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From the Director's Desk:

"A Place Where All Things Are Possible"

Last year, as part of our work on an Otto Bremer Trust grant application, we asked 35 community members to respond to the question, "How is Backus making a difference in our community or in your life?" Thirty community members or "stakeholders" of all ages responded to our request. All responses spoke positively about the impact Backus is having on the community and its citizens. The comments were sincere, heartfelt, moving, eye-opening and impactful. Our board members and staff were overwhelmed by the community's feelings about Backus.

One of the comments that seemed to sum up the key part Backus plays in the life of International Falls came from **Mary Bartlett, a dedicated Border Concert Association volunteer**. Mary wrote:

The word "Backus" should be in the dictionary with a definition "a place where all things are possible". A community needs a heart and our Backus Community Center provides it in International Falls. As a small, remote area, we are in need of an entity that looks after the social and artistic needs of the citizens. At Backus, many of the activities that go on would not have a home without the spaces and services available there. The revitalization of the structure was also a revitalization of the core of the community. People were brought together and continue to be as this force we call "Backus" moves forward. I love to see the auditorium full of folks enjoying music, plays and other events. I love knowing that businesses, churches and other agencies are coming together there to support the needs of this town.

Callie Lowthian, age 14 wrote:

I can't imagine living here in International Falls without the Backus Community Center. When we moved here two years ago I had to give up gymnastics since it isn't offered in this area. If it weren't for the Borealis Bards and Ice Box Radio Theater, I'd just sit upstairs in my room with nothing to do. Plus all the concerts we attend there and the After School Arts program. I loved being in Prairie Fire Theater each summer. Seriously, do you know how different life would be if we didn't have the Backus?

Continued on Page 2

From the Director's Desk cont.

The word
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Christa Heibel, owner of Replenish Yoga & Wellness and a Backus tenant commented: Backus Community Center has been instrumental in my ability to create and build a yoga studio in International Falls. They have created the perfect space for me and been a true partner as the business has grown by supporting us in many ways. The ability to be in Backus with other health and wellness focused groups and organizations has been an extra blessing for Replenish Yoga & Wellness as we are able to partner for people's better well being all under the Backus roof. But in addition to health and wellness, the creation of Backus Community Center was critical in helping save the arts in our community. So much wellness, culture and arts under one roof! It is a safe and welcoming place for ALL of our community members!

Many of the testimonials provided by Backus stakeholders blend with Mary Bartlett's sentiments. "The word "Backus" should be in the dictionary with a definition – "a place where all things are possible."

When you think about that definition "a place where all things are possible," many of the programs, activities and services provided at Backus come to mind. What other location in the Falls provides so many diverse opportunities for so many people to enhance, improve and enjoy their lives? That steadfast group of Citizens for Backus/AB founders who succeeded in acquiring, saving and developing these buildings probably never imagined the variety of experiences that now happen in this building. From a focus on arts and culture Backus has evolved into a community center where indeed, "all things are possible."

Heibel, mentioned all the activity in the building and that it's a safe and welcoming place for all. In 2015 over 44,000 people passed through the doors of Backus.

Building users came for a variety of reasons and needs: food access (Summer Lunch Program, Community Café, Ruby's Pantry, Community Market, the arts (Darcie's Dance, Border Concerts, Backus Performing Arts Series, Borealis Bards – Alice in Wonderland, etc, Ice Box Radio Theater, Summer Arts Week, Afterschool Arts, Northland Art Society, The Dungeon – music/orchestra/band), wellness (Yoga, & exercise, walking), recreation (volleyball, open gym), youth programs (4-H, basketball, FHS Trap Club, ISD 361 Alternative Ed. students) counseling (Northland Counseling, Rainy River Recovery), services (Senior Outreach/Medicare, Servants of Shelter/homeless, MN Driver's License Testing, AARP Free Tax Preparation, KCC-TV and United Steel Workers Local 159).

