

KIRKSVILLE QUARTERLY MAGAZINE



CHOREOGRAPHER OF THE SQUARE

How Laci Cook is conducting
Kirksville's downtown
renaissance — one mural,
one festival and
one storefront at a time.

INSIDE THIS ISSUE: NEMO Fair; Red, White & Blue Festival; Summer Block Parties; Car Shows; Concerts; Fireworks; Whiskey & Turkey Festival; Red Barn Festival & Crafts; Kids Mini Mud Mile



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Choreographer of the Square

How Laci Cook is conducting Kirksville's downtown renaissance — one mural, one festival and one storefront at a time

There is an unmistakable, rhythmic pulse to a thriving downtown, a collective humming generated when commerce, community, and creativity converge. For decades, the historic square of Kirksville has stood as the geographic centerpiece of Adair County, but its evolution into a living work of art requires something more than geography. It requires a visionary. It requires a choreographer of public space who can orchestrate a symphony of color, energy, and economic momentum.

Enter Laci Cook.

To encounter Cook is to experience an immediate infusion of high-octane enthusiasm. As the part-time executive director of Main Street Kirksville and the owner of SIP Downtown, situated prominently on the courthouse square, Cook does not merely inhabit the downtown district — she channels it. She is civic-minded, profoundly artistic, and fiercely dedicated to the principle that a community's heart must be visually and culturally arresting if it is to beat sustainably. Cook willingly shoulders a tremendous responsibility for the city's forward progress, transforming administra-

tive urban renewal into an expressive, collaborative canvas.

"I have always just had a passion for downtown," Cook said, her energy palpable as she reflects on the lineage of her devotion. "I remember as a kid walking down here with friends. There used to be a bookstore on the corner called Books and Things, and that was

our Saturday afternoon. We would come down to DeRosier's flower shop for ice cream, go shop at the bookstore, with the money from our parents to find little trinkets. I've always had those fond memories."

Those nostalgic, sun-dappled afternoons laid the groundwork for a lifetime of advocacy. When

Cook later sought to establish her own business, SIP Downtown, she began attending the meetings of what was then known as the Kirksville Downtown Improvement Committee.

Her initial motivation was entrepreneurial self-interest — discovering which historic storefronts might be available for acquisition — but



Main Street or Downtown

First Place

Kirkville

Anchored by its charming courthouse square, downtown Kirkville blends college-town energy with small-town charm. Home to two universities and surrounded by parks and recreational opportunities, it offers nearly 50 places to eat and drink, plus locally owned boutiques. From the Barn Arts & Crafts Festival to Summer on the Square concerts, farmers markets and festive celebrations for Fourth of July and Christmas, there's always something happening in this vibrant community.

Second Place

St. Charles

Editors' Choice

Lexington



ruralmissouri.coop April 2026 Rural Missouri 19

her artistic eye and community spirit quickly pulled her deeper into the fold. She recognized that the individual success of any single boutique, cafe, or gallery was inextricably linked to the vitality of the entire district.

The organizational machinery behind this revitalization has deep roots. Local records trace grassroots downtown efforts back to the 1980s, when an alliance of dedicated business owners spearheaded the Kirkville Downtown Improvement Committee. The group maintained that mantle until 2019, when it formally aligned with the National Main Street Association and the Missouri

Main Street Connection. This state and national framework provided a sophisticated, four-point blueprint designed to rescue dying downtowns across America through meticulous restoration and strategic economic development.

Since Cook assumed the mantle of executive director in May 2025, that blueprint has been executed with breathtaking velocity. Under her stewardship, Main Street Kirkville achieved monumental operational milestones, most notably a staggering 425 percent increase in partnerships and record-breaking engagement on its Missouri Main Street Connection survey. The organization rapidly

modernized its infrastructure, launching a comprehensive new website, expanding its digital presence across all social media platforms, and implementing streamlined financial systems to optimize core operations.

This administrative renaissance earned swift and prestigious acclaim. In the 2026 Best of Rural Missouri Reader's Choice Contest, readers voted Kirkville first place in the Best Main Street or Downtown category. The magazine itself praised the district as "anchored by its charming courthouse square," blending college-town energy with small-town charm—a community

home to two universities and offering nearly 50 places to eat and drink alongside locally owned boutiques.

