

Volunteer Newsletter

Spring – 2021

Volunteer Sue Pederson helped visitors with Scandinavian s'mores at the Norwegian Christmas event in 2019. This was the last major event before the pandemic hit.



Staying Connected

Over the decades, this newsletter has been the one publication at Vesterheim specifically focused on staying in touch with everyone who offers their volunteer time on the museum's behalf. In a normal year, hundreds of you collectively offer thousands of hours of volunteer time toward a wide range of programs and activities for Vesterheim's many audiences. Although the past year has put everything on a long pause, we fully expect to resume these quality experiences for all visitors who, once again, will tour the museum, participate in school programs, and attend events. You remain an integral part of the Vesterheim community and we look forward to inviting you back to be part of those activities that are important to you!

The fall 2020 *Volunteer Newsletter* noted that Vesterheim is cultivating a strong online presence. Indeed, staff have been working hard behind the scenes to stay in touch with Vesterheim friends and supporters around the country and beyond in a variety of ways. Have you joined any of Vesterheim's fascinating monthly webinars or members-only events? Perhaps you've taken an online class through the Folk Art School or signed up for one of the dozens

Stay in touch, COVID-19 update:

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of Collection Connections presentations that have been offered? If so, you know you're in good company. Through these online programs, widely expanding audiences and growing numbers of people are becoming interested in Vesterheim.

Whether or not you've participated in any of these online programs, a good way to see what has been happening in recent months is to look up the museum's YouTube channel and explore the recordings posted there at youtube.com/VesterheimMuseum.

Like me, you may be surprised to learn that YouTube is an important and growing medium for reaching new audiences. Anyone who is interested in Vesterheim can subscribe to the Vesterheim channel to ensure notification when new content is posted, which is happening regularly. At this writing, Vesterheim has 846 subscribers. It is free and uncomplicated to subscribe and doing so helps Vesterheim. Once the Vesterheim YouTube channel reaches the thousand-subscriber threshold, we can begin to stream events and activities live from anywhere on YouTube. It would be a breakthrough!

Over the pandemic year, staying in touch with Vesterheim's tour guides has been a priority. Guide training is underway in a mostly online format, which everyone seems to be much more comfortable with now. A highlight of 2020 was giving tours of the improvements in Heritage Park to tour guides and trainees early in December. We saw firsthand the substantial changes that were made last year, including accessible pathways throughout the area, a beautiful variety of trees, environmentally responsible landscaping, and sustainable storm runoff management. A schedule for Spring Guide Training was mailed to all guides and trainees in early March. Anyone interested in this unique and rewarding volunteer opportunity is welcome to request information and join us!

All of the work that has taken place over this extraordinary period of disruption caused by the pandemic ensures that Vesterheim will emerge transformed.

Area third-graders collaborated on making rope in September 2019 with the help of volunteer Dale Nimrod.

Kjære frivillige,

Vesterheim has certainly felt different this winter. When choosing the best adjective for this sentence, I considered using the word "empty." Of course, Vesterheim is far from empty even when no one is around. Likewise, a lot of work has been going on behind the locked doors of the museum since the pandemic hit, as discussed in the lead article of this newsletter.

Under typical circumstances, volunteers are essential to much of the regular programming for the visiting public. We miss you! It has been over a year without our usual routine of school visits, tours, and events, and we still have no certainty as to how 2021 will continue to unfold. We are slowly beginning to resume in-person activities, and we can hardly wait to be back to "normal."

Beste hilsen, Martha Griesheimer



Third-graders took a close look at the results of threshing grain with a flail. Volunteer Sally Stromseth guided the learning.





Book Review Martha Griesheimer

Does the name Waldemar Ager ring a bell? In the press gallery in the basement of the museum's Main Building, there is a large jar of pencil stubs that catches the eye of many visitors. It belonged to Waldemar Ager who emigrated from Frederikstad, Østfold, Norway, in 1885 and had a long career in the newspaper business. He also published a number of literary works and was a popular speaker with Norwegian-American audiences in the first decades of the 20th century.

Ager's novel *On the Way to the Melting Pot* was written in Norwegian in 1917, and was only relatively recently translated into English in 1995. The book is out of print, but is a valuable part of the core list of titles that are recommended reading for Vesterheim's tour guides. It touches on some of the complexities of the immigrant experience.

Considering the title of this novel, it is not surprising to learn that Waldemar Ager had an axe to grind. Like many others of his generation of Norwegian-Americans, he was concerned about the extent to which his fellow immigrants had adapted to the American way of life.

The characters in *On the Way to the Melting Pot* are exaggerated stereotypes. Elements of acculturation appear through the various characters as they go about their lives in an urban setting. Some take American names and engage in a frantic effort to achieve upward mobility. A universal reality is depicted as individual family

members serve as the interpreter for others who do not yet understand English. Class differences that kept people "in their place" in Norway are not easily shaken off.

The tension between embracing or rejecting *Norskdø*, or "Norwegian-ness," runs throughout the story. Various instances of inter-marriage with Americans are given. One fellow marries a woman who is proud to learn a bit of Norwegian. Another is chosen by the daughter of a local businessman who is himself trying to "move up" and who hoped for a better match for his daughter – the newlyweds leave town to get away from it all. Still others marry Americans as a way of becoming successful and moving away from old ways more quickly.

Ager laments the loss of ethnic identity. As the church introduces English services and people pursue a materialistic measure of success, his disapproval comes through. He admires the value of hard work in Norwegian society and many of his characters exemplify this. When ethics and culture are abandoned in the pursuit of wealth and status, Ager portrays these characters less favorably. In case there is any doubt of the deliberation involved in becoming a responsible Norwegian-American, one of Ager's characters ends up in an asylum, unable to reconcile her identity as an immigrant.

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Worth Noting

Nordic Fest:

Planning for Nordic Fest 2021 is underway. Everyone is eager for everything to get “back to normal,” but we are not quite there yet. Expect some familiar features and be prepared to enjoy innovations and adaptations throughout the entire festival, including at Vesterheim! Stay up to date by checking vesterheim.org and nordicfest.com.

Vesterheim is open!

Vesterheim reopened in mid-March and visitors are again enjoying the museum’s exhibitions, including a few special ones – *Water* (closing June 13) and *New Nordic Cuisine* (closing September 6). We’re adding to our hours on June 1 and will be open daily from 10:00 a.m.–4:00 p.m. *An Artist’s Journey: Carl Homstad, 50 Years* opens on June 5 and *Socially Distanced, Creatively Connected* opens on July 2. Come and find out what’s new – we’d love to see you!

Interested in becoming a guide?

As noted in the lead article, guide training is ongoing despite pandemic restrictions. Sessions are announced bimonthly. Contact Martha to learn more about this important and rewarding volunteer opportunity.



A young visitor at Nordic Fest 2019 tried their hand at carving under the supervision of Jim Langhus. We expect folk-art demonstrations will be back this year, but with the social distancing protocols that we are all accustomed to now.