Every day of the week (and many weekends) the building is alive with activity. During summer months Community Market takes place in the AB parking lot. On the second Monday of each month 120 volunteers provide surplus food to an average of 340 guests ranking the Falls rank consistently in the "top three" of 60 sites operated by Ruby's Pantry in Wisconsin and Minnesota. During summer months hundreds of kids enjoy a free healthy lunch and our Open Gym. Tuesday and Thursday evenings an average 60 people/night take part in free nutritious meals at Community Café 1,400 2015 Tax Returns were prepared by AARP volunteers free of charge.

Continued on Page 3

From the Director's Desk cont.

Callie Lowthian (age 14) wrote passionately about her involvement in the performing arts at Backus: Summer Arts, the "Bards," Icebox Radio Theater, Prairie Fire Theatre, concerts and "how different life would be without Backus." Last season a multi-generational cast of "The Borealis Bards" performed "Alice in Wonderland" and are currently auditioning for the "Wizard of Oz" musical in October. Adults enjoyed an edgy Christopher Durang comedy performance by the Bards and their dinner theatre, "Room to Act", drew a large and enthusiastic audience.

Helping make this all possible is a cadre of 600 volunteers who devoted almost 9,000 hours of service in 2015. In addition, 417 Backus members helped with their membership support of over \$36,000. Financial support from the City of International Falls, Koochiching County, donors, sponsors and foundations helps with programming and maintenance costs. Generous support from the MN State Arts Board, the Otto Bremer Trust, Chelsea Trust, Boise, Knudson Family Fund, KCDA, Midco and others, all help fund specific needs or programs.

This past week Backus hosted several All Class Reunion activities. On August 11, alumni enjoyed a book signing by eight local authors, a social hour with complimentary hors d'oeuvres and a cash bar. The evening was capped with a delightful concert/jam session. Friday found dozens of alumni back in the building and enjoying tours of Backus and AB. Alumni reminisced about favorite teachers, lockers, friends, their Kindergarten rooms, "the tunnel", lunch, mishaps, pranks and memories.

Both Backus and AB are filled with the memories of generations of our citizens. The buildings have served the community since 1912 and 1937. The bricks, mortar, granite walls, terrazzo floors, classrooms and spaces are filled with the footfalls and memories of over 100 years. The 1912 boilers still heat the building; the new roof is sound; the walls are solid and the building continues to be maintained and updated. New prospects are being discussed for the AB Building as you read this. For many, the building is viewed as "the heart of International Falls." One frequently hears the question, "What would we do without Backus?"

As I conclude this, my elementary school friend (Class of 1967), Charles Skrief, is playing that wonderful Steinway Concert Grand piano in the Auditorium. I've shut off the A/C unit and opened the office door. The music fills the Auditorium and spills into the halls and upper floors. It's a Friday afternoon. I have a building check and lock-up to do; but what a special way to end the week at Backus!

WARD

Ward Merrill, Executive Director



2016-2017 Performing Arts Series

**THE ROSE ENSEMBLE
JERUSALEM,
TREASURES FROM THE HOLY
LAND
SEPTEMBER 18, 2016 @
7:00 PM**

This performance will include Sufi mystical songs, Latin and Byzantine chant, Hebrew cantillation and spiritual music from across the Arab world. Yair Dalal, Iraqi-Jewish musician and composer will be the front man for the performance. Join the Backus Community Center for this eclectic mix of sounds.



OCTOBER 1, 2016 @ 7:00 PM




**SHAUN JOHNSON
BIG BAND EXPERIENCE**


The group performs contemporary songs with a big band punch, fusing the sounds that only big band can make with the modern mixes of all genres. The experience is truly one of a kind and will have you on the edge of your seat.

**WIZARD OF OZ
THE MUSICAL
OCTOBER 28 & 29 @ 7:00 PM
OCTOBER 30 @ 2:00 PM**

The Borealis Bards will feature the classic story of the Wizard of Oz with classic songs and characters. The International Falls community theater group will bring to life this classic musical and transport everyone over the rainbow.



