

## From the Director's Desk

This is my first newsletter from behind the Director's desk. It's still a little hard for me to believe that I get to do this job, but I understand now exactly why Ward Merrill consistently proclaimed that this was the best job he ever had. Life at Backus is great and I'm so happy to be here!

It's my pleasure to report that things at Backus are running very well. Operationally, we are sound. We are experiencing growth and change. Everyone at Backus has been on a learning curve for a year now, and our willingness to change the way we do things in order to meet our community's changing needs has served us very well. We all work together to make things happen, and in doing so we are strengthening our bench and are helping the individuals on our team to add to their skill sets and to grow. Our people are openly creative in problem solving. We actively share ideas and skills, and we are learning from each other. Backus continues to invest in quality programs that strengthen our community and promote good physical and emotional health for all. We want the offerings of Backus to extend deep into the area of Northern Minnesota that so many of us call home.

As you read through this newsletter, you'll learn about some of the new things that are happening.

- We are very proud to announce that we have a new tenant in the building! Jenna DeBenedet runs a fitness center called "LIFT" in the lower level of Backus. We are thrilled that she decided to make Backus the place to bring her dreams to life!
- The Backus Garden Club has begun to work on the 2021 garden! There are new plants starting in soil, and there are seedlings getting their start in hydroponic systems. This is a great opportunity to learn and to share your knowledge. Please come join the group!
- We are making plans for an exciting 2021-2022 Performing Arts Season. We're basing our artist selection decisions on what we heard through audience participation and survey responses. I think you'll be very happy when you see what we have lined up!
- We are VERY excited to announce our "Hidden Talents" program. This will be a year-long program, and one that we believe will be a very positive experience for everyone involved ~ from the performers, to the technicians, to the audience! We have SO MUCH GOOD happening in our communities ~ it's high time we showcase these hidden talents!
- We continue to take excellent care of the Backus building. You'll see photos and snippets about spring-time improvements on the pages that follow.

I hope you enjoy this edition of the newsletter. Please send your ideas or feedback to us as to how we can make the newsletter more meaningful for you. Take care!

*Lois Lundin*

I first met Ward in May of 2008. I was interviewing for the Volunteer Coordinator Position at Backus. Although I was not hired for the position, I was very impressed by Ward and his commitment to Backus and our community. I experienced his enthusiasm again when I was elected to the Backus Board and became the Board Treasurer in October 2008 and in February 2009, I had the privilege to work with Ward everyday as Backus Business Manager. In the last 12 years, I have witnessed many admirable qualities from Ward, however three of these qualities stand out and define him.

Ward is a compassionate. He cares for everyone who comes through the office doors at Backus. If he knows that someone needs something, whether personal or professional, he goes out of his way to meet that person's needs. Once an employee needed transportation to and from work, Ward picked up and drop off this person every day for as long as needed.

Ward is very generous. Whenever there is a request to use the Backus facility to hold a fundraiser to help with medical bills or other emergency reasons, he offers the family to use the facility without charge. I remember a conversation with Ward when we had the first performance art series. We talked about offering complimentary tickets for a certain group. I said, that would be a great idea. We can give one ticket to each couple. Ward looked at me and said just one? Then they have to decide which one can come to the show? I said NO, they will buy one more ticket and then both come to the show, it's business. Again, Ward gently looked at me and said "be nice Hoa.", and we gave two tickets to each couple.

Ward is dedicated to our community and to Backus. His dedication lead him to excel in his job as Executive Director. He made sure that all directives from the board were carried out in a timely fashion. He kept the Board of Directors aware and involved in all of the issues at Backus. Ward was dedicated to his staff and found opportunities for all of us to enhance our job skills. He also made sure we were comfortable coming to him to share our concerns and problems. His door was always open.

Finally, as everyone knows, Ward loves to tell story of The Backus Community Center and is very proud of the staff. On one occasion there was a new guest visiting the Backus office. They spent some time with Ward becoming acquainted with Backus. Afterwards when I was introduced to the guest, I was surprised to learn that this person knew much about me and was very excited about our community center. Ward's enthusiasm for Backus appears to be contagious.

