



FLOOD OF 2008 RELIEF REPORT



Community Foundation

Great River Bend

Special thanks is given to Andrea Lynn Photography of Cedar Rapids, Iowa, for donating their photos in kind.

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FLOOD OVERVIEW



On June 16, 2008, nearly one-third of Iowa was underwater. Iowa experienced record flooding that severely damaged and destroyed homes, businesses and farmlands. Dubbed Iowa's Katrina, the flood was headline news throughout the nation. Volunteers from across the country, including Louisiana, came to aid relief work.

Iowa Governor Chet Culver named 83 of Iowa's 99 counties in his disaster declaration. The floods affected eastern Iowa and the Cedar Rapids area most drastically, with 25,000 people evacuated from Cedar Rapids alone. In total, 35,000 to 40,000 people were forced to leave their homes.

The Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) reported that 2008 was "Iowa's worst year in the disaster annals...The 2008 Iowa floods will go down as one of the worst and most costly floods in Iowa - and even national - history."¹

In the face of great challenges, rises great opportunity. In a time of adversity, the residents of Iowa united in multiple disaster assistance efforts to recover and rebuild America's heartland.

Immediately following the record flooding, the need for serious relief work was apparent across the state. Several federal, state and local agencies sprang into action including:

- Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA)
- Iowa Army National Guard
- Iowa Department of Transportation
- Iowa Department of Natural Resources
- The Red Cross
- The Salvation Army
- The faith-based community

These agencies and many more began to offer assistance to the thousands of families affected by the flooding.

In addition to relief efforts, channels for financial support were also established. At the behest of Governor Culver, central Iowa community leaders established the Iowa Disaster Collaborative, a private sector fundraising initiative. The central focus of the Iowa Disaster Collaborative was to serve as a coordination/communication function regarding various fundraising efforts around disaster recovery contributions and to facilitate the Embrace Iowa 2008 Iowa Disaster Fund managed by the Greater Des Moines Community Foundation.

Within two months of creating the 2008 Iowa Disaster Fund, \$1.34 million in contributions poured in, eventually reaching more than \$8 million in cash donations by November 2009. The donations came from individuals, businesses and organizations in 45 states and three countries. As of July 2009, the Fund granted \$7,712,400 to people affected by these major weather events.



REGIONAL RELIEF EFFORT

The counties served by the
Community Foundation of the Great River Bend

Regional efforts mirror the incredible state-wide initiative that Iowan's took to restore, rebuild and move forward in their own communities. In addition, the magnitude of the flood inspired community organizations to develop reports exploring the scope of the disaster, the relief efforts that took place and recommendations for the future to protect the residents of Iowa.

The flood of 2008 devastated the Quad City region. From displaced families and abandoned homes, to the closure or relocation of area businesses, storms destroyed rural communities and left citizens feeling helpless. The Community Foundation of the Great River Bend began working immediately to assist those directly affected by the flood, serving as an intermediary, initiative manager and knowledge broker.

Of the 17 counties the Community Foundation serves, four were in desperate need of assistance. Residents in Cedar, Des Moines, Louisa and Scott counties in Iowa all faced extreme challenges. With support from local individuals and funding from state-wide fundraising efforts, the Foundation was able to distribute grants to meet Iowan's' immediate, intermediate and long-term needs.

In partnership with the Iowa Disaster Collaborative and disaster advisory committees established in each county, the Foundation awarded more than \$1 million to nonprofits that provided services to victims and agencies that were impacted. By continuous contact and collaboration, the Foundation has helped to rebuild community centers, restored county fairgrounds, rebuild homes and allowed more than 100 flood victims to go shopping for clothing and household items.

On the following pages, we provide you with stories of the recovery efforts that took place in the Community Foundation's service area. These highlights represent only a fraction of the flood relief work that took place, and continues to happen, throughout the state.

The Foundation worked with dedicated nonprofit organizations to identify local needs and assure that every grant from Embrace Iowa would directly assist those facing hardships. The Foundation awarded monies to regional organizations such as: Habitat for Humanity, United Way of the Quad Cities Area and the Atalissa Betterment Committee (ABC), which, in return, allocated grants to address specific needs in their communities allowing for maximum relief impact.



