



FEEDING HOPE

FALL 2025



NORTHEAST IOWA
FOOD BANK

From the Director



Feeding hope. These words hold great significance for me. When I think of hope, I ask myself: how do we make life better for ourselves and for others? Hope is the belief that we will find the resources and support needed to improve life for all. For more than 40 years, the Northeast Iowa Food Bank has been a place of hope for thousands. But we cannot do this work alone. It takes all of us, working together, to make hope possible.

In June, many of you came together as advocates, urging Congress to prevent SNAP cuts in the Big Beautiful Bill. While we were not able to stop them entirely, we did succeed in limiting their scope. More importantly, we were successful in putting a human face on food insecurity, showing lawmakers the real people impacted by their decisions. Unfortunately, much of the burden continues to fall back on our communities. And yet, it is the strength of our community that gives me hope.

Food banks and pantries began because there was food being wasted while people were going hungry. Communities came together to solve that problem. More than 40 years later, we continue that mission, finding new and innovative ways to meet the needs of today.

- **Adapting to changing food sources** – partnering with farmers, acquiring bulk product, accepting more perishable items, and purchasing additional food as needed.
- **Expanding programs** – placing greater focus on childhood hunger through Kids Café, Summer Feeding, and School Markets.
- **Seizing opportunities** – successfully implementing Healthy Kids Iowa with the dedication of our staff and 31 partner agencies.
- **Staying true to our core work** – bringing in large quantities of food and distributing it to our many community partners.
- **Investing in the future** – undertaking a major renovation and remodel to better meet community needs for years to come.

We are here to give hope, and so much of that hope comes from you. For that, we are grateful. Meeting the needs of those facing food insecurity takes all of us, and together we can provide the hope our community deserves.

Thank you for standing with us.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Barbara Prather". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long, sweeping underline.

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In Case You Missed It

Personal Care Drive

Our annual Personal Care Drive, held July 1 to August 2, was a huge success! With 31 drop-off locations, we collected 1,840 pounds of personal care items, including soap, shampoo, deodorant, toothbrushes, toothpaste, and more for people in northeast Iowa who may not have the means to purchase them. Thank you to everyone who donated to our Personal Care Drive!



Capacity Campaign Breaks Ground

We officially broke ground on June 17 on our \$14 million building expansion and renovation project! This exciting milestone was made possible by the support and belief of so many. Thank you to our dedicated Northeast Iowa Food Bank staff, Board of Directors, and builders for attending, and to our incredible Campaign Ambassadors who shared powerful words and helped put shovels in the ground. Together, we're building a future rooted in dignity, possibility, and hope.

Coming Up!

Hunger Action Month

It's Hunger Action Month! September is the official month dedicated to the fight against hunger with many events, fundraisers, and initiatives. Join us Thursday, September 25th and Friday, September 26th for Fall Sack Lunch by purchasing a \$10 lunch. Every lunch will provide up to 25 meals for those within the community. For more information on events happening in September, visit neifb.org!



Checker's Stone Soul Picnic

The annual Checker's Stone Soul Picnic for the Northeast Iowa Food Bank's children's programs will be held on Sunday, September 7 from 11:00 am to 5:00 pm in Overman Park in Cedar Falls, Iowa. Join us for live music, Blue Barn BBQ, and children's activities. Free will donations with live music performances! Come say hi to NEIFB staff and bring your lawn chairs and coolers!

Holiday Distribution

As we near the holiday season, that means Holiday Distribution is approaching! Our annual Holiday Distribution event will take place November 24 - 26 during which we will provide families in our community with a Thanksgiving meal. Want to volunteer? Please contact Raechel Miller at rmiller@neifb.org for more information.



DON'T FORGET TO WEAR ORANGE ON SEPTEMBER 9 FOR HUNGER ACTION DAY!

STAY UP-TO-DATE ON ALL
THINGS NEIFB!



FROM CAMERA TO COMMUNITY

Ron Steele's Dedication to Fighting Hunger



Many readers know Ron Steele for his dedication as a trusted news journalist at KWWL for over 50 years, but his impact within community organizations is just as remarkable. Ron began volunteering at the Northeast Iowa Food Bank 15 years ago with his wife through their church, Prairie Lakes. What began as a simple way to give back has grown into a commitment to fighting hunger.

"You can't spend time here without seeing the difference it makes for real people," Ron shares. "It's humbling and inspiring to be part of something that truly changes lives."

