



Vesterheim

The National Norwegian-American Museum & Heritage Center

Volunteer Newsletter

Winter 2019

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2018: The Year in Review

The past year has brought an interesting mix of experimentation and routine to the programming and volunteer activity at Vesterheim. An overview of some of the highlights of the past year illustrates the deep involvement of volunteers in activities that happen year-round. Read on to learn about the service and achievements of volunteers in 2018.

Everyone who has volunteered recently (since Nordic Fest 2017) is receiving this newsletter and is invited to the annual Volunteer Appreciation Event on February 20. See the back cover for details.

Unique approaches have permeated new exhibitions this year. *Koselig* explored a cultural concept rather than objects, welcoming visitors and community members for cake breaks, Nordic Noir films, and game nights. Volunteers provided some of the refreshments, and it was great to see many of you at the programs! The year wrapped up with the opening of *The Museum Lab* that will continue to engage audiences with interactive experiments through this year, helping to shape Vesterheim's future.

The current fine art exhibit, *Christian Midjo: Choose Your Own Artventure*, also includes an element of experimentation—four “tours” with different themes, available for any museum visitor to enjoy and learn about the art on view. Vesterheim's volunteer guides were introduced to these “tours” at Fall Guide Training. Of course, every tour given by these dedicated volunteers is a personalized experience for museum visitors. During the daily outdoor tour season alone, May through October, 182 tours were given and 1800 visitors served!

Of the many events that took place in the past year, some special ones are Luther Family Day and two guided tour experiences based on Kathleen Ernst's mystery novel, *Heritage of Darkness*, set at Vesterheim. Neither could have happened without volunteer assistance.

Luther Family Day is planned to coincide with the fall visit day for the families of Luther students. On Saturday, September 22, all museum visitors encountered a mini-event with extra tours and folk-art demonstrators. All the greeters, guides, and folk artists were volunteers with some connection to Luther College, and each wore a nametag that explained the connection. Luther parents and regular daily visitors were amazed to see the depth of these ties in the community.

The *Heritage of Darkness* tour events in November required the help of Volunteer Guide Becky Olafsen to lead a plot-



Heritage of Darkness tour event participants view the vault in the basement of Vesterheim's Main Building.

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Help Wanted:

Helpers for Pioneer Immersion Program:

Area fourth graders visit Vesterheim for hands-on activities from March through May and several of their activities require volunteer help. Shifts are about an hour in duration and in most cases no special skills are needed. Contact Martha if interested.

Tour guides:

Join Vesterheim's corps of volunteer guides who get to meet interesting museum visitors and share the museum's many stories and collections. Spring Guide Training will take place later in the spring, schedule yet to be determined. Contact Martha to be added to the mailing list of interested trainees.

Volunteer referrals:

If you enjoy your time volunteering at Vesterheim, please consider mentioning the opportunity to friends, family, and acquaintances. Your recommendations can open the way to wonderful new Vesterheim experiences for others!

Kjære frivillige,

This is my chance to thank you explicitly for all of your efforts on behalf of Vesterheim. The figures on volunteer involvement in the past year are 1,671 hours with 268 active volunteers, according to the most recent tally. These numbers are important for reports, grant applications, and other tracking functions. I don't like them as a way of really measuring volunteer involvement. The raw numbers say nothing about the qualitative contribution that volunteers represent for Vesterheim. You are among the most devoted advocates for the museum and its programming, and we are so grateful!

Choosing to volunteer is more than an offer to help—it is also a quality of life shift for the volunteer. There is a lot of research that correlates volunteering with well-being. Balance is important, so it is good to be able to say “no” when you need to, but it is great to know the “yes” is decidedly beneficial in many ways!

A great quality of life shift for me in the past year has been becoming a mentor through Helping Services here in Decorah. I've had a lot of fun so far, and I know what I'm doing is important for one child. It's my fifteenth year as a volunteer management professional. I'm pleased to be on the other side of it again, finding that what I've seen, learned, and read about volunteerism is true!

One of the activities I am involved with as Vesterheim's Volunteer Coordinator is meeting regularly with my counterparts from other organizations around the region. We are loosely affiliated as the Oneota Valley Volunteer Coordinators, and we've been working for the past few months to plan a public event to promote volunteerism on Friday, April 12. It is scheduled in conjunction with the annual Women, Faith, and Finance seminar, and happens to be during National Volunteer Week. Check out the *Worth Noting* column for details, and plan to stop by.

