WINNING THE WAR: NEBRASKA’S CONNECTIONS TO D-DAY
COLUMBUS NATIVE ANDREW HIGGINS MADE THE BOATS THAT HELPED TURN THE TIDE

“D-DAY + 75” GOVERNOR’S LECTURE: PG 3 • BOARD NOMINATIONS: PAGE 3 • SOWER AWARD ANNOUNCEMENT: PG 4
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Adolf Hitler referred to Andrew Jackson Higgins as the “new Noah” for his famed “Higgins Boat” landing craft. But in the middle of the war, a story is told of Dwight D. Eisenhower, Supreme Allied Commander for Operation Overlord, and his concern for landing craft.

In his book, “Andrew Jackson Higgins and the Boats That Won World War II,” author Jerry Strahan relates this story in the introduction:

Captain Harry Butcher, General Eisenhower’s personal aide, wrote that during March 1943, as the invasions of Sicily and Italy were being planned, the general was confronted with a massive shortage of landing craft. Butcher recalled Eisenhower saying that when he was buried, his coffin should be in the shape of a landing craft, as they are practically killing him with worry.

Andrew Jackson Higgins was born in Columbus, Nebraska and later moved to Omaha when he was seven. He joined the Millard Rifles (Nebraska National Guard) when he was 20. His assignments in the unit included bridging exercises over the Platte River near Ashland.

Following his time in Nebraska, he moved south to pursue a lumber business. The locals wouldn’t sell him prime timber areas but were open to his purchase of swamp lands. Higgins designed shallow draft boats to extract and bring the lumber out...the same technology that would be used at D-Day in 1944.

He would go onto fame in WWII as the leader of Higgins Industries in New Orleans, La. During the war his company would build 20,094 boats for the armed forces. Most of them would be his famous Landing Craft, Vehicle, Personnel (LCVP), often called a “Higgins Boat.”

The 36 foot wooden boat with a 10 foot steel ramp would be used in every major amphibious operation during World War II. Soldiers would be delivered close to shore by assault transports and the force would disembark down rope ladders to the landing craft.

The “Higgins Boat” was a strategic weapon that allowed...
our invasion forces to assault anywhere the Navy could take the transports. His design would play a major part in D-Day.

After the war, the Americans and French honored Higgins with a memorial on Utah Beach in Normandy. The Higgins Boat Memorial is located on the draw leading off Utah Beach close to where General Theodore Roosevelt, Jr. landed in 1944, saying to his subordinates “We’ll start the war right here.”

The memorial is a partial reproduction of the Andrew Jackson Higgins National Memorial in his hometown. They both feature his “Higgins Boat” waterline steel replica, statues of soldiers assaulting the beach, and a statue of Higgins himself.

The Utah Beach Museum has an original “Higgins Boat” on display. Visitors can walk into the outside memorial boat and get a feel for what it was like to approach the beach on that fateful day, June 6, 1944.

Higgins was honored in June 2000 with the opening of the National D-Day Museum in New Orleans. It would later become the National World War II Museum. New Orleans is where Higgins had nine plants and hired over 20,000 workers to build craft for the allies.

His workforce was diverse, and he paid them by their skill levels. They responded by shattering production records. Higgins was a household name during the war years for his production genius. One of the first macro-artifacts patrons see at the National World War II Museum is a “Higgins Boat” and the story of New Orleans’ role in producing it.

In 2019, a Nebraska Delegation visited Normandy as part of its Liberation Tour to follow in the footsteps of the 134th Infantry Regiment across Europe. They stopped at the Higgins Boat Memorial to pay homage to the vision and drive of Columbus native Andrew Jackson Higgins. The site of an international memorial to a Nebraska native was impressive on such hallowed grounds.

Andrew Higgins passed away in 1952 and never got the recognition that he deserved for his part in the war. A new generation of scholars is doing research on how important his role was in supplying the Allies with landing craft during the war. He is the only Nebraskan to have a national memorial in his hometown, a national museum in the place where he worked, and an international memorial on a foreign soil.

