

Volunteer Newsletter

February 2024

Vesterheim guides introduce staff from La Crosse County Historical Society to Vesterheim!



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Guide Exchange with La Crosse County Historical Society

After an exceptionally busy tour season, Vesterheim guides were invited to take part in an exchange with the La Crosse County Historical Society. On October 26, 2023, we loaded onto a bus and traveled across the Mississippi to La Crosse, Wisconsin. We toured Hixon House, home of lumber baron Gideon Hixon from the 1850s and visited the La Crosse Area Heritage Center. In both places, we were given behind-the-scenes access, looking into archives and non-public spaces. We were treated to lunch and conversation with their guides before returning to Vesterheim.

The following Friday, the La Crosse County Historical Society guides visited Vesterheim. In addition to touring the museum, Vesterheim curators showed them artifact storage, the Viking Cruise Line's Privileged Access Exhibit, and the Collections Access Space. We shared a Norwegian tradition of hotdogs (complete with Idun Norwegian Hot Dog Dressing), along with *boller* and *rømmegrøt*. Then we had a large-group discussion on best practices for guides.

The exchanges were educational and lots of fun. We hope to expand upon them in the future.

Vesterheim Welcomes Volunteers

Ready to Try Something New? Think About Guiding!

Some guides love to be inside the museum building, some love to walk through the buildings in the Heritage Park, and some love it all! Vesterheim is always happy to have more volunteer guides. You can choose your location and be in charge of your own schedule.

For volunteers interested in guiding, please come to as many training sessions as you like. You will gain important knowledge each time. Training will also include opportunities to shadow seasoned guides as they lead groups touring Vesterheim, and one-on-one practice with staff. Don't worry, we won't send you out on your own until you are ready.

Even if you don't want to guide, a couple of days of training is a great idea for anyone who wants to volunteer. You will learn what makes Vesterheim special, including core exhibits, stories of Norwegians immigrating to Decorah, and the connection between Vesterheim and Luther College.

Upcoming Guide Training Options

To sign up for guide training dates, please contact Chivonne Marlow, Visitor Services Manager and Volunteer Coordinator at cmarlow@vesterheim.org or 563-387-6995.

Museum Building:

Thursday, February 29, 1-3 pm

Wednesday, March 6, 10 am-12 pm

Monday, March 18, 2-4 pm

Tuesday, March 26, 11 am-1 pm

Heritage Park (weather permitting,
otherwise indoors):

Thursday, April 4, 2-4 pm

Monday, April 8, 10 am-12 pm

Tuesday, April 16, 1-3 pm

Wednesday, April 24, 9-11 am

Other Volunteer Opportunities

If formal guiding does not appeal to you, Vesterheim has other volunteer opportunities that you might enjoy. Please consider the following:

- Assist with children's groups by helping with demonstrations, such as shelling corn or pressing apples.
- Learn about one or two buildings in Heritage Park and host there during events.
- Help with crafts during events or prepare materials beforehand (cutting pieces for heart baskets, winding yarn, sorting) .
- Perform administrative tasks onsite or at home, depending on the job. In some cases, computer skills are helpful.

Three Cheers for Youth

Hurrah, hurrah, hurrah! In 2023, students from second grade into high school provided 88 hours of volunteer time. The younger volunteers greeted guests and provided water and snacks to demonstrators during Nordic Fest. They scared off harmful spirits as *julebukker* and played pranks as junior *nisser* during Norwegian Christmas. Older students hosted in Heritage Park buildings during Nordic Fest, led crafts during Norwegian Christmas, helped with children's group visits in the summer months, assisted with administrative tasks, and were back-of-group guides during Viking visits.

Volunteering can help youth build skills, like communication, problem-solving, and making connections. Most of all, it's a fun way to do something positive in the community. For high school students, it's also a great opportunity to earn hours toward a Silver Cord honor during graduation.

If you know of youth of any age who would like to volunteer at Vesterheim, please have their parent or guardian contact Chivonne Marlow at cmarlow@vesterheim.org or 563-387-6995.

