



A happy accident brought **Barb Klingensmith** to Country Neighbor 36 years ago. Now, almost four decades later, she's grateful to still be providing needed services to her neighbors in Ashtabula County.

Country Neighbor has partnered with the Greater Cleveland Food Bank in multiple ways for more than three decades. Now, Country Neighbor serves as a Partner Distribution Organization of the Greater Cleveland Food Bank, receiving food from the Food Bank, storing it in their own warehouse, and redistributing it to a network of partners within Ashtabula County, Ohio.

“We are Ashtabula County. We understand their needs,” Barb explains with a smile, remembering the thousands of people she's been able to help serve through Country Neighbor. Barb and her team work hard to distribute more than one million pounds of food per year to people in need through a variety of programs including senior meals and boxes, children's programming, and produce distributions.

Last year, Country Neighbor distributed over 827,000 pounds of food from the Greater Cleveland Food Bank to food pantries and hot meal programs, which made possible over 689,000 meals to low income people in Ashtabula County.

“The Greater Cleveland Food Bank brings the ability to leverage different resources and food items,” Barb explains, “They have the capacity to bring those together and then we are able to share in that.”

As Barb explains, Country Neighbor is the Food Bank’s key partner in Ashtabula County. She has served as Executive Director since 1988. Barb and her staff of approximately 50 employees work tirelessly not only to feed their neighbors, but to provide wrap-around services to ensure that people in Ashtabula County get the help they need.

Beyond food programming, Country Neighbor provides transportation assistance, adult services, senior activities, in-home services, and many more. “We always look at gaps in service - what’s going on that’s not being addressed?” she explains.

Country Neighbor has been operating for 42 years. Under Barb’s direction for 36 years, the organization has been able to transform the services they offer to positively impact the lives of the people they serve in Ashtabula County.



“I can think of so many people through the years,” Barb remembers thoughtfully. “We had one gentleman who was from Germany and could not speak English well. We took the time and sat down and just *listened* to him. He started coming through the years. He was one of our best friends because we took the time to take care of him when nobody else would.”



And that’s what matters - being there for the people of Ashtabula County. “When we are one of them, it’s that neighborhood feeling,” Barb says thoughtfully. Barb and the staff from Country Neighbor know the needs of Ashtabula County. And the needs of the county is changing. The population of the county is aging, and Barb and her staff are seeing growing numbers of older adults visiting their pantries and distributions. “We’re seeing a lot more grandparents raising grandkids,” Barb explains, “but the programs we provide, we touch the whole family.” Country Neighbor is ready to meet these changing needs.

And Barb is ready to meet these new challenges. Working at Country Neighbor is her passion. “I can go to work every day and I may not directly touch someone, but I know that at the end of the day I’ve made a difference in someone’s life. There’s not many people who can do that. Who can go home and know they’ve done something,” she says with a satisfied smile. “I guess I’ve built this agency to where it is. When I look back over the 36 years, there’s thousands and thousands of people I’ve helped.”

Without Barb Klingensmith, Country Neighbor would not be serving Ashtabula County like they are able to today. Her passion for her work is obvious - it’s in her words and her actions, and especially in her many years of working and advocating for her country neighbors in need.