Simultaneously, the Kirkville Area Chamber of Commerce named Main Street Kirkville the Non-profit of the Year. The honor arrived just one year after the chamber recognized Cook's individual business acumen by naming her the Entrepreneur of the Year.

Yet, for Cook, accolades are merely fuel for future innovation. Her grandest vision for the city centers on an uncompromising commitment to aesthetics.

"Our goal for 2026 is beautification," Cook said, invoking a cinematic philosophy to describe her approach to urban design. "I use the line from *Field of Dreams*—'If you build it, they will come.' Right now, with the open storefronts in downtown Kirkville, we really need to focus on beautification. If you have buildings that people don't find appealing, they may



not be drawn to the area. If we can make it more aesthetically pleasing, people will be more inclined to spend time here, and entrepreneurs will look at a restored, vibrant storefront and say, 'I want to put my business there.'"

Under this creative mandate, the downtown district is undergoing a visual transformation. Main Street Kirkville manages an ambitious portfolio of public art and landscape design, ranging from curated flower

pot installations and vibrant window paintings to an upcoming large-scale mural installation. The organization's reach extends across a geographic footprint spanning several blocks in all directions from the courthouse square, supported by crucial sponsorships from major financial institutions and local enterprises.

The apex of this artistic push includes a newly secured \$15,000 grant from AARP, designated specifically for

a major public mural downtown. Initiated by past president Ryan Ratliff and secured under Cook's current leadership, the mural project represents a permanent, sophisticated addition to Kirkville's visual landscape, with preliminary design and structural work expected to begin by mid-summer.

For Cook, beautification is not merely decorative; it is the stagecraft required to host the human comedy. By creating an aesthetically enchanting environment, Main Street Kirkville sets the scene for an array of massive community celebrations that drive economic vitality.

The crown jewel of these initiatives is the annual Whiskey and Turkey Festival, a sweeping cultural event held each September on the first Saturday after Labor Day. The festival is a masterful piece of historical preservation, celebrating the very genesis of the municipality. Local lore dictates that the city's namesake, Jesse



Kirk, fed early Missouri surveyors a feast of wild turkey and whiskey, successfully jesting at the end of the night that they should name the newly charted town Kirksville. Main Street Kirksville has transformed this frontier anecdote into a massive autumn spectacle.

The festival closes the historic streets to make way for food trucks, live musical performances, cornhole play, civic bingo hosted by the Rotary Club, and appearances by the Kirksville Circus. According to modern data analytics from Placer AI, the event draws an astonishing 6,000 people to the downtown square, generating unprecedented visibility for lo-

cal merchants.

The festival is part of a continuous, year-round calendar of cultural programming designed by the organization. Spring and summer months feature Downtown Live, Sidewalk Sales and participation in the bustling Red, White, and Blue Parade.

This July, the organization is introducing a new culinary element to the summer lineup with the Red, White & BBQ event, set for Friday, July 3, in downtown Kirksville. The main barbecue festivities, catered by the Wooden Nickel, are scheduled from 5 to 7 p.m., but community members can arrive early for the United Way Pie and Ice Cream Social, which runs from

4 to 7 p.m. The evening's entertainment, presented through the Kirksville Arts Association's Summer on the Square series, opens with a performance by the Kirksville Community Band at 5 p.m. and continues with the Aaron Russell Band at 7 p.m. The community event is sponsored by Northeast Regional Medical Center and the Wooden Nickel.

As the seasons turn, the aesthetic focus shifts to the KV Winter Lights initiative. This dedicated committee within Main Street Kirksville designs, installs, and maintains the elaborate holiday illumination display that blankets the courthouse square, featuring tower-



ing lighted gift packages, meticulously decorated Christmas trees, and brilliant canopy displays that draw families into the crisp winter air for carriage rides, Shop Small Saturday promotions, and the annual Merry Market.

