



Vesterheim

The National Norwegian-American Museum & Heritage Center

Volunteer Newsletter

Winter 2020

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“Cycling” Into the Future...

People are fond of citing an ancient Greek philosopher who asserted that change is the only constant in the world. As I look back over the past decade at Vesterheim, I see cycles of events and programming that repeat successfully with a similar format each year, along with many instances where new approaches are tried and eventually adopted as part of routine. Vesterheim continually moves forward managing the tension between stability and change for the benefit of the visiting public.

Our programs for area third- and fourth-grade youth are longstanding features of the annual cycle. It is gratifying to see the students engaged as they try out real tools and traditional processes during their visits to Vesterheim. Those of you who help with these programs see this firsthand!

Just over a month ago, we held our most complex annual event, Norwegian Christmas. This event highlights traditions of the Christmas season, in that way reassuringly traditional. Yet, there are features that change each year so it remains fresh and lively. We welcomed over 500 visitors on December 7 under ideal weather conditions. Hearty thanks to all of the more than 200 volunteers (including the music groups) who contribute in numerous ways, making this event enjoyable for those visitors!

One recent addition to Vesterheim's Norwegian Christmas is serving “Scandinavian s'mores” outside the entrance of the museum with a *koselig* open fire. We have only offered this for a few years, but everyone now agrees it is a fun, delicious, and even essential part of the event programming. It looks like it is here to stay.

Many of you were present at the Volunteer Appreciation event in 2016 when Chris Johnson facilitated a brainstorming session on improvements for Vesterheim desirable by 2025. A number of the suggestions generated at that time are coming to fruition. Have you noticed the expansion of afterschool classes in recent years?

This year, there will be an unusual level of innovation with an extensive upgrade to the Heritage Park on Vesterheim's

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Kare Aas, Norway's Ambassador to the United States joined our Norwegian Christmas event this year and stopped to make a “Scandinavian s'more.”

Worth Noting

Second Saturdays:

Audience research has inspired Vesterheim to shift to Saturdays for monthly free admission in order to attract new visitors. Special programming will be planned for these dates every month in 2020. A gallery talk in the *Favorite Things* exhibit on Saturday, March 14, is one of these special events. See the back cover of this newsletter for details.

Northeast Iowa Volunteer Opportunities:

Check out this new facebook page and help get the word out about volunteering.
<https://www.facebook.com/NEIAVolunteer/>

Kjære frivillige,

As this new decade begins, I'm reflecting back on 17 years as Vesterheim's coordinator of volunteers. There is continuity in much of the museum's programming, as discussed in the lead article in this newsletter, as well as in the volunteer pool at Vesterheim.

We have a remarkably stable roster of volunteers. It seems that you tend to remain involved once you have made a connection with Vesterheim. The museum has depended heavily on volunteers for decades. Volunteers handle the majority of tours given each year, capably staff the youth programming for area third- and fourth-graders, and handle a wide variety of tasks in connection with our events—large and small. Staff plan and schedule the programming, but volunteers truly make things happen. We could not do what we do without you!

I'll never forget what we learned back in 2008 when we asked our volunteers about their volunteerism during the annual Volunteer Appreciation event. At that time, 20% of those surveyed said that they volunteered exclusively at Vesterheim. The other 80% listed 23 other organizations where they offered their time. I often wonder if our current pool of volunteers is similarly active. If volunteering is a significant part of your lifestyle, I'd love to hear what you are up to besides helping at Vesterheim.

During most of my career at Vesterheim, meeting periodically with my counterparts from other non-profits around the region has been beneficial. There are common concerns of volunteer recruitment, retention, training, and appreciation, whether an organization is a social service entity or a cultural, educational, or environmental resource. The Northeast Iowa Volunteer Coordinators (NEIVC, formerly the Oneota Valley Volunteer Coordinators) is a regional group, open to anyone who is the point person for coordinating volunteers within an organization. It is wonderful to have peer-to-peer support and to be able to collaborate on promoting volunteerism. In April 2019, the NEIVC put on a volunteer fair at the Hotel Winneshiek. Several of you are now volunteering at Vesterheim after attending that event.

The NEIVC group has just launched a new Facebook page called Northeast Iowa Volunteer Opportunities. It will serve as an online clearinghouse for information on volunteer needs in Northeast Iowa, as well as a venue for promoting volunteerism. Check out the *Worth Noting* column in this newsletter for a link and more information. The group has also assigned its members some professional development reading. This winter the group is discussing the book, *The New Breed – Understanding and Equipping the 21st Century Volunteer* (McKee, 2012).

While many of Vesterheim's volunteers carry over from the twentieth century as I do, I have begun to see shifts in patterns of volunteering. There are now fewer families in which there is a stay-at-home parent with time available. Today's retirees are increasingly busy and mobile, making choices among many outlets for their time, whether it be grandchildren, travel, or a range of volunteer activities. We do not expect Vesterheim's need for volunteers to diminish going forward, so it is important that we adjust expectations and continue to emphasize the priceless benefits of volunteerism!

Beste hilsen, Martha Griesheimer



Young carvers from the afterschool whittling klubb demonstrate at Norwegian Christmas.

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campus. The old warehouse building is gone. This was one of the items noted by volunteers in 2016. We look ahead with great anticipation to the time when we can begin to use that area in the new and exciting ways that have been imagined for so long.

I plan to hold a Volunteer Appreciation event similar to the one four years ago at which we can unveil the schedule for this year's project. Watch your mailbox for an invitation.



Above: Help fourth-graders build log homes.



Above: Harriet Wangsness and Karen Teslow support handcraft presenters with hands-on activities—ironing quilt squares and using a drill and bit.

Help Wanted:

Pioneer Immersion Program Help:

Log homes, week of March 9 –

Volunteer supervisors are needed for building log homes.

Handcrafts, week of March 23 –

Handcraft assistants are needed.

Pioneer Chores, week of April 27 –

Fourth graders churn butter, saw wood, wash and wring clothes by hand, and stuff mattress ticks with straw. During this week, 24 volunteers are needed to supervise the hands-on experiences. Could you envision yourself helping with one of these activities?

Guide Training Notice:

The schedule of guide training sessions is available upon request from Martha. (Training includes the public programs on Feb. 12 and March 21. See the back cover of this newsletter for details.)

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!

Below: Marian Beiwel oversees making butter.





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Upcoming Vesterheim Events

"Gifts from Norway" - Laurann Gilbertson, Chief Curator

February 12 (snow date April 19) | 7 p.m. - Gathering Room, Amdal-Odland Heritage Center, 523 W. Water Street

Some of Vesterheim's most spectacular examples of folk art were sent as gifts in the 1920s and 1930s from Norwegian museums. "May these objects work so that the Norwegian-ness in you will not die too soon, and the connection with the homeland will because of this be tighter," they wrote. Learn about this generous gift of more than 400 artifacts in wood, wool, silver, and iron.

Favorite Things Gallery Talk

March 14 (Second Saturday of March) | 1:30 p.m. - Museum's Main Building, 3rd floor

Join Vesterheim's curatorial team to explore— How are Vesterheim's collections used in exhibitions? What is the planning process? How is *Favorite Things* different from the typical Vesterheim exhibit?

"All Tradition is Change" - Laurann Gilbertson, Chief Curator

March 21 (snow date March 28) | 2 p.m. - Gathering Room, Amdal-Odland Heritage Center, 523 W. Water Street

Explore and expand your ideas of what is "tradition" and "traditional," while looking at historical objects and pieces made today by artists working "within the Norwegian tradition." Examples are textiles from Norway and Norwegian America: weaving, quilting, embroidery, baptismal garments, and knitting.