

BACKUS Community Center

Volume 12, Issue 1

April 2020

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From the Director's Desk

This newsletter comes to you in the midst of the COVID-19/Coronavirus crisis. As I write this, news from Washington, D.C., New York, Texas, the Stock Exchange and the Congress is coming over our kitchen TV set. Since Tuesday, March 17, I've been working at our home on Riverside Drive. My "office" is now our dining room table; legal pads with notes piling up; a few file folders; my calendar has "Xs" through all of our March and April events at Backus, and I'm communicating via phone and email with our staff, board, President, Tim Fairchild, and our partners working on the AB School Adaptive Reuse Project.

Each day seems to bring more dire news and predictions about a worsening situation. Many of you reading this, whether you're in Minnesota or one of our many distant supporters throughout the nation, are probably secluded at home as Linda and I are. This edition of the newsletter will attempt to update you on how Backus is coping with the crisis and still helping meet the needs of those in our community.

As fate would have it, Linda and I had planned a winter get-away with three other couples last December to Palm Springs, CA. Little did we know how untimely that trip would turn out. As events began to unfold in late February and early March, I began to question whether we should make the trip or not. Concerns for losing all the money we already paid to rent a large 4-bedroom/pool/spa/putting green home, having had the trip planned for months, and a lack of any specific "travel ban," all figured in to the decisions to make the trip. During the week in Palm Springs, the crisis worsened by the

day; some attractions were closed in the area; prices of airline tickets dropped, and a local person was hospitalized for the virus. By the time we left on a crowded plane for Minneapolis, I strongly regretted our decision to go on the trip.

The regular Backus Board of Directors' meeting was held on March 12. We're fortunate to have as one of our board members Derek Foss, Director of Public Health for Koochiching County. Derek presented the public health facts to our board and the decision was reached that all Backus programs, activities, events, dinners and meetings be cancelled "unless there was a compelling reason to hold them." This was particularly heart-wrenching in the case of our Junior Bards community theatre group who were in final rehearsals for PINOCCHIO which would go on-stage March 20-22. The rehearsals and play were cancelled.

On Monday, March 16, on my return to the office, our entire staff met to discuss a course of action. All Backus events were cancelled through April 18 (and likely to May 1 or later). Office volunteers who staff the "front desk" were asked to stay home; the monthly food distribution program Ruby's Pantry was cancelled for April (most of our 80-90 volunteers are 60+), and tenants would be asked what their plans were for continuing services. We all felt the only program with a "compelling" need to continue was our Community Café twice-weekly free meal program. The "Café" had been serving 45-50 meals to guests in our dining room most of the winter. The decision was made to continue the Café as a "pick-up" meal only. Guests would call-in by 4pm each Tues-

From the Director's Desk continued

day and Thursday to order a meal(s) with a "pick-up" between 5-6pm. All volunteers from area churches and organizations (usually 7-9 each night) were asked to stay home. The word was spread through local media, Facebook, website, radio and our outdoor marquee. Staff would prepare food, hand out boxed meals and clean-up. We expected perhaps only 30 meals the first night. By Tuesday afternoon (March 17), 50 meals had been ordered. By 6pm that evening – 70 meals had been picked up! Thursday evening the Café handed out 120 meals! Business Manager Hoa Sobczynski estimates the need will grow dramatically in the next weeks as will the cost.

As of Monday, March 23 the Backus office is open from 8am-4pm. Café meals will be prepared each Tuesday/Thursday. Custodians are doing extensive cleaning, waxing and maintaining the boilers. Three tenants continue operating: Northland Counseling (mental health), Rainy River Recovery (chemical dependency) and Servants of Shelter (homeless assistance). All other programs in the building have been suspended including dance classes, MN driver's license testing, 4-H programs, ISD 361 Alternative Learning class, AARP Tax Preparation, exercise classes, Northland Art Society. All Gym activities and Ruby's Pantry.

Due to cancellations of meetings, events, programs and catered meal events, Backus is projected to face a 10-15% loss in projected revenue during the year. Expense

will see a similar increase estimated at 10-15% as we expand our Community Café meals to meet a growing demand.

As Backus continues as home for vital community services during the Covid-19 pandemic, Northland Counseling, Rainy River Recover, Servants of Shelter and Community Café will continue to function. Regular operational, maintenance and staff costs will continue with some costs such as Cafe increasing. As many of you practice "social distancing;" perhaps stay home from work and limit contact with friends and family, you might consider renewing your Backus membership or perhaps making a special donation to help cover costs of the Community Café. The Café costs an average of \$2,500/month to operate. With an absence of volunteer help, an increase in staff hours, and, a huge increase in meals served (estimated at 175 to 200 each Tuesday/Thursday) – costs are projected to double to \$5,000/month. Your donation will help provide meals for children and families at a critical time.

