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# SPRINGFIELD NEWS-LEADER WEEKEND

SUNDAY, JUNE 21, 2026 | NEWS-LEADER.COM

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Craters of the Moon National Monument & Preserve in Idaho served as a NASA research site.  
 PROVIDED BY CRATERS OF THE MOON NATIONAL MONUMENT AND PRESERVE

## Scenic trips to celebrate AMERICA'S BIRTHDAY

Awe-inspiring landmarks cross the country

USA TODAY NETWORK

America is turning 250, but some of its greatest treasures don't sit behind museum glass. • The awe-inspiring scenes that take your breath away and remind you of the beauty of our nation are hidden along winding roads, tucked into mountain valleys, perched atop sea cliffs and preserved in places that tell the story of who we are. • From a castle built by a Sherlock Holmes actor in Connecticut to lava fields in Idaho that helped train astronauts, these destinations showcase the beauty, ingenuity and delightful weirdness that make the United States unique. • To celebrate the nation's semiquincentennial, the USA TODAY Network rounded up places that capture the spirit of America, in hopes that it inspires travelers to see our land one unforgettable view, roadside attraction, historic landmark and natural wonder at a time.

### Gillette Castle State Park

Gillette Castle State Park in Connecticut feels like stepping into a storybook perched above the Connecticut River. William Gillette's whimsical, hand-crafted mansion – complete with carved doors, custom glasswork, and the remnants of his private railway – invites visitors to explore a world as eccentric as the actor who defined Sherlock Holmes.

Wander forest trails, relax by the riverfront, discover the charming Osaki cottage, or hop on the historic Chester-Hadlyme Ferry. With gardens, bridges, and peaceful picnic spots scattered across 184 scenic acres, the park blends mystery, beauty,

See **TRIPS**, Page 9A



Hundreds of thousands of tulips bloom in Central Park during Pella, Iowa's Tulip Time festival.  
 ZACH BOYDEN-HOLMES/DES MOINES REGISTER FILE

### LAKE SPRINGFIELD

## Fundraiser grows after dam tragedy

**Susan Szuch**  
 Springfield News-Leader  
 USA TODAY NETWORK

More than 72 hours after four people went over the Lake Springfield Dam in a kayak, one remains missing as of June 18.

On June 14, the Springfield Fire Department was called to rescue 12-year-old Aurelie Stawny, 17-year-old Sofie Stawny, 19-year-old Andrea Stawny and 40-year-old Taylor Stawny after their kayak with two inflatable tubes attached to it went over the spillway at Lake Springfield Dam during flood conditions.

SFD was able to rescue Aurelie Stawny at that time, who was taken to an area hospital and has since been released, according to a June 17 press release. The bodies of Andrea and Sofie Stawny were found on June 16 and 17, respectively, while the search continues for Taylor Stawny.

**“We are deeply saddened by the loss of Sofie Stawny, an incoming junior at Willard High School, and her sister, Andrea Stawny, a 2025 graduate of Willard High School.”**  
**Willard Public Schools**

A fundraiser is currently underway, [GoFundMe.com/f/support-for-stawny-family-after-tragedy](https://www.gofundme.com/f/support-for-stawny-family-after-tragedy). As of the morning of June 18, the fundraiser is at more than \$25,000 of its \$30,000 goal. The money raised will go toward funeral services for Andrea, Sofie and Taylor Stawny, as well as to support Aurelie Stawny.

According to the GoFundMe, Taylor Stawny was the mother of Aurelie, Sofie and Andrea.

Sofie Stawny was an incoming junior at Willard High School and Andrea Stawny was a 2025 graduate, according to a statement from Willard Public Schools.

See **STAWNY FAMILY**, Page 5A



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