

NEWS RELEASE

PenFinancial Announces 2025 Truly Local Grant Recipients, Supporting Community Programs Across Niagara and Dunnville

Welland, ON — [November 26, 2025] — PenFinancial Credit Union is proud to celebrate the four *Truly Local* non-profit organizations selected as the 2025 recipients of its Truly Local Grant Program. Now in its third year, the program provides \$25,000 in funding to grassroots, front-line initiatives that make a meaningful difference in the lives of local residents.

Throughout October, PenFinancial's Truly Local Grant committee reviewed dozens of applications, dedicating time to score and evaluate each initiative based on its community impact. After careful consideration, four organizations were chosen—each demonstrating remarkable commitment to meeting urgent needs and improving quality of life across the region.



One of this year's recipients is Northend Church of St. Catharines, which will receive \$8,000 to help sustain its "No One Goes Hungry" project. What began in 2020 as a small response to the pandemic has grown into a vital community food bank supporting more than 280 families each month. Powered by roughly 100 volunteers, the program distributes

close to \$1 million in food annually through partnerships with local stores and organizations. As Food Bank Coordinators Gary and Kathy Isaac shared, *"Because we are grassroots, and powered 100% by volunteers...the funds will go toward purchasing healthy grocery options for the more than 1,500 families who come to us experiencing food insecurities."*

Another grant will support ToolBox Project Niagara, which has grown from its first 25 holiday care packages in 2017 to more than 1,300 kits delivered last year to unhoused and vulnerable individuals. With \$7,000 in funding, the organization will expand its seasonal and year-round distribution efforts, offering essentials such as hygiene items, warm clothing, and small comforts to people



experiencing poverty. *"This will allow us to complete 270 care packages for individuals who are unhoused or experiencing various levels of poverty,"* said founder James Symons.



In Dunnville, Dunnville Secondary School will receive \$5,000 to strengthen its long-running Breakfast Program, which provides daily "Grab and Go" meals to students. With rising food costs and increasing demand, the school will use the funds to purchase equipment such as a refrigerated food tray and warming units; tools that enable staff to serve students more efficiently and safely each morning. The program ensures students have access to healthy food that supports energy, focus, and wellbeing throughout the school day. One Grade 11 student shared, *"I know if I miss breakfast, I can grab something which will help get me through the day."*

The final grant supports the Crystal Ridge Dream Center, which will receive \$5,000 toward its Community Kitchen Program. The initiative provides free, hot, nutritious meals twice a week to residents in Crystal Beach and Fort Erie, including seniors, low-income families, and individuals facing mental health or housing challenges. With demand increasing sharply—17,500 meals served in 2024 alone—the funding will help maintain essential meal services for some of the community's most vulnerable residents. As Program Coordinator Nicole Kuehnel shared, *"Our Community Kitchen is more than just food. It's community, compassion, and connection."*



PenFinancial CEO Shari Sekel emphasized the importance of investing in programs that create real, measurable change during uncertain times. *"Our Truly Local Grant Program reflects PenFinancial's deep commitment to improving lives and strengthening the communities we serve,"* she said. *"Every one of these organizations is making a tangible impact—providing food, dignity, safety, and connection to people who need it most. As the cost of living continues to rise and more families rely on community supports, our Truly Local impact matters now more than ever. We are proud to stand beside these remarkable organizations and help ensure their vital work continues."*

About PenFinancial Credit Union

PenFinancial Credit Union is a truly local values-based credit union committed to improving the lives its nearly 20,000 members and businesses. PenFinancial delivers a full range of financial services digitally and through a network of six branches across Niagara and Haldimand. Through their Truly Local Commitment, the credit union is a proud Living Wage employer who invests a portion of their pre-tax profits into the communities it serves. PenFinancial is also proud to choose 100% renewable energy with Bullfrog Power as part of their commitment to environmental sustainability. For more information visit penfinancial.com.

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