



# Where Hope Grows Wings: Flying the Compassionate Skies with Doug Pralle

**D**oug Pralle, Franklin REC member, has been flying since 2008, but his journey into the skies started much earlier, rooted in an emotional childhood memory.

“When I was a kid, my Dad died at an early age,” Doug recalls. “I found some of his pilot books. He was training to be a pilot. I think as an 8-year-old that kind of tied me to him. Once I got old enough and was able to afford it, I went ahead and got my license.”

One particular childhood memory stands out, shaping his future endeavors. “My Dad was in a hospital in Chicago. The doctor gave us his limo to take to a Cubs game. As a kid, you kind of remember that stuff. You don’t really realize what’s going on. That kindness, when someone was in need, was what really sparked that.”

That spark ignited a spirit for giving back. In 2008 and 2009, Doug flew a local child and his mother to Rochester for cancer treatments.

“Years later, I kind of got to thinking about it, how can we give back and use some of the skills we built over time, so we started Compassion Flights,” he said.

Compassion Flights, a non-profit organization, offers free flights to those in need of medical care. Doug and Compassion Flights fly patients from Iowa to surrounding states, working with other groups for longer trips.

The process is simple. Those in need or who know someone in need can visit [www.compassionflights.com](http://www.compassionflights.com), fill out an online flight request, and get a response directly from Doug or his wife.

When Doug isn’t flying for Compassion



## Shine the Light winner

**Above |** Doug Pralle, Compassion Flights, won one of three Shine the Light prize grants in the amount of \$3,000. Pralle and his non-profit, Compassion Flights, offer free airplane rides to those in need of medical care. Pralle is a member of Franklin REC. Visit [www.compassionflights.com](http://www.compassionflights.com) to learn more.

Flights, he’s working his day job as a crop duster, spraying fields with an airplane or helicopter or farming with his brother. The non-profit operates entirely on donations.

“We are here for everyone,” Doug emphasizes. “We work 100-percent on donations. No one takes any wage. My spray business pays for most of the bills, from the lighting and heating. When people donate money, they donate it directly to a flight.”

Each flight costs about \$500, depending on various factors. Despite the costs and the challenges, Doug remains committed to his mission.

“Our motto is ‘Where Hope Grows Wings,’” he says. “We’re trying to help somebody not think about what’s actually

going on in their life. Just kind of get them away from everything for a little bit.”

Through Compassion Flights, Doug Pralle offers more than just transportation; he provides a lifeline, a moment of relaxation, and a twinkle of hope for those navigating the toughest times of their lives. ■

To learn more about  
Compassion Flights visit them  
online and on Facebook:

[www.compassionflights.com](http://www.compassionflights.com)



# Community Beacon: Judy Hess and the MAGs Revitalize Fonda



When Kerry Noethe encountered the Shine the Light Contest, one name stood out instantly: Judy Hess. As the vibrant founder of Moms and Grandmas for Fonda, Inc. (MAGs), Hess represents the heart and soul of community dedication and innovation.

“I’ve always admired (the MAGs) dedication,” Noethe shared. “Judy has always been a good leader. Sometimes, she gives people a kick in the pants when they need it. I’ve been on volunteer programs in the past. I know how important it was to me when my children were young. Just to keep people aware of the community and show it’s a good place to live, even though we’re a bedroom community. Judy is always looking for new ideas, comes up with new ideas; she’s always happy. Even when she’s crabby, she’s happy. She’s just a great motivator.”

Amanda Johnson, a dedicated member of MAGs, highlights the group’s profound connection to their hometown.

“I think we have a lot of pride about our hometown of Fonda,” Johnson said. “Our kids and our grandkids are really important to us. So, it’s just a no-brainer to do things that are beneficial for our community and our kids.”

For Noethe, now a grandmother herself, the value of a thriving community is deeply personal.

“Well, my grandchildren are 16 and 13,



**Shine the Light winner**

**Above** | Moms and Grandmas for Fonda, Inc. (MAGs) led by Judy Hess, center, won a prize grant in the amount of \$3,000. MAGs is dedicated to enhancing the quality of life for children and families in Fonda.

and they have been coming to Fonda since they were babies,” she said. “They still come to Fonda. They’re in the park, down at the pits, any place they can find entertainment. Even though they just live in Storm Lake, you want those memories. So, when the kids now grow up, they’ll want to bring their children back.”

“Our little towns are just dying out,” she continued. “We want to keep it so our kids have a place to play and enjoy our town, keeping it a place where people want to live and raise their families.”

Hess launched MAGs in 2018, and the group’s momentum has been unstoppable ever since.

“It stands for Moms and Grandmas,” Hess explained. “We put the group together in 2018, setting up the pool. We put everything towards the youth. We gave them a freezer and refrigerator to use. We added a slide, lawn chairs, a water filler, and a drinking fountain in the park. We’ve organized various fundraisers for the group.”

Every MAGs project relies on a mix of volunteer effort, donations, and grants.

“I got some people together,” Hess recalled. “Everyone was excited about it. We started doing fundraisers. We do Chicken Bingo, we’ve organized different community events, and we even hosted a father/daughter dance.”

Other fundraising events feature a variety of activities, including festive Christmas events, an exciting rodeo, and many more community gatherings.

Currently, MAGs is rallying funds to replace the outdated public basketball court. The new court, projected to cost \$78,000, will feature a regulation-size VersaCourt floor with official markings and new baskets.

Hess is hopeful that the project will be completed by 2025.

“It could be early spring,” she said. “Our husbands and some local guys will help with the demolition—digging out the cement and hauling it away—so there won’t be any charge for that.”

