Vesterheim Invites Everyone to Commons Dedication and Ribbon Cutting

Decorah, Iowa – Vesterheim, the National Norwegian-American Museum and Folk Art School, extends an invitation to everyone to the opening dedication and ribbon cutting ceremony for Vesterheim Commons on Saturday, September 30, 2023.

The event is open to the public and will be at 1:30 p.m. on Water Street in front of the Commons building. Entertainment, demonstrators, and refreshments will follow from 2:00-4:00 p.m., including Decorah's Nordic Dancers and Luren Singing Society. Notable guests from the Norwegian-American community and the project designers will be present.

The museum will be open with free admission from 9:00 a.m.-5:00 p.m. The historic buildings in Heritage Park will be open from 2:00-4:00 p.m.

With 7,600 square feet spread across three levels and almost an acre of surrounding landscaped patio, the new Vesterheim Commons building physically links the past and the future, connects the museum collection to the Folk Art School, and enriches the Vesterheim visitor experience for those coming to Decorah or participating digitally through a new video and photography production studio.

This project is part of a comprehensive, long-range planning process with Snøhetta, the renowned international architecture and landscape architecture firm, and is supported with work of the architect of record, consultants, and construction management including BNIM; Meyer, Borgman, Johnson (MBJ); Morrissey; and McGough Construction.

More information about the project is listed below and available at the following links.

Vesterheim Commons

The design for Vesterheim Commons was driven by programming that inspires community engagement and experiences, and it emphasizes the building as a cultural gathering place.

The stunning and honest architecture and natural materials honor the beauty of Decorah’s natural surroundings and have been created with a focus on sustainability.
The building benefits include:

- An entrance space for visitors to plan their Vesterheim experience or meet after a tour or class.
- A multi-use space on the ground floor that seats 100 people for lectures, meetings, concerts, receptions, and classes and can be set up for luncheons and other meal service.
- A commercial catering kitchen.
- An intimate gallery space for special exhibits on the second floor.
- An indoor / outdoor experience on the second floor with a terrace flowing to a north patio that connects to Heritage Park.
- An artifact collection study room that allows focus and study of Vesterheim’s astounding collection by individuals and special group tours.
- A direct indoor connection to the Westby-Torgerson Education Center and Vesterheim’s Folk Art School and Museum Store.
- A digital production studio that expands Vesterheim’s connection to its global community.
- A north patio with outdoor event reception/seating options surrounded by a landscaped area to connect to Vesterheim’s other buildings and outdoor spaces.

Some special building features include:

- A sustainable building using mass timber frame construction.
- Exterior walls made of regionally sourced brick from Adel, Iowa, with color and shading variation.
- An interior limestone and brick wall from the original east wall of the previous building to maintain some of that character and history.
- A stunning view between the ground floor and second floor through an oval oculus opening.
- A view north to the beautiful Heritage Park and beyond, including the limestone bluffs that ascend from the Upper Iowa River, showcasing the astounding Driftless Region.

Plans to grow Vesterheim have required the creativity of many partners – museum staff, designers, contractors, fabricators, fundraisers, and trustees, as well as many donors who have contributed to the Strong Roots | Bold Future, The Campaign to Grow Vesterheim that has supported the Commons project. All donors will be recognized on a special donor wall in the building.

For more than 30 years, Snøhetta has designed some of the world’s most notable public and cultural projects. Snøhetta kick-started its career in 1989 with the competition-winning entry for the new library of Alexandria, Egypt. This was later followed by the commission for the Norwegian National Opera and Ballet in Oslo, and the National September 11 Memorial Museum Pavilion at the World Trade Center in New York City, among many others.

Since its inception, Snøhetta has maintained its original transdisciplinary approach, and integrates architectural, landscape, interior, product, graphic, digital design and art across its projects. The practice has a global presence, with offices spanning from Oslo, Paris, and Innsbruck, to New York, Hong Kong, Adelaide, and San Francisco.
Find out more about the project at these links:
strongrootsboldfuture.org
strongrootsboldfuture.org/blog
vesterheim.org/announcing-the-vesterheim-commons-project

Vesterheim, the National Norwegian-American Museum and Folk Art School, welcomes people of all ages and backgrounds to engage in the conversation of the American immigrant journey through the lens of the Norwegian-American experience. Vesterheim offers innovative and interactive exhibits, classes, and programs, both at the dynamic campus and park in scenic Decorah, Iowa, and online at vesterheim.org and Vesterheim social media. For more information on exhibits, classes, programs, tours, membership opportunities, and ways to donate and volunteer, connect at vesterheim.org, (563) 382-9681, and Vesterheim, 502 W. Water St., P.O. Box 379, Decorah, IA, 52101-0379.

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