CEDAR COUNTY SNAPSHOT



The Cedar River, which runs directly through the heart of Cedar County, exceeded its historic 1929 flood record, cresting at over 32 feet on June 13, 2008 (more than 20 feet above flood stage). It was one of nine rivers in Iowa to crest at record levels that summer. The Cedar River even topped over both the east and west bound lanes of Iowa Interstate 80 causing a 110 mile detour for weeks.

The county received \$109,000 through Embrace Iowa funding and the Community Foundation to alleviate needs in the area. Working with the support of the Foundation, the Atalissa Betterment Committee (ABC), used these funds for immediate and long-term recovery in Cedar County³. The full amount of money granted was directly channeled to flood victims who needed resources to replace critical supplies and to rebuild their homes.

Relief grants were distributed to 75 families (168 flood victims total) to shop for clothes, household items and other essentials. The members of the committee accompanied victims on shopping trips for necessities and directly paid for their purchases. In the wake of the flood, families lost everything in their homes and had

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This couple was grateful to receive assistance from ABC and Embrace Iowa.

³ Embrace Iowa: 2008 Iowa Disaster Fund - Greater Des Moines Foundation. Retrieved August, 2009, from <http://www.desmoinesfoundation.org/page10002683.cfm>

CEDAR COUNTY SNAPSHOT

to make hard choices about personal possessions when they had to evacuate. The shopping assistance provided by the relief grants and facilitated by dedicated volunteers helped those who had nothing left begin to rebuild.

ATALISSA BETTERMENT COMMITTEE (ABC)

Founded in 1989, the Atalissa Betterment Committee (ABC) has worked for over 20 years improving the Atalissa area. As the Cedar River devastated communities, ABC sprang into action, connecting people in need with resources.

Immediately following the flooding, ABC began coordinating with Atalissa Fire Chief Bill Wilson, the American Red Cross, FEMA, the Salvation Army and the Community Action Center to maximize relief efforts. The Atalissa Fire Station became a shelter for approximately 127 flood victims who had no other place for refuge. They were provided two to three meals a day and were also assisted by organizations coordinating with ABC. Vada Baker, secretary and historian for the committee, said of the

disaster, "The flood was an eye opener for everyone, a real wake up call." She was pleased that the Cedar County Management Committee established a central location for people to stay in the event of another disaster.

The Rochester/Atalissa community is also home to many older citizens, who needed even more assistance in the wake of the flooding. It was a struggle for many to rebuild, obtain permits and receive funding. Baker said, "We are a small community and you can't forget about the little people." One of the individuals ABC helped was its own vice president, Charlotte Hill.

Hill lived along the Cedar River in a house her husband Larry, remodeled for her. When Larry was diagnosed with leukemia, he wanted to make certain his wife would have little to worry about after he was gone. When the waters subsided, Hill, a widow at 67, faced a 30-year mortgage on her destroyed home. After the series of devastating flood-related events, she reflected, "I went to my kitchen cupboard to get a glass for a drink of water and realized I no longer had any glasses."

In Cedar County, many people suffered the loss of everything they owned, from drinking glasses

to clothes, and from family heirlooms to personal possessions. ABC worked diligently to help people find assistance for their needs and replace these essential items. ABC applied for a grant from the Community Foundation to help individuals replace lost items. After they were awarded funding, members of ABC were able to take 75 families shopping for food, clothing, housewares and building materials.

When their relief efforts began, the Committee thought their work would last a few months. Now 18 months later, they are still working on families' unmet needs. Hill and Baker continue their work, helping individuals sign up for necessary programs and find assistance, assisting the Red Cross and organizing donation drives. All through this devastating disaster, Hill remained steadfast in one belief. Even though she could do nothing about her own losses, she could help others.

Working on regaining normalcy is a community-wide effort in Atalissa. Baker explained, "That is what is unique about small towns, we band together to work, like a family rather than a city, and that is good to see."

DES MOINES COUNTY SNAPSHOT



Des Moines County is located on the Mississippi River and borders Louisa County. Within six months of the initial flooding, 52 Des Moines County homeowners had applied for rehabilitation and repair assistance from JumpStart, a housing assistance program. Of the 52 that applied, only 11 had been assisted based on funds available at the end of December 2008.

