

Vesterheim

The National Norwegian-American
Museum & Heritage Center

Volunteer Newsletter

Spring 2016

Look inside for...

- Help Wanted
- *Kjære Frivillige*
- Worth Noting

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Volunteers Look to the Future with Chris Johnson!

What a turnout, and what a discussion! About 60 volunteers attended the annual volunteer appreciation event on February 18. The purpose of this event was to look back over the past year in appreciation of the contribution that volunteers make toward Vesterheim's events, operations, and programming. It was a wonderful opportunity to acknowledge the important role you play at Vesterheim.

The volunteers who attended were honored with a special opportunity to add their voices to the discussion of

strategic plans for the museum going forward.

Chris Johnson, President and C.E.O. of Vesterheim, led a conversation about Vesterheim's future looking ahead to the year 2025. This will mark the bicentennial anniversary of the famous 1825 voyage of the sloop *Restauration*, sometimes referred to as the "Norwegian Mayflower." Chris emphasized that this date will be an important target because it provides a longer view that is still near enough to aspire to.

Vesterheim's staff and trustees have been discussing refinements to the institutional vision, goals, and values for several months. In his presentation, Chris shared some of the results of these conversations, and received valuable feedback from the volunteer audience. "I felt it was important to listen to the volunteers early-on in this strategic planning process because Vesterheim's volunteers bring a unique front-line perspective. They are often the first people that a visitor meets here at the museum," Chris said.

During the presentation, an impressive range of ideas were suggested for possible improvements to Vesterheim by 2025. It was reassuring that many of the ideas were along the same lines as those expressed



Chris Johnson presents *Looking to 2025: A Conversation with Vesterheim's Volunteers* to a full house at Vesterheim's Bethania Church on February 18, 2016.

Continued on page 3.

Help Wanted:

• **Bloggers** - Do you want to help spread the word about Vesterheim? Do you like to write or take pictures or videos? Iowa has two blogs, *Imagine Northeast Iowa* and *Travel Iowa*, and we are encouraging you to send in your stories about Vesterheim and Decorah and your experiences at the museum and in the area. Both blogs are easy to work with. If you are interested but unsure how to get started, don't hesitate to contact Becky Idstrom at bidstrom@vesterheim.org.

• **Mailing volunteers** - Although Vesterheim has fewer in-house mailings than decades ago, the more volunteers we have on the mail crew list, the better. Smaller mailings can be finished quickly with good crews working together. Volunteers tend to be busy people, and it's best to have enough names on the list of prospects that we can get the perfect mail crew together on any day there's a mailing. Let Martha know if interested.



• **Hospitality volunteers** - We are currently seeking volunteers interested in helping with class refreshments and various receptions. Limited openings are available. Please contact Martha for more information.

• **Tour guides** - Spring guide training will take place primarily during the week of April 18, and will include a book discussion. We will be discussing Solveig Torvik's novel, *Nikolai's Fortune* (2005). Three copies are available in the volunteer library at Martha's office. The final guide training schedule will be available by the end of March by request from Martha. Anyone is welcome to take part in guide training. There is no obligation to become a guide, though you may be inspired! It's a great learning experience.

Kjære frivillige,

Everyone wants to find ways to have a healthier, happier life. On February 23, we welcomed adult visitors to enjoy an evening of coloring inspired by the exhibition, *From Tradition to Protest: Lila Nelson's Weaving Life*. It was fun to see quite a few volunteers in attendance. The media is increasingly filled with articles touting the benefits of volunteering and coloring. Isn't it great that both of these options are available at Vesterheim?

Late last year, I saw an article online [www.huffingtonpost.com/entry/happify-volunteering-benefits] advising that to get a health boost from volunteering, a "threshold" of 40-100 hours per year with two or more organizations must be reached. It is interesting to look at the patterns of volunteer activity at Vesterheim in light of this information. The vast majority of volunteers at Vesterheim do one task, once a year. Only two dozen of the more than 300 active volunteers report for more than 20 hours in a year!

I know better than to be worried about Vesterheim's volunteers reaching the optimal threshold, however. At a volunteer appreciation event back in 2008, we surveyed attendees about their volunteering habits, not only at Vesterheim but also in the wider community. The results showed that those volunteers were very active. Twenty-two other volunteer outlets were mentioned and more than half of the responding volunteers said they volunteered more than 10 hours per month. By the standards in the article quoted above, these volunteers had to be benefitting from their volunteering. It is not surprising that so many of you continue to be involved at Vesterheim!

