



LAKE VERMILION CULTURAL CENTER

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NEWSLETTER • FALL 2025 - WINTER 2026

Board of Directors: Elaine McGillivray-Chair, Sandy Wallin-Vice Chair, Mary Batinich-President, Shelby Vaske-Secretary, Ryan Bajan-Treasurer
Members at Large: Maddy Zupancich, Amy Banks, Tom Baldrica, Karel Winkelaar



MIDSUMMER 2025 - Songs of the Journey

The Midsummer Gala, held in Tower this past June 14 was similar to past Midsummers in many ways with the festive dinner and auctions being held in the Herb Lamppa Civic Center, and a musical program in St. Mary's Hall. It was a fun evening of connecting, community and supporting the biggest LVCC fundraiser of the year.



Guest speaker, Ida Rukavina shares her lovely violin skills

New this year, was an online silent auction. For our first effort, it was a success financially largely because people who didn't attend the event could still take part in bidding. There was also an in-person silent auction before the dinner and the ever popular live auction. Items auctioned this year were a week in a French chalet, a week in an Italian bed and breakfast, a plane ride over Lake Vermilion, an Amish outdoor rocking chair, 2 tickets to the MN Vikings and 2 tickets to the MN Wild. Steve Solkela again "called" the auction to the delight of the audience and was ably assisted by Master of Ceremonies, Tom Baldrica. IRRRB Commissioner, Ida Rukavina, was the guest speaker and delighted the audience by playing several Finnish songs on her violin. The LVCC appreciates the businesses and individuals who donated to our auctions and those who bid. We invite you to see our in-kind donation list in this newsletter.

Members of the Sectionals singing group perform a Sea Shanty tune during the entertainment segment of Midsummer in St. Mary's historic hall



(L to R) Silent Auction bidders, Beth Debeltz and Sherry Zupancich review items on the auction table



Members of the Sectionals singing group perform a Sea Shanty tune during the entertainment segment of Midsummer in St. Mary's historic hall

The program, "Songs of the Journey", written by Ryan Bajan, was about the musical journey of immigrants coming to this part of America. It included a choir of Midsummer singers, a quartet of men from the Sectionals singing group, and was directed by Tom Moe of Gilbert.

Not only did we do well on the event itself, but also, contributing to the success was an added matching-donation opportunity. Board member Tom Baldrica, announced after dinner that an anonymous donor was giving up to \$25,000 for a match-donation that prompted several guests to donate personal checks or make pledges. The outcome was \$24,525 from friends of the LVCC, matched by the anonymous donor for a total of \$49,050. The event itself netted \$25,882 for a grand total of \$74,932, most of which will be going toward our continued building restoration project.



(L to R) Event guests Clayton Halunen, Kristina Schultz, Maggie Romens and David Duddingston; Linda Haugen, long-time Midsummer dinner Chair and husband Gary; former LVCC Board members Sharon Legg and Sue Ellis; Tracy and Tom Baldrica

SAVE THE DATE FOR MIDSUMMER • JUNE 20, 2026

The Lake Vermilion Cultural Center is dedicated to community enrichment through education and the arts by offering quality programming and providing opportunities to showcase the rich cultural heritage of the area.



In Honor of Jim Marttila



Kathy Meyerle and husband James Marttila visit Monet's Garden in Giverny, France during a past LVCC fundraising trip.

We wish to thank Kathy Meyerle for her generous donation of \$25,000 in honor of her late husband, James K. Marttila, Pharm. D., M.B.A. Jim was on our LVCC Board for several years as Member at Large, Treasurer, and President. This was special in that he was a member of St. Mary's Episcopal Church from birth and served as an acolyte, choir boy, and member with his parents. He was able to share much early history of St. Mary's Church. His mother was a WWII bride from England, thus the Anglican connection. His father, a pharmacist, started and operated the Marttila Drug store in Tower for many years. Jim only worked there one summer after completing his Doctor of Pharmacy degree at the U of MN. He also had an M.B.A. from the University of St. Thomas. After co-owning and operating pharmacies in the Twin Cities, he ended his career at the Mayo Clinic where his final title was the Director in the Pharmaceutical and Finance Dept. You can see why we were so honored to have him as a member of our LVCC Board. He certainly was the "local boy made good."

Kathy and Jim went on many of our fundraising trips over the years and attended Midsummer whenever possible. They underwrote one of the windows in the east end of St. Mary's Hall. Kathy, who is also a pharmacist and an attorney, ended her business career at the Mayo Clinic too. She spends part of her summers at their cabin on Pike Bay and we hope to see her often this summer.

