



Charles L. Sommers Alumni Association, Inc.

# REFLECTIONS



Supporting the mission and programs of Northern Tier National High Adventure.

FALL/WINTER 2016 EDITION



## Lodge Interpretive Center opens

By Dick Shank

Fulfilling a dream of former Base Director Sandy Bridges, the Lodge Interpretive Center was completed and opened at the August Rendezvous of the Sommers Alumni Association. The opening was a culmination of years of planning and work on the Lodge begun in 2004. Mike Holdgrafer spearheaded the restoration work on both the interior and exterior of the building, helped immeasurably by the vision and unsolicited generosity of Jim Sowell. Jim had fond memories of his experience there in the 1960's, and donated more than half the cost of the final Interpretive Center project. Along the way, the entire interior of the building was cleaned and varnished, new floor installed in the library, and the exterior stabilized with numerous log replacements, chinking, and staining. Countless hours were spent by dozens of SAA volunteers during this process over the ensuing decade.

The Interpretive Center was developed in collaboration with Split Rock Studios, a nationally

Photos by Mike Holdgrafer

recognized museum outfitter headquartered in Minnesota. They have done similar work for numerous state and national parks and monuments, including Chik-Wauk Lodge Museum on the Gunflint Trail, Tettegouche State Park Interpretive Center, Bois Forte Heritage Museum in Tower, Denali Park Interpretive Center, and many others. Charles L. Sommers Alumni Association volunteers met with the designers from Split Rock over more than two years to develop concepts and displays illuminating history of Native Americans, early European exploration, fur trade, logging, and mining. Natural history of the area including glacial history, fire history and wildlife are represented. History of Northern Tier from its inception to today, including canoe building and winter camping are highlighted. Dozens of artifacts were donated by volunteers.

The Interpretive Center will enhance program for Scouts and Venturers attending Northern Tier well into the future. Come see it yourself!



## From the President's canoe

By Chuck Rose

*If I had a million dollars...* Earlier this year, I asked Treasurer Eric Johnson how much (not including expenses such as newsletters, web site, etc.) the SAA has given to the Northern Tier program and staff since our beginning 24 years ago. His answer was that we were on track for a total of \$1,000,000 and change by the end of 2016. These donations fall into three broad categories: 1) staff awards such as paddles and packs, \$235,000, 2) scholarships, \$433,000, and 3) projects—lodge and cabins, \$395,000. This is really a milestone our membership can celebrate.

*If I had a million dollars...* I hope you don't get this song stuck in your head like I do now.

*If I had a million dollars...* I suppose we could do some estimates on the value of the sweat equity SAA member have contributed over the years. When I think about the worth of Dick Shank's medical contributions, the 1999 blowdown cleanup, Jim Barrot's forestry expertise, and all the seminars presented during staff training, I'm sure it would run into six figures, another source of pride.

*If I had a million dollars, I'd buy...* What should the SAA do with our next \$1,000,000 of donations? A few of my opinions follow. I really support raising the scholarship amounts from the current \$1000 per year.

We are already investing our funds from named scholarships to get a better return. Hopefully with income from the Triple Crown and Grand Slam awards plus investment income, we can make scholarship funding sustainable. Maintaining the staff awards as is should simply continue. In general, I'd only support infrastructure projects that are directly related to enhancing the staff experience. Contact me with your opinions. Whatever decisions are made, we will continue to have a profound impact on the staff and through them all those electronically-connected adolescents who need the peace and quiet of the canoe country wilderness.

**After reading this...** you are probably asking how you can contribute to the next million dollars. Making a donation is easy, you can just send a check in the amount of your choosing to Charles L. Sommers Alumni Association, Inc. (PO Box 428, Ely, Minnesota 55731), or you can donate online by visiting <http://crossingportages.holry.org/>. We are headed into the 2016 Crossing Portages giving campaign in which you will have more opportunities to learn about all that the SAA has accomplished with your help and more ways to give. Thanks!

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## Recipients of 2016 SAA scholarships announced

The names of the 2016 SAA's Seasonal Staff Scholarship Program recipients were announced by Dan Miller. Requirements for the scholarships are: complete two years on staff having fulfilled their terms of employment, enrolled as a student in good academic standing at an accredited post-secondary institution and receive the recommendations of management at Northern Tier.

The scholarship recipients are: Kassondra Baird, Michael Beeksma (Marshall Hollis), Nicholas Birkhimer, William Cuddy (Clifford J. Hanson Memorial), Patrick Darby, Ryan Elson, Elizabeth Geisinger, Noah Hale,

Sean Henkenius, Henry Higby, Daniel Koponen, James Landah (Christopher D. Breen Memorial), Kimberly Livers, Adam Long (Terry J. Wall Charles Sommers), John McKinney (Erickson Memorial), Matthew Meyer, Scott Pate (David Hyink), Madeline Penn (Butch Diesslin), Rachel Poppe, Isaak Ridge, Paul Rohrbach, Micah Stiel, Bailey Taylor, Mitchell Thompson (Friends of Tinnerman / Tinnerman Guide Association), Russell Wicklund and Charles Yates. Congratulations to all recipients and we look forward to your return to Northern Tier as staff and as alumni members of the association.

