



Knife River Heritage & Cultural Center

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By Paul von Goertz - KRHCC Board Member

GB LEIGHTON VISITS JULEBYEN 2024 SINGS WITH CAROLERS AT DEPOT

The KRHCC, transformed into “Troll Village” for the Julebyen weekend of December 7 and 8, was a rockin’ place on Saturday with trains arriving and departing, and hordes of people visiting the big farmer’s winter market tent. Then suddenly there was a buzz going through the village that Brian Leighton was present.

For you that may not know Brian Leighton, he was recognized by Billboard.com as a Top 10 Country Artist to watch in 2014. He is Minnesota’s Emmy-Award-winning singer/songwriter with more than 12 albums and 100,000 sold. He performs about 200 shows a year. Dedicated fans follow his band (“GB Leighton”) from Minnesota to Mexico. Mary and I learned of him through our daughter when she attended St. Olaf college in Northfield, MN, and became a GB “groupie.”

Photo right: Mary von Goertz and Brian Leighton. Photo credit: Paul von Goertz.



Leighton partnered with Lovin’ Lake County, the county’s destination marketing organization (DMO), for its new tourism marketing campaign, “Nature’s Rhythm, Center Stage,” said Lovin’ Lake County’s marketing director, Kathryn Holm. “A series of short and extended videos will highlight North Shore activities combined with Leighton’s musical talent to create a delightful harmony that captures the essence of what makes Lake County an ideal travel destination. For instance, Brian tries his hand at fishing for lake trout on Lake Superior, makes pies at the Rustic Inn, and takes a dip in the big lake.”

“We couldn’t be more thrilled to have Brian Leighton represent Lake County in our marketing efforts,” expressed Janelle Jones, executive director for Lovin’ Lake County. “His notoriety as a much-loved Minnesota musician will help grow awareness of Lake County as an exceptional getaway filled with

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mindful and life-changing adventures. The marketing theme characterizes what spending time in Lake County is all about, and we're excited to have folks discover our beautiful region in refreshing ways."

Good to see that Lovin' Lake County recognizes Julebyen as a part of what captures the essence of Lake County!



Mary von Goertz was one of several carolers who greeted train riders when Leighton asked to sing with the group. "I thought 'why not,' we welcome anyone," said Mary. "I still can't believe I didn't know who was singing by me. I was sharing my song book with him, then decided this guy, like others joining us, would like his own song book. He proceeded to sing with a raspy voice. He apologized for it and gave me the music back - still no clue who he was. I said, 'So play your guitar then.' He promptly pulled out his guitar (Photo credit Paul von Goertz). Boy, what a treat it was to sing with him and did I think I sounded good! I never found out who he was until later when our son, Christian, who was boarding train riders nearby, informed me."

I (Paul von Goertz) was dressed as the KR depot agent, saw a videographer and asked if he was shooting news for a local TV station. He said he wasn't, then asked if I could be interviewed. I said I had to load a train and asked if he could wait ten minutes. He said he only had five minutes, so I agreed.

There was a man with the videographer, so I faced him for the interview. He said he was not the interviewer and that would be Brian. ("Who is Brian?") The man who had been singing with Mary and the other carolers appeared next to me. I greeted him as "GB" and he said, 'Call me Brian.' The interview was short. He asked when Julebyen started and what brings out all the people. I told him it was all about a Scandinavian celebration of Christmas with a focus on families. Or something like that."

Both Mary and I found Brian to be very friendly and unpretentious. To quote Brian from his website, "I'm just a common guy, a working-class kid from a Twin Cities suburb who loves to put on a good show and hopefully write some good songs in between."

Here is the link to the Leighton video shot at Julebyen. It may contain a commercial and videos on other attractions Brian discovered around Lake County: <https://youtu.be/qiunvhyM9rc?si=9-otiKMokNfamHIC>

“LIVE NATIVITY” WAS LOVED BY PEOPLE OF ALL AGES

The “Live Nativity” sponsored by the Knife River Lutheran Church was a moving and memorable portrayal of why Christmas is celebrated worldwide by Christians of all denominations.



