

KNIFE RIVER HERITAGE



& CULTURAL CENTER

October 2025

By Paul von Goertz

KRHCC BOARD MEMBER

PO Box 240 • 180 Marina Road

Knife River, MN 55609

info@krhcc.org

CELEBRATE!

Restoration of depot and fish tug IS complete!

Who would have thought 8 years ago that....

- The Lake County Historical Society would gift CRUSADER II to the Knife River (KR) community.
- The KRRC, a non-profit, would agree to accept ownership of the boat until a non-profit heritage center could be created.
- Randy Ellestad would coordinate moving CRUSADER II from Lighthouse Point in Two Harbors (TH) to KR. City of Two Harbors would prep the site for the move, KR Marina provide marine hydraulic trailer, Mike Ostman the truck and THPD escort to city limits – all at no cost to KR.
- Eric Thomas, president/owner of Barker's Island Marina Sailboats, Inc., the company that manages the KR marina, would agree to store CRUSADER II for three years until a site for the KRHCC could be found, and move the fish tug three times all at no cost: once from Two Harbors to KR, marina to KRHCC site, from location on site to shelter slab.



Photos above: CRUSADER II before and after restoration. Photos credit: Jim Allert

- The non-profit KRRC would agree to be the steward for the tug until a non-profit could be formed to restore and display it. Once the KRHCC was established as a non-profit in 2017, the KRRC would sell the boat to the KRHCC for \$1.
- Randy Ellestad, owner of the KR depot, would agree to sell the depot to the KRHCC for \$1.

- The Regional Rail Authority would agree to lease the proposed KR heritage center site for 20 years at \$1 a year. The lease would be renewable.
- A local resident would offer to gift the fledgling KRHCC \$20,000 provided it was matched with local donations.
- The KRHCC would request the KRRC provide the match; KRRC votes “yes”.
- Mona Linden, a gifted numbers person, would agree to serve as CFO for the KRHCC; later elected to KRHCC board (continues to serve!)
- Larry Ronning, recently retired general contractor and board member, would agree to serve as volunteer general contractor to restore depot and give volunteers access to his tool trailer.



Photos above: Depot and freight building before and after.
Photo credits: Left - Todd Lindahl and right - Paul von Goertz

- Wieme family of KR would agree to sponsor a community flagpole, flag and night lighting at the KRHCC site.
- Krista Mosby, a Wieme family member, would agree to replace the community flag as it weathers, which has been yearly.
- Two Harbors American Legion Post would agree to sponsor at the KRHCC site a 4' x 3 ½' x 9" deep granite memorial to Lake County veterans, including those who served in the U. S. Merchant Marine.
- Adolph Ojard Jr. would agree to sponsor night lighting for the veteran's memorial (Adolph Sr. served in the Merchant Marine during WWII).
- The Lake Superior Railroad Museum (The Depot) would donate an order board pole.
- A collector of railroad memorabilia would donate the order board pole operating mechanism (by law non-functioning).



- Coop Light & Power of Lake County would raise and set the flagpole and order board pole at no cost.

Photo left: CL&P raises the flagpole at the KRHCC site.

Photo credit: Paul von Goertz

- That 'Lovin Lake County,' the county's marketing arm, would help offset promotional costs of KRHCC events that generate income for the KRHCC.
- That the KRHCC would enjoy the support and encouragement of those who could embrace the vision of the KRHCC.
- That more than 30 volunteers would restore the depot under Larry Ronning's direction from early 2018 through fall of 2023.
- David Grong, KRHCC board member, would volunteer to complete depot and freight building interior and freight building exterior.
- Anne-Lù Hovis would agree to produce the monthly KRHCC newsletter from text and photos provided, from May of 2019 to present
- Doug Hill, related to the Larsmont Hill family of boat builders, who built CRUSADER II, would donate two summers living on site to help restore the exterior and interior of the fish tug.
- John Hill would allow the KRHCC to place his 5th-wheel camper on site so that his cousin, Doug Hill, would be able to help restore CRUSADER II over the summers of 2023 and 2025.
- Larry Ronning, a bonafide boatwright, would volunteer to oversee the restoration of CRUSADER II.
- Todd Lindahl, KRHCC historian and archeologist, would build and loan to the KRHCC railroad dioramas of both north and south KR rail yards, advise on RR history wall and depot colors, contribute to the KRHCC newsletter, give historical programs at the depot and replicate the depot agent's office in the freight building.
- Duane Madison would have the insight to salvage maple flooring from the original depot and make a sturdy table for Todd Lindahl's diorama of the KR south rail yard.
- Sponsorships would cover cost of depot peripherals: order board pulls, freight wagon, 11 custom windows, coal stove, ticket counter gate, self-standing kiosk, period storage cabinet and phone, depot agent's chair, and our website.
- The Two Harbors American Legion Post would agree to perform a "first flag raising" ceremony of the KR community flagpole complete with Honor Guard in 2019.