Beste hilsen, Martha Griesheimer

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based tour of locations throughout Vesterheim's campus. Volunteers from the Hospitality Committee also provided Norwegian treats for the private reception for tour participants. Kathleen herself was on-site for the second tour event, and she is very pleased that Vesterheim is building a corps of guides who can offer this tour. If you have not yet read this delightful and surprising story, check it out from the Volunteer Library in Martha's office!

Many events and activities at Vesterheim, even the big ones, take place in a steady and routine manner each year. We had wonderful conditions for Nordic Fest in 2018. The Norwegian Christmas Celebration on December 1 was another story. It was a snowy, slushy day with very poor travel conditions. About 300 visitors still came out for the event, and there was only 10% attrition among the 80 volunteers on the schedule for the day! We adapted, and the event was as festive and fun as always, thanks to all who braved the weather.

One notable statistic this year is that 22 new volunteers became active for the first time. Looking more closely at

the list of new volunteers, it is apparent that the majority of these are folk artists who demonstrated in the tents outside the museum entrance to promote the Folk Art School during Nordic Fest. This facet of Nordic Fest programming alone involved 29 volunteers offering 92 hours of service over two days.

Vesterheim's youth education programs for area third- and fourth-grade students require a large number of volunteers to staff various hands-on activities throughout the spring and fall. With five to six classes visiting for each session, there are times when as many as 22 volunteers are needed in the space of one week. Let Martha know if you are interested in learning more about the range of volunteer activities for these programs.

There are numerous other statistics and stories we could share. All would illustrate the many and varied ways that volunteers make it possible for Vesterheim to serve its audiences each year. Please join us for the volunteer appreciation program of entertainment and refreshments on February 20, so we can thank you properly for all you do.

Oneota Weavers Guild

Have you ever stopped to watch a weaver or spinner working during Nordic Fest or Norwegian Christmas? You may not realize they are members of the Oneota Weavers Guild, a group of highly skilled volunteers who have been central to the signature events and youth programs at Vesterheim for decades. It seems long overdue to feature them here.

Although weaving has always been a core function in terms of what the volunteers have offered the museum, they are best described as a group of fiber enthusiasts. Among them, there are also spinners, knitters, nålbinders, needleworkers, and more. A number of the members are local to Decorah, but the regional membership is impressive. There is representation from Zumbrota and Houston in Minnesota, and Dorchester, Elkader, Monona, McGregor, Tipton, Iowa City, and Grinnell in Iowa.

At least six traditional *rutev* textiles have been produced on the big loom in the textile gallery by the group over many decades. One of these graces the wall of my office, the Norgaard Volunteer Center, where I enjoy it every day. An indication of the dedication of the weavers is that they have arranged a class for themselves focusing on the *rutev* technique this winter. This will ensure weaving demonstrations into the future.

Along with spinning demonstrations at our two major annual events, the weaving-in-progress provides a wonderful opportunity for visitors to gain an appreciation of traditional textile production methods. Several spinners from the group also provide demonstrations for area fourth graders every spring as part of the Pioneer Immersion Program.

The Oneota Weavers Guild meets regularly at Vesterheim, and they welcome visitors and new members. Members produce many textile items on an ongoing basis, and twice a year hold sales at Vesterheim. Look for their Artisan Market at Nordic Fest and at Norwegian Christmas!



Worth Noting

Koselig Cake Breaks return:

Get Koselig at Vesterheim! Join us from 1:00-2:00 p.m. on Saturdays, February 23 and March 23, for cake and conversation at the Bruening Visitor Center.

Community Volunteer fair:

Vesterheim is joining other organizations in the area to promote volunteerism during National Volunteer Week. Stop by the Hotel Winneshiek ballroom on Friday, April 12, 2:00-6:00 p.m.

Volunteer Library:

Stop by the Norgaard Volunteer Center (Martha's office) to see what's available at the Volunteer Library, including back issues of this newsletter. They are a great way to gain an appreciation for Vesterheim's thriving volunteer program.



Left: Oneota Weavers Guild member Judy Shuros demonstrates for a young museum visitor at Norwegian Christmas.

Above: Kathleen Almelen of Washington, Iowa, a first-time demonstrator at Nordic Fest 2018, show how to do bandweaving.



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Vesterheim Volunteer Appreciation

You are invited!

Wed., Feb. 20, 2019 - 2:00 p.m.
(snow date Feb. 27)

A Musical Tour of Norway

Performance by Norwegian Musician Vidar Skrede
Plus refreshments at Vesterheim's Bethania Church.

Vidar Skrede plays Hardingfele and fiddle and has taught
several Scandinavian folk music workshops through
Vesterheim's Folk Art School.

