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to better serve the public**

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MINNESOTA HISTORY Interpreter

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'You're hired!'

Shift from volunteer to paid staff takes planning

enny Tvedten laughs when he recalls his first days on the job as the Martin County Historical Society's first executive director. A retired teacher new to museum work, he had been hired by the board to work 30 to 35 hours a week. "What will I do to fill all that time?" he remembers asking them. He soon learned he was lucky if he could fit all he had to do into *60 hours* a week.

Too much to do - not enough time. It's a challenge faced by historical organizations large and small. But for groups transitioning from volunteer to paid staff, there are added challenges - learning new roles, setting measurable goals, defining boundaries, boosting the organization's stature in the community.

In the public eye

Tvedten had the good fortune to work for a board that gave him lots of latitude but also set clear goals. Still, it took him some time to realize he couldn't do it all. "A year later I finally hired an assistant to work on organizing the collections," he says. "I needed to devote more time to networking in the community - writing a newspaper column, doing TV interviews about our events and programs, lending historical perspective to discussions at meetings of the Chamber of Commerce and other community groups. The higher

visibility has really helped our fundraising."

Higher visibility was also a goal for the White Bear Lake Area Historical Society when it hired its first staff person in 2001. Executive director Sara Markoe Hanson had the distinct advantage of knowing the community well: White Bear Lake is home to six generations of her family.

She knew the historical society well, too, from her many years as a member and from a turn on the board.

"This was an all-volunteer organization for 30 years," says Hanson. "Every board member had an area of responsibility. We've kept that model; it helps spread the workload around."

That workload has increased steadily over the years as the society



Sara Markoe Hanson, executive director of the White Bear Lake Area Historical Society, greets a young visitor to the Depot Museum. Visitation has soared since Hanson signed on as the society's first paid staff person.

grew from sponsoring teas, tours and an annual musicale to managing two sites, a burgeoning collection and a broader array of programs - growth

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'You're hired!' *continued from page 1*

that couldn't have happened without paid staff in place. "There's been a gigantic increase in our community presence over the last four years," notes Hanson. "We

now have strong ties to the local business association, tourism bureau and high school alumni group. Those partnerships are essential for our historical society, which relies entirely on private support."



The White Bear Lake Area Historical Society operates two facilities – the Depot Museum, pictured, and the Fillebrown House, a 19th-century cottage.

Changing roles

The catalyst for professionalizing the society came in 2000 when the White Bear Lake Chamber of Commerce moved its offices out of the historic railroad depot, where it had rented the freight room to the WBLAHS as exhibit space. "The Chamber wanted the historical society to take over the whole building," says Hanson, "but under the condition that the depot would be open more than the few hours a month the volunteers could commit to. The board decided

person to coordinate all our activities," says WBLAHS board member Peter Reis, who helped guide the society through its transition. "We debated whether to make the position full-time or part-time but in the end decided we could afford only a three-quarter-time position so it was imperative to hire someone who knew the community. Sara fit the bill. She's made the most of those hours." Among the improvements since her arrival: an on-time, lively newsletter that members can depend on; grant-writing that is essential to an organization with no public funding; and follow-through on all projects to ensure that the society runs smoothly.

Drawing on his decades of experience as a business executive and his work on larger boards, Reis advised WBLAHS board members on their biggest challenge: sorting out their new advisory role from the director's management role. "We had always been a hands-on board – we still are," he says. "But we gave up day-to-day duties to concentrate on big-picture issues – strategic planning, policies, the mission."

Reis also made sure that all the pieces were in place for one of the



Board members Dick Hanson (left) and Peter Reis pitch in on construction of the White Bear Lake Area Historical Society's new storage space at City Hall.

to take the leap."

"So many things had been falling through the cracks without a staff



President Elizabeth Schwarze (center) hosts a meeting of the McLeod County Historical Society board. Some members do double duty as the museum's volunteer staff.



board's crucial new responsibilities – regular review of the director's job performance. "To do that, you need a job description for the director with a clear definition of duties," he explains. "You need a good work plan – a list of goals and objectives to measure against. And you need a policy that spells out the procedure for the job review. Too many boards overlook this important step in ensuring that the organization's goals are being met."

