

Join Us for HI Conference 2018!

Laura Johnson and Crystal Wieland are Homeschool Iowa's new conference coordinators. They sat down with Homeschool Iowa Magazine to discuss the upcoming 2018 conference. Both of these ladies bring something different, yet similar, to the table as they spearhead conference plans: Lauren is the daughter of former Homeschool Iowa board members, Scott and Stephanie Bailey, she grew up as a conference volunteer, and plans to begin her children's homeschool journey this fall. As an avid homeschool mom, Crystal has been attending the NICHE Conference for the past seven years and, in her life before homeschooling, was an event coordinator.

Who should attend the NICHE Conference?

Lauren: Anyone who has children still in the home -- regardless of whether or not they plan to homeschool. Teaching the next generation encompasses all aspects of life and is not limited to the textbook arena. Be filled by the support of like-minded parents, be challenged by speakers who point upward and onward, and be prayed over by our staff and leaders who are ever-ready to lend a listening ear.

Crystal: Everyone! I have attended with my husband, my mom, and another homeschool mom. Each person has benefited from attending. Last year, my husband couldn't come, and I missed being with him. Conference always helps re-calibrate us and puts us on the same page for our family and our homeschool journey. I'm also surprised by how much my mom has enjoyed the conference. She loves her grandchildren and wants to be part of their childhood. Getting a glimpse into our world, as homeschoolers, has really enhanced her support of us.

What makes the NICHE Conference special from other conferences?

Lauren: While it can be beneficial to visit other conferences from time to time, we believe the benefits of attending your own state homeschool conference are invaluable. A crucial building block to a strong support system is networking with and meeting new people in your own community. Are you wondering where you can find a local homeschool group? Come meet your Regional Representative! Are you concerned about homeschooling laws and how they might change? Come meet your legislative liaison! Are you wondering how you can get further involved with the state organization? Come meet your Homeschool Iowa board members! You don't need to walk this journey alone. Let us walk it with you.

Crystal: I love homegrown local stuff, and the NICHE Conference is truly all that put together. I've attended this conference for the last seven years. The workshops are so plentiful, it's been hard to decide which one to go to at times. The vendor hall has been a great way to see new ideas. I've told my husband that conference is the new Christmas, and we try to budget accordingly. To find something so rich in our own backyard is great.

When and where is this year's conference located?

Crystal: May 31-June 2 in Coralville. As a Des Moines resident, I was surprised by how much I enjoyed going to Coralville and getting away from my obligations at home. The hotel and conference center are attached and make getting to workshops easy: no meters, no parking, and no walking. Also, everything you need is in walking dis-



tance of the hotel -- even a grocery store and a variety of restaurants.

Who are some of the featured speakers?

Lauren: Hop on our website, homeschooliowa.org, to find the complete list. You'll be surprised by the wide range of topics from which you are able to choose! However, I am most looking forward to hearing Eric Ludy. His passion is inspiring others to live boldly, walk powerfully, and give relentlessly for the gospel of Christ.

Crystal: There is quite the array of speakers! I'm personally looking forward to Sonya Shafer, with Simply Charlotte Mason. I try to follow the style of teaching that "Education is an Atmosphere, a Discipline, a Life." Mrs. Shafer is a great leader on this.

What is there for my kids?

Lauren: If you have small children, like myself, Mother's Room and Toddler Town are the places for you! Located on the second floor of the Marriott, you'll find a little reprieve with toys for the littles and refreshments for yourself. When you stop in, look for me, as I will be there with my newest -- coming May 12!

Crystal: Personally, we have done it all, from the children's program, to keeping the kids with us because I had an infant and needed the older one's help, to the kids staying at Grandma's so my husband and I could focus.

What blows me away, and makes a lot less work for parents, is the children's program directed by Scott and Hannah Kratzer. They have been leading this awesome program for eight years. That shows a lot of love and faithfulness to our kids and to NICHE. The children's program is an engaging "Vacation Bible School experience" which moves the kids through skits, small group learning, and Bible time -- all centered on a strong theme. This year's theme is The Great Adventure: a mission to pursue, a love to share! The two days are focused on a shipwreck adventure in the travels of David Livingstone.

Is there anything new at the conference this year?

Lauren: Yes! Kicking off the last day of conference, we will be holding a Moms & Muffins and Dads & Donuts session. Heidi St. John will present a brief devotional, along with a time of fellowship, during Moms & Muffins, while Eric Ludy presents the same during Dads & Donuts. Come fuel your bodies with a scrumptious breakfast while our speakers fuel your spirit with encouragement.