

BACKUS *Community Center*



Volume 11, Issue 1

March 2019

Citizens for Backus/AB Board of Directors

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Joe Kenny

From the Director's Desk

As I write this, it's mid-February, snowing, and the flight from Minneapolis with two architects traveling here to conduct a "Conditions Assessment" of the Alexander Baker Building has been re-routed to Grand Forks and potentially returning to the Twin Cities. Our activities right now are focused on the adaptive reuse of the AB Building and all that it entails.

2018 seems like it was over in a flash. An array of things took place in those twelve months: Thanks to our active Arts & Programming Committee and Robin Bjorkquist we offered a quality Performing Arts season featuring music, comedy, drama and ending with the Rhythmic Circus' "Holiday Shuffle" which several proclaimed as "the best show they'd ever seen in Backus." The Borealis Bards continued to engage a multi-generational group of actors in their community theatre productions featuring youth-directed plays, one-acts and dinner theatre.

Our three food and meal programs continued to meet community needs. Work continued to improve our stage rigging and above-ceiling catwalk. We engaged over 2,000 volunteers who contributed over 12,000 hours of service to Backus projects. New office space is almost completed for Thrivent Financial and Backus is at full occupancy of rental space. (We've even rented two tiny office spaces between the Conference Room and Board Room).

Backus grant-writing garnered over \$129,000 in support; membership produced 430 members and over \$39,000

up from \$33,000 in 2017; Koochiching County and the City of International Falls each approved increased Backus funding for 2019.

With our Business Manager Hoa Sobczynski moving to half-time, administrative job descriptions were re-written with Robin Bjorkquist moving up from Event Coordinator to Administrative Assistant and Jaime Sjoblom taking on the role of Event Coordinator. Jill Malone also took on expanded responsibilities with the changes working well in the new year.

Our Board of Directors benefitted from the addition of three new members: Harry Batdorf (who was an avid member of the citizens group fighting to save the buildings from demolition in the late 1990's); Tim Fairchild (with a background in banking and community development), and Bob Marquardt (bringing business and corporate experience to the board). In addition, a new youth member, David Griffith, joined our board in December.



Since July 2017, when Backus and KOOTASCA Community Action signed joint resolutions to work towards adaptive reuse of the Alexander Baker School, energies of both organizations have been focused on that goal.

Backus holds successful Annual Meeting to review 2018

February 13 saw 48 Backus Board Members, staff, Backus members and interested local citizens gather for the Annual Business Meeting for Citizens for Backus/AB.

The annual report reviewing the calendar year 2018 was shared, detailing financial statements, events and reports from the committees who plan and oversee Backus operations.

Hoa Sobczynski's 10-year work anniversary was celebrated. President Gail Rognerud presented Hoa with a crystal award commemorating her 10 years of service in the business office. Hoa's primary duty is recording and maintaining the financials of Citizens for Backus/AB.

A decorated cake was served in her honor.



Executive Director, Ward Merrill, gave an overview of the Alexander Baker School Reuse Project. This project was started in 2017 when Backus and KOOTASCA Community Action partnered to address a lack of housing in the area.

Highlights from the 2018 annual report include:

- An Eagle Scout project to refinish the auditorium doors was completed by Gavin Wilson
- Ruby's Pantry had an average of 280 guests each month to pick up usable food that would otherwise be discarded in landfills
- The RRCC Food Pantry continued to serve the 245 students enrolled at Rainy River Community College

If you would like to become a member of Citizens for Backus/AB, please stop by the office and complete a membership form, or go online at www.backusab.org/membership.

Membership benefits include discounted Performing Arts Season tickets, annual "Members Only" event and invitation to the annual meeting each February.

Backus is not just a building, we are a dedicated group of board members, staff and volunteers who want to see the community succeed one event and project at a time.

If you did not receive our annual report and would like one, please stop by our office or contact Robin at (218) 373-3004 or email backusoffice@backusab.org.