Needing relief, like a majority of counties in the state, Des Moines County applied for a grant from the Community Foundation. In January 2009, the Foundation awarded \$100,000 to help the remaining 41 applicants purchase materials for repairs.

INDIVIDUAL STORIES

A disaster recovery case manager working through the Des Moines County Extension Office helped citizens utilize resources and apply for funding. She wrote about one of families she assisted:

DES MOINES COUNTY SNAPSHOT

“We have a Des Moines County couple, in their mid-50’s, with a daughter and grandson that live with them on their family homestead. Their property was located in an area that was underwater for about six weeks. Their home was destroyed, they lost their crops and multiple farm buildings were either destroyed or damaged.

So far, they have spent \$36,000 just repairing one grain bin and some outbuildings on the farm. They will put off the rest of the outbuilding/grain bin repairs until they have finished repairing their home. When they came in to meet with me the first time, they kept saying how lucky they were because of all the help they had been getting from churches, their work, family and friends. They received the maximum allotment from FEMA of \$28,000, another \$60,000 from Jumpstart and a Small Business Loan for \$44,900.

With a total reconstruction cost of almost \$150,000, this left them facing over \$15,000 just to finish repairs

for the home. The family had a lot of volunteers help in the reconstruction of their home and did as much of the work themselves as 18 months could. The Long-Term Recovery Committee was generous in giving them a grant from Embrace Iowa funds to replace the carpeting in their home. They have moved back into their home as of June 2009. What amazed me about this couple was how humble they were. They kept saying that maybe we should help someone else who was in worse shape than they were.”

The case manager shared additional anecdotes in which not having flood insurance was an apparent theme. This fact added to the catastrophic nature of the recovery work. When homeowners do not live in a flood plain, they are not expected to have flood insurance. However, the floods touched areas outside the flood plains.

With no insurance, the cost of rebuilding fell mainly to the homeowners. Thus, the relief work of dedicated volunteers and timely grants were critical to families

who could never recover on their own, especially without insurance.

The case worker noted, “The difference that Embrace Iowa has made to these families is immeasurable, and the thankfulness they feel and have expressed for the monies awarded is not something that can be put on paper. It has truly made a difference in their lives.”

LOUISA COUNTY SNAPSHOT



Ken Purdy, a board member of the Community Foundation of Louisa County, estimated around 1,500 truck loads of sand were used in Columbus Junction alone, to raise levees. Tragically, the Cedar River breached these efforts a few days after they were completed.

Relief efforts for Louisa County will benefit from \$781,000 from Embrace Iowa (the second highest amount of aid granted in all Iowa counties). Upon receiving funding, the Community Foundation partnered with several local organizations and awarded the monies in the form of grants. The grants received by the organizations, in turn, supported flood relief efforts, including:

- Habitat for Humanity of Louisa County – Rebuild homes of flood victims
- Columbus Junction Senior Center – Rebuild senior community center
- Louisa County Fair Board – Repair county fair grounds
- Muscatine/Louisa Disaster Relief Committee - Individual aid

The Columbus Community Senior Center was one of thousands of buildings throughout the state submerged in water.

COLUMBUS COMMUNITY SENIOR CENTER

Columbus Junction suffered heavy losses in their east business district in the 2008 floods. On June 14, the Cedar River crested over three feet higher than the previous flood stage record. The result: a grocery store, medical center, senior center, fire station, the city's water treatment plant and an estimated 25 more businesses were under between 10-12 feet of water.

The Columbus Community Senior Center was one of the buildings submerged, up to and over its roofline; the roof itself was only three weeks old when the floods came. The Center served as a meal site for the Congregate Meal Program, which provides lunch for seniors in a group setting. It also provided a location for activities and meetings, as well as a place for seniors to gather for social activities such as card games, internet access and other services.

The waters destroyed everything in the interior of the senior center, including the walls and floors. The only remnants left standing were the skeleton of the building: a concrete base, support studs and the new roof. The community missed the Center, not only because it served the senior population, but it also was the meeting place for the Lions Club and the location for the Louisa County Farmers Market. Many other organizations utilized the facility for various programs on a daily basis year round.

