

NONPROFITS

Free birthday cake group expanding

By Francie Williamson,
The Gazette

An organization that tries to help brighten the birthdays of those in need is expanding in Iowa.

Birthday Cakes 4 Free is a national organization founded in California in 2010. Cakes are made for seniors and children who are in socially and financially disadvantaged situations.

In 2013, Pat Vandersee of Marion opened a chapter in Linn County.

"Last year we made more than 300 cakes," Vandersee said. "We're jumping."

Vandersee said the chapter, which has 35 volunteers, makes eight cakes each month for the congregate sites of Meals on Wheels, and also makes cakes for five senior homes and the H.D. Youth Center in Cedar Rapids. The group also works with Tanager Place, Four Oaks and Linn County Development Center, and takes requests from unaffiliated individuals.

Recently, Vandersee started getting more interest from Johnson County residents, so she started looking for someone to open a chapter there. Kay Baker, a West Liberty resident who had been volunteering with the Linn County chapter, said she decided to step forward.

"I thought about it for a few days because I knew it would be a big responsibility but it would be a really big awesome thing," Baker said. "So

FOR MORE INFORMATION

Those interested in receiving a cake or volunteering for the Linn or Johnson County chapters of Birthday Cakes 4 Free, or seeing photos of past cakes, can go online to <https://www.facebook.com/BirthdayCakes4FreeLinnCounty> or <https://www.facebook.com/pages/Birthday-Cakes-4-Free-Johnson-County-Iowa/1635971986637231>

• For Johnson County, email Kay Baker at kaylynnbaker@hotmail.com

• For Linn County, email Pat Vandersee at birthdaycakes4freemarion@gmail.com or call (319) 804-8949

I got in touch with her and said I would be delighted to open up a chapter in Johnson County."

Baker opened the Johnson County chapter in March, and volunteers already have made several cakes.

"We've gotten a lot of great response," Baker said, adding she has been getting cake orders every week, and has about 20 volunteers to help make cakes. "I'm just so glad there are other people like me that are eager to help out the community."

Although Baker lives in West Liberty, she works at the VA Health Center in Iowa City, so she said she is in the Johnson County area every day.

Vandersee said she thinks Baker is going to do "awesome" work.



Liz Martin/The Gazette

Kay Baker of West Liberty (left) and Pat Vandersee of Marion deliver a birthday cake May 1 to Alijah Collins, 5, a preschooler at Linn County Child Development in Cedar Rapids. Baker and Vandersee run the Johnson and Linn County chapters, respectively, of the Birthday Cakes 4 Free organization that provides free cakes to people who are financially in need and to seniors.

"She's a go-getter and she still helps my chapter when she can," Vandersee said.

Vandersee said a Birthday Cakes 4 Free chapter also has formed in Polk County, and she would like to find others

interested in forming chapters in other counties as well.

"I really would like to see Iowa take off with it," Vandersee said.

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