HELPING NEBRASKANS EXPLORE WHAT CONNECTS US AND MAKES US HUMAN

CAPITOL FORUM ON AMERICA’S FUTURE HELPS HIGH SCHOOLERS UNDERSTAND GLOBAL ISSUES

PG 2

FIRST KURMANJI
PRIME TIME
FAMILY READING
IN THE NATION

PG 5

“WEATHERING UNCERTAINTY” DISCUSSIONS TO BEGIN SOON

PG 12
When the world shut down due to the global pandemic in March 2020, it was a mere two weeks before HN’s Capitol Forum Day. Months of planning to bring student delegations from 24 high schools around the state to Lincoln for a day of deliberating important global issues and meeting elected representatives were erased in a moment.

Participating teachers at each high school were able to continue to use the Choices curriculum by Brown University to engage their students - now online - in learning about immigration, international trade, nuclear proliferation, terrorism, and climate change. However, missing the culminating event of deliberating different views with other students was an unfortunate loss.

In 2021, while an in-person event was still not possible, HN offered some options to continue to engage with teachers and classrooms. The switch was made to digital classroom resources so that teachers could utilize the Choices curriculum easily whether meeting in-person or virtually. Former Secretary of Defense Chuck Hagel gave a workshop to teachers on current issues in foreign policy, enhancing their own understanding so they could be better equipped to lead discussion and field questions from students. Various State Department representatives also spoke with some classes via Zoom.

“The good thing about Choices is that it’s always relevant,” noted Kristi Hayek Carley, HN program manager. “The program and deliberations are adjustable, and teachers are able to use current events to launch in-depth discussion and research.”


“The landscape has changed a great deal in our world and in our classrooms,” Hayek Carley said. “I really appreciate the teachers’ flexibility as we changed a few things for 2022. We all wanted the students to have a memorable and worthwhile experience.”

As she and other staffers prepared for Capitol Forum Day, important contributions from the Cooper Foundation and other generous donors helped limit possible barriers for schools sending their students.
to Lincoln. Donated dollars helped cover transportation costs, substitute teacher fees, and overnight accommodations for out-state students.

Twelve schools sent delegations of students to participate in the day, each prepared to discuss the five Choices topics with peers from other parts of the state.

Co-sponsor Secretary of State Bob Evnen welcomed the students that morning, lauding their willingness to learn about important international topics that affect everyone. “You are America’s future,” he stated.

Two instructors from the University of Nebraska-Lincoln (UNL) helped enhance understanding of the current conflict between Russia and Ukraine. Dr. Hana Waissrova, assistant professor of practice of Czech, and political science Ph.D. student Lukasz Nipako of Poland clarified the history of the region and explained political decisions that led to war.

During breakout discussions, students shared insightful comments and listened respectfully to other views.

In the nuclear proliferation discussion, students talked about Russian President Vladimir Putin’s veiled threat to use nuclear weapons if other superpowers got involved. One student wondered, “If nuclear weapons are supposed to be a deterrent, who is deterring who?”

In another room, the topic of using U.S. buying power to force other nations to end human rights violations took an interesting turn when one student said, “What if the reason these countries don’t pay fair wages is because the U.S. insists on lower prices for the goods we are buying?”

The day ended with a Zoom appearance by U.S. Rep. Adrian Smith, who answered students’ questions about foreign policy and economics.

“I learned so much today. I think we all have,” one student said. “I hope we’ll all remember that it’s important to listen to each other and learn more about issues like these.”

“That’s what we want to hear,” said Hayek Carley. “This program can really have a profound effect on the next generation of engaged citizens and elected officials.”

Funding for Capitol Forum was provided by the Cooper Foundation and “A More Perfect Union,” an initiative of the National Endowment for the Humanities.

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Humanities Nebraska is now recruiting high schools for Capitol Forum in 2022/23. For details to share with your local social studies teacher, visit HumanitiesNebraska.org/programs. To become a sponsor, please email heather@humanitiesnebraska.org.

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Above: Student delegates, their teachers, and HN staff. Right: Dr. Hana Waissrova, UNL, gave a presentation on the current situation with Ukraine and Russia.

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For more information, visit www.NebraskaChautauqua.org.
WELCOME, NEW BOARD MEMBERS!

Humanities Nebraska recently welcomed four new board members during its spring board meeting. Three have joined the board of the Nebraska Humanities Council, and one was added to the Nebraska Foundation for the Humanities.

NEW TO THE COUNCIL

VALERIE CUPPENS (Lincoln) is a digital and analogue producer who communicates meaning through print, visuals and music. Cuppens is co-author of “Learning with Nature Idea Book: Creating Nurturing Outdoor Spaces for Children,” an alumni coach for IDEO U, and an Inaugural Fellow of the Center for Social Impact Strategy at the University of Pennsylvania.

MATTHEW LOW (Omaha) has been an English teacher in Nebraska for 20 years in classrooms ranging from middle school to graduate school. He is currently the English Department Chair at Brownell Talbot College Preparatory School in midtown Omaha, where he teaches English and Journalism. Matt holds a Ph.D. in English from the University of Iowa and an M.A. in English from Creighton University.

