



Knife River Heritage & Cultural Center

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By Paul von Goertz - KRHCC Board Member

VIKING SHIP A BIG HIT AT JULEBYEN; WILL BE IN KR FOR AWHILE

The Viking ship LEIF ERIKSON made a dramatic entry at the KRHCC site arriving just two days before Julebyen on Thursday, December 2.

Earlier in November, both the KRHCC and the KRRC invited the ship's stewards, the Save Our Ship Organization (SOS), to have the ship as a Julebyen attraction, but by the time the SOS board met and accepted the offer, a dual-axel truck found, and DOT papers completed, it was down to the wire.

Image: Viking ship drew a steady crowd Saturday of Julebyen weekend. Photo credit: Paul von Goertz



In the ship's nearly 100-year history, it has never been out of Duluth where it was a city icon since its arrival from Norway in 1927. It had traveled the route to North America thought taken by Leif Erikson. SOS was given the ship by the Duluth city council last July when the city acknowledged it did not have the funding to display or maintain the ship.

SOS has said that the KRHCC is a finalist for a permanent site for the ship. For Randy Ellestad, who sits on both the SOS and KRHCC boards, and was instrumental in bringing the ship to Julebyen, moving the ship to the KRHCC had special meaning.

NEWSLETTER

“It was rather serendipitous to once again be hands-on with moving the LEIF ERIKSON,” said Randy. “This move is the fourth one since 2001 when Larry Ronning and I built a cradle to slide the ship across the snow and ice to a city of Duluth appointed location. And now, 20 years later after looking for that final safe harbor of refuge, and navigating the confused sea of city politics, I believe the KRHCC site is the solution for a forever home. Its appearance here was a welcomed one!”

“The site answers many of the concerns that we have been facing. There is still work to do, but the ship, like the depot project, seems to bring out the best in people’s generosity and ‘can do’ spirit!”

Randy also praised Jeff Foster Trucking and his team for their long-time support of the Viking ship project, for storing the ship when no other options were present, and for bringing the ship to KR.



Image; The ship arrived on Thursday, December 2. Randy Ellestad provided the “Wide Load” escort with flashing amber lights. In its nearly 100 year history the ship has never been out of Duluth. Photo credit: Paul von Goertz

Neill Atkins, SOS president, said the Viking ship will winter at the KRHCC while SOS and the KRHCC decide how the ship might tie to next summer’s Tall Ship Festival, which will be held in Two Harbors (TH) August 4 - 7. First thought is a Scandinavian themed event at the KRHCC that recognizes the ship as a replica of “The first tall ship in the Americas.”

Image: The ship uncovered at a Duluth event and how it will appear at the KRHCC event that ties to the Tall Ship Festival next summer. Photo credit: Randy Ellestad



The Tall Ship Festival has been held in Duluth for years, but repairs to the Duluth DECC dock face necessitated moving the festival to TH.

While even in shrink wrap, the Viking ship had a steady stream of onlookers both young and old during Julebyen. SOS had a display of informational panels as well as the ship's dragon head and tail, which had been removed while the ship was in storage. The image is of the ship arriving at the KRHCC site. Photo credit: Paul von Goertz



Helene Hedlund, Julebyen chair, said Julebyen 2021 was very successful despite the Sunday snowstorm. "Record Saturday attendance was due in part to expanded publicity by Lovin' Lake County and MPR. The financial support helped to defray expenditures. Most important, the talents of the local volunteers provided charm and hospitality fitting of this holiday season and our community."

KR DEPOT SETS RECORD FOR NUMBER BOARDED AND DEBOARDED IN ONE DAY!

We don't know how many passengers may have been boarded and debarked in a single day at the KR depot in the past 125 years, so we will claim the record as we don't think any day could match December 4, 2021.

On that day, a sold-out crowd of 300 Julebyen Express train riders from Duluth arrived and debarked (600). 824 (1,648) Troll Train riders boarded and unboarded. That's a total of 2,248 boardings and debarkings in one day! Record claimed!

