

KNIFE RIVER HERITAGE



& CULTURAL CENTER

December 2025

By Paul von Goertz

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Non-profit Partnerships Bring Holiday joy to Northland Families

Four Knife River (KR) non-profits worked together to bring joy to thousands of Northlanders and visitors around Minnesota and Wisconsin this holiday season. The four are the Knife River Recreation Council (KRRC), the Knife River Heritage & Cultural Center (KRHCC), the North Shore Scenic Railroad (NSSR), and the Viking ship organization Save Our Ship (SOS).

“Trees. Trains. Traditions.”

On Saturday, November 29, a partnership between the KRHCC and the NSSR brought 200 people to KR to share in “Trees. Trains. Traditions,” which ties to NSSR’s “Christmas Tree Train”.



It was a sell-out with triple the number of riders when the train first ran in 2021. Clearly the Christmas Tree Train has become a family tradition as we remember our own family’s Christmas tree gathering traditions!

Photo left: Searching for the perfect tree. A family memory in the making!

Photo credit: Paul von Goertz

NSSR Executive Director, Ken Buehler, said in an interview with the *Duluth News Tribune*, “We could have easily taken another 100 (riders) as we sold this out weeks ago and we have a waiting list, but we can only carry so many Christmas trees”.

NSSR Station Manager, Josh Miller had praise for the event and the host community. “The Christmas Tree Train is always a unique event, and somehow we always have the perfect crisp wintery day complete with snowflakes lightly coming down in the air. Combine that with the lovely space at the Knife River Depot, and the trees, and the music, it is like being inside a Christmas snow globe! Passengers love it, and it’s a unique offering for us to operate every year.”



Photo right: Wreaths were a big seller, eventually selling out. Photo credit: Paul von Goertz

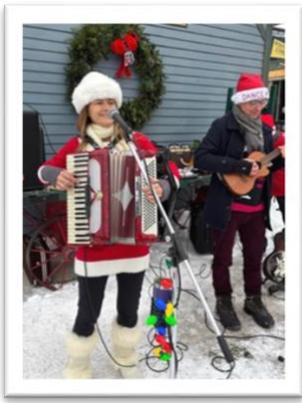


Photo left: Lively Holiday music was provided by Dance Attic from Duluth. This is the fourth year they have entertained at “Trees. Trains. Traditions.”

Photo credit: Paul von Goertz

Julebyen Troll Trains

The weekend following “Trees. Trains. Traditions,” the KR community hosted its annual Julebyen Scandinavian-themed celebration of Christmas. As of this writing in mid-December, an official guesstimate on number of attendees has not been made, but consensus among Julebyen volunteers is this year’s celebration was the largest ever at somewhere between 6,000 – 6,500 festivalgoers with consideration for a cold day Sunday. Lovin’ Lake County, the county’s marketing arm, shared in sponsoring the celebration.

Julebyen Express trains bringing people from Duluth each day of Julebyen, sold out at 200 riders each day. Four Troll Trains carried nearly 1,000 riders in search of trolls reported to be camped in Troll Canyon three miles west of KR. Optional dome car seats sold out each day.

Partners in the weekend trains were the KRHCC, NSSR and Knife River Recreation Council. The NSSR keeps the revenue generated by the Julebyen Express and the KRHCC and KRRC share the revenue from the Troll Trains. A win/win/win/win for the three non-profits and Troll Train riders who were treated to the most trolls ever seen at Troll Canyon!

Members of the Troll Control Patrol, who were “sent by the governor to investigate troll sightings in the KR area,” rode each train from Homestead Road to where trolls had reportedly been sighted. The Patrol told riders that the large number of trolls spotted this year may indicate the trolls had been caught migrating!



Photo right: Troll Train riders press against car windows as trolls are spotted! Photo credit: Paul von Goertz



Photo left: Mary McDonald, a member of the Troll Control Patrol, briefed train riders on latest troll sightings as the Troll Train heads for Troll Canyon. Husband, Bob, also a member of the Patrol, passed out bells to children to help ward off trolls who don’t like noise!

Photo credit: Paul von Goertz

Viking ship LEIF ERIKSON

From all indications, the Viking ship LEIF ERIKSON drew a significant number of people to Julebyen, giving both the KRRC and KRHCC a larger customer base. Save Our Ship (SOS) members worked feverishly the weeks before Julebyen to complete the ship's pavilion and replace the dragon head and tail that had been in storage for at least 12 years.

