



Becky Idstrom, Director of Communications and Marketing  
bidstrom@vesterheim.org • 563-382-9681  
More Info: [vesterheim.org/media-kit](https://vesterheim.org/media-kit)  
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## Vesterheim Opens New Commons Building with Week of Celebration

DECORAH, Iowa — Join Vesterheim, the National Norwegian-American Museum and Folk Art School, to celebrate the opening of the new Commons building with numerous activities from Sept 23-October 1, both onsite and online!

There will be free museum admission the entire week from September 23-October 1.

On Saturday, September 23, Norway's Minister of Foreign Affairs Anniken Huitfeldt will visit Decorah in celebration of Vesterheim Commons and the rich legacy of Norwegian emigrants who came to America. She will give a public presentation and Q&A about Norway's foreign policy objectives at 11:30 a.m. in the Noble Recital Hall in the Jensen-Noble Hall of Music on the Luther College Campus.

The Minister of Foreign Affairs is responsible for Norwegian foreign policy, the promotion of Norway's interests internationally, and the foreign service, which includes 78 embassies, 9 permanent missions and delegations, and 8 consulates general. Vesterheim is honored to welcome this distinguished guest for her first visit to the museum and continue this strong relationship with Norway.

The week continues with two free online events. On September 24 at 2:00 p.m. photographer Randall Hyman will give a Gallery Talk for the exhibit "Sámi Dreams: Portraits of Resilience in the Norwegian Arctic," on view now at Vesterheim. Then on September 27 at 7:00 p.m., Dan York, a lifetime paddler and traveler, will present "Kayaking the Lofoten Islands: Norway's Craggy Crown Jewels." Both events are free. Register at [vesterheim.org](https://vesterheim.org) to receive Zoom links. Celebrate Vesterheim Commons by connecting from anywhere in the world!

The week of celebration culminates in a public dedication for the Commons on September 30 at 1:30 p.m. on Water Street in front of the Commons building. There will be a ribbon cutting and welcome presentations from the Norwegian architect firm Snøhetta and Vesterheim staff and trustees. Activities will follow throughout the campus from 2:00-4:00 p.m. with refreshments, tours, and entertainment including Decorah's Nordic Dancers, Eden Ehm on Hardanger fiddle, and Luren Singers.

For those in Decorah through the weekend, on Sunday, October 1, meet silver experts from the Sylvsmidja company in Voss, Norway, at Vesterheim! Co-owner of Sylvsmidja Anne-Kari Salbu, Chairman of the Sylvsmidja Board Heidi Hjellestad, and Sylvsmidja designer Svanhild Strom will be available in the

Commons from 2:30-3:30 p.m. to give a presentation about their new Sagastad collection and talk with visitors about Sylvsmidja jewelry. Sylvsmidja is Norway's largest producer of silver pieces. They have been crafting exquisite jewelry and accessories since 1940.

Also, Vesterheim is pleased to open on September 23 the exhibit, "A New York Minute: City Scenes by Bernhard Berntsen," in the new gallery space on the second floor of Vesterheim Commons. Berntsen was a construction worker, sculptor, and fine art painter who was born in Oslo in 1900 and immigrated to the United States in 1919. There are more than 150 oil paintings, crayon drawings, and sculptures by Bernhard Berntsen in the Vesterheim collection. For this first solo show of his work at Vesterheim, the focus will be on his sketches on newspaper and unique views of the growing metropolis of New York City.

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. Find more about the Commons building and the Strong Roots Bold Future, Campaign to Grow Vesterheim at [strongrootsboldfuture.org](http://strongrootsboldfuture.org).

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](http://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](http://vesterheim.org), (563) 382-9681, and Vesterheim, 502 W. Water St., P.O. Box 379, Decorah, IA, 52101-0379.