10,000 THREADS

CURIOUS. CONNECTED. COMPASSIONATE. VOLUME 1 • FALL 2026



We the People

Through the eyes of four Minnesotans, 250 years of democracy come to life — its struggles, its progress, and its enduring promise.

★★★★★★

Page 20

Minnesota Humanities Center

MINNESOTA MADE
Director Martín Blanco on the origins of his film, *Nuestro Norte*
Page 10

OPERATION METRO SURGE
How the humanities emerged to help the community heal
Page 26

HUMANITIES IN ACTION
Meet six grantees that received Legacy Cultural Heritage grants
Page 41



Where Ideas and People Connect

Host your next event at the Minnesota Humanities Event Center—a full-service meeting and retreat center, centrally located in a historic building in St. Paul.

From corporate meetings and events to special occasions celebrating important milestones, our versatile space and overnight rooms provide the perfect backdrop for meaningful moments. The Minnesota Humanities Event Center offers a welcoming setting designed to bring people together to think, imagine, plan, and celebrate.







Explore our Event Center and plan your next experience today.

987 Ivy Avenue East St. Paul, MN 55106

651-772-4242 | Info@mnhum.org

Contact Us

Minnesota Humanities Center

FIRST WORD

Celebrating Minnesota's People, Perspectives, and Possibilities

In this inaugural issue, we amplify the stories, ideas, and voices that bring Minnesotans together through the power of the humanities.



Photo by Caitlin Abrams

Welcome to *10,000 Threads*! We are thrilled to add a new chapter of storytelling at the Minnesota Humanities Center (MHC), where we fulfill our mission of increasing collective understanding of ourselves, our communities, and our histories through the humanities.

10,000 Threads is an open love letter to the people of the state of Minnesota, where we weave together the beauty, wisdom, and stories of its people to help all of us imagine, create, and ensure a vibrant and thriving Minnesota for current and future generations.

With vivid imagery and photography, *10,000 Threads* will provide an opportunity to fully appreciate and see the wonder and expanse of the land of more than 10,000 lakes. The magazine will also give us an opportunity to examine the issues of the day from a wide variety of thought leaders to give you different perspectives that feel personal, hopeful, and non-partisan.

10,000 Threads will provide a platform for both MHC and readers to explore our past and deeply engage in the rich history of our state, to make connections to our current reality, and envision new possibilities.

This summer, I enjoyed many conversations at our Declaration of Independence commemorative events. I found the conversations to be enlightening, and I trust you will enjoy our feature story, written by Frank Bures, highlighting the perspectives of four Minnesotans discussing the first and next 250 years of our country (see page 20).

The story that captured the attention of the nation this year was Minnesota's response to Operation Metro Surge. The article by Gina Czupka, Morgan Halaska, and Kate Nelson provides us with a variety of stories that detail how Minnesotans responded to Metro Surge that you may have previously not experienced.

As with all our programs, we value your feedback. I look forward to reading all of your comments on what you appreciated (and what you didn't) as well as hearing the stories about the people, places, and events that you want to see in future issues.

Thank you for reading and helping us create a more just society that is curious, connected, and compassionate.



Kevin Lindsey
Chief Executive Officer

WE'D LOVE TO HEAR FROM YOU

Your feedback helps shape future issues of *10,000 Threads*. Share with us which stories resonated with you, what you'd like to see more of, and how we can make the magazine stronger. We are always looking for new voices and perspectives throughout the state. If you know a writer, storyteller, or organization whose work deserves to be featured, please email us at magazine@mnhum.org with contributor recommendations. For all other feedback on *10,000 Threads*, email editor@mnhum.org.

Join the Conversation

- mnhum.org
- magazine@mnhum.org
- mnhumanities
- TheHumanitiesCenter
- vimeo.com/mnhum







Contents

FALL 2026

FEATURES

20 THE VIEW FROM 250 YEARS
Four Minnesotans — Daniel Bergin, Kao Kalia Yang, Dave Kleis, and Christina Woods — examine the legacy of the United States and chart a course for the next 250.

26 CONNECTIONS THAT HEAL
During Operation Metro Surge, the humanities played a vital role in helping the community process, remember, and reimagine. Hear from local artists, storytellers, performers, and small business owners who brought hope and light during a time of uncertainty.

36 THE DISCOURSE
Kevin Lindsey, CEO of the Minnesota Humanities Center (MHC), and Dr. Yohuru Williams of the University of St. Thomas delve into why the humanities remain essential for navigating societal challenges and preserving our collective humanity.

PATCHWORK

5 CHANGE MAKER
Marcella Prokop encourages personal storytelling

6 FIVE TO KNOW
Historic libraries to visit

8 ON THE MAP
Explore African-owned businesses and diverse cultural experiences at Little Africa Plaza

9 EMERGING VOICES
A poem by Knox Frederickson, Minnesota Youth Poet Laureate Runner-Up

DEPARTMENTS

10 MINNESOTA MADE
A conversation with filmmaker Martín Blanco on the origins of his documentary, *Nuestro Norte*

12 TAPESTRY
Native Pride Productions celebrates Indigenous cultures through dance

13 EXPRESSIONS
Tashia Hart, a writer, artist, and filmmaker, shares what shapes her genre-defying art

14 BACKSTORY
Roxanne Givens reflects on the history of the Givens Collection of African American Literature

15 COMMUNITY WEAVERS
Honoring Patrick Henry, former MHC board member

16 ROAD TRIP
Indigenous cultural educational events

18 SNAPSHOT
An appreciation for Minnesota's waterways

FROM HERE

43 MHC'S GRANT PROCESS
What to know and how to apply

44 MINNESOTA'S POET LAUREATE
Meet Gwen Nell Westerman

48 QUIZ
Test your Minnesota state symbol IQ

49 RECIPE
Stir-fried baby bok choy with pork belly

ON THE COVER
Pictured clockwise from top left: Daniel Bergin, Kao Kalia Yang, Dave Kleis, and Christina Woods. Photos by Caroline Yang.

Photos by (left) Kickturn Studio, (top and bottom right) Caitlin Abrams

10,000 THREADS

Volume 1

Minnesota Humanities Center

987 Ivy Avenue East
St. Paul, MN 55106
651-772-4242
mnhum.org

Minnesota Humanities Center

Kevin Lindsey	Chief Executive Officer
Aby John	Chief Operating Officer
Beth Commers	Chief Impact Officer
Tristy Auger	Director of Grants
Casey DeMarias	Director of Public Programming
MayKao Fredericks	Director of Immersive Programs
Ann Mayers	Director of Development
Sung Ja Shin	Director of K-12 Education
Aisha Richardson	Director of Administration
Ali Syverson	Director of Strategic Communication

Carla Albrecht
Eden Bart
Lorena Bonilla
Rachel Busse-Aswar
Amy Carroll
Joe Coleman
Briza Maldonado
Rose McGee
Lizzie Neary
Mychi Nguyen
Tiffany Orth
Hailey Rathgeber
Jessica Rust
Brian Silver

Magazine Staff

Amanda Welshons	Senior Content Director
Bret Ryan	Creative Director
Morgan Halaska	Senior Content Manager
Amy Overgaard Fenske	Senior Content Strategist
Allison Alt	Senior Project Manager
Tim Dallum	Senior Production Manager

Advertising

Ann Mayers magazine@mnhum.org

MHC Event Center

info@mnhum.org

Content Strategy, Design, and Publishing

THE Agency@MSP

953 Westgate Drive, Suite 107, St. Paul, MN 55114
agencymsp.com / 612-339-7571

Acknowledgment

NATIONAL ENDOWMENT FOR THE HUMANITIES

CLEAN WATER LAND & LEGACY AMENDMENT

We want to respect your communication preferences. Please let us know whether you prefer to receive *10,000 Threads* by email, print mail, or both. If you'd like to change your current preference, please visit us at *mnhum.org/magazine*.

Photos courtesy of contributors

Contributors



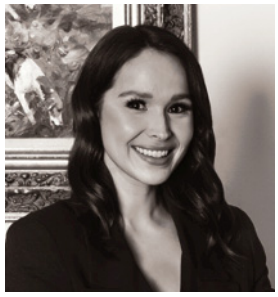
FRANK BURES

Frank Bures is a writer based in Minneapolis and author for *Pushing the River,* published by the Minnesota Historical Society Press, which tells the story of Ojibwe canoe builders who raced in the legendary 450-mile Paul Bunyan Canoe Derby. His work has appeared in *Harper's*, *Outside*, *The Atlantic*, and other publications. His book, *The Geography of Madness*, was selected by *Newsweek* as one of the best travel books of the decade, and his stories have been featured in *The Best American Travel Writing*, *The Best American Sports Writing*, and *The Best American Essays*. More at *frankbures.com*.



GINA CZUPKA

Gina Czupka is a Minneapolis-based "words person": content strategist, editor, and writer. She indulges her passion for exploring the intersections of history, art, craft, and culture with as much international travel as she can swing, but really, she does the same in her beloved home city. She is proud to help share the stories of the people and organizations who, through the humanities, brought together and buoyed the spirits of her neighbors and wider community during Operation Metro Surge.



KATE NELSON

An Alaska Native Tlingit tribal member, Kate Nelson is an award-winning independent journalist based in Minneapolis who focuses on amplifying important Indigenous change makers and issues. She has written for publications including *The New York Times*, *National Geographic*, *ELLE*, *Esquire*, and *Vanity Fair*, and interviewed such luminaries as Sean Sherman, Quannah ChasingHorse, and Sterlin Harjo. Nelson is also the co-author of the book *Turtle- Island: Foods and Traditions of the Indigenous Peoples of North America.*



CAROLINE YANG

Caroline Yang is a Taiwanese American photographer whose work examines identity and culture through storytelling and portraiture, and strives to bring connection to our communities. Notable projects include documenting the Tour de France, Saint Paul Ballet, the Twin Cities social justice movement, and a project exploring the power of storytelling through multiple exposures. Yang's work has appeared in publicatons such as *The New York Times* and *Washington Post*, and has been recognized by *Communication Arts* and *American Photography.*



Come Curious. Leave Connected.

There's always something new to discover at the Minnesota Humanities Center.

Hear compelling stories. Encounter new perspectives. Explore the history, culture, people, and ideas shaping Minnesota and the world around us.

Our events bring together diverse voices and perspectives through thoughtful conversation, engaging programs, and experiences that inspire learning and connection. Whether you're joining a conversation, exploring a place or experiencing a story in a new way, our programs invite you to listen, learn, connect, and imagine what is possible.

Minnesota Humanities Center

See what's coming up at MHC. Save your spot today!

Come curious. Leave connected.

Patchwork

STORIES THAT SHAPE MINNESOTA



Marcella Prokop, a Rural Regenerator Fellow through Springboard for the Arts, pictured near her farm in southwestern Minnesota with her cat, Stripes

Photo by Kickturn Studio

CHANGE MAKER

Amplifying Rural Voices

Marcella Prokop helps ordinary people see the value in sharing their own stories.

Marcella Prokop believes everybody has a story to tell, but finding the appropriate space to bring these stories to life is often a barrier. A writer, educator, beekeeper, and farmer, Prokop wants to help those who live in and around her home of Beaver Creek to see the value of telling one's own story. Through her independent writing workshops, which she's run since 2009, she aims to foster community, connection, and change through storytelling. And it's generally not in a classroom setting.

"Last year I hosted a three-legged race during Beaver Creek's Beaver Days celebration, and hearing adults and grandparents tell their kids or grandkids about how they used to do that or potato sack races when they were young was really fun," Prokop says. "Watching adults and kids alike stumble around, laugh together, and experience the joy of the event brought participants and onlookers together."

(Continued on page 6)



(Continued from page 5)

Raised on farms in Colombia and Nebraska, Prokop earned her Master of Fine Arts in creative nonfiction from Chatham University in Pennsylvania and has devoted her career to helping others write or tell their own stories, particularly within rural communities. Acceptance to the Springboard for the Arts' Rural Regenerator Fellowship for the 2024–2026 session has only deepened this work.

"There is a lot of identity and representation for what it means to come from a rural space or to come from a background that people don't necessarily think of as progressive or important," Prokop says, noting that a rural story is both personal and universal. "In rural areas, we have important things to say, and there are all kinds of interesting and amazing things going on. People who come to my workshops ... they know that they've got stories worth telling.

"We are super aware in our rural communities that we need each other to grow, and to thrive, and to get through the hard things, because we can be isolated by location, geography, and weather," she adds. "Connection breeds a real sense of joy." – *Faith Vue*

FIVE TO KNOW

Historic Libraries

Explore the original architecture of these libraries throughout the state.



1 Pierre Bottineau Library combines two historic structures from the former Grain Belt campus in Northeast Minneapolis: the 1893 Wagon Shed and the 1913 Millwright Shop. A modern addition was completed in 2003 to create a 12,000-square-foot facility.

2 Sumner Library was one of the first libraries in Minneapolis. Located in North Minneapolis and built in 1915 with Carnegie funds, it was originally a one-and-a-half-story brick building with two gabled roof wings and a flat-roofed polygonal tower. Two large additions were added to the layout in 2024 to enhance the community space while preserving its character.





3 Winona Public Library in downtown Winona features a 56-foot copper dome, Bedford stone walls, glass-floored stacks, and Kenyon Cox's *The Light of Learning* mural. The 1899 structure is the oldest building in the state built specifically as a public library that still operates today.

4 Hosmer Library opened in 1916 as the last of four Carnegie-funded libraries in South Minneapolis. The Tudor Revival-style building retains much of its original exterior character, while a later interior renovation preserved its historic woodwork, lighting, and the original arrangement of the space.





5 Little Falls Carnegie Library is an American Craftsman-style building built in 1905, featuring brick, local stone, granite, and a slate roof. In 2000, the library expanded with new wings designed to match the original style.

