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Winona County Historical Society



Featured in a 2004 calendar produced by the Winona County Historical Society is this photo of the Winona Yacht Club, ca. 1900.

A date with history Calendar project raises funds – and visibility

Mark Peterson knows a good idea when he sees one. The executive director of the Winona County Historical Society had to look no farther than neighboring Olmsted County for inspiration for his latest fund-raiser – a calendar featuring photos from county historical society collections.

A successful model

“The Olmsted County Historical Society had an excellent model to work from,” says Peterson, who keeps his eyes open for new fundraising strategies – especially

those not weather-dependent. “We had tried the calendar idea in the past but didn’t make any money at it. The success of their calendar showed us the key: sell advertising.”

So the WCHS staff gave local businesses a choice of promotional opportunities: buy a small ad and receive copies of the calendar to distribute to select customers, or purchase an exclusive, branded calendar to give away as a customer premium. “Two banks bought branded calendars,” says Peterson. “Several other businesses had already committed to 2004 calendars but

promised to work with us next year. We’re hoping to do repeat business with most of the small-ad buyers, too.”

Tapping in-house talent

Planning for the calendar project began late last fall with a commitment from the WCHS board. Ad sales kicked off in February and wrapped up the next month thanks to the tireless efforts and salesmanship talents of a board member well known in the community. The calendar layout went to a local printer Aug. 1 and will be distributed to advertisers by Sept. 15. The print run: 5,000 copies, plus 1,000 each of the two bank-branded versions. The WCHS will sell the calendars for \$4.95 at its Museum Shop and annual Victorian Fair this fall.

“We created the calendar entirely in-house, using our great collection of photographs as the starting point,” explains Peterson. “Our exhibits/publications coordinator selected the pictures and did the layout on Quark. Our archivist came up with a selection of interesting date-related county history facts. And we plugged in our own calendar of events along with various events from the community calendar.”

How successful was the project? “This was our best fund-raiser ever,” reports Peterson. “We’ll clear at least \$10,000, which will go toward our general operations. Not bad for the first time out.”

To learn more about this successful fund-raiser, call Peterson at 507-454-2723. For information on the model that inspired it, call John Hunziker, director of the Olmsted County Historical Society, 507-282-9447.

Making the case for local history

Minnesota's historical organizations strategize to articulate their worth

by Timothy Glines, manager of outreach services

Those of us involved in local history know intuitively that the work we do is important. Convincing others, however, is not always easy. And in these difficult economic times, it is more crucial than ever before to know how to articulate our organizations' worth.

Last spring representatives of Minnesota's county and local historical organizations gathered at four regional field workshops to strategize. The workshops, sponsored by the Minnesota Historical Society, provided an opportunity to brainstorm on developing and refining the messages we take to a variety of stakeholders - especially funders whose support is vital to our continued existence.

Key questions

Workshop participants in Red Wing, Fairmont, Alexandria and Virginia began making the case for the importance of local history by addressing three key questions:

- Why is it important for county and local historical organizations to exist?
- What are the characteristics of an exceptional county/local historical organization?
- How can we measure the effectiveness and community impact of our services?

The questions got everyone talking about how to explain the value of public history, how to identify quality in a historical organization and what kind of information they should keep track of in order to demonstrate their effectiveness. Brainstorming at each workshop generated a list of ideas,

which then got refined and ranked in priority order. Despite a range of responses, enough similarities emerged to paint a clear picture. So whether you're seeking to educate a government funder, corporation, foundation,

local service club or individual donor about the work you do, you'll find below a strategy that works for you.

Why is it important for county and local historical organizations to exist?