**JAMES SEWELL BALLET
"BAND IT"
FEBRUARY 4, 2017 @ 7:00 PM**



This is a unique ballet performance compared to contemporary ballet. The performance is set to the driving rhythms of American band music and incorporates hover boards, color guard flags, and giant inflatable water balls. The performance was commissioned by the Wenger Foundation in honor of Harry Wenger.

“HARD TRAVELIN’ WITH WOODY”

BY RANDY NOOJIN

MARCH 4, 2017 @ 7:00 PM

This one-man multimedia play includes the music and artworks of Woody Guthrie, one of America’s iconic folksingers. Hop a box car through the Dustbowl with Woody, the saint-of-the-workingman and poet-of-the-people.



RING OF KERRY

APRIL 1, 2017 @ 7:00 PM

This high energy Irish music group plays its Celtic music with a heart closer to its American home. The five musicians all sing and playing several instruments. The group’s specialty is playing highly energetic and engaging stage shows that include a troupe of fully costumed Irish dancers.

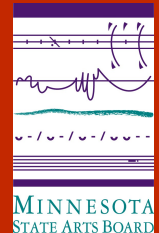


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THESE PERFORMANCES ARE MADE POSSIBLE BY THE VOTERS OF MINNESOTA THROUGH A GRANT FROM THE MINNESOTA STATE ARTS BOARD, THANKS TO A LEGISLATIVE APPROPRIATION FROM THE ART AND CULTURAL HERITAGE FUND.



Season tickets are available for purchase at the Backus Office or online at backusab.org

Season Tickets: \$65 Non-Members | \$55 Backus Members
And Backus Members get Two “Bring a Friend” tickets

Individual Show Tickets: Adults: \$12 | Family: \$25 | Students: \$6 | Pre-K: Free.
Individual show tickets will be sold at Backus Community Center, City Drug, J&D Family Foods in Littlefork and Betty's in Fort Frances.

TAKE YOUR SEAT PLEASE...



AUDITORIUM SEAT SPONSORSHIP PROGRAM

With the 2016-2017 Performing Arts Series kicking off on September 18th now is the perfect time to sponsor a seat in the auditorium as a tribute to those who have touched your life. A plaque or label will mark a seat In Honor of, In Memory of, or In Appreciation of. Your seat sponsor dollars help to fund the Backus Community Center in all of its numerous programs. Sponsorships are placed on the arm of the seat chosen, based on availability.

Stop into the Backus Office at 900 Fifth Street to learn more about sponsorship levels and how you can help the arts grow at Backus.

Rose Ensemble “Free Sneak Peek”

Join The Rose Ensemble for a FREE sneak peek at their *Jerusalem* concert Sunday, September 18, 2016 @ 4:00 pm in the Backus Auditorium. This one-hour educational event will feature music and a wealth of information about the research and history behind the concert program. This event is free, open to the public, and suitable for all ages. Complimentary wine and cheese will be served.



Backus Flashback



The “E.W. Backus Junior High School” was constructed eighty years ago in 1936. The building was added to the National Register of Historic Places on May 26, 2004. The Backus and AB buildings served educational needs in International Falls before closing in 1991.

Now the Backus building is flourishing, providing the community with performing arts shows, housing numerous businesses, serving meals for community members, hosting events to bring the community together and preserving the history of our dazzling northern town.

A huge thank you to the Bronco Football team for coming to
 Backus Summer Food Service Program and Open Gym!
 We wish you luck in your upcoming season!



Fused glass art
 created by
 Kay Arnold

“Members Only” Event

SEPTEMBER 9TH AT 6:00 PM

Backus Members are invited to participate in a members only event to take place on the Backus stage. The event will include a presentation about glass fusing and shaping from local artist, Kay Arnold. This will give members an inside look into an artist’s mind and the creative process of glass fusing.

There will be complimentary pasta salad, dinner rolls and dessert, along with beverages. Members can also sign up to be entered into a door prize drawing.