Photos (1, 2, 4) by Bret Ryan; (3, 5) courtesy of libraries

THEN & NOW

Delano Turns 150

The city celebrated its sesquicentennial in 150 ways.


Delano

The City of Delano, which began as a settlement along the Crow River and grew into a regional commercial center, found 150 different and interesting ways to commemorate its sesquicentennial this year.

While the city's official downtown celebration took place Oct. 3, events have been held throughout the year, including the publication of a book chronicling Delano's history; a tea party and historic fashion show; and a screening of the 1998 movie *A Simple Plan*, which was largely filmed in Delano.

In June, the city also unveiled its new "Sesquicentennial" sculpture, designed by James and Ryan Pedersen, that showcases the four pillars of Delano's history: the Crow River, agriculture, industry, and the railroad. – *Amanda Week*

THE BIG NUMBER

54,400,000

The number of times Minnesotans borrowed or downloaded public library materials in 2025

Source: 2025 Minnesota Public Library Annual Report Snapshot

ARTIFACT

LIVING PAGES

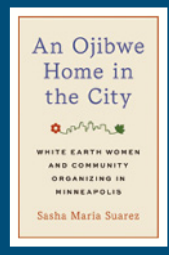

A page from a 300-year old Psalter

Imagine opening a 17th-century Ethiopic book of prayer and devotion that has absorbed hundreds of years of candles, incense, fires, and cooking in the environments where it was read. This 300-year-old Psalter (HMML0016) was carried by generations of Ethiopian and Eritrean Orthodox Christians and enjoyed in their homes and churches. Hundreds of years of daily use means that its pages still carry a distinctive smoky, perfumed aroma that can instantly evoke memories of people, places, and spaces. Encountering this physical object — even in Minnesota in 2026 — offers an intimate connection to the people and communities across centuries, borders, and cultures.

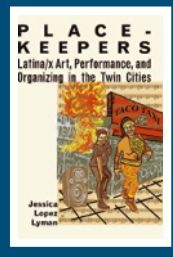
– Dr. Jeremy R. Brown is the curator of Eastern Christian manuscripts at the Hill Museum & Manuscript Library (HMML). Dr. Audrey Thorstad is the director of programming at HMML.

WHAT WE'RE READING

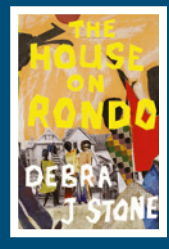
STORIES OF COMMUNITY RESILIENCE



An Ojibwe Home in the City: Sasha Maria Suarez centers the histories of generations of Indigenous women who forged community in Minneapolis from the 1930s through the 1970s.



Place-Keepers: Jessica Lopez Lyman explores how Latina/x artists in the Twin Cities challenge and resist systemic oppression through public performances and creativity.



The House on Rondo: Set in 1963, Debra J. Stone's novel follows 13-year-old Zenobia and her family as they grapple with the demolition of their Black St. Paul neighborhood to make way for Interstate Highway 94.

Photos (Delano) courtesy of City of Delano; (Psalter) courtesy of Hill Museum & Manuscript Library

ON THE MAP

Little Africa Plaza

This thriving cultural hub gives people who have never visited African-owned businesses the opportunity to experience a different culture.









Pictured: Participants in September's "Learning from Place: Little Africa Plaza" event joined round-table discussions, experienced an Ethiopian coffee ceremony, tried their hands at making injera (an Ethiopian-style flatbread), and enjoyed a meal prepared by some of the owners of Mama's Deli & Market, among other cultural learning activities.

The heady perfume of incense, balanced by the scent of freshly brewed coffee, greeted more than a dozen Twin Cities residents as they gathered for an event called "Learning from Place: Little Africa Plaza," on Sept. 3.

Hosted at Mama's Market and Deli, within the Little Africa Plaza building on Snelling Avenue in St. Paul, the group gathered to learn about the food traditions, art, culture, and immigrant experience in the Afro-diasporic community. It's part of an ongoing event series hosted in partnership with African Economic Development Solutions (AEDS) and the Minnesota Humanities Center (MHC).

"The reason we partnered to do this event is to help people to immerse themselves with different cultures, without traveling to a different country," says Dr. Gene Gelgelu, founder, president, and CEO of AEDS. "The beauty of the Twin Cities is you don't have to travel to a different country to experience another culture because you have different cultures right here."

The event started with participation in an Ethiopian coffee ceremony, along with deeper learning about the tradition. As the coffee was being prepared, participants shared conversations on the ideas of home and belonging, and what that means for different groups of people.

The group then went next door to the African Museum, Arts, and Culture Center (AMACC). The exhibition on view, called "Voices of Freedom: Creative Journeys Toward Belonging," was curated in recognition of America's 250th anniversary.

The event concluded with sharing a meal together — but not before some hands-on learning about making injera, a traditional Ethiopian flatbread that is both a staple food and eating utensil. Participants laughed and cheered each other on as each person tried their hand at pouring the bubbly batter onto a griddle in a spiral formation, then removing it with a *sefed* basket once cooked. The spongy bread was served to the group alongside a traditional Ethiopian meal.

Little Africa Plaza is an anchor within St. Paul's broader Little Africa Cultural District and is home to the AEDS offices, Mama's Market and Deli, AMACC, and a micro-retail space that's under development.

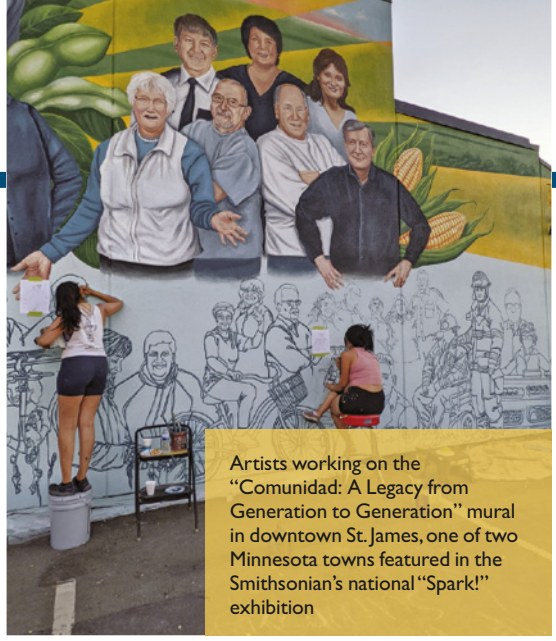
The building itself brings to life AEDS' mission: building wealth within African immigrant communities through economic development and personal enrichment opportunities. The organization offers business development training, business lending, financial counseling and coaching, homeownership education, and community building/creative placemaking events — like the annual Little Africa Festival and Parade.

"Investing in art and culture is not a luxury. It is of critical importance as a society. It is economic development. It's about health and wellness," Gelgelu says. "We are grateful for the Minnesota Humanities Center to invest in this space and help us to build our capacity to deliver [these opportunities]."

MHC hosts the Learning from Place series in various cultural corridors throughout the state. Visit *mnhum.org/learning-from-place* for more information.

– Amy Overgaard Fenske

Photos courtesy of AEDS



Artists working on the "Comunidad: A Legacy from Generation to Generation" mural in downtown St. James, one of two Minnesota towns featured in the Smithsonian's national "Spark!" exhibition

ON THE HORIZON

Sparked by Innovation

A Smithsonian exhibit will visit Minnesota in 2027.

What's going on with innovation in *your* community? In Granite Falls, investments in creativity and the arts are catalyzing innovation all over town. It's in "The YES! House," a space for people to gather, learn, make, perform, and connect. It's in the creation of the first-ever Granite Falls Film Festival. It's in the growth of its arts festival, Squid Fest. This makes the town a fitting first location in Minnesota for the "Spark! Places of Innovation" exhibition next spring.

It's part of the Smithsonian's Museum on Main Street (MoMS) program, which brings world-class Smithsonian exhibits to communities across the country. The exhibition asks, "What makes some places hotbeds for innovation and creativity?"

"Spark!" features diverse stories from over 30 rural communities across the country, revealing the dynamic relationship between place and creativity through photos, videos, and hands-on exhibits.

Along with Granite Falls (May 22 – July 2, 2027), additional "Spark!" stops in Minnesota include:

- West Concord (July 10 – Aug. 20, 2027)
- Detroit Lakes (Aug. 28 – Oct. 9, 2027)
- Roseau (Oct. 16 – Nov. 26, 2027)
- Lanesboro (Dec. 4, 2027 – Jan. 14, 2028)
- Rochester (Jan. 22 – March 3, 2028)

The Minnesota Humanities Center has an extensive history with MoMS, hosting more than a dozen traveling exhibits over the last 25 years that engage communities and inspire conversations about life in America. – *Amy Carlson Gustafson*

Photo (top left) courtesy Uniting Cultures/Uniendo Culturas, (bottom right) courtesy of Knox Frederickson

EMERGING VOICES

HOUSE OF COLBY

By Knox Frederickson

Mother told me to write a poem.
She told me to stay on the right side of history.

So I write poems to prove that activism is not dead,
even when the world is ending.
And so,
I write to speak for all those who cannot.
I write to find the sun and the sparks.
I write for those who cannot find joy in the
palm of their hand.
I write because sometimes
it is all I can do.

Because when the world is so terrible,
it wishes me dead,
I pick up a pen,
and let the words take over.
Even when I've run out of words to speak,
I will write a million more.
When my story is over,
my words will tell it over again.



Knox Frederickson is a queer and autistic poet located in the Twin Cities. He uses writing as a form of escapism while advocating and giving voice to those who have been silenced. He is the author of I Use This Voice to Scream *and the Minnesota Youth Poet Laureate Runner-Up. His work can be heard throughout the Twin Cities at local open mics.*

Flipping the Script

In his film *Nuestro Norte*, writer, director, co-producer, and editor Martín Blanco shines a spotlight on the untold stories of the Latine experience in Minnesota.

By Taylor Hugo



Martín Blanco's documentary, *Nuestro Norte*, premiered at the Minneapolis St. Paul International Film Festival in April.

Photo by Cristina Bevià

When it was announced that *Nuestro Norte* would premiere at the Minneapolis St. Paul International Film Festival in April 2026, writer, director, co-producer, and editor Martín Blanco was shocked by the community's reaction: First, the trailer went viral, garnering upwards of 40,000 views. Then, when tickets went on sale, the screening sold out within 36 hours.

"We felt that the community was eager for stories that really try to portray [the Latine immigrant experience] in this honest and beautiful way, beyond all the strife and the struggle," says Blanco. "We've heard from a lot of members of the community [...] that they feel seen by the experiences that we're showcasing there."

Nuestro Norte, which translates to *Our North*, is a love letter to Latine Minnesotan identity and its community, rootedness, intergenerational links, intersectionality, history, and future. Through shared stories, memories, musical interludes featuring traditional songs interpreted by local artists, and fictional scenes that dip into the realm of magical realism, audiences are captivated by how Blanco celebrates Latine leadership through the lens of intergenerational ties and cultural identity.

"I've always been a big lover of nature, a big lover of fantasy," Blanco says. "That collision definitely made it into the film."

Drawing from personal experience

Blanco called on his own experience as a Latine immigrant while creating *Nuestro Norte*. Born in Maracaibo, Venezuela, Blanco and his family immigrated to the United States when he was 10 years old, eventually settling in Eden Prairie.

Moving to a new school — let alone a new country — can be challenging for any kid, but it wasn't long before Blanco found his place among the snowboarding and skateboarding crowd, many of whom enjoyed creating video montages of tricks to post to YouTube.

"That culture really led me to the process of making films," says Blanco, now 29. He went on to study film at New York University. After graduating, he stayed in New York, where he now works as a freelance director for brands like Coca-Cola and Puma, but he also spends a significant amount of time working with organizations in Minnesota. So, when LatinoLEAD — the largest network of Latine professionals in the state — and the Minnesota Humanities Center contacted Blanco about making a film that highlights local Latine leadership and community stories, he jumped at the opportunity.

(Continued on page 46)



Bring Your Team Together Differently

Give your employees an experience they'll remember—and conversations they'll continue long after the day is over.

The Minnesota Humanities Center offers private, customized experiences using storytelling, history, culture, and facilitated dialogue to spark curiosity, deepen understanding, and strengthen connection.

From leadership retreats to specifically tailored learning from place events, we create space for people to connect, listen, learn, and see new perspectives.

Minnesota Humanities Center

Create an experience for your team today.

Feel the Rhythm

Native Pride Productions showcases Indigenous cultures through the power of dance. *By Kate Nelson*



Larry Yazzie, founder and artistic director of Native Pride Productions, uses dance as a means to educate others about Indigenous cultures. The group performs worldwide.

Photo by Agnes Lopez

The drums pulse like a heartbeat. The dancers move with individual flair in unspoken harmony, layering on the sound of bells and jingles. Their regalia — festooned with elaborate details such as feathers, intricate beadwork, and brightly colored fringing ribbons — creates a hypnotic pattern. Every Native Pride Productions (NPP) performance is a mesmerizing, multisensorial experience. But this is far more than simply dance; it's a creative expression of living Native American cultures.

"Dance is such a powerful medium to educate people about Indigenous cultures, because it's a universal thread," says Larry Yazzie, a member of the Meskwaki Nation and the founder and artistic director of NPP. "When you tie music and dance together, people feel the rhythm. We all have a common thread, but some people don't realize it until they see it, feel it, and experience it."

