Westby Area Historical Society
Museum and Genealogy Center

HISTORY KEEPERS

2026
Issue 4
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PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE



Dear Members and Friends,

Since 1989, the Westby Area Historical Society (WAHS) has brought people together to preserve and share the stories of our community. Through museum exhibits, programs, tours, genealogy research, workshops, and our newsletter, we help people learn about Westby's past and discover the stories behind familiar places and families. Our website and Facebook page also keep everyone informed about upcoming events, activities, and ways to get involved.

2026 has been a busy and successful year for WAHS! Our monthly member meetings and Kaffegruppe gatherings, February's Snowflake sponsorship and Valentine's member recognition, cemetery stone cleaning workshops in April and October, Syttende Mai school programs, summer Sunday Open Houses and Party on the Porch, September's Homecoming Open House, October's Chamber Business Trick-or-Treat, and our November Volunteer of the Year Award have all brought people together. I was pleased to welcome so many familiar faces and new friends to our events throughout the year, including community leaders, residents, former coaches and players, and visitors. Our biggest event, Sweet Rides & Sweet Pies, was another tremendous success! The video created to promote the event has now reached more than 1.4 million people, bringing attention to WAHS, our homemade pies and car show, and the City of Westby. Scheduled tours and genealogy research have also kept us busy throughout the year. Thank you to everyone who attended, participated, and helped make these activities possible. Be sure to check our Facebook page and website for updates. You can also find current and past newsletters under the ABOUT US tab on our website.

Our members and volunteers are the heart of WAHS. They welcome museum visitors, help people trace their family histories, organize events, and share our community's stories. As we look ahead to 2027, I encourage you to join or renew your membership, invite friends and family with Westby connections to become involved, and consider volunteering. You don't need to give a lot of time. Even a few hours can make a difference! We welcome anyone who enjoys local history and wants to help in our mission to "collect, preserve, promote and communicate" Westby's history and heritage with future generations.

Interested in volunteering or serving on the board? Email us at westbywihistory@gmail.com or leave a message at (608)634-4478. Inviting a friend to join WAHS is another wonderful way to support our work. Thank you for being part of our historical society!

Your financial support also makes a difference. Memberships help pay for museum exhibits, history programs, genealogy resources, tours, and everyday operating expenses. Gifts, memorial donations, and planned giving also help protect our collections and preserve local history for future generations. In 2027, your support will be especially important as we work to repair the damage from the April 2026 hailstorm. Every gift helps us move forward with these repairs and continue sharing Westby's history. To donate, visit westbywihistory.com/annual-appeal and click the Annual Appeal button, or mail your gift to: WAHS; PO Box 42; Westby, WI 54667. Thank you for your generosity, your involvement, and your continued support of WAHS!

– Blaine Hedberg, WAHS President

SWEET RIDES WINS VERNON COUNTY DEVELOPMENT 2026 EVENT OF THE YEAR

On Wednesday, November 4, Chairman of the event, Garland McGarvey, accepted the Vernon County Development 2026 Event of the Year Award on behalf of *Sweet Rides & Sweet Pies*. In a room filled with more than 250 nominees, award winners, and dignitaries, Garland thanked Kathy Anderson (WAHS Secretary/treasurer and newsletter editor) as the other half of what he calls the Sweet Rides "two-headed monster," our Pie Crew, the many volunteers, the City of Westby, our sponsors, and the attendees for making this event such a successful WAHS fundraiser.

Following a wonderful catered meal, Larkin Breckel, Vernon County Development's Economic Development and Marketing Coordinator, announced the award, highlighting the growth of *Sweet Rides* from 15 vehicles in 2016 to more than 250 this year. Garland shared that the 2026 event drew more than 2,000 people, served over 730 pieces of pie, and that the 2026 Preising Productions video has reached more than 1.4 million viewers worldwide. He also noted that national TV personality, Dennis Gage, returned for a second year because he loves the area and believes in what we are doing!

Receiving several nominations for the award this year was an honor in itself—and another affirmation that something truly special is happening in our Westby area.











Photos on the right: The trophy; Garland accepting the award; Kathy and Garland. Rep. Tara Johnson and VCD director Larkin with Garland; Volunteers: Ellie (pies), Blaine (WAHS president), Garland, Kathy, Grant (parking), Karri (pies), and Julie (pies).



Shining a Light on the Past

Did you know this was a thing? A warning was printed in the November 21, 1956 issue of "The Westby Times." Hunters have enough trouble dragging a deer out of the woods – they probably don't want to deal with stolen property! 🤣

Hunters Warned Against Stealing Christmas Trees

Again this year there will be a drive against the stealing of Christmas trees by deer hunters. The Conservation Department warns that a hunter bringing back a tree this year should avoid trouble by carrying proof of ownership.