From the Director’s Desk, continued

To that end a number of action steps have been undertaken:

- Backus/KOOTASCA organized the Koochiching County Housing Collaborative with over two dozen stakeholders meeting regularly to discuss housing issues and solutions.
- Assistance from the MN Housing Partnership (MHP) was secured to help build capacity, explore housing issues and take action
- Collaborative stakeholders agreed a current county-wide housing study was a necessity in order to move housing forward. Over \$25,000 was raised by county-wide stakeholders and a \$10,000 grant was awarded by MHP to fund the study.
- Community Partners Research conducts a comprehensive county-wide housing study which was presented to the public on January 16-17, 2019.
- KOOTASCA/Backus secure a technical assistance grant from MHP specific to development of the AB Building.
- The Housing Collaborative meets on January 28 and initiates seven action steps based on recommendations from the Housing Study.
- “Requests for Proposals” (RFP) were sent to sixteen prospective developers for the AB reuse project.

- February 8-10, 2019, Backus/KOOTASCA staff participates in an American Institute of Architects “Search for Shelter Design Charrette” at the University of MN. The AB Project is one of only six projects to be selected.
- February 12-13, 2019, architects from Kaas Wilson Architecture conduct an on-site visit to the AB building to prepare a “Conditions Assessment” to aid in preservation planning. Their work is funded in part by a \$10,000 Legacy Grant from the MN Historical Society and a \$5,000 gift from Henry & Virginia Sweatt through the Charles B. and Margaret L. Sweatt Family Fund of the Minneapolis Foundation.

Tentative plans for the Alexander Baker Adaptive Reuse Project include locating KOOTASCA’s anti-poverty programs and Head Start classrooms on the first floor with affordable housing on the second and third floors. The Housing Study specifically recommends this project be pursued.

If successful, the AB Project will be the first multi-unit housing project completed in almost 40 years in our community! When completed, the project will bring to fruition the goal of original Backus/AB supporters – to bring both buildings back to life as integral parts of life in our community.

WARD

Ward Merrill,

Beautifully designed by Bell, Tyrie and Chapman in the Classical Revival style, the three-story Alexander Backer School was completed in 1914 as a K-12 school. Listed on the National Register of Historic Places for its local historical significance; the original building layout and many of the historical finishes are still intact. A walk through the building today transports the visitor back in time.



Gavin Wilson completes Eagle Scout Project



Above, doors before refinishing

Below, Gavin staining doors



In 2018, Gavin Wilson refinished the Backus Auditorium doors for his Eagle Scout Project.

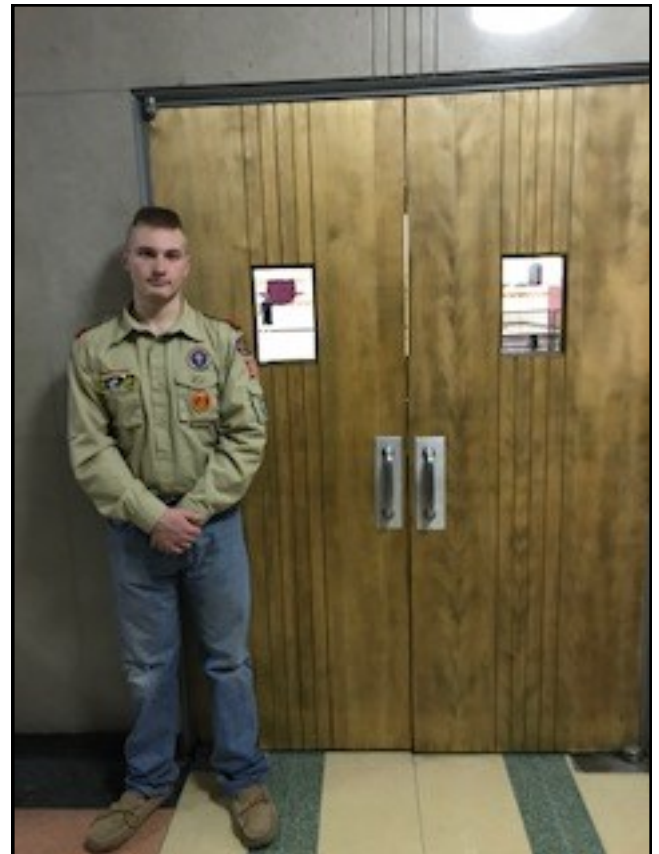
The project took the time and effort of adults Frank Edwards, Steve Bruess, Bruce and June Wilson, Mike Hedtke and Eagle Scouts, Nick Riley and Hunter Wilson. Younger Scouts assisted; Odin Hansen, Ian Blumer, Ethan VerSteeg and Alex Robar helped to complete the 127 volunteer hours needed for door refinishing.

