

Matthew25

SPRING
2026

What if We Didn't Wait?



*A note from Courtney Ball
Executive Director of Matthew 25*

Not long ago I took a five-week class focused on helping Eastern Iowans think about how our communities might transition to a time when we will no longer have access to cheap energy in the form of oil and natural gas, while also adapting to the effects of climate change. This will happen in my lifetime (it's already on the way there), and most likely it will force us to make some major changes to our lifestyles.

There was a high potential for this class to be full of doom and gloom. But actually, some of those necessary changes could be very good for us. Instead of consuming food shipped from thousands of miles away while covering our own soil with petroleum-based pesticides, Iowans might return to eating locally grown, healthy organic food like our grandparents and everyone before them did. Instead of living in oversized homes in neighborhoods built primarily for cars, we might return to more walkable, human-scale cities and towns. Or instead of spending huge spans of our time in front of energy-consuming computer, phone, and TV screens, we might actually do work with our hands and reconnect with our neighbors and coworkers in person.

But what if we started to do all of those things now instead of waiting for a collapse of world energy reserves to force us into a painful time of change? Actually, in the neighborhoods we serve, Matthew 25 is doing most of those things: growing clean, local food; preserving historic neighborhoods full of reasonably-sized affordable homes (while also making them more energy efficient and building new sustainable homes); putting a few staff and hundreds of volunteers to work on practical, helpful projects, and reweaving the fabric of community that has been unraveling at faster and faster rates.

We didn't get into this work because of peak oil or climate change, but our mission of strengthening neighborhoods today also happens to make them more prepared for changes we'll see in the next century. Matthew 25 has been experimenting with the work of strengthening neighborhoods for nearly 20 years now. We've learned a lot, but honestly, it feels like we're still just getting started.



I imagine looking back on this work from 20 years in the future. When the time comes, my hope is that instead of telling a sad story of tumultuous times, we get to share all the ways we paved the path to a stronger, more resilient city. I know it's possible. Matthew 25 has helped our neighbors recover from two major natural disasters. Those were not much fun, but each time, we learned how to be stronger, smarter, and closer to each other in the process. And we are better for it.



"...we get to share all the ways we paved the path to a stronger, more resilient city."



1875



2025



2026

Bringing a Home Back to Life

For more than 150 years, the home at 1316 3rd Avenue SE has stood through the growth of Cedar Rapids - from farmland to streetcars, from hitching posts to modern streets.

Along the way, it has been a farmhouse, a boarding house, a family home, a collector's museum, and now, once again, a place for families to live.

The land where the house now stands was part of a government land patent issued by President James K. Polk in 1848. In the 1860s, a small five-room farmhouse was constructed on the land. The rural setting began to evolve into a thriving Cedar Rapids neighborhood, and a second story was constructed. It was cherished by its owners and filled with joy and memories—until it became empty and quiet. Neighbor St. Paul's UMC purchased the house and debated its destiny while it sat vacant for many years, awaiting its new chapter.

That next chapter began when St. Paul's UMC donated the property to Matthew 25, along with \$150,000 toward its restoration.

In May 2025, work began on what many expected to be a long and complex rehabilitation. Homes like this, vacant for nearly two decades and once slated for demolition, often take years to restore. But through the dedication of Matthew 25's housing team, Corridor Construction Company, and community partners, the project moved at an extraordinary pace. In just ten months, the house was brought back to life.

Today, the home has been carefully restored to reflect its historic significance from the late 1800s and early 1900s while being thoughtfully adapted into two homes for families.

Matthew 25 Executive Director Courtney Ball shared the broader impact of the project:

COURTNEY BALL

“We have an affordable housing shortage in Cedar Rapids. Along with building new units, it's also wise to preserve and repair as many existing homes as possible. This project brings back a historic home that sat vacant for years but can now house two families at very affordable prices.”

Local historian Mark Stoffer Hunter emphasized its deeper significance:

MARK STOFFER HUNTER

“It is connected to the very heart and soul of Cedar Rapids. It is a physical reminder of the earliest history of the city... critical to our sense of place and identity.”

This project not only preserves a meaningful piece of Cedar Rapids history, it also helps meet a critical need. Safe, stable housing supports health, education, and opportunity. Preserving homes like this ensures neighborhoods remain strong, connected, and accessible. The Coe-Paul-Westrom House has been many things: frontier farmland, family house, collector's landmark, and now affordable housing. And yet, even this version of the story is only part of what this house has seen.

Want to Read the Full Story?



Visit our website to see more pictures and explore the full history of the Coe-Paul-Westrom House.



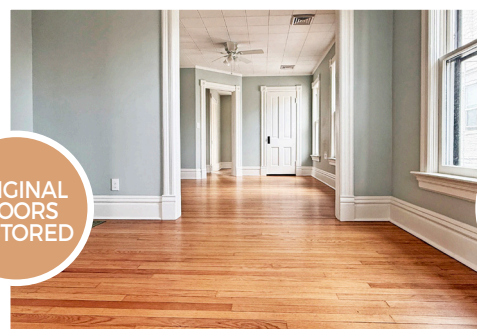
ORIGINAL WINDOWS RESTORED



ORIGINAL & CUSTOM CABINETS TO MATCH



95% ORIGINAL MOLDING



ORIGINAL FLOORS RESTORED



ORIGINAL SINK

Cultivate Hope's Full Circle Sustainability

How Matthew 25's New Composting System is Closing the Loop



ANYSSA BALL, URBAN FARM MANAGER

Instead of throwing away vegetable peels, Groundswell Cafe saves them.