Thank you for your past support of Backus and, wherever you are, stay safe and healthy.

Ward Merrill,
Executive Director
Citizens for Backus/AB, Inc.

WARD



Why I became a Backus Board Member

A few years ago I was invited to join the Board of Directors of Backus. This would be an opportunity to help shape the future of Backus. I believe in giving back to my community and this seemed like a good fit. I have never regretted that decision.

Backus has made amazing progress since it was saved by a group of people with a vision for its future. The Board of Directors works to make sure we honor that vision. We have made great progress over the years and continue to move forward.

Sherrie Lessard, Backus Board Member Since 2010

Contributions, Donations and Memorials

Contributions given from January 2020 through February 2020

Memorials

- *Betty Einarson* from Pat Ettestad
- *Edna Karsnia* from Mary Graves Budak, Betty Ericson, Georgia Growette, and Philip Hopfner
- *Emilee Schultz* from Terry Schultz
- *Gerald Lee Kantor* from Harry & Sally Batdorf
- *Gordon Ettestad* from Patti Ballan and Richard & Elizabeth Forsythe
- *Grace McClanahan* from Sharon Backlund, Tom & Jackie Glowack, Walter & Dorothy Glowack, Roger & Rebecca Griffin, David & Pauline Hebig, Charlene Jensen, Brad & Shelly King, Marit Lee Kucera, Iverne & Heather Kuryla, Lyndon & Susan Larsen, Milo & Kay Larson, Mary Lepage, James & Sherrie Lessard, Patricia MacInnis, Ron & Janice McClanahan, Ward & Linda Merrill, Kevin & Julia Olson, Arthur Rogers, Robert & Barbara Rogers, William Rogers, Terry Schultz and Darlene Walls
- *Jack Wolf* from John & Karen Wilson
- *Tom Hardy* from Virginia Napper and John & Karen Wilson

Community Café Contributors

- Lady Elks
- Koochiching County

Ruby's Pantry Donors

- Koochiching County
- Michael & Caryn Noland

Seat Sponsors

- Bremer Bank - In Honor of Bremer Bank Employees
- Steve & Christy Earley - Bernard & Vera Earley Memorial
- Violet Johnson - In Honor of Violet Johnson
- Kim C. Manley - Jean Manley Memorial
- Julie Manley-Hartje - Roy Manley Memorial
- Duane & Marilyn Mitchell - Kevin Mitchell Memorial

Other Contributions

- Pinocchio Production from Doug & Beth Lowthian, Douglas Skrief and Samantha Crossley & Jim Yount
- Purchase of projector from Arrowhead Ultra 135 Marathon

For a complete list of contributions, donations and memorials in 2019, see our 2019 Annual Report.

If you would like one mailed to you, please contact Robin at (218) 373-3004 or backusoffice@backusab.org

During this time of crisis in our country, please continue to support and contribute to the many nonprofit organizations who remain in service to others.





Generous donation kicks-off Backus Endowment Fund



Gordy Ettestad was an original Backus supporter and his financial knowledge was critical in the beginning of Citizens for Backus/AB.

In November 2008 Gordy Ettestad laid the foundation for an endowment fund for Backus. With three major capital improvement projects on our agenda (roof replacement, kitchen/dining room and third floor renovation), the Backus Fund lay inactive until 2019.

In June, Ivan and Marcia Stewart offered a generous gift of \$100,000 to Backus in hope their gift would generate additional funding. The gift will be received over a three year period beginning in 2019. Their initial contribution of \$33,333.33 forms the basis for the Backus Endowment Fund. On December 12, 2019 the Backus Board of Directors approved a resolution revising the fund and establishing it as a new article of the By-laws. The Board has set an initial goal of reaching \$1 million within five years.

The Fund is “established to provide effective and responsible stewardship of special gifts and to ensure the expansion of community work in International Falls and the surrounding area.” The fund “can accept gifts and bequests in wills, charitable trusts, gift annuities, assignments of life insurance, and transfer of property (cash, stock, bonds, real estate, etc.)”