Northern Lumber was instrumental in answering questions and supplying materials throughout the project.

At right, Gavin Wilson stands beside the completed doors.

Backus is sincerely thankful for Wilson's efforts in restoring the doors to their original state.

An Eagle Scout Court of Honor will be held in the Backus Auditorium on Sunday March 31 at 1:00 pm.



Nice Job!

Backus Testimonial:

"I can honestly say I am a believer in this group and facility. In my honest opinion, I was not an original supporter of saving this building. Years later I am a supporter and do not know where our community would be without this venue and the group that runs it. They have not only resurrected a facility, but have added to this community culturally and educationally. It has been a journey that has brought young and old together to experience history along with pushing forward to enrich all of our lives with ongoing social activities." **Kevin Grover – Superintendent ISD #361, International Falls Public Schools**

Way to go!

Did you know ...

If you are a Thrivent member, you can contribute to Backus Community Center through Thrivent Choice and Thrivent Action Teams. Log in to your Thrivent account online, call -1-800-847-4836 or speak with your personal Thrivent representative for more information.



THRIVENT®

Be Wise With Money™

Final Performing Arts Series Performance 2018-2019

Friday, April 12 @ 7 pm
Sam Miltich—exploring
mental health through Jazz

This show is brought to you by
Northland Counseling Center

Tickets \$12 Adults | \$ 5 Kids
Available at City Drug, Betty's,
J&D Foods, Backus, at the door



Platinum Level \$1,000 and up

- City of International Falls
- Marshall N. Knudson Family Community Fund
- Packaging Corporation of America
- Stewart's Super One Foods
- Family of Karen (Turnquist) Johnson

Gold Level \$500 to \$999

- Bremer Bank
- Coca-Cola Bottling Inc
- Days Inn
- Jim & Sherrie Lessard
- Sandy's Place
- Wagner Construction

Thank you
to the
2018-2019
Season
Sponsors!

Silver Level \$250 to \$499

- Ballan Furniture
- City Drug Store
- In Memory of Robert Frederickson
- Rainy Lake Medical Center
- Rainy Lake Oil Inc
- Up North Builders Inc

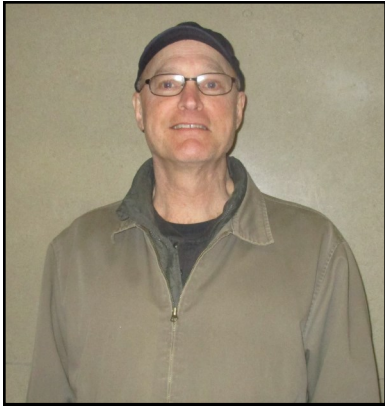
Bronze Level \$100 to \$249

- Borderland Insurance
- In Memory of Mary Jo Gerlach
- Peter Graham Auxiliary VFW Post #2948
- Thrivent Financial, Ann Backes
- Waschke Family GM Center