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## Newest endowed scholarship

By Chuck Rose

Dr. Marshall Hollis has donated \$25,000 to the SAA scholarship endowment. A new member of the Northern Tier Advisory committee, Marshall is active in Scouting at the local, council, national, and international level. He owns Hollis Pharmacy in Ripley, Mississippi.

At this past reunion, he was able to reconnect with Charlie Guides from his treks; Allen Rench in 1976 guided his crew in the Quetico and Jim Oliva in 1982 in Bissett, good conversation ensued.

Thank you Marshall.

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## 2016 George D. Hedrick Memorial "sweat equity" Award recipients

*By Cory "Godfrey" Kolodji*

This year's George D. Hedrick Memorial Volunteer Service Awards were presented at the 2016 Sommers Alumni Association Reunion banquet. The worthy recipients were Allen Rench and Alex Nepple. The Hedrick award was established in 1995 and honors the former Region Ten Executive, Canoe Base supporter, and Boy Scout historian George D. Hedrick who even wrote a book called "Canoe Base." Sometimes called the "sweat equity" award, it recognizes individuals, often Base Alumni, who have contributed to the health and wellbeing of the Northern Tier National High Adventure Program in varied ways over the long haul.

Allen and Alex both have served the Base, the staff, and the SAA for a long time, donating their particular talents, personal time, and vision. Allen Rench was a Charlie Guide in the 1970's, a "graduate" of the last Swamper group in 1974. You know the screamer, the death defying corner on the Griddle Lake ski trail? That was Allen and some colleagues. Rench has been a SAA director and is a past president of the Association. He has organized reunions. He was a driving force behind the Blowdown Cleanup at the Base. Also, he is the creator and curator of the Canoe Base Photo History

Project.

Alex Nepple is the man behind the Bytes. Thanks to Alex, SAA has a modern and functional online presence. He moved our membership database online and automated our high adventure awards. You can largely thank him for the photo contest and for online registration for reunions. He has also been an SAA board member and secretary. Many a reunion benefited from his presence, organization, and technical support. In addition, Alex worked with alumni from Philmont and the Florida Sea Base to establishing the Alumni Exchange Program. It is this program that runs the joint alumni treks/trips from the National High Adventure Base.

Allen and Alex could both be Silicon Valley tech tycoons. Instead they join the pantheon of past George D. Hedrick Award winners: Robert "Red" Renner, Allan Batterman, Craig Pendergraft, the late Ed Chapin, Gene Felton, the late Henry Bradlich, Cherie Bridges-Sawinski, Dick Shank, Mike Holdgrafer, Butch Diesslin, the late Bob Cary, the late Jack Osborn, Don Melander, Bill Erickson, Dave Hyink, Cory Kolodji, Mike McMahon, Real Berard and Nigel Cooper.

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## 2016 Reunion

*By Karl Huemiller*

As I look forward to spending time with family this holiday season, I look back on the great time I had with my North Woods family this past August. I want to thank everyone that was able to make it to the base for the reunion. With each passing reunion I remember the reasons I fell in love with the Base to begin with, and find more reasons to support the program year after year. With seventy five alumni and friends in attendance, it was great to see all of the familiar faces, rekindling old friendships and making some new ones. I was excited to see the recently finished Interpretive Center that we were able to build in the lodge with everyone's support. I enjoyed interacting with all of the amazing exhibits with everyone and look forward to the hearing the experience of the scouts next year.

The weather was perfect Saturday afternoon for

reconnecting in Ely at Whiteside Park over burgers and brats. Lots of reminiscing and time to get reacquainted with Ely. Over one hundred attended the banquet at Amici's Event Center which gave more time to reconnect and the opportunity to enjoy a fine meal. We had a wonderful speaker, Professor Emeritus UW-River Falls and Board Member of the North Star Museum of Boy Scouting and Girl Scouting Kurt Leichtle, who inspired us with stories from the life of Charles L. Sommers. To top it all off we raised \$5,000 for the staff scholarship fund at the silent auction.

As always it was tough to leave on Sunday morning. If you were not able to make it this year, I hope you will mark your calendar for the next reunion. To everyone else, thank you for the good times. I look forward to seeing you again the next time. Red-eye!!

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## Election results for board of directors announced

Congratulations to Blake Edwards, Cory Kolodji, Eric Peterson, and Don Richard on their election to the Charles L. Sommers Alumni Association, Inc.'s Board of Directors!

Their term begins January 1, 2017 and will serve until December 31, 2019.