Seeing results

Hanson ticks off some of the WBLAHS's accomplishments: membership has nearly doubled, attendance at events has soared and the collections have grown 300 percent. To deal with that volume of artifacts, she has instituted collections management practices – cataloging objects, identifying photographs, developing collecting guidelines.

But she couldn't do it without her hands-on board, including Reis, who took the lead in finding storage space

for the collections at City Hall – then drew up blueprints, got the construction permit, bought the materials, supervised delivery to the site and took instruction at Home Depot on putting up sheetrock.

Handing over the reins

The McLeod County Historical Society has tried it both ways. The society opened its new museum in 1988 with a full-time director. But four years ago budget problems forced the board to make a tough decision: close the doors or stay open with volunteer help instead of paid staff. Board members decided to keep the museum going themselves.

A small team of board members committed to doing the bulk of the managerial work, opening the museum two days a week. Additional, behind-the-scenes volunteers put in more hours maintaining the building and tending to the society's archives.

"We're all retired," says MCHS president Elizabeth Schwarze, "but we

consider this work our jobs. We've accomplished a lot for a small museum. We strengthened the library, updated our exhibits, did two MAP assessments – one on our overall operations and one in collections management.

"We're getting tired, though," she says. "So we're making plans to hire a full-time director again in early 2006. That will get us back to doing what we've been too busy to tend to – going to workshops, raising funds, drumming up support for the organization beyond Hutchinson. We want to hand over the day-to-day responsibilities, get some younger folks involved and return to being just regular volunteers."



For more information on managing the transition from volunteer to paid staff, call Sara Markoe Hanson, executive director of the White Bear Lake Area Historical Society, 651-407-5327; and Elizabeth Schwarze or Gerard Stifter, board president and treasurer, respectively, at the McLeod County Historical Society, 320-587-2109.

A new sense of order

Museums redo small spaces to better serve their communities

Seven years ago, when Ed Oerichbauer took over as executive director of the Koochiching County Historical Society in International Falls, he found “a typical small-town museum – everything we had was on display. It was a real jumble of stuff.”

Working slowly as funds became available, Oerichbauer set out to bring some order to the place. “I hauled everything out of each gallery, one room at a time, and started over,” he explains.

“There were 6,000 square feet of exhibit space and only 300 feet of storage space. I remade 2,000 square feet of the space into storage, put up shelving and stored some of the



Reorganization of the Koochiching County Historical Society made room for special exhibits like this one featuring the society’s collection of photographs by conservation activist Ernest Oberholtzer.

collections away for the time being.” He also reorganized the society’s archives and library.

Now museum exhibits are

arranged by theme – prehistory, American Indians, the fur trade, boundaries. “Koochiching County is only 100 years old,” says



Mahnomen County Historical Society board members Jerry Kochmann (center) and Joanie Kramer consult with Tim Glines of the Minnesota Historical Society before making changes to their museum space.



Oerichbauer, “but there have been 10,000 years of human habitation here. So we try to tell the story of the whole region, including neighboring northwestern Ontario.”

Community response to his monumental reorganization has been strong. Reports Oerichbauer, “Visitors now say this museum is amazingly good for a small place like International Falls.”

Drawing repeat visitors

The Mahnomon County Historical Society was also laboring under a lack of organized museum space when it sought advice from the Minnesota Historical Society’s Local History Services staff. The problem: a somewhat random arrangement of artifacts, with archival materials scattered throughout the display space. The solution: improved traffic flow, with research materials centralized in one area, and changing exhibits near the entrance to entice visitors to return.

“We put out brochures and newsletters by the entrance and pinned up thank you notes from schoolchildren,” says Joanie Kramer, MCHS board member and the museum’s volunteer curator. The changing exhibits contribute to the museum’s fresher look. “People are noticing things for the first time,”



The Martin County Historical Society’s library doubles as meeting space and a workroom for students doing research.

as a workspace for visiting school groups and a meeting space for local community organizations.