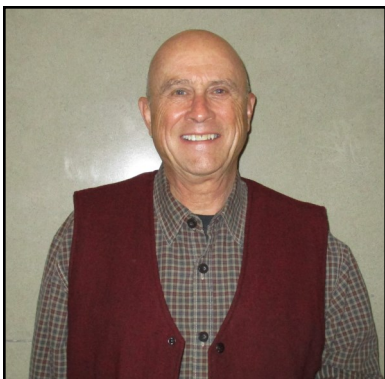
Meet our Newest Backus Board Members

Harry Batdorf, an International Falls native and 1973 graduate of FHS, served in the U.S. Navy from 1974-1976. Returning to the Falls following two years of sea duty, Harry worked for the local paper mill for 44 years earning two Vocational Certificates from Rainy River Community College during those years. He was actively involved in



community organizations including the Koochiching County Community Health Board, Hardwig House Board, Friends Against Abuse, Servants of Shelter and the MN D.N.R. Snowmobile Trail Committee. As an active church member of St. Paul Lutheran, Harry worked in fundraising to build a school in Haiti and support students. During that time he made two trips to Haiti on construction missions. In 2013 he self-published a book about 50 Koochiching County Veterans. Proceeds from book sales benefit hospitalized veterans. In the late 1990's Harry worked with the original group of citizens who fought to save the Backus and Alexander Baker school buildings from destruction. They were successful in getting the buildings named to the Preservation Alliance of Minnesota's "Ten Most Endangered Buildings" list. That effort led to the successful preservation and re-use of the historic buildings known as the Backus Community Center today.

Tim Fairchild was elected to the Board in February 2018. He was a 1968 graduate of Falls High School and earned a B.S. Degree in Social Studies from Bemidji State University. Tim taught Government and Economics at East Grand Forks H.S. from 1973-1978. After earning a Certificate from

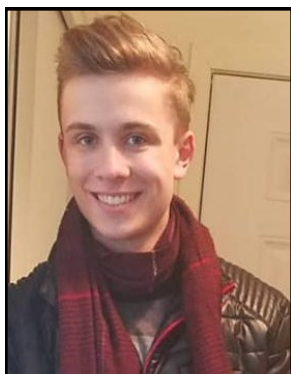


the North Dakota School of Banking, he worked in the banking field from 1978-2009. Tim brings a wide range of nonprofit and volunteer experience to the board from his years in East Grand Forks. He served in leadership roles in Kiwanis, Rotary, Chamber of Commerce, Library Board, Special Olympics, United Way and with the Altru Health System and Foundation. In addition, Tim served as President of the Bethany Lutheran Church Council. Since retiring and returning to International Falls with his wife Marva in 2009, Tim serves as a Backus and Ruby's Pantry volunteer and is past Chairman and current Board Member for Koochiching Aging Options. Serving as our Vice President, Tim brings a wealth of experience in banking and community development to the Backus Board. Tim is part of the AB project team.

Bob Marquardt was appointed to the Board in November 2018. He grew up in the Falls, attended college at Concordia (Moorhead, MN), The American College (Paris, France), the University of Minnesota and the American Graduate School of International Management. He earned a BA from the U of M and an MBA/



MIM at AGSIM (Thunderbird Campus - Glendale, AZ). Bob spent 22 years working in international business and commodities trading /management. For the past 21 years he engaged in various telecom software, finance ventures and startups in the U.S. and Canada. He is still involved in several ongoing business entities as an equity partner and director. Bob returned to the Falls to take advantage of all the area's positives and the quality of life. He is an avid Backus volunteer; serves as Secretary of the Tuesday Musicale group and has become our "piano expert" researching our three pianos and donating funds for tuning and repairs. Bob is also an active member of our AB project team.



David Griffith is our new Student Board Member for the 2018-19 school year. He is a junior at the International Falls high school and an excellent student who excels in English and Literature. Since an early age David enjoyed participating in a number of dramatic art opportunities. He is an active member of Backus Community Center's theatre troupe, Borealis Bards and recently puppeteered the part for our recent production of "Little Shop of Horrors." For two summers he lived in Moorhead, Minnesota, working as an actor and technical assistant for Gooseberry Players. In his younger years he performed with the renowned Icebox Radio Theater here in International Falls. He is excited to be part of the Backus Board and hopes to bring a youth perspective to our discussions and decision-making.