Photo right: Viking ship in its new digs!

Photo credit: Paul von Goertz

According to Jim Allert, KR analytics guru, in response to my email of December 2, the ship has "Facebook exploding with interest. In the past 7 days there have been 18,000 views of Julebyen posts. Usually each of those posts generate an average of around 800 views, but the one last Saturday (November 29th) about the Viking ship was viewed well over 11,000 times!"



"It is also worth noting that 80% of the views were by people who are not Julebyen "Followers" on Facebook. I don't think you are going to get anything like 11,000 people, but the Viking ship is proving to be somewhat of a sensation."



Just prior to Julebyen SOS sent out a news release announcing the Viking ship was finally ready for viewing. Metro television station KSTP ran the story supported by an interview with a ship restoration volunteer.

Photo left: Noatum Community Wooden Boat Works, a neighbor to the KRHCC, provided their summer lawn mowing crew to the delight of children. Photo credit: Paul von Goertz

Photo below right: Larsmont Trading Post provided hot food and beverages for both "Trees. Trains. Traditions" and Julebyen. Photo credit: Paul von Goertz

Much praise goes out to all the volunteers of the Knife River Community and surrounding area for creating holiday memories and so much fun for so many families! Thanks too, to the members of the Knife River Lutheran Church who opened its doors to Julebyen volunteers offering warmth, coffee and treats.



Knife River Lutheran Church honors Carol Carlson for her “Music Ministry”

Carol Carlson was honored for her dedication to creating a “music ministry” at Knife River Lutheran Church (KRLC) at a reception held November 20, following the Sunday morning service.

Carol succeeded her mother, Evelyn, as church organist in 1978 and has since been on auto renew. She devoted herself to organizing a children’s choir, the adult choir "Joyful Noise," and later, the women’s ensemble "Seraphim". She also invited guest musicians to enhance the church’s worship and encouraged those who loved to sing to share their voices as either soloists, in duets, or quartets.

Church members thanked Carol for her countless hours of planning, practicing, and all the hidden purchases she made throughout the years. They expressed their hope that she will enjoy her years of retirement and possibly even return to the bench occasionally at times of her choosing. The church has put out a call for a new organist.



Thank you, Carol, from your church family that so appreciates the music ministry you have instilled in KRLC and continues to grow.

Photo left: Carol Carlson at the piano with Jaeckel organ, which she also plays, in the background. With Carol is Lawrence Burkhard, longtime accompanist on the clarinet.

Photo credit: Patti Stoddard

The Hill family’s venture into pleasure boating was on a national scale.

The KRHCC’s and our town’s good friend, Doug Hill, has been digging into his family’s boat building history, perhaps inspired by his work over two summers in helping to restore CRUSADER II, which was built by his grandfather and great uncle in 1938.

Photo right: One of the larger pleasure boats, perhaps the “*Four Winds*,” that the Hills introduced to the booming pleasure boat market after World War II. Photo credit: Doug Hill Collection



The boat in the photo (the “*Four Winds*”?) apparently was a major accomplishment, judging by all those standing in front of it. According to Doug and his “Uncle Bob” Hill, now in his mid-nineties, the boat was built for a customer in the Chicago area. Its hull was a modification of the flat-bottom hulls of the several boats the Hill family built for the Lukinnen family, which owned the Bluebird Landing at the west base of Stoney Point. A pull-off on

Scenic 61 is all that now exists of the landing. Remnants of the dock were carried away sometime in the last ten years or so.

By point of interest, Steve Carlson's dad, Bertil, (Bert) was a Bluebird charter captain. Bert, through Steve, introduced me to the "Homestead Open." From the water about a half mile out in the lake, one can see the length of Homestead Road "open up." That's where the fish are. True!

Bluebird boats had modified flat bottoms that allowed them to be pulled ashore when not being chartered for lake trout. A concrete dock allowed fishermen to board the boats once returned to the water. The boat in the photo had about a four-foot area of flat bottom, the rest being traditional carvel hull. I question why the owner ordered the boat with a partial flat bottom, unless he intended to haul it onshore, or because the flat bottom offered more cabin space.

What I found interesting is the size of the pleasure boats the Hills were building, once they decided to expand into the booming pleasure boat business following WWII. Length of the boat in the photo is not known but looks to be nearly 40 feet or more. According to Doug, the boat was built in a shed now long gone. It was moved from just north of the Expressway in Larsmont to the lake shore, pulled along on a skid with a tractor. Hard to picture this, but that's how boats of even this size were launched.

