

The FreeStore Story

Spring 2023



A FreeStore Note

By Diane Munns, Board Chair

Our all-volunteer charity has never been busier and more needed. Last year we delivered furniture and other household goods to a record 389 families, an increase of almost 20 percent in one year. By year's end there was a consistent two- or three-week waiting list for clients needing help. The trend is continuing and as of early April, we are booked a month in advance.

Donations of gently-used goods are also up, and thanks. We need beds, small couches, dining sets, linens, kitchen goods, and everything else that makes a home. Bring them to the warehouse on Tuesday, Friday or Saturday mornings, please, or call us at (515) 282-3733 to arrange a free pickup.

In addition to our record numbers, our other big news is that late in 2022 we received the single largest financial gift in our 20-plus-year history. The Steven & Alexandra Cohen Foundation based out of Stamford, CT provided \$100,000 to replace our two oldest trucks, one a 2004 model and the other a 2006. We've

already replaced the '04 and we're still shopping, thanks to the Cohen gift.

The Cohen gift solved the pressing truck issue, but we still need your support for ongoing operation costs. Our single largest expense is warehouse rent, which increased recently to reflect market rates. We also have truck upkeep and fuel, payments for parking lot repaving, utilities, insurance, and supplies for clients.

We rarely have enough donated microwaves, vacuum cleaners, and dressers for kids, meaning we also use your donations to shop for sales. One expense we don't ask our donors to cover is for paid employees. That's because there aren't any. The work is done entirely by volunteers who reported some 8,700 hours last year.

You're receiving this note because you have helped us in the past. Thanks for that, and thanks in advance for your continued support.

New Wheels



Our 2006 box truck, left, has been a faithful workhorse over the years, going on countless runs to collect donated gently-used household goods, and countless more runs to deliver those goods to families in need. But it's tired and soon will be replaced, thanks to a gift from the Cohen Foundation. A similar truck, a 2004 model, has already been traded in for a brand new truck, right.

Annual Meeting

The FreeStore annual meeting is 5:00–7:00 on April 25 at the warehouse, 834 10th St. in Des Moines. The entrance is on 11th Street. Everyone is welcome. A brief business meeting at 5:30 will recognize volunteers, bring everyone up to date on our 2022 achievements, and plans for the year to come. Light refreshments will be available.

Our pool of volunteer truck drivers and loaders is stretched. Are you interested? No special license is needed to drive our two-axle box trucks. Driving shifts usually last only two to three hours. We also need people willing to move furniture. Leave a message about driving — or for any other volunteer job — at (515) 282-3733 and we'll get back to you with details.

Spring 2023 FreeStore Gift

Please return this portion in the envelope provided to:
**FreeStore, 1020 24th St.,
West Des Moines, IA 50266.**

Your donations help pay for expenses such as warehouse rent, truck maintenance and fuel, furniture re-building supplies, and cleaning supplies for clients.

Yes! I want to help the FreeStore continue its work.

Name _____

Address _____

City _____ State _____ Zip _____

Email Address _____

My Gift: \$25 \$50 \$75 \$100 \$200 Other \$ _____

Information on the other side explains how the Birdies for Charity program matches up to 10 percent of your tax-deductible gift.

Volunteer of the year



It was decades ago, but Peg Smith vividly recalls the fear and hurt when she was forced to flee an abusive relationship. "I know what it's like to be the victim of abuse.

One time all I could take with me was my three children and a diaper bag," she said. "I also know what a difference it made in my life to receive help. This isn't charity. Instead it's more like justice to help people who are in the same situation as I was."

Peg retired seven years ago after a 37-year career as a special education teacher for kids up to age 5 in the Des Moines school district. "I was looking for a way to give back and make a difference, and also something completely different from my career," she said. She chose the FreeStore, where she recruits and manages "greeters" who shepherd clients as they tour the warehouse and pick out items for their new homes.

She also acts as scheduler for many clients, designed and helped organize the new warehouse administrative area, and was instrumental in creating the new internet-based interactive client application form. Peg has been named Volunteer of the Year.

"Peg combines passion, compassion, high energy and great insights in everything she does for the FreeStore," said operations manager Marty Rathje. "She isn't nicknamed 'The Queen of the Greeters' for nothing!"

Peg said there are a couple of things that keep her energized for the FreeStore. "I have seen the tears of gratitude and joy when clients see that there are so many people who are willing to help. When they tell me their stories, I can say I know, I've been there," she said. "I do want to add that this is such a great group of volunteers. It feels like a community of people who just want to help people," she said.

Thanks to Businesses

The FreeStore has received generous donations from many businesses through the years. In this issue we'd like to say thanks to:

- Simpson College for donating dozens of mattresses and bunk beds.
- The Wietz Company for providing office furniture and cabinets to upgrade the administrative area of our warehouse.
- Travis TV for helping to re-program hotel-donated televisions, and for donating remote controls.
- Prairie Meadows for donating tables, mattresses, and televisions.
- Donna and Dick Bray (right) for a significant donation to help buy our new truck, and similar donations for prior trucks.



By the Numbers

	2022	2021
Total families helped	389	328
Adults	465	371
Children	492	432
Value of goods, estimated	\$785,000	\$529,000
Salaries	0	0
Volunteer hours	8,700	8,000

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For financial details, go to thefreestore.org and navigate to the latest annual report.

In Memory



Two longtime volunteers for the FreeStore died recently. Among other activities, **Lois Krebs** (top left) helped

organize events in which dozens of volunteers gathered for several hours to assemble dressers for kids. Each event yielded some 250



dressers. **Gary Oliphant** (bottom left) also died recently. Gary was a longtime driver to pick up donated furniture.



Birdies for Charity

Many charities in central Iowa, including the FreeStore, partner with the Principal Charity Classic Golf Tournament's Birdies for Charity program. The FreeStore receives EVERY penny you donate. The Birdies program adds up to 10 percent to your gift (at no cost to you). For example, your \$100 becomes as much as \$110 to help families start over. Write your check to the FreeStore and mail it in the envelope provided. Learn more at: principalcharityclassic.com/charity/birdies-for-charity