We've heard from readers that they'd like to stay informed regarding donations, contributions, etc. With that in mind, we are printing those pieces of information from November 1, 2018, through January 31, 2019. Our goal is to print this information quarterly. Backus sincerely thanks you for your interest and support of our community center, and all the ways you help us serve the area.

Contributions, Donations and Memorials

Contributions given from November 2018, December 2018, January 2019

AB Project—Kay Arnold

General Donation

- Charles & Jean Kelly
- Bob Marquardt
- Terry & Emilee Schultz
- Jay & Darcie Schulz
- Sheila Tatone
- Betsey Warrington
- Robert & Patricia Crossley - Christmas gift in honor of Jim Yount

Memorial

- Rick & Lou Anne Faulkner - Barb McDowell
- Ron & Janice McClanahan - Harold Helgeson
- Mary Sabatke - Harriet Rosenberg
- John & Karen Wilson - Harriet Rosenberg and Peggy Little
- Jim & Sherrie Lessard - Jane Rosendahl
- Ward & Linda Merrill - Lil Koranda
- Darell Bradley & Patti Ballan - Mary Pat Bruggeman
- Arthur & Anne Przybilla - Nell Anderson
- Rick L'heureux & Martha Enzmann - Ralph & Arleen Enzmann
- Mary Niehaus - Shirlee Bannert

Community Café

- First Lutheran Church Women
- Koochiching County
- Zion Lutheran Church Women
- Zion Lutheran Church
- Donna Frederickson - In Honor of John Frederickson

RRCC Food Pantry—Jim & Linda Sutch

Ruby's Pantry Gift Certificates

- Ken & Jackie Krueger
- Corky & Shar Schaak
- Mike & Barb Johnson
- Ward & Linda Merrill
- Greg & Lois Lundin
- Michael & Caryn Noland

Seat Sponsors

- Richard & Raynita Houglum in Memory Dale Arnold
- Duane & Marilyn Mitchell in Memory Kevin Mitchell
- Helen Loudon in Memory Effie Hanover
- Kim Manley in Memory Jean Manley
- Julie Ann Manley-Hartje in Memory LTC Roy Manley
- In Honor of Jim & Kathy McDaniel
- Martha Enzmann in Memory Ralph & Arleen Enzmann



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Upcoming Events

March

- 11—Ruby's Pantry Food Distribution 5:00 pm
- 22—Junior Bards One Acts Episode 2 @ 7:00 pm
- 23—Junior Bards One Acts Episode 2 @ 7:00 pm
- 24—Junior Bards One Acts Episode 2 @ 2:00 pm

April

- 5—MN Deer Hunters Banquet
- 8—Ruby's Pantry Food Distribution 5:00 pm
- 10—Backus Volunteer Appreciation Lunch @ Noon
- 12—Sam Miltich Mental Health Through Jazz 7 pm
- 19—Backus Office Closed for Good Friday
- 27—Borealis Bards Room to Act

May

- 13—Ruby's Pantry Food Distribution 5:00 pm

Walkercise Monday—Wednesday—Friday | 10 am to 11 am

Adult Volleyball Wednesdays @ 7:00 pm, \$2 per person

Community Café Tuesday & Thursday | 5:30 pm to 6 pm

Some dates tentative and subject to change, visit www.backusab.org for up-to-date information.

AN EMPRESS, A FAUN, AND... OLIVE LOAF!
 BY EM ERAPPIER
 DIRECTED BY CODY BOYER

JUNIOR BARDS PRESENT
ONE ACTS
BACKUS
EPISODE 2

03.22-23.19 @ 7:00PM
 03.24.19 @ 2:00PM

\$12 ADULTS
 \$5 KIDS 6-18
 KIDS 5 & UNDER
 ARE FREE

10 WAYS TO SURVIVE THE END OF THE WORLD
 BY DON ZOLDIS
 DIRECTED BY GRAYSEN GABLE