



Norse Valley Lodge 5-491

Nytt Notes March 2026

Interview with our new Lodge President Lois Gruetzmacher...

After our past Norse Valley Lodge President Judy Ghastin stepped away from governing board activities in January, it's time to meet our new incoming President Lois Gruetzmacher.

Here is a transcript of my interview with Lois in January of this year.

How would you describe your role as President and were there other positions that you served?

As President I'll ensure that Lodge operations continue, for example, Board meetings, Lodge meetings, and special activities. I'll work with and support members of the board in their chosen/assigned areas and support compliance with International Sons of Norway requirements. I hope to keep the Lodge energized and foster a welcoming, enriching, and energetic atmosphere for current and future members.

For the past four years, I have coordinated the annual Lutefisk dinner at LaSure's Banquet Hall in Oshkosh. I have been on the Board for about 6 years and previously was the Cultural and Sports Medal Director.

Can you talk about your childhood / family?

I grew up in the countryside of Mondovi, WI, a small farming community about 20 miles southwest of Eau Claire. With two (much) older brothers and no sisters, I learned to work on the farm alongside my dad and brothers. I was heavily involved with 4-H so along with what my mother taught me, I learned to garden, cook, sew, knit, crochet... all the more domestic skills.



How long have you been connected with the Sons of Norway?

I joined the Norse Valley Lodge about eight years ago.

How did you get connected with the Norse Valley lodge?

A friend of mine who had recently discovered her Norwegian heritage had learned about Norse Valley and encouraged me to go to a meeting with her.

Please talk about your Norwegian heritage...

All of my maternal and paternal ancestors came from Norway- most from the Sognefjord area. The Tang farm, where some of my paternal ancestors came from, is still operational and is located on the shore of Lake Hafslo. My DNA testing revealed that I am 97% Norwegian.

What are your activities / interests when not leading the Norse Valley Lodge?

I am the Music Coordinator at All Saints Lutheran Church in Oshkosh and play guitar for one service per month there. I love to do Hardanger embroidery and Rosemaling. As the winter temps start to moderate and we get closer to Spring, I'll be tapping maple trees in my neighborhood and boiling it down for syrup. In the summer I'll be gardening and enjoying Lake Butte des Morts with my kayak and stand-up paddle board. Although my mountain bike racing days are over, I still love biking on the

trails. My best evenings are spent around a fire in the fire pit.

Please tell me about any travel you have already taken or your future travel plans to the Nordic countries.

I have been to Norway once - in May of 2024. I plan to go again, this time with my two children and their families to visit the Sognefjord area where our roots lie.

What is one thing that makes you somewhat unique or is something no one knows about you but you are proud of?

I was the 1974 Betty Crocker Family Leader of Tomorrow of Mondovi High School! I have been retired since 2012 after a 30-year career as a Public Health Nurse. I have a Bachelor's Degree in Nursing from UW-Oshkosh and also a Gerontological Nursing Certificate from the same school.

Next Lodge Meetings are as scheduled at Our Saviour's Lutheran Church located at 3009 North Meade Street in Appleton.

Saturday February 21st at 6:00 p.m.

Board member, LeAnn Ostrem Knoeck will present a pictorial tour of the famous Thomas Dambo trolls she has visited so far. I believe it was in May of last year that Wisconsin received its' first Dambo Troll which is located in Wauwatosa. She stands over 40 feet tall and named Mama Rosa. There are over 150 trolls scattered across the world with 40 located in the United States.

LeAnn will have pictures and lots more information about the Dambo Trolls on February 21st.

Saturday March 21st Noon-ish:

We will be marching as an organization in the St Patrick's parade in New London. Stuart and Jo Norman will provide their truck for the parade. We will be unveiling our new Norse Valley Sons of Norway parade banner to advertise our group, educate the public that it was actually the Vikings that founded Dublin Ireland, and get some fresh air exercise. The parade route is $\frac{3}{4}$ of a mile in length. Theme for this year's parade has to do is Shamrocks so green it up as much as possible in your attire. Try to arrive around Noon or 12:15 p.m. to help decorate the Norman's truck.

As a meeting place, look for our familiar faces at the corner of Law and Division Street where we will stage the Norman's truck. The parade starts at 1:00 p.m. and we start marching at approximately 1:30 p.m.

Saturday April 18th at 6:00 p.m.

It's our annual "Chili cook-off and the Cookie bake-off" contest so get those award winning recipes out and prepare enough food so our Lodge meeting attendees can taste test and award grand prizes. Linda Hash won last year's golden ladle for her Chili recipe and Sharron Huss won the golden spatula for her scrumptious cookies.

Sunday May 17th at Noon: Syttende Mai Picnic at Dercks Park

It only happens about once in ten years but our Picnic celebrating Norway's Constitution Day actually falls on May 17th. The Lodge will provide lefse, hot dogs, and ice cream, just like we were in the middle of Oslo. We will have trivia contests and field games for children of all ages to have fun. All we ask is that you bring a side dish and a smile on your face.

Dercks Park is located at the corner of Kensington Drive and Guyette Drive, just west of highway 441 in south east Appleton (1/2 way between Menards and Target Stores).