Photo above: First flag raising ceremony conducted by the Two Harbors American Legion. Photo credit: Jim Allert

- Foundation support: IRRR would provide more than \$100,000 in match funds; Match funds secured by Lloyd K. Johnson Foundation; LaBounty Family Foundation; Two Harbors Area Fund, and Co-op Light & Power of Lake County, as well as many private donations.
- Local resident would respond to KRHCC plea for help with funding CRUSADER II shelter with gift of \$20,000.
- By request of the KRHCC, Lake County Sheriff's Department provides security cameras during construction periods.
- Noatum Norwegian wooden boat workshop and school would relocate to KR from Duluth, strengthening recognition of KR as a center of Norwegian boat building and restoration.
- Red town house neighbors would provide vigilance for unwanted activity at KRHCC site during depot restoration.
- Two Harbors Lumber would donate gallons of white paint for CRUSADER II's interior and exterior.
- MN DNR would agree to donate six steamboat bollards from Johnson slip in KR harbor for KRHCC landscaping.
- Randy Ellestad would donate concrete curbs to define KRHCC public green space from parking lot.
- Neil Atkins, former Duluth City council member and Save Our Ship (SOS) board president, would successfully arrange for ownership of Viking ship LEIF ERIKSON be transferred from City of Duluth to SOS.
- Randy Ellestad, board member of both KRHCC and SOS, would negotiate relocation of Viking ship from Duluth to KRHCC site.
- Jeff Foster Trucking would bring ERIKSON to KR at no cost to SOS.



Photo right: Jeff Foster Trucking brings LEIF ERIKSON to Knife River. Photo credit: Paul von Goertz

- More than \$10,000 dollars in donations would be received from outside Area Code 218, mostly from people who love the North Shore and/or value the work of the KRHCC in preserving KR history and culture.
- Lake Superior Marine Museum Association would lease a period-correct engine for CRUSADER II with historical ties to KR until year 2043, at which time the lease can be renewed.
- Mike Ojard and Rich Ojard, both third generation from founding fishing families, advise on reconstructing fish tug interior and donate net lifting apparatus and other components related to a working fish tug.
- Lee and Jim Bujold would come up with a sweet corn fundraiser for the KRHCC, which to date has brought in more than \$8,000 - with the Bujolds' donating all the corn.
- Michelle Gratton, owner of 47 Degrees, an art gallery and gift shop in KR, would donate almost \$1,000 to the KRHCC through a holiday sales promotion where a portion of sales would go to the KRHCC.
- The North Shore Scenic Railroad would donate all Troll Train fares collected during Julebyen to KR's non-profits – the KRRC and KRHCC.

- The property owner on which the Troll Train skit take place would grant access to skit actors.
- 24 individuals would cover the cost to purchase and plant 15 Legacy Trees to honor or memorialize a loved one.
- Lake County Soil & Water would apply for and receive a state grant to cover \$10,000 of the cost to create a swale to control site run-off.
- The Lake County Board of Commissioners, and especially our commissioner, Rich Sve, would enthusiastically support the KRHCC and authorize \$4,000 in county rec funds per year to help maintain KRHCC public green space and amenities for visitors to the KRHCC.
- The KRHCC would receive cash donations of more than \$50,000 in amounts of \$15 - \$5,000.
- Odyssey Resorts and their 150 homeowners would donate \$10,000 to the KRHCC.
- The Minnesota state legislature would provide a \$200K grant to SOS to help build a shelter over the Viking ship.

All the recognitions mentioned give testimony that the creation of the KRHCC was a total community effort and implemented through a focused and passionate board of directors who never lost sight of the goal to preserve and present the history and culture of Knife River. Congratulations and my heartfelt thanks to my colleagues on the board: Larry Ronning, Mona Linden, Randy Ellestad, Todd Lindahl, David Grong, Bob Entzion and our genealogist, Duane Madison.

