

From the Director's Desk



TEN YEARS AGO, A DEDICATED GROUP OF INDIVIDUALS WERE AWARDED PURCHASE OF THE BACKUS/AB BUILDING COMPLEX FROM THE SCHOOL DISTRICT. PHOTO COURTESY OF THE JOURNAL.

This fall marks the ten-year anniversary since Citizens for Backus/AB acquired possession of the Backus and Alexander Baker buildings. Needless to say, a lot has happened in the decade from 2002 to 2012. During a recent cleaning and re-organizing of the Backus Director's Office, I came across copies of news clippings, old Daily Journals, board agendas, minutes, letters, posters, programs and notes. Some items merited saving while others went in the recycle box. What was most interesting was a 55-page packet of photo copies of Daily Journal articles and "Letters to the

Editor" which began in December 1996.

"AB School's fate uncertain," was the first headline which appeared on December 20. A letter to the editor described four possible options for the AB Building that had been listed by the Superintendent: AB to become a middle school, conversion to apartments, sell it, or demolish it. What followed was six years of meetings, letters, articles, attempts at organizing a citizens group, options, potential uses, accusations and acrimony. Many people

active in that struggle have moved on in one way or another. A forceful superintendent was replaced, a number of advocates have passed on, many were active in the citizens groups or served on the Citizens for Backus/AB Board.

One name appeared in almost every article and on many letters to the editor: Cay Kroeten. I had the good fortune to meet her just shortly before her passing. She was riding in the Fourth of July Parade and being honored as a World War II veteran, I believe. Cay mentioned knowing my par-

ents and being involved in the Lions Club with them in the 1950's. I thanked her for her efforts to save the buildings and regretted not getting to know her more personally. She must have been a real thorn in the side of the superintendent for a number of years. Thanks to her tenacity and the dedication of many others, the buildings were saved. Kay Arnold became the spokesperson for the citizens group which evolved into Citizens for Backus/AB where Kay served as president from 2002 to 2007. Four of the original board members still serve on the Backus Board of Directors: Kay, Donna Frederickson, Patti Ballan and John Faith. Whenever people compliment us on what Backus has become, I always point to the perseverance of the many people who had the fortitude to step forward and make the effort to save the buildings; without them – today's Board, staff and volunteers would have nothing to work with.

Newspaper headlines ranged from "School's fate put on hold" to topics about roof repairs, school referendums, facilities, alternative uses for AB & Backus to "Vote saves Backus complex" on August 1, 2002. On July 31, the school board voted 6-0 to sell the AB/Backus complex. "The greatest wish of the Citizens for Backus/AB Committee came true Wednesday when the Falls School Board agreed to sell the complex to the school group." When one board member voiced hesitancy about the sale, fellow board member Ann Baron stated, "If we don't try to let them have the opportunity, we will never have closure." During the past ten years, Citizens for Backus/AB have certainly made the most of that "opportunity."

A dramatic turning point in the buildings' history came on March 27, 2008, during the final stages of fundraising for 28,000 square feet of roof replacement on the building complex. That evening, during the first Ethnic Food Festival, word was received from the Otto Bremer Foundation of a \$75,000 grant that put the fundraising effort over its goal of \$250,000. Within a six-month period Backus had raised almost \$275,000 for new roofs on the entire AB/Backus complex, ensuring that the buildings' integrity would remain intact for years to come. This achievement dramatically signaled that the project was here to stay and was well on a path to success as a community center.

Community Café

Backus Community Center and the Falls Hunger Coalition will begin a collaborative project that has been developing since the Backus kitchen opened in February 2010; a "Community Café" project that will provide a weekly meal to those in need. With almost 20% of Koochiching County children living in poverty, an increase of 29% in the Backus Summer Food Service Program this year, a growing use of food shelf services and an estimated 600,000 meals missing in the county, the need for this service is obvious.

Backus will serve as the host for this program and also the administrative agent. We are currently seeking both grant funding and local donations to support the "Café" in addition to securing local groups, churches, agencies and businesses that would supply volunteers. Meals will be provided on Tuesdays and expanded to Thursdays as demand increases. Serving times will be 5:30-6:00 pm with doors opening at 5pm. The meals are intended for families and individuals who are living with food insecurity. The "Community Café" is dedicated to reducing hunger and building a stronger community.