A two-time world champion fancy dancer who took up the artistic practice when he was 7 years old, Yazzie, now 59, grew up surrounded by his Meskwaki culture in central Iowa and lived in Minnesota for 15 years before recently relocating to Florida. He founded NPP in the North Star State back in 2003 and estimates the Indigenous dance troupe has performed more than 1,000 times since then. Performances include high-profile appearances at the Macy's Thanksgiving Day Parade, the John F. Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts, and the Smithsonian Institution's National Museum of the American Indian, in addition to annual Minnesota State Fair performances and countless powwows, festivals, and school events.

About 15 years ago, the troupe became part of the U.S. Department of State's Arts Envoy Program and began touring worldwide. Still, the group has deep Minnesota roots. In fact, Yazzie's first-ever mainstage performance was at St. Paul's Ordway Center for the Performing Arts, for which he remains grateful.

Throughout the years, about 100 dancers have joined the troupe, from ages 2 to 88 (Yazzie's own granddaughter and mother, respectively). They represent multiple tribal nations from 25 U.S. states and Canada, and specialize in various styles, such as men's fancy dance, women's jingle dance, hoop dance, chicken dance, and grass dance. Among them is 36-year-old grass dancer Sean Soukkala, a member of the Mille Lacs Band of Ojibwe who grew up on the Fond du Lac Reservation near Cloquet and now lives in the Twin Cities. One of 10 NPP members currently based in Minnesota, he has been part of the group for nearly 20 years.

The aim behind all NPP presentations — which typically include songs, dances, storytelling, and even an invitation to join in — is to enthrall, enlighten, and educate audiences of all backgrounds. "This is our way of life, who we are, and how we express ourselves," says Soukkala. "No matter who your ancestors are, if you go back far enough in time, there's probably a drum and dance."

Like Indigenous communities themselves, Indigenous dance isn't stuck in the past. To that end, Yazzie places an emphasis on education, providing workshops at public elementary schools to teach both Native and non-Native youth these mesmerizing moves. This passing down of time-honored practices reflects a modern-day renaissance of Indigenous cultures.

"It wasn't that long ago that Native American teachings and histories were hidden," says Soukkala, whose three sons are also involved in NPP performances. "We want people to develop a better understanding of who we are. These kids are our future, and we hope they'll become the teachers themselves."

Yazzie echoes that idea, underscoring the importance of creating cross-cultural understanding. "I hope audiences take away from our performances that Native Americans are not 'savages,'" he says. "We have a beautiful culture and way of life. We are connected to our ancestors and to Mother Earth. When I'm dancing, I'm not just putting on a show; I'm also dancing in prayer."

It Comes from Dreams

Writer, artist, and filmmaker Tashia Hart brings her full self to her art and life — tapping into her Anishinaabe identity, her personal experiences, and even her dreams — and the result is a genre-defying body of work. She lives in Duluth with her family, and her newest book, *Patrick DesJarlait: Fine Artist*, is part of Minnesota Humanities Center's Minnesota Native American Lives Series.

Interview by Josh Cook

Your work spans an incredible range — from contemporary romance in *Native Love Jams* and middle-grade fantasy in *Gidjie and the Wolves*, to culinary writing and illustration and even jewelry making and filmmaking. What medium did you fall in love with first?

My first love was storytelling. When I was 8, I had a short story assignment [in school]: write three paragraphs — a beginning, middle, and an end. After struggling for days with the assignment, my mom suggested, "Why don't you write about the Bigfoot tracks we found in the backyard?" That's when I realized writing could be used to explore the things I was interested in. It was the start of my life as a writer and of tracking my personal experiences with the paranormal. One of my other first loves — science — has been incorporated into my writing life. I studied biology in college so that I could write informed science fiction. My newest book (possibly self-publishing this fall/winter), called *Bead Me a Portal to Midnight*, is the first full-length manuscript I've written in this genre (sci-fi rom-com to be exact), so I feel like I've finally come full circle — it's only taken me 35 years!

Do you find that these different mediums allow you to express different facets of your Anishinaabe identity, or do they all spring from the same creative well?

Some of the stories feel like they come from someone — or someplace — else. For example, the story within a story, "Bluebird Sings in the Day," found in *Gidjie and the Wolves*, was written down exactly how I received it during a "transmission," as I like to call them — some people might call it a download. It was as if it was streaming in from somewhere, already whole and intact. I received this story after praying for a story to put into *Gidjie* that would represent what I was trying to convey about the essence of the character. I love stories within stories.

You've said that your story ideas almost always come from dreams. Can you talk a little more about that?

Gidjie and the Wolves is based on a series of animal dreams I had between the winters of 2017 and 2018. They started soon after I asked the universe for direction with my next writing project. I dreamed often of the animals and wrote them down in my dream journal and collected them until it just felt like it was time, and then I read over the collection and realized that it was a story for kids that I was meant to write.

Bead Me a Portal to Midnight is the essence of a handful of those weird and absurd dreams, with a focus on a dream about a ragtag group of NHIs (non-human intelligences) who team up with the main character to save the world. [It is] also largely based on my own experiences with the paranormal/supernatural.

***Native Love Jams*, book one in your Rainy Bay Romance series, was nominated for a Minnesota Book Award and was a finalist in the Fiction category. What about the genre excites you?**

Because I write what I know, I write stories with Ojibwe characters. Romance is the only genre that guarantees a happy ending. It excites me to create narratives where Native characters get a happy ending; I think of this as spreading joy for healthy, happy internal narratives to grow in. This is different from the unhealthy narratives of the defeated Indians that you see in a variety of genres and mediums.

Interview edited for clarity and length



Tashia Hart is a multi-hyphenate creative, but storytelling is her first love.

Photo by Jonathan Thunder

A Home for Black History

The Givens Collection of African American Literature is an important thread of Minnesota's fabric.

By Amy Carlson Gustafson



Roxanne Givens, president of the Givens Foundation for African American Literature

Roxanne Givens remembers one of her first memorable experiences with the Givens Collection of African American Literature: the moment she picked up Phillis Wheatley's *Poems on Various Subjects, Religious and Moral*. She wasn't just holding a rare 1773 book; she was holding history in her hands.

"That was incredible," says Givens. "I could just feel it seeping through my bones."

Wheatley, an enslaved woman, was the first African American author to publish a collection of poetry, paving the way for future Black authors. Wheatley's book is just one of the more than 10,000 books, magazines, plays, pamphlets, and other literary pieces by or about African Americans in the Givens Collection, spanning more than 250 years of American culture.

In 1972, Givens' parents, Archie and Phebe Mae Givens, founded the Givens Foundation for African American Literature to provide scholarships for Black students. More than half a century later, the foundation continues to champion Black voices and words through its support for writers, events, and reading initiatives for students. It was the first African American foundation in Minnesota.

"My parents believed education was the way to freedom — the way to get the doors of opportunity opened," says Givens, foundation president since 2023.

In 1985, University of Minnesota (U of M) professor John S. Wright, then chair of the Department of African American Studies, approached the family about a unique opportunity — acquiring a private collection of African American literature. The Givens family provided the lead gift, with the rest funded by local African American donors, civic leaders, and the university. The collection was then given to the U of M, with Wright as founding curator.

Libraries removed 5,668 books from their shelves in 2025, the highest number of censored titles recorded in a single year according to the American Library Association. Givens and Lissa Jones-Lofgren, the foundation's executive director, say that today, the Givens Collection and the Givens Foundation are more important than ever as huge portions of America's history are threatened to be erased.

"At a time when books face increasing threats of censorship, there is no more critical moment to champion African American literature," says Jones-Lofgren. "We've needed it in this country since we started writing, and we need it now, and we'll need it forever and ever and ever." She notes that it's the foundation's job to activate the collection — to make it come alive out in the community.

Givens agrees. "It's time for activation because preservation alone is no longer what we need as a community," she says. "For decades we have protected and cared for the collection. It's now our responsibility to get it out in the community. It's the right time, given the environment, given the deep-seated need for hope, and literature does that. ... It tells the American story through voices that were too often excluded from the telling of it. It allows our own narration to come to the forefront."

The Givens Foundation is experiencing a "rebirth," notes Givens, with several new initiatives — an expanded podcast series, an enhanced digital hub, community exhibitions, and the opening of a Givens Foundation Hub at Hosmer Library in Minneapolis in January 2027.

Reflecting on the longevity and impact of the foundation, Givens says, "The foundation is viable after all these decades — my parents planted those seeds. They planted seeds they were never going to see, never thinking that half a century later, it would still be giving birth. I think they'd be absolutely pleased that African American literature is viable and still being presented to so many families, children, individuals, and scholars."

Photo by Bill Hickey



The late Patrick Henry, along with his wife, Patricia Welter, received the Alex Didier Award in Philanthropy in September.

Photo by Paul Middlestaedt

IN MEMORIAM

When Compassion Meets Vision

In each issue of *10,000 Threads*, we will take time to recognize an individual or organization that has worked to create a more curious, connected, and compassionate Minnesota through the humanities — as a grant recipient of the Minnesota Humanities Center (MHC), a key strategic programming partner of MHC, or one who has made a significant impact in Minnesota by working with educational institutions or community organizations.

The Community Weaver we recognize in this issue is the late Patrick Henry, a former two-term MHC board member who passed away on Oct. 6, 2026.

By Kevin Lindsey

Patrick Henry was a classic humanities scholar. After obtaining degrees from Harvard (AB), Oxford (MA) where he was a Marshall Scholar, and Yale (Ph.D), Henry left his mark in higher education as a professor of religion at Swarthmore College and executive director of the Collegeville [MN] Institute for Ecumenical and Cultural Research at St. John's Abbey and University.

Henry authored, co-authored, or served as the editor of nine books. His book, *The Ironic Christian's Companion: Finding the Marks of God's Grace in the World*, suggested that people should not view faith with dogmatic certainty but rather as an ongoing humble adventure; that spiritual insight can be found in unexpected places and everyday life; and that individuals should distrust unequivocal answers and live in a world that is more open-ended and mysterious.

Henry was an active MHC board member for nine years and served as its communications committee chair. Most notably, taking a page from the musical *Hamilton*, he was in the room when the current vision statement of MHC — a more just society that is curious, connected, and compassionate — was created. MHC staff spoke fondly of Henry as a board member who cared passionately about ensuring that all communities had the opportunity to have their story heard on their terms.

Between 2007 and 2024, Henry had a regular monthly column in the *St. Cloud Times*, where he wrote 204 columns about the "renewal of human community." Many of his columns highlighted wonderful acts of kindness and generosity of spirit in the greater St. Cloud area that sought to create an inclusive community. Henry reminded his readers that the work of building society requires intentional acts of understanding and compassion without falling victim to cynicism and division.

Throughout his life, Henry was active in the community, advocating for issues such as affordable housing, racial justice, science literacy, support for the arts, and public education funding. In September, Henry and his wife, Patricia Welter, were honored with the Alex Didier Award in Philanthropy by the Central Minnesota Community Foundation for their work in building strong communities throughout their careers.

Henry (*IronicChristian.org*) passed away on Oct. 6, 2026, at the age of 87. He was a true community weaver who helped build a stronger, more vibrant Minnesota for all.

If you would like to bring a community weaver to our attention, please contact us at magazine@mnhum.org.

Discover the Richness of Indigenous Culture

Across the state, organizations are creating programming for the public and students within schools to learn more about Indigenous culture. Check them out on the map!



Fosston

The Firefly Center for Art and Wellbeing hosts events that feature Indigenous scholars and authors and provides cultural immersion programs for students. *Ojibwe scholar and author Anton Treuer will speak at Firefly Center on Oct. 28.*

Park Rapids

Park Rapids Public School students will experience a powwow and receive cultural education from Native American Student Council. *These opportunities will be presented throughout the 2026/27 school year.*



Ely

Ely's Historic State Theater is presenting Indigenous-led films and workshops that preserve cultural knowledge through the Dibaajimowin: Indigenous Film Program. *See the program March 10 – 12, 2027.*

Osseo

Dakhota Iapi Okhodakichiye is digitizing, preserving, and revitalizing the *Iapi Oaye*, a Dakota-language newspaper published from 1871 – 1939. *Keep an eye out for an event about the* Iapi Oaye *in spring of 2027.*

Minneapolis



Owámniyomni Okhódayapi uplifts Dakota history and lifeways through free or low-cost educational programming. It's transforming Owámniyomi (St. Anthony Falls), a sacred site to Dakota people, through cultural and environmental restoration. *Owámniyomni Okhódayapi is hosting an open house for the public on Dec. 1.*

Hinckley



Bear Paws Cultural Art will offer workshops on making Ojibwe pucker toe moccasins that incorporate beads and sequins and demonstrate how to embellish pre-designed cuffs and tongues. *Classes are ongoing this fall and winter.*

Shafer



Franconia Sculpture Park features artworks and programs for the "Spawning Indigenous Reverence" project, created in collaboration with Dakota and Ojibwe artists and culture bearers. *Spawning Indigenous Reverence is on exhibit for the month of October.*

Want to learn more?
Visit *mnhum.org/events* to discover events and opportunities available in your area.


HERE 1475 FT
ABOVE
THE OCEAN
THE MIGHTY
MISSISSIPPI
BEGINS
TO FLOW
ON ITS
WINDING WAY
2552 MILES
TO THE
GULF OF
MEXICO

Honoring Minnesota's Waterways

Our state's identity is deeply intertwined with water — a connection that carries special meaning this year as we honor the efforts over the past 100 years to restore the Mississippi River to its glory. It's a powerful reminder of what's possible when communities come together to protect natural resources.

We Are Water MN (WAWMN), a program led in partnership between the Minnesota Humanities Center (MHC) and the Minnesota Pollution Control Agency, builds on this legacy and asks: *What does it mean to truly care for our water?*

Funded by the Clean Water, Land, & Legacy Fund, WAWMN explores the cultural, historical, and ecological importance of water. Ten years in, the traveling interactive exhibit continues to invite Minnesotans to reflect on their relationship with the precious resource and discover ways to become better water stewards.

