



GIVE THE PERFECT GIFT



WINTER 2025



NORTHEAST IOWA
FOOD BANK

From the Director



I'm trying to put words on paper to share with the community how grateful I am for all those in northeast Iowa who make a difference in the lives of people living with food insecurity.

For years, the Food Bank has worked to advocate for improving SNAP benefits for people who need them and to educate our elected officials on the benefits, including the economic benefits, of SNAP. This year was no exception. Our message was clear: if SNAP is cut, the number of people served through the Food Bank and Food Pantry goes up.

In October and November, we witnessed what happens when SNAP is cut, and the influx at food banks and food pantries drastically increases. The number of people who needed help through food banks and food pantries went up by nearly 60%; nearly 40% were kids and nearly 30% were seniors. Ten percent of households had not been to a food pantry before. (Source: NEIFB database)

And you all stepped up to help us and food pantries throughout northeast Iowa make a difference for those who sought assistance. Your support, including volunteering, giving financially, and donating food, helped us make a difference in the lives of so many people who sought assistance. Organizations, businesses, foundations, and individuals all made a difference in the lives of people who need help.

While the need has gone down because the safety net is there, changes in the SNAP program that were enacted with HR 1 this past summer were implemented on November 1. This means additional verification for some people who can't work and for children over the age of 14.

The data clearly show demand on food banks and food pantries goes up when SNAP is cut. You acted by showing up to assist us when we needed it most. We continue to ask you to show up and support the Food Bank, and we ask you to continue to educate others about the good the SNAP program does in our communities. Both are vital in providing resources to the community. Together, we can ensure people who need food have access to it.

Every Meal. Every Day. Everyone.



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In Case You Missed It

WARTBURG PACK

On October 29, the annual Wartburg Pack took place. With the help of more than 450 Wartburg students, faculty, and staff, we were able to pack 18,000 backpacks to provide food for children across northeast Iowa. Special thank you to Ruan Transportation for providing trailers for this event.



STUDENT FOOD DRIVE

Starting October 6 and wrapping up on November 7, seven local high schools raised more than 40,000 meals, completed 398 volunteer hours, and raised \$16,260.59. Cedar Falls raised the most money with \$8,257.81. Waterloo East logged the most volunteer hours with 166 hours. Valley Lutheran hosted the most events with 15 events. Hudson collected 3,372 pounds of food and had the most social media posts making them the overall winner of the Student Food Drive.

HOLIDAY DISTRIBUTION

Our annual Holiday Distribution was a major success, serving over 3,500 families Thanksgiving meals in northeast Iowa. With the help of over 400 volunteers, they completed over 1,200 hours of volunteer work. A huge thank you goes out to our volunteers, sponsors, donors, and community members who made this such a success!



Coming Up!

PACK THE DOME

Our annual Pack The Dome: Martin Luther King Jr. Day of Service event will take place on January 19, 2026 at the UNI-Dome. This day is dedicated to pack food for our BackPack Program. Last year, we had 1,200 volunteers and packed nearly 80,000 bags for children across northeast Iowa.



EMPTY BOWLS

Empty Bowls is our annual fundraiser and will be on March 27th, 2026 at Bien Venu in Cedar Falls. Throughout the event, attendees will join us in learning about the Food Bank, while also raising awareness and educating the community on the issue of hunger. Attendees will have the opportunity to purchase tickets and bid on both silent and live auction items. Tickets go on sale mid-February!

STAY UP TO DATE ON ALL THINGS NEIFB!



TAKING ACTION WITH ART

As food insecurity continues to rise each year, retired earth science teacher Gary Stewart decided to take action in his own way. A lifelong lover of art, Gary wanted to use his creativity to help combat hunger in his community of Floyd County, where his family has lived for decades.

During an extended family dinner, Gary came up with the idea of creating a Stewart Family Heirloom. This heirloom was something meaningful and fun that could also raise money for the Charles City Food Pantry. He decided the heirloom would be a drawing, and family members could purchase tickets for a chance to win it. His goal was to raise \$500 to donate to the food pantry.



“

Art that transforms itself into food is rather magical.”

- Gary

Every element of Stewart Heirloom was created to have a significance. Gary has a love for making art with natural items like polypore, which is what the Stewart Heirloom is made with. Polypore is a fungus that grows on the side of trees, also known as shelf fungi. Using wood-burning techniques, he

incorporated six trees to represent himself and his siblings, and a north star to symbolize his parents. For Gary, his parents were true north stars, guiding him and his siblings to live lives of service, kindness, and generosity. Even after their passing, the family continues to honor those values by supporting their community.