BOARD OF DIRECTORS

- ◆ Patti Ballan, President
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WWW.BACKUSAB.ORG**

- ◆ Ward Merrill, Executive Director
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- ◆ Robin Bjorkquist, Event Coordinator
- ◆ Julie Talmage, Backus Kids Club Coordinator
- ◆ Mary Ann Lien, Event Supervisor
- ◆ Steve Barnett, Custodian

Backus Kids Club

Our summer Kids Club program experienced a solid increase in numbers with many days averaging 20–25 children in grades K-6 enjoying a variety of activities including art, reading, library trips, walks to playgrounds, gym activities, academics, story time and field trips. An energetic group of teachers and assistants provided a fun, well-supervised and safe environment for kids. Out of town trips included the International Wolf

Center in Ely, the Headwaters Science Center in Bemidji and the Discovery Center in Chisholm.

Although the High School pool was closed during the summer, Backus Kids enjoyed many trips to the International House of Bowling for activities. Funding for this after school program is provided by a combination of fees and a grant from the Otto Bremer Foundation. We also have a limited

amount of scholarship money provided by the foundation to assist with program fees. Parents in need are encouraged to phone our office for more information. The Kids Club program continues throughout the school year Monday – Friday from 3:30 to 6:00pm. Backus is fully licensed through the MN Department of Human Services as a school-age child care center.

Summer Food Service Program

The summer of 2012 marked the third year the Backus Community Center has provided a Summer Food Service Program for the youth of the International Falls area. The program is sponsored by the Minnesota Department of Education and provides for a continuation of the same quality noon lunch offered by school districts during the nine months of the school year. Each summer our program has experienced significant growth in the number of meals served. The summer of 2012 was no exception.

The three-year history of the program shows the following meal totals:

Summer 2010 3,031 meals served
Summer 2011 5,272 meals served
Summer 2012 6,803 meals served

We again offered a free supervised “Open Gym” program that coincided with the lunch hours of 11:30am to 1:30pm each day. The gym activities were well attended and appreciated by both kids and parents. The average number of meals

served daily totaled 92 with many days rising to over 130. 186 meals were served on June 11 which set a record for Backus! 82% of meals were served to children with 18% served to parents.

The cost of children’s meals was reimbursed by the State of Minnesota (Dept. of Education) while adult meals were either paid for by donations from parents or the Falls Hunger Coalition. Healthy Friday “snack packs” were also distributed by the Falls Hunger Coalition each week. Several local businesses (Stride Fitness and Streiff’s Floral) sponsored radio menu announcements and printed menus in the local newspaper. The local movie theater, Cine 5, donated movie passes for our weekly “Clean Plate Awards.” In spite of the inability of Arrowhead Transit to provide bus transportation this summer, our program grew by 29% and the Backus Community Center served almost 7,000 meals to those in need.

Parent surveys during the month of

August indicated a heart-felt appreciation for the summer lunch program. Many parents mentioned the impact of this program on their food budget and the fact that these meals really made a difference in being able to provide their children with a healthy meal throughout the summer.

This year we were blessed with wonderful volunteers: a retired university instructor/musician who showed up every day to wash dishes and clean tables; a single woman who found a safe place to volunteer and developed some positive relationships with others; two youth who were placed with Backus as part of the Workforce Center’s summer work program developed positive work habits and social skills; and a retired volunteer on a fixed income who came every day and was in charge of meal counts and donations. All of these folks played a key role in our program, shared their talents, provided hundreds of hours of service and also gained immeasurably from the experience.

Summer and After School Arts

Betsy Ward serves as our Arts Coordinator for summer and after school programs. Current classes began in September and include: The Masters & Me, Special FX, Medieval Chain Mail, World of Watercolors, Drawing and Multi-Cultural Creations. Classes are offered for various grade

levels Kindergarten and up. Twenty children are enjoying these classes. Watch for their art work in the main hallway and showcase!

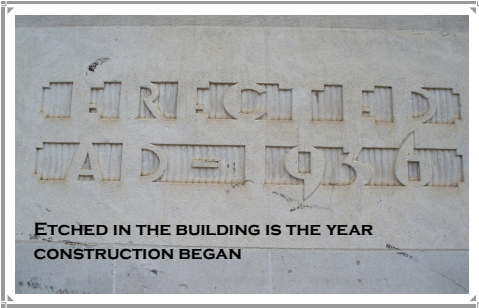
Approximately 60 children took part in the annual Backus Summer Arts Week. Many participated in Prairie

Fire Theatre’s production of “Beauty and the Beast” as well as afternoon art classes. The week culminated with a big-screen video of the week, a fantastic Art Show and a cast full of youthful actors in a humorous version of “Beauty and the Beast.”





