

View from

Listening Point

Newsletter of the **Listening Point Foundation, Inc.**

Volume XXVI, No. 1 | Spring/Summer 2023 | www.listeningpointfoundation.org

Dedicated to preserving Listening Point and advancing Sigurd Olson's wilderness philosophy.

In Memory of David Backes

By Douglas Wood

It is impossible, of course. To find the words to sum up a life. A personality, a career, an impact. A friendship.

My friend and yours, David J. Backes, Sigurd Olson's exceptional biographer, passed away very unexpectedly this past December 23. His service was held on January 14. David was only 65. He published 6 books about Sig and the North Woods. But those are just numbers, even more inadequate than words in any sort of summing up.

So we will try with words, for they are all we have, save perhaps a mute monument, or a piece of art or music.

David and I had a special bond. As very young men, rather lost and looking for direction and guidance, we both—within weeks of each other—wrote to a writer named Sigurd F. Olson. Each of us received a warm and encouraging letter back—almost immediately—that changed the direction of our lives. Neither of us knew this about the other until years later. Then, over the course of conversations, letters, emails, and phone calls, we established a connection that felt almost more like brothers than mere friends.

We encouraged and sympathized with one another about the ups and downs of the writing life and the publishing world. We shared notes about families and the ongoing journey of life. We recalled with gratitude and wonderment the eerily similar effect Sig had had on each of our lives. We shared interest and praise for one another's new books and projects. And sometimes we just chatted.

Yet we somehow never got to spend a lot of personal time together. We never paddled a canoe at sunrise together, or walked down a forest path, or sat on a rock and quietly watched the sunset. And I will always regret that. Yet those are private moments I know he shared deeply with others, especially his family.

For David was truly a family man. I had my own limited window into his life, and the broader world knew him as a teacher at the University of Wisconsin Milwaukee, and as a writer of books. But David's wife of more than four decades, Judi, along with his children Tim, Heidi, Jenny, and Andrew, and grandkids Rosalie, Lily, Charlie, Malachi, Jack, and Walter, all knew the most private and authentic David. Dad. Grandpa. And the David they speak of is exactly the same man I knew and admired so deeply for his many wonderful qualities. Just more so.

In speaking with Tim and Jenny, in talking with current LPF President Patsy Mogush, and Executive Director Steffi (O'Brien)

Huberty, all the same words keep coming up, again and again. Which is a remarkable thing. Those words, in no particular order, are: Gentle. Humble. Kind. Generous. Wise. Genuine.

Steffi speaks of calling David whenever she needed a little life-advice or had some sort of problem to deal with. He was, she said, often her "first call." His responses were always "fulsome" A word we do not hear too often these days—but just the right one, for it denotes the ability to listen closely, to empathize deeply, and to respond not just with words but with an emotional capacity that is rare. Steffi says she could listen to David "literally for hours," whether he was talking about Sig, or the North Woods, or any subject at all, and she feels that his own emotional depth was the reason he was the perfect biographer for a complex subject like Sig Olson. Steffi says, in three pure and simple words, "I loved David."

Patsy recalls meeting and hearing David for the first time at an LPF dinner where David was the featured speaker. She remembers that during one part of his presentation, in recalling something about Sigurd Olson, David got tears in his eyes. A moment so genuine and touching, she said, "I knew I would like him." Of course, her intuition was correct. Patsy and David later communicated often about the Foundation, about new initiatives and directions. And David—who had been deeply involved from LPF's earliest days—was always a source of helpful and encouraging advice. Patsy remembers David as a true mentor. And, like Steffi, says he was often "her first call."

Alanna Dore, beloved former LPF Executive Director, also remembers David as a wonderful resource—who sometimes stopped by the LPF booth at the Blueberry Festival to help. He was always available and warm, and sometimes funny. "I have a new granddaughter," he once told Alanna, "and she's a magician!" Oh? "Yes—she turned me into a grandpa!"

And so we return once more to families, and to efforts at summing up. As longtime LPF Vice-President Chuck Wick and I drove across wintry Wisconsin to attend David's service, we passed the hours telling stories, remembering our own interac-



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Celebration, Caring, Change, and Challenge

by Patsy Mogush, LPF President

Celebration! The Listening Point Foundation is 25 years old!

After the deaths of Elizabeth Olson and her husband Sigurd F. Olson, the author, educator, environmentalist, and wilderness advocate, the family needed to determine the future of the property on Burntside Lake named Listening Point.