Judy Hess and MAGs are making a significant impact on Fonda, turning it into a more vibrant and welcoming community. Their unwavering commitment ensures that the town remains a cherished place for both current and future generations. ■



**MAGs revitalize Fonda**

**Above** | MAGs for Fonda work to better their community for future generations.

Search

**"MAGS 4 Fonda Inc."**

on Facebook to learn more about MAGs.

# Grefe starts Corn Belt Power career

Brandon Grefe started as an apprentice electrician at the cooperative's Hampton service center August 19. Grefe worked for Vestas for the past seven years repairing and maintaining wind turbines.

He and his wife Alexis live in Hampton and have three daughters, Elle, Aja and Mila. He enjoys golfing, fishing and hunting. Welcome to Corn Belt Power, Brandon! ■

# Crop dusting accident takes down line structure

A Kansas man has died after his crop-dusting helicopter crashed in northeast Iowa. The plane crashed into one of Corn Belt Power's transmission structures.

Chickasaw County Sheriff Ryan Shawver reported at 1:30 p.m. on Monday, July 29 officials received a 911 call of a recording that the owner of the iPhone has been involved in a crash and gave coordinates. Deputies were dispatched and determined a crop-dusting helicopter had crashed northeast of Nashua.

The pilot, Eleazar Villafranca Jr. of Manhattan, Kan., was pronounced dead at the scene by the Chickasaw County Medical Examiner. A full autopsy has been ordered to be completed by the Iowa State Medical Examiners Office.

The crash site remains under investigation by the Iowa State Patrol, the FAA and the NTSB.

"Our thoughts and prayers are with the victim's family," said Jeremy Stattelmann, transmission superintendent, Corn Belt Power. "It's so important to always be aware of your surroundings when it comes to power lines and electrical equipment. It doesn't matter if you're on the ground and see a downed line or flying an aircraft. Always be on the lookout for electrical infrastructure. It could save your life."

Also assisting with the crash were the Nashua Fire Department, Chickasaw County Rescue Squad, Chickasaw EMS, Chickasaw EMA, New Hampton Police Department, Corn Belt Power Cooperative and Hugeback-Johnson Funeral Home. ■

# Iowa State Fair sees record breaking attendance

The Touchstone Energy Cooperative of Iowa led by Corn Belt Power Cooperative, Northwest Iowa Power Cooperative, Central Iowa Power Cooperative and the Iowa Association of Electric Cooperatives sponsored the Rastettler 4-H Exhibits Building at the 2024 Iowa State Fair.

Electric co-op staff from across the state handed out plastic hard hats with Touchstone Energy Cooperatives of Iowa stickers on them and suckers to kids. Kids could also try on select line worker safety gear and take fun photos in our co-op safety selfie station. According to fair officials, 1,182,682 people visited the fair in 2024, breaking the previous overall attendance record of 1,170,375 visitors set in 2019.

A big thanks to all the distribution cooperatives that allowed staff to fill a time slot at the booth. Co-op employees and directors handed out more than 4,000 hard hats and met with countless cooperative members from across Iowa and the midwest. ■



**Brandon Grefe**

**Above** | Brandon Grefe, apprentice electrician, Corn Belt Power, began his career at the cooperative Aug. 19.



**Crop dusting accident**

**Above** | A spray helicopter crashed into Corn Belt Power's transmission structure in Chickasaw County, near Nashua Monday July 29. The pilot from Manhattan, Kan., was pronounced dead at the scene and the crash site remains under investigation by the Iowa State Patrol, the FAA and NTSB.



**TSE co-ops represent**

**Above** | A 2024 fairgoer poses for a safety selfie at the Touchstone Energy Cooperatives of Iowa booth during an overall record-breaking attendance year. The Touchstone Energy Cooperatives of Iowa sponsored the Rastettler 4-H Exhibits building, giving away hard hats and candy to fair attendees.

Corn Belt Power electricians install a new breaker at the Osgood Switching Station ten miles northwest of Emmetsburg after the previous 169 kilovolt breaker failed while in service mid July.



**August Touchstone Energy Volunteer Challenge winner | Rudy Halvorson, first class**  
 lineman, Midland Power Cooperative, donated his \$100 prize to the Human Fund.

## Latimer Industrial Park expansion closes on revolving loan funds

The Latimer Development Corporation secured critical funding for the expansion of the Latimer Industrial Park through the combined efforts of Corn Belt Power Cooperative, Franklin REC, and the Franklin County Development Association, all of whom finalized loans with the LDC August 20.

Corn Belt Power and Franklin REC each provided an initial Revolving Loan Fund of \$176,850, while the FCDA contributed an initial loan of \$26,850. This funding will facilitate the acquisition of land adjacent to the existing industrial park, conveniently located one mile east of Interstate 35.

The collaboration between the City of Latimer, LDC, FCDA, Franklin REC, and Corn Belt Power underscores a shared commitment to fostering positive economic growth and community development within the local area, county and region. ■



**Latimer Industrial Park loan closing**

**Above |** At the Latimer Industrial Park expansion loan closing August 20 are from left, Mark Johansen, mayor, Latimer; Doug Peters, president, Latimer Development Corporation; Wayne Pralle, treasurer, LDC; Garrett Thompson, CEO, Franklin REC; Brittany Dickey, vice president business development, Corn Belt Power Cooperative; Mary Amsbaugh, Franklin County Development Association; and Stacy Cirks, development finance director, Corn Belt Power Cooperative.

## Corn Belt Power Cooperative Watts Watt

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