The Community Center volunteers worked hard to clean-up and preserve what little they had left. With no paid staff and no source of income, the task of rebuilding appeared monumental. The Center applied for grants from United Fund, FEMA, Alliant Energy, and private citizens to contribute to the costs of reconstruction. The Community Foundation of Louisa County, an affiliate of the Community Foundation of the Great River Bend, also granted money to aid the immediate debris clean-up and assessment that was

necessary before any other work could begin. They also funded much of the center's reconstruction.

The Columbus Community Senior Center has since been completely rebuilt and was reopened in early 2009. A Center representative wrote, "[The] timely funding assistance to cover our expenses for the costly clean-up and debris removal was instrumental in allowing us to proceed forward in our recovery operations and reconstruction. Your support is so greatly appreciated, and will long be recognized by our community... Our flood recovery would have been difficult, if not impossible, without your support!"

SCOTT COUNTY SNAPSHOT



Scott County is adjacent to the Mississippi River, across from Rock Island County, Ill. In June 2008, the Mississippi reached near-record flood levels spanning from northern Illinois to Missouri as a result of the heavy rains in Iowa and Wisconsin. The river crested at 22.5 feet in late June (7.5 feet above flood stage). The City of Davenport was fortunate to have their levee hold, protecting much of its downtown. However, many homes and families in the county were still affected by the rising waters.

The Community Foundation awarded Scott County's Long-Term Recovery Committee \$120,000 to help fund needs identified by green shirts' assessments (volunteer case managers who were provided through Lutheran Services). The county also received an additional \$42,500 from other sources, such as private funding, for immediate relief efforts and food bank funds.

INDIVIDUAL STORIES

United Way of the Quad Cities Area hired a case worker through Lutheran Services in Iowa to temporarily serve the county. She worked on a case-by-case basis with much of the population who suffered losses in the flood. She recalled a few memorable cases.

“One lady that comes to mind was a very spunky 87-year-old woman who had been flooded. She called stating she had attempted multiple times to get FEMA to reassess her basement, but to no avail.

I investigated and FEMA did not award her any assistance. This was apparently due to the clause that they did not cover foundation issues. This lady had considerable damage to her finished basement, with mold and wet carpet. The damage was even worse than at the time she called me – the basement was still leaking water everywhere from the spring rains. She was nearly hysterical.

Embrace Iowa funds allowed her to get her foundation repaired, added a drainage system for the basement and a sump pump so she could live in the home safely. She was very grateful. It was several thousands dollars she could not afford on her fixed income.

Another elderly man had moldy carpet and actual mushrooms were growing on it. He was depressed because he did not have the funds to fix things so when Embrace Iowa funds assisted him with his clean up, he was incredibly happy. He was clearly living in a health hazard when this assistance became available. He did write a thank-you letter to my supervisor and was so appreciative.

The resources for these families really did save some families from becoming homeless.”



AFTER THE FLOOD 2009 AND BEYOND

After initial relief work was completed, many Iowa communities still faced hardships. Efforts continue even more than a year later to rebuild businesses, homes and infrastructure. It is important to offer continued support to flood victims, as well as reflect on the events surrounding the floods in order to better prepare for the possibility of a future disaster.

United Way⁴, the Cedar Rapids Recovery and Reinvestment Coordinating Team (RRCT)⁵ and the Rebuild Iowa Advisory Commission (RIAC)⁶ developed reports discussing the scope of the disaster, the relief efforts that took place and recommendations for future situations. Five themes were covered in these report, addressing both specific recommendations and general suggestions for handling possible future floods.

The reports shared five themes in preparing for the future:

1. Priorities: to help establish clear focus in community action
2. Centralization: work toward united efforts
3. Information: how to communicate in time of disaster and following
4. Preparedness: what to prepare for if there is a "next time"
5. Services: what is offered for people and communities in need

1. PRIORITIES: ASSESSMENT, FUNDING, RECOVERY

United Way identified assessment as a priority. They noted the importance of conducting green shirt

assessments as soon as possible after the flood. The green shirt workers (in this case provided by Lutheran Services) evaluated flood damage and gave long-term recovery efforts a starting point for prioritizing. United Way also suggested hiring a caseworker during the initial stage of the disaster. This would allow the worker to immediately start helping victims, in order to cut down their wait time for aid.