Over the years, Ron has witnessed the Food Bank's work up close, feeding children through the Backpack Program, providing groceries to seniors, and keeping shelves stocked at partner pantries across 16 counties. He often reflects on the staggering need he sees.

"It's still hard for me to believe that 1 in 6 children suffer from hunger every day. And then I pull into the parking lot at NEIFB and can't even find a spot. It's that full. The need is just so obvious, even in the parking lot," he says. "People forget that NEIFB is serving 16 counties, and with all these trucks that go out early in the morning and drive two or three hours to these locations on a daily basis, the need is just so incredibly great, unfortunately, at this time. And it's not going to stop. Can you imagine having a child and not knowing how you're going to feed them? We must work together to turn that helpless feeling some families face into hope."

Given this, Ron volunteers as the spokesperson for the Food Bank's \$14 million Capacity Campaign, From Hunger to Hope: Building a Secure Tomorrow. The campaign focuses on a major building expansion and renovation, creating more space for food storage, improving efficiency, and providing a welcoming environment for everyone who walks through its doors.

"This campaign isn't just about a building," Ron explains. "It's about ensuring that no one in our community has to wonder where their next meal will come from."

For Ron, lending his voice to the Food Bank is both personal and purposeful. He hopes his advocacy will inspire others to join the fight against hunger.

"I've spent my career sharing stories about people helping people," he reflects. "The Food Bank is one of the greatest examples of that in action. I'm proud to stand with them and invite others to help build a future where everyone in northeast Iowa has the food they need."

THE SCHMITTS' LASTING LEGACY AT THE NORTHEAST IOWA FOOD BANK

For more than two decades, Reggie and Suzie Schmitt have been pillars in the Northeast Iowa Food Bank's mission to fight hunger and serve communities across 16 counties. Married for 25 years and both raised in large, low-income families, the Schmitts understand firsthand the importance of making sure no one goes without a meal.

Reggie began his journey with the Food Bank in 2004 as a non-voting liaison to the Board of Directors. After retiring from John Deere in 2009, he committed himself to volunteering. He started by sorting food products, then transitioned to assisting with truck routes. By June 2010, Reggie was driving NEIFB trucks two to four times per week, delivering food to partner agencies, with a fellow volunteer, Howard Hughes, who had volunteered for 30 years. Over those 13 years, he logged nearly 200,000 miles in service to the mission.

Soon after, Suzie joined Reggie in volunteering. She started in the agency services area and later became a regular presence at the Cedar Valley Food Pantry. For 11 years, she volunteered twice a week from open to close, helping ensure families received the support they needed then transitioning to helping in the office.

Their impact goes far beyond their time and physical service. During Reggie's six years on City Council, he never cashed a single paycheck. Instead, he chose to donate his earnings to the Northeast Iowa Food Bank, House of Hope, and Habitat for Humanity. Even after moving out of state, the Schmitts continue to give financially and support the Food Bank's mission from afar.

Together, they have contributed 1,300 hours of volunteer service since 2022. Suzie encourages others to get involved. "Just jump in," she says. "There's a real need, and people have to be aware and not be afraid to step up and do what needs to be done."

Their relationship with the Food Bank goes beyond volunteering. For Suzie, it has also been about building meaningful connections. "We've found a true friend in Barbara Prather," Suzie said. "She's one of those people who is for the people and the Food Bank."

"Reggie & Suzie are at the heart of our mission. Their dedication, compassion, and generosity have made a lasting difference. The work we do simply wouldn't be possible without people like them," says Barbara Prather, Executive Director of the Northeast Iowa Food Bank.

Reggie continues to serve on the Board of Directors, now marking 15 years of leadership and support. The legacy that Reggie and Suzie Schmitt have created is one of lasting impact and deep care for their community.





A Birthday Party with a Purpose

Joy Thorson marked her 70th birthday in a special way — by volunteering at the Northeast Iowa Food Bank! Surrounded by close family and friends, she spent the day repackaging oats for distribution across the Food Bank's 16-county service area.

Her celebration was a joyful gathering and a powerful act of service in the fight against hunger. Joy's example shows how birthdays can be an opportunity to support those in need and strengthen our communities.

Looking for a memorable way to celebrate your own birthday? Consider giving back through volunteer work or community support. It's a gift that helps others and leaves a lasting impact.



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FOR \$15 A MONTH



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By Carol Waltmann
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Mary Ann Hesse
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THANK YOU!

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Indicia



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