From the Director's Desk, continued from page 1



leaders and businesses in late 2007. Mr. Salene has worked with numerous communities, groups and investors over the years but commented that he had *never* seen such widespread support for a project as he noted for the Backus Community Center. Another statement that I've quoted many times comes from Karen Shickell, who at the time was serving on the Backus Board. Her observation was that Backus needed to move from a "survival" mode to a "business" mode of operations in order to be successful. Both observations help describe the success of Backus: widespread community support for what Backus means to the community and the organization becoming more business-like in our day to day operations. Both factors have helped us achieve the success we enjoy as Backus marks its first decade.

Today, one encounters numerous citizens who tell us that ten years ago they were among the group that favored demolition of the buildings. However, based on the project's success, programs, and worth to the community, they are now 100% behind the organization. Many have become financial contributors and members; some are local business leaders while others serve on local government bodies that have provided support.

Two observations from others come to mind as I close: the first from our project consultant Mr. David Salene of St. Paul who visited community

Please join us in celebrating our first ten years on Thursday, October 25, from 5:00 to 7:00 pm. We'll be serving spaghetti dinner with a program, photo slideshows and raffle ticket prize drawings.

Give to the Max Day

Backus Community Center is one of many nonprofit organizations throughout the state that will once again ask Minnesotans to display their record-breaking generosity by donating to their favorite charities and schools online at www.GiveMN.org during the fourth annual "Give to the Max Day" on Nov. 15. In 2012, GiveMN will offer several incentives to encourage donor participation in Give to the Max Day. International Falls community members can support Backus and other local nonprofits and schools for an opportunity to win prize grants up to \$12,500 as top donation earners.

What's happened in 10 years? Just a few of the wonderful events going on at Backus:



SPECIAL COMMUNITY EVENTS



SUMMER FOOD SERVICE PROGRAM



"A CHOCOLATE AFFAIR"



ICE BOX DAYS TURKEY BOWLING



CELEBRATING VOLUNTEERS



ALL SCHOOL MUSIC FESTIVAL



ETHNIC FOOD FESTIVAL



EXERCISE CLASSES



SPECIAL GUESTS SUCH AS GOVERNOR MARK DAYTON



A VARIETY OF MUSIC CONCERTS



EGG ROLL MAKING CLASSES



VARIOUS DINNERS & LUNCHEONS



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Find us on Facebook! Search for "Backus AB"



Up Coming Events

You're Invited!

Backus 10 Year Anniversary Celebration
Thursday, October 25, 2012 | 5:00 to 7:00 pm
Join us for spaghetti dinner with a program highlighting our last 10 years, photo slideshows and raffle prize drawings!

It's Not Too Late!

Please think of Citizens for Backus/AB for any "end of the year" charitable contributions you may be considering.

Your donations are tax deductible to the full extent of the law. Citizens for Backus/AB is an IRS 501(c)3 non-profit corporation and your donations help support programming, planning, grant-writing, maintenance and preservation of both the Backus and Alexander Baker Buildings.

You are also invited to become a Backus Member. Membership levels begin at just \$60 per year. Membership forms may be downloaded at www.backusab.org or call the Backus office at 218-285-7225 for more information.

November

Soup Supper - Thursday, Nov. 1 @ 4:30 to 7pm
Sponsored by Bremer Bank

Top the Tater - Tuesday, Nov. 13 @ 4:30 to 7pm
Sponsored by Good Samaritan Center

Border Concert, "Two on Tap" -
Tuesday, Nov. 13 @ 7:30pm

Holiday Arts & Crafts Festival -
Saturday, Nov. 24 @ 10am to 4pm
Lunch @ 11am to 2pm

Library Documentary Movie Night
Monday, Nov. 26 @ 6:30 pm

December

Soup Supper - Thursday, Dec. 6 @ 4:30-7pm
Sponsored by Education MN, Local 331

Tuesday Musicale Christmas Program -
Saturday, Dec. 8 @ 7 pm

St. Thomas School Christmas Program -
Tuesday, Dec. 18 @ 6:30 pm

**Backus is fully accessible to persons with disabilities —
Please call our main office for specific accommodations.**