



‘Sharing our heritage’ Meet new HCSCC Executive Director Laura Forde

BY LONNA WHITING
The Arts Partnership

The Hjemkomst Center is known around the world for housing a mystical replica Viking ship brought to life by legendary local Robert Asp.

But underneath the giant boat hull, the imposing starboard and down a quick flight of stairs, there’s more treasure to uncover: a collection of oceanic proportions ranging from a celebration of regional cuisine to a Norman Rockwell-esque photography exhibit depicting rural 4-H life, plus countless artifacts recognizing the region’s rich Scandinavian and Native American histories.

Tucked away, you’ll also find Historical and Cultural Society of Clay County Executive Director Laura Forde either in her office getting



Photos by Alyssa Goelzer / The Forum

Top: Laura Forde, executive director of the Historical and Cultural Society of Clay County talks about the current and upcoming exhibits at the Hjemkomst Center on Aug. 19 in Moorhead. **Above:** Laura Forde, executive director of the Historical and Cultural Society of Clay County talks about the current and upcoming exhibits at the Hjemkomst Center.

organized in her new position or exploring the depths of the museum’s collections.

Standing near a glass wall display featuring steamer trunks, fiddles and wind instruments

brought over by Norwegian immigrants, Forde, who began her tenure at the helm of HCSCC on July 1, feels naturally at home among all the history.

“You can see all the

things Norwegian people brought over, and it’s just so neat,” she added, pointing to a cast-iron lelse pan. “My grandma had one just like that.”

For Forde, it’s more than nostalgia or a love

of her own Scandinavian heritage driving her curiosity. She’s made a career out of learning history and helping others do the same, first as a social studies teacher with a master’s degree in educational leadership, and later at the North Dakota Heritage Center and State Museum in Bismarck.

“People need to be engaged and involved in their own learning,” she said, and from her perspective, a community-based historical museum like HCSCC is the perfect place to explore it.

Originally from Aneta, ND, Forde’s been slowly moving herself and family from Bismarck where they’ve lived for the past several years. She’s spent her first weeks as executive director getting to know the organization and making small, incremental improvements.

HERITAGE on B6

In Minn. town, there’s no place like gnome

In Peterson, Minn., gnomes are fun, historical and a signature attraction

BY CATHARINE RICHERT
MPR News

PETERSON, Minn. — If you aren’t looking, you might miss the dozens of gnomes hiding in the yards, doorways and windows of Peterson, Minnesota.

“They aren’t mean. They’re not a troll, but they’re hard to spot,” said Becky Stocker. “[Gnomes] are very real and active members of the community in Norway.”

Stocker is a long-time resident and a bit of a gnome expert (some might call her a ‘gno-me-it-all’) after plotting to bring Peterson its first gnomes in 2018. These

usually tiny, mischievous creatures that feature prominently in Norwegian folklore are tucked away in front stoops, and in windows — a nod to the town’s Norwegian heritage.

Peterson was founded by Norwegian immigrants in the mid-1800s. The town, which boasts 227 residents today, is surrounded in the hills of Minnesota’s driftless region, surrounded by corn fields and nestled in between the Root River and its popular biking trail.

After Fillmore County opened up homesteading, settlers started arriving, including Cheryl Eaton’s

grandfather.

She grew up here and said that the community’s Scandinavian heritage runs strong.

“It’s more Norwegian,” said Eaton, who now volunteers at the Peterson Museum. “There’s been a few Swedes here, but not very many. And then the man who ran the fish farm — that was the only Catholic family in town [when I was a kid.]”

Eaton said that the gnomes are just one way Peterson celebrates its heritage. Gammel Dag Days is Peterson’s annual Scandinavian midsummer festival. Placards around town detail how the community benefited

from the railways and how settlers lived on the land.

And more recently, there are the gnomes.

How do you lose a giant gnome?

Stocker said the idea for making gnomes the town mascots started out on a whim. Her friend had seen a huge gnome for sale in nearby Rochester. It was too expensive, so they found a cheaper one online.

But the giant gnome they ordered never arrived.

“How do you lose an eight-and-a-half-foot gnome? The company [said] they’d send us another one right away,



Ken Klotzbach / MPR News

Bikers on the Root River State Trail pass by the “Velkommen to Peterson” sign accompanied by one of the town’s many gnomes on Aug. 8.

because the gnome was lost,” recounted Stocker. “On the day of delivery here, they unloaded two gnomes for us, which is

very fitting because gnomes always come as twins.”

GNOMES on B6

When an old flame won't let go

Dear Annie: I need advice on how to deal with a former fiancé. We dated for nearly a year before getting engaged, but the engagement lasted only a few months. Once we were engaged, he began laying down expectations for our future: dinner on the table at 5, how many children we would have, even which promotions I should turn down at work. I am a health professional with two graduate degrees, and our outlooks on life could not have been more different. I ended the engagement.

At the time, he told me I would regret it. I never have, not for a single moment. I have been happily married for over 30 years.