A lot went with the pleasure boats the Hills designed and built beyond the woodworking. The Hills preferred Lathrop engines, one of which was installed in CRUSADER II. It can be assumed the boat shown also had a Lathrop. The Lathrop was once touted as the finest scratch-built marine engine - as opposed to modified automobile engines - because every part was accessible and could be repaired in the boat while on the water. This was a feature the Hills apparently admired.

The engine and drive had to be carefully aligned, and the shaft hole had to be drilled true to avoid any vibration. Electrical and interior cabinetry completed the boat. The Hills apparently were blessed with all the skills to compete on a national level with factory-built boats.

The last part of a boat building contract could be to deliver the boat. This the Hills also did. At least on one occasion they delivered a 29' sailboat through the lengths of Superior and Michigan and a portion of Huron to Chicago and then hopped a train back home. Bob also remembers a 20' boat built by Reuben Hill for his sister, Inez, being delivered on a converted hay wagon to Salt Lake City, Utah. Later the boat was brought to Millwood, Washington. Another boat went to Omaha, Nebraska, after the owner had seen it while visiting the North Shore.

The Hill family were gifted boat designers and builders. The KRHCC is very pleased to draw attention to, and highlight, their accomplishments. See the January 2023 issue of this newsletter to learn more about the Hill family and how they designed and built 93' subchasers for the Navy on Park Point during World War II. The issue can be found at our website, KRHCC.org under "Recent News."

Many thanks to Doug and "Uncle Bob" Hill for their contributions to this story - also Steve Carlson.

Lake Superior gifted us with another commercial commodity – block ice!

I have been intrigued with ice harvesting ever since I saw huge blocks of ice covered in sawdust in an icehouse at the Sivertson fish camp in Singer Island on Isle Royale in early June of 1963. This was my first trip to “The Island,” repeated many times since. To me the island is “magical.”

How were those 2' x 2' or 3' x 3' chunks of Lake Superior ice cut from the lake, hauled ashore to an icehouse, and stored to last into the summer months? The availability of ice was essential to a commercial fisherman's livelihood, and before refrigeration, the only source was the lake.

History of ice harvesting out of Knife River is a bit sketchy, but it is generally known ice was harvested between the coal dock and the island, as documented by at least two ice-cutting contraptions breaking through the ice and now resting on the lake bottom. They were reportedly mounted on a car or truck frame and powered by the vehicle's engine.

I have not been able to find any photos so far of an ice-cutting device used out of Knife River, or anything related to ice harvesting, but this past fall I did see a device in good shape at the Bodin Fisheries fish market in Bayfield. It was mounted on skis and had a gas engine that used a chain-link drive to turn a monster saw blade that could be raised and lowered. Obviously, a resourceful fisherman's creation.



Photo left: Ice sled featured at Bodin Fisheries had a large saw blade, probably of the sawmill variety, that could be raised and lowered to depth of ice.

Photo right: Power was provided by a gas engine that turned the saw blade by a chain drive.

Photo credits: Paul von Goertz

There was a market for lake ice for both businesses and homes before refrigeration became widespread. According to Wikipedia, ice harvesting in the Great Lakes region was typically a two-week stretch each January or February. In Michigan's Upper Peninsula, good ice could still be had into March.

Men would cut ice on frozen lakes with hand saws, and later gas-powered circular saws. Using a long-handled "spudder," they would break apart the floating rows of foot-thick ice

into large slabs. They'd be loaded onto horse-drawn sleds and, in later years, truck beds. The frozen haul would then be stacked in ice houses and packed in sawdust.



This ice would be shipped on specially designed ice barges to cities across the Midwest, preserving food and cooling drinks. It was dangerous work; men could easily slip into the freezing water or be crushed by shifting ice.

Photo left: Ice harvesting on a commercial scale, probably on Lake Michigan.

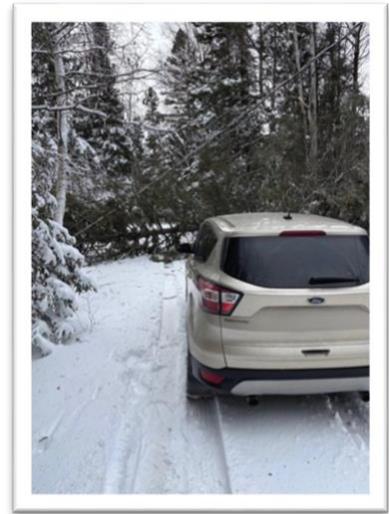
Photo credit: Public domain

What we learned about electrical surges.