- *Historical organizations are educational institutions.* With a focus on the history of their communities, local historical organizations promote an understanding of the places where people live. Some workshop participants saw this educational role extending to the promotion of citizenship by helping younger people and new immigrants learn about the past.
- *Historical organizations preserve a record of the past.* Collecting and preserving evidence of the past is central to the mission of historical organizations. It is a mission unique



Chippewa County Historical Society

During Heritage Week each spring, the Chippewa County Historical Society welcomes more than 1,200 elementary school students for classes and artisan demonstrations at Historic Chippewa City.

to them. Without historical organizations, important evidence of the past would be lost to future generations. Some participants emphasized the importance of maintaining this evidence for research, enabling individuals to learn about the past through their own efforts.

- *Historical organizations play a vital role in their communities.* There are tangible ways in which historical organizations contribute to a community's economic vitality - by attracting visitors and tourists, for example. But perhaps more significant is the less tangible role historical organizations play in fostering a sense of community

and thereby adding to the quality of life. One workshop group carried this idea further, suggesting that historical organizations take part in the discussion of contemporary community issues, bringing a historical perspective to the discussion that could help the community set goals and identify priorities.

What are the characteristics of an exceptional county/local historical organization?

- *Customer service:* An exceptional historical organization is one that values the high quality of the services it delivers. Among the hallmarks of quality: programs and services that are excellent, authoritative and inclusive, welcoming everyone in the community, not just some people or some age groups.
- *Leadership:* An exceptional organization is one where the board of directors, staff and volunteers are visionary and passionate about local

history. They bring a variety of skills and talents to their work, take advantage of continuing education opportunities and provide for continuity in leadership so that the organization does not suffer when leaders change.

- *Governance:* Exceptional governance involves setting clear direction, priorities and goals and ensuring that the organization has the financial resources it needs to carry out its mission. Other essential ingredients: effective communication with stakeholders, strong volunteer support and cooperative partnerships with other groups and organizations - all indicators of strong community support.
- *Stewardship:* Exceptional historical organizations collect widely and wisely, take excellent care of their collections, and use them to document and interpret the past. People know they can entrust the organization with the items and heirlooms they donate.

How can we measure the effectiveness and community impact of our services?

Measuring starts with keeping statistics. All workshop participants agreed that historical organizations need to keep records that will help them demonstrate their success.

- *Participation:* This means counting everything - attendance at all programs, the number of research requests, member rolls and any other indicators of public participation. Such statistics should be collected regularly and recorded in a way that charts organizational growth.
- *Financial data:* Financial information also must be tracked. Knowing where financial resources come from and how they are spent can help improve effectiveness over time. For example, if a large share of your budget is going to programs with low participation, perhaps those programs need to be reevaluated.
- *Recognition:* Recognition of your organization and its activities by the regional print and electronic media is another thing to track. It is also important to keep track of awards, honors and grants. Such public recognition can be used to make your case to potential funders.
- *Evaluation:* Some workshop groups stressed the importance of surveying program participants to find out whether programs and services met their expectations. Surveys also can be used with people who are not members to find out what needs are not being met.

Some conclusions

Historical organizations can no longer take for granted the support their work receives. Competition for resources is sharp and funders now ask questions they've never asked before.



St. Louis County Historical Society staffer Bryan Lean, putting the finishing touches on a new exhibit last winter, landed on the front page of the Duluth News Tribune.

Reprinted by permission of Duluth News Tribune

Time to prioritize

Nonprofit group offers Top 10 checklist for survival

Today's uncertain economic times require a different level of focus and commitment from nonprofit organizations. Traditional governance and decision-making processes may be too slow and cumbersome to follow for the quick responses needed when budgets are cut.

To help nonprofits survive - and perhaps even thrive - in this environment, a Minnesota group called Nonprofit Allies has developed a checklist of 10 critical areas for nonprofit managers and boards to address. If your organization isn't dealing with all 10 of these issues, you may need to make some changes.



Cottonwood County Citizen

A strategic partnership between the Cottonwood County Historical Society and Windom Community Education won the organizations a grant from the Southwest Minnesota Foundation for a yearlong, intergenerational genealogy project.

1 Tap the skills of your board. Look for ways to help your current board acquire the skills they'll need - particularly in the areas of financial management, fund-raising and communications - or make changes in board membership so they'll have the combination of skills and commitment needed to guide your organization through the challenges ahead.

