

Vesterheim

The National Norwegian-American
Museum & Heritage Center

Annual Report

January 1-December 31, 2015

The Year in Review

The sum of the parts makes a whole. In this recounting of 2015, we look back and recognize moments of celebration alongside ones of sadness—all things that make us whole.

In January, we celebrated the successful launching of online membership, evidenced by 544 memberships purchased online. This major step provided a nice parallel to our “Pay It Forward” Annual Fund campaign, which ended in February. For every \$100 gift, Vesterheim provided an admission for a young person age 7-18. The result was 300 free admissions.

Vesterheim was named one of the 15 Best Small-Town Museums in the U.S. by the world-respected travel guide Fodor’s. In addition, thanks to wonderful reviews by our guests and visitors, Vesterheim received Trip Advisor’s Certificate of Excellence for a second year.

June marked the beginning for new president and CEO, Chris Johnson. Chris graduated from Luther College with a B.A. in history and received his masters from University of Nebraska. Chris and his family moved from Bismarck, North Dakota, where he was Museum Division Director at the State Historical Society of North Dakota. A native of Northeast Iowa, Chris shared that Vesterheim and the Decorah area are places he has valued all his life.

Front cover: *Woodcarved Figures, Nordic Roots*, a special exhibition at Vesterheim guest curated by Harley Refsal, featured the rich heritage and complex mastery of the seemingly simple figures.



Vesterheim welcomes new President/CEO Chris Johnson.

King Olav's 1951 Cadillac returned to Norway into the care of the American Car Club of Norway (AMCAR). AMCAR buys and restores vintage American cars. When they found out Vesterheim owned the King's favorite car, they expressed an interest in obtaining it for restoration and to showcase it for promoting their efforts in developing a National Motor Museum near Lillehammer.

July folk-art classes saw the arrival of three Norwegian folk-artists, carver Torgeir Lirhus, rosemaler Johild Mæland, and knifemaker Morten Håkonsen. The response to their classes was great and classes were full with wait lists. Johild also offered a *kroting* (chalk-paint decoration) class and on the last day, students and staff tried their hand at *kroting* in the Norwegian house on the first floor of the museum. The results were quite nice.

The fall opened two new exhibitions, From *Underwear to Everywhere: Norwegian Sweaters* and *Woodcarved Figures, Nordic Roots*. Both were popular exhibitions with positive feedback. We ended the year with festivities including Deck The Tables, a two-day holiday event at the Hotel Winneshiek in November and Norwegian Christmas at Vesterheim on December 5.

Along side the wonderful successes of the year 2015, we also experienced many

losses, including the passing of close, long-time friends Dan Huebner, Betty Nelson, and Dag Rossman, all of Decorah, and Lila Nelson of Minneapolis.

Dan Huebner was a board member, who served as board chair. He also was Vesterheim's first million-dollar donor and a member of the Valhalla Society—Vesterheim's planned giving group. During his lifetime, Dan and his wife Bonnie established the Dan and Bonnie Huebner Westby-Torgerson Education Center Endowment and in 2015 Vesterheim received its largest gift to-date from the Dan Huebner Estate in support of educational programming. Within the walls of Westby, their financial support has helped to maintain the classrooms and support events and education programs, such as the Pioneer Immersion Program for area fourth graders. The remarkable stewardship of the Huebners has made it possible for people of all ages to be inspired to celebrate heritage and tradition.

Betty Nelson was an accomplished weaver, demonstrator, teacher, supporter, and volunteer. She earned her Gold Medal in weaving in 2013. As a volunteer, one would often find her on the upper floor of the museum, demonstrating weaving on the floor loom. For many years, Betty was the weaving instructor for Vesterheim's Pioneer Immersion Program and we estimate that she guided well over 1,000 schoolchildren into the world of complex



King Olav's 1951 Cadillac returned to Norway into the care of the American Car Club of Norway (AMCAR).



A young boy proudly displayed his nisse during Vesterheim's Norwegian Christmas Weekend celebration. This event was sponsored by Duane and Eileen Bruening.

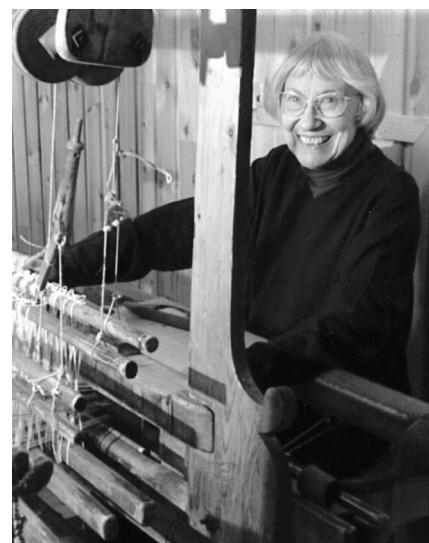
weaving. Like her late husband, David T. Nelson, who was a board member for 20 years, Betty was a constant at Vesterheim and will be missed.