To find a host city near you, visit *mnhum.org/we-are-water-mn*.

WAWMN is co-led by MHC and the Minnesota Pollution Control Agency, in partnership with the Minnesota Historical Society; the Board of Water and Soil Resources; the Minnesota Departments of Agriculture, Health, and Natural Resources; and University of Minnesota Extension.

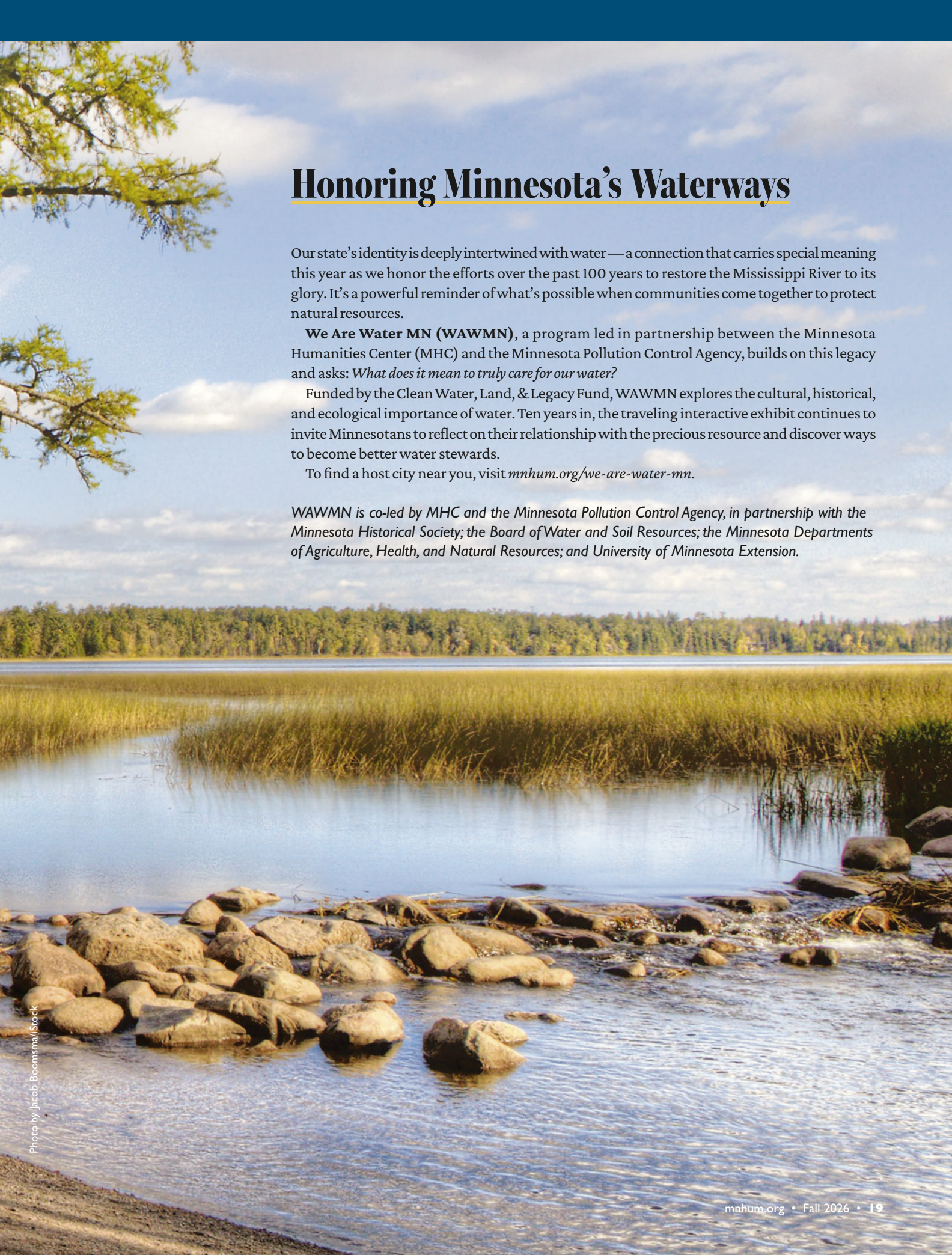
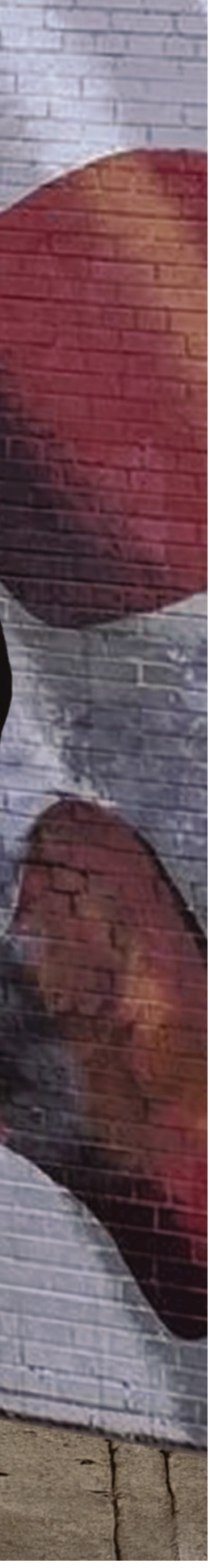


Photo by Jacob Boomsma/iStock





« **Pictured left to right:** Christina Woods, Dave Kleis, Kao Kalia Yang, and Daniel Bergin outside the James Ballentine "Uptown" VFW Post 246 in Minneapolis. The American flag mural in the background is the work of artist Scott LoBaido, who has painted thousands of iconic American flag murals across all 50 states.

The View From 250 YEARS

Four Minnesotans reflect on the nation and state's history, and find hope for the future.

★★★★★★★

By Frank Bures • Photos by Caroline Yang

IN FAR NORTHERN MINNESOTA, a hill at the end of the Superior Hiking Trail looks out over trees stretching to the horizon. Below, the Pigeon River winds toward Lake Superior. If you didn't know it, you might never guess the river marks a border — one country on this side, another on the other. From above, it's easy to see how borders begin in the mind. Yet imagined lines can still shape real histories, shared stories, and entire nations.

For 250 years, the United States has been growing, expanding, and changing within its boundaries. As political scientist Benedict Anderson wrote, a nation is "an imagined political community" — imagined not because it is false, but because most of its members will never meet.

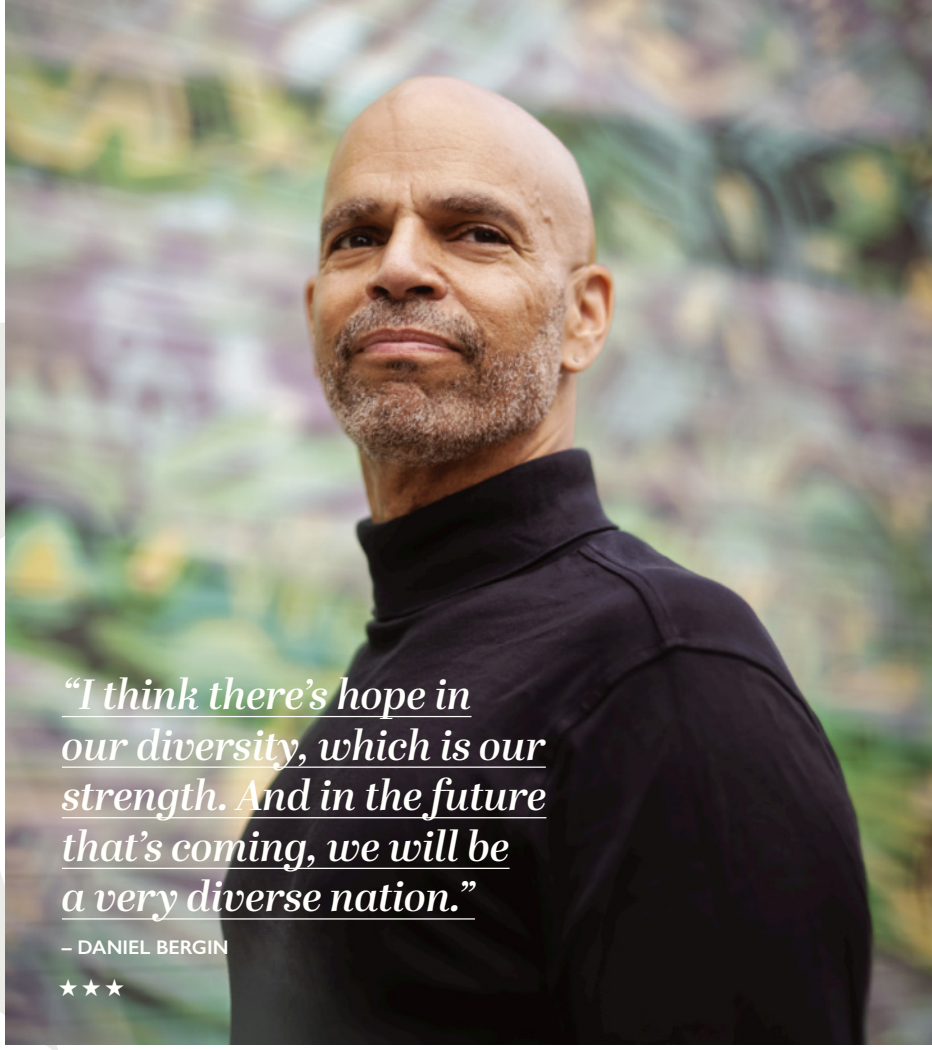
A national story requires constant creation. Since its inception, America has been made up of many people and many stories. This reality was something the country confronted in 1976, when the 200th anniversary rolled around, as Daniel Bergin — who is a filmmaker, executive producer, and WEM Foundation endowed director of history at Minnesota

PBS — discovered while researching for his documentary film, *Summer of '76: The Bicentennial in Minnesota*.

"Lois Pollari, one of the organizers, described the Bicentennial as a people's celebration," Bergin says. "They really worked to make it grassroots, inclusive, and fairly diverse — geographically, culturally, and otherwise. There were people who wanted to blindly celebrate American history and American exceptionalism, but there were also a lot of diverse communities who could access resources to celebrate their own communities and struggles and progress."

People like Seitu Jones and Ta-coumba T. Aiken, who received a grant on behalf of the African American Cultural Center to create a Minnesota Black History exhibit. Stephen Rivkin — brother of Prince's drummer, Bobby Z — also took part in a student film project funded by the Bicentennial Commission. The project produced *The Winter Count*, a film featuring a Lakota elder explaining the importance of her family's winter count as a way of remembering years and keeping time.

In fact, the more Bergin researched the 1976 celebration, the more he came to see it as part of what he called the "messy and awesome spectrum of democracy." Today, on the heels of our country's 250th anniversary, we find ourselves in a different moment. American democracy is still messy, and this anniversary arrived in a different national mood than Bergin found in 1976. Still, people nationwide — and right here in Minnesota — are grappling with our history and what the next 250 years might hold.



A nation of immigrants

In 1987, when author and speaker Kao Kalia Yang was 6 years old, she arrived in America as a refugee. She was one of tens of thousands of Hmong people displaced from their homes in Laos after supporting the U.S. during the Vietnam War. Yang later recounted that experience in her 2008 memoir *The Latehomecomer* (which was selected for LA County Library's The Story of the USA as Told by 250 Titles and the National Endowment for the Arts' Big Read book lists).

"Growing up, I thought all the world was a refugee camp, because we were fenced in," Yang says. "People could come in with cameras to take photos of us, but we couldn't leave with them."

Then she and her family were flown to St. Paul, where they started a new life. As she grew up, people would ask where she was from and if she was ever going home. As a girl, Yang didn't know what to say. "When we came to America," she says, "although I knew I wasn't an American on paper, I also knew that there was no other place for me to go."

Then in 2001, while she was studying at Carleton College, she wanted to study abroad in Thailand. But she figured it would be better if she were a citizen before she traveled. So at age 20, she took her naturalization exam and became an American

Has the pursuit of happiness made Americans unhappy?

That was the question posed at the 2026 Great American Think-Off. Essay finalists at the 33rd annual event, which took place in New York Mills, Minnesota, debated the question. The winner, Allen Taylor from Colorado Springs, Colorado, argued it wasn't the pursuit of happiness that makes Americans unhappy, but rather cultural division and social media.

What do you think?
Meet the finalists at *kulcher.org/meet-the-finalists-2026-great-american-think-off*

on paper as well. Today, she still gets asked where she's from, but the question doesn't bother her like it once did.

"Now I understand that each time I say I'm an American, each time I say I'm from the Midwest, each time I say I'm a Minnesotan, I'm making a declaration, I'm planting a seed into the world, and there's power there," Yang says. "If America is a country built on freedom, then choice is an important part of it, and I'm making a choice to be an American."

According to Dave Kleis, who served as mayor of St. Cloud for 20 years, stories like Yang's are exactly what America should be celebrating at 250 years. Kleis majored in history in college, and as mayor, he led history tours of the city.

"We are a nation of immigrants," Kleis says. "I remember Ronald Reagan's last speech before he left the presidency. He tells the story of somebody who said, 'You can go to live in France, but you cannot become a Frenchman. You can go to live in Germany or Turkey or Japan, but you cannot become a German, a Turk, or a Japanese. But anyone, from any corner of the Earth, can come to live in America and become an American.'"

During Kleis' tenure as mayor, he oversaw the renovation of a monument outside the St. Cloud library that shows the flags of countries from which St. Cloud residents have immigrated.

"Prior to 1880, there were about 20 different countries, some of which don't even exist anymore," he says. "Today, people from over 120 countries have immigrated to St. Cloud over the last 168 years."