On Wednesday, November 26, we were returning from Two Harbors with our 24-pound SuperOne turkey. We rounded the corner into our private road and – disaster! A large fir tree had been blown over from high winds and was blocking our road. Worse – it had knocked down our power line. Our minds raced – how would we and our 19 Thanksgiving guests get to our home? How could we prepare the feast we had planned assuming our power was out?

Photo right: Welcome home! Yeah, Right!

Photo credit: Paul von Goertz



Once in our home, we were relieved to find our power on, but intermittent. An electrical odor could be detected. Then an under-cabinet fluorescent light began to spark and crackle. Shut that down!

We were later told our home had experienced a power surge caused by the grounded connector from the transformer breaking loose. Our appliances and several electronics suffered a big electrical surge. The odor we had detected was the toasted ballast in nearly all our fluorescent lights. LED bulbs were also blown out. Damaged beyond repair were the control panels in our dual fuel range, propane fireplace insert, and microwave. Thankfully, computers and TVs were spared.

To the rescue:

A call to Lake County Co-op Light & Power brought a crew to our home in about an hour, and an hour later power was fully restored. The crew suggested the outage may have caused a surge and that I should contact an electrician.

Much praise for the CLP line crew for their quick response, when they probably had other power outages attributable to the windstorm to attend to. A second call was made to Doug Homola, KR resident and owner of NorEast Electric. Doug was home as it was Thanksgiving Day eve, but he said he would come right over. He checked our electric service entry and

confirmed we had full 110 and 220 service. He also confirmed our dual fuel range, microwave and all fluorescents were DOA.

Thanks to family and friends who allowed us to use their ovens, Thanksgiving was saved!

A final shout-out to Nick Stokes, owner of Madison Well Service who responded to our request he inspect our well pump. He pronounced it seriously damaged and encouraged us to replace it – which Nick did in the next few days.

The last thing we learned about surges is what our insurance claim representative told us.



He said that the two most common claims for personal property losses are jewelry and electrical surges. Doug Homola said most newer homes have surge protection. Our home is now 53 years old, and we will install surge protection!

We are very thankful that CLP, NorEast Electric and Madison Well Service for responding to our predicament in such a timely manner. Great to live in a small rural community where folks take care of one another!

Photo left: CLP linemen reattach the grounded connector

Photo credit: Paul von Goertz

An accordion in Knife River Lutheran Church? Yes!

While Knife River Lutheran Church may never match some Iron Range Catholic churches' "Polka Masses," the church did have an accordion player as part of its "Christmas Celebration of Music," Sunday, December 14. And those in attendance loved it!

Patti Stoddard was the accordionist (photo right, taken by Anne-Lù Hovis). Just prior to being introduced she momentarily left and returned with her red accordion - and to a round of applause! She played a piece called "Colorful Tunes," which included a medley of familiar and lively Christmas music. The audience was encouraged to identify the songs, and an impromptu sing along occurred. It was delightful.



Patti and husband, Pete, moved to Stoney Point from Hibbing just over a year ago. She was the former Hibbing High School Choir director where she directed three 60-voice choirs and the vocal jazz ensemble, the "Northern Lights." Patti received her Master of Music in choral conducting from the U of M-Minneapolis. Photo left & credit: Patti Stoddard.

KRLC's "Christmas Celebration of Music" initially ended the Julebyen weekend but was dropped in 2019 when Julebyen had to be reorganized to the level of volunteers available. The idea for the celebration was the brainchild of Carol Carlson, the church's honorary "Director of Music

Ministry.” Anne-Lù Hovis reactivated the celebration this year as chair and hopefully the celebration will continue and showcase all the musical talent within the KRLC and surrounding KR area.

DECEMBER DONATIONS, MEMORIALS, HONORARIUMS AND SPONSORSHIPS.

Donations:

- Ronald and Cynthia Svee to general fund.

Please remember the KRHCC if you plan to gift in 2025. The KRHCC is an IRS recognized 501(c)(3) so all donations are fully tax deductible. Send to KRHCC, POB 240, Knife River, MN, 55609. Thank you!



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