In closing I am reminded of an old Vietnamese saying "Ăn trái nhớ kẻ trồng cây". Translated this means "when eating a fruit , think of the person who planted the tree." As the Backus Community Center continues to grow and provide needed services to our community, we must remember all of the work and dedication that Ward provided that we are now enjoying.



Ward, it was my honor to work for you, to know you and Linda!

From *Hoa Sobczynski*

## Hidden Talents Program Announced

The **Minnesota State Arts Board** has awarded Backus Community Center a Creative Support Grant for arts programming. This grant will be used to fund a program designed to promote local artists who might not otherwise have an opportunity to perform or display their arts. The goal is to bring local talents to light and to share the artistic abilities within our community.

The Backus “Hidden Talents” program will feature the talents of Minnesotans with an emphasis on residents from outstate northern Minnesota and Koochiching County. **Individuals and groups** of all ages and all artistic levels are encouraged to participate. This program is limited to nonprofessional artists.

Backus is very excited to have been awarded this grant and to offer opportunities to artists in our community to share their talents. So often we learn about talented artists in our region and we see and hear the beautiful work that they do. This is a wonderful opportunity for artists to tell their stories and to share their passions and skills with the public. Backus is thrilled to provide this for our community through broadcasts on KCC-TV.

Artistic areas that will be considered include music, creative visual arts, and speech/oration. Backus is encouraging original works and compositions. Our vision is to record people introducing themselves and telling a story about their talent or art, and then to record a video of the performance or to show their craft/artwork. If people are camera shy, they can record themselves independently and give the recording to Backus. They can do this with equipment that they already own (good iPhones work!), or they can come to Backus and borrow equipment from our studio. Our KCC-TV Program Director, Darcy Sullivan, is great to work with and makes the experience of recording the feature fun.

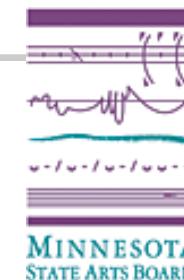
Everyone is welcome to participate; this program is open to arts in all forms. We want to encourage people to not be shy or to think that what they do isn’t good enough. Let us help you showcase your work.

People who are interested in participating and/or registering can find more information and forms on the Backus website at [www.backusab.org](http://www.backusab.org), or at the Backus office. Registration forms can be mailed to or dropped off at the Backus office at:

Hidden Talents  
Backus Community Center  
900 5<sup>th</sup> Street  
International Falls, MN 56649

Playing an instrument. Wood crafting. Metal arts. Painting. Pottery. Weaving. Sculptures. Glass work. Wood burning. Welding. Photography. Singing. Writing poetry. Wood carving. Sign painting. Quilting. Sewing. Dance. Beading. The opportunities are endless! This program will run through February 28, 2022.

Backus is proud to be supported by the  
**MINNESOTA STATE  
ARTS BOARD**



## And that's a wrap!

Seating was limited, but spirits were high!  
The audiences enjoyed another great season of entertainment.



Plans are underway for an exciting  
**2021-2022 Performing Arts Series.**  
The Arts and Programming Committee is working with a variety of artists and types of shows to bring something for everyone to the Backus Auditorium! Details will be announced soon.