In fact, three distinct communities founded the city: German Catholics, Southern slave owners, and Yankee abolitionists. Tensions among them ran high. After the abolitionist newspaper editor Jane Swisshelm wrote scathing editorials about the slaveholding mayor, Southerners broke into her office, smashed her printing press, and threw it in the river.

"A lot of St. Cloud's history mirrors the national history, and the state's history, too," Kleis says. One example from Kleis: When the Minnesota State Capitol was renovated in 2005, workers discovered old German-language paintings in the basement cafeteria, known as the Rathskeller. These paintings had been covered up during World War I, a time when anti-German sentiment was high across the United States.

Many truths

For Christina Woods, a member of the Bois Forte Band of Ojibwe, questions of who belongs here and who doesn't — and of what the 250th anniversary means — look slightly different.

"There tends to be a sentiment that the history of Native people started 250 years ago," says Woods, who is the executive director of the Duluth Art Institute. "But our history as Native people doesn't start with the Declaration of Independence. It goes back thousands and thousands of years."

In fact, as Woods points out, there's a telling phrase in the Declaration of Independence that is often conveniently ignored. In the colonists' list of grievances against King George III, they stated, "He has excited domestic insurrections amongst us, and has endeavored to bring on the inhabitants of our frontiers, the merciless Indian Savages."

This was ironic, given that the practices of the Iroquois Confederacy and other tribal governments, who separated military and secular leadership, deeply informed the U.S. Constitution. Besides, they had good cause to side with the Crown.

"The reason is because they realized that what was happening on behalf of the colonists was terrible," Woods says. "They were murdering Natives. They were burning villages down. And the King was trying to stop them."

Woods started pondering this phrase in the Declaration of Independence a few years ago, as she tried to figure out how to recognize the sesquicentennial at the





"Our history as Native people doesn't start with the Declaration of Independence. It goes back thousands and thousands of years."

– CHRISTINA WOODS

★★★

Duluth Art Institute. After months of meetings and discussions, they launched a series, "We Hold These Truths," under the premise that "American identity holds many truths — complex, diverse, and sometimes contradictory."

They planned a year's worth of rotating exhibits around this theme. These included art from Carl Gawboy's *Fur Trade Nation: An Ojibwe's Graphic History*; jewelry and finery featured in Wendy Savages' "Ojibwe Adornment in Ribbons, Cloth, Beads, and Fur;" a short film that reimagined an Ojibwe story called, *Ish Meets a Mermaid*; and an annual show with over 100 artists responding to the truths they held.

"This has become a platform for our community to really talk about what their truth is, and about being an American," Woods says. "How do they feel about it? What does it mean to them? What things are we still overwriting and erasing? And how can we build community? For me, that's really the necessity of our celebrations. Not to say who belongs in community, but to see who's in our community and to build community with them."

Building community

Kleis also points to strengthening community as something worth celebrating. As mayor, he held a regular "Dinner with Strangers," where he cooked dinner at his home for the first eight people who signed up.

"That's the beauty of this country," he says. "Over the past 250 years, you can meet with people you elect and who represent you. They're part of your community."

The power of those connections became apparent in 2016, when a tragic stabbing happened at Crossroads Center, the St. Cloud mall. "That entire night, I called people I had relationships with from the Somali community, from the NAACP, our community policing agreement signators, because we had a relationship," Kleis recalls. "I made phone calls all night long, and so did the police chief, so that we could tell people exactly what happened before rumors could start."

As a result, St. Cloud remained calm.

"The next day," he says, "the Somali community came out and had a press conference denouncing the actions of the individual. And that's because of the relationship that we'd built. That's the important thing: It's relationship building, getting to know people and listening to their stories. And because of what we did, there were no riots, which we had anticipated, and the satellite trucks left within a day."

Communities across Minnesota have similarly strong ties. But in January 2026, those bonds came under serious strain when more than 3,000 federal agents arrived in the Twin Cities as part of the Department of Homeland Security's Operation Metro Surge.

As more and more people were picked off the street and disappeared, including an elderly Hmong man whose grandson watched through the window as he was taken away, Yang's 10-year-old son asked her, "What happens to us if you're taken?"

In conversation across the state

MHC, along with Braver Angels and the Minnesota Historical Society, marked the 250th anniversary with a conversation series called "The Declaration of Independence and Liberty, Then and Now."

This conversation series visited locations across every congressional district in the state, giving Minnesotans the opportunity to come together, reflect on what the Declaration of Independence stands for, look back at our history, and think about where we want to go as a nation.

Rising voices

In partnership with the Smithsonian's *By the People: Conversations Beyond 250*, MHC created **Voices Forward**, a poetry program featuring the voices of local youth. Through mentorships with acclaimed Minnesota poets, young poets created works that remember our past, mark our present, and imagine a shared future. They presented their work in a public performance this summer. *mnhum.org/voices-forward*



Yang had already tried to run these scenarios herself, and she didn't really know the answer. But she did know the subtext of her kids' questions. "They're not dumb," she says, "They know about the history of African Americans. They know that if your mother is a slave, then you're a slave. But these are confounding questions. And I think they are very much American questions. But that's where we are at our 250th: a place where a mother can be torn apart from her child."

Cheering for America

A few months after Operation Metro Surge officially ended, Yang found herself cheering for America during the FIFA soccer World Cup.

"I cheered for this place," she says. "I cheered for the people who are my teachers and our neighbors. And I think that tells me something about my own heart and the hearts of so many people who come to America hoping for life — just the ability to live in the most fundamental way. That's what we were looking for. So during the World Cup, while my kids were cheering for America, I was cheering for them."

The present may be as messy as the past, but what about the future? What will the next 250 years bring? To answer that, Kleis looks to the past and the community he helped build in St. Cloud.

"I tend to be an optimist," he says, "but I feel very confident in the future because of the willingness of people to give their time, talent, and treasure to benefit their communities. When people say this is the worst time we've ever had, I remind them of our history and how bad things have been. That doesn't mean everything is sunshine now, but we've had conflict and we've overcome it because of the perseverance of some amazing people."

Woods, too, is cautiously optimistic.

"Moving into the next 250 years, I really do hope the country can survive. And I hope it continues with representation — especially Native representation — at the tables," she says. "There are more and more Native people obtaining the academic credentials needed to do the things we want to do. And when that happens, we'll be able to find ways not only to the tables, but to make our own tables. This June, I saw 10 Native people graduate from Berkeley Law with my youngest daughter."

For Bergin, the climate crisis casts some (often literal) haze on what the next 250 years might hold. But as a student of history, he also sees reasons for hope.

"I like to look back and see how we've solved problems at the community level, in policy, and even in politics. And I think there's hope in our diversity, which is our strength. And in the future that's coming, we will be a very diverse nation."

In spite of all the recent challenges we've seen in Minnesota, and because of the way they brought people together, Yang also sees more than just darkness ahead.

"I believe as much in the future today as I did when I was 25," she says. "We live in a beautiful country, and it's full of beautiful people. And in all of these different places, all these people have built things that are worth saving. So I'm honored to be here at the 250th. I hope that in another 250 years there will be other families, other girls, and other people like us here marveling at everything our human intelligence has built."



Connections That Heal

By Gina Czupka, Morgan Halaska, and Kate Nelson



Photo by Jim Lester

Operation Metro Surge drew legal scrutiny from the start. Judges questioned whether it was lawful, a federal court in Minnesota raised concerns about how it was carried out, and local businesses petitioned the Trump administration to remove the ICE officials involved. As those questions moved through the courts, Minnesotans answered in their own way — through art, food, story, song, music, dance, and more. **What began as a legal and civic reckoning became a lesson in how communities hold together, grieve, rebuild, and imagine a way forward.**

Pictured: Butchy Austin (left, front) leads Brass Solidarity, a community band that uses music as a tool for healing, resistance, and community building.

A symbol of solidarity

Thirty minutes. That's how much time self-taught Indigenous artist Marlena Myles had to create her now-iconic anti-ICE artwork. Her friend Courtney Cochran, the Anishinaabe artist behind Skoden Studio, extended a last-minute invitation to participate in a community screen printing event she hosted on Jan. 9 as part of Operation Metro Surge resistance efforts.

Eager to help, Myles wholeheartedly agreed. Little did she know that the design — which proclaims "ICE Out of Mni Sóta Makóče: No One Is Illegal on Stolen Land" — would end up on more than 15,000 shirts, posters, patches, stickers, and pins in places as far-flung as Europe. The response was overwhelming, even for an artist whose public works can be seen across the Twin Cities.

"My career is about raising awareness that this is Dakota homeland and that we have responsibility to the land and to one another," says Myles, a member of the Spirit Lake Dakota Tribe. "When I opened up Adobe Illustrator that day, I thought about how my own ancestors were forcibly removed from Mni Sóta Makóče [the Dakota phrase that inspired the state's name]. When I saw immigrants being terrorized, arrested, and forced from their homes, it was a reminder of that history."

That first event became a weekly occurrence that lasted through March. Screen printers donated their time and skills, while others donated materials, making the merch free for anyone who wanted it. Hundreds of people showed up and happily waited for hours, creating a welcome sense of camaraderie.

"During a time that felt like a really bad dream, everyone was so happy to be in community with human beings who understood we shouldn't be acting this way toward one another," Myles recalls. "That's what made it feel so special: They were trying to divide us, but people from all different backgrounds came together." – *Kate Nelson*

Feeding the need

When the ICE occupation hit Minneapolis, Pow Wow Grounds owner Bob Rice was ready. The coffee shop and gathering place sits within the Franklin Avenue Native American Cultural Corridor, just a couple miles from where police killed George Floyd in 2020. In other words: This wasn't the first time the local Indigenous leader mobilized in response to the community's needs.

Meeting this moment meant nourishing protesters, volunteers, unhoused people, police — anyone who came into the shop — with fry bread, wild rice soup, and hot coffee. "My talent is cooking," says Rice, a member of the White Earth Nation who







Above (clockwise from top left): Marlena Myles (right) holds a T-shirt featuring her anti-ICE artwork; Myles' design was printed on more than 15,000 shirts, posters, patches, stickers, and pins; Pow Wow Grounds is located within the Franklin Avenue Native American Cultural Corridor.

Photos (top) courtesy of Marlena Myles, (bottom) by Bret Ryan



Right: Brass Solidarity is a collective of musicians that promotes social justice and unity through music.
Below: Singing Resistance gathered at Minneapolis City Hall in solidarity.

grew up in Minneapolis. "Making sure people got fed and opening up [Pow Wow Grounds] for action was my way of standing up and helping out in this situation."

He estimates his team doled out 5,000 pieces of fry bread, 600 gallons of coffee, and 400 gallons of soup free of charge, in addition to collecting mutual-aid donations in collaboration with the neighboring All My Relations Arts. Above all, Rice wanted to provide a safe space, something he's been doing for the Twin Cities Native community — among the country's largest urban Indigenous populations — since the coffee shop opened its doors 15 years ago.

"People come to Pow Wow Grounds because they feel safe here," he says. "The Native community has experienced police brutality before. But this wasn't just the Native community stepping up; it was the entire community saying, 'This is not OK. This is against our morals. This is against our Constitution.' The Constitution is supposed to be like a treaty, and we can't just break that as has been done in the past. We knew we had to stand up for what's right." – *KN*

Photos (top) by Jim Lester (bottom) by Sarah Whiting

"When you sing together ... I think it creates a foundation of connection."

– Rev. Jullan Stoneberg, member, Singing Resistance



Connection through music

Sometimes it felt improbable: the warm, shiny sound of brass instruments sending joyful songs like *Stand By Me* or *You Are My Sunshine* out into the sharp, cold air of winter. But that has been the power of Brass Solidarity's presence since the collective's inception in the wake of the murder of George Floyd: offering connection, joy, and — yes — solidarity with the community.

Butchy Austin, co-founder and co-leader of the roving brass band, calls out the fact that Minnesota has been through some tough experiences. "We've been through a lot," he says, referencing not only Floyd, but also Jamar Clark, Philando Castille, Annunciation, Renee Good, Alex Pretti, and more. "Those of us who are musicians and who have participated in some level of activism know that it can be ... emotionally draining. And I [saw] music being a common healing factor ... You can lead with a lot of righteous anger, but it only carries you so far," Austin says. "If we can lean into love and compassion and joy — and find





Above: Co-founders of Kalpulli Yaocenoxtli, a traditional Mexica-Nahua cultural group, Maestro Sergio Quiroz (left) and Mary Anne Ligeralde Quiroz (right)

joy in that resistance — it gets sustained."

On clandestine chats, the connective power of music spread even further through the Twin Cities. While word traveled unseen by most, what emerged was the voices of groups of everyday people, walking through neighborhoods, singing songs of support to people isolated indoors. Those voices belonged to members of Singing Resistance. The loosely organized group grew organically as more people connected to the idea of sending messages — including encouraging ICE agents to lay down their weapons and leave the organization — through song.

Rev. Jullan Stoneberg, retired minister of the First Unitarian Society of Minneapolis, found her way to the group, joining trainings and marches. Stoneberg went to one of those trainings alone and ended up partnered with two strangers.

"In a normal circumstance … you sit down next to people, you don't talk to them and connect; you don't look out for each other. The singing context offered that opportunity to be in it together with people, and to connect, knowing that you were there … to express feelings and values together in community. When you sing together … I think it creates a foundation of connection." – *Gina Czupka*

Drums for hope

Knowing who the primary targets of Operation Metro Surge were, there was a sense of pride — daring and defiant — in the presence of Kalpulli Yaocenoxtli. The group, whose name means Warriors of the First Cactus Flower in the Nahuatl language, is a traditional Mexica-Nahua (Aztec) cultural group dedicated to preserving and sharing Nahua dances, songs, philosophy, and cultural traditions. The group, co-founded by Sergio Quiroz and Mary Anne Ligeralde Quiroz 20 years ago, has long been a community staple — practicing, applying, and passing on ancestral dancing, drumming, singing, rituals, and ceremonies. Marked by billowing copal incense, thundering drums, and swirling feather headdresses, these dance ceremonies take place at protests, marches, community gatherings, cultural events, parades, and intertribal ceremonies in the Twin Cities, across the state, and beyond — nationally and globally.