Executive director Lenny Tvedten recruited board volunteers to help with his next reorganization project. “We’re redoing our museum displays room by room, removing things that don’t fit the themes,” says Tvedten. “Our attendance is higher since we’ve made all these changes. And that has helped our fundraising. We just held a successful raffle to raise funds for an elevator, which will improve accessibility. That should boost attendance even further.”

she reports “even though the items have been here for 20 years.”

A place to meet

A combination of new space and reorganized old spaces gave the Martin County Historical Society an opportunity to improve service to its community. Using reserve funds, the society in 2003 created a research library in the addition to its museum, a former Catholic convent. The library centralizes the newspaper collections, bound volumes and microfilm. It also serves

For more information on these ways of doing the most with what you have, call Ed Oerichbauer, executive director of the Koochiching County Historical Society, 218-283-4316; Joanie Kramer, curator of the Mahnomon County Historical Society, 218-935-5490; and Lenny Tvedten, executive director of the Martin County Historical Society, 507-235-5178.

Mirror image

Stevens County museum addition preserves local landmark

When it came time for the Stevens County Historical Society to find larger quarters for its museum, the society had to look no further than its own back yard. With plenty of land for expansion, the board decided to build an addition onto the existing museum facility. The catch: that facility was the historic Morris Carnegie Library, a 100-year-old Classical Revival building on the National Register of Historic Places.

To ensure that the addition would complement the 1905 brick-and-stone original, SCHS board and staff proceeded slowly and deliberately. They consulted with Charles Nelson, then the Minnesota Historical Society's historical architect. They launched a \$1.3 million capital campaign. They hired a firm with experience renovating older buildings. And they devised a long-range plan to guide them through the expansion project in manageable phases.

This fall, four years after their planning began, the Stevens County Historical Society dedicated its new addition with a weekend of festivities that drew members and the public, families, young people and seniors. "This has raised community awareness

of our building and all our programs," says SCHS director Randee Hokanson.

Room for everything

"The addition triples our space and gives us room for things we never had before," explains Hokanson. "There's a workroom for artifact intake and collections care. There are staff offices, ample collections storage and space for volunteers. And now we have an exhibit hall for changing exhibits with room for group lessons. We're especially grateful for the new elevator, which makes the building accessible, lets us move artifacts more easily and greatly aids exhibit construction."

Now that the addition is open for visitors, SCHS staff have turned their attention to renovating the old library building. "The City of Morris paid for a new roof and ceiling that allowed us to retain the historic domed interior," says Hokanson. And a State Capital Projects grant-in-aid from the Minnesota Historical Society funded a new HVAC system. With climate controls in place, the first level will house the archives and a research room. On the second level will be a gift shop, community meeting room,

more offices, a galley kitchen and a permanent exhibit devoted to the history of Stevens County.

The last pieces of the puzzle

For future growth, tracks have been laid in the new wing to accommodate stackable, high-density collections storage as needed. "Our aim is to be creative about using the space," says Hokanson. "We plan to lease part of the new wing to the University of Minnesota, Morris for the West Central Regional Research Center. And [MHS outreach conservator] Bob Herskovitz has offered to help us maximize use of nonpublic areas of the old building."

The new museum has just about everything - everything but a new name. "For the time being, we're still calling it the Stevens County Museum and Historical Society," says Hokanson. "But we're offering naming rights on the addition's new exhibit gallery. If a donor steps forward with the last \$300,000 for our capital campaign, we'll name the gallery in their honor."

For more information call SCHS director Randee Hokanson at 320-589-1719 or e-mail info@stevenshistorymuseum.com

Stevens County Historical Society



Designed by Steve Gausman of Short Elliott Hendrickson, the addition to the historic Morris Carnegie Library triples the space of the Stevens County Historical Society. The new street-level entrance, pictured at left during construction last winter, is a mirror image of the original portico. Artist Lisa Johannes, whose 1998 painting *Sunrise* graces the library dome (right), will return to paint the ceiling of the new rotunda.

Check it out

Changes to MHS web site put Local History Services at your fingertips

The Minnesota Historical Society's web site has been upgraded to provide additional information and resources

for local historical organizations. Go to www.mnhs.org/lhs and see for yourself.


In the section "Networking" you'll find ways to stay in touch with your history colleagues. "In the Field" lets you know how to take advantage of MHS outreach services, including workshops (turn to page 8 of this issue for the 2006 schedule).

