

BACKUS Community Center



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From the Director's Desk

Although the title for this piece is, "From the Director's Desk," it could be more aptly titled, "From the Director's Dining Room Table." Since March 17 I've been working at home; all programs/events at Backus remain cancelled with the exception of Community Café, Summer Food Service Program and Ruby's Party; social distancing is in effect in the building; tenants are working limited schedules with most counseling taking place online or remotely; phone and Zoom meetings are commonplace, and the building sparkles with fresh wax and extreme cleanliness without the usual influx of visitors.

These past several months have given my wife a feel for what my upcoming retirement may be like with me home all the time. That date is fast approaching on December 31, 2020. The "Now Hiring – Executive Director" ad in the Falls JOURNAL and numerous, "Congratulations on your retirement" wishes have made my impending retirement seem real. My 13-year tenure as the executive director of Backus has really been "the best job I've ever had." Working with the best staff, the best board of directors, the great volunteers, members, donors, and a community that appreciates the work we do and the treasure that the Backus Community Center has become – all combine to make this job the highlight of my working career.

With all regular events/programs cancelled, our focus has been on what we can do for the community safely and with an impact. That focus has been food. Backus food and meal programs have seen a huge upsurge in use during the Covid -19 pandemic. Use of the Tuesday/Thursday Community Café meals have more than tripled with the pick-up system in place since March 17. The average number of meals served/night has jumped from 49/night in our dining room to 162/night with highs of 190+ to 203 on several occasions. Also operated on a pick-up basis, the eleventh year of the free Summer Food Service Program serves a daily average of 121 lunches – a higher daily average than the previous four summers! June's total lunch count is on track to exceed 2,750 meals and could top our all-time June meal count of 2,795! Parents appreciate the

"pick-up" format. The summer lunch program is funded by the MN Department of Education, U.S. Department of Agriculture with additional support from the Falls Hunger Coalition, Coca-Cola Bottling, Packaging Corporation of America, the Otto Bremer Trust and the Northland Foundation. Ruby's Pantry food distribution continues as a "drive-up" system with most guests and volunteers proclaiming it a success. Ruby's is held the second Monday of each month from 5-7pm. We ask that guests phone our office at 285-7225 to reserve a share or two. For a \$20 cash donation guests receive an abundance of food. Guests may donate and receive more than one share. Why not share one with a friend or relative?

As the year counts down to December 31, our most satisfying task has been working on the Alexander Baker School Project. Our colleague at KOOTASCA Community Action, Isaac Meyer, Community Development Coordinator, has spearheaded the project locally. Co-developer with KOOTASCA is Community Housing Development Corporation of Minneapolis. With almost 4,000 housing units completed – we couldn't have a better partner to see the AB Project to completion. If our application for Housing Tax Credits is approved by MN Housing, 30 new units of affordable housing will be constructed in AB providing a mix of one, two and three bedroom units. The vision of the original group of citizens who formed Citizens for Backus/ AB will be realized with the re-birth of the historic AB School as a "home" for thirty families and the continuation of Backus Community Center as the "heart" of International Falls.

Ward Merrill, Executive Director

WARD



Food Programs See High Attendance Rates

Throughout the COVID-19 pandemic, Backus has been able to host three food distribution programs: Community Café, Summer Food Service Program and Ruby's Pantry. Serving rates are the highest they have ever been and we are pleased to see that the outreach and impact of these programs has increased throughout the community. Recently, the Community Café served 203 meals in one night! One guest wrote, "This program extends beyond a tasty meal to families, it also fills community spirit. The members that come to the Café are from all ages and various backgrounds. Many of us are leaning on this to help us get through our own pile of bills. The Community Café relieves stress and brings community connection (at a distance)." At Backus, we are grateful to serve you and love to hear how our programs make a difference for you, your families, and our community!

A 4th Grade Student's Lofty Responsibility in the A.B. school By Harry Batdorf

Fourth grade commenced for me in Mrs. Krall's room in 1964 on the second floor of Alexander Baker school. The tall windows in our classroom faced north. On the first or second day in class, right after roll call and the principal's loudspeaker announcements, Mrs. Krall had me stand up next to my desk. I wondered what I had done to get in trouble so soon in the school year. She told me that it was going to be my job each day to take the waste-paper basket down to the furnace room in the basement and empty the paper into the furnace. How or why she selected me to take on this awesome responsibility, I never knew.