Gary believes that a healthy community depends on people taking care of one another and taking action. He found his own way of contributing. His inspiration to keep creating comes from his nephew, Adam, who shares his passion for art and motivates him to continue his creativity.



FORWARD TOGETHER: PARTNER AGENCY CONFERENCE



On October 22nd, the Northeast Iowa Food Bank hosted its Partner Agency Conference. This conference brings agencies together from across our 16-county service area throughout northeast Iowa. The event provides an opportunity for partners to connect, share ideas, learn from one another, and strengthen their programs. This year's theme was Forward Together: Strategies to Nourish a Brighter Future, reminding partner agencies that they are not alone in the fight to relieve food insecurity across northeast Iowa.

There were 23 agencies and program sites represented and 33 total attendees at the conference. Among those who attended was Patty Potratz, Director of Open Hands Food Pantry in West Union, Iowa, who shared her experience as an agency partner leader. Patty proudly noted that Open Hands was one of the first brick-and-mortar pantries to adopt electronic record-keeping, a change that saved countless hours each week. Patty expressed that the conference group sessions helped her learn more about the program and build her confidence.

Patty believes the greatest value of the Partner Agency Conference is the chance to exchange ideas with other pantry leaders. They are able to discuss what works, what doesn't, and learn from shared experiences. Patty encourages all partner agencies to be as involved as possible, adding, "It will make your pantry life easier and more enjoyable."

The Partner Agency Conference was a way to reinforce the power of collaboration. By coming together under the theme of Forward Together: Strategies to Nourish a Brighter Future, agencies across northeast Iowa showed that shared knowledge and mutual support are essential. As leaders like Patty remind us, the true impact of these gatherings is in the connections made and the collective commitment to ensuring that no one goes hungry in northeast Iowa.

LEADING THROUGH SERVICE

When it comes to philanthropy, Carol Toppin truly embodies the spirit of giving. This year, she was honored with the Gift of the Heart Philanthropy Award from the Association of Fundraising Professionals, Northeast Iowa Chapter, a testament to her dedication to the Northeast Iowa Food Bank.

Since 2022, Carol has contributed more than 539 volunteer hours, a remarkable commitment that reflects both her personal devotion and her ability to inspire others. She not only volunteers individually but also organizes weekly shifts with her Pickleball group. She lends many hands to sort donations, pack food, and supports pantry operations. Her commitment shines through special projects like gleaning apples for families in need and mentoring her granddaughter in hosting a pickleball fundraiser.



Carol's leadership extends beyond the volunteer floor. As a member of the Capacity Campaign Committee, she is a part of advancing a \$14 million fundraising effort to expand and renovate the Food Bank, ensuring its ability to serve more families for years to come. She also serves on the Empty Bowls Committee, where she secures auction items and engages her family in the mission, strengthening the community's connection to the cause.

Her impact is not only measured in hours or dollars but in the inspiration she provides. Carol's example encourages others to give, serve, and build a more compassionate community.

"Carol does so much for us, and we are grateful for her generosity, leadership, and heart," says Executive Director, Barbara Prather, reflecting the appreciation felt across the Food Bank team.

Through Carol's unwavering commitment and service, she has become a true model of what it means to lead with compassion, creativity, and commitment.

Honorariums

Patty Cutts' 80th birthday

By Tamara & Reed Hunemuller
By Anonymous
By John & Kaye Englin
By Karin Rowe
By Marvin & Jeanie McElvain
By Shirley Merner
By Barbara & James Prather
By Stanley & Rosalyn Lorenz
By Gregory & Janet Hankins
By Joan E. Dua
By Patsy Ott-Pick
By Susan Roberts-Dobie
By Sharraine & Dean Dreyer

Judith Finkelstein

By Linda Fitzgerald

Those who need help

By Thomas Smock

Jane and John Richmond

By Elaine Bliss

Diana Knutsen

By Diana Knutsen

Norma Rappmeyer

By David West

Marla L. O'Neill's 90th birthday

By Ruby Livengood

Luther & Paula Thorsen

50th anniversary

By Dorothy Keith

Iowa families!