Please join HN at 7:30 p.m. on Thursday, October 24, for the 24th Annual Governor’s Lecture in the Humanities at Omaha’s Holland Performing Arts Center. In this free public lecture, historian Dwight David Eisenhower II, grandson of General Eisenhower, will discuss “D-Day + 75 in the Eyes of America’s Postwar Generations.” For tickets and sponsorships to the preceding benefit dinner, please call 402.474.2131.

Humanities Nebraska (HN) is seeking nominations for its Council board by Friday, October 11. Board members are selected statewide from those who show a strong appreciation for the humanities and the cultural life of Nebraska.

HN makes every effort to find community members from the state’s diverse geographic, occupational and ethnic constituencies. The selection committee also seeks those who have a balance between involvement in the humanities and other professional, business or community pursuits.

Nominations for the Council board must be postmarked on or before October 11. You can find nomination forms and a complete list of basic board obligations at the HN website: HumanitiesNebraska.org. Or, contact HN at 215 Centennial Mall South, Suite 330, Lincoln, NE 68508; call (402) 474-2131; or e-mail your request to info@humanitiesnebraska.org.
JOE STARITA TO RECEIVE 2019 SOWER AWARD IN THE HUMANITIES

Joe Starita of Lincoln will receive the 2019 Sower Award in the Humanities on Thursday, October 24 at the Holland Performing Arts Center in Omaha. The award ceremony will precede the 24th Annual Governor’s Lecture in the Humanities featuring historian Dwight David Eisenhower II.

Each year, the Sower Award is presented to someone who has made “a significant contribution to public understanding of the humanities in Nebraska.”

Molly O’Holleran nominated Starita for the Sower Award, describing him as the “ultimate storyteller” who “inspires our thinking in a way that calls each of us to seek truth in our own lives, analyze the problems, explore solutions, and plant our own seeds of courage to enhance humanity.”

Currently a journalism professor at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln, Starita previously worked as an investigative reporter for the Miami Herald. There, he was a finalist for a Pulitzer Prize in local reporting.

He has also penned three award-winning books that explore the historic role of Native Americans, showcasing their courage in the face of racial prejudice. All profits from his books, “I am A Man: Chief Standing Bear’s Journey for Justice” and “A Warrior of the People: How Susan La Flesche Overcame Racial and Gender Inequality to Become America’s First Indian Doctor,” go to a scholarship fund that enables Nebraska Native American students to attend college.

As a university professor, Starita inspires students to use journalism to expose prejudice and effect change. Students in his in-depth reporting class who wrote about the troubles in Whiteclay became the first college students to win the Robert F. Kennedy Humanities Foundation Grand Prize, besting The New York Times, National Geographic, Reuters TV and HBO.

Starita also gives public talks across the state, independently and as a member of the HN Speakers Bureau, telling the stories of Chief Standing Bear and Susan La Flesche.

Judi M. gaiashkibos, executive director of the Nebraska Commission on Indian Affairs, also supported his nomination. She wrote, “Starita’s passion for Indian culture, his relentless research and creative work, have earned him the trust and respect of Indian people throughout Nebraska and America...He is truly worthy of the Sower Award.”

Table sponsorships and tickets to the dinner prior to the Sower Award presentation are still available. Please call 402.474.2131 to make your reservations or go to HumanitiesNebraska.org.

STUDENT BALLOTS INDICATE NEARLY EVEN DIVIDE OF OPINIONS

Last March, students who participated in the 21st Capitol Forum on America’s Future voted on their choices for U.S. foreign policy. While previous years have shown a clear front-runner, the option to “Focus on Our Efforts at Home” barely bested “Protect U.S. Global Interests,” and “Build a More Cooperative World,” which was last year’s top choice at 46%. “Lead the World to Democracy” was the fourth choice.

