president of the Community Foundation of Northern Illinois. "This year's finalists represent the very best of northern Illinois. Their commitment to service above self has strengthened our communities, inspired others to lead, and created positive change that will be felt for years to come."

The Excalibur and Excelsior Awards are presented by Community Foundation of Northern Illinois, along with its partners — the Northern Illinois Center for Nonprofit Excellence, the Rockford Register Star, the Boone County Community Foundation, the Rochelle Area Community Foundation, and the Foundation for Northwest Illinois.

When the award recipients will be announced

The annual awards ceremony is scheduled for Dec. 10, 2026, at Prairie Street Brewing Co.

Community leaders, nonprofit partners, businesses and residents are expected to gather for the event, where Community Champion Awards also will be presented to individuals and organizations representing Boone, Ogle, Stephenson and Winnebago counties.

More information about the awards is available at ExcaliburExcelsior.com.

This story was produced by reporter Nida Tazeen, NTazeen@usatoday-co.com, with the assistance of Artificial Intelligence (AI). Journalists were involved in every step of the review, editing and publishing process. Learn more at cm.usatoday.com/ethical-conduct .

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