Bob Olson, son of Sig and Elizabeth, wrote about the decision in his book *The Story of Listening Point*. "In 1998, friends and family decided that Listening Point was part of the regional and national heritage and that it should be preserved and protected. This should also include, as much as possible, the home of the author, the writing shack, memorabilia, and the legacy of wilderness education, thought, and writing. What to do? They finally decided that the best means to do so was to establish a trust or foundation that could carry on these goals and interests beyond their lifetimes. As a result, they formed a not-for-profit, charitable foundation guided by a Board of Directors and named The Listening Point Foundation, Inc. The Olson family then donated the property to the Foundation."

Bob later wrote about his vision for this new organization:

"The Listening Point Foundation will seek to carry on the Sigurd Olson legacy, his wilderness philosophy, his defense of the wilderness to our own spiritual health, and his example of public service to which he devoted his life.

The Listening Point Foundation is dedicated to the preservation of the historic and natural integrity of Listening Point for all time for the pleasure and inspiration of future generations. Listening Point is at once a place and an idea. It has become the Walden Pond of the Upper Midwest and for many others from all parts of the country and the world. Listening Point has become a touchstone, a setting of beauty and meaning where others can see and feel the world where Sigurd Olson himself walked, and worked, and wondered. As the owner and custodian of Listening Point, the Foundation provides a permanent authority and responsibility for its care and preservation.

The Foundation will join with others in the continuing campaign of wilderness education for both new and older generations. It recognizes that the promotion and defense of wilderness in the 21st century will require no less strength and vision than it has in the past. New and mighty challenges will require new degrees of cooperation and new insights by all sectors of society.

The special task of the Foundation will be to help meet the challenges of the 21st Century in two principal ways: first by engendering a sense of love and respect for what is still natural and wild; and second, by lifting the horizon of wilderness care and education from the local to the global, thus responding to new realities and following the evolution of Sigurd Olson's own thought and career. We shall, in effect, be starting out where he left off."

The Listening Point Foundation continues our work toward the mission and the vision that Sig envisioned for the wild areas and their intangible value for people, and that Bob envisioned for furthering Sig's quest through the Listening Point Foundation.

We will celebrate our 25th Anniversary at two main events. First, an outdoor Garden Party and Writing Shack Plaque Dedication at the Olson Home in Ely, MN on Saturday, July 22 (see page 4 for more info) and then at the LPF Fall Dinner on Friday, September 8, 2023 at the Grand Ely Lodge in Ely, MN.

Caring. The Listening Point Foundation is remembering two people who've devoted much time and thought and energy toward fulfilling Sigurd Olson's dreams. David Backes, Sigurd Olson's official biographer and author of several books (including *A Wilderness Within: The Life of Sigurd F. Olson*), and Mark Allsup, LPF board member who pioneered our strategic learning initiative, have both died in the past few months. Although our hearts are broken, we remember with gratitude their efforts to further the mission and vision of the Listening Point Foundation. Both David and Mark understood deeply the value of nature and the need to preserve wild places. Read more about each of these extraordinary men in this edition of the LPF newsletter.

Change. Steffi Huberty, who's been with us for more than five years, will be leaving her position as the Listening Point Foundation Executive Director to pursue her new adventure with designing and creating pottery. She will continue to be in touch and involved with the Foundation while living in Ely and operating her own business, studio, and storefront.

Steffi and her dad, Bill O'Brien, visited the Listening Point house and writing shack in the summer of 2015. After seeing Sig's maps on top of the file cabinets in the writing shack, Steffi, a student of cartography, returned several times to Ely to study the maps for an upcoming thesis. Those visits convinced the soon-to-retire Alanna Dore that Steffi should follow her as the Executive Director of the Listening Point Foundation.

It was a good decision! During her tenure with LPF, Steffi has moved the organization forward through technology, reaching out to

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tions with David. We recalled his invaluable early assistance in setting up the Foundation, his initial trepidation in getting started with Sig's biography and the need to navigate sometimes treacherous Olson family waters. His early feelings of intimidation and later warm friendship and love for Sig's son and LPF founder Bob Olson. We discussed those early letters, and how a lost and fearful young man desperately needed direction from a mentor—and how after finding that direction and confidence, became a mentor to others and the honest and discerning voice of his hero. Somehow finding the words to put an amazing life into perspective.

