

# The FreeStore Story



November 2018

## A FreeStore Note

By Marty Rathje, Board Chair

*"This is the greatest gift," she wrote. "Now my brothers have their own place to sleep instead of sharing a bed. I have my own space to use the computer and for my brothers to do their homework. We have a place where we can be together more because we didn't have couches before."*

Our volunteer FreeStore network is something to behold. A case in point is when the Sleep Inn motel people decided to refresh their rooms and to donate their gently used furniture to us.

With over 100 rooms to clear out during the Labor Day weekend, our volunteers went to work. Our own trucks made countless trips and two large trucks and crews from Two Men and a Truck also picked up all of the mattresses and delivered them to our warehouses.

Bob Culbertson recruited a team from his church, and crews from Holy Trinity Lutheran of Ankeny and Saint Timothy's Episcopal of West Des Moines also helped out. We hauled about 100 mattress sets, several hundred lamps, about 100 combination desk/dressers (that had to be cut away from walls), and many dozens of chairs, alarm clocks, ironing boards and irons, waste cans, and everything else you find in a hotel room.

Hats off to all, and particularly to Bob and to warehouse manager Judy Bloom.

Now let me tell you why all this matters. Or better yet, let one of our clients explain what the FreeStore means to those we serve.

We received an email from a woman after we delivered furniture. She explained that she is the caretaker for her own child as well as her brothers. She is 21 and lost her dad. Her mom is not a citizen.

"This is the greatest gift," she wrote. "Now my brothers have their own place to sleep instead of sharing a bed. I have my own space to use the computer and for my brothers to do their homework. We have a place where we can be together more because we didn't have couches before.

"Thank you for your help—it is much appreciated. Hopefully there are more good and caring people like you guys. God bless you all."

## AmazonSmile

AmazonSmile is a simple and automatic way for you to support the FreeStore every time you shop, at no cost to you. When you shop at [smile.amazon.com](https://www.smile.amazon.com), you'll find the same shopping experience as Amazon.com, with the added bonus that Amazon will donate a portion of the purchase price to the FreeStore.

To shop at AmazonSmile simply go to [smile.amazon.com](https://www.smile.amazon.com) from the web browser on your computer or mobile device. You can use the same account on Amazon.com and AmazonSmile. Your shopping cart, Wish List, wedding or baby registry, and other account settings are also the same.

On your first visit to AmazonSmile [smile.amazon.com](https://www.smile.amazon.com), you need to select the FreeStore to receive donations from eligible purchases before you begin shopping. Amazon will remember your selection, and then every eligible purchase you make at [smile.amazon.com](https://www.smile.amazon.com) will result in a donation.

# Bill's Workshop

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*These dressers are ready for delivery to needy families. Before restoration by Bill Brentano, they were attached to desks in motel rooms.*

Furniture donations to the FreeStore fall into three categories; ready for a new family, ready for the dumpster, and ready for Bill.

That would be Bill Brentano's workshop at the downtown warehouse, where wobbly tables become sturdy again, where lamps are repaired, and where worn-out desks get new life.

"Almost all of the donations meet our standards. I get to work with furniture that just needs a little help," said Bill, who has run the repair shop since he retired three years ago as chief engineer at McGladrey in Des Moines.

Some items need more than a little help. The combination desk/dressers donated by the Sleep Inn motel this fall are being repurposed as stand-alone dressers, each with refinished surfaces and new trim.

Items that can't be saved are often disassembled for their parts. "As a result, we don't need to buy very many materials," he said. He said he learned his way around wood working tools from his father. "He fixed everything."

Bill said the work is rewarding. "I get to do whatever is necessary to make a piece of furniture usable again, and the work helps hone my skills, such as matching stains and trim. And I know the end product will have a good future with a family in need," he said.

## Another Successful Dresser Day

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There are lots of kids who will be putting their clothes in a brand new dresser this coming year, thanks to another dresser building day. On September 11, the United Way of Central Iowa hosted a Day of Action with the FreeStore receiving 250 dressers. Starting at 8:00 a.m. approximately 280 volunteers reported for work at the Elwell building on the Iowa State Fairgrounds. As always, there was lots of hammering, talking, laughing, and good cheer as teams assembled dresser kits. It didn't take long before all was completed, the place cleaned up and we were out the door by 11:30 a.m.

We are indebted to all who helped, including volunteers from 10 different companies and services provided by Mayflower Select Van & Storage, UPS, Keller & Associates and MC Patrick Porto. As in the past, John Deere provided the experienced captains and Corteva DuPont Pioneer got everything set up the day before. We owe many thanks to all who participated as well as much gratitude to United Way who for the sixth year has provided this event for The FreeStore. A similar number of dressers were made last year and almost all have gone to new families in need.



*Dresser day organizer Lois Krebs is flanked by board chair Marty Rathje, left, and Harry Swanson, one of the FreeStore founders.*