A BUILDING UPDATE



Amy Banks,
Building Committee

Thank you to everyone who has offered ideas and suggestions surrounding our lovely Cultural Center building. We also appreciate your patience as this historic project continues to move forward. We are pleased to announce just days ago we received updated architectural drawings from Widseth Architectural firm. We are now able to move forward in a stepwise fashion to resume the construction work on the project. Specifically, over the next several months we will be removing the back of the current sanctuary wall, and allowing for additional seating in the former entry. Some additional footings and structural work will be needed to do this. Following that, we will focus on underfloor plumbing work in the basement which will prepare us for installation of our permanent kitchen and bathrooms. We are very excited to see you in 2026 and show you the progress we have made on our gorgeous building!

GRATEFUL



Elaine McGillivray, LVCC
Chair and husband Peter

In communities as small as Tower-Soudan to Lake Vermilion and the Arrowhead Region, many of us belong to several organizations. One that we both attend year-round is a book club and one of our books is entitled, GRATEFUL, the subversive practice of giving thanks. As we read through the book together, we came upon G.K. Chesterton's quote, "Gratitude is happiness doubled by wonder." It describes our feelings of the Lake Vermillion Cultural Center project so well. Throughout this newsletter, there are hundreds of names of people and businesses for which we are grateful. This past year has truly been a wonder both in accomplishment and results. Rather than reiterate the names of those to whom we are grateful, we want to applaud them as well as giving thanks to our families who have weathered this project well.



Mary Batinich, LVCC
President and husband
Mike Skorich

We were more than pleased to hear from our builder this past week that if we had enough funds, our entire building could be completed by this coming fall....YES, fall of 2026! Does that seem possible...there's always hope. The rebuild is well underway as you can see in Building Chair, Amy Banks' article in this newsletter. Please carefully read this letter and fill in our return form with whatever you can give. If you or your business associates would like to speak with either of us about a potential area named in honor of you or a loved one, please indicate on the enclosed form. Equally important is to let us know that you would be willing to volunteer in one of the many needed capacities as we go full steam ahead.

Happy holidays and more GRATITUDE.

Elaine McGillivray-Chair



Mary Batinich-President

THE SWEET 16 EVENTS by Shelby Vaske, LVCC Program Chair



Sweet 16. When asked for my reflections on the 2025 LVCC season of programs, those were the words that came to mind. As it turned out, there were actually seventeen as one final program was added late. As Program Chair, attending all 16 programs was a great pleasure!!

(From left) Opera characters; Branden Taus as the Mute, Steve Solkela as Uberto and Jessica Moss as Serpina



Our year kicked off with an April performance of La Serva Padrona, a comic opera featuring Steve Solkela and friends. Our only May event was a pasty feed and program by storyteller Gloria Anderson-Hegg on the lives of miners and their families. LVCC Board member, Maddy Zupancich donated all of the pasties from the family store.



The schedule included new faces and returning favorites. Audiences were again treated to wonderful music from Irene Hartfield, The Sectionals, The Night Sky Singers and their amazing drumming. A trifecta of performances by Steve Solkela, including another opportunity to enjoy the opera and an encore of Finntoberfest with the Solkela Polkela Band. Linda Smith taught a group of watercolor artist "wanna-bees" in painting their own versions of an owl. The Northern Lights

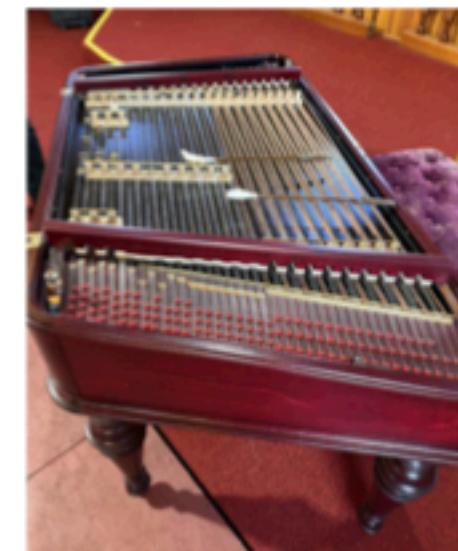
Music Festival returned for a chamber concert, with the opportunity to hear world-class musicians. The highlight this year was a performance by Moldovan virtuoso Ivan Curtean on the Cimbalom, a rare stringed instrument played with mallets, but resembling a piano.