One new feature is "Technical Help," a compilation of sources and links in four categories: management, preservation, research and interpretation. A work in progress, this section will be added to over time. Subscribers to the listserv MNLOCALHISTORY are encouraged to comment on the resources listed and suggest additions.




For those needing assistance with, or information about, historic preservation, see the revised web site for the State Historic Preservation Office at www.mnhs.org/shpo.

LOCAL HISTORY SERVICES

Augment your history organization's development and your own management skills with these tools and services designed to help you interpret and preserve the history of your community.



FEATURED LOCAL HISTORY SERVICES

 <p>Networking</p> <p>Share ideas and best practices with your history colleagues.</p>	 <p>Technical Help</p> <p>Resources for running a history museum, from administration and facilities management to collections care and interpretation.</p>	 <p>In the Field</p> <p>We'll bring workshops and onsite consultations to your doorstep with the latest word on history museum operations.</p>
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Services for Minnesota's local history organizations are featured at www.mnhs.org/lhs.

Stay in touch

What are the two best ways to share your news with your colleagues in Minnesota's county and local historical organizations?

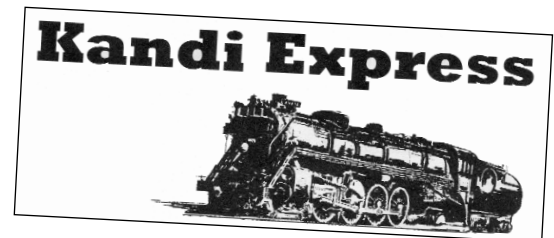
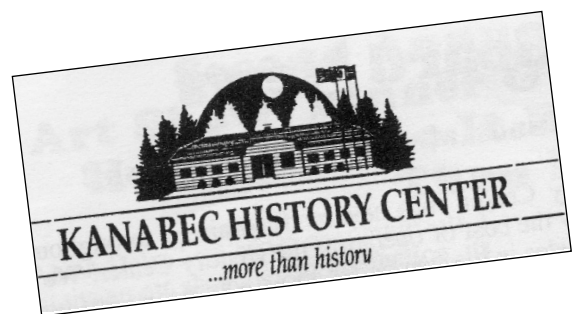
1. Put the Minnesota Historical Society's Local History Services office on your newsletter mailing list.

We use your news for Interpreter story ideas. Also, make sure that your newsletter gets mailed to **Serials** at MHS. That copy becomes part of the periodical collection in the Reference Library, where it's accessible to researchers.

For both copies, use the Minnesota Historical Society address: 345 Kellogg Blvd. W., St. Paul, MN 55102-1906.

2. Subscribe to MNLOCALHISTORY.

This list service, e-mailed weekly to subscribers, is an electronic meeting place to share information and exchange messages. Join now by sending an e-mail with the text SUBSCRIBE MNLOCALHISTORY to majordomo@state.mn.us.



2006 workshops announced

“Working Together: Community Collaborations.” That’s the theme of next year’s local history workshops, scheduled for five venues around the state:

- March 24** Wright County Historical Society, Buffalo
- April 7** Historic Hormel House, Austin
- April 21** Stevens County Historical Society, Morris
- April 28** Forest History Center, Grand Rapids
- May 19** Kittson County Historical Society, Lake Bronson

Workshop sessions will offer plenty of winning ideas for teaming up with other local organizations – chambers of commerce, educators, librarians, preservationists, genealogists – to maximize all of your community’s resources. It’s a sure-fire way to build your audiences and bring greater value to your customers. Watch for more information in the January-February 2006 Interpreter.

CAP grant changes for 2006

Two changes in eligibility criteria for the Conservation Assessment Program (CAP) in 2006 will allow more museums to participate:

- The number of days per year a museum must be open to the public will change from 120 days to 90 days.
- A second assessment will be available to organizations that participated in CAP before 1999.

CAP, a program for small to mid-sized museums, provides assessments of the museum’s collections, environmental conditions and historic buildings by a conservation professional. Applications – available at www.heritagepreservation.org/programs – will be accepted on a first-come, first-served basis until the postmark deadline of Dec. 1.

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