As I put together the “Who would have thought....” list , it occurred to me all the individuals and organizations said “Yes!” when asked to support the KRHCC. Sometimes to reach a goal all you need to do is ask for some help!

Writer’s note: there are undoubtedly people and organizations I may have overlooked in this story. My sincere apologies, but I am about to enter my 8th decade!

OPINION

How close did we come to losing our heritage?



Now that the KRHCC has restored its two icons and can provide a summarized history through nine interpretive displays at the KRHCC site, we can relax a bit knowing that the history and culture of our town is on display for the world to see.

Every time I see a family on the CRUSADER II viewing deck intently reading our interpretive displays and studying the boat, I have a deep sense of gratitude for all who made the KRHCC possible, and knowing our history is of interest and value to our visitors.

Photo left: Visitors learn of the KR commercial fishing heritage from the five interpretive displays at the CRUSADER II shelter. Photo credit: Paul von Goertz

During researching and writing the five interpretive displays that summarize our commercial fishing heritage, I chose to get the history of our earliest fishermen, the Indigenous peoples, from them direct.

I was able to contact an elder of the Grand Portage Band of Lake Superior Chippewa who was very helpful. He was not in good health and nearly blind, but his mind was very sharp. He answered all my questions about Indigenous fishing from near historic times to the present, how and where they fished and the evolution from dugouts to birchbark to fishing methods past to present.

At the end of our conversation, he thanked me for my interest in KR's earliest fishers and reminded me why there is little written history of Indigenous peoples as recorded by them. The two reasons that stood out in my mind are that Indigenous history was passed along by word of mouth. When Europeans arrived in North America, the Indigenous peoples did not have the resistance to the diseases the Europeans brought with them. Tribal elders died and with them tribal history.

The second take-away on lack of Indigenous history as recorded by Indigenous people is they did not have a written language as we know it. Thus, much of Indigenous history has been written by non-Indigenous people.

Now I look at how KR history has been recorded. There are two credible histories of which I am aware. One was written in the 1970s by "The Descendants of Knife River's Original Settlers", and the second a history by Todd Lindahl, KRHCC historian and archeologist.

The history as recorded by descendants of original settlers was given to Mary and me by Serona Kendall Slotness, our neighbor. She would often visit us and share her memories of KR as a member of the Kendall family, all of which was very interesting and often humorous. I can thank Serona for sparking my interest in KR history. I don't know how many spiral-bound copies of the "original settlers" books were printed, but I feel fortunate to have a copy and use it as a reference source for the KRHCC newsletter.

The second history of KR, written by Todd Lindahl, is an excellent source of information and I use it as a very credible reference for stories I write for the newsletter. Todd told me he had five copies printed and spiral bound. He gave copies to individuals (me included) and a copy to the TH library. While it's great to have these histories to draw upon, we are now in the electronic age and people want their information in digitalized form. With current technology, information can be sent around the world in seconds. Each issue of the KRHCC newsletter is posted on our web site: KRHCC.org and so can be accessed by the world.

We are fortunate in KR that so many second and third generations have contributed to preserving our history and only needed to be asked to share their families' histories in words and photos. Since the KRHCC was formed in 2017, I have had the opportunity to talk with a half dozen or more second-generation KR "elders", all at the time in their 80s and 90s. Some of the conversation I cut short as the elder was becoming frustrated by lack of recall.

The third generation from our founding fishing families has been very helpful in coming forth with KR history as experienced by their family members. These are all people now in their

late 60s, 70s and early 80s. A dozen or more have contributed their stories and family photos which are now part of our interpretive displays and KRHCC newsletters.

Surprising to me is that so much KR history was with individuals and really all that was needed was for them to be asked to share, and with the knowledge it would be centralized and secured within the KRHCC.

So how close did we come to losing our history and culture? I'd say closer than we would like to admit. Give credit to the KRHCC for being the rallying point for people to recognize the value of the town's history, and that of their families, and to support it with volunteer time and donations, and sharing of memories.

Everyone has a theory on what sank the *Fitzgerald*. Here's mine...

With the 50th anniversary of the sinking of the *Edmund Fitzgerald* on November 10 of this year, many articles and documentaries are appearing. They are all very interesting, but I have my own theory, some of it firsthand from sources I consider reliable.

The first is from Captain Dudley "Packy" Pacquette who was on the lake as skipper of the *Wilfred Sykes* the night the Fitz went down. He later wrote a book, "The Night the Fitzgerald Went Down".