"We'll show up as best we can in those moments, bringing ceremony into those spaces," says Ligeralde Quiroz, co-founder/co-director of Kalpulli Yaocenoxtli and co-founder/executive director of Indigenous Roots Cultural Arts Center. "So, for the surge, it was a very natural thing for us. We had a choice to

Photos (left) by Bianka Csenski, (right) by Laura Alpizar









Above (clockwise from top left): "We Are Minnesota: Art As Resistance" at the Torrance Art Museum in California; "Love in the Time of Resistance" by Co-Prosperity in Chicago.; ICE OUT Protest Poster Show at Can Can Wonderland in St. Paul; "Art Against Operation Metro Surge: Selections from the Rebel Loon Archive" at the Minnesota State Capitol

Photos (left) by Nu Nguyen, (top center) by Chan C. Smith, (bottom center and right) courtesy of ArtYouHeart

stay low — and some people did, there's no judgment for that — [but] for us it was … literally our people. Undocumented relatives who were getting kidnapped and detained and deported, and assaulted, killed, murdered. And so we [could] either choose to be silent, or we [could] choose to honor those people, our people, in the way we would want to be honored as well."

Their effort and presence was both seen and, through the reverberations of the drums, felt. "We received a lot of gratitude from family members, community members, who said, 'You know, there's something about how the drum centers all of us.' We say that the drum is the heartbeat of the circle [of dancers], and that heartbeat, that drum, connects all our heartbeats together … and reminds us of how precious life is," says Ligeralde Quiroz. That reminder was, for many, crucial. "People [have told us] that we brought hope, we brought healing, we brought a sense of safety."

Ligeralde Quiroz says showing up to perform danza (a ceremonial dance tradition) gave group members themselves an outlet to escape their mental exhaustion, but also to fulfill the role they were uniquely able to play within the statewide response to the crisis. "Minnesota has an abundance of fighters. It comes from different backgrounds, and it wasn't just one group that showed up against ICE. It was all of us that showed up. We were all in it. And I am really proud that Kalpulli Yaocenoxtli was a part of standing up against ICE." – *G.C.*

Archiving emerging art

At the time, online and offline, people drew, painted, and wrote their emotions into physical media. Erica Helander, Nicki McCracken, and Eddie Hofmeister all realized there was a risk of that art disappearing — and they all decided to do something about it. Helander founded the Rebel Loon Archive while McCracken and Hofmeister curated the ICE OUT Protest Poster Show.

The Rebel Loon Archive grew from Helander's intent to publish a booklet of poems. As she wrote, she watched more and more protest art emerge. "I thought, if somebody doesn't collect this into one place, we're not going to have a record of it," she says. "And this is such a significant period … that people are going to want to look at this historically, and these are going to be primary sources." So Helander reached out to artists, expecting to create a

Funding Community Work

Since the beginning of the year, several organizations used the restorative healing power of the humanities to share stories in response to Operation Metro Surge. Here, we highlight three MHC emergency response grantees.

Green Card Voices

This funding captures the stories of immigrants and refugees from 13 African countries, with a focus on Somali, Liberian, Oromo, and Nigerian Minnesotans. Two projects bring these voices to life: a bilingual graphic memoir and the African Immigrant Voices of Minnesota Exhibit and Video Collection, featuring 20 first-person video narratives from across the state.

Semilla Center for Healing and the Arts

This funding partners with local Latinx artists on a three-part arts response that helps a neighborhood grieve, heal, and find hope and connection during tragedy. The work unfolds through three activities: art kits delivered to family homes with materials and instructions for hands-on projects, a community mosaic and memorial mural, and youth leadership programming.

Alight

This funding supports a hybrid, humanities-based emergency response built around small, community-led spaces where participants feel safe. The project creates one culturally specific group for each of five communities: Somali, Ukrainian, Afghan, Oromo, and Sudanese. Each group meets monthly over four months, for a total of 20 facilitated sessions. Through storytelling, shared interpretation, memory, and cultural expression, participants build connection and support community recovery.









small booklet. Instead, nearly all the artists agreed to be included.

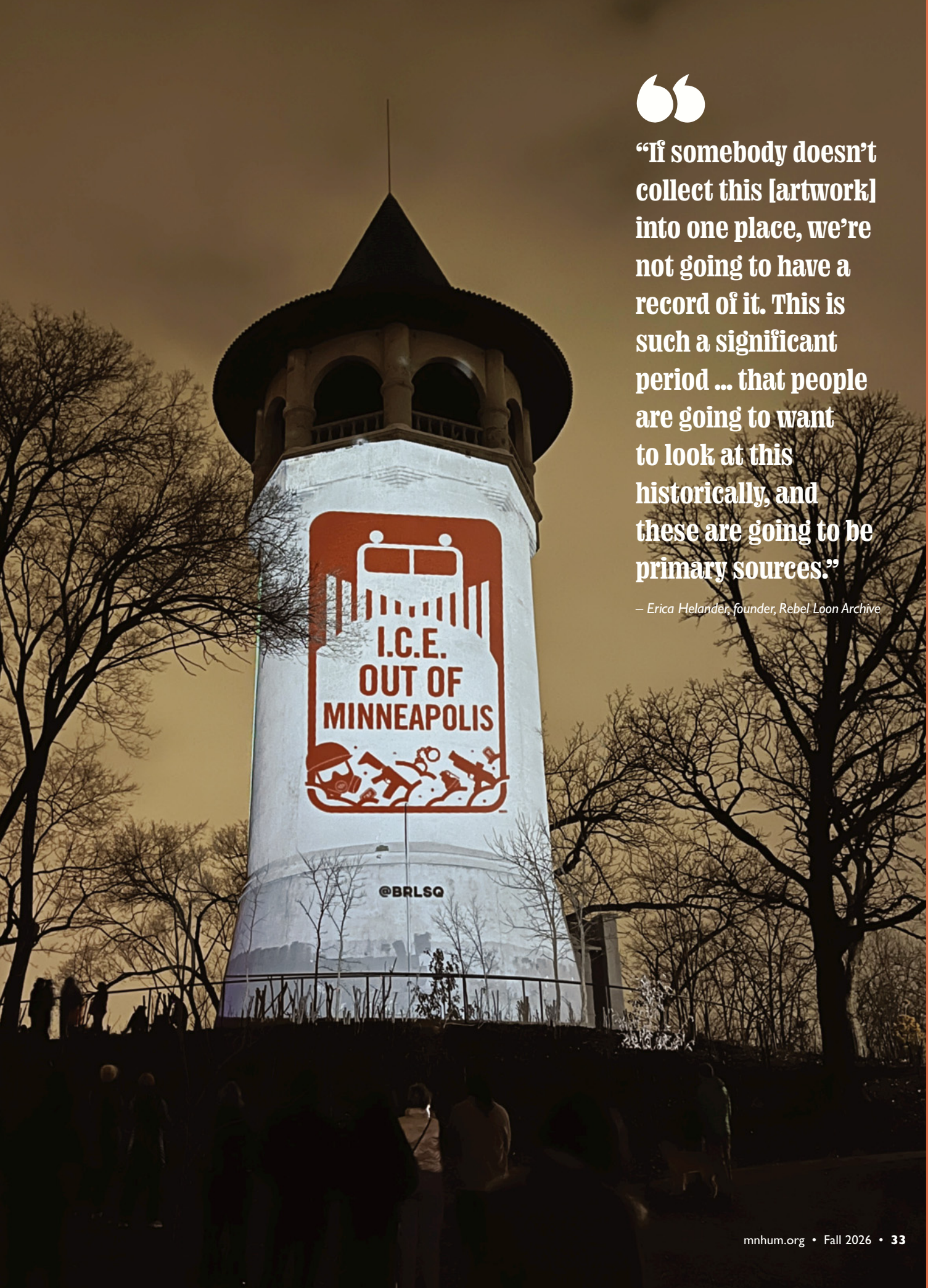
Eventually, she amassed over 1,000 works by more than 500 artists — many of whom would never describe themselves as such. Helander curated, edited, and laid out the work into a full-sized book, and McCracken and Hofmeister, co-founders and graphic designers of ArtYouHeart, designed it. A browseable online archive is also in the works.

McCracken and Hofmeister were similarly concerned about the disappearance of art. So when Jeannie Kenevan of Can Can Wonderland asked them to curate an exhibit of anti-ICE posters, they tapped their network to pull an event together

Above: Rebel Loon Archive collected over 1,000 works of protest art by more than 500 artists, including (clockwise from top left): "Salty Hmong Girl" by Tou Yia Xiong; "Love, Minneapolis" by Eliza Wheeler; "Alex Pretti" by Topsy; and "Protect People Not Borders" by Liberal Jane

Opposite page: ArtYouHeart curated a projector-mapping event showcasing anti-ICE artwork on the Witch's Tower in March 2026.

Photos (this page) by featured artists, (opposite page) courtesy of ArtYouHeart



“If somebody doesn’t collect this [artwork] into one place, we’re not going to have a record of it. This is such a significant period … that people are going to want to look at this historically, and these are going to be primary sources.”

– Erica Helander, founder, Rebel Loon Archive

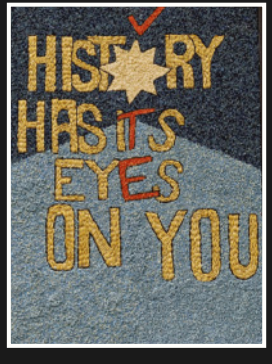


Memorialized in Crop Art

Often a major attraction at the Minnesota State Fair, this year's crop art exhibit garnered hours-long lines to view the submissions, many featuring thematic concepts related to Operation Metro Surge.

"I love that the submissions are so varied. Some are heartbreaking, some are funny, some are made by experienced crop artists, others are made by first-timers who felt compelled to tell their story and support the cause," says Teresa Anderson, who took over the *cropart.com* website in 2020, which posts crop art entered for the fair. "Many people have commented that seeing all this in one place has been very meaningful to them."





> **"I [felt] like our gathering and presenting that artwork was allowing people to connect with each other in a time period in which people might have been very isolated."**
>
> *– Eddie Hofmeister, co-founder, ArtYouHeart*

in about two weeks. The show drew so many people that its run was extended to two additional nights. The collection, ICE OUT, now lives on the ArtYouHeart website (*artyouheart.com/collections/ice-out*), with posters available for purchase.

"[What] I always thought about was that people were producing the art out of a need for connection," Hofmeister says. "I [felt] like our gathering and presenting that artwork was allowing people to connect with each other in a time period in which people might have been very isolated." She adds the simple act of gathering the art in one place helped amplify it on a new level.

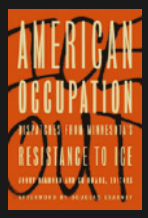
As it turned out, that amplification and sense of connection reached beyond Minnesota. The initial spark came from Nick Chatham-Taylor, an instructor at Minneapolis College of Art and Design (MCAD), who was coordinating an exhibition at Co-Prosperity in Chicago. Chatham-Taylor invited ArtYouHeart to participate in the ICE OUT group exhibition. "We said, 'Absolutely,' and we printed our posters and sent them to Chicago," McCracken says. "The same thing happened with the Torrance Museum of Art in California."

Through mutual connections, Mark Fisher, curator of "We Are Minnesota: Art As Resistance" at the Torrance Art Museum and a native Minnesotan, worked with Helander, McCracken, Hofmeister, and Art Price (who had turned his Northeast Minneapolis studio into a hub for screen printing garments with protest art) to bring the show together.

"It just felt extremely important to have

Photos by Caitlin Abrams

American Occupation: Dispatches from Minnesota's Resistance to ICE



Edited by Jonny Diamond and Su Hwang, with an afterword by Douglas Kearney

A collection of intimate writings, first published by Literary Hub in its Letters From Minnesota series, documenting lived experience under — and resistance to — ICE violence during Operation Metro Surge. Blending firsthand testimony with reflections on state power, the book captures both the terror of the crackdown and the courage, solidarity, and defiance it sparked.

this exhibition," Fisher says, noting he wanted people to feel the physical presence of the artwork in a way that social media can't match. "I hope [people will] be inspired to create work of their own elsewhere to help build communities." – *G.C.*





Above: (Top to bottom) *Sahan Journal* and Mixed Blood Theatre co-hosted a live storytelling event called "I Got Your Back" in May 2026; Hannah Ihekoronye (left) and Tolu Ekisola (right)

Grassroots storytelling

During the unrest, Mixed Blood Theatre facilitated story circles for community members — a methodology developed by civil rights activist and theater artist John O'Neal — to build trust and foster community consciousness.

"Back in the '60s, [the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee] would go out for a direct action, whether it was the bus boycotts or the sit-ins. And afterward, they would come back and sit in a circle, and one by one, they would share a story from their experience," says Tolu Ekisola, Mixed Blood Theatre's manager of community organizing and engagement. "We did an abridged version of this kind of story circle idea, giving people a chance to share with each other a story from their experience of the surge."

Knowing their response to support community would need to shift once the immediate threat had passed, Mixed Blood collaborated with the *Sahan Journal* to continue building community through storytelling.