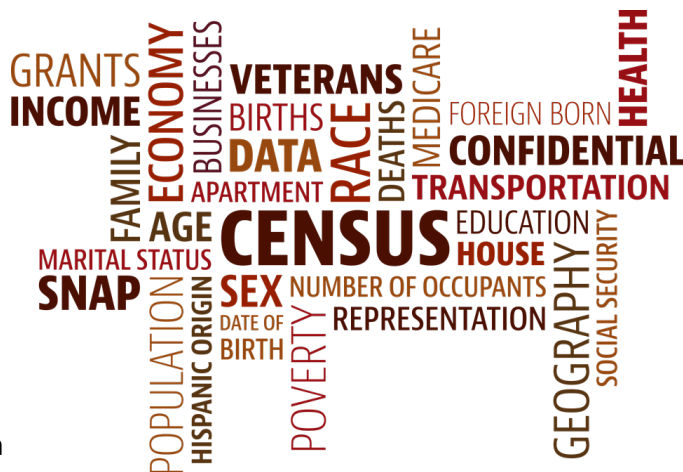
In honor of Gordy Ettestad’s belief in the Fund, Pat Ettestad donated \$1,030 in memorial gifts to the fund which now totals \$34,843. We welcome your participation in this effort to ensure the continuation and expansion of the work of our Backus Community Center.

An endowment fund is an investment fund established by a foundation that makes consistent withdrawals from invested capital. The capital in endowment funds, often used by universities, nonprofit organizations, churches and hospitals, is generally utilized for specific needs or to further a company's operating process.

Everyone Needs to be Counted: Census 2020 will affect funding for roads, housing, emergency response, services to the disabled, elderly and children, schools and veterans.

- Census results help determine how billions of dollars in federal funding flow into states and communities each year.
- The results determine how many seats in Congress each state gets.
- It's mandated by the U.S. Constitution in Article 1, Section 2: The U.S. has counted its population every 10 years since 1790.
- **March 12 - 20:** Households will begin receiving official Census Bureau mail with detailed information on how to respond to the 2020 Census online, by phone, or by mail.

Visit www.2020census.gov for more information



Backus welcomes Lois Lundin as Event Coordinator



Backus is excited to welcome International Falls native, Lois Lundin, to the staff. Lois started at the end of February as Event Coordinator. Her job is to work with clients on all events, big and small, and work events to see them through to completion.

“I’m very excited to be a part of the Backus team! I’m looking

forward to working with clients to plan events and to tend to the details that add value to people’s experiences.” Said Lundin.

“Lois makes a great addition to the Backus team.” said Robin Bjorkquist, Administrative Assistant. “She has the experience, community connections and love for people that will make her a great person to work with.”

Backus Community Center is available for rent for all types of occasions. You can contact Lois at (218) 373-3007 or events@backusab.org.

To Do List

1. Stay home, stay safe, stay healthy
2. Call a friend or neighbor on the phone
3. Watch a good movie
4. Read a good book
5. Continue supporting local Nonprofits who are serving the community



Behind the KCC-TV Camera

Greetings! Darcy Sullivan here, your Program Director for KCC-TV, bringing community information and events for Koochiching County to your television and computer.



I call International Falls home, where I live with my husband our two children and one nutty dog.

My work at KCC-TV began in March of 2018 when it was under the direction of a volunteer board. Dynamics have changed and KCC-TV is now part of the Backus Community Center.

This job allows me to be a part of our area year round in a variety ways. Whether behind the camera at public meetings, school concerts, special music and art events, parades and even a 100th birthday celebration, or at the studio editing footage and scheduling programs. I feel that the work has a positive and informative community impact.

I especially like being a service to those who are not able to attend that school or summer concert, a VNP science or Koochiching Museum history discussion, a memorial day VFW service or 4th of July Parade, with KCC-TV they can still be a part of it.

If you see me behind the camera, feel free to smile and wave!

Darcy Sullivan can be reached at kcctv@backusab.org or 218-434-3465. If you would like to suggest an event for recording, please contact Hoa Sobczynski at (218) 285-7225.

USDA Rural Development Facilities Improvement Grant

With grant funding from the U.S. Department of Agriculture’s Rural Development Fund and other funders, Backus was able to complete several major building improvement/maintenance projects. In addition to the USDA, funders included: the Koochiching Community Development Association, the Ray Community Club, Harry and Virginia Sweatt, the Otto Bremer Trust and Backus. Projects already completed include:

- Purchase of a floor scrubbing machine
- Installation of LED lighting throughout the basement
- Removal of old floor tile in the east hallway
- Repair of basement drains in the boys’ locker room (basement)

Soon to be completed:

- o Installation of new flooring in the east hallway
- o Replacement of the boiler condensate tank

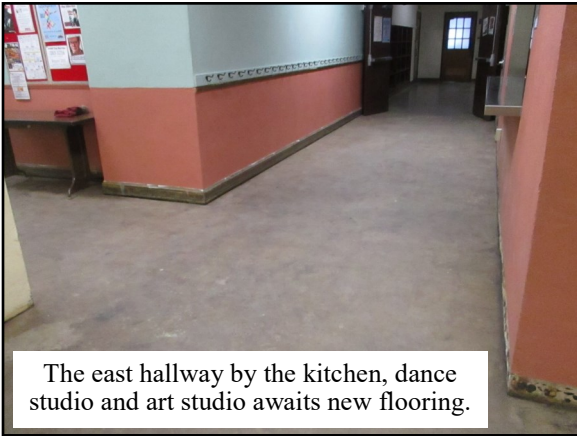


New LED lighting in the basement

Local contractors completing the work included: Shannon’s Inc., Kantor Electric and Pelland-Swenson. Jerry Vohler, our head custodian, and board member, Harry Batdorf, put in many hours of work on the locker room project.