To pull off such an exhaustive calendar of events, Cook champions a philosophy of radical institutional collaboration, shifting the town's civic organizations away from isolated efforts and toward a unified, grand performance.

"When I began, I talked to other historic towns like Hannibal that have huge festivities every weekend, and I asked how they pull it off," Cook reflected. "They explained that while they are separate organizations, they work together like a Ferris wheel. I laughed and said when I started a year ago, we were a bit more like a Tilt-A-Whirl, with everyone spinning in their own directions. If we can get into synchronization, communicate, and work together, we can make all of our events bigger and bring in more people. I've also used a boat analogy where we all need to row in the same direction, along with the Ferris wheel anal-

ogy. We're going on a lot of rides, but the overall theme is unity."

This collaborative momentum is establishing Kirksville as a premiere regional destination, creating a picturesque, culturally rich environment that serves as a vital economic asset during university parents' weekends, collegiate athletic events, and tourism campaigns.

Through grant administration, promotional press releases, educational series, and the maintenance of a comprehensive local business database, the administrative outreach of Main Street Kirksville ensures that the momentum generated on the pavement translates into long-term commercial sustainability.

As the historic district looks toward a future defined by public art, economic growth, and heightened community pride, Cook continues to lead the charge with the precision of an executive and the soul of an artist. Through her eyes, the bricks and mortar of downtown Kirksville are not merely remnants of the past, but the foundation for an inspired, brilliant future.

KIRKSVILLE

RED, WHITE & BLUE FESTIVAL

AARON RUSSELL BAND

HEADLINES 2026 KIRKSVILLE
RED, WHITE, AND BLUE FESTIVAL

AARON RUSSELL



NEMO PHOTOGRAPHY



COMMUNITY CONCERT BAND - OPENING ACT

FRIDAY, JULY 3 - ADAIR COUNTY COURTHOUSE LAWN

United Way Pie Sale and Auction



July 4th United Way Pie Contest and Auction

The takes place on July 3 on the Adair County Courthouse lawn in downtown Kirksville from 4 to 7 p.m. Bring your pies between 4 and 5 p.m., and stick around — the auction runs between sets during the Summer on the Square concert.

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Location: W. Washington Street & S. Elson Street, Kirksville

**Proceeds go toward the fireworks.*



SATURDAY, JULY 4: SERVICE CLUB PANCAKE BREAKFAST

2026 Kirksville's Annual Red, White, and Blue Festival

Time: 7:00 a.m. - 11:00 a.m.

Location: Adair County Courthouse North Parking Lot

Rain Venue: Adair County Courthouse

\$7.00 per person (kids 5 and under free)

All Proceeds Go Toward the Fireworks!



10 a.m. Red, White, and Blue Parade
Begins at N. Franklin and Missouri Streets, going South



Events at North Park

North Park
Fireworks at 9:30 p.m.
Rain date: Sunday, July 5

Location: North Park, 2710 Novinger Street



Kids Games, Block Party starting at 5 p.m.
Live Entertainment - 5:30 - 9:30 p.m.
Travis Curtman Band
Music, Food Trucks, Games, and much more fun.
Food Trucks Start serving at 5 p.m.

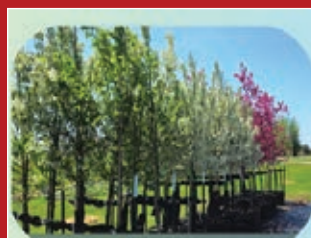
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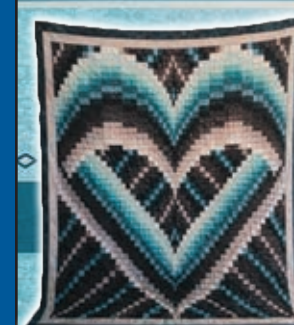
Main Street Kirkville RED, WHITE & BBQ



Time: 5:00 - 7:00 pm
Date: July 3
Location: Adair County Courthouse
Lawn - Downtown Kirkville



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2026 NEMO Fair - July 14th - 18th

Opening Day - Monday, July 13th

- Pie Contest - July 13 10 a.m.
- Opening Ceremony - 6 p.m.
(Reveille & Grand Marshal Introduction) - FREE ADMISSION ALL DAY!
- Pie Eating Contest + Pie Ice Cream Social
6:30 p.m.
- Garden Tractor Pulls 7 p.m.
"no carnival on Monday"



Outlaw Rodeo - Tuesday, July 14 at 7 p.m.