The two organizations co-hosted a live storytelling event called "I Got Your Back" in May 2026. "This was an opportunity to have a creative element and then also a fact-based element," says Ekisola. Mixed Blood had already commissioned local writers to produce original, first-person accounts to document and process the moment. *Sahan Journal* had been covering the developing news during the surge, and had a network of community activists for a panel. But the crux of the event was the interactive element that handed the pen over to audience members to write about their experiences, then talk about what they hoped to carry forward with them in small group discussions.

Hannah Ihekoronye, community engagement manager at the *Sahan Journal*, says, "I think it reminded people of what good came out of [Operation Metro Surge]. What new villages they formed, what new friendships they formed, what new networks they formed." – *Morgan Halaska*

Photos by Chris Juhn

The Discourse

Thought-provoking conversations with leaders, scholars, creators, and changemakers.

Edited by Meghan Keating • Photos by Caitlin Abrams

Why do the humanities matter today? **Kevin Lindsey**, CEO of the Minnesota Humanities Center (MHC), and **Dr. Yohuru Williams**, professor of history at the University of St. Thomas, discuss how the humanities help us navigate big questions about democracy, identity, and human connection.

▸**Kevin Lindsey:** If you went to the dictionary and looked up the humanities, you would find various academic disciplines — religion and philosophy, history and literature, civics, and jurisprudence — and, I would say, within those six academic disciplines is conveying lessons through stories. Stories are very powerful for us as individuals in guiding how we think about ourselves in the short time that we're here on the planet. The storytelling and the narratives that we support very much undergird our democracy.

▸**Dr. Yohuru Williams:** I couldn't agree more and think where you started, Kevin, gets at the core of how I understand humanities as a historian. I'm especially appreciative that you put stories at the center. I think the study of humanities is how people across time and place have understood themselves, one another, and the world around them. The humanities are really the nexus of learning and humanity. And multiple



Kevin Lindsey
(pictured left)
is the CEO of MHC and former Minnesota Department of Human Rights commissioner.

Dr. Yohuru Williams
is distinguished university chair, professor of history, and founding director of the Racial Justice Initiative at the University of St. Thomas.



disciplines contribute to that, from history, literature, philosophy, and language to art, religion, culture, and social science. The humanities allow us to wrestle with questions at the core of our own humanity: Who are we? What do we value? What do we owe one another? What does it mean to live a meaningful life? These are questions that continue to echo and reverberate in our contemporary moment, and remain front and center in ways that I think we can't ignore.

KL: Yes, and I would say, too, like most things, there's an ebb and flow to it. For me, I think it's very evident that we are in a moment of wrestling with these questions and, at the Minnesota Humanities Center, we've really understood the importance of the humanities and how helpful they are as we consider these questions. And, I don't pretend that we've found the respective answers — it's about the importance of pausing and reflecting on big weighty questions and finding better questions in which to ask one another, as opposed to just trudging along with your head down. I'm hoping people will continue to stop, reflect, look up, and say, 'What is it that we really want to be?'

YW: One of the things that I've appreciated about the Minnesota Humanities Center is that you create the space to tug at those threads and allow us space to reflect on what it means to be human, especially in this contemporary moment around questions of American democracy and democratic practice. What does it mean to be an immigrant or a child of immigrants in this moment? What does it mean to question or to be confronted with this evolving standard of what has constituted as belonging, both in a political sense and in a more communal sense? There aren't easy answers in those spaces; there's simply the invitation to reflect — and that is also at the core of the humanities.

KL: I've been impressed by how people have gravitated to appreciate how inquiry-based learning — which is where people are provided the tools to find answers as opposed to being told the answers — can help prepare the next generation to be better suited to take on the roles and responsibilities of leading within our democracy. This year has been very meaningful to me as I've gone around the entire state, seeing people and having conversations about 'We, the people.'

YW: Yes. And defining what that means. Who are 'the people' and who is part of that conversation? What does it mean when we practice exclusion and who creates the space? And how do we support those who create the space for us to meaningfully remain in discourse about that, recognizing the inherent danger that's present when we fail to have those conversations, when we don't take it seriously and understand the appropriate weight which it carries, particularly in a participatory democracy. That's part of the bargain. And when we lose sight of that, we're also complicit in the erosion of the very fabric of that democracy.

"The humanities will always be relevant because people are always seeking, at their very core, to try and do better."

– KEVIN LINDSEY

KL: I really appreciate what you're saying. It's not necessarily assuming that we're all going to have the same common understanding, but appreciating the fact that there may be different understandings of what happened. And being able to wrestle with that as an individual and as part of a collective. That is the challenge — understanding the tension that might exist within that but also finding some type of common ground to move forward within the democracy. And, hey, now that I keep seeing you on Netflix [laughs], what are the things that you're thinking about at this moment in American history?

YW: It's interesting because the 250th anniversary has been this opportunity for people to reflect on the grand narrative, the meta-narrative that we want to tell about the American experience. And the stories that you and I are in the work of collecting and sharing broaden that story and show how it has evolved. This is a long process. So when we say, 'democracy is a practice,' it's a reminder that if we have moved the needle, it's because we've learned from others who have pushed back against or challenged or worked to expand the vision that was articulated by the founders. We need people pushing at those boundaries, expanding those definitions, and pushing for the aspirational language of what America might be. Not what it was, not what it is, but what it might be.

KL: Your words remind me of something that [former U.S. Attorney General Eric] Holder said as relates to the arc of the moral universe: It only bends toward justice if people are willing to put their hands on it and bend it toward justice. The work of the democracy is really the interaction between people. It's how much respect they give one another, and building up and allowing those narratives to be heard and appreciated and valued. And I appreciate your words within this space because it reminds us of the power that each of us has to be able to bend that arc of the moral universe toward justice just by our everyday interactions. It doesn't necessarily mean putting on our cape and going into Congress — there are positive, great things that each of us can do every day in our local communities.

YW: Absolutely. For example, recycling is an act of everyday democracy. It is recognizing that I, as an individual, have an impact on the environment and the community and others whom I share this planet with. And if I make good decisions around the way that I dispose of waste, I am helping to maintain the health of the planet and our overall society — now and also for the next generation. And then there's participation in the electoral process and political processes in terms of presidential elections and the school board. That's bending the arc toward justice. Those are examples of everyday democratic practices that help us build up the muscle.

KL: I really appreciate the school board example because, for most of us — the school board, county government, city government — those are the areas where government decisions are going to be most impactful on your life. We can always have debate and discussion as it relates to what's the proper tax rate, for example, but it should always be a respectful civil discourse. There has to be more of an acceptance and an understanding of the willingness to have dialogue as relates to the vision of the country for everybody to be seen, heard, and appreciated.

YW: The strongest case we can make for the humanities is that it's not just a safeguard against our democracy in our republican form of government, but it's also an invitation for us to be authentically human. It's the one thing that makes us robot-proof. We don't think in terms of a mechanical definition of existence, we think about it in terms of what is the greatest good for the greatest number in the context of our human experience and what we would want for ourselves, and what we should want to promote and create and preserve for others.

KL: Speaking of robots, there's language within the enabling legislation of the National Endowment for the Humanities — a quote about how we should not become beholden to the technology of our time. And within AI, we are at a really critical moment in time and I appreciate the recent words of [Bill] Gates and others to really think through how AI is going to transform the nature of work and the nature of how we find meaning within our respective lives. It's a really important time for the humanities to be leaning in and attentive to how AI is going to be transformative within our respective economy and society.

YW: And I think there's fundamentally a question around what the purpose of AI is. Artificial intelligence, by definition, reminds us that artificial is a substitute. When you cut the human out of the intelligence, when it's artificial intelligence, it's kind of like an artificial sweetener. By definition, it

(Continued on page 47)



"The humanities are an invitation for us to be authentically human. It's the one thing that makes us robot-proof."

– DR. YOHURU WILLIAMS







Leave Your Legacy in the Humanities

Your story can help shape Minnesota's future.

A planned gift to the Minnesota Humanities Center helps ensure that future generations can explore the rich cultures, voices, and places that make our state unique.

Your legacy gift to the Minnesota Humanities Center helps create a future filled with possibility — bringing people together to learn from one another, bridge generations, and build the connections, understanding, and hope that helps communities thrive.

Minnesota Humanities Center

Learn how you can include the Minnesota Humanities Center in your estate plans.

From Here

NEWS & NOTES FROM MHC



Public art exhibit
In 2025, Minnesota Latino Museum's *Alebrijes: Keepers of the Island* captivated over 300,000 visitors with 17 vibrant sculptures on Raspberry Island in St. Paul.

Photo by Larry Lucio, Jr. courtesy of the Minnesota Latino Museum

Strengthening Communities Together

Meet some of the 2026 grantees that received Legacy Cultural Heritage grants.

Through our mission and funding from the Legislature, the Minnesota Humanities Center (MHC) has provided numerous grants to organizations and individuals that are creating and celebrating the culture and heritage of Minnesota communities. Read on for representative grants awarded by MHC.

While **Minnesota Latino Museum** works to open its doors as the state's first Latino-focused museum, the organization continues to provide Mexican and Latin American folk, cultural, and public art programming. In 2026, the organization is working with Minnesota-based Latino muralists to create "Mural Mania," celebrating the Mexican Muralist Movement and Latino history and culture in Minnesota.

(Continued on page 42)

From Here

(Continued from page41)



The Ukrainian Global Symphony Project provided an opportunity to unite the Ukrainian community through music, dance, and visual art, and invited Minnesotans to discover Ukrainian culture through the "Sights and Sounds of Freedom: Lyatoshynsky Lives Again!" at Orchestra Hall in Minneapolis. The symphony was performed by members of the Twin Cities Musicians Union, Minnesota Opera, Minnesota Orchestra, and St. Paul Chamber Orchestra.



The Taiwan Online Library is producing *Formosa Footprints: A 60-Year Journey of Freedom for Taiwanese Minnesotans*, a documentary film project that will preserve and share a powerful, untold story of the state's history. The film will explore how a small community of students and immigrants from Formosa, the ancient name for Taiwan, found their voice after arriving in Minnesota.



Walker West Music Academy, one of the nation's oldest community music schools founded by African American musicians, is expanding performances, recordings, and string education to preserve and amplify African American music and heritage. Funding will also support the Academy's podcast program that highlights intergenerational stories, local community history, and interviews with Minnesota music legends such as Grammy Award-winning artist, Stokely.

Project FINE

Focus on Integrating Newcomers through Education

Project FINE is creating a "Walk Around the World" cultural exploration activity involving children of various ages within three school districts across Winona County. Through this project, families will travel between stations representing various countries and cultures, and each station will have information, interactive activities, and educational resources. The goal of the project is to foster cross-cultural understanding and relationships among students, staff, and families.



The Phyllis Wheatley Community Center continues to build upon the cultural legacy of its namesake to support new programming — including an open mic poetry series that will provide youth with opportunities to create and perform original works that explore themes of personal identity, cultural heritage, and community connection. Funding will also support the creation of a new community ballet program, and music.



The Immigrant Development Center is elebrating the diverse cultural traditions of immigrant, refugee, Indigenous, and BIPOC communities in the Fargo-Moorhead region through pop-up arts and culture events. These events are built around Juneteenth, the All African Festival, Eid, Indigenous Peoples Day, and Hispanic Heritage Month, along with Global Pop-Up markets that feature Minnesota-based artists, cultural practitioners, and community vendors.

Photos (clockwise from top left): courtesy of Ukranian Global Symphony, by Josh Nemitz, by Benny Moreno, courtesy of Project FINE, courtesy of Phyllis Wheatley Community Center, courtesy of The Immigrant Development Center

Navigating the Grant Process

Apply for funding from MHC and create meaningful change across Minnesota.



Photo by Hannah Lynch

In the last four years, the Minnesota Humanities Center (MHC) awarded nearly $35 million from the Minnesota Legacy Amendment Fund (Legacy Fund) to individuals and organizations throughout Minnesota.

The Legacy Fund was established in 2008 to protect and support water sources; parks and trails; fish, game and wildlife habitats; and preserve arts and cultural heritage. The Legacy Amendment, unless renewed by Minnesota voters, will expire in 2034.

While not exhaustive, grants awarded by MHC, at the direction of the Minnesota Legislature, have supported the:

1. Creation of art, books, plays, and films
2. Development of classroom and civics materials
3. Amplification of cultural heritage through art, books, dance, music, and community events
4. Children's museums, museums, ethnic media organizations, festival organizers, and exhibitions and collections within Minnesota

Please consider applying for a grant or learning more from MHC. Our staff are ready and eager to support you by answering your questions, providing technical assistance, creating frequently asked question materials, and reviewing your draft application before submission.

In each subsequent issue, we will share information about grant opportunities and provide tips for strengthening your application. If you have questions or suggestions, please feel free to contact MHC's grant staff at **grants@mnhum.org.**

Three Upcoming Events

Objects of War: A Storytelling Circle of Service, Memory, and Community

Oct. 27, 12:00 – 2:30 p.m.
Edina Senior Center, 5280 Grandview Square
Edina, MN 55436

Veterans and their families are encouraged to bring a meaningful item — such as a good luck charm, heirloom, or dog tags — to start a conversation and share stories. This is an opportunity to reflect upon how war, conflict, military service, the friendships developed during military service, or the experience of returning to civilian life have shaped their lives.

We Are Water Exhibit and special program, *Among the Mermaids: Fascinating Facts and Fictions About the Sirens of the Sea*

Oct. 8 – Nov. 30 (We Are Water Exhibit)
Nov. 7, 2:00 – 3:00 p.m. (Special Program)
Northtown Library, 711 County Hwy 10 NE, Blaine, MN 55434

Now in its 10th year, this traveling exhibit helps Minnesotans deepen their connection to water, engage with diverse perspectives, and foster a shared commitment to water stewardship while bridging divides between scientific understanding and lived experience.