Image: Debarking 300 passengers from Duluth and boarding 300 Troll Train riders in 15 minutes took some planning. Photo credit: Paul von Goertz



Many thanks to Mary von Goertz and her ticket-selling crew and Josh Miller, NSSR Station Manager, for figuring out the most expeditious way to sell and cancel tickets. Also thanks to Steve Carlson, Larry Ronning and John McDonald for herding 300 Express people from Duluth off the train, and then herding 300 Troll Train on, all in 15 minutes and without the aid of a high voltage cattle prong!

Best part of what was accomplished was safely keeping people off the railroad right-of-way when so many wanted a picture of the train approaching the depot. And then

there were all the children darting about filled with excitement of riding a train and seeing trolls. Good grief. But, setting a record is no easy task!



Image: KR carolers greeted passengers arriving from Duluth. Many arriving and those standing to board a Troll Train joined the carolers in song.

Magic moments!

Photo credit: Paul von Goertz

A KNIFE RIVER CHRISTMAS STORY

The “Magic” of Julebyen!

It was KR’s second Julebyen in 2014 that chair, Carol Carlson, in her zeal to see more people experience Julebyen, called the North Shore Scenic Railroad (NSSR) and left a message for Ken Buehler, NSSR’s Executive Director, with a suggestion to offer a train to Julebyen.



Image: “Ralphie” Source: Internet public domain.

Time passed and about five days before Julebyen, Ken returned the call and said he thought the idea was a good one and he would make a train and 300 seats available.

Carol called me very excited and said that as volunteer marketing guru, I had to sell out the 300 seats! Five days before Julebyen??? Now, many of us know it is not a good idea to tell Carol “no.” (how do you think I became Marketing Director?).

Julebyen had no money to advertise the train and the thought of a mostly empty train to such a fun event seemed a huge missed opportunity.

Ahh! An idea!

I was a member of the Duluth Rotary Club for many years. The club believed strongly in the Boys & Girls Club of Duluth (BGC) and did many things to help club members celebrate Christmas. These were kids, through no fault of their own, were disadvantaged. What were their Christmas memories? Running through Walmart on Black Friday?

I suggested to Carol that we should try to fill the train with as many BGC kids 8-12 years old as we could. I would raise the money and establish a separate “outreach” account within the Knife River Rec Council (KRRC) to pay their fares and buy their lunch at Julebyen. There was no time to get KRRC board approval on this plan, so we just did it. The board would later totally endorse it.

The BGC administration loved the idea and we agreed on 30 kids for the first go with one chaperone for every five kids.

Now, how to raise the money for fares and lunches for 30 kids and six chaperones? First call was to Mike Ojard, owner of Heritage Marine of KR, who was raised in a single parent home. I explained the outreach and without hesitating, Mike agreed to cover the full cost.



Image: A happy group of BGC kids after just arriving and ready to enjoy Julebyen. Mike Ojard, left, helped greet the children. Mike was the primary sponsor of the outreach to the BGC every year. Photo credit: Paul von Goertz

At 9 AM on Saturday of festival weekend, Mary and I, dressed as a gnome and nisse, met 30 noisy children and their chaperones at the Duluth Depot. They were filled with excitement and that was all needed to tell us all the work we had done to put an outreach together within five days was well worth it.

As the train rolled along to Julebyen, Mary handed out candy canes to the children, which they consumed with great relish. I would later comment to Mary how much the kids loved the candy canes and she, who had worked with families and children at risk nearly her whole career, said thoughtfully “I think they were hungry.”

Image: This BGC member velcroed himself to Mary for the trip to Julebyen. My favorite outreach pic. Photo credit: Paul von Goertz



A different mindset is needed.

Now, to understand the plight of disadvantaged children requires a different mindset, which I had to acquire. Many grow up in homes where parental /guardian oversight

may be missing. Kids leave home without a proper breakfast, or not dressed properly for an outdoor activity like Julebyen.

Now, after understanding that, I called our daughter-in-law, Laura von Goertz, who is the dietitian at Lake View Hospital in Two Harbors.