RRCT noted that long-term redevelopment is based on the availability of on-going funding. The team estimated it will take 15 years for demolition, reconstruction and protection of residential and business neighborhoods in Cedar Rapids to be completed. Therefore, priority should be given to securing funding commitments to ensure the long process of redevelopment will continue.

⁴ United Way of the Quad City Area Internal Report.

⁵ Corridor Recovery: Cedar Rapids Nine-Month Progress Report. Corridor Recovery: The Iowa Disasters of 2008 are the 5th-largest disasters in US history.. Retrieved August, 2009, from <http://corridorrecovery.org/progress-report-9mo.asp>

⁶ Resources: Reports – Rebuild Iowa Office. Rebuild Iowa Office. Retrieved November 5, 2009, from <http://www.rio.iowa.gov/resources>

Likewise, RIAC suggested the urgent priority of a long-term recovery plan. In their November 2008 report to the governor⁷, they urged policy makers to adopt 12 recommendations cited in the report to help direct recovery and future planning efforts. Legislation covering all 12 recommendations passed in the 2009 session and was later signed into law:

1. Provide individual services and guidance
2. Make housing a priority
3. Provide incentives for Iowa's struggling small businesses, micro-enterprises, and nonprofits
4. Invest in infrastructure
5. Create sustainable funding options for local and state rebuilding efforts
6. Invest in local emergency management agencies for the central coordination function and work in all areas of emergency management
7. Enact policies to make communities sustainable and protect Iowa's quality of life and cultural heritage
8. Lead and support integrated, regional recovery planning
9. Enact policy to address floodplain and watershed management
10. Complete floodplain mapping for the entire state

11. Formalize the Rebuild Iowa Office and recovery responsibilities
12. Lead communications efforts to educate Iowans on recovery efforts and planning for future potential disasters

2. CENTRALIZATION: COORDINATION

With many people offering to donate time and money, centralizing efforts is key to keeping valuable contributions from going to waste. United Way suggested creating a volunteer center, which could be web-based, to connect those in need with volunteers. Donation coordination is also very essential; United Way suggested creating a form of disaster Craig's List to match posted needs with donations.

The RIAC's report also highlighted centralization. They suggested investing in local emergency management agencies with a coordination mission. The commission stated there is a need for preparedness, response, recovery and mitigation. Their suggestions to the legislature included a general focus on the state's role in recovery efforts and communicating those centralized efforts to Iowa residents. By guiding

and facilitating many functions including individual services and guidance, housing and regional planning for multi-jurisdictional initiatives, the commission hopes the state will take a central role in disaster preparedness.

3. INFORMATION: RECEIVING AND DISSEMINATING

In times of disaster, it is imperative to distribute vital information to the appropriate people. To aid the flow of information in the event of future disasters, United Way suggested increased marketing efforts calling for assistance in order to inform broader audiences. As mentioned before, a better single-source for donation and volunteer information would assist the recovery process.

Recommendation 12 of the RIAC report outlines information distribution. The report proposes supporting communications concerning outreach initiatives, public education and local/regional government. The report calls for the state to lead communication efforts to educate Iowans on recovery efforts and planning for future potential disasters by presenting information to the

7 "Rebuild Iowa Office." Rebuild Iowa Office. N.p., n.d. Web. 5 Nov. 2009. <http://www.rio.iowa.gov/news/releases/2009/050109_disaster_legislation.html>.

public in laymen's terms, crafted to fit the audience through multiple channels.

4. PREPAREDNESS

In addition to green shirt assessments and hiring a case worker, United Way recommended three additional policies to better prepare for a future similar event:

1. Decreased wait time for assistance with immediate available funding sources
2. Increased marketing efforts to call for assistance
3. Centralized volunteer center and donation center

Creating cash reserves can be difficult, but it is an important step in being prepared. The suggestions of United Way fit well with the recommendations of the RIAC. The commission offered additional advice to help prevent flooding in the future. To try to keep future homes and businesses out of the harmful path of flood waters, the RIAC suggested floodplain mapping of the entire state. Funding has been secured from FEMA for the mapping process, and the Iowa Flood Center at the University of Iowa will develop floodplain mapping models and develop flood forecasting.