XCaliber Truck & Tractor Pull

Wednesday, July 15 at 7 p.m.

Concerts



Pork Tornadoes
Thursday, July 16 at 8 p.m.
- Special Guest Riker



Travis Denning
Friday, July 17 at 8 p.m.
- Special Guest Jason Brown



Chris Cagle
Saturday, July 18 at 8 p.m.
- Special Guest Chloe Hoecker



Bring the whole family out to celebrate being start of an unforgettable week at the NEMO Fair!
From sweet treats to smoking engines, there's something for everyone.



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SEPTEMBER 5-7



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Kids Movie Night
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At the Downtown La Plata Square

2026 Knox County Corn Festival



Annual community celebration
the first weekend after Labor Day in September,
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2025 NEMO Fair Queen Contest

SUNDAY, JULY 12

4 P.M. EVENT CENTER/MULTIPURPOSE BUILDING

NEMO Fairgrounds

Cortney Diggins Photography

Kirkville Arts Association Presents

Summer on the Square Concert Series

July & August Bands
All Shows 7 p.m. Adair County Courthouse Lawn

July 10 The Kirkville Community Band

July 24 Shakey Ground
(Sponsored by Lovegreen Ford)

July 31 Matt Kennedy & the Busted String Band
(Sponsored by Maxwell's Bar & Grill)

Aug. 7 The Sharpshooters

Aug. 17 The May Belles
Bluegrass & Folk

Aug. 21 Deadwood
Blues & Rock & Roll

Aug. 29 Truman Steel

In Case of Rain: Rain: Club One, 301 W. McPherson

For More Info: 660-665-0500

Kirkville Arts Association

BABY & KIDS CONTEST THEME 2026

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AGES 0-8 Years Old Welcome
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Sunday, July 12
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Paintings by Trish Hill-Bellington

July 14-Aug. 28th

Reception & Meet and Greet: July 16th 5:30-6:30

Hands of Friendship Quilt Guild

Sept 14th to Oct 21st

Reception: Oct. 1st 5:30-6:30

Arts Center Rummage Sale

July 24th and 25th




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Whiskey & Turkey Festival

Main Street Kirksville
September 12, 2026



5-11 p.m. • Adair County Courthouse Square

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Archery • Great Food

Concert to honor legend, Jesse Kirk



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Thousand Hills State Park Programs

Thousand Hills Star Party

Friday, July 3, 9:30-11:30 p.m.

Come out for a celebration of the night sky! Join others in the exploration of the stars and sky above you. There will be telescopes but everybody is welcome to bring their own telescopes, chairs, and binoculars. Meet at the Point Shelter.

Art in the park

Saturday, July 11, 10 a.m.-noon

Connect with nature through several art activities for artists of all ages. Park staff and volunteers will have several art-based activities available during this time frame for people to come enjoy art in the park. Meet at the tables by the Oak Trail and Playground. Questions? Contact the park office at 660-665-6995.

Petroglyph tour

Sunday, July 5, 10 a.m.

Thousand Hills State Park is home to a collection of petroglyphs or rock carvings made by ancestors of today's American Indians. Explore the petroglyphs with park staff to learn more about this unique piece of history. Petroglyph shelter located next to beach.

Something about a snake

Saturday, July 17, 7 p.m.

Something about snakes make them super important. Join park staff to learn what that reason is and why snakes are unique. Campground 1 amphitheater.

Petroglyph tour

Friday, July 24, 7 p.m.

Thousand Hills State Park is home to a collection of petroglyphs or rock carvings made by ancestors of today's American Indians. Explore the petroglyphs with park staff to learn more about this unique piece of history. Meet at the petroglyph shelter located next to the beach. Questions? Contact 660-665-6995.

Petroglyph tour

Friday, Aug. 7, 7 p.m.

