

North Plains LIVING

Stories That Shape Our Community

**From the
Archives:
Atfalati**

**Start Fresh:
Local experts
share insight
on home, skin,
and wellness**

**More Than a Gym:
A story of survival,
strength, and
service**

**Discover
North Plains:
Dixie Mountain
Local Spotlight**

**Fresh From the Farm:
Meet *Stoneboat Farm***

Community Spotlight

Highlighting the people, groups and organizations strengthening North Plains.



Pictured from left to right: Melody Broten, Kitty Peterson, Lora Dexheimer, and Ann Saalfeld. Photo by Lauren Crowston Photography.

More Than a Food Bank: How Lora Dexheimer Built a Place Where Dignity, Care, and Connection Come First

Written by Jessie Hansen, Publisher

There is a quiet kind of leadership that doesn't announce itself or ask to be seen. It simply shows up—early, consistently, and with an open heart—attentive to the hesitation at the door, the trembling voice, and the questions people are often afraid to ask. That kind of leadership lives inside the walls of the North Plains Food Bank, and it begins with the woman behind it all, Lora Dexheimer.

Lora didn't set out to build a nonprofit or follow a polished roadmap. She started a food bank because she saw something she couldn't ignore—hunger. Years ago, while dropping off fresh eggs from her chickens at the North Plains Senior Center, she noticed seniors quietly looking—not to socialize, but to see if there would be food. When she asked why they weren't going to the local food bank, the answer stopped her cold: it had closed years earlier. "I couldn't believe it," Lora says. "So I said, okay. I'll start one."

That moment was deeply personal. Lora grew up extremely poor and remembers walking with her sister to the armory to receive government food—powdered milk, blocks of cheese, whatever was handed out that day. There was no choice and little dignity, and those experiences stayed with her long into adulthood.

Today, the North Plains Food Bank doesn't feel like charity. It feels like a grocery store. People shop with carts, pause, choose, and select food that works for their bodies, their health needs, and their families. One client described it simply: "This feels like a grocery store with no cash register." That sense of dignity is intentional.

What many people don't see is that food is often only the first need someone brings through the door. Over time, Lora began to notice how often hunger was intertwined with loneliness, fear, shame, and untreated medical or mental health struggles. For many, the food bank became the only place where someone asked how they were really doing—and had time to listen.

Without a local grocery store and with limited transportation options, the food bank fills a vital gap, particularly for seniors, individuals with mobility challenges, and those already feeling isolated. Care here goes far beyond groceries. Food deliveries double as wellness check-ins, conversations are unhurried, and volunteers and staff notice changes when someone seems withdrawn, overwhelmed, or simply not themselves. Lora regularly helps people navigate next steps—connecting them with aging services, helping them understand paperwork, advocating within the judicial system and government assistance programs, or simply being a steady presence when everything else feels overwhelming.

In a community with limited access to mental health services, the food bank has quietly become a place of emotional safety. People know they can come here and be met with patience instead of judgment, compassion instead of bureaucracy, and support that recognizes mental health challenges don't exist in isolation.

That same philosophy extends beyond the food bank walls—especially when it comes to children. Last summer, Lora led the *Kickstart 2 School* program, ensuring students begin the school year with a new pair of shoes. The event provided 700 kids with a new pair of name-brand shoes as well as backpacks and school supplies. Through a partnership with other local organizations, they were able to offer access to eye exams, dental care, vaccinations, and prescription glasses. Serving families across the Hillsboro School District, the program was born from a simple realization: no child should feel left out because their family is struggling.

What began as a small operation became an independent 501(c)(3) in January 2024. In November of 2023, the food bank was serving 163 people across 65 families. Today, it supports 1,720 people across 563 families, including 402 seniors—a growth that reflects both the depth of need and the trust the community has placed in this work.

Each week, thousands of pounds of food move through the building and back out into the community. Partnerships with 15 independent food banks ensure that food is shared rather than wasted, while independence allows flexibility, responsiveness, and care—especially for smaller communities that might otherwise be left without support. While North Plains remains the primary service area, the food bank also supports families in Hillsboro, Forest Grove, Cornelius, Banks, Vernonia, Scappoose, Portland, McMinnville, and surrounding rural communities through direct service and partnerships with other independent food banks.

With nearly 90 volunteers, the work continues to grow—grounded not in scale, but in intention. Lora's vision extends beyond food alone. She hopes to expand hours, strengthen mental health support, and build a true hub of wraparound services where people don't have to travel far, navigate systems alone, or fall through the cracks simply because they live in a small town. "We're not there yet," Lora says. "But we're building it." And she is—patiently, thoughtfully, and with a deep understanding that nourishment means more than food.

The North Plains Food Bank welcomes more than just food donations. Some shoppers are on liquid diets, while others need hygiene products or personal care items. Financial donations allow the food bank to respond to real, immediate needs by purchasing exactly what people require, when they require it, rather than hoping those items come through the door.

Donations of food, funds, and volunteer time all make a meaningful difference, helping ensure that when someone hesitates at the door—carrying hunger, worry, or shame—they find not just food, but care, connection, and reassurance that they are not alone.

To learn more, donate, or get involved, visit: npfoodbank.org



Lora Dexheimer, founder of the North Plains Food Bank
Photo by Lauren Crowston Photography





NORTH PLAINS FOOD BANK IMPACT

2025

FOOD BANK SNAPSHOT (END OF YEAR)

1,720

PEOPLE SERVED

563

TOTAL FAMILIES

402

SENIORS

1,318

PEOPLE AGE 59 & UNDER

32,010

LBS. OF FOOD DONATED IN DECEMBER

1,720
PEOPLE SERVED

COMMUNITY NEED IS GROWING

To learn more, donate, or get involved, visit: npfoodbank.org



Scan to donate via Venmo, PayPal, or Cash App

2023

165
PEOPLE SERVED

Connecting Our Community, One Story at a Time.

WWW.NORTHPLAINSLIVING.COM



READY FOR

SPRING

PORTRAIT PHOTOGRAPHY FOR EVERY SEASON
www.laurencrowstonphotography.com • 971.238.2240

LAURENCROWSTON
PHOTOGRAPHY