Once again, the issue students most often cited as a concern was “Nuclear, biological, and chemical weapons will proliferate and end up in the hands of terrorists” (43%). The second most cited item (42%) was “The U.S. will drain its resources trying to solve other countries’ problems.”

Complete ballot results are available online on the Capitol Forum page at HumanitiesNebraska.org.

More than 25 schools across the state will be using the Capitol Forum “Choices” curriculum beginning this fall and culminating in the March 2020 Capitol Forum Day.
On August 2 & 3, Humanities Nebraska helped put “The Fifties in Focus” in a newly invigorated and re-imagined Nebraska Chautauqua. Hundreds of people, including Chautauqua fans from other communities, gathered in Kearney to explore many different aspects of America’s most iconic decade. The Downtown Kearney Business Association welcomed participants with a 1950s concert on Thursday evening featuring the Surfin’ Safari Band.

Friday evening, HN kicked off “The Fifties in Focus” with a fashion show featuring Speakers Bureau favorite Sue McLain and local models. Dr. William I. Hitchcock of the University of Virginia then took the podium with his talk, “Liking Ike: How Eisenhower Defined the 1950s.”

Saturday was filled with a variety of breakout sessions on topics ranging from the Cold War to sports, pop culture to agriculture. In the evening, Chautauqua scholars Becky Stone and Dr. Lenneal Henderson portrayed Rosa Parks and Thurgood Marshall. After their vivid performances, they took questions from the audience as their respective historic figures, followed by a question-and-answer session with the three main scholars.

Humanities Nebraska thanks the many Chautauqua committee members, sponsors, and volunteers who helped launch “The Fifties in Focus.” Major funders included the Johnny Carson Fund at the Nebraska Cultural Endowment, Kearney Visitors Bureau, the Ron & Carol Cope Foundation, Culligan of Kearney, Tami & Jerry Hellman, the Kearney Area Community Foundation, and many other organizations and businesses. HN is also grateful to the participating venues: Merryman Performing Arts Center, Kearney Public Library, the City of Kearney and the World Theatre.

Visit HumanitiesNebraska.org for more information and more photographs to enjoy.
Many donors make multiple gifts throughout the year. Donors are listed at the level of their cumulative giving for the year in our annual report.

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We thank these generous individuals who helped ensure a vibrant cultural life in Nebraska with annual gifts of $1,000 or more made between May 1, 2018 and June 30, 2019. To learn more about the Patron’s Circle, please contact Heather Thomas at 402.474.2131 or heather@HumanitiesNebraska.org.

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Join these generous contributors and help to cultivate an understanding of our history and culture. Thank you for becoming part of our mission!
NEBRASKA STUDENTS EARN RECOGNITION AT NATIONAL HISTORY DAY COMPETITION

Fifty-four students from across Nebraska competed at National History Day in College Park, Md., June 9-13 with projects based on the theme, “Triumph and Tragedy in History.” Students had advanced from the state contest held at Nebraska Wesleyan University (NWU) in April. Abigail Hyer and Jameson Margets of Chadron High School finished second in the Senior Group Website category with a project about the Triangle Shirtwaist Factory Fire.

Elizabeth Wortmann of St. Rose of Lima School in Crofton received the Native American History Award for “Mistrust and Misunderstanding: A Deadly Clash at Wounded Knee.”

Tyler Richardson of Ralston High School was awarded the senior Outstanding Affiliate Entry Award. Ralston middle-schoolers Bethany Madden, Olivia Van-Lancker, and Carol Van-Lancker earned the junior division’s Outstanding Affiliate Entry Award and also made finals.

Richardson and Wortmann also joined Grant Taylor of Arapahoe and Lauren Collins and Grace Sorenson of Chadron in ranking in the top 20 percent of their categories.

Jaclyn Johnson and Maya Dooley of Ralston were selected to represent Nebraska at the National Museum of American History for a day-long exhibition.