## Thank you to our 2020 - 2021 Performing Arts Series Sponsors!

**Platinum Sponsors:**




The  
**MARSHALL N. KNUDSON  
FAMILY COMMUNITY FUND**

**Gold Sponsors:**




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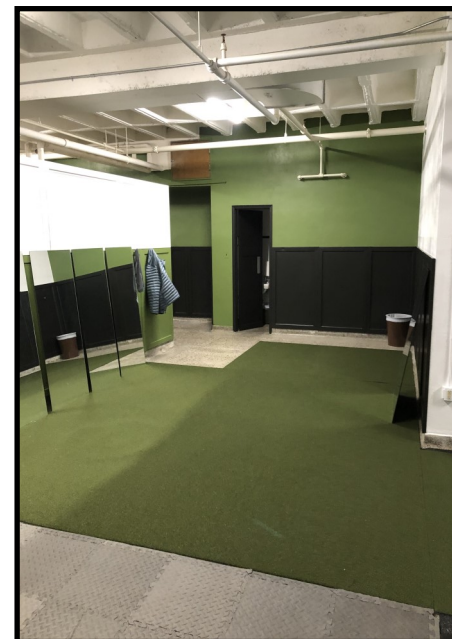

### Welcome LIFT!

Backus is very excited to have Jenna DeBenedet and her new business, LIFT, in the building. Many from the Backus Team pitched in to help transform the former Girl’s Locker Room into a powerful new environment.

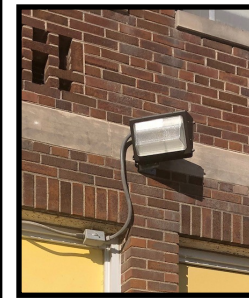


*“Welcome to LIFT. This has been a dream of mine for so long and it is finally coming true!! I offer group class and one on one personal training. Strength/Conditioning and Lifting are my passion!!”*

*- Jenna DeBenedet*



### Building Improvements



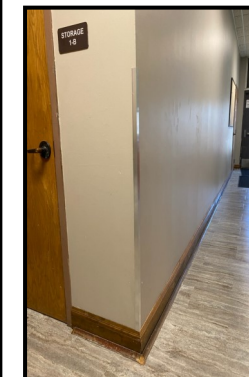
Look up! New LED fixtures are lighting up the Backus exterior and grounds!



New personal safety updates include a plexiglass shield in the kitchen food service area, and new touchless soap and paper towel dispensers throughout the Backus Building.



Fiberglass sheeting was installed on the walls of the lower level hallway and the back stairways leading up to the first floor.



Aluminum corner moldings were installed to protect corners in the hallways from bumps and bruises.

AND... The walls in the office just received a fresh coat of paint. Stop by to see!

## From The Archives

By Bob Marquardt



Mrs. Tone was the teacher and our classroom was in Alexander Baker School. I do not know which room number was our actual classroom - old school records might be where to look to find out. There are 2 photos as the class had too many kids to fit into one. Mrs. Tone took the pictures and then had copies made for each student. Classes were quite large back in those days with 36 kids in this class. Unfortunately I can only identify 18 of my classmates.

The event was for "Famous Americans" and held I believe in February. Each student was to pick a famous American and then do a autobiographical research to learn about that person. Then we created a character costume and each student presented "who they were" to the class at large. I don't think we presented to other classes as I don't remember but this could have happened. I was Thomas Edison and I recall I was fascinated by his inventions - probably got the idea from one of the many Bell Telephone film presentations that we were treated to in the "film room" on the second floor. As you can see by the photos some of these costumes were pretty convincing and I'm sure everyone had a lot of fun. I remember Mrs. Tone as being a really good teacher ( I probably got decent grades to arrive at this judgement) plus the fact the class was full of fun and smart kids. What is so interesting to me is that many of those kids are so easily recognized and had the same distinctive features when they got older!

## ~ Reflections on Backus

from Mr. Jim Roberts

I came to International Falls in 1974 and had the privilege of serving as Superintendent of Schools for nineteen years. The first thing that impressed me on arrival was the excellent facilities of the School District. After a tour of the buildings, it was clear to me that the Alexander Baker- Backus was a quality facility despite being the oldest. Most impressive was the beautiful auditorium which was the gemstone of the community. The names of E.W. Backus and Alexander Baker started my education on the history of International Falls and Borderland. These names for the buildings were well chosen.

The summer I arrived the Backus Auditorium was being refurbished. The seating was replaced and/or repaired and the interior was redecorated. Stan Johnson, an art teacher picked out the color scheme that still exists. It remains a beautiful facility.