I was a member of the Downtown Duluth Rotary Club for 30 years. At the time I was a member, the club had more than 250 members, mostly business owners and professionals. With that esteemed membership it could attract some very good speakers.

In November of 2001, the club asked Captain Pacquette to speak on the sinking of the Fitz. He arrived the day before he was to speak, and so as president of the club at the time, I offered to take him to breakfast, to which he agreed. I asked a friend, David Stout from Larsmont, a fellow boat nerd, to join us.

"Packy" was very cordial and talkative. He gave two reasons why the Fitz sank. First, Captain McSorley of the Fitz believed the marine weather forecast and took the most direct and usual route to the Soo, which took the boat closer to the south shore. This would maximize the "fetch" of the impending NW gale over the lake. The "fetch" is the distance waves have to build, and so the Fitz would be exposed to the greatest fury of the lake.

Packy said he studied the weather maps and concluded the low pressure sweeping out of the Rockies had considerable intensity. He left from the same dock as the Fitz about an hour earlier. He chose to follow a longer, but safer route to the Soo by staying closer to the north shore and ducking in behind Isle Royale, and by doing so reduce the wave fetch. A wise decision.

Second take-away from Packy was he felt McSorley was "pushing the Fitz too hard" into the rolling seas and should have reduced speed. McSorley said in a radio transmission to other ships in the area and at the Soo that he did reduce speed, but apparently Packy felt not enough. Packy speculated the increased stress on the hull contributed to a hull fracture and so she broke up.

My second credible source, in my opinion, is a naval architect/engineer employed at Great Lakes Engineering in River Rouge, MI, where and when the Fitz was built in 1958. The Fitz was credited for being the largest bulk carrier on the Great Lakes at that time. He was also asked to speak to our club at a November meeting. I can't recall his name, but he said the Fitz was well built and doubted the boat broke in half on the surface, but rather as it descended.

Photo right: The *Edmund Fitzgerald* fully loaded with 26,000 tons of taconite pellets as she may have appeared when she left Duluth on November 9, 1975. Photo credit: Public Domain.



McSorley acknowledged several deck vents had been carried away by the seas. The naval architect felt the intrusion of water through these vents was more than McSorley realized. McSorley had commented to the skipper of the *Arthur M. Anderson* that was behind the Fitz, that he (McSorley) had never seen such large waves on Lake Superior and they were breaking over the length of the boat. It might have been that the Fitz was sinking deeper and deeper into the water, and from McSorley's lower perspective he could see the full magnitude of the waves being driven by 50 mph winds. He also acknowledged the boat had taken on a list and all six pumps were operating.

The engineer's hypothesis was that a huge wave rolled over the forward section of the boat and with the weight of the wave, and added weight of the water in its hold, it simply lost buoyancy and began its descent bow first to the bottom.

Earlier this year, I watched a History Channel documentary on "shipwreck mysteries," or a title something like that. One of the stories was on the Fitz, and I was particularly interested because each of the shipwrecks mentioned relied on a forensic study of the ship's remains to unravel the mystery surrounding the sinking. The documentary was made in 2006 and was said to be the most recent (and last?) investigation using the most current underwater investigative technology. It was also at this time the Fitz's bell was recovered and replaced with a replica.

The findings of 2006 dive team, which was conducted robotically, seemed to support what the naval architect alluded to. The 730-foot Fitz did not break up on the surface, but rather when it hit the bottom at 530 feet. To support this, the 2006 team noted the deep trench the boat left on the bottom, which would indicate she powered her way to the bottom after



losing buoyancy from a large wave. The team also documented the mid-section of the boat was crumpled metal which they conclude meant that the section collapsed on itself from the impact of the boat striking the bottom bow first, much like a folded accordion.

Image left: The Fitz graphically depicted as she rests on the bottom of Lake Superior.

Image credit: Public Domain

Finally, the after half of the boat is upside down and a distance from the bow half. The 2006 team surmised that the torque of the still churning ship's propeller was sufficient to turn the aft half upside down.

So that's what I think happened to the Fitz based on two sources I feel are credible, and a forensic study using the underwater technology current to 2006, all of which tend to support what I contend happened to the Fitz.

A parallel shipwreck, in part, to the Fitz?