The Conservation Department points out that there isn't a single unowned tree in Wisconsin, regardless of its location. Every tree is either the property of an individual, a corporation or a governmental unit and represents in many cases considerable investment. Many trees are being raised specifically for the Christmas tree market, involving planting, shearing and growing for a number of years. Some Christmas trees continue to be a by-product of forestry planting.

Tree owners have been calling on the Conservation Department for help in protecting their property. Many of them are planning to take protective measures of their own. All of them have the right to prosecute in these cases as they have in any other form of larceny.

Wisconsin has a big Christmas tree industry. Anyone transporting Christmas trees commercially must have a state license.



UPCOMING WAHS EVENTS

Please put these dates on your calendar so you can join us!

Tues., Dec. 8: ANNUAL MEETING at the Westby VFW; 11:00 a.m.

REMINDER: No January monthly member meeting

Tues., Jan. 12: Kaffegruppe at Thoreson Museum; 2 – 4 pm

Tues., Feb. 2: WAHS Monthly Meeting at Thoreson Museum; 1 – 3 pm

Tues., Feb. 9: Kaffegruppe at the Daily Brew; 2 – 4 pm



Stabbur is beautified & we helped!



The Westby City Council has enlisted the help of very talented people who are transforming the stabbur, our local visitor's center, with a much-needed facelift! In the Spring, the corner posts will be finished, the sign will go up, and the freshly painted shutters will be hung. In the meantime, WAHS did our part by decorating it for Fall! 🎃

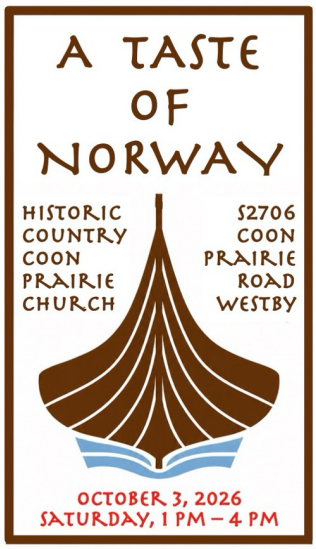
WAHS at Veterans Day Program

Once again, WAHS will be part of two Veterans Day programs when our mannequins, dressed in Army, Navy, Air Force, and Marine uniforms from our collection, serve as backdrops for the American Legion program and Westby High School concert. This year's American Legion guest speaker, National Executive Committee Past State Commander Karl Stuvengen, the Westby High School Band, and the Westby High School Choir will be part of the program that ends with a 3-gun salute and band director Kory Dahlen playing "Taps" on Wednesday, November 11. On Thursday, November 112, the High School Choir will present a concert of patriotic music for veterans, their families and the general public to honor veterans and students who have enlisted. WAHS is proud and honored to be asked to participate in both events.

First-time event was a huge success!

The invitation from Country Coon Prairie Church Preservation, Inc. to join them and four other non-profit heritage organizations in our area has been extended for 2027! The event was a huge success, attracted over 250 attendees, and brought an enormous amount of attention to the mission of all of them.

The "Taste of Norway" committee has already met and started to plan for next year. Each organization will again be serving two food samples. Our open-faced sandwiches and sandbakkels with ice cream and Norwegian caramel sauce were a big hit this year. We will have to work hard to do something even better next year!





WAHS secretary/treasurer, Kathy, with CCPCP, Inc. VP, Mark, wearing their Gudbrandsdal bunads at "Taste of Norway."

JOHN ERLANDSON AND NINA HEALY NAMED 2026 VOLUNTEERS OF THE YEAR



Nominated multiple times and chosen unanimously, **John and Nina** were the clear choice for this year's honor. Because they dedicate their time to WAHS as a team, it is only fitting that they receive this award together.

If you've been around WAHS lately, you've likely seen them in action. This past summer, our WAHS VP John and member Nina could be found selling our traditional, delicious lefse/pølse at the Norse Market. They also prepared all of the food for our Homecoming Tailgate Party, decorated our light pole, worked the Westby Chamber Walkabout, and handed out Halloween candy. Beyond hosting our monthly Kaffegruppe, they have taken on a wide range of vital behind-the-scenes projects, from welcoming museum guests and helping with yardwork to setting up for *Sweet Rides & Sweet Pies*. They've even kept things running smoothly by serving on the hail damage committee to coordinate with contractors, waiting on-site for routine maintenance appointments, and keeping an all-around watchful eye on the museum grounds.

