



Nearly 2,000 Volunteers Rally on MLK Day to Exceed Pack the Dome Goal and Support Local Children

WATERLOO, Iowa (January 21, 2026) - The Cedar Valley showed its strong commitment to service and ending childhood hunger during the 2026 Pack the Dome: MLK Day of Service, which brought together nearly 2,000 volunteers. While the goal was to pack 60,000 bags of food, the community surpassed expectations by assembling an impressive 70,272 bags for the Northeast Iowa Food Bank's BackPack Program.

The BackPack Program is one of the Food Bank's eight programs, delivering bags full of meals and snacks for children during weekends and school holidays. In FY 2025, the Program distributed over 127,400 bags to more than 150 schools across 16 counties in northeast Iowa. Events like Pack the Dome are vital in sustaining these efforts, providing critical support to children and families facing food insecurity.

This annual event honors the enduring legacy of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., whose inspiring words remind us:

"We can all get more together than we can apart. And this is the way we gain power. Power is the ability to achieve purpose, power is the ability to effect change, and we need power."

The success of Pack the Dome is made possible through the collective efforts of community members and partnerships between the Northeast Iowa Food Bank, the University of Northern Iowa's Office of Community Engagement, and the Volunteer Center of Cedar Valley.

Barbara Prather, Executive Director of the Northeast Iowa Food Bank, shared her gratitude for the community's dedication:

"Seeing nearly 2,000 people come together with a shared purpose is incredibly inspiring. Pack the Dome reflects the heart of our community, with community members working side-by-side to ensure children across northeast Iowa have the food

they need outside of school. We are so grateful to every volunteer who helped turn service into real impact."

Lauren Finke, Executive Director of the Volunteer Center of Cedar Valley, added:

"Pack the Dome is a great way to start the year by making service to the Cedar Valley a community priority. The Volunteer Center of Cedar Valley is proud to be part of this effort and looks forward to seeing that excitement carry into year-round involvement."

Kristina Kofoot, Assistant Director of UNI's Office of Community Engagement, reflected on the event's significance:

"Pack the Dome is a powerful reflection of the Cedar Valley community's commitment to service. It was extra exciting this year to have the opportunity to kick off Spring Into Service: Cat's Who Care, a semester-long celebration of service and commitment to community recognizing UNI's 150th anniversary, as part of the event. This partnership with the Volunteer Center of Cedar Valley and the Northeast Iowa Foodbank is a prime example of how UNI and our community partners continue to work together to create meaningful impact."

All three organizations extend their sincere gratitude to every volunteer who participated, from community leaders to UNI student-athletes, whose time, energy, and commitment on Monday helped make a difference in the lives of children across northeast Iowa.

For those unable to attend the event, there are still countless ways to join the fight against hunger. The Northeast Iowa Food Bank's focus for the first three months of the year is highlighting volunteer opportunities. To learn more about how you can help, visit neifb.org/get-involved/volunteer.

###

Media Contact: Abby Turpin, Director of Development, Marketing and Communications, Northeast Iowa Food Bank, aturpin@neifb.org

About NEIFB: The Northeast Iowa Food Bank (NEIFB) is a proud member of Feeding America® and the Iowa Food Bank Association. NEIFB distributes nutritious food and grocery products to over 127 nonprofit organizations and programs that help families and individuals facing food insecurity. Last year, the Food Bank distributed over 8.6 million meals within its 16-county service area. For over 40 years, the Food Bank has alleviated hunger and provided nutrition education through its eight programs: Agency

Distribution, BackPack, Cedar Valley Food Pantry, Kids Café, Mobile Food Pantry, School Market, Senior Nutrition, and Summer Feeding. To learn more, visit neifb.org and follow us on social media.

About Volunteer Center of Cedar Valley: The Volunteer Center of Cedar Valley promotes and supports volunteerism throughout the Cedar Valley community by serving as the resource and coordination center for volunteers and community partnerships. In collaboration with 250+ community organizations and events in Black Hawk County, thousands of volunteers have discovered ways to serve for the last nearly thirty years. Individuals, families, and groups of all sizes are welcome to be part of service in the Cedar Valley. Visit vccv.org to get involved.

About UNI Office of Community Engagement: The UNI Office of Community Engagement enriches student learning and development by cultivating impactful partnerships that address the needs of the Cedar Valley and beyond. By fostering meaningful collaborations between the university and the community, the office serves as a catalyst for positive change. Through its efforts, students, faculty, and staff are challenged and supported to engage in transformative experiences that benefit both the university and the broader community. Learn more at engagement.uni.edu.