

Volunteer Newsletter

February 2023

Vesterheim guides for the Viking Mississippi shore excursion tours were fantastic on the first Viking visit!



Stay in touch:

Chivonne Marlow
Visitor Services Manager

Phone – Vesterheim:
563-382-9681, ext. 305

Phone – Direct Line:
563-387-6995

E-mail:
cmarlow@vesterheim.org

Website:
vesterheim.org

Write:
523 W. Water Street
Decorah, IA 52101-0379

Viking Comes to Vesterheim

The relationship between Viking Cruises and Vesterheim goes back many years. They are committed supporters of the museum and make significant financial contributions in various ways, including donations to Vesterheim Benefit Auction.

Viking debuted its Mississippi River tours in 2022, which includes a visit to Vesterheim as an optional excursion from La Crosse, Wisconsin. It speaks well of Vesterheim that Viking included the museum and that their guests were excited to travel to Decorah.

Last spring, the guides started training heavily in preparation for the Viking guests. Unfortunately, delays beyond Viking's control, such as late delivery of the ship, complications with timing in the docks, and low water levels on the Mississippi River, led to the cancellation of all but one excursion to Vesterheim.

This visit was September 19, and the guests had a wonderful time. Many had not been to this part of the country before and expressed surprise at the hills and bluffs. Nearly all the guides and staff heard some version of "I thought Iowa was flat!" It felt good to accomplish this first visit and test out our script and schedule!

Greetings, Vesterheim Friends!

From Chivonne Marlow
Vesterheim Visitor Services Manager

It has been a long time since we have had a *Vesterheim Volunteer Newsletter*, and I am ready to start fresh in 2023.

My first year as Visitor Services Manager was exciting and sometimes challenging, but the support of the staff and volunteers made it a wonderful journey. I deeply appreciate the kindness and grace that has been given as I navigate this new position. Now that I have been through all the major events once, I feel as though I have a better idea of how to plan for the future.

Preparing for 2023

The new Vesterheim Commons building and the updates to Heritage Park mean that we will be finding new ways to use our spaces, while continuing to honor cherished traditions that make the museum a special place for so many people.

In 2022, Vesterheim staff began to work with Kera Collective, an agency specializing in helping organizations understand and enhance their impact on their audiences. This collaboration is funded through a grant from Margaret A. Cargill Philanthropies. The process has been guiding the staff and board as we develop a unified vision and become more intentional in what we do. We look forward to welcoming guests throughout 2023!

New Office Location

I am pleased to announce that in spring of 2023, my office will move to the lower level of the Dayton House building on the east side of the museum. Rolf Svanoë, who was a long-time volunteer and is now the Coordinator of Tours to Norway at Vesterheim, will share this downstairs space with me. The new office enables me to be more accessible to both volunteers and visitors. Once the move is completed, I will have room to expand the volunteer library, and my plan is to create a comfortable place for conversation and event planning.

Updating Volunteer Records and Seeking Volunteers

I want to make sure I am contacting the right people for events at Vesterheim. Please complete and return the volunteer questionnaire (through mail, drop off, or email) so I know how you want to be involved. If you prefer to do this through a conversation, I am happy to schedule a face-to-face meeting or a phone call.

We are also seeking new volunteers and would be grateful for your help. Please encourage friends and relatives to contact me. Please remind them that they do not need to be retired to volunteer. Some employers, including Luther College, will even grant a few work hours to employees when they give time in the community. Youth and young adults are welcome. If you know someone who is building skills, please tell them that volunteering is a great way to gain or diversify their experience.

Guiding at Vesterheim – Not Only for Norwegians

You might be surprised at how much fun you can have as a Vesterheim guide. You don't have to be a historian and guiding is a wonderful way to learn about Vesterheim! More than anything, visitors appreciate a friendly smile and a willingness to share the story of Norwegian immigrants.

Beginning guide training for the Main Building will take place on three days – Feb. 15, 2:00-3:00 p.m.; Feb 17, 2:00-4:00 p.m.; and Feb. 27, 10:00 a.m.-12:00 p.m. Please RSVP. If you are unable to attend, please contact me and I will arrange additional times. We have scripts and practice sessions that will help you gain confidence, and you will shadow other guides for experience.