Whether you contribute via membership, sponsorship or other method, we consider you a “Member”. The “Members Only” evening is our way of saying thank you for being a part of our Backus Community!

NOT A MEMBER YET?

Stop into the office at 900 5th Street or go Online to www.bakusab.org Memberships start at just \$60.

Members get 10% discount on room rentals, Invitation to the annual meeting/ dinner each February, “Member’s Only” events, and helping Backus to feed the hungry, encourage arts & expression, support local school and sporting events and restore the buildings.

Summer Food Service Program Recap



Pictured above are
Summer Food
Service Staff

In 2016 the Summer Food Service Program served over 6,000 meals to both Children and adults in the International Falls and surrounding areas. While this is a large number it has decreased 8% from the number of meals served in the 2015 program and decreased 24% from the 2014 program.

Backus is proud to serve the community and help children access healthy food in the summer months when school is not in session. The summer food service program is open to all children ages 1 to 18 and there are no income guidelines or eligibility requirements. Kids can simply show up and eat.

The program is intended to help children access healthy food during the summer and is supposed to get kids out of the house and moving. In an effort to help the program Backus partnered with Arrowhead transit and offers free rides to kids under 18, all they need is a parent to fill out an application and they can ride free all summer. Backus also offer open gym during the lunch hours to encourage kids to be active during the summer.

Thank you to Northern Lumber and the MN Department of Education for sponsoring the 2016 Summer Food Service Program.

Minnesota Department of

Education



NORTHERN
LUMBER & HARDWARE

Thank you
McDonald's for
sponsoring our
"Clean Your Plate"
Contest



The Backus Bite



Recipe from
Mary Ann Lien
Backus Kitchen
Supervisor

Ingredients:

6 pork chops
1/2 cup of milk
1 cup of shredded cheddar
cheese
1 can cream of celery or
cream of mushroom soup
1/2 cup of sour cream
24 oz bag of hash browns
1 can of French fried onions
Salt and pepper
2 Tbs. oil

Directions:

Brown pork chops in 2 tbs oil, sprinkle with salt & pepper. In a separate bowl stir together the bag of hash browns, 1/2 cup of milk, 1/2 cup of sour cream, 1 can of cream of celery or cream of mushroom soup and 1/2 cup of cheddar cheese and 1/2 the can of the onions. Spoon the hash brown mixture into a 9x13 baking pan, add pork chops, cover and bake at 350 F for 40 minutes. Top with remaining cheese and onions and bake 5 more minutes uncovered.

What does Backus Mean to You?

Community Members Answer the Question “How Backus Community Center is making a difference in our community or in your life?”

Willie Harala – Basketball Player, Age 14

“I think it is an important building because it has a gym that we use because without it we wouldn’t know what to do. It also helps people with financial need because they have a cafeteria and they give free dinners twice a week.”

Wade Pavleck - Commissioner, Koochiching County

“Backus Community Center has filled a huge void in the International Falls and greater Koochiching County community in recent years of start up and operation. The tireless efforts of a few have created a positive and lasting impact on many lives here in different ways. By finding a way to save and preserve one of the area’s most historic structures these dedicated community members have been able to provide housing for vital services to include 4-H, Regional Mental Health, Chemical Dependency Programs, Food Services, Governmental and Community public meetings. Backus has been able to gain support of local Government, Community and Citizen Contributors because of the success they have achieved in making Backus a true community center for all.”

“The tireless efforts of a few have created a positive and lasting impact on many lives here in different

Julia Herbert Joins Backus Staff

Backus Community Center is pleased to announce that Julia Herbert has joined the Backus Staff as Marketing and Fundraising Coordinator. Julia is a 2011 Falls High graduate, earned an Associate of Arts Degree from Rainy River Community College and received a B.A. Degree in Communications from the University Of North Dakota in 2015. She began work on August 2 and jumped in immediately to secure door prizes for the Backus Rainy Lake Triathlon. Julia will be in charge of press releases, marketing, advertising and promotion of Backus events and programs. She will also work closely with the Backus Fundraising Committee. Her addition to the Backus staff will allow Robin Bjorkquist, Event Coordinator, more time to focus on event planning and development. Robin had taken on marketing and promotion tasks over the past year. Julia is excited to begin her new job especially since it allows her to work in her field of communications. Backus employs a total of 15 full and part time employees with a F.T.E. (Full Time Equivalency) of 5.5 employees.