5. SERVICES

Organizations across the state felt pressure upon services they offered in the wake of the flood and have since taken steps to be better prepared. However, attention to public services is necessary to insure that people's needs are continuing to be met in the face of, and following, a disaster.

RIAC identified 10 of Iowa's hardest hit communities:

- Cedar Falls/Waterloo
- Cedar Rapids
- Coralville
- Iowa City
- New Hartford
- Oakville
- Palo
- Parkersburg
- Waverly

To administer on-going relief efforts, RIAC established Long-Term Community Recovery (LTCR) in these areas. LTCR is an adopted FEMA practice where local community organizations are designed to meet the needs of a community after a disaster. LTCR's connect those affected by the disaster with the local agencies

and resources they need to complete the recovery process. A second function of LTCR's is to connect volunteers with local agencies and organizations that have a need for assistance. Connecting people in need with those willing to help is vital to helping the state heal.

Our leadership work at the Community Foundation is an essential ongoing function of our organization. By stepping up as a community leader, we accept the responsibility of many supporting roles.



CONCLUSION

The flood of 2008 was an incredibly difficult experience for the people of Iowa. In the face of these challenges, the true spirit of Iowa's citizens emerged as people began to help one another. In the months and years to come, Iowa will continue to rebuild while looking toward the future.

As an intermediary, the Community Foundation received a grant from Embrace Iowa and passed that funding on to people in need through affiliate foundations. We worked to coordinate the large-scale state efforts of Embrace Iowa with the smaller, local projects in our communities. Functioning as a go-

between, we were able to synchronize these projects and ensure accountability, making certain the dollars were used appropriately.

As an initiative manager, the Foundation worked on an effective plan for the region to disseminate the funding. An initiative is a process from beginning to end, and we are invested in distributing the money well and thoroughly completing this process. To do this, we functioned as a path of communication to the people directly helping flood victims from the state organization. At times, we conducted case-by-case analysis to help manage the best use of the funding.

As a knowledge broker, we passed flood relief information from Embrace Iowa to the Long-Term Recovery Committees working in our communities. With knowledge of the funding process, the Community Foundation was able to apply those standards to specific situations encountered in the communities we serve. As a long-term knowledge broker, the Foundation is sharing information about the process of the initiative. Through this report we are working on planning ahead and compiling what others have learned in an effort to serve the community most effectively.

BY THE NUMBERS

MIDWEST FLOODING SPRING/SUMMER 2008

FLOOD STATISTICS⁸

9 Iowa Rivers crested at record levels	22 levees breached as of 6/20/08	24.09 inches of rain in Cedar Rapids, 10 inches above normal	83 of Iowa's 99 counties named in Governor's disaster report	106 people injured, 18 killed	1,300 city blocks covered by water in Cedar Rapids, 9.2 square miles	4,000 or more homes and businesses in Cedar Rapids flooded by Cedar River	35,000-40,000 estimate of people evacuated from homes	\$2 billion in estimated agricultural economic loss in Iowa
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RELIEF STATISTICS⁹

11 cities with Jumpstart Iowa and Rental Rehabilitation programs	69 grants issued by Embrace Iowa	11,000 Iowans have received one-on-one counseling with professional mental health care providers	39,928 individuals who have filed for assistance with FEMA	50,000 volunteer hours logged at Cedar Rapids Animal Shelter	300,000 gallons of drinking water distributed	6 million or more sandbags laid in Iowa cities	\$7,712,725 distributed in grants by Embrace Iowa as of 7/8/09 ¹⁰	\$1 billion in Public Assistance funding to Iowa residents ¹¹
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“YOUR SUPPORT IS SO GREATLY APPRECIATED,
AND WILL LONG BE RECOGNIZED BY OUR
COMMUNITY... OUR FLOOD RECOVERY WOULD
HAVE BEEN DIFFICULT, IF NOT IMPOSSIBLE,
WITHOUT YOUR SUPPORT.”

– LOUISA COUNTY RESIDENT





Community Foundation

Great River Bend

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