She told me she was going to show me what to do. Mrs. Krall had me walk to the front of the class where I picked up the waste-paper basket on our way out the classroom door to the east stairway. When we reached the first floor we continued down the stairs to the basement level (where no students ever go!) through a door at the bottom of the stairs, and then through another door into the boiler room where #1 & #2 boilers stand side-by-side. I noticed two folding chairs in front of the boiler doors. Mrs. Krall showed me how to flip over the latch on #1 boiler, then swing open the door revealing the coal-fired flames into which I would empty the waste-paper basket.

This was my job each day for the entire year, usually mid-morning, sometimes twice a day if the basket filled up because of a class project involving a lot of paper. Some of the other kids were envious of me because it was apparent that I enjoyed the special job and getting out of the classroom for a few minutes each day. Once or twice during the year I entered the boiler room with my waste-paper basket and saw our family friend from church, Mr. Napper. John Napper was a janitor having his coffee break with his lunch pail on his lap in front of the open boiler door enjoying the fire. Mr. Napper would say, "Sit down, Harry," and gesture toward the other chair. I recall that we chatted about people that we knew for a few minutes before I hurried back up to Mrs. Krall's 4th grade classroom.



Harry & friends being goofy in front of the Alexander Baker School.

Contributions, Donations and Memorials

Contributions given from March 2020 through May 2020

In Memory of:

- Ed Anderson to 2020-2021 Performing Arts Series from James & Louise Bartkowski, Sheri Erickson, Debbi LaVigne, and Christine Olson
- Gladyce Arnold from David & Ann Bzdok
- Don Crosby from Ron & Jancie McClanahan
- Gordy Ettestad from Shermoen Law Office
- Donna Hodel from Stuart & Sue Nordquist
- Edna Karsnia from Allan & Beth Anderson, Carolyn Davison, Donna Frederickson, Robin Garbe, Robert & Jean Houska, Brad & Shelly King, Albert & E. Jean Larson, Jennifer Stevens, and Beth Waterhouse
- Bud Larson from E. Jean Larson
- Patrick Lindsey from Milo & Margaret Christianson
- Bob Peterson from Wayne & Mary Ann Kasich
- Barb Trompeter from Donna Frederickson



Community Café Contributors

American Family Insurance, Carol Anderson, Clifford & Sharon Carlson, Justin Carney, Sheryl Christianson, Erin Coutts, Steve & Christy Earley, Donna R. Erickson, Evangelical Covenant Church, Tim & Marva Fairchild, Falls Hunger Coalition, Susan Foran, George & Susan Fraik, Karen Ganter, Mary Graves, Roger & Rebecca Griffin Daniel & Theresa Halpern, Gerald & E. Jean Hilfer, Cameron & Shelley Hokenson, Jeff Holenko, Holy Trinity Episcopal Church, Dale & Jan Johnson, Sylvia Johston, Marit Lee Kucera, Doug & Beth Lowthian, Marshall N. Knudson Family Community Fund, Arden McKnight, Duane & Mary Nelson, Packaging Corporation of America, Mary B. Pelowski, Brenda Roche, Barbara Shaw, Peter Skrief, St. Thomas Church, Verlle (Punky) Stadum, Jim & Linda Sutch, Susan Swendsen, The Women of the ELCA of the Laurentian Conference, John Turenne, Linnea Velsvaag, Roland Wallestad, Randy & Patricia Waskul, Kay Wento, Andrew & Georgeann Wright, Zion Lutheran Church, Zion Lutheran Church Women

Donations to Ruby's Pantry from Kirsten Wagnenius and Michael & Caryn Noland

Seat Sponsors from:

- Andrew & Dru Faith in memory of John & Gen Faith
- Mary Graves-Budak in memory of Michael Kent Budak
- Tom & Jarlyn Hodel in memory of Bob Hodel, Bud Hokenson, Donna Hodel, and Jennie Hokenson
- Arden McKnight in memory of Birket Anderson, Lee Anderson, Bob Anderson, and Craig McKnight
- Ruth Sumner in memory of Gerald Sumner
- Roger & Mary Weum in memory of James Liebe

Grants from:

- Northland Foundation for general operating, Community Café, Summer Food Service Program, and Ruby's Pantry
- Marshall Knudson Family Community Fund for KCC-TV and Community Café
- KCDA for drainage repair
- Midco Foundation for Community Café