We will begin Heritage Park guide training in the spring. Look for that opportunity beginning in April, but materials are available anytime if you would like them in advance.

You only guide when it works for your schedule, and you are always in control of how often you guide. We have an online system that many guides use to sign up for dates in the Heritage Park, but some simply call to be placed on the schedule. For group tours, I look at the interests of the group and ask guides who fit those interests accordingly.

What Vesterheim Volunteers Say!

Vesterheim volunteers serve the museum in so many different roles, and they come for so many different reasons. We are grateful for their talents and gift of time! Here is what some of them have to say about volunteering at Vesterheim. Thank you, to all of our volunteers!

From Meg Storkamp: I volunteer because I enjoy telling visitors the interesting story of Norwegian immigration to this area and relating it to the universal immigration story. (Even though I am not Norwegian). It's fun to meet people, find out where they are from, and what brings them to Decorah and Vesterheim. I like to promote Decorah and the Driftless Region, as well. Vesterheim is a wonderful asset to our community, and I enjoy being a part of it (in my small way).

From Pat Downs: I love meeting new people and being an ambassador for Decorah.

From Lee Grippen: I have been a volunteer since 1968 when I worked Nordic Fest in the Armory and then in later years worked as a host in the old Vesterheim entrance before the remodeling. I enjoyed working with the third and fourth graders during the fall and spring. We were *julebukkers* many Christmas seasons and enjoyed that frivolity. I have worked many shifts at the museum and at Bethania Church during the festivals. It is so gratifying to see the numbers of folks from all over the country and world. One of the first times I visited Vesterheim was with my fifth graders in 1968 and we enjoyed the tour with Dr. Marion Nelson. At that time, the third floor contained many Native American artifacts. I look forward to the new center opening and the chance to welcome visitors there, too.

From Becky Olafsen: Giving tours at Vesterheim is a welcome way for me to keep teaching. The visitors and I share information and stories and the whole group learns.

From David Amdahl: I enjoy history and there is a lot of that at Vesterheim! You meet such wonderful people from all over Iowa, the United States, and worldwide. While some tours may be better than others, I've never had a bad experience at Heritage Park or inside the Main Building. And the schedule is flexible.

From Uwe Rudolf: Vesterheim Museum is one of Decorah's community gems that make this such an attractive town, not only for visitors but also its inhabitants. Although a native of Germany, I was given a very Nordic name (Uwe Jens) and coming to teach at Luther convinced me to eventually become a Lutheran and ultimately even (in my mind at least) a quasi-Norwegian.

My wife, Ruth Caldwell, and I were both language teachers at Luther College for over 40 years. We directed the Scandinavian Institute for five years and made so many friendships with Norwegian teachers as well as others from Sweden, Finland, Denmark, and Iceland. In 2010, I led a semester program for Luther College students in Lillehammer. Singing with the Luren Singing Society (including touring Norway) has further solidified my interest in Norway and Norwegian culture. To date, I have enjoyed three classes taught by three different artists at the museum's Folk Art School. It is so important to support this unique institution, not only financially but also working as a volunteer guide, helping to showcase so many beautiful and fascinating facets of this gem.

Volunteer Perk!

Lingonberry Juice Available to Volunteers:

There are about 30 bottles of lingonberry juice concentrate available to volunteers. They were not properly marked for sale in the Museum Store, and we would prefer to have someone use them rather than discarding them. Please let Chivonne know if you would like to pick up a bottle or two. Unfortunately, we cannot send them out.



Norwegian-American Museum
P. O. Box 379
Decorah, IA 52101

Address Service Requested

Nonprofit Org.
U.S. POSTAGE
PAID
Decorah, Iowa
Permit No. 192

Vesterheim Membership

One of the best ways to support Vesterheim is by becoming a member or giving a gift membership to your friends and family!

February is Member Appreciation Month at the Museum Store and all members receive 20% off.

Three ways to order a membership:

- Online at vesterheim.org/join-give/membership
- Call the Membership Office at 563-382-9681
- Download a membership form from vesterheim.org and mail to Membership Office, P.O. Box 168, Decorah, IA 52101

Members receive free admission to the museum, Vesterheim magazine, discounts in the Museum Store and Folk Art School, and much more!