National History Day is an international program for students in grades 6-12. Coordinated by NWU’s Professor Steven Wills and Shari Sorenson, the state program is funded in part by Humanities Nebraska, the Dillon Foundation, History Nebraska, and Nebraska Wesleyan.

HN AWARDS 34 GRANTS TOTALING $123,853

Humanities Nebraska recently awarded the following grants:

Asian Community and Cultural Center, Lincoln, $1,600, for Untold Migrant Stories, and $2,000 for the Continuation of “Stories of Us.”

Bemis Center for Contemporary Arts, Omaha, $7,000 for Speaking Sound lecture series.

Bethany Lutheran, Elkhorn, $1,250 for African Culture Connection workshops for students.

Cran River Theater Company, Kearney, $1,850 for the “Of Mice and Men” Student Matinee Series.

El Museo Latino, Omaha, $3,000 toward an exhibition titled Traditional Textiles: Huipiles.

Elkhorn Valley Historical Society, Norfolk, $2,000 for the exhibit, “Young At Art.”

Flatwater Shakespeare Company, Lincoln, $5,000 for Little But Fierce Youth Education.

Fort Atkinson Foundation, Fort Calhoun, $1,400 for “When the Troops Meet the Native Americans.”

Friends of the Homestead, Beatrice, $3,000 toward Traditions of Homesteaders.

Great Plains Black History Museum, Omaha, $1,655 for “Will Brown & Lynching in the Great Plains of America.”

Kaneko, Omaha, $5,000 for its Passages program.

Lincoln Orchestra Association, Lincoln, $6,000 to support the Lincoln Crossroads Music Festival.

Malaika Foundation, Central City, $5,000 toward Global Education for Nebraska Schools.

Metropolitan Community College, Omaha, $8,000 for the Great Plains Theatre Conference 2019.

National Orphan Train Complex Museum and Research Center, Concordia, KS, $5,500 for “Riders on the Orphan Trains - Foundlings to the Frontier.”

Nebraska Folklife Network, Inc., Lincoln, $7,000 for Cultural Traditions of Nebraska Places.

Nebraska National Guard Museum Society, Seward, $1,800 for events commemorating the 75th anniversary of D-Day.

Nebraska Shakespeare Festival, Inc., Omaha, $8,000 for Shakespeare On Tour.

Nebraska StoryArts, Omaha, $1,700 for the Moonshell Storytelling Festival.

Nebraska Writers Collective, Omaha, $1,250 for a post-show discussion about “A Day in the Life.”

Omaha Area Youth Orchestra, Omaha, $1,998 for its “Common Ground in Sound” program.

Omaha Public Library Foundation, Omaha, $2,000 for the Omaha Lit Fest 2019.

Platte Valley Literacy Association, Columbus, $2,000 in support of citizenship classes.

Plum Creek Children’s Literacy Festival, Seward, $8,000 for Plum Creek Children’s Literacy Festival 2019.

Scotts Bluff County Tourism, Gering, $2,000 for the Scotts Bluff Celtic Gathering.

Strategic Air and Space Museum, Ashland, $2,000 for Apollo 11 50th Anniversary exhibit.

UNK Board of Regents, Kearney, $2,000 for Women’s and Gender Studies 30th Anniversary and $7,000 supporting the UNK Paws (Personal Achievement Workshops) Summer Camps.

UNO Board of Regents, Omaha, $3,500 for an exhibit, “The Art of Samuel Bak,” and $850 to Artelatinx 2019.

Valentine Community Schools, Valentine, $1,300 toward summer learning and reading activities.

Washington County Historical Association, Fort Calhoun, $6,000 for an exhibit on pioneer history.

Willa Cather Foundation, Red Cloud, $6,700 for the Willa Cather Spring Conference 2019.
GRANT SPOTLIGHT: CELEBRATING 100 YEARS OF “MY ÁNTONIA”

Renowned Nebraskan author Willa Cather published “My Ántonia” in 1918. This past year, Nebraskans everywhere celebrated the 100TH anniversary of the book, which has held up over the last century because of its enduring themes.