My three boys all attended Backus, played basketball, and performed in music concerts. They talked about the student pranks, among them involved the three-story open stair wells. For some reason they enjoyed going to shop class in the basement that was shared with the custodians and the food storage. Our entire family enjoyed attending the Border Concerts and the many other activities sponsored. I am sure families will enjoy them for years to come.

In 1974 student enrollment of the school District was about 3,500. Now it is less than one-third that amount. Years declining enrollment and cost of operation forced closure of several school buildings including Backus. When Backus was closed, I feared that the community would not be able to maintain the facility. I was wrong, Backus is alive and well under excellent management.

Now, after 47 years, I go to Backus early in the morning, put on my mask, sign in, say good morning to Lois Lundin, and start my walk.



## Backus Garden Club



Do you like to garden but need a garden to work in? Would you like to learn how to garden, but don't know where to go?

The newly formed BACKUS GARDEN CLUB might be just for you!

The goals for the club are pretty simple:

- Everyone is welcome to participate, no matter how much time you have.
- Let's make gardening fun and available to everyone.
  - Raised beds. Vertical growing. Square foot gardening. Container gardening. Vegetables. Herbs. Flowers. Traditional and unique plants. Hydroponic gardening.
- Learn together. Share techniques, knowledge, and ideas.

Would you like to get in on the fun? Please call the Backus office to see when the group is meeting. Come join us!

Would you like to contribute plants, seeds, or other items that we need? Please call the Backus Office or check out the Garden Page under Backus Programs on the website to see what we need.

www.backusab.org



### KCC-TV Membership Form

Your membership contribution is tax deductible. NOTE: Backus is eligible for **Thrivent Choice Dollars**. If you would like to designate your Thrivent Choice Dollars to Backus, please contact your Rep.

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

City: \_\_\_\_\_ State: \_\_\_\_\_ Zip: \_\_\_\_\_

Email Address: \_\_\_\_\_

Phone: \_\_\_\_\_ Cell: \_\_\_\_\_

<b>Individuals</b>		_____ \$ _____
_____ Student \$15	<b>Businesses</b>	
_____ Crew \$50	_____ News Anchor \$150	Businesses supporting KCC-TV
_____ Cameraman \$100	_____ Director \$250	will receive an informational slide
	_____ Producer \$500	that runs on the Carousel Calendar



**Remembering those who we have recently passed away that have made an impact at our community. Backus has received contributions in memory of:**

- *Nell Anderson* from Arthur & Anne Przybilla
- *Kathryn Awe* from Ralph Awe
- *Violet Johnson* from
 

Lloyd & Donna Barg	Byrne & Carole Johnson	Punky Stadum
Marilyn Borell	Ward & Linda Merrill	Stan & Betty Tomerlin
Justin Carney	Clarice Miller	Kathlyn Weir Tornes
Marguerite Davison	Reid & Jenny Rabon	Susan Weir
- *Elaine Goulet* from Keith Goulet
- *Dick Hill* from Arthur & Anne Przybilla
- *Florence Knutson* from Harry & Sally Batdorf, Rick & LouAnne Faulkner, and Frank & Doreen Swendsen
- *Linda Merrill* from
 