Vesterheim's matriarch Lila Nelson passed away at age 93. Lila, a weaver and former Vesterheim Textile Curator, and her husband Marion Nelson were instrumental in the formation of Vesterheim. Hired in the mid-1960s to catalog the collection, they travelled on weekends from their home in the Twin Cities to work at the museum. When Vesterheim became an independent nonprofit in 1965, Marion was engaged as the Executive Director and together, he and Lila worked tirelessly to shape and present the tremendous collection that we enjoy today. Many of Lila's weavings are in Vesterheim's collection and in celebration of her expertise and innovation in weaving, Vesterheim opened the exhibition *From Tradition to Protest: Lila Nelson's Weaving Life*, on view until November 13, 2016.

Dag Rossman was a storyteller and author of Norse mythology and Viking tales. He died the day of opening ceremonies for Nordic Fest—a favorite time for him to give presentations and share his love of Norse myths and legends. A retired biology professor, Dag and his wife Sharon created the *Echoes of Odin: Norse Mythology in Scandinavian and America* exhibition at Vesterheim in 2003.

In October, Vesterheim experienced a great personal loss as friend and fellow staffer, Alison Dwyer, passed away. Alison started as a volunteer at Vesterheim and became Collections Manager in 2008. Many museum members and visitors knew Alison through her work, such as her richly detailed artifact photos in Vesterheim's publications, the online Virtual Galleries, the exhibition *Favorite Things*, and her presentation *When Disney Called*. Her warmth and professionalism were especially appreciated by folk-art students and researchers who came to study Vesterheim collections.

Thank you to all of members and friends for your support and guidance in 2015. Your great care and thoughtfulness means so much.



Vesterheim will miss all of the close, long-friends we lost in 2015, including Dag Rossman, Dan Heubner, Betty Nelson, and Lila Nelson.



The Nordic Dancers entertained guests during their performance at Vesterheim's annual Syttende Mai celebration. The event is sponsored by Decorah residents, Jeff and Marilyn Roverud.



At the 42nd Annual Nordic Celebration and Marketplace, Stacey McCurnin, of Fladeboe Auctions, congratulated the winner of a wonderful live auction item while onlookers smiled and enjoyed the festivities.

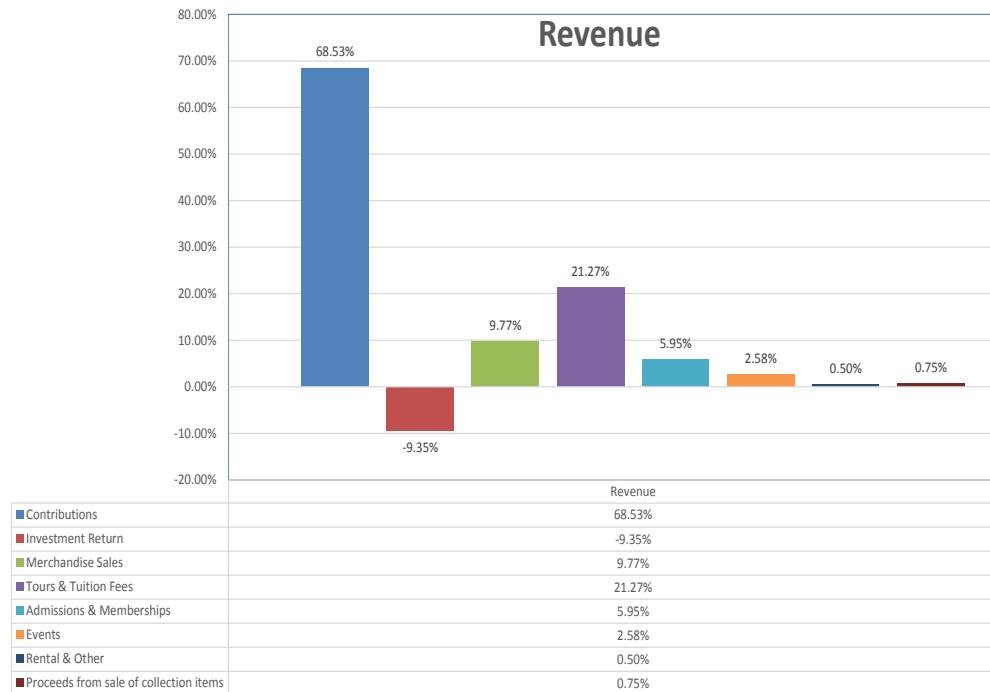
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Year Ended December 31, 2015

