

A LEGACY of feeding people

Bequeaith carries on Comet Cupboard's mission.

What began as Andrew George's Eagle Scout project to share food with others through Polk City United Methodist Church has grown into the NP Comet Cupboard, a community food pantry and a place for residents to give back.

Dixie Bequeaith took over as manager of NP Comet Cupboard after it was completed.

"For the first two years, it started out slow. Then COVID hit," she recalls. "That's when we really got into food. Originally, we didn't have an indoor pantry but handed out bags of food. After COVID, we started an indoor pantry as well as an outdoor one."

Now, Bequeaith works alongside about 20 volunteers who help operate the pantry.

"Part of what we do is food rescue from Fareway," she explains. "Four times a week, we pick up food that is still good but has hit its expiration date. We stock our pantry with it and share with other local food banks because we must move the food quickly."

NP Comet Cupboard's indoor pantry is open from 5-6 p.m. on the first and third Wednesday of each month. The outdoor pantry is open at all hours. Polk City United Methodist Church is also home to St. Luke's Free Clinic, which is open from 6-8 p.m., just after the food pantry.



"The food pantry is a continuum of the clinic outreach," Bequeaith says. "No insurance is required and no questions are asked. If people come and need food, they have choices."

Volunteering at NP Comet Cupboard is one of many ways Bequeaith has invested her time.

Prior to volunteering at the pantry, she served on the school board for 12 years and on Polk City's Board of Adjustment for 29 years. She has also been involved with the Polk City Community Library.

"I chaired the foundation to build the library we have now, and I currently co-chair the Friends of the Library," she shares. "I also work with Women of the Well, a prison ministry through the United Methodist Church."

Bequeaith says she is a long-time volunteer but has had to slow down recently due to knee surgery.

She says volunteering matters because it brings people together.

"Regardless of where we are in life, we all have certain stories in common," she says. "I may not be in need of food, but when I get to talk with people who come to the pantry, I usually find some way I can relate to them. The personal interaction with individuals helps show them that we all matter."

She also says volunteering offers a different way to connect with others. "It's not a job like when I worked in healthcare," she explains. "It's something I truly believe in and want to go well. My parents were farmers in northeast Iowa. Feeding people is kind of my legacy now to my parents, who are both deceased. That was how I grew up — feeding people."

Bequeaith plans to continue volunteering at the pantry for the foreseeable future, as well as with the Polk City Community Library.

"The library, director and staff are amazing," she says. "When I was trying to find another point of entry for people, I talked to Jamie Noack, the library director, about it. She said she would absolutely love to have food at the library. It is a place people can drop off and pick up food, and the community is invested in it."

Bequeaith says there is a special feeling that comes from giving.

"Things succeed when everyone does a little bit," she says. "It doesn't have to be a grand gesture. One of my favorite memories was during COVID. A father drove up in his minivan and helped two little kids in their jammies out of the van. He handed them each a can of food, went over to the cupboard, picked them up, and they each put a can of food in. It just warms your soul to see the investment of people realizing that not everyone is as fortunate as we are right now."

She says no one knows when life will change, and it is encouraging to see how much the community cares. She invites others to get involved by donating food or volunteering their time to help serve those in need. ■



Dixie Bequeaith is this month's Good Neighbor.



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