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Award of Excellence: "Through the morning mist"  
by Patrick Darby

## 2016 SAA Northern Tier Staff Photo Contest

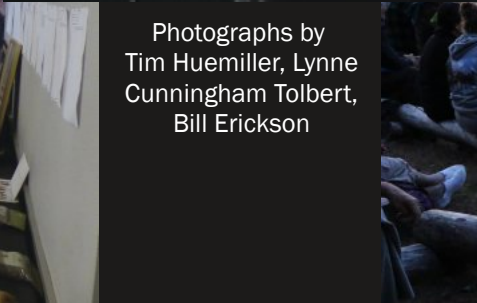
Award of Merit: "Boardwalk"  
by Russell Wicklund



Award of Merit: "Three scouts/friends/fishermen"  
by Aidan Farrell







Photographs by  
Tim Huemiller, Lynne  
Cunningham Tolbert,  
Bill Erickson



## Alumni work week tradition continues

By Dick Shank

Volunteers from the Charles L. Sommers Alumni Association continued a tradition of service and fun at the C. L. Sommers Base this spring, with sweat equity projects on the Welcome Cabin and teaching with our seasonal staff. Work Week actually predates the founding of the SAA, with building projects headed by Robert "Red" Renner, Butch Diesslin and others in the early 1990's. This year we focused on the Welcome Cabin, moved a few years ago to the new parking lot before construction of the new program center. This building is a one-room gorgeous hand-hewn log structure, but needed weatherproofing and roof repair. Led by alumnus and carpenter Neal Olson, rotted roof valleys were repaired, and windows and the entire interior were cleaned and varnished by Owen Gibbs, Tim Huemiller, Laura Damon, Melissa Mills, Ben Rutherford and Dick Shank. This was Neal's first return to the base since he guided here in the 1960's.

All trail staff receive Wilderness First Aid and CPR certification. Alumni contributing to that training this year included Kim Renner Bielawski, Erik Keeler, Chuck Rose and Spenser Moreland.

Many alumni participated in Seminar Day for the seasonal staff. This is an opportunity for some elective in-depth learning on topics not covered in formal staff training. Classes on canoe country ecology, Native American culture, birding, journaling, fishing, storm proofing, photography, navigation, shore lunch, glacial history, weather, paddling skills, route planning, night sky, Charles Sommers history, and voyageur songs were offered. Participating this year were Mike Holdgrafer, Karl Huemiller, Polly Carlson-Voiles, Butch Diesslin, Steve Niedorf, Cory Kolodji, Jim Barott, Chuck Rose, Chris Bursch, Allen Rench, Sandra Lee, Kathryn Farion, and Dick Shank. We invite interested alumni to participate with these or additional topics next year!

Photos by Tim Huemiller

Left: Owen Gibbs in new canoe repair building



Above: Neal Olson and Karl Huemiller working on Welcome Cabin roof



Below: Owen Gibbs, Chuck Rose, Neal Olson, Laura Damon, Karl Huemiller, Pedro Miller



Right: Mike Holdgrafer staining log ends of the Welcome Cabin



## On the Water: Four Souvenir Stones

By Steve Wingeier

*Every seven years,  
throughout my entire body,  
new cells replace the old*

*But still  
the muscles remember:*

*Silently dip the blade  
through the surface tension  
of the lake,  
dig deep  
to pull the water past,  
tightening every muscle in my body—  
a twist of the wrist  
to correct our course,  
rest a beat—  
scatter an arc of droplets  
like a skipping musical phrase  
as I reach forward  
again  
for my next stroke*

Quiet water  
reflecting still trees  
under calm sky:  
sunset on the lake,  
lichen on the rocks  
catching the last golden light  
of a hard day's  
paddle

### About the poem

John King, 1964-1968 wrote: This poem was written by my brother-in-law, Steve Wingeier, following a canoe trip we took in the BWCAW a few years ago. He was just recovering from cancer and we thought of it as a therapeutic journey. The cancer is in complete remission. The journey may or may not have had anything to do with his recovery, but the poem is a testament to the transformative power of a canoe journey. Hol-Ry!

Stars between stars—  
bright dust  
horizon to horizon,  
studded with brighter specks

Cloudy streak of the galaxy  
splitting the dark halves of the sky

Shooting spark of a meteor—

No dark gap unbridged  
by distant light  
as the gaze plunges deeper  
into the night

Thank you, restless wind,  
for your thundering hiss  
through the trees,  
the panicky flap of the tarp,  
salvos of rain against our tent-fly  
all night— now  
blow these rain-burdened clouds away  
down the lake, unsheathe  
the freshly sharpened blades of the stars  
and lie down at last  
to rest  
before the sun comes and we crawl  
out of our sleeping bags,  
eat breakfast and paddle out  
into the morning



Interpretive center Okpik display. Photo by Mike Holdgrafer.



Interpretive center dry aquarium. Photo by Mike Holdgrafer.



Charles L. Sommers Alumni Association, Inc.  
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( Address Label )

### Calendar of events

**Canoecopia – Madison, Wisconsin**  
March 10 – 12, 2017

**Alumni Work Week – Northern Tier**  
May 25 – June 6, 2017

For further information, see the website at  
<http://www.holry.org>

### SAA Officers

*President:* Chuck Rose, [REDACTED],  
[REDACTED]

*Vice President:* Owen Gibbs, [REDACTED]

*Corporate Secretary:* Cory Kolodji,  
[REDACTED]

*Treasurer:* Eric Johnson,  
[REDACTED]

### Reflections Newsletter

*Editorial Staff:* Bill Erickson, [REDACTED]

*Technical Advisor:* Alex Nepple

*Advisor:* Chuck Rose