ANNIE LANE
Dear Annie

He eventually married as well, but I recently learned his wife passed away six years ago. Over the past two years, I have started seeing him around town, at the grocery store, at church. He stares at me in a way that makes me deeply uncomfortable. When we cross paths, I say a polite hello and move on, but he deliberately walks in front of me or lingers nearby so I will notice him. I have no interest in reconnecting.

He is 67, and I am 70. I know he has family two hours away where his parents and wife are buried. I cannot help but feel unsettled by his presence. I want to make it clear that this is over and there is nothing to discuss.

How can I send that message firmly but respectfully? — It Is Over

Dear Over: You have every right to feel unsettled. Your former fiancé may be lonely or nostalgic, but that does not give him permission to make you uncomfortable.

You ended that relationship decades ago and moved on with your life. A simple hello is more than enough. You do not owe him conversation, closure or curiosity.

If his presence begins

to feel intrusive or persistent, you have a few options. Keep your distance when possible, and if he tries to approach you directly, look him in the eye and say, "Please respect my space. I have no interest in reconnecting." You do not need to explain or justify yourself.

Should the behavior escalate or continue, do not hesitate to speak with a pastor, store manager or even law enforcement. Being polite does not mean tolerating discomfort.

This chapter closed a long time ago. It is perfectly fine to keep it that way.

Send your questions for Annie Lane to dearannie@creators.com.

YOUR DAILY HOROSCOPE

BIRTHDAY STAR: Actor China Anne McClain was born on this day in 1998 in Decatur, Georgia. She is known for playing Jazmine on "Tyler Perry's House of Payne" and played Jennifer Pierce, also known as Lightning, on "Black Lightning." McClain has been on "9-1-1: Lone Star," "K.C. Undercover," and "Bones." Her movies include "Hubie Halloween," "Blood Brothers," and "Grown Ups 2."



MAGI HELENA
Your Daily Horoscope

ARIES (March 21-April 19): Time spent at home could have extra meaning today but it's Monday, so you may need to rise and shine. Today is another strong day in the sky; there's potential opportunity for the taking. Grab some quiet time later if you can.

TAURUS (April 20-May 20): Confidence in your abilities could seem like your trademark even if you sometimes doubt yourself. You've got the chops, work through any imposter syndrome but find the balance—steamrollers are seldom appreciated at home or at work.

GEMINI (May 21-June 20): Think about your core values and what means most to you, now is a time you could get an epiphany. A friendship could undergo an exciting metamorphosis ushering in a new era of closeness and commitment.

CANCER (June 21-July 22): Find your mission—hint, hint, it's closely aligned with your passions. Understanding what moves your needle begins to reveal the path. Your experiences bring your Easter Eggs and opportunities for growth. Your best future could be hiding in plain sight.

LEO (July 23-Aug. 22): Say it, but say it wisely, mindfully, and not out of reaction. The goal is communication leading to progress, not to overwhelm someone. A partner could potentially provide some stability and logistical support. Vigorous activity could blow off some steam.

VIRGO (Aug. 23-Sept. 22): Your ambitions could be at the forefront; examine them to see if a change, even a minor one, is warranted. Stars are in some of the best opportunity days of the year. Do you have something you want to launch with best odds?

LIBRA (Sept. 23-Oct. 22): Bring the fire to light things up—but also use logic to keep it appropriate. You might hit resistance or you might get a pass from someone, it could go either way now. Investing in yourself is the best investment you'll ever make.

SCORPIO (Oct. 23-Nov. 21): Apply higher-level, spiritual wisdom to a money matter, it could lead to positive change

and ultimately, growth of cash flow or capital. Something could be jangling in the back of your mind, try to identify it as a step toward inner peace.

SAGITTARIUS (Nov. 22-Dec. 21): Something on the home front could feel depleting or not supportive instead of helpful and recharging. See if you can find and resolve the pain point; it can lead to greater confidence in the outer world once fixed.

CAPRICORN (Dec. 22-Jan. 19): Relationships could occupy you today. If you are single, you might find lightning; decide if you want to get scorched. Committed partners could find renewed intimacy and gentle support and sharing.

AQUARIUS (Jan. 20-Feb. 18): You could feel confident in every area except money today but new resources or assistance could be on the way. Remind yourself of old wins, even tiny ones—self-validation builds up self-confidence and frees you from people-pleasing.

PISCES (Feb. 19-March 20): Float and drift in the streams of joy and creativity and you might find that something you love can be monetized and turned into a gig or career. You should have extra confidence by the time you need it. Keep building your best life.

IF TODAY IS YOUR BIRTHDAY: Your status could be on the rise and plenty of help could be on the way in the next few weeks. Keep watch for tiny miracles and glimmers from the Universe. September could be a great time to get back to working out if you took time off during the summer—move your body, you'll need the outlet. Your mind could be concurrently strong and on point, truth can be a powerful ally. In October, wishful thinking could make someone appear more trustworthy than they may be, it's generally a poor month for both new meetings and new initiatives. November might bring a person with unique knowledge or you might stumble across just the intel you need. Bring talent and charisma to the forefront in December, you could really get noticed. Be sure to uphold an alliance or a confidence—someone could succumb to a temptation toward disloyalty, don't let it be you. 2026 looks powerful and strategic.

