

UNI

**University of
Northern Iowa.**

Community
Engagement



Newsletter: May 2026

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Day of Service - Thank You

On a single extraordinary spring day, nearly 2,500 UNI Panthers fanned out across Cedar Falls, Waterloo, and surrounding communities to tackle more than 80 service projects.

What set this Day of Service apart was the integration of course connected service, where academic coursework in classes such as GIS mapping, education, health sciences, and the arts translated directly into measurable community impact. As UNI celebrates its 150th anniversary and Carnegie Community Engagement Classification, this milestone event embodied the university's foundation: that learning and service are inseparable. Panthers proved once again that when Cats Who Care come together, the ripple effects are truly endless. Thank you to each and every person that participated!

Thank you to the Volunteer Center of Cedar Valley for your support and collaboration in making this day possible.



A Snapshot of Our Collective Impact

By the Numbers

- 80+ Service Projects
- Nearly 2,500 volunteers
- Over 6,000 hours
- Nearly \$180,000 in value of time



Thank you to everyone that participated or supported the UNI Day of Service.

Do you have feedback? We want to hear it! [Click here to share your thoughts.](#)

Community Impact

Knowledge Sharing, Workforce & Community Learning

- 12 free online courses developed (Students in Instructional Design for Online Learning)
- 3 tourism nonprofits heard from 60 UNI students about what attracts them to a community (Grow Cedar Valley, Experience Waterloo, Community Main Street)
- 40 paperwork packets assembled (Friends of the Family)
- Digital Writing students produce language app (Meskwaki Language and Cultural Preservation)
- 60 UNI students generated 17 pitches for improving civic culture at UNI
- GIS classes produced maps to support bed deliveries and trash pickup projects
- Spring mailings prepared for the Cedar Falls Historical Society



Education, Youth & Family Engagement

- Supported local schools with lunchroom and recess supervision (College of Education students & faculty)
- 16 families participated in math games and received take-home math folders (Math Department)
- UNI athletes walked over 300 (combined) miles with elementary and middle school students
- 60 youth participated in a basketball skills and drills night with UNI basketball teams (Unite Hoops)
- UNI students educated others on business etiquette across 8 countries (International Club of Business Students)
- 1,500 guests attended the Hearst Lecture: Gabby Giffords & Fabi Hirsch Kruse



Arts, Culture & Creative Engagement

- Assisted in building a community art project (Youth Art Team)
- 30 art glass garden stakes created, with potential to raise \$3,000 (Recreation, Tourism, & Nonprofit Leadership majors & Friends of Cedar Rock)
- UNI students hosted 4 free concerts
- 8 podcasts reflecting Day of Service stories to be produced (UNI Cornerstone class)
- Painted large posters for Children's Cancer Connection summer camp (Art Department)
- Lap blankets created for residents at Friendship Village by UNI international students
- August Wilson Play Stage Reading



Housing, Home Support & Community Infrastructure

- Built a desk, shelf, shoe rack, and can collection structure (American for Independent Living)
- 3 homes demolished/built and ReStore cleaned and organized (Construction Mngt & Interior Design majors & Habitat for Humanity)
- 4 picnic tables built for campus (Construction Management majors)
- A cemented flag pole installed for a local veteran (UNI Athletes)



Environmental Sustainability & Outdoor Stewardship

- 107 lbs of trash picked up with Iowa Waste Reduction Center
- 320 lbs of solid waste collected across the city, trails, and campus (Kinesiology & Athletic Training faculty & students)
- Supported spring cleaning efforts for 4 nonprofits
- Completed yard, garden, and grounds work for 7 nonprofits/roadside areas
- Assisted 7 foster care families with yard work and garden preparation (Language and Literature faculty & students & Cedar Valley Angels)
- Potted 350 fruit trees and later distributed to various cultural and ethnic groups (School of Public Affairs and Service faculty and students)



Food Security & Basic Needs

- Packed 60,048 meals, feeding 230 kids for a year (Meals from the Heartland)
- 469 lbs of food collected and donated to the Panther Pantry
- 10 students supported Hope City Food Panty
- 15 Athletes sorted and packed food for the North East Iowa Foodbank
- 151 beds delivered to families in need (Love INC; UNI wrestling, volleyball, and swim teams)
- 150 bed sheets donated (Athletics)
- 100 family kits prepared for Migrant Education Program agencies (Early Childhood Education class)
- 10 welcome/starter kits assembled for newly housed individuals (Social Work majors & Friends of the Family)



Community Health, Safety & Well-Being

- 32 individuals increased their disaster readiness (Volunteer Center of the Cedar Valley)
- Hosted disease prevention screening
- Social work majors attended Hearing Voices Simulation to increase their understanding & empathy for those with mental illness
- 7 people participated in a bystander intervention (Green Dot Training)
- 27 units of blood were donated, sustaining or saving 81 lives (Nursing & LifeServe Blood Center)
- 35 people received free tax return assistance (VITA)
- Facilitated Special Olympics for 42 athletes at the YMCA (Goodwill clients)
- Painted 2 apartments at NewAldaya Senior Living Center



Reflections

Community Partner comment

“My final take-away is something I've known but is always wonderful to see. That a genuine desire to make things better for everyone is at the heart of true community partnership. Donating blood is one of the most selfless acts a person can do as it's giving a part of yourself to a stranger with nothing expected in return. The nursing students brought that same selflessness when they volunteered their time to serve a community they are still learning from and may one day work in. When the want for better shows up on both sides, from the donors and the volunteers, everyone benefits. That's what community partnership really looks like.”

Students' comments

“I enjoyed being able to take things that I've been learning in class and use them for an actual project that makes a difference.”

“How important lunch and/or recess is for elementary students and how seeing new faces can make their day ten times better.”

“I am setting up more volunteer opportunities with the organization that I volunteered for that day.”

“I was surprised by the scale of the whole day. When my professor showed me how many projects would be taking place, it took me by surprise.”

Faculty/Staff comments

“Students don't know much about Cedar Valley nonprofits, and it's a missed opportunity for them. I think the nonprofit sector is what makes the Cedar Valley special, and I wish we could share that with each and every student.”

“This should be a yearly thing!”

Online Engaged Department Institute

Seed Coalition

The EFI Online Institute is a cohort-based online course which combines asynchronous and synchronous activities to guide faculty, instructors, and staff who support community-engaged teaching and learning through the core considerations, elements, and process of designing a community-engaged course.

Registration Deadline: May 11

Free to UNI faculty & staff

[Click here for more information and EFI Registration](#)

Summer Salutations

As you re-charge this summer if you need assistance, want to work through ideas for service-learning classes, make a community connection that aligns with your expertise or research, we can help. Email us at community.engagement@uni.edu or call our office (319) 273-4507 any time.

Wishing all of Panther Nation a relaxing and fun-filled summer!



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