We are incredibly grateful for everything they do for WAHS, and we offer our warmest congratulations on this well-deserved award!

Please join us for the **2026 WAHS Annual Meeting** on Tuesday, December 8, at the Westby VFW/American Legion, 205 N. Main Street. **Social Hour begins at 11:00 a.m., followed by Lunch at Noon.** President Blaine will present the Annual Report after lunch. Please RSVP by emailing westbywihistory@gmail.com or leaving a message at 608-634-4478. We look forward to seeing you!

ONE STEP AT A TIME TOWARD RESTORATION!

Work has begun on the foundation of the original building that housed both the summer kitchen (yellow wall on left top photo) and barn (brown wall) built for Katherine and Theodore Thoreson. When the floor was removed to begin leveling the walls and repairing the stone foundation, a large open space was discovered beneath the building (lower left photo). Our contractor, Joel DeWitt, couldn't resist climbing down to investigate and discovered a huge underground "tank" that once collected rainwater from the downspouts! We want to do this restoration right, and that means starting at the bottom. Although not part of the hail damage, this foundation must be stabilized, the room squared, and the floor rebuilt before repairs can begin on the hail-damaged roof and exterior walls. This is just the beginning, but an important first step in bringing the 1891 Thoreson property back to life! Preserving the Thoreson House means protecting an important piece of Westby's history for future generations. We are currently studying old photographs and researching things about the museum that will give us guidance on how we can best repair and restore the building. In the coming weeks, we'll share more about the work ahead and how members and friends of WAHS can help make this restoration possible.





Our Homecoming Open House Tailgate was a lot of fun, with hot dogs and a steady stream of people for 4 hours! Thank you, Coach Alex, former coaches, players, students, and visitors!



Thank you to WCCU volunteers who did our Fall cleanup! "Living Our Values Day" is a wonderful community service – we appreciate you!

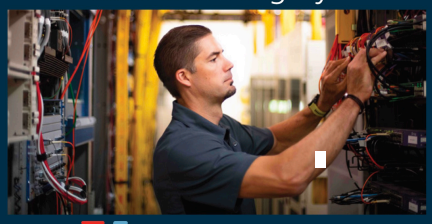








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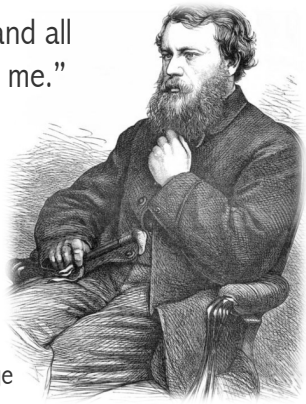
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You will get a separate notice when it is time to renew your membership. Please do not pay before that time.

Dues are just $20/person and help us continue our mission. *We appreciate your renewal!*

"I go into my library and all history unrolls before me." Alexander Smith (1829 – 1867) Scottish poet, essayist, and Secretary of Edinburgh University.

— Wikipedia info & image



Thank You!

to our sponsors for their support! It helps our general operations budget, our members, our newsletter, and our events!



If you guessed this **SUMMER SNAPSHOT STUMPER** was the Oium Service Station in Timber Coulee, you were correct!

The Standard Oil pumps in the photo feature distinctive milk glass crowns. The white crown on the left dispensed premium ethyl gasoline, while what was a red crown on the right was used for regular gas.

Pumps like these were common in the 1930s.

Please leave a message at 608-634-4478, email us at westbywihistory@gmail.com, or find us on Facebook. Your ideas, opinions, and suggestions matter! We want to hear from you!









If reading the newsletter online works for you and you no longer need a paper copy, email us at westbywihistory@gmail.com or leave a message at 608-634-4478.

2026 Officers and Board of Directors

President and Curator – Blaine Hedberg (2027)
Vice President – John Erlandson (2027)
Sec't/Treas & Newsletter – Kathy Anderson (2026)
Board Member – Dorothy Skaaland La Due (2028)
Board Member – Carol Erlandson Navrestad (2028)
Board Member – Marlo Volden (2026)

* Officers are elected at the Annual Meeting



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Helping you build a better life.

Please share our newsletter with your friends, and encourage them to join WAHS by filling out and mailing this membership form!

Westby Area Historical Society

P. O. Box 42; Westby, WI 54667

www.westbywihistory.com 608.634.4478 westbywihistory@gmail.com

$20.00 for Annual Dues from each of our WAHS members supports our education efforts, our quarterly newsletter and the Thoreson House Museum building.

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