Thousand Hills State Park is home to a collection of petroglyphs or rock carvings made by ancestors of today's American Indians. Join park staff for a slide-show presentation to get a close-up look and learn more about this unique piece of history. Meet at the petroglyph shelter next to the beach.

Native reptiles

Friday, Aug. 14, 7 p.m.

Join park staff to learn about some of Thousand Hills' native reptiles. From snakes, to lizards, to turtles, there is always something fascinating to discover. Meet at the Campground 1 amphitheater. Questions? Contact the park office at 660-665-6995.

Snake survival

Friday, Aug. 14, 6 p.m.

Snakes have a variety of different ways that they defend themselves. Join park staff to discover these survival techniques. There may be a chance to meet a live animal. Meet at the Campground 1 amphitheater.

Dark sky program

Friday, Aug. 21, 8:30-10:30 p.m.

Celebrate the night sky at Thousand Hills State Park. Explore the night sky and learn about the stories that go with the constellations in the sky. There will be telescopes but everybody is welcome to bring their own telescopes, chairs, and binoculars. Meet at the Point Shelter.

Petroglyph tour

Saturday, Aug. 22, 10 a.m.

Thousand Hills State Park is home to a collection of petroglyphs or rock carvings made by ancestors of to-

day's American Indians. Explore the petroglyphs with park staff to learn more about this unique piece of history. Petroglyph shelter located next to the beach.

Fall painting

Saturday, Aug. 29, 1-3 p.m.

Art is a wonderful way to connect ourselves to nature. Learn with staff and volunteers how to paint a fall nature scene. Supplies will be provided but you may bring your own if you prefer. Meet at the Park Office. Questions? Contact the park office at 660-665-6995.

Snake survival

Friday, Sept. 4, 6 p.m.

Snakes have a variety of different ways that they defend themselves. Join park staff to discover these survival techniques. There may be a chance to meet a live animal. Meet at the Campground 1 amphitheater.

Petroglyph tour

Sunday, Sept. 6, 10 a.m.

Thousand Hills State Park is home to a collection of petroglyphs or rock carvings made by ancestors of today's American Indians. Explore the petroglyphs with park staff to learn more about this unique piece of history. Petroglyph shelter located next to the beach.

Learn 2 Aim

Saturday, Sept. 12, 10 a.m. and 1 p.m.

Begin your archery journey by attending a hands-on workshop this summer! Prior registration is required. Register at: mostateparks.com/learn2.

Petroglyph tour

Sunday, Sept. 20, 10 a.m.

Thousand Hills State Park is home to a collection of petroglyphs or rock carvings made by ancestors of today's American Indians. Explore the petroglyphs with park staff to learn more about this unique piece of history. Meet at the petroglyph shelter located next to the beach.

Dark sky program

Friday, Sept. 11, 8-10 p.m.

Thousand Hills State Park is hosting a series of dark sky programs in 2026. Join park staff and representatives from Truman State University at the Point Shelter to explore the stars and sky above you. Telescopes will be set up, but you are welcome to bring your own, along with chairs, blankets and binoculars. These events are free and open to the public with no registration required. For more info, Call 660-665-6995.

Missouri State Parks — a division of the Missouri Department of Natural Resources
Questions? Contact the park office at 660-665-6995

7th Annual Kids Mini Mud Mile

Date: August 15
Time: 9:30 or 10:30 Start Times

North Park Sports Complex.
 Children 3-15.
 1-Mile Mud Obstacle Run.

Children 5 & Under:
 Adult Free

Register at
kirkville.gov/p/parks-recreation
 or in person at
 Kirkville Aquatic Center.

MOSI Art Guild

Invites Artists to Monthly Meetings

The MOSI Art Guild encourages any artist, budding artist, and supporter of the arts to join them at their monthly meetings

5:30 p.m.
 on the second Thursday of each month
 typically at the Adair County
 Annex Building in Kirkville
(July meeting location to be announced)

MOSI will have an art exhibit
 at Truman State University
 August through December.