Photo credit: Steve Hovis

For many who partook in the Julebyen festival, the presentation was the highlight of the weekend, which took place at 10:30 AM on Sunday on festival grounds. All the cast of the “Christmas Story” was portrayed by children and adult members of the church and narrated by Tim Anderson reading from the Gospels of Luke and Matthew.

The “friendly beasts who around him stood” were a real donkey, two camels and two miniature goats. Really a remarkable portrayal of the nativity!

Much praise goes to the team of Patti and Pete Stoddard, Anne Jaspersen and Jillian McCorison who orchestrated the whole spectacle for the church, and to the many church members who portrayed the cast of the “Christmas Story” and sang in the choir. Is KR a great community or what!!!

Photo credit: Paul von Goertz

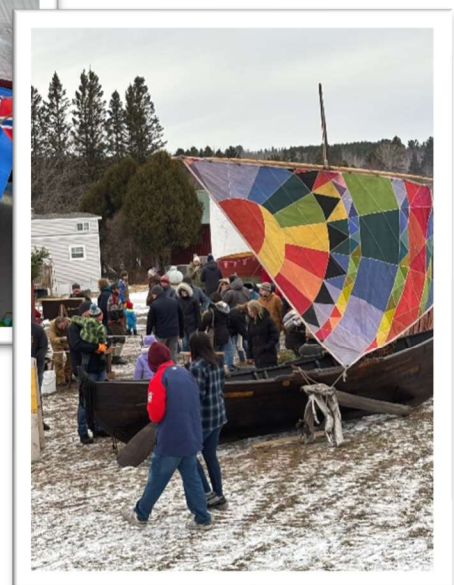


IDEA OF KR AS “CENTER FOR HISTORIC BOAT BUILDING & RESTORATION” DEBUTS AT JULEBYEN 2024.

Ever since Nóatún Community Wooden Boat Works was invited to relocate their school from Duluth to the unused KRLSD maintenance building, the KRHCC board of directors has been “floating” (pun intended) the idea of publicly proclaiming KR as a “Center for Historic Boat Building & Restoration.” To support this claim, the board only needed to point to the restoration/rebuild of the 35’ longtime KR fish tug, CRUSADER II, the relocation of Viking ship LEIF ERIKSON from Duluth to KR, and now the relocation of Nóatún.

The idea was rolled out at Julebyen 2024 by calling attention to CRUSADER II in its new shelter built this summer, LEIF ERIKSON on the slab for its new home to be completed next summer, and Nóatún’s pine-tarred faering boat SKADDI, photos left to right. All had interpretive signage with SKADDI and ERIKSON having docents to field questions from captivated festivalgoers.

Adding to the idea of KR as a boat building and restoration center, is acknowledging all three represent Scandinavian boat-building skills. This assumes that Finnish people can agree that Finland is part of Scandinavia. (Historical note: the Hill family from Larsmont, who built CRUSADER II, immigrated from Finland).



JUEBYEN TRAINS SELL OUT! (But there's an unfortunate reason...)



One of the highlights of the holiday season for many families is the Julebyen Express trains that bring them to Julebyen, and the Troll Trains while they are here. Last year more than 1,100 rode the two weekend Express Trains and the five Troll Trains to Troll Canyon.

As best the Julebyen committee can figure, the Troll Canyon trolls have had enough of people gawking at their winter camp every Julebyen and took drastic action this year – they hid badly needed parts for the NSSR's aging train cars!

North Shore Scenic Railroad Executive Director, Ken Buehler, explained it differently: "The North Shore Scenic Railroad has had to reduce the number of passengers on some of our special trains due to a shortage of equipment. Repairs to our fleet of cars took longer than expected due to supply chain interruptions."

Whichever reason you want to believe is up to you, but the net result is that we had only three cars available when we normally have five or more. So, we only had room for about half the number of riders we've had in year's past. And instead of having three Troll Trains on Saturday and two on Sunday, we had only two trains each day. This was to enable the trains to get back to Duluth in time to host Christmas Express trains that run between the Fitger's complex and the Duluth Depot.

Certainly, there was disappointment among children anticipating a train ride and the opportunity to see trolls in their element, but also a financial hit for the KRHCC that counts on Troll Train revenue to cover about half our yearly fixed costs. **(Note to self: insert heart-wrenching fund appeal here).**

Something we did this year that we haven't done since the Troll Trains started several years ago was to raise prices: adults from \$10 to \$15, children four to 12 from \$5 to \$8 and kept children three and under free.

