

# BACKUS Community Center

## From the Director's Desk

At this time of year I'm sure many of us reflect back on the year just past. Our reflections might include such things as births and deaths, trips taken or family gatherings, financial gains or losses, retirement plans, our jobs or careers, sickness or disease, tragedies, losses or successes or any of the multitude of milestones that mark our lives.

I gave thought to many of these things as I composed what has become an annual "Christmas Letter" in our family. The focus was not so much on Linda and I but on the activities of our children and our grandchildren – the last of whom made his appearance on November 3<sup>rd</sup> – just in time to be included in

the letter.

Here at Backus I always think about the past year at this time in much the same way as I think about our personal life. In fact, for Linda and me, Backus has become an enormous part of our lives.

During 2015 Backus experienced a number of highs and lows. Among the many positives was a full schedule of high quality performances featuring acoustic guitarist Billy McLaughlin, the talented acappella group Tonic Sol-fa, The James Sewell Ballet's performance of "Guy Noir," The Rose Ensemble, Chris Koza & Rogue Valley and "Blind Joe." With over 500 people attending "Blind Joe's" concert, we ended the year on a high note.

Our community theatre group "Borealis Bards" engaged actors of all ages in a most entertaining presentation of "Alice in Wonderland" drawing a total audience of 854 for its three performances.

Other highlights included grant awards from the Otto Bremer Foundation of \$120,000 and an Arts Tour grant from the MN State Arts Board of \$41,185. A membership drive led by Board Member Betsy Ward resulted in our highest ever membership total of 417 members who donated a record \$36,622 in 2015!

Backus continued to partner with the Falls Hunger Coalition to help improve food access and reduce hunger in our community. The

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January 2016

### Board of Directors

Sherrie Lessard,  
Vice President  
Betsy Ward, Secretary  
David McKee, Treasurer

### Board Members

Barb Albert, Emeritus  
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Patti Ballan  
Julie Bartkowski  
John Faith  
Donna Frederickson,  
Emeritus  
Shelby Harmening  
Beth Lowthian  
Tracy Lunser  
Beth Nelson

### Backus Staff

Executive Director  
Ward Merrill

Business Manager  
Hoa Sobczynski

Event Coordinator  
Robin Bjorkquist

Event Staff  
Jill Malone  
June Wilson

Kitchen Supervisor  
Mary Ann Lien

Cooks  
Rick DeBenedet  
Wanda Linder

Custodians  
Joe Kenny  
Jerry Vohler

## Backus Annual Meeting

Conference Room 101/102  
Thursday, February 11, 5:00 pm  
Light refreshments provided



## From the Director's Desk, continued

Community Market, Summer Food Service Program and Community Café, all helped bring healthy food and meals to people experiencing food insecurity.

Since beginning in 2010 and 2012 respectively, Summer Food and Community Café have served 56,475 meals

to people of all ages in our area!

Backus was selected as the site for a Ruby's Pantry food distribution program which began in July and operates on the second Monday of each month. Over 2,300 families have benefitted from Ruby's Pantry which seeks to provide surplus food to all who wish to participate. Ruby's believes the best place to store surplus food is in people's stomachs and if you get hungry or put food on the table – you qualify for Ruby's. For a \$20 cash donation each guest receives an abundance of food (usually

two laundry baskets full). 10% of each donation remains in the community to be used for charitable purposes. To date almost \$5,000 has been donated lo-

"The word "Backus" should be in the dictionary with a definition: *a place where all things are possible*. A community needs a heart and our Backus Community Center provides it in International Falls." – Mary Bartlett – Border Concert Association, Backus Member & volunteer

cally. Community response has been positive with 120 volunteers helping each month.

Backus Community Center was honored to receive donations, memorials, contributions and gifts from many groups and individuals in 2015. Perhaps the most unique was by Mary Graves who donated 155 pieces of her art and craft collection with the intent that it be used for the benefit of Backus. Several items that were on display have been sold with a number of other items to be raffled in time for the All Class Reunion this summer. Backus

will retain a number of items for permanent display in the building. Our sincere thanks to Mary for this outstanding gift.

2015 was also a year of loss for Backus; not in a financial sense but in personal loss. A number of Backus supporters and volunteers passed away in the past year. Among them were Barb Eckels (office volunteer), Pat Hamalainen (supporter), Joe Gust (volunteer & supporter), Edith Holmstrom (supporter), Helen Williams (supporter), Margaret Patnode (former Board Member, volunteer & supporter), Bob Jacobsen (volunteer & musician), Representative David Dill (strong supporter of the arts and MN Legacy Amend-

Heritage Fund), Millie Ballan (supporter, volunteer & excellent baker of "lemon bars") and Marcia Bringedahl (Board Member, volunteer, supporter, Publicity & Advertising Chair and our premier proof-reader).

All of these people were

a part of what makes Backus such a vibrant, active and bustling place today. Each one of them touched the lives of the people that work, learn, play and come together in our building. We will miss them.

Ward Merrill,  
Executive Director





BACKUS

## Annual Meeting

All members of Citizens for Backus/AB are welcome to attend the 2016 annual meeting to review the 2015 Annual Report, activities, financial statement, and discuss the health and welfare of our community center.