General Donation from Phillip & Krista Pillsbury and Kurt & Hoa Sobczynski

COVID-19 Updates

- Backus is now open for essential business only Monday through Friday from 8:00am to 4:00pm.
- Community Café remains carry-out only. We ask that you continue to call in before 4:00pm on Café days, so that we can record the number of meals you would like. Meals can be picked up from 5:00-6:00pm every Tuesday and Thursday at the east door.
- The Summer Food Service Program has also been switched to carry-out only. The program serves ages 1-18 with delicious meals Monday-Friday from 11:30am to 1:30pm. Meals can be picked up at the east door as well.
- Backus resumed with the May and June food distribution for Ruby' Pantry. Food was distributed via drive-thru system and was successful. We intend to use this system until further notice.
- Summer Arts Week and open gym have been cancelled. We do not anticipate that these programs will be happening at all this summer but are hopeful that they will make a strong return next summer.
- Individual Walking and Walkercise Classes have been suspended until further notice.
- Backus is still offering rental spaces for meetings and gatherings. All spaces rented must follow the current guidelines set in place by the State of Minnesota.
- The only Backus tenants that are open as of now are Northland Counseling, Rainy River Recovery, and Servants of Shelter.



Featured Mosaic

The Alexander Baker School Building features beautiful mosaic tile inlays to the building's exterior. According to the National Register of Historic Places, the two top stories are visually demarcated from the first floor with a stone belt course. In the central block, there is a superb series of mosaics, depicting scenes of Native American life. Neither newspaper accounts nor architectural plans reveal the creator of these mosaics. Our mosaics are in excellent condition considering they have weathered cold, harsh winters for the past 107 years.

This is one of 5 mosaics featured in the AB building and all were hand-made in 1912 by a company that is now called The Moravian Tile and Pottery Works. The Company also created the decorative tiles that are located on the fireplace, around the exterior doors, and on the upper face of the building.



Backus welcomes Danielle Piekarski as Student Intern



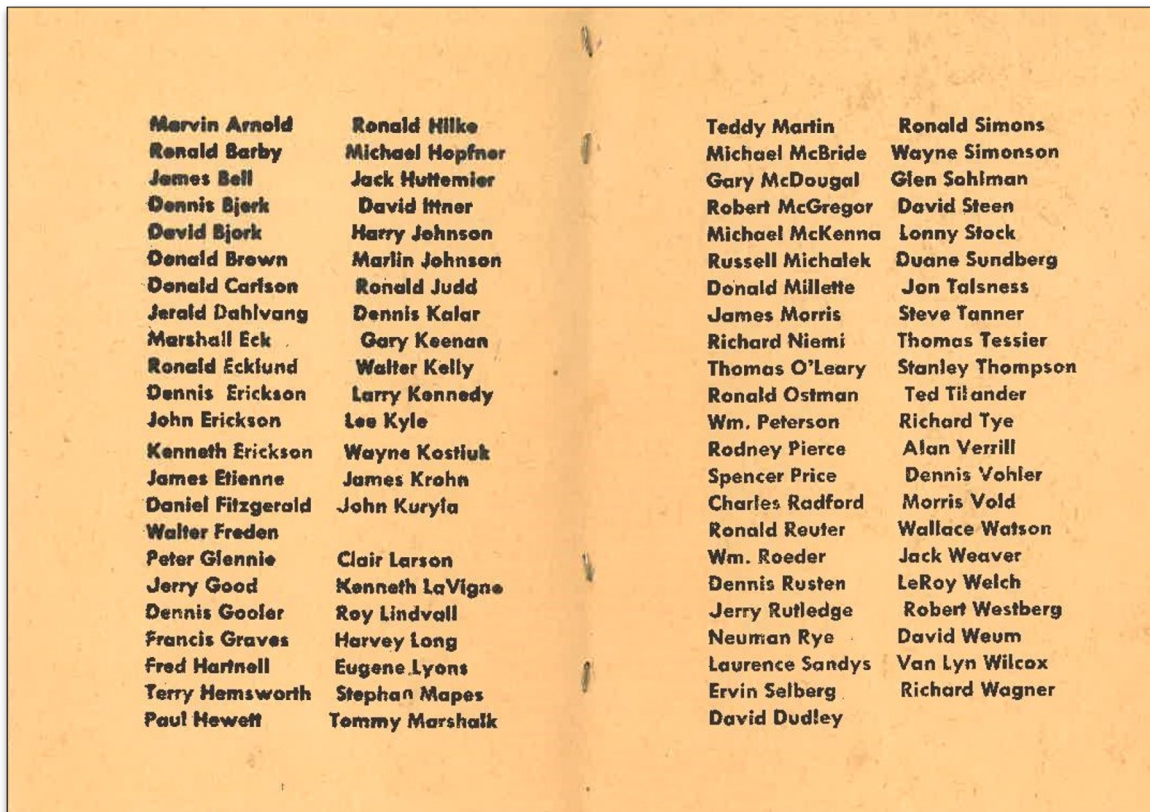
Backus is excited to welcome Danielle Piekarski to staff. Danielle, daughter to Dean and Dawn Piekarski and a Littlefork-Big Falls graduate, is now a student at the University of North Dakota and is studying Management and Nonprofit Administration.