The next Feeding America volunteer event is coming up on March 18th!

Please mark your calendars for **Wednesday March 18th from 12:30 a.m. to 3:00 p.m.** to help the less fortunate in Northeast Wisconsin at Feeding America. Norse Valley members can volunteer at Feeding America on the north side of Appleton, at that time. We will pack boxes with food items.

Please contact Norse Valley member Linda Hash, (lhash@new.rr.com), our volunteer coordinator, if you would like to help out on Wednesday, March 18th.

“My Granddad helped rescue RAF Crew Members over Norway in World War II”

On a remote mountain side in Norway is a memorial which remembers a World War Two RAF pilot and a daring escape. It is dedicated to British Airman Wilfred Surplice, 30, a RAF Pilot from Essex, England who sacrificed himself in November 1944 so his crew could bail out. Four of the crew made it back to Britain thanks to Norwegian resistance workers like Espen Thronsen's grandfather, Einar.

Espen Thronsen, now 53, is from Skien in southern Norway, says it is important to remember "a story about people helping others, knowing that they can be killed". They risked their lives to rescue Allied forces because "the English wanted to help the Norwegians in their fight against the Germans", he explained.



Espen's grandfather, Einar Thronsen joined the Norwegian resistance as a wireless operator in 1940, soon after German troops invaded neutral Norway.

He worked for NRK - the national public radio station - which meant he had German papers allowing him to freely travel around the Skien area.

"By 1944, he had become the boss of the wireless operation in the area,"

said Espen.

The 6 members of the British Special Operations Executive arms and equipment resupply mission took off from Chelmsford, England on the 2nd of November, 1944, heading to a secret rendezvous spot in Norway.

As the British plane neared its drop zone, it was struggling to cope in the bitter cold and thick snow showers.

British Pilot Commander Wilfred Surplice ordered the six men aboard to bail out and the icebound plane smashed into the mountain.

Espen Thronsen said: "Squadron Leader Kenneth Bolton, Pilot Officer Robert Chapin, and Warrant Officer Robert Dalton jumped in a snowstorm and got together almost at once and were soon joined by Lt Michael Hicks, the SOE liaison officer" [who had also been on the plane].

"The evaders wandered around for a couple of days in the wilderness until they found a cottage, put a fire on and someone from the resistance found them."

The other two survivors were not so lucky; they were captured and imprisoned by the Germans.

For the better part of two months, the four men were taken on night time marches, boat trips, car journeys - and left in remote huts for days at a time as the Norwegian resistance organized their return to England.

Espen Thronsen's grandfather was put in charge of the escape from November 16th, driving a wood-burning car, commandeering a taxi, and using horse-drawn sledges, to continue their journey south to Bamble, on the Norwegian coast.

"On about November 22nd, they were given to another party of resistance workers who shipped them out to a small island," he said.



Einar on the left and his four rescued British officers while on the run

They had to flee their camp after the Germans located it, killing two Norwegians.

"Then they were stuck for almost a month as they waited for a boat to take them to Sweden."

The first rescue boat was forced to turn back due to the appalling weather conditions.

"But the second attempt was successful, they made it to Sweden and on January 2nd, 1945, they were flown to Scotland," he said.

Just a few days later, Einar, his wife and little daughter fled the country on the same boat.

Espen Thronsen said: "The Germans were finding out who had helped [the resistance] so they needed to get away, because if the Gestapo got hold of them, my grandfather would have been tortured and given up names and they didn't dare stay for that."

The family did not return to Norway until after Victory in Europe was declared in May 1945.

Espen inherited the post-war letters his Grandfather received from the four rescued British airmen.

"They wanted to help my Grandfather after the war, Norway was very poor, so they sent him chocolates for his daughter and told him how much they appreciated his help," he said.

Let's meet one of Norway's Seven Natural Wonders

Saltstraumen

Just north of the Arctic Circle near Bodø, experience Saltstraumen, the world's strongest maelstrom (oceanic whirlpools). More than 105,000 billion gallons of water rush through the strait between Saltenfjord and Skjerstadjord at nearly 25 miles per hour to create 30-foot spinning whirlpools every six hours. Since this whirlpool is a tidal current, Saltstraumen is strongest just after the new and full moon. Experience this incredible phenomenon by land from the bridge Saltstraumbua or by water in an inflatable boat.



Saltstraumen has existed for about two to three thousand years. The current is created when the tide tries to fill Skjerstad Fjord. The height difference between the sea level and the fjord inside can be up to 3 feet, 3 inches. When the current turns, there is a period when the strait is navigable.

Whirlpools of the maelstrom of Saltstraumen, Nordland, Norway

Attention Facebook Users

Be sure to Follow our lodge's Facebook page ([@norsevalley](#)) and check in regularly to Like and Share our posts if you happen to miss them in your feed.

The more our posts are Shared and Liked, the more exposure our lodge gets which is great advertising for us. Don't forget that our website [norsevalley.org](#) is a great place to find out about upcoming events and check out photos from past events.

Got a question? Send an email to norsevalley@gmail.com.

If you have any questions or concerns about lodge activities, please contact Lois Gruetzmacher at gmacher@charter.net or 920-527-1337.