After learning the news of David's passing, I had messaged Tim: "Your dad was one of the finest human beings I have had the privilege to know, and the world is a better place for him living in it. He shared that sweet, gentle spirit with everyone—

along with serious commitment, strength, and courage. Please remember—as your dad knew—that all which is best in us lives on. And he will do so in so very many ways."

But I think Tim himself put things in the best perspective in saying that his dad lived "in gratitude and celebration." Recalling that his very favorite phrase was, "All is abundance!" That he found a way to live that philosophy every day. That he "lived a life of abundant love for all, and left behind a legacy of immense wisdom, comfort, kindness, humility and gratitude."

That was the David Backes I knew. The man who wrote Sigurd Olson's life and helped to preserve his legacy. Who loved the natural world and fought to preserve its beauty. Who was a friend, a dad, a grandpa, a mentor. And I cannot imagine better words of summation.

Celebration, Caring, Change, and Challenge continued from page 2

younger people to connect them with natural places, strengthening our non-profit status by meeting the standards of the Charities Review Council, and so much more. I had written a few years ago that with Steffi's tenacity and openness to discovering new ways of doing, LPF will grow and adapt as changes are necessary. She has done just that.

We're grateful for Steffi's many contributions to the Listening Point Foundation, and her ongoing connection with Sigurd Olson and his vision.

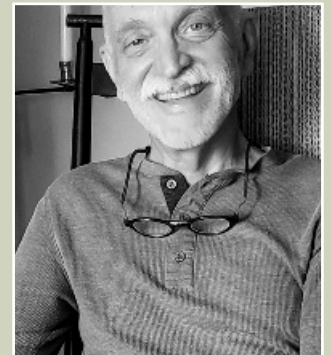
The LPF Board of Directors is conducting a search for a new Executive Director who will work closely with Freja Finkle, our

Program Director. We'll keep you informed as we complete that process.

Challenge. We celebrate our accomplishments, we care about those we've loved, we acknowledge change. Sigurd Olson understood the many challenges of life itself, and of preserving wild places. He left us with his poetic words that continue to guide us as we work toward his vision for the future. Read his words, in any of his books, to help you reflect on celebration, caring, change, and challenges. Then take a deep breath and find your own listening point.

In Memoriam: Mark Allsup

Mark Allsup, dedicated LPF board member for many years, died in April from cancer. During graduate school, Mark encountered Sig Olson's writings, which became inspirational touchstones throughout his career. Mark, always curious and planning the next adventure, began annual visits to the north woods of Minnesota, then to Listening Point, which led him to the Foundation. Mark served with a passion for preserving the properties, for creating a development plan to increase financial stability, and for inspiring the board to think toward the future through strategic learning. Mark was a good friend to many. I continue to hear his laughter, wish for phone calls, and watch for text messages. Communicating with him brought joy and new energy for our work with the Listening Point Foundation. After retiring from the board of directors in the summer of 2022, Mark arranged for LPF to receive a significant planned gift upon his death. He wanted to express his gratitude to the Listening Point Foundation, its people and its vision. We are grateful to Mark for his friendship, his generosity, and for his dedicated service to the organization. Our thoughts are with his partner Oliver and his family and many close friends.



—Patsy Mogush

Listening Point Intern

Hi friends of Listening Point! My name is Chase Piper (they/them) and I'm excited to be this year's intern at the Foundation! I discovered the beauty of Ely in the summer of 2021 when I took a wilderness writing class up in the Boundary Waters. That was also when I first read Sigurd Olson's works and learned about Listening Point. Needless to say, I'm delighted to return! I've just graduated this year from Beloit College in Beloit, Wisconsin with a double major in Philosophy and Cognitive Science. I look forward to learning more about Sigurd Olson's environmentalism, as well as getting to meet as many of you as I can!



THIS & THAT

🍷 **Blueberry Arts Festival in July!** If you happen to be in the Ely area during July 28-30, feel free to stop by the LPF booth to say hello! We look forward to seeing you.

🍷 **Successful Snowshoe Hikes.** We had another great year of hikes to Listening Point during the Ely Winter Festival. Thanks to our volunteers and Program Director Freja Finkle for making them so enjoyable!

🍷 **New Book by former LPF President Douglas Wood.** A *Wild Path* will be released in December 2023. Stay tuned for a book release event later this year!