For more information visit facebook.com/mosiartguild,
facebook.com/groups/MOSIartguild,
www.mosiartguild.org or email info@mosiartguild.org

KIRKSVILLE COUNTRY CLUB

July 10 — United Way Golf
 August 7 — 32nd Annual Chamber Golf Tournament
 Sept. 9 (Wednesday) —
 The Ville Celebrity Golf Classic

LANCASTER GOLF COURSE

July 12 — Ronnie Long Memorial
 Tournament, 3-person scramble
 July 17 — Senior 2-person
 July 19 — 2-couple scramble
 Sept. 20 — 4-lady scramble
 Sept. 27 — 1-man marathon

La Plata Golf Course

July 11 — Junior Golf
 July 18 — B4 Outdoors Fundraiser
 Aug. 1 — Atlanta School Booster Club
 Fundraiser, 4-person scramble
 Aug. 30 — Couples Scramble
 Sept. 6 — Couple Par 3 Tournament
 Sept. 12 — Fall Brawl, 4-man scramble
 Sept. 19 — EMS Scramble, 2-person scramble

2026 REGIONAL SUMMER & AUTUMN BAND SCHEDULE

JULY • AUGUST • SEPTEMBER

JULY

July 4 / 26 AARON RUSSELL BAND
 VFW Kirkville (7 pm)
 July 11 / 26 AARON RUSSELL BAND
 Black Diamond Jubilee, Macon (7 pm)
 July 16 / 26 FULLY LOADED BAND
 NEMO Fair, Kirkville MO
 July 17 / 26 BOOT CUT
 Nemo Fair Beer Tent, Kirkville MO
 July 18 / 26 BOOT CUT
 Nemo Fair Beer Tent, Kirkville MO
 July 24 / 26 SHAKEY GROUND
 Kirkville Summer on the Square
 July 24 / 26 BOOT CUT
 Bike Night, Centerville IA
 July 25 / 26 AARON RUSSELL BAND
 Black Diamond Jubilee, Macon (7 pm)

AUGUST

Aug 1 / 26 AARON RUSSELL BAND
 VFW Kirkville (7 pm)
 Aug 4 / 26 BOOT CUT Bevier MO
 Aug 6 / 26 FULLY LOADED BAND
 Takers of America Convention, Macon MO
 Aug 8 / 26 BOOT CUT
 Jammin on the River, Glasgow MO
 Aug 8 / 26 AARON RUSSELL BAND
 Black Diamond Jubilee, Macon (7 pm)
 Aug 22 / 26 AARON RUSSELL BAND
 Black Diamond Jubilee, Macon (7 pm)

SEPTEMBER

Sept 5 / 26 AARON RUSSELL BAND
 VFW Kirkville (7 pm)
 Sept 12 / 26 AARON RUSSELL BAND
 Black Diamond Jubilee, Macon (7 pm)
 Sept 26 / 26 FULLY LOADED BAND
 Knights of Columbus - Monroe City
 Sept 26 / 26 AARON RUSSELL BAND
 Black Diamond Jubilee, Macon (7 pm)

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Kirkville Parks and Recreation's 2026 Summer Block Parties.

Join city staff and community partners for a family-sized load of fun at local parks.

June 28 – P.C. Mills Park
 July 12 – Memorial Park
 July 26 – Jaycee Park
 August 9 – Brashear Park

Each block party will run from 3-5 p.m.

For more information, contact the Kirkville Parks and Recreation Department at 660-627-1485.

2026 RED BARN FESTIVAL

Arts & Crafts

The 52nd Annual Red Barn Festival and Crafts will be held on September 19th in Downtown Kirkville from 9 a.m. to 4 p.m.

- Artists and crafters from throughout the Midwest
- Entertainment Corner with local amateur talent
- Creative Corner with fun and crafts for the kids
- A variety of food vendors

ENTERTAINMENT CORNER: Local Amateur Talent

NEMO Food Court

The 2026 Red Barn Festival - September 19th - Downtown Kirkville - 9 a.m. to 4 p.m.

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*As reported by Financial Planning magazine, 1996-2025, based on total revenue. Securities and advisory services offered through LPL Financial, a registered investment advisor, member FINRA/SIPC.

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