Join us in the Conference Room  
101/102 for the meeting, light refreshments & door prizes!

## February 11

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### NOT A BACKUS MEMBER ...?

Join today! Online at [www.backusab.org](http://www.backusab.org) or stop by the office at 900 5th Street. Your membership dollars help Backus to be the vibrant community center it is. Memberships allow us to be site host for Ruby's Pantry, provide twice weekly meals at Community Café, serve lunch at the Summer Food Service Program, provide Open Gym on weekends, host Bronco junior high and elementary basketball games and practices, provide space for community meetings, school meetings and so much more!

Check us out!



## 2016 Performing Arts Season Continues February 5th

### **Sister** Friday, February 5 @ 7 pm

These three women are a sample of all that is great about the Midwest. Their regional humor is coupled with a universal sense of family that is captivating to all kinds of audiences. Their sense of hospitality goes beyond "Minnesota nice" and is a genuine expression of life in the heartland. Hometown harmony, Scandinavian humor, and familiar music. This is world class regional entertainment built on a pattern of Midwestern quality. Brought to you in part by The Sons of Norway.

### **Baby Boomer Comedy**

#### Friday, February 19 @ 7 pm

Fellow baby boomer and veteran comedians, Jan McInnis and Kent Rader have developed The Baby Boomer Comedy Show. This 90-minute theater event is filled with clean humor on topics the boomer generation can relate to — family, kids, work, do-it-yourself projects, dieting, aging, grandchildren and is perfect for boomers everywhere.

### **Hobo Nephews of Uncle Frank**

#### Saturday, March 5 @ 7 pm

Teague Alexy's music is deeply rooted in Americana after touring the country a few times with brother Ian in their foot-stomping band Hobo Nephews of Uncle Frank. If you listen closely to the swing of Teague's voice, guitar and harmonica you can hear he has not completely forgotten his young days as a reggae and funk obsessed hip hop DJ. It is a toe-tapping backdrop for a profound American writer and storyteller.

### **Bill & Kate Isles**

#### Saturday, April 16 @ 7 pm

Bill & Kate Isles are an acoustic singer/songwriter duo based in Duluth, Minnesota. Using a wide variety of musical styles, their performances carry audiences through a broad landscape of experiences from metaphorical worlds to small town family stories and to zany comedy.

*Sisters, Baby Boomers,  
Hobo Nephews and Isles  
round out the Backus  
season—a great variety of  
live entertainment on stage!*

The Performing Arts Series is brought to you in part by David McKee and Lynn Naeckel, Boise Paper, Lucachick Architecture, Stewart's Super One Foods, Wagner Construction, Ballan Furniture, Ward and Linda Merrill, Days Inn, Cynthia Jaksa, Solutions Insurance Agencies. *A sincere thank you to our sponsors!*

*Tickets are available in advance at Backus, City Drug Store, J & D Family Foods in Littlefork, Betty's in Fort Francis, or at the door the night of the show.*

**Adults \$12 | Students \$6**

**Family \$25** (immediately family only please)





900 Fifth Street  
International Falls MN 56649  
(218) 285-7225  
www.backusab.org

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*“Historic Backus Community Center, the heart of International Falls, where all generations celebrate arts, culture, recreation, wellness and life-long learning.”*



## Upcoming Events

- **February 5** Top the Tater Dinner sponsored by Bremer Bank 5:00 to 6:30 pm
- **February 5** Sister 7:00 pm
- **February 8** Ruby's Pantry 5:00 to 6:30 pm
- **February 10** All School Music Festival 12:45 pm
- **February 11** Backus Annual Meeting 5:00 pm
- **February 13** Tuesday Musicale's TET - Vietnamese New Year Special Dinner 6:00 pm
- **February 15** Contractor Class 8:00 am
- **February 19** Backstage Taco Bar sponsored by Up North Builders 7:00 pm
- **February 19** Baby Boomer Comedy Show 7:00 pm
- **February 27** Borealis Bards Room to Act 6:00 pm
- **March 5** Backstage Bistro sponsored by Coca-Cola Bottling 7:00 pm
- **March 5** Hobo Nephews of Uncle Frank 7:00 pm
- **March 14** Ruby's Pantry 5:00 to 6:30 pm
- **March 30** Ethnic Food Festival
- **April 1** MN Deer Hunters Association Banquet
- **April 11** Ruby's Pantry 5:00 to 6:30 pm
- **April 16** Bill & Kate Isles 7:00 pm
- **April 19** Top the Tater Dinner sponsored by City Drug 5:00 to 6:30 pm
- **April 19** Border Concert: Tribute to Neil Diamond
- **May 7-8** Dancin' with Darcie Dance Recitals
- **May 9** Ruby's Pantry 5:00 to 6:30 pm
- **June 1** Summer Food Service/Open Gym Start
- **June 6-11** Summer Art Week/Prairie Fire Children's Theatre

**Dates Subject to Change**

For more details and updates, visit

[www.backusab.org](http://www.backusab.org)

Or stop by the office at 900 5th Street