“My Ántonia” was inspired by Cather’s friend Annie Pavelka, a young Bohemian girl who immigrated to Nebraska and spent her entire life in Red Cloud. In the book, the narrator, Jim Burden, also arrives in Nebraska as a young orphan and becomes a friend to Ántonia.

Humanities Nebraska, along with the Willa Cather Archives at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln and the Willa Cather Foundation in Red Cloud, held events across the state celebrating the still-relevant themes of “My Ántonia.”

“So many of the themes that we’ve explored over the year are highly relevant, especially immigration and the environment and how women are treated in the world,” said Emily Rau, an assistant editor of the Willa Cather Archive and a doctoral student at UNL.

Each event throughout the year has explored a theme of the book. For example, in August 2018, Emily Rau and Ashley Olson, executive director of the Cather Foundation, used Cather’s life and the novel to lead a discussion with more than 100 women about their experiences in the workplace.

The “My Antonia’s Birthday Feast” was the last event in the series and explored the themes of community and immigration. There were readings from “My Ántonia” in multiple languages, live music and food. The event was supported by a grant from Humanities Nebraska. Each of these events offered Nebraskans and other Cather fans insight into the novel and the issues that are still present today, 100 years later.

FAVORITE TITLES FROM OUR PRIME TIME LIBRARY

If you venture into the back rooms of the Humanities Nebraska office, you will be surrounded by shelves full of children’s books. We have a selection of 125 titles used in Prime Time Family Reading Time and Prime Time Preschool. Here is a preview of two favorites.

“A Spoon for Every Bite” by Joe Hayes tells of a clever riddle that is, perhaps, taken a bit too far. After a poor couple is laughed at by their rich neighbor for only having three spoons, the couple mentions that they “have a friend who uses a different spoon for every bite he eats.” The neighbor is so disturbed that someone would have a richer lifestyle, he goes home and refuses to use the same spoon twice.

Participants at Gomez Elementary School in Omaha said the book “taught us a lot about life and how to be humble, and that no matter if we are poor or rich we can make friends.”

“Stellaluna” by Janell Cannon is the beloved story of a baby bat who gets lost from her mom and grows up under the care of a mama bird.

At Westside Elementary in Norfolk, families discussed how the baby bat and her bird siblings learned from their similarities and differences. This led to a conversation about being friends with someone from a different culture or a different outlook on life.

A similar conversation happened at the Grand Island Public Library when families were asked if Mother Bird was right to make Stellaluna follow her rules. They discussed how they perceive others as different, what they expect from other people, whether those expectations are appropriate or not, and how they have responded when someone else behaved in a way that was considered inappropriate.

For more information about Prime Time, visit our website at HumanitiesNebraska.org.
IN MEMORY

FRANK LEMERE, 1950-2019

Frank LaMere died on June 16. Frank was a member of the Winnebago Tribe of Nebraska from South Sioux City, a lifelong Native American activist, and a board member of the Nebraska Humanities Council (NHC) from 1994 to 1999.

The son of a Gold Star Mother and a combat veteran father, Frank began working for Native peoples as a member of the American Indian Movement (AIM) in the 1970s. He served on the Democratic National Committee from 1996 to 2009, for which he was chairman of the National Native American Caucus. Frank’s passion, dedication and tireless efforts to support Native American rights is widely recognized as having made a significant impact on Nebraska.

DON PEDERSON, 1928-2019

Former Nebraska State Senator Don Pederson died on June 2. While managing a successful law career, Don’s work in public service began on the North Platte school board. He was appointed to the Nebraska Legislature in 1996. During his 10 years in the Unicameral, he served as chair of the Appropriations Committee and was critically involved with passage of the Nebraska College Savings Plan, the Nebraska Cultural Endowment, and more. He was on the NHC board 2003-2010, serving as chair in 2007, and on the Nebraska Foundation for the Humanities Board (NFH) 2009-2010. He befittingly received the Nebraska Sower Award in 2010. Don leaves behind his spouse, June, other family members, and many friends.

