

KALAMAZOO ABRAHAM LINCOLN INSTITUTE

Annual Report, October 4, 2024

The Kalamazoo Abraham Lincoln Institute (KLI) held its third Annual Lincoln Birthday Celebration at the new Desenberg Event Center in downtown Kalamazoo. The event included the first time the Institute had a prominent out-of-town guest speaker, Dr. Kate Masur, history professor at Chicago's Northwestern University. Dr. Masur's Lincoln connection is her association with John Washington's book, "They knew Lincoln." She is the editor of Washington's republished book, giving it a new generation of readership. At this event, the Institute premiered "History Comes Alive in Kalamazoo," the latest in the series of short promotional films produced over the past three years. The birthday celebration was well attended and consequently the Desenberg was selected as the repeat venue for the KLI's 2025 annual event. Dr. Matthew Pinsker of Dickinson College will be the featured speaker at the February 8th event.

The KLI's email newsletter expanded its viewership reaching 450 recipients by the fall of 2024. Editor Tom George reported an "open rate" of 57%. This is the percentage of recipients who actually opened the newsletter upon receiving the email. The Mailchimp standard is 47%.

A significant and unexpected grant award was received from the *Freedom of Spirit Fund* administered by Robert Lehman, former Director of the Fetzer Institute of Kalamazoo. The KLI joins the ranks of past recipients including journalist Bill Moyers and author Sue Monk Kidd. The KLI's acknowledgement statement reads as follows: *How honored we are to be a recipient of the Freedom of Spirit Fund grant award and accompanying sculpture so beautifully crafted by artist April Wagner. To say this was a surprise and unexpected is an understatement. Please know we are so appreciative of being so generously recognized for the work we are engaged in to add value to the life of the community by building on Kalamazoo's unique Abraham Lincoln legacy—a legacy that resonates with those values John Fetzer so aptly identified as that "inner freedom that is the energizing source of human courage, creativity, and love in the world." We believe Mr. Lincoln's life and legacy can help advance this shared vision upon which we can build a better community and a better world. On behalf of the Kalamazoo Abraham Lincoln Institute, thank you for selecting us as a Freedom of Spirit award recipient. We are most grateful!*

A plan for investing the *Freedom of Spirit Fund* grant award was researched and recommended to the board by the KLI's Investment Advisory Committee consisting of Vice President Tom George, M. D., Secretary Chris Praedel, and Treasurer Terri Novaria. The board approved investing the funds in Federated Hermes Prime Cash Obligations Fund—a money market fund— through Ameriprise Financial Inc.

The KLI Board accepted the resignation of Director Gary Swain with regret, but with recognition of exemplary service rendered. Director Swain chaired the board's Lincoln Statue Committee. A Lincoln Word Portrait and gift certificate were presented to Director Swain in appreciation of his outstanding years of service.

The board welcomed new board member, Tony Ettwein, a local Kalamazoo Lincoln author. Director Ettwein brings a solid business background and literary skill set to the KLI Board of Directors.

In the early summer of 2024, discovery was made of fabrication flaws in the Bronson Park Lincoln statue. Bronze statue specialist Andrew Kline was hired to review and assess the condition of the statue. In consultation with the City of Kalamazoo, a remediation plan was submitted by artist Bill Wolfe and accepted by the city. This work is ongoing at this time.

The board was notified by the president of the Association of Lincoln Presenters, Kevin Wood, that Kalamazoo has been selected as the site for his group's 2025 annual meeting to be held April 24-27, notably on the strength of the placement of the new Lincoln statue in Bronson Park. Discussions are underway as to how best to assist and help promote this unique organization as a complement to the Institute's own programming goals.

The Development Committee met with suggestions to maintain the board's Annual Lincoln Birthday Celebration as the KLI's premier fundraising event and to maximize its fundraising capabilities. This discussion remains ongoing.

Plans were initiated in the summer of 2024 to replace the Michigan Historical Marker in Bronson Park with a new marker providing information front and back that is more historically accurate. It is the intent to place this marker just east of the Lincoln statue in Bronson Park and retire the marker currently located near the Indian Mound in the southwest corner of the park grounds. Vice President Tom George is coordinating a collaborative effort with the Michigan Historical Commission and the City of Kalamazoo to achieve this goal. An unveiling ceremony of the new marker is anticipated for 2025 along with the newly commissioned film, *Abraham Lincoln: A Purposeful Life*.

The Institute looks forward with eagerness to an exciting year ahead that will undoubtedly advance the board's Lincoln legacy plans for Kalamazoo in the most creative and productive manner. We invite the public to join us in this adventure of using a gift of history to enrich the life of Kalamazoo today and into the future.

—Submitted by Cameron S. Brown, President