🍷 **2023 LPF Scholarship Recipients.** Congratulations to our recipients Margaret Damman (Ely Memorial High School) and Jack Lien (Minnesota North College - Vermilion Campus) on their excellent essays. Excerpts will be featured in a future newsletter.

🍷 **Annual Fall Dinner.** Our Annual Fall Dinner will take place at the Grand Ely Lodge in Ely, MN on Friday, September 8th, 2023. Registration will open in August and all are welcome as we continue to celebrate our 25th Anniversary!

Watch our website and Facebook page for announcements and updates!



You're Invited!

What: LPF's 25th Anniversary Celebration:
Garden Party & Writing Shack Plaque Ceremony

When: Saturday, July 22, 2023

Time: 1:00 - 4:00 PM

Where: Olson Family Home in Ely
directions provided upon registration



We invite you to the Olson Family Home in Ely, MN to continue our celebration of the 25th Anniversary of the Listening Point Foundation!

Join us for an outdoor, social gathering of our volunteers, friends, neighbors, and supporters where we will enjoy the beauty of the Olson yard (revitalized gardens in progress!), beverages and light refreshments, a plaque-dedication ceremony for the Writing Shack's placement on the National Register of Historic Places, the premiere of a new LPF short film featuring the Olson Home & Writing Shack, and good conversation about the vision of Sigurd Olson, the current and future goals of the Foundation, and our upcoming plans.

All are welcome to join in the celebration and we look forward to seeing you there.

RSVP required. Check the LPF home page for registration information today!

www.listeningpointfoundation.org

The Listening Point Foundation, Inc. Asset Summary as of December 31, 2022

The following funds are held in trust for uses directed by donors or where the needs are greatest in support of the Listening Point Foundation mission.

1. Operating Funds

WFB Checking Account	6,382
Undeposited Funds	22,812
Unrestricted funds invested at Edward Jones	178,882
Inventory	7,404

Total Operating Funds (Unrestricted) \$ 215,480

2. Maintenance Endowment Fund

207,645

(Invested permanently to generate income for the Listening Point Foundation)

Total Endowment Funds (Permanently Restricted) 207,645

3. Temporarily Restricted Funds

Listening Point Preservation Fund at Edward Jones	70,329
WFB Savings Account for designated projects	5,435
WFB Savings Account for Gusty Island expenses	7,760

Total Temporarily Restricted Funds 83,524

4. Fixed assets

Listening Point Property	493,576
Gusty Island Property	98,000

106 E. Wilson Street	\$ 221,502
Less accumulated depreciation	39,322
Total 106 E. Wilson St.	182,180

Art and books	
F.L. Jaques originals (8)	18,000
J. Brandenburg prints (4)	1,500
Oil painting acquired w/house	5,000
SFO Books	500
Total Art and books	25,000

Total Fixed Assets 798,756

Total Foundation Assets as of December 31, 2022 \$ 1,305,405

WOMEN'S CREATIVE LISTENING POINT RETREAT 2023

CALM YOUR MIND. RENEW YOUR SPIRIT. AWAKEN YOUR CREATIVITY.

When: September 14-17, 2023 • **Where:** Burntside Lake in Ely, Minnesota

Your hosts, Annette and Kathryn, bring together a unique set of skills, writing prompts, and Earth-based practices that support you to deepen your connection to the natural world and tap into your creative spirit through playful exploration and collective inquiry. No previous experience is required.

Register and learn more at www.listeningpointfoundation.org/womens-creative-retreat-2023/

GIFT SHOP

Share the spirit of Listening Point with friends and family with one of these gift items that celebrate Sigurd Olson, Listening Point, wilderness and more!

SIGURD F. OLSON

Listening Point



ILLUSTRATED BY FRANCIS LEE JACQUES

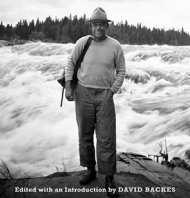
Sigurd Olson Classics

Attractive paperback versions of seven of Sigurd Olson's most loved books.

- *The Singing Wilderness*
- *Listening Point*
- *The Lonely Land*
- *Runes of the North*
- *Open Horizons*
- *Reflections from the North Country*
- *Of Time and Place*

..... \$16

THE MEANING OF WILDERNESS



Edited with an Introduction by DAVID BACKES

The Meaning of Wilderness

Now available in paperback! First published in 2001, this book features a collection of Sigurd F. Olson's articles and speeches. It offers a lively look at the evolution of one of environmentalism's leading figures and is essential reading for Olson fans, historians, and outdoor enthusiasts around the country.