Thank A Guide!

While all volunteers are vital to Vesterheim's operation, in 2023 the guides repeatedly answered the call to help, and they deserve some extra recognition. They supported daily Heritage Park tours from May 1 – October 31. They also guided group and school visits and made the Viking Voyage visits run like clockwork. Guides share the stories behind the artifacts and bring unique skills to enhance the visitors' experience. Each guide adds special touches to the narrative, giving every tour a completely different flavor.

If you see any of these folks, please give them a hand for being the heroes of Vesterheim in 2023.

David Amdahl	Sunny Nimrod
Barbara Amundson	Becky Olafsen
Barbara Davidson	Kris Peterson
Pat Downs	Sharon Rossman
Darlene Fossum-Martin	Rose Schutte
Martha Griesheimer	Dave Skallerud
Karen Nance	Marv Slind
Dale Nimrod	Meg Storkamp

Viking News

Thanks to gracious volunteers and community partners, Vesterheim hosted over a thousand guests from Viking Mississippi River Voyages between July and October 2023. The visits were an optional shore excursion from the boat docked in La Crosse, Wisconsin. Despite record-setting low water levels, only one of the 12 planned visits was canceled.

Depending on whether the ship was going up the river or down, two to three buses came per visit. Each bus was hosted by a representative from the Decorah Chamber of Commerce, who gave a historical narrative of the area, managed the lunch orders, and divided the groups for tours. Upon arrival, each group had a lead guide and a back-of-group guide who ensured that they stayed on schedule and that their needs were accommodated. Also, the guides minimized the times that groups ran into each other. Since there were sometimes 140 guests on site at once, this was no small feat.

Following lunch at T-Bock's Sports Bar and Grill, they roamed Decorah or returned to Vesterheim for the afternoon. One hundred and fifty-five guests elected to take a folk art class in *kroting* or crafting

Volunteering at Vesterheim by the Numbers

- Approximately 150 volunteers served 1,765 volunteer hours in 2023. They performed a wide variety of tasks, including guiding, assisting with events, folk art demonstrations, Viking Voyage visits, hosting in Heritage Park buildings, writing for *Vesterheim* magazine, and making crafts. These numbers include 244 hours of professional development like the appreciation event with Miranda Moen, Viking guide training, tour guide training, and the guide exchange with volunteers from the La Crosse County Historical Society.
- Volunteers gave 53 group tours in 2023, not counting the third-grade program and other educational groups hosted by Vesterheim staff Jennifer Kovarik.
- Approximately 130 daily Heritage Park tours were given by volunteers, and that does not include Viking dates, events, and holidays. From May through October, nearly 1,700 Vesterheim guests participated in the daily tours.

sølje earrings, while others visited Heritage Park or the museum building. During this free time, volunteer hosts shared stories about Heritage Park or engaged guests in the museum building.

About a dozen volunteers per visit were needed to make Viking days run smoothly. Collectively, they dedicated over 350 hours over the season.

Although Vesterheim itself is the excursion site, welcoming Viking guests to Decorah has a significant regional impact. As Jessica Rilling, Executive Director of the Decorah Area Chamber of Commerce, said, "... the value of the marketing from just being listed in the Viking materials is extraordinary and would exceed what any local entity could buy for ad exposure by many, many times." She extends her thanks to Vesterheim for its "work to introduce the community of Decorah to an international audience."

Many guests said that they'd never been to this area before but hoped to return for a longer visit. They were impressed by Vesterheim's collection and the beautiful Decorah community, but most important, by the kindness they were shown here.

Tusen takk to all who made these visits a resounding success. We look forward to hosting Viking guests again in 2024.



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

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Volunteer Appreciation Event!

Join us in Vesterheim Commons on
April 19, 2024, from 2:00-4:00 pm
for a reception in your honor!

There will be cake, ice cream,
coffee, and tea!

RSVP by April 15, 2024,
by contacting Chivonne Marlow
at cmarlow@vesterheim.org
or 563-382-9681.



We look forward to celebrating you!