Coffee grounds are collected. Food scraps, pineapple peels, and pepper ends are no longer thrown away. Instead, they return to earth.

Thanks to a grant from the Giacometto Foundation, our urban farm manager, Anyssa Ball, launched a comprehensive composting system at Matthew 25, one that creates a full-circle model of sustainability.

COMPOST AS A RESOURCE

The Urban Farm has always composted, but this new technology lets Matthew 25 do it intentionally and efficiently. The farm formerly used Linn County Solid Waste Agency compost or purchased compost to maintain soil fertility.

"We produce a lot of plant waste and food scraps," Anyssa says. "Knowing that these materials can be used as an asset instead of being thrown away is important."

Matthew 25 can now compost 20–30 gallons of trash debris per week. Anyssa says that putting food waste in the landfill is a system failure. "There, it turns into methane gas, which is not good for the environment." Matthew 25 is helping solve the problem.

HEALTHY SOIL, HEALTHY COMMUNITY

Composting builds living soil, not just reduces waste. "Years ago, soil was thought of as inert," Anyssa says. "Now we know soil is a living ecosystem."

Organic soil enhances water retention, aeration, and nutrient availability. Compost releases nutrients slowly, limiting runoff and improving soil health.

Healthier soil means healthier plants and food. "It's all connected," Anyssa explains. Public and environmental health are interconnected, and the Urban Farm, Groundswell Cafe, and Corner Store provide concrete opportunities for growth, sharing, and eating.

THE BOKASHI ADVANTAGE

At the Corner Store, composting goes farther. A Bokashi composting system collects unconsumable bones and trimmings from in-house meat cutting. This fermentation-based pre-composting technology properly processes leftovers before adding them to compost piles.

"Bokashi allows us to compost materials that wouldn't work in a traditional system," Anyssa says. Fermented material can be added to compost piles or buried in soil after two weeks.

EDUCATION AND THE FUTURE

Anyssa believes composting supports Matthew 25's education and community engagement.

"This is a fantastic opportunity for science learning," she explains. "Youth Development Program students can compare systems, grasp ratios, and see how organic matter becomes fertile soil. School field trips and farm food camps will also provide learning opportunities.

With the new composting systems, including Bokashi, passive bins, and a three-bin rapid system, students can

SUSTAINABILITY IN MOTION

CULTIVATE HOPE URBAN FARM



1) Cultivate Hope Urban Farm grows produce.

COMPOST FEEDS THE SOIL



3) Scraps are composted which enriches soil. The dirt grows the next Urban Farm crop.



CORNER STORE & GROUNDSWELL CAFE



2) That produce becomes meals at Groundswell Cafe and food at the Corner Store.



compare methods, observe decomposition in real time, and deepen their STEM learning through hands-on problem-solving, troubleshooting, and exploring how nutrient cycles impact soil health and crop yields.

Anyssa's vision for the future is clear: "The more we can make the Urban Farm a self-sustaining ecosystem, the better. We respect natural cycles and work together to strengthen them."

Matthew 25 shows that sustainability is more than reducing waste—it's about restoring balance, practicing stewardship, and building resilience from soil to table and back again.

When we care for the land, we care for one another.



UPCOMING EVENTS

- Spring Celebration April 28
- Spring Plant Sale May 2
- Storytellers of Cedar Rapids May 6
- Community Potluck May 12
- Cultivate Community Market... May 28



For more information about these events, scan the QR code or go to: matthew-25.org/events





Matthew 25

Growing Strong Neighborhoods

Matthew 25

201 3rd Ave SW
Cedar Rapids, IA 52404



The Cultivate Hope Corner Store: A Store for Everyone

At Matthew 25, we believe access to healthy, affordable food is a basic building block for strong neighborhoods. That belief comes to life every day at the Cultivate Hope Corner Store, a welcoming grocery store at 604 Ellis Blvd NW. It was built as a store for everyone!

The Corner Store was opened to expand access to fresh, nutritious food in a part of Cedar Rapids that historically had limited grocery options. Today, it has become much more than a place to shop. It's a place where neighbors run into each other, families shop with dignity, and community connections grow.



One of the ways we help make grocery shopping easier for households is through our **Reasonably Priced, Reliably Stocked** items. Marked with bright blue tags throughout the store, these staple products are foods families count on week after week. By keeping these items affordable and consistently on the shelves, we help shoppers plan meals, stretch grocery budgets, and feel confident that the essentials will always be there.

At the Corner Store, you'll find a large fresh produce section (including items from Cultivate

Hope Urban Farm when they're in season), a wide variety of local Iowa products, convenient Good Meals To Go, and a full in-house cut meat cooler.

Every purchase helps support this nonprofit grocery store and expands access to healthy food for our neighbors.

If you've never been to the Corner Store or haven't shopped there in a while, "**lettuce show you**" what we're all about in this quick video!



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JOIN OUR EMAIL LIST:



OUR MISSION:

Improve the health of people and neighborhoods by investing in quality affordable housing, healthy food, educational opportunities, and community building.