..... \$18



LPF Mug

3 finger handle. With logo, website, and "Sig's legacy ... pass it on!" Available in black or white.

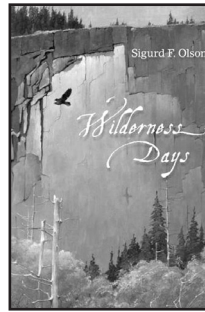
..... \$10



LPF Tote Bags

Tote measures 14" x 10" x 5". Attractive and sturdy 5 oz cream cotton canvas with 20" green handles. Complete with the LPF logo. Carry your books and other items around in style!

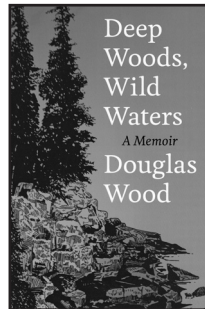
..... \$20



Wilderness Days

University of Minnesota Press has published a new paperback edition of *Wilderness Days*—a collection of Sig's writings that depicts the essence of the magnificent woodlands and waters of the legendary Quetico-Superior region that borders Minnesota and Ontario.

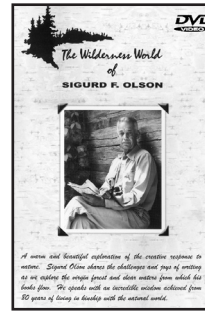
..... \$18



Deep Woods, Wild Waters, A Memoir

A joy to read - Wood shares bushwhacking skills, hurtling down wild rapids, crossing stormy lakes, or simply navigating treacherous currents and the twisty trails of everyday life.

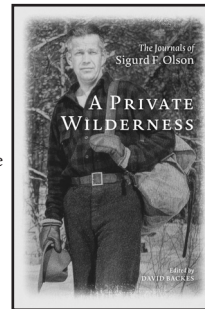
..... \$23



The Wilderness World of Sigurd F. Olson DVD

A digitally remastered version of the classic film "The Wilderness World of Sigurd F. Olson" includes more than two hours of conversations with Sig as he speaks about the craft of writing and life in the wilderness. You'll also hear Sig's wife Elizabeth and their son Sig Jr. speak candidly about Sigurd, his profession, and life in the north woods.

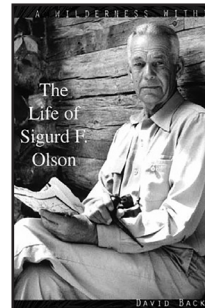
..... \$15



A Private Wilderness

Edited by David Backes. Written mostly during the years from 1930 to 1941, Sigurd F. Olson's journals describe the dreams and frustrations of an aspiring writer honing his skills, pursuing recognition, and facing doubt. Author of Olson's definitive biography, editor David Backes brings a deep knowledge of the writer to these journals, providing critical context, commentary, and insights along the way.

..... \$30



A Wilderness Within

By David Backes. The authoritative portrait of one of the greatest environmentalists of the twentieth century. The book is a stunning look at a man with a vision for the natural world and for himself. Essential reading for Olson fans.

..... \$23 (paperback)



Listening Point Waxed Waterproof Journal

Journal measures 4.5" x 6". 40 pages of waterproof Rite In The Rain paper with a waxed canvas cover. LPF logo on the front cover. Made in Duluth, MN. Available colors: Slate, Red, Blue, Yellow (Saffron), Brown, and Green

..... \$20



LPF Hats

For your wearing pleasure! 100% cotton, embroidered with the Listening Point logo. Aqua, Caribbean Blue, Ivory, Khaki/Spruce Green (two-toned), Poppy, and Spruce

..... \$18

Green. Adjustable leather strap.

See website for complete gift shop offerings

If you are shopping through Amazon, please consider using AmazonSmile ([smile.amazon.com](https://www.amazon.com/smile)).

The AmazonSmile Foundation will donate 0.5% of the price of eligible purchases to the charitable organizations selected by customers. Every little bit helps!

Listening Point Foundation Contribution Form

Name: _____

Address: _____

City, State, ZIP: _____

Email: _____

☐ My contribution is in (select one) honor/memory of:

Listening Point Foundation is a 501(c)3 organization that welcomes charitable contributions that support its educational mission and preservation efforts.