In April of 1914, the 239' *Benjamin Noble* left the Soo loaded to its anchor pockets with a load of steel rail. It rode the following seas generated by a northeast gale when it approached the Duluth entry at night, when the captain noticed one of the kerosene pier lights was out, perhaps put out by the thundering seas. The dilemma he faced was to enter the safety of the harbor by steering to the left or right of the one light.

Photo right: Believed the last photo taken of *Benjamin Noble* overloaded with iron rails. Photo credit: Paul von Goertz collection



Rather than chance the 50/50 odds, he apparently chose to turn around and head for Two Harbors. About a mile from Two Harbors, while heading into ferocious head seas, people from shore and at least one person from Knife River saw the boat's lights go out. Days later boat debris appeared on Park Point. Of the 18 or so crew, there were no survivors.

For many years the *Noble* was a "ghost ship" of Lake Superior. Then in 2004 it was discovered in 246' of water by a dive team using side-scanning sonar. One of the members of the team was Ken Merryman. He wintered his boat in KR and so I got to know him because of our common interest in shipwreck diving.

Ken surmised the boat, while still till under power during its descent, plowed a long and deep trench in the lake bottom. This would indicate that the *Noble*, like the Fitz, took a huge wave that washed its deck, and in this case tearing off hatch covers, causing the boat to take on water and lose buoyancy. Ken said the wheelhouse of the *Noble* was totally smashed in, either from the huge bow wave that raked her or from hitting the bottom with such force.

While we so often think of the cause of a shipwreck as having been holed, it can be just a simple matter of losing buoyancy.

Get your Julebyen train tickets early!

During Julebyen weekend the North Shore Scenic Railroad (NSSR) provides trains to and from Knife River on the **Julebyen Express**, and optional trips on the **Troll Train** to Troll Canyon for those inspired to search for mischievous trolls.

For **Julebyen Express times, fares and tickets** go to www.DuluthTrains.com

Troll Train times, fares and tickets are available only at the KR train depot both days of Julebyen starting at 9:00 AM Saturday and 10 AM Sunday. Trains depart at 11 AM and noon both days of Julebyen. It's a 45-minute round trip ride to Troll Canyon. It is suggested that persons intending to ride a Troll Train purchase tickets early in the day.

Dome car seating available at an additional charge. No ATM on site. Food and cocoa for sale in Knife River depot.

Two ticket options

Main Level Seats:

Adults - \$15

Children through age 12 - \$10

Children 3 and under - FREE

Dome Car Seats:

Adults - \$20

Children through age 12 - \$15

Children 3 and under - FREE



Photo above: Dome cars offer 360-degree panorama viewing and living room seating.

KRHCC is gifted with a print of a prized poster.

The KRHCC recently received a print of a rare 1927 Duluth Missabe & Iron Range Railroad (DM&IR) safety poster from the collection of railroad memorabilia of William (Bill) DeRoche of KR. The poster depicts a DM&IR 2-8-2 Mikado locomotive under full steam. It was the workhorse of the railroad. First developed in the 1860s, the 2-8-2 was the largest road engine heading into the 1900s. It had the tractive effort required to pull heavy freight.



Photo left: Bill DeRoche stands by the 1927 Linden safety poster donated to the KRHCC. Photo credit: Randy Ellestad

The numbering refers to the specific wheel arrangement: two leading wheels in a front truck, eight driving wheels, and two trailing wheels in a rear truck. This configuration is also known as the "Mikado" or "Mike" type, named after the first locomotives of this design that were built for a Japanese railway. The leading truck provides guidance, the eight driving wheels provide power, and the trailing truck allows for a larger firebox, which increases steam production and power.

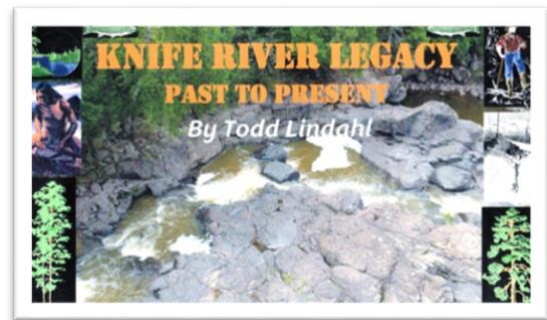
The artist is identified only as "Linden", who according to Randy Ellestad, also wrote safety articles for the railroad. There was apparently no pattern for when safety posters were commissioned, but all railroad facilities received them during the history of the DM&IR. Bill DeRoche is a longtime Knife River resident with a lifelong passion for railroading. He has a large and detailed HO model railroad in his home that is quite remarkable. Bill is a former volunteer conductor for the North Shore Scenic Railroad.