Kay Arnold	Kirk Skallman & Georgia Growette	Bob & Pam Peterson
Ann Backes	David & Gigie Harder	Robert & Toni Rapaway
Darell Bradley & Patti Ballan	Joan Heinle	James & Gail Rognerud
Lloyd & Donna Barg	Mary Herges	Corky & Sharalyn Schaak
James & Sharon Baron	Steve & Mary Holmes	John & Catherine Schroeder
Jay & Julie Bartkowski	Mike & Cynthia Jakska	Al & Linda Shannon
Delphine & Edward Bernath, Jr.	Alan & Elaine Johnson	Jason & Heather Sjoblom
Les & Joanne Bjorkquist	Byrne & Carole Johnson	Tom & Barb Smith
Dick & Pat Bjorum	Phyllis Karsnia	Kurt & Hoa Sobczynski
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Dick Clements	Greg & Lois Lundin	Robin Tilander
Tom & Julie Clements	Carol Mannausau	Michael & Nicole Turenne
Rick & Pat Debenedet	Bob Marquardt	Dennis Vohler
James & Joann Dornhecker	Ron & Janice McClanahan	Beth Waterhouse
Pat Ettestad	Susan McCloskey	Mike & Darla Wellcome
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Harold & Jayne Fenske	Lynn Naeckel & David McKee	Terry Wento
Katherine Fluke	Paul & Paulette Medin	Tom & Randi Wherley
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Karen & Doug Franchot III	Robert & Mary Norbie	
Donna Frederickson	Anne Nordstrom	
Paula Gondek	Judith Nelson & Soren Olesen	
Mary Graves	Rebecca Otto	





- *Henry “Harry” L. Sweatt* from Sweatt Foundation
- *Dirk Tilander* from John & Karen Wilson
- *Dave & Barb Trompeter* from Tom & Randi Wherley
- *James Wento* from Al & Wanda Linder
  
- *Fran Zaren* from
 

Kay Arnold	Genevieve Fisher	Corky & Sharalyn
Walter Beier	Gene & Pat Kjellgren	Schaak
Lynn & Carol Belanger	Lynn Naeckel & David McKee	Kurt & Hoa Sobczynski
Joan Benedix	Beverly Nagurski	Jeff & Marge Veeder
Catholic Daughters of America	Ron & Wanda Pelland	Betty Villata
Susan Congrave	John & Rose Rasmusse	John & Cynthia Weiske
		Marie Zaren
  
- *Betty Zeipen* from
 

Tim & Marva Fairchild	Kevin & Char Jensen	Bob & Pam Peterson
Rick & Lou Anne Faulkner	Roy & Minnie Kidd	Jon & Anne Reuter
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Roger & Rebecca Girffin	Arden McKnight	Robert & Faye Thomson
Kirk Skallman & Georgia Growette	Raymond & Debbie Ostman	Ward & Monica Zeipen
Charlene Jensen	Todd & Patty Pavleck	



## *Linda Merrill*

February 1, 1949—February 17, 2021

### THANK YOU

To the friends, family, colleagues and community members who celebrated Linda’s life, love of community and caring for others with their condolences, sympathy and memorial gifts.

Linda always made others feel special. One of her friends said, “Linda made everyone feel like they were her best friend.” Last November Linda encouraged friends and family to contribute to Community Café’s “Feed Just One” campaign and raised over \$1,400 to help feed others. She delivered Café meals, Ruby’s Pantry food boxes and volunteered countless

hours at Backus. Her CaringBridge site had over 8,600 visits with over 650 individuals posting comments and tributes. Prior to her passing on Ash Wednesday, February 17 – over 175 cards and birthday cards arrived. Over 200 sympathy cards arrived follow her death. Thousands of dollars have been gifted to Backus, Fairview Hospice and Zion Lutheran through memorials in her honor. I am overwhelmed by this show of support and tribute to Linda. I know she would be pleased by this outpouring of generosity to benefit others.

On behalf of our family, Thank You!

Ward Merrill

### THANK YOU TO OUR NEW / RENEWING SEAT SPONSORS

*Plaques have been placed on auditorium chairs.*

- ◇ *Judith Bratta* - In Memory of Vic & Opal Mannila
- ◇ *Helen Louden* - In Memory of Effie Hanover
- ◇ *Arden McKnight* - In Memory of Birket Anderson, Bob Anderson, Cheryl Anderson, Lee Anderson, and Craig McKnight
- ◇ *Duane & Marilyn Mitchell* - In Memory of Kevin Mitchell
- ◇ *Terry Schultz* - In Memory of Emilee Schultz
- ◇ *Backus Board and Staff* - In Honor of Ward Merrill and in Memory of Linda Merrill

### Backus has the greatest volunteers!

Backus is terribly proud of and extremely grateful for the volunteers who help make Backus happen! Thank you one and all!