ANA LOPEZ SHALLA (Omaha) is a Nebraska native who currently serves as the senior director of workforce development for the Greater Omaha Chamber of Commerce. She attended Boston College, where she double majored in English and theology and minored in creative writing, and earned a master’s of education at Harvard University.

NEW TO THE FOUNDATION

PATRICK LEAHY (Omaha) is an Information Operations Planner at U.S. STRATCOM and has been an Intelligence Officer in the U.S. Army Reserve for nearly 16 years. His background includes political campaign and public policy roles. Patrick was elected to the Papio-Missouri River Natural Resources District Board in 2012 and re-elected in 2016. He presently serves on the Keep Omaha Beautiful Board.

The Council re-elected CONNIE DUNCAN of Lincoln as chair and BETH WHITED of Omaha as vice chair. DORI WANITSCHKE of Grand Island was elected treasurer. The Foundation re-elected TAMI HELLMAN of Kearney as president, BRENDA CHRISTENSEN of Omaha as vice-president and MIKE HOMA of Omaha as treasurer.

THANK YOU TO OUR NEWLY RETIRED BOARD MEMBERS!

Humanities Nebraska is grateful to the board members who reached the end of their board service in January. AMY SANDEEN of Hastings served on the Council 2016-2022, including two years as Chair and a year as a member of the Foundation board. LAURA CAPP of Ashland, who was chair of the 2021 Nebraska Chautauqua, served on the Council from 2016-2022, as did STEVE ELLIOTT of Wayne. BEV KRACHER of Omaha retired from the Foundation board after serving from 2016-2022. Each of these board members provided leadership in many ways, including chairing numerous committees and providing insight and direction through HN’s strategic planning process and visioning for the future.

We are grateful to them for their service and dedication to enriching the lives of all Nebraskans through the humanities.
UNIQUE PARTNERSHIP OFFERS PRIME TIME FAMILY READING FOR YAZIDI REFUGEES

For 18 years, Humanities Nebraska has offered bilingual Prime Time for Spanish-speaking families. In 2021, HN partnered with Juniper Refuge and Calvary Lutheran Church in Lincoln to offer the nation’s first bilingual Prime Time Family Reading in the Kurmanji language.

Participation started small, but as word spread, attendance reached six families: 13 adults and 21 children. The program continues to grow this spring.

Program Coordinator Lynett Wilson reported, “One participant invited a friend on her own!” Another attendee appreciated having a family activity instead of dropping off her kids.

Lincoln is home to more than 3,000 Yazidis who fled genocide in Iraq. The Yazidi are a Kurmanji-speaking minority group indigenous to Iraq, Syria, Turkey, and Iran. Juniper Refuge suggested the idea for Prime Time in Kurmanji as a way to provide opportunities for refugees and American citizens to engage with each other, grow in understanding of one another, and create friendships.

Since Juniper Refuge does not have their own space, they partnered with Calvary Lutheran Church. The church provides free space rental and the pastor’s wife, Jenny Vineyard, enjoys serving food and interacting with the families.

The team also partners with The Career Academy to staff the preschool room for Prime Time. Jame Cartwright, an Early Childhood Education instructor at Southeast Community College and The Career Academy, leads the preschool room and brings two high school students each week to help. Jame plans three activities for each evening to go along with the session’s preschool book.

Nina shared the story of a child who loves reading, but her parents did not read to her and her mother doesn’t speak English at this time. “This program made her aunt realize how much she loved reading. Her aunt said she’ll start reading to her and take her to the library more often. The little girl was so excited to come to Prime Time. She listened and participated a lot.”

Lincoln Prime Time is funded by the Nebraska Cultural Endowment, State of Nebraska, Sherwood Foundation, Rogers Foundation, John & Catherine Angle Charitable Fund, Duncan Aviation, Give to Lincoln Day donors, and an anonymous donor.

MEET ABBY JAVIER-PAXTLE

Recently, HN welcomed Abigail “Abby” Javier-Paxtle as the new program intern. Hailing from Grand Island, Abby is a senior at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln (UNL) double-majoring in Spanish and Child, Youth & Family Studies with an emphasis on human development and family science. She also helps first generation and low-income high school students prepare for college and future careers at UNL’s Nebraska College Preparatory Academy.

Abby said, “I’m learning a lot about Prime Time as I read through comments families have made about the program. I am grateful to be a part of something that helps families connect with each other.”
THANK YOU TO OUR DONORS

Join these generous contributors and help Nebraskans explore what connects us and makes us human.

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Many donors make multiple gifts throughout the year. Cumulative giving for the year is listed in our annual report.

*Deceased
May 26 is Give to Lincoln Day! Sponsored by the Lincoln Community Foundation, the 11th annual Give to Lincoln Day is a perfect time to show your love for your favorite nonprofit organizations, including Humanities Nebraska. Gifts to HN will go toward “summer reading kits” for Prime Time Family Reading families. Containing books, a discussion guide and fun activities, the kits, valued at $150 each, will help families read and discuss books together.

