

PELLA COMMUNITY FOOD SHELF

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HELEN BOERTJE: SIMPLE BEGINNINGS TO A LEGACY OF SERVICE

by Grant Morgan

Dear Friends,

As we look back on how the Pella Community Food Shelf began, we're reminded that the strongest foundations are often built on simple values: dignity, service, and relationships.

This summer, we had the honor of sitting down with Helen Boertje, the woman whose relentless effort sparked what would grow into the food shelf we know today. And it started with a truckload of hope. In the early days, there was no separate building — just a shelf in a church used to store food.

That shelf was originally started by the church's pastor to help members of the congregation. But soon, he realized he was going to need help expanding it, so he asked Helen. As the shelf became more popular, they began to run out of space. Sometimes, things got so crowded that Helen and her husband had to store food in his truck until it could be distributed.

Not everyone believed in the food shelf at first. But she did. And she didn't just win people over, she welcomed them in, helping former skeptics become some of the first volunteers. She understood what many overlooked: that not everyone can do everything, whether that was due to mental, physical, or financial struggles. Her mission was never about charity; it was about seeing people fully and serving with respect.

Helen often says that her parents are the reason she has such a kind and giving spirit. She remembers her father as the kindest man she ever knew. Even though he was always busy, he somehow found time to lend a hand to others. Growing up near the Des Moines River, Helen and her family often saw people in need. Instead of looking the other way, her parents stepped in to help as many as they could. Watching their generosity in action left a lasting impression on Helen.

Those early lessons shaped the way she chose to live her own life, first as a school teacher, and later through her work with the food shelf. For Helen, helping others wasn't just something nice to do; it was a way of life passed down from her parents.

She said during our interview, "I'm happy with the life I lived. I was never the Tulip Queen, but I have flat feet, so I could wear the Dutch shoes," and then she laughed. Her words carry the heart of this place: grounded, humble, and built to serve. Thanks to her, the shelf continues to grow. Every meal distributed, every hand extended, every neighbor fed is part of the legacy she began.

THIS IS GOOD GROUND TO SOW INTO

>>> VOLUNTEER HIGHLIGHTS

WELCOME BACKPACK

You may have noticed some of the shelves have a new face... We're excited to share that our Backpack Program is now being housed right here at the Pella Community Food Shelf! Since its beginning, this program has been lovingly supported and housed at Faith Christian Reformed Church, but now with all of our new space, we're able to continue this partnership under our own roof.

This program provides kid-friendly food for children over weekends and school breaks, serving Madison, Lincoln, Jefferson, and Pella Christian Grade School. Families must meet free/reduced lunch requirements. For details, contact school counselors or Michelle Brouwer (kidshope@faithcrpella.org). Donations are welcome please note Backpack Program on contributions to Pella Community Food Shelf, P.O. Box 465.

>>> SAVE THE DATE <<<

Mark your calendars for the 2nd annual Coldest Night of the Year event

Saturday 28th of February 2026

Looking for more volunteers to join our event leadership team: Contact Melissa Zula (theshelf.pella@gmail.com)

>>> FUN RIDE

This September we hosted our second annual Fun Ride—a 5-mile ride for friends and family and it was such a blast! Along with the ride, everyone enjoyed games, prize drawings, a silent auction, and plenty of good food. Huge thanks to American Legion Post 89 for partnering with us to make it all happen. The Fun Ride will be back at a different time of year, so stay tuned!



>>> SPONSORS



>>> WHERE WE ARE TODAY <<<

Households Served: On-Site

2024 YTD (Jan-Dec): 4192

2025 YTD (Jan-Aug): 4835

Households Served: Mobile Pantry

2024 monthly: 240

2025 monthly: 240

Financial Contributions

Annual General Budget: \$147,000

Contributions YTD: \$108,967 (74% filled)

HopeFULL Movement Building Campaign

Remainder of Campaign Need: \$137,000