“I am so excited to be a part of the Backus staff. I had no idea how much Backus had going on until I started working here. The staff and volunteers here at Backus truly have a passion for helping the community and a drive to be better for the needs of the people. I feel honored to be able to help Backus grow!” - Julia Herbert



The New Backus Marketing & Fundraising Coordinator, Julia Herbert

Ruby's Pantry Anniversary

On January 21, 2015, at a monthly Community Café committee meeting, we heard about a food distribution program operating 70 miles south of International Falls in Cook, MN. Mary DeNeffe, Director of The Hardwig House, had been driving clients 140 miles round-trip to access the Ruby's Pantry in Cook. As we heard more about the program our committee became increasingly enthusiastic. The Falls had just undergone the lay-off of 265 workers at the local paper mill – 1/3 of the workforce. Unemployment would grow to rank in the state's top five counties. 20% of the county's children were living in poverty and free and reduced meal numbers at schools were climbing. Numbers at the center's free Summer Food Program had been increasing dramatically.

The Committee wanted to know if opening a "Ruby's Pantry" in International Falls was possible. I called Ruby's the next day – and was told someone would call me back. I waited. No one called. I called again. I had nothing to report at our next meeting except that "someone would call me back." I tried an email without results. In desperation I wrote a letter on March 27, 2015. Finally on April 16 – the phone rang. It was Lyn Sahr calling to say, "Ward – your persistence paid off. We've been talking about International Falls for some time. . . . It's not impossible that we could have a distribution site up there." Finally I had something to report to our committee!

Six days later Lyn and staff were in International Falls for a committee meeting. They explained how Ruby's worked, distributed Ruby's "Food Distribution Guidelines", answered questions, promised to be back for training and to help us at the first three distributions. A major hurdle discussed was whether Ruby's was open to having a non-church sponsored site in the Falls.

May and June were a flurry of activity: weekly meetings, an expanded committee comprised of numerous clergy, social service providers, interested citizens, Falls Hunger Coalition staff and board members along with Backus staff. (Eleven area churches now support Ruby's with volunteers or clergy helping monthly). The Backus Community Center was selected as the Ruby's site and the Backus Board of Directors approved Backus as the site sponsor. One remaining obstacle was enlarging the Gym doors to accommodate 4-foot wide wood pallets. Volunteers stepped up to head a fundraising effort, list equipment needed, secure bids on door remodeling, meet with grocery store owners, visit Ruby's sites in Babbitt and Cohasset, contact local government bodies and secure more volunteers. Cash donations for start-up costs came from the Falls Hunger Coalition, Holy Trinity Episcopal Church, Boise Paper and individuals. Local businesses loaned their fork-lifts, pallet trucks, outside lights. Friends Garbage donated a roll-off dumpster for cardboard. Roche's towing donated a fork-lift and a freezer curtain for winter months. Wagner construction donated outside lighting. Boise donated machine felt to cover the gym floor and Border Country Auction donated "bid numbers" to attach to paint sticks.

Continued on page 9



Ruby's Pantry
Distribution line.

Ruby's Pantry Anniversary cont.

By June 22 Lyn and staff returned for training. By then almost 200 people had applied to be volunteers! 147 attended training and heard the moving story by Lyn of how Ruby's Pantry had been born. We all recall his words repeatedly about how, "this will be a moving experience for both volunteers and guests." Indeed, we had emotional volunteers with tears in their eyes following our first distribution.