Thank you, Bill DeRoche, for this poster that now graces a KR depot wall!

Take in another Todd Lindahl "don't want to miss" program!

Todd Lindahl, KRHCC historian archeologist, and KRHCC board member, has researched and written another outstanding program, this time on the history of the Knife River watershed from archeological times to the present, with all the impacts of natural and human events.

Image right: Title page of Todd Lindahl's most recent program. Image credit: Todd Lindahl



Todd asked about 20 people from KR (including me) to take in the program and critique it prior to hitting the road with it. The "dry run" was at the KR depot on Thursday, October 16. It was about 90 minutes of fact-packed information that left many of us longtime KR'ers wondering why we weren't aware of a fraction of what Todd had to say. We learned we live in a very significant archeological and historical area. Todd has titled his program Knife River Legacy – Past to Present.

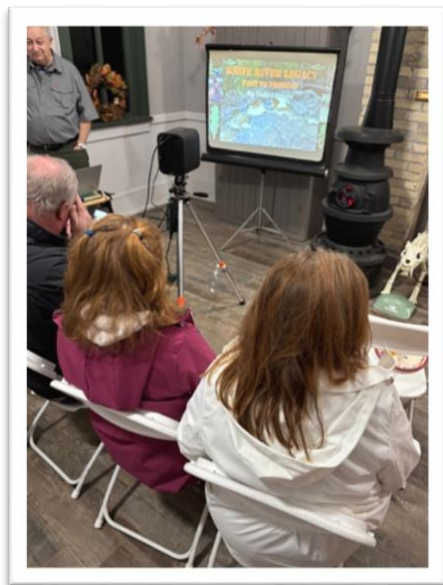


Photo left: Todd addresses those invited to critique his latest program. Photo credit: Paul von Goertz

Here is his description of the program as written by Todd:

The Knife River is one of the most important rivers along the American north shore of Lake Superior. People have continuously lived along the river for thousands of years to the present-day making use of the resources found there. Among these resources are fish, copper, timber, and animals such as beavers that are attracted to the water.

Following a long tradition of fishing by Indigenous people, The American Fur Company established a

commercial fish collection station near the mouth of the Knife River in 1837. Historic-period copper prospecting and mining followed the Treaty of La Point in 1854. Timber harvesting and the establishment of the village of Knife River grew in 1898 with the arrival of a logging railroad.

The program will present changes in the river and its tributaries from post-glacial times to the present.

Photo right: Todd stands by a guest who thought the program was a bit long. Actually, the guest was part of a Halloween theme Todd used for the “dry run.” Photo credit: Paul von Goertz

For those who may not know Todd, here is his bio as requested by me: “I have been intensely involved in historical and archaeological work since 1967 to this very day. This involves research, in the field excavations, documentation, teaching, and consulting.

I have done consulting work for various government agencies such as the U. S. Forest Service, National Park Service, Minnesota Historical Society, county and private historical societies, municipal entities and others. I have also worked with many colleges and public schools as well as cultural resource management firms. I work closely with the Duluth Archaeology Center and UMD in teaching archaeology field school students. In 2022, I was awarded the Hill/Lewis Award by the Minnesota Archaeological Society for archaeology.

I have presented over two hundred historical/archaeological programs over a 30-year span. And I’ve done restoration/interpretive work for the Lake County Historical Society and the Knife River Heritage & Cultural Center, to mention a couple”.

Two upcoming dates of Todd’s program “Knife River Legacy – Past to Present” are as follows:

- Tuesday, November 18
Advocates for the Knife River Watershed
Duluth Town Hall
Homestead Road
6:30 PM
- Monday, November 24
Northern Lakes Archeology Society
Mt. Royal Public Library
6:30 PM

The programs are free and open to the public.



October Donations, Memorials and Sponsorships

Donations:

- Randy Ellestad moveable concrete curbs to help define and protect public green space.
 - Bill DeRoche 1927 framed print of DM&IR safety poster.
-

The KRHCC is a 501 (c3) non-profit so all donations whether in the form of a memorial, honorarium, or sponsorship are fully tax deductible. Your comments and suggestions for this monthly emailed newsletter are always welcome. Email to: info@krhcc.org

If you have family or friends who may enjoy reading this newsletter, they can access the current and all past issues on the "Current News" page of our website at: krhcc.org

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