We raised prices on the advice of the NSSR when they compared our 45-minute Troll Train ride to other destination rides they offer the public. And the other obvious reason is that we needed to counter the lost revenue from reduced rider seats with a price increase.

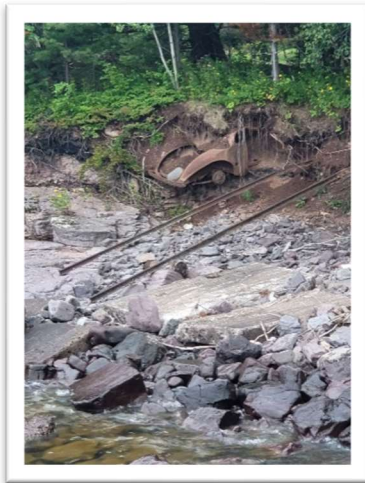
There was good news for riders this year, more than half the seats were in the dome cars offering 360-degree vision and more comfortable seats.

**“SUPERIOR IT IS SAID NEVER GIVES UP ITS DEAD.”*
BUT MAYBE AN OLD CAR.**

*Gordon Lightfoot “Wreck of the Edmund Fitzgerald.”

In the September issue of this newsletter, I addressed Lake Superior shoreline erosion and the impact it has had on the Scandia Cemetery on London Road near where I grew up. If you missed this story, it is in the September 2024 KRHCC newsletter on our website krhcc.org under heading “Recent News.”

If you look closely at the photo left, there is a car that is slowly being revealed by an eroding mud bank. The property, which is along the site of what was almost all Knife River fishing activity, was once owned by Paul Nordley (photo right), a commercial fisherman.



According to Randy Ellestad, KRHCC board member and historian, the Nordleys had a large net warehouse that caught on fire. There was a 1938 Chevrolet coupe parked next to it that also burned, which apparently was no loss as the engine and transmission had been removed – perhaps to power the winch used to pull boats up a railed skid, seen in the photo, and out of the water.

Randy and several longtime KR residents surmise that the site of the fire was bull dozed and partially pushed to the water’s edge, or over, then covered with earth - only to be revealed generations later. The site today is on private property, which must be respected.



Editor’s note: This story was brought to my attention by Randy Ellestad who also provided most of the information and all the photos.

KRHCC SITE VANDALIZED – AGAIN!



Some little boys never grow up. Put them behind the wheel of a 4x4 and show them a patch of mud and they can't resist driving through it. This happened about a year ago just after we, SOS and Lake County Soil & Water spent \$9,000 seeding and sodding the KRHCC's public green space.

So it was that someone driving north on Marina Road last month saw a patch of recently laid down additional grass fill and just had to leave the road, jump the ditch, and drive through the mud right after a heavy rain.

Photo credit: Paul von Goertz

Realizing impending cold weather would freeze the ruts and create a tripping hazard for Julebyen visitors, this near octogenarian pulled on boots and grabbed rake, waded into the muck and leveled the slop as best I could. To say I was "POed" is an understatement. To think that someone would vandalize property that is a result of thousands of community donations and hundreds of volunteer hours really stinks.

My mother – a real saint - taught me to look for the good in a disappointment and so I remembered a similar incident that happened at the KRRC beach parking lot a few years ago.

A pick-up was cutting donuts in the lot creating deep ruts when Randy Ellestad at the nearby KR Campground saw what was happening. He got the license number and called the Lake County Sheriff's department. The department ran the plate and traced it to a party on Homestead Road. A deputy was sent and spoke with the owner of the truck.

The man said his son was the primary driver of the truck and summoned his son, who thankfully was home. The dad told his son what the deputy had told him and then told his son to take a shovel and rake out the damage that was done – which the son did. So the upside here is an example of good parenting, which thankfully still exists.

DECEMBER DONATIONS, MEMORIALS, HONORARIUMS AND SPONSORSHIPS

Donations

- Robert R. and Susan Nelson to general fund
- Ronald M. and Cynthia R. Svee to general fund
- Cash donations from Julebyen visitors to depot responding to appeal
- David H. Grong to general fund

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