2 Revisit your strategic plan. Do you need to adjust the plan to accommodate changes in your situation? Augment your long-term planning with a strategy for the short term: empower your executive committee to make decisions so that you can respond quickly to the current economic climate while keeping your eye on the future.

3 Make realistic contingency plans. Take a hard look at your revenue and expenses, then develop strategies for the best-case, most likely and worst-case scenarios for your organization. Involve your board in making the hard decisions now so that you're ready to react quickly to any situation.

4 Lead - don't whimper. All successful organizations go through difficult times. The ones that survive have people at the helm who are willing to make difficult

decisions with decorum and, when necessary, take action quickly and decisively.

5 Focus on your core mission and strengths. Tighten your focus to concentrate on activities central to your mission; then do them as well as possible. Quality is what matters in delivering your programs and services. Now is the time to prioritize, eliminate peripheral activities if necessary and avoid engaging in new activities that push the boundaries of your mission.

6 Collaborate in new and more strategic ways. Work with other organizations on a deeper and more committed level through strategic collaborations or partnerships. Look for unlikely partners – not just the usual suspects – who can help you achieve your mission while making the most of your limited resources.

7 Stay up-to-date. Review your organization's programmatic and financial results frequently (quarterly reviews may not be enough). Make sure you have the latest information on funding trends and changes, legal obligations, legislative considerations and government support.

8 Manage cash and cash flow. The greater the uncertainty of your funds, the greater the need for cash reserves and effective cash-flow management.

9 Communicate clearly, honestly and regularly with all key stakeholders. To manage speculation or uncertainty about the future, communicate on a regular basis, both formally and informally, with your board and staff. Also keep lines of communication open with your funders.

10 Advocate your position. Make sure all your key stakeholders, including legislators, know what you stand for. Be willing to fight for your core values and beliefs.

Additional resources

- From the Amherst H. Wilder Foundation: *Coping with Cutbacks: The Nonprofit Guide to Success When Times Are Tight*, by Emil Angelica and Vincent Hyman (1997, \$20). Learn how to make new connections, create buy-in and bring new partners to the table to accomplish your mission. The guide offers a six-step process for finding solutions to problems, plus 185 specific cutback strategies you can put to use right away. To order call the Wilder Foundation at 1-800-274-6024 or go to www.wilder.org/pubs/cutbacks.
- From Nonprofit Quarterly (Spring 2002): "Managing Financial Uncertainty." Authors Thomas Raffa and Robert Cocchiario outline strategies for nonprofit leaders to successfully guide their organizations through uncertain economic times. Find the article online at www.nonprofitquarterly.org.

Nonprofit Allies

Nonprofit Allies is a network of Minnesota organizations providing services and management support to nonprofits. For assistance and additional resources on nonprofit

management issues, visit the web sites of these members:

- Center for Nonprofit Management, University of St. Thomas, offering classes, seminars and workshops on nonprofit management issues: www.gsb.stthomas.edu/nonprofit
- MAP for Nonprofits, providing management and board development services: www.mapfornonprofits.org
- Minnesota Council of Nonprofits, a statewide membership association sharing information, services and research: www.mncn.org
- Minnesota Council on Foundations, offering news and information on Minnesota grantmaking and philanthropy: www.mcf.org
- Minnesota Nonprofits Assistance Fund, providing financing and planning for long-term financial stability: www.communityloantech.org/nonprofits_mnaf.asp
- Springboard for the Arts, sponsoring workshops and informational materials applicable to a wide range of nonprofit organizations: www.springboardforthearts.org
- Amherst H. Wilder Foundation, producing a variety of publications that offer practical strategies for nonprofit and community organizations: www.wilder.org

From the summer 2003 Giving Forum newspaper, used with permission of the Minnesota Council on Foundations (www.mcf.org).