ANN LINDLEY SPENCE, 1934-2019

Ann Spence died on May 10. With her husband, Gene, she formed SpenceLindley Abstract and Title Company in 1961. After a brief break in her career to raise their sons, Ann formed Spence Title Insurance Company in 1975 and ran it for 18 years. She was appointed to the Planning Department of Omaha and helped to institute a green spaces policy for new construction. Upon retiring, Ann and Gene traveled the world extensively, visiting nearly 80 countries. Besides her business acumen, Ann was blessed with outstanding artistic ability which was reflected in every aspect of her life, including her tenure as a Humanities Nebraska board member; she served on the Council board, 1980-1982, and the Nebraska Foundation for the Humanities board, 1996-2001.

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THANK YOU, LINCOLN!

More than 80 donors contributed $22,969 to Humanities Nebraska during the month of May for Give to Lincoln Day, exceeding last year’s total of $19,363. Sponsored by the Lincoln Community Foundation (LCF), a record-breaking $5.5 million was raised for more than 430 Lincoln nonprofits.

Most gifts to HN were designated for Prime Time Family Reading Time in the capital city. HN appreciates the many donors, match fund sponsors, media sponsors and the Lincoln Community Foundation for helping us realize a successful outcome. Thank you!

STRENGTH IN DONOR CHOICE

Community Services Fund (CSF) connects donors to causes they care about. It is a coalition of 70 diverse nonprofit organizations, some of whom provide services statewide. Humanities Nebraska is a proud member agency. For more than 30 years, CSF has been helping make Lincoln and Nebraska a better place to live. CSF celebrates the arts and humanities, protects our environment and creates green spaces, provides health care to those who cannot afford it, provides education and advocacy, and works to protect at-risk children.

HN greatly appreciates donors who designated gifts through CSF workplace giving campaigns in 2019. For details, call 402.489.4332 or visit www.communityservicesfund.com.

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Or, contact Kyle Cartwright at kyle@nebraskaculture.org or 402-595-2722.
COMMUNITIES SOUGHT TO HOST SMITHSONIAN TRAVELING EXHIBITION ON RURAL AMERICA

In 1900, about 40% of Americans lived in rural areas. By 2010, less than 18% of the U.S. population did so. In just over a century, massive economic and social changes led to massive growth of America’s urban areas. Yet less than 10% of the U.S. landmass is considered urban.

Many Americans assume that rural communities are endangered and hanging on by a thread—suffering from outmigration, ailing schools, and overused land. But that perception is far from true in many areas.

Despite the economic and demographic impacts brought on by these changes, America’s small towns continue to creatively focus on new opportunities for growth and development. Economic innovation and a focus on the cultural facets that make small towns unique, comfortable, and desirable have helped many communities create their own renaissance. The future is bright for much of rural America as small towns embrace the notion that their citizens and their cultural uniqueness are important assets.

Nebraska has many small-town success stories — communities that have capitalized on their unique aspects to serve local people, encouraged young adults to stay in or return to their home towns to work and raise families, appealed to new residents, and attracted tourists.

As rural Americans work hard to sustain their communities, the Smithsonian “Crossroads: Change in Rural America” exhibition asks, “Why should revitalizing rural places matter to those who remain, those who left, and those who will join these communities in the future?”

All Americans benefit from rural America’s successes. “Crossroads” shows visitors that everyone can learn great things from listening to those stories. There is much more to the story of rural America.

Communities selected to host “Crossroads” will have a chance to look at their own paths and highlight the changes that affected their fortunes over the past century. The exhibition will prompt discussions about what happened when America’s rural population became a minority of the country’s population and the ripple effects that occurred.

To bring “Crossroads” to your local museum or library, visit HumanitiesNebraska.org for a community application. For assistance, please contact Mary Yager, associate director, at 402.474.2131 or mary@humanitiesnebraska.org.