Local hosts invite you to join folklorist and featured local author Varla Ventura for tales of mermaids from around the world that will thrill every lover of this romanticized mythological creature. Ventura is author of *Among the Mermaids: Fascinating Facts and Fictions About the Sirens of the Sea* and six other books.

The Declaration of Independence and Liberty, Then and Now: A Community Conversation

Nov. 5, 6:00 – 8:00 p.m.
Meeker County Historical Society at the G.A.R. Hall,
308 North Marshall Ave., Litchfield, MN 55355

Nov. 12, 5:30 – 7:30 p.m.
Chanhassen Public Library, 7711 Kerber Blvd.
Chanhassen, MN 55317

The Declaration of Independence and Liberty, Then and Now, a partnership between the Minnesota Humanities Center (MHC) and Braver Angels, is a statewide facilitated dialogue series marking the 250th anniversary of the Declaration of Independence. Rather than simply presenting the declaration only as a founding text to be celebrated, participants engage its language and ideas through facilitated conversation about liberty, the pursuit of happiness, equality, and the institutions necessary for people to experience those ideals today.

Get to Know: Gwen Nell Westerman

Meet Minnesota's Poet Laureate.



Minnesota is home to many talented humanists, and we are excited to shine the spotlight on their work. In this inaugural edition, we are honored to highlight Gwen Nell Westerman — an artist, writer, and teacher who has served as the Minnesota Poet Laureate since 2021.

Has writing poetry changed the way you see the world?

Not the way I see the world, but more how I respond to it. Especially in times of community distress. Three poems this past year have been in direct response to tragic events around us in Minnesota, and I hope that they served as a reminder of what we can do together to make this a better place.

What advice would you give to aspiring poets?

Write about what you see, what you feel, what you hear, and how those experiences help us better understand the world and our place in it. But get those words and feelings out of your head and onto the page (or screen). They don't have to be perfect the first or second or third time, but they do have to express what it is you want to share. Read them out loud. Better yet, record yourself reading them. Do the words sound the way you heard them in your head?

How does poetry help us connect with one another?

It gives us a glimpse into someone else's perspective on life and what is happening around us. The more perspectives we have, the more we can realize how much we share.

What is a Poet Laureate?

This governer-appointed role fosters a deeper love for poetry.

Key responsibilities:

- Promote and encourage appreciation of and engagement with poetry
- Engage marginalized voices in poetry
- Celebrate the state's rich and vibrant cultural heritages
- Engage young people within and across lived experiences
- Inspire all generations of poets and readers
- Champion poetry and spoken word across the state
- Support children's mental health and well-being, and an inclusive state workplace

Gwen Nell Westerman is Minnesota's third Poet Laureate, and will remain in her role until a new appointment is made.

The Minnesota Humanities Center reviews and recommends individuals for the Laureateship.

Photo courtesy of Gwen Nell Westerman



Join us in weaving Minnesota's Story, one thread at a time.

Become a sponsor of 10,000 Threads.

Sponsorship and advertising rates are available at many different levels. Scan the QR code to learn more.

Minnesota Humanities Center

(Continued from page 10)

"For a long time, I had been wanting to make a film that spoke about how our identity, our traditions, the complex lineages within our ancestry, and our heritage when it comes to different ethnicities — how all of that showed up in Minnesota," Blanco says. "I find that, a lot of times, when there are documentaries that are going to be made about a specific ethnicity or about a specific community, a lot of it revolves around facts and history and explaining certain topics for accessibility for an audience that's not part of the community. It felt really important, instead, to do a piece that spoke directly from inside of the community, a piece that felt like it didn't have to justify itself."

Exploring cultural duality

Building on a project called *Voices of LatinoLEAD*, a monthly video series originally launched in 2020 to showcase the achievements and narratives of the Latine leaders in Minnesota, Blanco wished to tell a more holistic story. He wanted one that went beyond anecdotes to explore rootedness and how Latinidad has taken shape in Minnesota, intertwining with the state's landscapes and rhythms to create a distinct cultural experience.

That vision hinged on finding the right people to feature in the film. "We wanted to showcase diversity across ages, across regions, across heritage, across vocations and disciplines," Blanco says.

Through ideation sessions, conversations with people in the community, and interviews, Blanco and the rest of the production team landed on five people to carry the storyline, including Patricia Totozintle, former CEO of Esperanza United, a community and organizational leader, and a domestic violence and immigrant rights advocate; Otto Sánchez, a kinesiologist and senior scientist at the Minneapolis Heart Institute Foundation; Aiyana Sol Machado, an Indigenous Boricua multidisciplinary community organizer, birth worker, educator, and cultural worker; Tahiel Jimenez Medina, a filmmaker and founder of Mamá Papaya; and Jessica Lee Velasco, a community organizer and agricultural meatpacking workers' rights activist.

Though all come from different backgrounds, the stories they tell of their family histories, challenges, triumphs, and sacrifices share a common theme: the ways cultures intersect and give rise to new expressions of identity, tradition, and belonging in everyday life. This shows up in a multitude of ways — from the meals that are cooked to the languages that are spoken to the traditions that are celebrated.

"A lot of us are trying to figure out where it is that we belong," Blanco says. "Once you become accustomed to living elsewhere for a very long time, that place also becomes a part of you … where you begin to incorporate traditions from one place and mix them with the conditions of the other."

Creating room for reflection

Since its premiere, *Nuestro Norte* has sold out three additional screenings in the Twin Cities, each accompanied by panel discussions with individuals portrayed in the film or with Latinidad elders, politicians, community leaders, and scholars.

"There's a real hunger for a film like this, especially with everything that happened earlier this year with Metro Surge," says Blanco, referring to the federal immigration enforcement action in the state. "People are trying to find new modes of organizing, new modes of supporting the community. So even if folks are not directly talking about exactly what they saw in the film, it creates a space to talk about the different issues that exist within the Latino experience in Minnesota."

Blanco also hopes viewers come away from the film with a better understanding of the complexity of the Latinidad culture. This comes into play in the most personal scene from the film: Sitting along Lake Superior's shoreline with Split Rock Lighthouse in the background, a man plays a *cuatro*, a traditional Venezuelan instrument, while singing *Alma Llanera*, which translates to *Soul of the Plains* and refers to his kinship to landmarks in Venezuela. That man is Blanco's dad, and the chair he's using is from the dining room set Blanco's family has had since they moved to Minnesota.

"I think that scene really conveys that feeling of being caught in between these two worlds and trying to make sense of the two of them," Blanco says. "The Latino community's journey centers on really finding … what does the continuity of our traditions and our foods and modes of being look like in Minnesota?

"That's something that every generation, every person in their individual family, is going to have to figure out for themselves," he adds. "I hope that the film creates room to really reflect on that."



Photo by Ben Brodsky

Above: Behind the scenes during the filming of Martín Blanco's documentary, *Nuestro Norte*

(Continued from page 39)

loses something of the essence that made it special and unique. And I think we'll find ourselves increasingly leaning into — and not from a place of nostalgia, but from a deep longing for — that authentic human experience. Not perfection, not speed, not efficiency, but connection. Humanities have always been about connection. Allow me to share my story with you. Allow me to share my language and culture with you. Allow me to invite you into a world which may at first feel foreign and different from your own, but if we spend enough time in this place we'll ultimately come to the conclusion that perhaps we're not so far apart in the way that we think about or appreciate beauty and culture and the pursuit of knowledge. So I sit in the discomfort that I think everyone does in this moment about the existential threat posed by artificial intelligence. And yet I also think it's an invitation and an opportunity to remember the importance of human connection.

KL: Love hearing your words, professor. And going back to the power of the humanities, well, it's still relevant because it's always been relevant. I am hopeful. The humanities will always be relevant because people are always seeking, at their very core, to try and do better. And learning history and learning from others gives all of us the tools to do better. It's really a steward for us. The gift that we're given at MHC is to try and get as many of those stories, wrap our arms around them and then share them with people so they have the knowledge they need to make their lives better.

Interview edited for clarity and length

Minnesota Humanities Center Board of Directors

Officers:
Sherry Sanchez Tibbetts, Mattie Harper DeCarlo, PhD., Michelle Bauer, Dr. David Hamlar, Joshua Ney

Members:
Julie Brock, Will Cooley, Dr. Marcheta Evans, Dr. Antonia Felix, Mary L. Hilfiker, Dr. Amina Jaafar, Matt Kuskie, Warren Larson, Kristie Lazenberry, Lynne K. Leaf, Dr. Matt Lindstrom, Jordan Metsa, Nancy Aronson Norr, Jessica O'Brien, Rebecca Lynn Petersen, Carolyn Roby, Kim Schaufenbuel, Jay Sieling, Kirsten Wittmann

Big stories live here.

What makes Minnesota, Minnesota?

Throughout 2026 and 2027, Minnesota Humanities Center is gathering stories from every corner of our state.

Through Minnesota 100, we're gathering the people, places, objects, ideas, and traditions that connect us all — celebrating the stories of Minnesota.



MINNESOTA 100
PEOPLE • PLACES • OBJECTS • IDEAS • TRADITIONS

Explore Minnesota 100 mnhum.org/mn100

Minnesota Humanities Center

How Well Do You Know Minnesota's State Symbols?

Put your love for Minnesota to the test with trivia about its unique emblems.

1 **What is the estimated summer population of the loon, Minnesota's state bird?**

A. 12,000
B. 50,000
C. 4,500
D. 15,000



2 **Our state fruit, the Honeycrisp™ apple, is a cross between which two apples?**

A. Macoun and Empire apples
B. Gala and Honeygold apples
C. Macoun and Honeygold apples
D. None of the above





3 **Which of the following is not a Minnesota state symbol?**

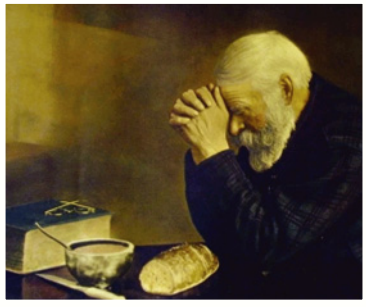
A. Blueberry muffin (state muffin)
B. Ursa Minor (state constellation)
C. Baseball (state sport)
D. Milk (state drink)

4 **What year did the Pink and White Lady's Slipper become Minnesota's state flower?**

A. 1858
B. 1902
C. 1897
D. 1924

5 **The state photograph, "Grace," captured by Eric Enstrom in Bovey, Minnesota, depicts an elderly man bowing his head and giving thanks. Where can a copy of this photograph be found on display today?**

A. The Charles Lindbergh House and Museum in Little Falls
B. The Secretary of State's office in St. Paul
C. The Glensheen Mansion in Duluth
D. None of the above



1) A. 12,000. Head upstate, and you're likely to hear the echoing calls of the loon on our northern lakes.
2) D. None of the above. Originally thought to be from Macoun and Honeygold apples, genetic testing has since revealed its parents are the Keepsake apple and MN1627, an unreleased variety from the University of Minnesota. First developed in the 1960s, it was officially released in 1991 and millions of trees are grown worldwide today.
3) C. Baseball. Since 2009, ice hockey has been Minnesota's official state sport — a designation championed by sixth graders at Minnetonka Middle School East, who spent six months collecting over 600 signatures in support of the idea.
4) B. 1902. Did you know lady's slippers can take up to 16 years to produce their first flowers, and can live up to 50 years?
5) B. The Secretary of State's office in St. Paul. Eric Enstrom took the original photograph in 1918.

Photos (1, 2, 4) Adobe, (5) by Eric Enstrom, courtesy of Minnesota Historical Society

Gathering Around the Table

In each issue of *10,000 Threads,* we'll feature a recipe that's representative of the many people groups and cultures found throughout the state of Minnesota.

Stir-Fried Baby Bok Choy with Pork Belly *(Zaub Ntsuag Dawb Kib Xyaw Nqaij Npuas)*

Makes 6 servings

Hmong people are especially fond of pork belly because it has wonderful textures and flavors. When cooked, the skin is chewy, the fat is soft, and the lean meat is very tasty. Pork belly, usually sold in a slab, is available at some mainstream supermarkets and most Asian grocery stores. As an alternative, or for a more Western flavor, use loin roast with some fat on it. Can't find bok choy at your local grocery store? Any leafy green vegetable can be substituted for the bok choy.

Ingredients

½ pound pork belly
1 bunch baby bok choy (about 10 small heads)
2 tablespoons vegetable oil
1 teaspoon salt
1 chicken bouillon cube (Asian-style or regular)

Preparation

Cut the pork belly slab or loin roast into pieces about 1 inch long and ⅛ inch thick, and set aside. Carefully wash the bok choy, pulling each leaf off of the head. Cut each leaf in half from tip to stem. Drain on paper towels. Heat the oil in a wok over high heat. Add the pork, salt, and bouillon cube. Stir-fry for about 10 minutes. Add the bok choy and stir-fry for about 5 more minutes. The dish is done when the meat is cooked, the bok choy leaves are limp, the stems are still a bit crispy, and a glossy glaze covers everything. Serve hot, accompanied by white rice.

Excerpted from Cooking from the Heart: The Hmong Kitchen in America *by Sami Scripter and Sheng Yang. Published by the University of Minnesota Press. Copyright 2009 by Sami Scripter and Sheng Yang. Used by permission.*



Photo courtesy of Cenveo: Robin Lietz, photographer

Minnesota Humanities Center







Help Build a More Connected Minnesota

Stories help us understand where we've been. Conversation helps us imagine where we can go together.

Your gift to the Minnesota Humanities Center creates opportunities for people throughout our state to share stories, explore new perspectives, and build stronger connections across communities.

Invest in the conversations that bring us closer.

Together, we can create a Minnesota where every voice is valued and has a place, and everyone has the opportunity to learn, belong, and thrive.

Give today.