Doing history

Revised *Northern Lights* curriculum integrates primary sources

Students become amateur historians when they open *Northern Lights*, the newly revised Minnesota history curriculum now available to schools and libraries. Presenting the engaging stories of individuals who have shaped our state, each chapter concludes with primary-source activities called “Investigations” that encourage students to analyze evidence and form their own interpretations.

Written at a sixth-grade reading level and fully classroom-tested, this second edition of *Northern Lights* has been expanded to include three components: the Student Edition, an Annotated Teacher’s Edition and a Classroom Resources Workbook. Together the three volumes provide a complete package for teaching Minnesota history, including background information, discussion questions, teaching tips, worksheets, mapping activities and tests.

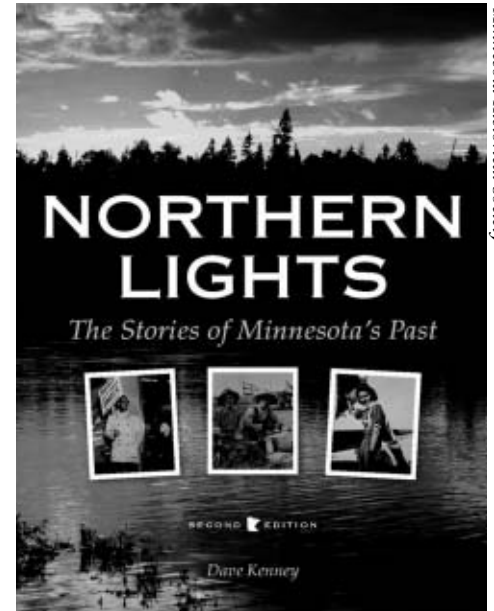
Add it to your library

Though intended for classroom use in grades 5–7, *Northern Lights* would make a valuable addition to the library of any Minnesota historical organization. If you’re familiar with the materials students use in their schools, you’ll better be able to design your own museum’s education program to complement their classroom activities.

For price and ordering information and to inquire about examination copies, call Suzi Hunn, Minnesota Historical Society sales and marketing associate, at 651-215-1763, or e-mail suzanne.hunn@mnhs.org.

Training available

A statewide series of training workshops has been planned to introduce teachers to the new curriculum. Among historical societies hosting workshops in the 2003–04 school year will be those in



The new second edition of *Northern Lights*, a Minnesota history curriculum, features photographs of hundreds of objects from Minnesota Historical Society collections.

Brown, Clay, Olmsted and St. Louis counties; workshops also will be held at the Lindbergh Historic Site in Little Falls and the Mille Lacs Indian Museum in Onamia. For dates and registration information, call teacher education specialist Nancy O’Brien Wagner at 651-284-3818 or e-mail curriculum@mnhs.org.

Workshops spotlight Minnesota history topics

From milling history to Minnesota myths, a range of thought-provoking Minnesota history topics will be explored this school year in a series of workshops for teachers and other educators. First up:

Oct. 20

Mill City Minneapolis

Mill City Museum, Minneapolis

Explore the heart of the city’s milling and lumbering industries with a visit to the new Mill City Museum.

Nov. 7

North Shore Industry

St. Louis County Historical Society, Duluth

Learn how the North Shore’s economy evolved, from commercial fishing to timber to tourism.

Workshops run from 9 a.m. to 3 p.m.; the cost is \$75. For more information or to register, call teacher education specialist Nancy O’Brien Wagner at 651-284-3818 or e-mail curriculum@mnhs.org.



Recreational fishing drew this tourist to Lake Superior’s North Shore ca. 1940.

AASLH announces 2003 award winners

Four Minnesota projects recognized

Each year the American Association for State and Local History (AASLH) honors historical organizations across the country for excellence in the collection, preservation and interpretation of state and local history. Among winners of 2003 awards, announced in June, were four Minnesota projects, each recognized with Certificates of Commendation for excellence within the context of available means and regional standards.