The Sectionals



Night Sky Singers



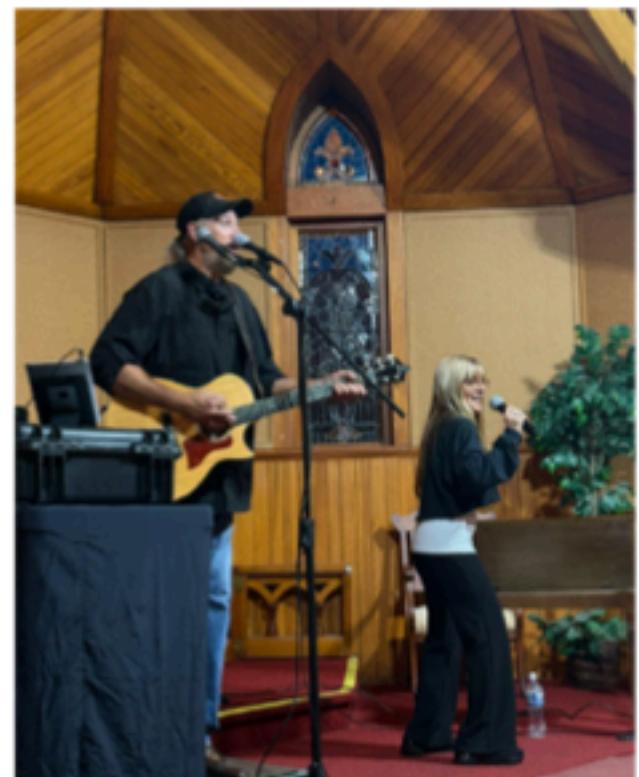
The Cimbalom, a rare instrument fascinated the audience



Colleen Baldrica (center in pink top) speaking



(L to R) Jaynee Yocom, Shelby Vaske, Mary Mulari and Elaine McGillivray display aprons



Pat and Donna Surface



(L to R) Linda Smith and Arlene Berquist display their paintings



Mandala Rock Painting



Author Dave Pearsall

Authors Colleen Baldrica and Dave Pearsall spoke about how they came to write their books, Tree Spirited Woman and Son of Wake Island respectively. Dave also spoke about his new book. WWII: Honor and Remembrance. Mary Mulari, a local PBS celebrity, presented a program on aprons, which had the audience nodding their heads, smiling, and remembering their moms and relatives wearing similar styles. A feel-good program!

Our season ended with a lively concert featuring Pat and Donna Surface who plan to star in Midsummer next June. They provided a great ending to a wonderful season of art, music and other events. Watch for another outstanding schedule in 2026!



We Love The Lake Vermilion Cultural Center

Steve Solkela

This was an EPIC year at LVCC! I had the luxury of bringing my Comic Italian Operetta La Serva Padrona, Finntoberfest Polka Band, & my Comedy Act there this year joining forces with The Roadkill Boys! It was a trilogy of "Shenanigans & Culture", forever imprinted on the dendrites of my brain labeled "Fun Memories."

Midsummer is always a hit also! It's remarkable; the life you guys put into that ol' building & I'm so honored to be a part of its resurrection & growth. To think, that Minnesota swamp was moments away from swallowing that building into the sub-tundra Minnesotan abyss. Y'all yanked that building right into a brighter tomorrow.

I look forward to being a part of more epic cultural events in the future. The network of friends Mary & the gang has created brings a lot of sunshine to the area. Please continue to joyfully & passionately support the arts.

Val Myntti

We are the luckiest people in the world to live in such a unique rural community that is rich in Ojibwe and immigrant cultures, each with their vibrant history, traditions, cuisine, music, dance, and stories. The dedicated LVCC Board have capitalized on showcasing these cultural assets of the Iron Range with programs that highlight the heritage

& history of all our early ancestors, adding to our knowledge & the richness of our lives in the Northwoods. We so appreciate what you all do!

Tom Baldrica

I joined the Lake Vermilion Cultural Center Board as a Member at Large in January of 2025, and what a whirlwind year it has been! The building renovation project is so close to the ultimate goal of becoming a year-round facility! And, we as a Board continue to look towards the future to keep the LVCC flourishing for years to come. As I reflect on my first year of involvement with the LVCC, I think about the passionate group of people who have given so much time, energy and love to this wonderful project. Their belief is infectious, their spirit is in indomitable, and their dedication is inspiring. I am so grateful to be amongst them. And, to all of you who continue to support our efforts with your time and your money, THANK YOU! Happy holidays to you and yours, and I look forward to seeing you in Tower in 2026!

Barbara Baldrica

President, Northern Lights Music Festival

I am so happy to support LVCC! It is a huge asset to the arts in our area, and I have attended a variety of wonderful events there. The acoustics are perfect, and it is a splendid space for performances by Northern Lights Music Festival artists. A huge thank you to everyone who makes the LVCC possible!



Road Kill Boys group leader Dan Skorich (R) with band members