After weeks and months of meetings, preparation, promotion and excitement our first distribution day arrived on July 13, 2015 – one of the hottest and most humid days of the summer. What felt like utter chaos and disorganization to us, appeared to be a well-organized effort to Lyn. His positive attitude and assurance gave us a high degree of confidence in ourselves and our organization from the very first time. 540 guests moved through our double line that afternoon. The line stretched almost two blocks and reminded me of the line up in town for the Davey Crockett movie in 1956!

Our Leadership Team and committee met monthly to de-brief and fine-tune our operation. Each month saw improvements made based on volunteer and guest suggestions. Volunteer support continued and was amazing with 115-120 showing up each month! Our highest turnout would reach 130 in January! Each Monday and Tuesday students in our Alternative Learning program completed the set-up, take-down and clean-up for Ruby's. Any issue or problem that arose was quickly solved by our Leadership Team.

Early on we established a "Benevolence Committee" with its own guidelines and commitment to distributing 100% of our benevolence money every month to local charities or non-profits. Without fail that money has been distributed since we began and now totals \$7,100 to local causes! Each month a photo appears in the newspaper with the recipient and one of our volunteers highlighting the impact Ruby's has on the community.

All our coordinators do an amazing job from truck unloading to carry-out, from sanctuary coordinator to our two food-line coordinators and in our finance/data, registration, volunteer, set-up, promotion and parking areas. We've conducted two guest surveys with drawings for \$50 grocery cards at local stores. Results have been positive with guests coming from 19 communities including Canada. An average of 345 guests attend impacting an average of 752 family members each month. 57% of our guests come every month; 93% have encouraged others to come; 62% are eating a more healthy diet and 46 of the 168 survey respondents signed up to become volunteers!

When informed about Ruby's Pantry prior to its start, Koochiching County Commissioner Wade Pavleck stated, "This is the best program to help people that's come across this table in the 20 years I've been on the Board." The International Falls JOURNAL commented following the first distribution about, ". . .the experience of joining with family, friends and neighbors to stand shoulder to shoulder as a volunteer or to stand in line for the distribution" and, "that many people met and talked with people they may never have met had they not attended Ruby's." The JOURNAL went on to mention "the true feeling of community that was exhibited at Backus Community Center" and that "Borderland ought to share that more often."

Ward Merrill, Site Coordinator

Ruby's Pantry – Backus Community Center





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www.backusab.org

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“Historic Backus Community Center, the heart of International Falls, where all generations celebrate arts, culture, recreation, wellness and life-long learning.”



Upcoming Events

Community Market
runs through Oct. 15
Wednesday 4:00 to 6:30 pm
Saturday 9:00 am to Noon

September

- Members Only Event
September 9 - 6:00 pm
- Ruby's Pantry
September 12 - 5:00 - 6:30 pm
- The Rose Ensemble- Jerusalem, Treasures from the Holy Land
September 18 - 7:00 pm

October

- Shaun Johnson Big Band Experience
October 1 - 7:00 pm

- Border Concert - Bravissimo Broadway
October 6 - 7:00 pm
- Ruby's Pantry
October 10 - 5:00 - 6:30 pm
- Borealis Bards "The Wizard of Oz"
October 28, 29 - 7:00 pm
- Borealis Bards "The Wizard of Oz"
October 30 - 2:00 pm
- Treat Street & Haunted House
October 31 - 4:00 - 5:30 pm

November

- Ruby's Pantry
November 14 - 5:00 - 6:30 pm
- Border Concert - Duo Del Sol
November 21 - 7:00 pm

December

- Koochiching Aging Options Logging Camp Christmas
December 2
- Falls High Band & Choir Concert
December 11
- Ruby's Pantry
December 12 - 5:00 to 6:30pm
- St. Thomas Christmas Program
December 13 - 6:30 pm

Community Café
Every Tuesday & Thursday
5:30 pm to 6:00 pm

For more details and updates, visit
www.backusab.org
or stop by the office at 900 5th St.