- ◆ Community Café
- ◆ Performing Arts Concerts
- ◆ Folding Newsletters
- ◆ Office help
- ◆ Building maintenance projects
- ◆ Kitchen activities



### Backus Community Café

Community Café Continues to serve many in the Northern Minnesota communities. An average of 250 meals are served on Tuesday and Thursday evenings. Guests continued to come to Backus through the cold winter months, and our volunteers were very happy to serve meals.

We are pleased to announce that the outdoor, pick-up process will continue into the summer months. We are grateful to hear of the people who are picking up meals and are delivering them to home-bound family and friends. This extended service shows great compassion and is a tremendous way to help Backus to get food out to others who can't come to us!

**If you would like to volunteer at Community Café, we could use your help!** We have a number of jobs to be done, and would love to have you join us on any days that you can come. Please consider coming to help with this essential service! Call the Backus office for details.

### Summer Food Service Starts on Monday, June 7

Would you like to come volunteer to serve lunch to area children? This service will continue as pick-up only, too. We would love to get a jump start on gathering volunteers. Please call the Backus office if you would like to come help!



### Backus Community Center Membership Form

Your membership contribution is tax deductible. NOTE: Backus is eligible for **Thrivent Choice Dollars**. If you would like to designate your Thrivent Choice Dollars to Backus, please contact your Rep.

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

City: \_\_\_\_\_ State: \_\_\_\_\_ Zip: \_\_\_\_\_

Email Address: \_\_\_\_\_

Phone: \_\_\_\_\_ Cell: \_\_\_\_\_

**Membership Categories**

\_\_\_\_ Affiliate \$25 to \$59      \_\_\_\_ Sponsor \$150 to \$249      \_\_\_\_ Patron, \$500 to \$999

\_\_\_\_ Associate \$60 to \$99      \_\_\_\_ Benefactor \$250 to \$499      \_\_\_\_ Presidential \$1,000 and up

\_\_\_\_ Supporter \$100 to \$149

### Backus Community Center Donation Form

Your membership contribution is tax deductible. NOTE: Backus is eligible for **Thrivent Choice Dollars**. If you would like to designate your Thrivent Choice Dollars to Backus, please contact your Rep.

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

City: \_\_\_\_\_ State: \_\_\_\_\_ Zip: \_\_\_\_\_

Email Address: \_\_\_\_\_

Phone: \_\_\_\_\_ Cell: \_\_\_\_\_

Amount of your gift: \$ \_\_\_\_\_

This gift is a:

\_\_\_\_ Monthly Donation

\_\_\_\_ One-Time Donation

Does your donation honor someone special?

In Memory of: \_\_\_\_\_

In Honor of: \_\_\_\_\_

We would be happy to notify the family of or honoree of your gift. Please provide us with their complete name and address.

\_\_\_\_\_

Please send your check payable to  
**Backus Community Center**  
 900 Fifth Street  
 International Falls, MN 56649

You can also make your contribution on line. See the options available on our website at [www.backusab.org/donations](http://www.backusab.org/donations)

Please call the Backus office if you have questions or need assistance. 218-285-7225



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 Business Manager  
 Judy Medeiros,  
 Event Coordinator  
 Alyssa Crawford,  
 Office Assistant  
 Jerry Vohler, Custodian  
 Joe Kenny, Janitor  
 Harry Batdorf,  
 Building Manager  
 Linda Sutch, Cook  
 Wanda Linder, Cook  
 Lenard Bobst, Cook  
 Mary A. Lien,  
 Kitchen Supervisor  
 Jill Malone, Event Staff  
 June Wilson, Event Staff  
 Darcy Sullivan,  
 KCC-TV Program Director

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



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**Be sure you don't miss any of our mailings.**  
 Please send us your updated address, or just give us a call with any changes.  
 ~ Thank you.