CONTRIBUTION AMOUNT

- ☐ \$35 ☐ \$250
☐ \$50 ☐ \$500
☐ \$100 ☐ (other) _____

Please send your check payable to
Listening Point Foundation (LPF) to:

Listening Point Foundation, Inc.
P.O. Box 180 • Ely, MN 55731

Or donate online at
www.listeningpointfoundation.org

Thank You!

The Listening Point Foundation would like to thank the following individuals, businesses, foundations and organizations for their generous donations:

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December 1, 2022 – June 1, 2023

Thank You!

Donations in Memory or in Honor

In Honor of...

- Mark Allsup, *In honor of Amanda Heaton and Harry Veilleux*
- Mike Barrows, *In honor of Sig*
- Linda Birnbaum, *In honor of Christine Bueton*
- Margaret Dahl, *In honor of Kelly LaMarre and Paul Dahl*
- Johnny and Phyllis Kimble, *In honor of Doug Throckmorton*
- Linda Law, *In honor of Steve Cristen*
- John O'Keefe, *In honor of Jane and Wayne Fridlund*
- The Robert and Rebecca Patient Charitable Fund, *In honor of Stanley Larson and Earl Patient*
- Rubin Stenseng and Sue Wilmes, *In honor of Carolyn Sundquist*
- John and Jane Todd, *In honor of Denis and Marty Shaak*

In Memory:

- Keith and Anita Anderson, *In memory of John Bergstrom*
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- Bruce Baker, *In memory of Sigurd T. Olson*
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- Jim and Jan Call, *In memory of Sharon Kastelic*
- Dwayne Cates, *In memory of Jim Cates*
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- Sandy Dodson, *In memory of Tom Duffy*
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- Peggy Marxen, *In memory of Buell Tubbs, and Rob and Ina Miltmore*
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- Roberta Moore, *In memory of Marge Sill, mother of Nevada wilderness*
- Andrea and David Novak, *In memory of Sigurd F. Olson*
- Julie Reid, *In memory of Len and Ruth Anderson*
- Peter Rothe and Gail Amundson, *In memory of Wendy and Malcolm McLean*
- Kurt Ruud, *In memory of Roy and Nora Ruud*
- Mark and Patti Sontag, *In memory of Lucy and Dave Sontag*
- Laura Stolpe, *In memory of James Olson*
- Diane Tessari, *In memory of Gary Warren Crawford*
- Forrest Tibbetts, *In memory of Shirley Tibbetts*
- Brad and Melissa Ward, *In memory of David Gardner*
- David and Marjorie White, *In memory of Robert K. Olson*

In Honor Of David Backes:

- Mark Blanchard, *In honor of the late David Backes*
- Ellen Galligan, *In honor of Dave Backes*
- Marcy and Buddy Huffaker, *In honor of the life of David Backes*

In Memory Of David Backes:

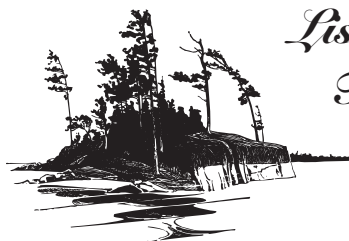
- Donna Arbaugh
- Joseph and Cynthia Arvai
- Dan Backes
- Paul and Linda Backes
- Anne Borland
- Katherine B Floyd Burrows
- Mary Jo Carrell
- Rick and Sandra Chojnacki
- Mary and John Clarke
- Suzanne and William Coe
- Robert and Winifred Dalla Santa
- Divine Mercy Parish and staff in South Milwaukee
- Mary Ann Erdtmann
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- The Reverend Thomas Harbold
- Dan Hawley
- Rebecca Jones
- Kent and Lori Korek
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- Kathy Miner
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- Frank and Susan Mrnik
- Mark and Jeanne Nicholson
- The grandnieces and grandnephews of Sigurd and Elizabeth Olson
- Mark and Erica Peterson
- Kevin Proescholdt
- Guy and Susan Repa
- South Milwaukee High School English Department
- James and Sharon Vivian
- Chuck and Marty Wick
- Jenny Winkler

* denotes brick

December 1, 2022 – June 1, 2023

"Since we go through this strange and beautiful world of ours only once, it seems a pity to lack the sense of delight and enthusiasm that merely being alive should hold."

– - Sigurd F. Olson, *Reflections From the North Country*



Listening Point Foundation, Inc.

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