Piekarski said, "I spent a lot of time in Backus when I was younger, and I am very excited to be a part of some of the programs I experienced as a kid! I look forward to serving the community and learning more about how nonprofit organizations operate along the way."

Event Coordinator Lois Lundin stated, "Danielle has been a very welcomed addition to the Backus office. She is eager to learn and very willing to provide support wherever help is needed. To date, she has been helping with letters and other correspondence, updating the Backus web site, writing articles for the Newsletter, answering phones and assisting callers with a wide range of questions, and helping with registration data for the Summer Lunch program, Community Café, and Ruby's Pantry. Danielle is very creative and offers helpful information and ideas."

From Our Archives

The following list of names was found in a small booklet from the Backus Junior High seventh grade industrial arts class of 1955-1956.



Update on the Alexander Baker Adaptive Reuse Project

On Thursday, June 11, the Backus Board of Directors approved a Sales Agreement with KOOTASCA Community Action and Community Housing Development Corporation for the sale of the Alexander Baker School in the amount of \$249,000. Executive Director Ward Merrill signs the agreement while the three longest serving Backus Board Members look on. Back: Patti Ballan and John Faith, seated: Kay Arnold. Kay was president of Citizens for Backus when the AB and Backus buildings were purchased from ISD 361 in August 2002 for \$850. All three board members were instrumental in the effort to save the historic buildings and were part of the dedicated and determined group of citizens who succeeded in that endeavor.



KOOTASCA Community Action's Planning & Development Director, Isaac Meyer, seated with Merrill, has been the key local partner in the reuse project since the two nonprofits joined in the effort in 2017.



The Alexander Baker School had its origins over 100 years ago during the beginning of the lumber and paper industries in remote Koochiching County. The 1912 editions of the *International Falls Press & Border Budget*, housed in the archives of the MN Historical Society, depict an exciting time when the area was just being developed. E.W. Backus figures prominently in that development with the building of the dam, the paper mill, railroads, timber and water rights and, by 1912, the huge sawmill employing 500 men, the new bridge, long-distance telephone and a monthly payroll of almost \$100,000. The area attracted immigrants, farmers seeking land, businessmen and entrepreneurs of all types.

Headlines and articles throughout 1912 included:

- Jan. – the new Rex Hotel opens. The 125'x125' building costs \$100,000
- Feb. – the new City Jail was completed and “formally opened by the juggling of a bunch of Finlanders for disorderly conduct”
- Feb. – a School Board Election for the purpose of bonding the district for a \$125,000 proposed building “a handsome 3-story affair” in hopes of being ready by next fall “leaving the unneeded part to be finished as required”
- Mar. – the International Lumber Company opens the “big sawmill” employing 500 men and sawing 125 million board feet of lumber/year
- April – “the most appalling disaster of the sea occurred last Sunday night when the new \$8 million steamship *Titanic* went down by colliding with an iceberg. 1,350 lives, \$5 million in diamonds and 3,425 bags of mail lost.”
- May – School Commencement for rural and city youth held at City Hall. Prof. R.E. Denfeld of Duluth to speak
- June – Proposals for High School Building in International Falls accepted for nine separate contracts until noon on June 16. All work and materials to conform as set forth by Bell, Tyre & Chapman Architects of Mpls
- June – The Northern MN Development Association convenes in the Falls. “Koochiching County the *Garden Spot* of the State of MN” and, “Int'l. Falls is the most industrial city of the northwest.”
- July – Acceptance of school proposals moved to July 16. Contracts let for the “commodious and magnificent school building which will be ready by next (1913) summer. The general contract let to Gray Const. of Watertown S.D. (\$93,000), Heating/vent. \$20,000, Plumbing \$6,711, Electrical \$4,900. Total of \$125,000. The contractors are to have the building ready in 12 months.