By Thomas & Sue Etringer

Ron Steele

By James & Sandra Borseth



NORTHEAST IOWA
FOOD BANK

Memorials

Harold Maser

By David West

James Jacobson

By Betsey & Robert Kujak
By Kathryn & Lyle Buhr
By Ken & Kathy Kehrl
By Jean Trainor

Janine Halverson

By Mark Halverson

Larry Wilson

By Dennis & Jane Dodd

Myron McClurg

By Shirley McClurg

Clarissa Kunz

By Brian & Julie Hayes
By Alan & Debra Bernard
By Susan & Terry McGee
By David & Dianne Happel

Janis Hennings

By Steven Hennings

Forrest, Donna, & Warren

Timmerman

By Barry Timmerman

Darlene Prather

By Kathleen Holst
By Cheryl Erb

Gene & Carmen Condon

By Debbie & Walter Broten

Donnie

By Russell Weinmann

Sharel Jorgensen

By Brian & Kim Harper

Judy Chelle

By Jon & Wendy Foote

Chuck Stilwell

By Jim & Fran Waring

Melvin Such

By Randy & Mariann Berg
By Barbara & James Prather

Erica Turner

By Patricia Turner

Herb and Marceile Cristoph

By Marjorie Troyna

Jeffrey Cash

By D.J. Davis

Brian Pittman

By Trina Pittman

James Hutchins

By Dorothy Hutchins

Rev. James (Jim) Hanke

By Mary Twomey

Merlin Harbaugh

By Christine Carpenter
By Joy & Dave Tokheim
By Brigitte & Stephen
Cornelius
By Dr. Terry & Hollace
Lichty
By Randy Hodgkin

By Thomas DeJaeger

By Ronald & Denise Flory

By Anonymous

By Robert & Joyce Hansen

By Dennis & Michele

McFarlane

By Drew & Angela Conrad

By Mark & Lisa Rolinger

By Mary Mathis

By Kathleen Nettleton

By Michael & Vivikka

Christiason

By Terry & Mary Sandberg

Cindy Fisher

By Robert McGinn

By Chris & Richard White

By Judy Loonan

By James Shadle

Alice Diehl

By Terri Mowery

By Judy Thompson

Arnold Averhoff

By Karen Averhoff

Lawrence Seery

By Mrs. Lawrence Seery

Michael Putnam

By Ricky & Kathleen
McFarland

Jerry Zbornik

By Sharon Zbornik

John Calloway

By Gwendolyn & Michael
Calloway

Merle Larkin

By Ethel Koch

Brian Pittman

By Suzanne Bembridge

Craig Olson

By Lyle Schmitt

Mary Yusko

By Mark Yusko

Mary Woerner

By David & Sue Feltman

Jeanette Coontz

By Veronica Holm

Betty Hellman

By Robert Hellman

Paul Opsahl

By David & Sue Feltman

Ron Messingham

By Bonnie Messingham

Dave Hoth

By Kathy Hoth

Checker (Stone Soul)

By Anonymous

Michael Peyton

By Dennis & Helen
Knutson

Lori Harris

By David & Sue Feltman

Mary Ann

By Diane Thierer

Milton Woody Thomas

By Everett & Vicki Rowland

Pastor Allen Craft

By Richard & Marcia
Bechthold

Carl & Bob Hundley

By Norma Hundley

Mary Jo Kups

By Cheryl Martins

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Laurel Whitcome

By Scott Whitcome

John Culbertson

By Myrna Culbertson

Jack & Cletus Calder

By Ruth Calder
By Mary Fratzke

Craig Olson

By Debora J Olson

Dave Schrader, Roger Regel,

Sandy Backer, Larry Adelmund,

Dennis Kiefer, Mary Hoelt

By Charlotte & Galen
Greenzweig

Ruth Peterson

By James Peterson

Earl & Mary Bellis

By Jean & Robert Bellis

Laura and Marc Hemmes

By William Hemmes

Mary Ann Hesse

By Stewart & Barbara Fluent

Paul Braun

By The Braun Family
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By Denise R Willig



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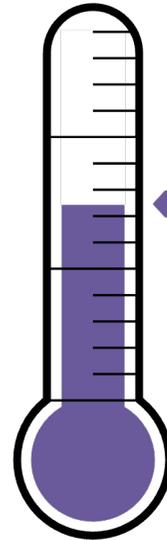


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