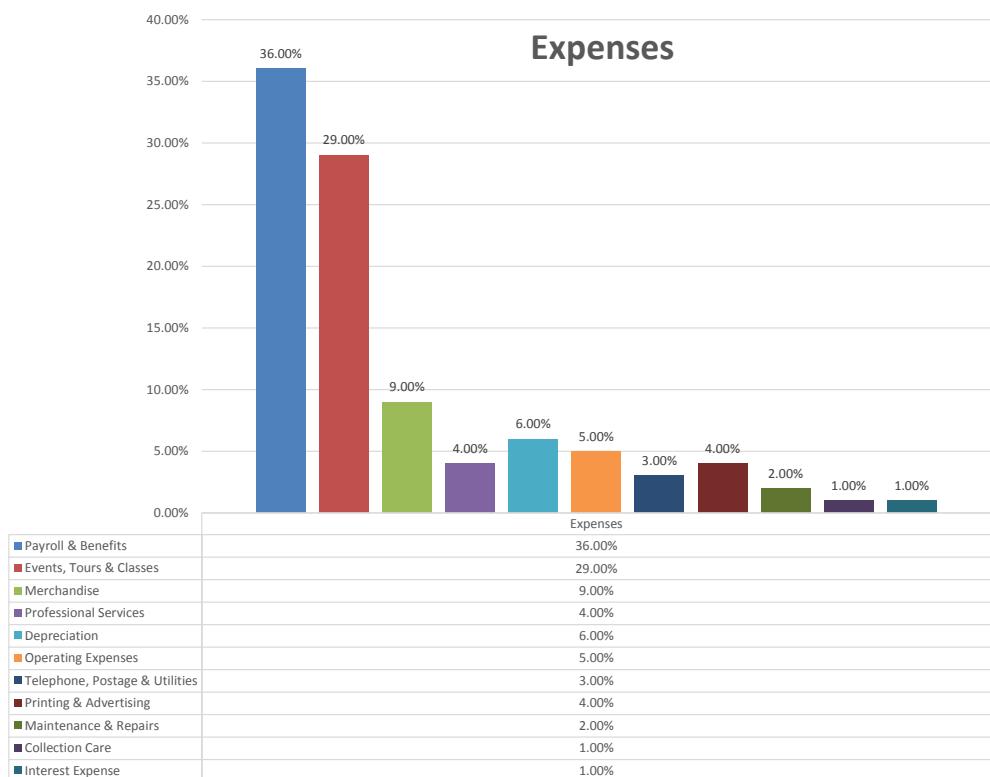
Revenue

Need new numbers	
Contributions	\$2,919,088
Investment Return	\$(398,343)
Merchandise	\$416,216
Tours & Tuitions	\$905,788
Admissions & Memberships	\$253,471
Events	\$109,941
Rental & Other	\$21,260
Sale of Collection Items	\$32,095
TOTALS	\$4,259,516



Expenses

Payroll & Benefits	\$973,654
Events, Tours & Classes	\$795,648
Merchandise	\$231,355
Professional Services	\$119,617
Depreciation	\$163,655
Operating Expenses	\$146,792
Telephone, Postage & Utilities	\$94,866
Printing & Advertising	\$109,891
Maintenance & Repairs	\$54,091
Collection Care	\$25,887
Interest Expense	\$7,311
TOTALS	\$2,715,456



Vesterheim Norwegian-American Museum

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Sims TV & Electronics
Norma Skordahl
Marley Wright Smith
St. Paul Saints
Stages Theatre Company
Mark and Jeanean Staples
Julie Steller
Anne Strootman
Swedish Bakery
Talla Imports
The Cottage House
the good foot
The Hairloom
The Malt Shop Restaurant
The Stone Path Gifts
Claire Anne Thoen
Teresa McCue Thompson
Sara Tollefson
Toys et Cetera
Tre Kronor Restaurant
Treadle Yard Goods
Gerald Trocinski
Twin City Grill
VocalEssence
Norma Wangsness
Wet Paint
William and Kathi Wild
Winneshiek Wildberry Winery
Barbara Wolter
Women and Children First