Each of you knows best why you volunteer, and I hope you feel that your preferences are heard and honored at Vesterheim. I recently read an opinion piece from within the volunteer management profession stating that "all anyone needs to know about volunteer motivation can be summed up in five points." These are:

1. Every person's motivational mix is different.
2. Every person's motivation mix changes.
3. Every person has a differing mix of altruistic and egoistic reasons for volunteering.
4. Nobody wants to have their time wasted, no matter how little or how much they give.
5. Everybody who volunteers wants to make a difference.

These ideas resonated strongly with me. Matching volunteers with tasks that benefit them as much as Vesterheim is always my goal. We are not just looking for "warm bodies." Highly motivated volunteers matched with appropriate tasks at Vesterheim is a formula that makes the organization as effective as it possibly can be in unmeasurable ways.

We can count hours and the number of volunteers. It is much harder, if not impossible, to measure effect, impressions, enjoyment, and learning. As we interact around the museum at events as well as on typical days, I am regularly astounded at the dedication shown by Vesterheim's volunteers. There's no simple explanation for it. We're grateful.

Continued from the front page.

by the other groups. The informational powerpoint slides that were shown as well as the list of ideas generated are available upon request from Martha.

Coordinator of volunteers Martha Griesheimer also provided an overview of volunteer activity in 2015. Speaking about the main events and programs of the year, the contribution of many volunteer hours were summarized with a few pictures of volunteers in action. The slide show illustrated how it takes large numbers of volunteer hours to put on major events such as Nordic Fest and Deck the Tables. Programs for schoolchildren, tours for museum visitors, gallery opening receptions and quite a few behind-the-scenes tasks were also discussed, as they are heavily dependent on volunteers.

The majority of the turnout was local-area volunteers, as well as a handful from around the region. There are many of you for whom it is too far to travel except on the occasions when you volunteer. Know that you were remembered at this event, and we'll look forward to seeing you at the museum soon!



Becky Olafsen (above), retired teacher, reads Jan Brett's *Who's That Knocking on Christmas Eve?* to young museum visitors at the Norwegian Christmas Celebration in 2015. It is a variant of the Norwegian folktale, *The Cat on the Dovrefjell* and the Norwegian house on the museum's first floor is the perfect place to read it!

Members of the Nisse Rosemalers (right) run the Rosemaling Ribbon Winner's Sales Area during Nordic Fest 2015. If you're curious about this group, ask Martha for a copy of the *Fall 2004 Vesterheim Volunteer* newsletter!

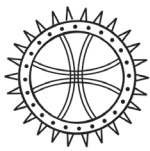


Worth Noting:

- Fifty years of folk art classes will be remembered this year in a special exhibition running September 3, 2016, through April 23, 2017. Celebrate a half century of the groundbreaking Vesterheim Folk Art School and the famous annual exhibition it inspired, and revel in the works of artists who have taught and were nurtured here.

- For many years, the official count of objects in Vesterheim's collections stood at 24,000. The curatorial department recently updated the number to 33,000. That's a lot to care for, and so much potential for interesting stories!

- Did you miss *Ung kvinne til sjøs: Young Woman at Sea*, at Syttende Mai last year? Come to a reprise of this wonderful story at 6:30 p.m. on Thursday, May 19, at the Bethania Church! Kari Gronningsæter and Nick Preus tell the tale of a voyage around the world in 1913-1914, based on the letters and journals of Gronningsæter's grandmother. The ship, a full rigger captained by Gronningsæter's great-grandfather, sailed to Australia loaded with timber and returned to Norway loaded with wheat. On the way home, in the Atlantic, they found out that WWI had started.



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Vesterheim Hospitality Committee May Need the Extras in Your Cupboard

The Vesterheim Hospitality Committee is an active group of volunteers who serve receptions, dinners, and other events throughout the year. Special attention is always given to developing a theme that reflects the subject of each event. The table setting and menu are planned accordingly. Not surprisingly, no matter the occasion, the table setting and menu reflect our Norwegian heritage.

The committee would like to build an inventory of serving pieces and table textiles that would represent the museum to use at these various events. Up until this time we have more or less been begging and borrowing items. We'd like more to choose from and would welcome the ready availability of such items.

We now have a storage space for items and hence the request for the following:

- Scandinavian and/or serving boards and trays
- Pedestal serving pieces made of different materials, including glass
- Uniquely shaped baskets
- Norwegian enamelware
- Scandinavian or theme-related table textiles such as solid colors, holidays, runners, and woven pieces
- Other unique items you may think we might use

We do ask that items be in very good condition. We plan to keep a record of the donation and if possible we would like a little history of the object: how old it is, was it a wedding gift, was it purchased in Norway, what have you liked to serve in/on it, etc.

If you have an item you'd like to donate, please contact Martha Griesheimer with a description of the item and possibly a photo. She will relay the information on to the committee and they will make contact with you.

Thank you in advance for searching your cupboards,
The Hospitality Committee