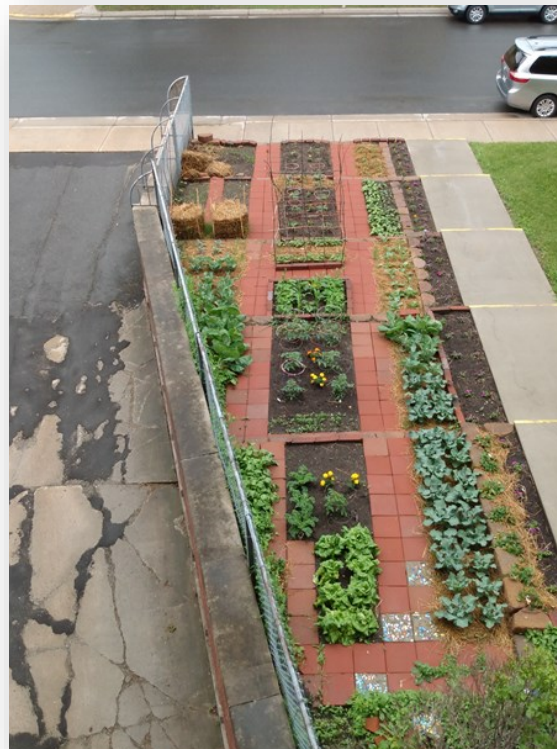
- Aug. – the Annual Report of the School District shows a budget of \$93,559. New schools built this year: 6 log & 3 frame. Total number: 23 log, 18 frame.
- Aug. – “Backusphobia” prevalent among some citizens as election nears
- Aug. Sudden death of E. Raymond Backus, 21-year-old son of E.W. – result of a hunting accident on Dry Weed Island
- Sept. – City school opens with 379 students and 13 teachers with a temporary addition of four rooms built by Stubee & Co. @ cost of \$1,200
- October – Attempt on presidential candidate Col. Roosevelt’s life in Milwaukee
- October – “Official Ballot” for 1912 election printed in newspaper. “Women’s Ballot” has only one elected position: “County Superintendent of Schools” – Annie Shelland v. C.A. Miller
- November – Koochiching County votes Republican but Woodrow Wilson wins Presidential contest with 638 votes to Roosevelt’s 522, Eugene Debs 460 and Taft 239
- Dec. – “We are now building a \$125,000 high school. The foundation is in.”
- Dec. – an article promoting northern Minnesota and Koochiching County, “. . . millions of undeveloped acres. An empire in area and a kingdom in resources awaits agricultural development.”



Photo: Courtesy of Carol Pavleck
Construction begins on the Alexander Baker School circa 1912. One of the workers is Einar Johnson, Carol’s Grandfather, looking North - 3rd Street.

Landscaping

Thank you to Kathryn O’Connor for planting her beautiful flowers here at Backus!



Thank you to Rick DeBenedet for his hard work on the Backus Garden. Please stop by to see the excellent job he has done!



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www.backusab.org

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Introducing BunBun the rabbit! He will be hidden in each issue. Can you find him?

The background of the lower half of the page is a musical staff with various notes and wavy lines. The staff is black, and the notes are purple and orange. There are also wavy lines in orange and red that sweep across the page. The text "2020-2021 Performing Arts Series" is written in a large, bold, black serif font. Below it, "Watch for details!" is written in a smaller, bold, black sans-serif font. The text "Next season will include bluegrass music, Borealis Bards presentation of 'Charlotte's Web', a fantastic Christmas show, a popular, well-known family show, improv comedy and a lively, up-beat dueling pianos show!" is written in a bold, black sans-serif font. At the bottom, "Interested in making a donation or sponsoring event(s)? Call us at 218-285-7225" is written in a bold, black sans-serif font.

2020-2021

Performing Arts Series

Watch for details!

Next season will include bluegrass music, Borealis Bards presentation of "Charlotte's Web", a fantastic Christmas show, a popular, well-known family show, improv comedy and a lively, up-beat dueling pianos show!

Interested in making a donation or sponsoring event(s)? Call us at 218-285-7225