"This is the first time since 1973 that Minnesota has been honored with so many awards," said David Grabitske, state awards chair for the AASLH program. "That's well-deserved recognition for the high quality of the stories told and preserved last year by Minnesota's history community."

Certificate of Commendation winners

- The American Swedish Institute in Minneapolis collaborated with the Kalmar County Museum in Kalmar, Sweden, on an interpretive program titled "Alla Tiders Historia: Here and There, Now and Then." The program, which teaches local history through site-specific "time travels," explored immigration to Minnesota using costumes and a variety of role-playing activities. Participants were inner-city youth from nearby Bancroft Community School, many of whom are themselves immigrants from Africa and Asia. (See *Interpreter*, April 2002.)
- The Minnesota Historical Society developed the innovative web site "Forests, Fields, and the Falls: Connecting Minnesota," which explored four stories in Minnesota history on the themes of lumbering,

agriculture and industry.

Designed as an online school resource, the site appeals to all ages and provides a model for using the web to tell stories using

local history sources. (See *Interpreter*, March 2003.)

- The State Historical Records Advisory Boards of Minnesota and North Dakota were honored for their collaboration on a project to document changes in agriculture and rural life in the Red River Valley. Their findings will guide archivists for years to come as they work to document the region's history. To read a copy of the report, go to www.mnhs.org/preserve/shrab/projects.html.
- The Minnesota State Public School Orphanage Museum in Owatonna produced the acclaimed documentary film *The Children Remember: Life at the Minnesota*



State School Orphanage Museum

The award-winning documentary *The Children Remember* features interviews with former residents of the State School for Dependent and Neglected Children in Owatonna.

State Public School for Dependent and Neglected Children, 1886-1945. Through interviews with former residents and staff, the film captures the stories of the children who called the state orphanage home. The film was named Best Feature Documentary at the 2003 Fargo Film Festival and placed second on the list of audience favorites at the 2003 Minneapolis/St. Paul International Film Festival. (See *Interpreter*, May 2002 and October 2002.)

MAP grant applications available

Museum Assessment Program (MAP) grant application are now available from the Institute of Museum and Library Services (IMLS). The deadline is Dec. 1 for the first-come, first-served grants, which fund consultations and assessments in four areas – operations, collections management, governance and public aspects. To request a grant

packet, call 202-289-9118, e-mail map@aam-us.org or go to www.aam-us.org.

Note: MAP grant applicants must have a Dun and Bradstreet Data Universal Numbering System (DUNS) number, now required for all IMLS grants. If you do not have a DUNS number, go to www.dnb.com/us or call the toll-free request line, 1-866-705-5711, to receive a number at no cost to your organization.

Strategize *continued from page 3*

So it's more important than ever to be able to demonstrate your value.

Making the case for your organization starts with being able to articulate why it's important that you continue to thrive. Participants at the Minnesota Historical Society's field workshops pooled their best ideas to start you down that road. Their advice in a nutshell:

- Stress the vital contribution your local historical organization makes to the community as a unique educational institution.
- Emphasize the high quality of your every undertaking, from inclusive programming to excellent public service to dedicated stewardship of the community's shared past.

- Demonstrate for stakeholders how you measure your success at

every turn.

They just may find it hard to say no!

2004 field workshops set

It's not too soon to mark your calendars for the 2004 Minnesota Historical Society field workshop nearest you. Choose from the following:

- March 26** Anoka, Anoka County
- April 16** Windom, Cottonwood County
- April 30** Bemidji, Beltrami County
- May 14** Rochester, Olmsted County

The theme, "The Cost of Doing Business," emerged from ideas submitted by participants in

last spring's workshops. Sessions will address such issues as fundraising, budgeting and controlling the cost of collections management.

Watch for more information in the January-February Interpreter. Meanwhile, address questions to Tim Glines, manager of outreach services, at 651-296-5460 or timothy.glines@mnhs.org, or David Grabitske, field programs assistant, at 651-297-4416 or david.grabitske@mnhs.org.

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