Installation of new flooring by Studio B Flooring will take place once the COVID – 19 crisis ends.

Overall project costs amounted to almost \$59,000 with 55% funded by the USDA grant.



The east hallway by the kitchen, dance studio and art studio awaits new flooring.



Photos of the boys locker room throughout the project

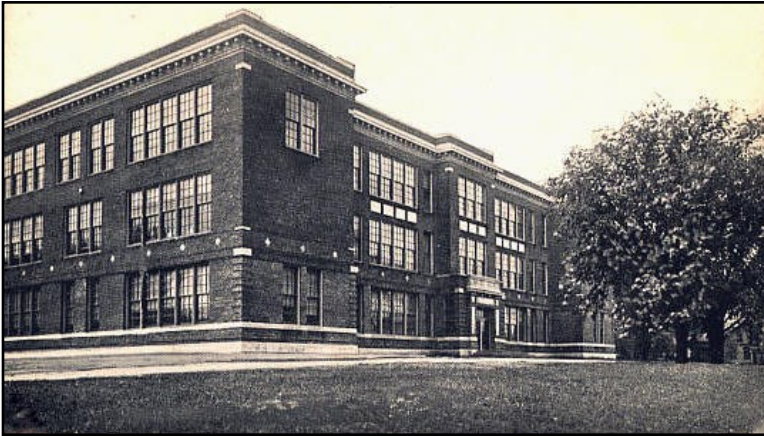


Completed Project

Update on the Alexander Baker Adaptive Reuse Project

As with much of our daily lives, the COVID-19 crisis has put a hold on our Alexander Baker Adaptive Reuse Project. Backus and KOOTASCA Community Action have been actively working on plans for the rehabilitation of the historic AB School (1914) and for its reuse as affordable housing since 2017. That seems like a long time ago and it's been a lengthy process to develop partnerships, build capacity, develop resources and make connections. A multitude of tasks have been completed with grant funding and dollars from each partner. The MN Housing Partnership has been instrumental in building capacity and providing funds for different phases and tasks. By January and February 2020 perhaps the most critical partnership was finalized with Community Housing Development Corporation (CHDC) (a nonprofit developer with dozens of successful projects to its credit) secured as a "co-developer" with KOOTASCA. In addition, their architects Urban Works and historic consultants Hess Roise came on board with the project.

By sheer coincidence and good fortune, CHDC had just completed the adaptive reuse of the historic New Ulm High



High School, New Ulm Minnesota, 1915
Image courtesy of [www.lakesnwoods.com/
NewUlmGallery](http://www.lakesnwoods.com/NewUlmGallery)



Alexander Baker School, 1914

School (1915) designed by Bell, Chapman & Tyre, the same architects who designed the AB School. Backus board member Harry Batdorf toured the Emerson Union project in New Ulm in February and found the affordable housing project truly amazing in the quality of work and preservation of historic features. We are pleased to have CHDC leading our efforts for our AB Project which will create 30 units of direly needed quality affordable housing in our community – the first multi-family housing project in over three decades and the first housing tax credit project ever in Koochiching County.

Unfortunately, a site visit by CHDC, Urban Works and Hess Roise, scheduled for March 26, has been postponed due to the COVID-19 pandemic. We hope to re-schedule in the near future, and in the meantime have asked Minnesota Governor Tim Walz and MN Housing (formerly MHFA) to extend the deadline for their Request for Proposals. This Consolidated Request for Proposals is the primary mechanism for funding affordable housing projects in Minnesota. In the meantime, all partners will continue work on various parts of the project.

Ward Merrill, Executive Director
Citizens for Backus/AB, Inc.



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Community Cafe

With the Backus dining room closed due to the COVID-19 situation, Community Café is serving meals for pick up only.

Guests are asked to call 285-7225 before 4:00 pm on Café days to reserve a meal.

Meals can be picked up at the **east side building door #3** between 5:00 and 6:00 pm on Tuesdays and Thursdays.

As always, everyone is welcome, there is no charge for meals but donations are graciously accepted.

Community Café—dedicated to reducing hunger and building a stronger community.



Visit www.backusab.org for menus, or watch Backus Community Center Facebook page