I asked if she would help suggest healthy breakfast snack foods and, perhaps, with the help of hospital volunteers, make up snack bags for the kids for the ride to Julebyen. The outreach would pay all costs. She soon responded that Lake View would provide the snacks and packaging, at no cost. Thank you, Lake View!

“Kristmas Kroner.”

We would add another component to the outreach based on an observation by Barb Eaton and Gail Safstrom, who worked the indoor market (rec building).

The kids would walk through the market and see all the interesting and creative crafts made by local people. One little girl picked out a Christmas gift for her mom and brought it to Gail, who was the cashier. Gail told her the price, but the little girl said she only had a dollar, and started to put the item back.

I don't know the details from this point, but between Gail and Barb, who overheard the conversation, the little girl got the Christmas gift for her mom.

It was then decided between Barb and Gail and others, that there would be a way for kids to buy Christmas gifts and/or treats at Julebyen. The idea born was “Kristmas Kroner.”

Here's how it worked.

Children would **earn** their Kristmas Kroner through public service. For every hour of community service, they would receive \$5 in Kristmas Kroner valid only at Julebyen. Kids could perform up to five hours of community service and so earn a max of \$25 in Kristmas Kroner. Julebyen booth crafters were notified about the Kroner and told it would be redeemable in cash at the end of the day.

Many kids took advantage of the Kristmas Kroner and perhaps learned that performing community service, from volunteering at the humane society to reading stories to small children, can be both fun and rewarding.



Image: These BGC kids pose at the Duluth Depot just before departing for Julebyen. The girl in the middle waves the Kristmas Kroner she earned and just given to her by a Julebyen gnome (Dork).

Photo credit: Mary von Goertz

Skates for all.

Polly Sannes noticed how popular the skating rink was with kids. The BGC kids didn't have skates, as well as other kids. Polly decided not having skates should not deprive a child from enjoying skating at Julebyen and throughout the winter, for that matter.

Polly, noted for her negotiating skills, said she would get skates from a skate exchange. Again, I don't know the details, but Polly soon showed up with a box of used skates and like "loaves and fishes," that box of skates has grown over the years with others' donations of skates that no longer fit family members.

Outreach outlook.

As the next few years went by, many heard about the Julebyen outreach to the BGC and donated generously to it; it was always well funded. In 2019, the outreach to BGC members was cancelled just days before Julebyen because of lack of volunteers to serve as chaperones. This was most disappointing, but understandable.

In 2020 there was no Julebyen because of COVID. This year it was cancelled again because of lack of volunteers. Myself and several past donors decided to put the outreach to BGC members on "Pause" and take all remaining outreach funds - just over \$600 - and give it to the Club to offset cost of their 2021 Christmas party.

I am hopeful the Julebyen outreach will return after we get through this COVID mess and once again have volunteers and financial supporters to keep it going. In the meantime, we have the satisfaction of witnessing how a community could open its heart in so many ways to about 150 disadvantaged children over the years, so they could experience a Christmas celebration that truly expresses "Peace and Goodwill to All."

And that's a Knife River Christmas Story.

A CHRISTMAS GREETING TO ALL THOSE ORGANIZATIONS THAT HAVE PARTNERED WITH THE KRHCC

While the KRHCC so many times expresses its appreciation for the tremendous support it receives from the KR community, we want to at this Christmas also thank those organizations that have supported our vision, and to much of the success of the KRHCC can be attributed.



THANK YOU
to all supporting organizations

The KRRC

The KRRC gave us our launch pad when we were given a challenge match of \$20,000 by a local party, and the KRRC matched it. In appreciation, in part, since 2019 the KRHCC has made its site and depot available to the KRRC at no cost other than utilities.