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Photos by Ken Klotzbach / MPR News

Peterson, Minnesota, resident historians Chris Grindland, Cheryl Eaton and Becky Stocker say the local gnomes are a nod to the community's Norwegian heritage.

GNOMES

CONTINUED from B5

Thus, Gus and Gunner were born.

"Those are our two gnomes, and they've kind of been our mascots ever since," she said.

When the twins arrived the town got gnome fever, said City Administrator Chris Grindland.

"You drive through town, and all of a sudden you see all these new gnomes just popping up in people's yards. And the next thing you know, it's all over the place," he said. "It just happened

organically."

One of the giant twin stands outside the Peterson Museum, the other on the old rail line that's now the Root River State Trail. He greets bikers, walkers and runners. But no one in town can tell which one is Gus and which is Gunner.

And since the gnome twins arrived in Peterson, they've acquired a lot of friends. Gnome flags hang from lamp-posts downtown. There's life-sized cutouts of gnomes for pictures. A gnome scavenger hunt helps people find hidden



Colorful gnomes, large and small, adorn nooks and crannies in Peterson, Minnesota

gnomes in people's yards and in their windows.

Standing next to a historical marker at the entrance to town, Grindland said the gnomes are just one way Peterson tries to stand out at a time when small towns are often overlooked.

"It just preserves the history of the town. You have people coming through on the bike trail [and they think] just another little, small town. This gives them a glimpse

into our history and to see how the town was started, and, you know what it's been through," he said.

Grindland admitted he doesn't know how many gnomes are in Peterson. But it's fair to say there are scores of them.

"Definitely we are the gnome capital of Minnesota," he said. "For sure."

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HERITAGE

CONTINUED from B5

"I'm looking at how we can streamline some things, for example, using technology more effectively," she said, which is an area Forde is eager to expand on in order to grow HCSCC's community education initiatives and other engagement programming.

But in-person work remains important. "Programs like our History on Tap events get us out into communities throughout Clay County so we can educate and tell our history in interesting ways," she said.

Forde calls HCSCC's approach to county historical and cultural preservation refreshing.

"One of the things that impressed me about coming here to work is that this little staff of five or six people are designing international museum-quality exhibitions," she said. "In addition to managing our artifacts, they are doing professional museum fabrication work at a very high level."

Aside from making exhibitions visually appealing and interactive, Forde believes the historical society is in a unique position to offer valuable experiences for community members, all while growing and preserving the mission and collections at HCSCC.

"It's history, but it's also culture," she said. "Just embracing those cultural differences and sharing our heritage in such an impressive way is a refreshing take on historical societies and their value in our

communities."

For now, Forde has been focused on getting to know her new professional home. And with a busy fall schedule at the museum, she's been focusing on streamlining administrative services and adding technological elements that make operating the county museum as efficient as possible.

It's all part of her strategy to get to know the region better and begin to understand the intricacies of keeping local history alive.

"The first year will focus on small things, but I've also been thinking of other ways to fundraise in addition to grants so we can raise money to expand the museum's amazing services to the community," Forde said. "As a historical society, we can show history and really make it move."

Forde walks past a photo by Minnesota photographer R.J. Kerns showing a rural 4-H scene. It's part of a larger exhibit called "The Unchosen Ones," and captures the spirit of kids who compete in livestock competitions but do not win.

"The boat is impressive and there's no denying that," she said, spreading her arms in a gesture of welcome. "But it's just the beginning of what we have to offer."

New at the museum
"Land to Table: Food Stories from Clay County" explores the history and stories associated with food in Clay County. "Whether it be Potato Days in Barnesville, spaghetti dinners in Dilworth, breweries in Moorhead, or the revival of



Photos by Alyssa Goelzer / The Forum

Laura Forde previously worked at the North Dakota Heritage Center and State Museum in Bismarck.

Native American cuisine throughout the Red River Valley, food plays an important role in all of our lives and plays a key role in our identities," museum staff wrote on their website. "Land to Table' highlights these and ways food has shaped the lives of Clay County residents."

Exhibition highlights include a Scandinavian collection of lefse-making equipment, some church cookbooks and videos explaining different foodways in Clay County.

PANGEA: Cultivate Our Cultures 2025
When: 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. on Nov. 15, 2025
Info: Pangea has become one of the community's most beloved culinary events. Featuring

local chefs, along with musicians, artists and merchants, this unique local tradition brings thousands to the museum for an international bazaar featuring live performances, music and an international food court. Admission is free.

Regular Hjemkomst Center admission rates are:
• Adults 18-64: \$12
• Seniors 65+: \$11
• Youth 5-17: \$8
• Children under 5: free

This article is part of a content partnership with The Arts Partnership, a nonprofit organization cultivating the arts in Fargo, Moorhead and West Fargo. For more information, visit <http://theartspartnership.net>.



Laura Forde shared that one of the things that impressed her the most about Historical and Cultural Society of Clay County is that the small staff continues to produce high-quality, professional exhibitions.