The NSSR

The NSSR makes its train available to the KRRC during the time the Julebyen Express arrives and departs Julebyen weekend, at no cost. As a result, the KRRC is able to run three “Troll Trains to Troll Canyon” on Saturday of Julebyen and two on Sunday. This is a very popular train ride and revenue generator for the KRRC. In 2021, 1,048 people rode the Troll Train, even though compromised by a near blizzard on Sunday,

The St. Louis and Lake Counties Regional Rail Authority (RRA)

The RRA is our landlord and charges us \$1 a year rent. In 2021, the RRA agreed to our request to increase our five-year renewable lease to 20 years to allow the KRHCC to make grant requests to state and federal agencies. The RRA also agreed to be our fiscal sponsor on a federal grant request that mandates grant requests can only be made by a government agency, which the RRA is.

The Save Our Ship Organization (SOS)

The KRHCC and KRRC invited the SOS people, who are now the stewards of the Viking ship LEIF ERIKSON, to be an attraction at Julebyen. They agreed and the ship became an unexpected special treat for festival-goers, who were awed by the ship and its history. The SOS people have already agreed to partner with the KRHCC on an event at the KRHCC that ties into next August’s “Tall Ship Festival.” In 2022 it will be hosted by the City of Two Harbors.

American Legion Post 109 of TH

We asked the Post if they could help us go about creating a modest monument to recognize the many men from KR that served in the US Merchant Marine, an often-overlooked branch of our military. The Post took an immediate interest in what we had in mind and over a period of several months a monument was planned that not only recognized the KR men, but all veterans of Lake County. The Post agreed to pay for it. The four-foot-high monument is now in place and is a beautiful and fitting memorial to all veterans of Lake County.

The Post also responded to our request to conduct the “First Flag Raising” ceremony of our new 30’ flagpole on Veteran’s Day 2020. They also dedicated the flagpole to Albert Wieme and family members on Memorial Day 2021.

Erick Thomas, CEO of Sailboats, Inc., management company for the KR Marina

Erick spent a lot of time at the KR Marina as a boy as his parents, Nelson and Margaret Thomas, kept their sailboat at the marina for many years. He later worked for Sailboats, Inc. that managed the Barker’s island Marina and now manages the KR Marina as well. Erick eventually bought Sailboats, Inc.

Erick and the KR Marina staff have been very good to the KRHCC and therefore KR. They provided the specialized trailer that brought CRUSADER from Lighthouse Point in TH to KR back in 2016, then they stored it for almost three years at the marina before bringing it to the KRHCC site in late 2019. All this time and equipment was at no cost to the KRHCC.

Most recently, Erick offered to remove and replace the shrink wrap on LEIF ERIKSON so that Julebyen festival-goers could see the whole boat. The offer was graciously declined because of winter storm warnings for Sunday, which proved to be very accurate!

To all those folks represented by the public and private organizations that have supported the KRHCC, our best wishes for your continued success in the New Year!

DECEMBER DONATIONS, MEMORIALS, HONORARIUMS AND SPONSORSHIPS

Donations

Derek and Anne Wright, owners of Larsmont Trading Post, stanchion posts with retractable belt barriers (to protect depot displays).

Peter Geist to KRHCC programs and events that focus on families. *

Editor's note: Pete's parents are John and Lois Geist who for years supported all KR activities that benefited children. John was an ardent tennis player and taught many KR kids and adults how to play and enjoy the game. In recognition, the KR tennis court is named in John's honor.

David and Linda Grong – to KRHCC program and events that focus on families. *

* All gifts received from now through January 31, 2022, will be directed to offsetting costs of KRHCC initiatives that families can enjoy and from which they also learn.

And a “Thank you:”

I want to thank all who wished me well during my bout with COVID-19 earlier this month, and from which I am recovering. Mary and I were both vaxed in March and waiting for a booster shot when I was diagnosed. Thankfully she has tested negative.

I wrote part of this e-newsletter with “COVID Brain,” so if some of my writing doesn't make sense, that's my excuse.

(e-newsletter continues on page 11)

THE DAWN OF A NEW DAY AND A NEW YEAR...

Commercial fisherman, Steve Dahl, returns to the KR Marina through “night ice” in late November. The herring catch was good that day, he said. Photo: Paul von Goertz



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