The online giving platform is open May 1 through May 26 so you may make a gift anytime during the month. Every donation you make helps even more because Humanities Nebraska will receive a proportional share of a $500,000 challenge match fund. Thank you!
CHAD BAILEY | 1965-2021 Chad Bailey died November 21. A graduate of Kearney State College, he was a secondary teacher with endorsements in History, Social Sciences, Physical Education, and Coaching. As a high school social studies teacher at Holdrege Public School, Chad was a long-time participating teacher in HN’s Capitol Forum for America’s Future. Known for encouraging his students to be the best they could be, he was given Nebraska’s Outstanding Teacher Award in 2018.

FREDERICK C. LUEBKE | 1927-2021 Fred Luebke, celebrated educator, historian, and author, died November 27. As a member of the University of Nebraska-Lincoln (UNL) faculty for 26 years, Fred inspired many students and fellow faculty members. He left a lasting mark on Nebraska as founding director of the Center for Great Plains Studies and founding editor of the Great Plains Quarterly. Among many honors, Fred was a past recipient of the Sower Award in the Humanities.

ALBERT HAMERSKY | 1924-2021 Albert Hamersky died November 18. A respected architect, Albert contributed to many civic, commercial and religious organizations, including chairing the Lincoln Community Foundation, the Lincoln Parks & Recreation Advisory Board and the Capitol Environ Commission. He served on numerous other boards, including the Nebraska Humanities Council (1986-90) and the Nebraska Foundation for the Humanities (1986-87).

TEDD C. HUSTON | 1926-2022 Tedd Huston, longtime Central Nebraska attorney, died January 8. After serving in the U.S. Navy, he attended UNL, earning his law degree and competing on the swim team. After moving to Broken Bow, he became very active in numerous legal and community organizations, including the Jaycees, the Rotary Club, and the University of Nebraska Foundation. He also served on HN’s council board (1994-1999) and the foundation board (1994-1997).

MARILYN WHITNEY PETERSON | 1933-2021 Dr. Marilyn Peterson died December 12. A graduate of Kearney State College, she taught in Kearney, Cozad, and schools in Colorado while completing her master’s degree. Further studies in New Mexico, Texas, Hawaii, Europe, and at UNL led to her Ph.D. and career as a professor of journalism and English at Midland Lutheran College in Fremont. Among numerous boards, she served on the Nebraska Humanities Council 1997-2003.

ELAINE PHILLIPS SPIRE | 1928-2022 Elaine Spire died on March 12. Originally from Boston, Elaine graduated from Wellesley College. After marrying Omaha native Bob Spire (later attorney general) and moving to Nebraska, Elaine became a big Cornhusker fan and took up community service, serving on many boards, foundations, and organizations including HN’s foundation (1995-2001). She was the first recipient of the Hubert Locke Award for Distinguished Service in 2002.

DALE YOUNG | 1928-2022 A U.S. veteran who served in World War II and Korea, Dale Young died March 1. The Palmyra native had a banking career in Lincoln, where he served many local and state-wide organizations. Among them, he was president of the Lincoln Chamber of Commerce, an executive committee member of the Nebraska Bankers Association, and founding board member and treasurer for the Lincoln Children’s Zoo Foundation. He served on HN’s foundation board 2000-2005.
A public discussion funded by an HN grant explored why African-American women are largely absent from male-dominated careers such as environmental science.

Rae Wynn-Grant, who has a Ph.D. in ecology and evolution, and Dr. Sheritta Strong, the assistant vice chancellor of inclusion at University of Nebraska Medical Center, spoke about amplifying black women in the sciences at the Charles B. Washington Branch, Omaha Public Library on February 16. Omaha Performing Arts hosted the event.

Grant, a California native, said she is currently the only Black woman in the world who is a carnivore wildlife ecologist. She said she has always had a passion for wildlife but did not always excel in school. Her advice to others is “to not be too intimidated by academics.”

Fellow panelist Sheritta Strong agreed. “I was the only female student in my engineering class at Omaha North. I had the highest grade in the class.”

Both women urged listeners not to confuse passion with performance. “It’s not about how well you study for tests,” Grant said. “It’s more about: Do you have the energy for this? Do you have good ideas? A test isn’t going to save the environment, but really good ideas and energy are.”

She continued, “We see women and women of color falling out of math and science early...Society tells us, ‘It’s too hard for you.’ It’s not. It is hard for everybody.”

The event concluded with a discussion on the importance of communication in the sciences.

RECENTLY AWARDED GRANTS

Antelope County Historical Society, Neligh, $2,000 to help fund a permanent Native American display in the society’s museum. • Asian Community and Cultural Center, Lincoln, $1,450 in support of Camp Culture 2022. • Buffalo Commons Storytelling Festival, McCook, $2,000 to help fund the 2022 event. • Crane River Theater Company, Kearney, $2,000 for the 2022 “Page to Stage” library outreach program. • Food Fort, Lincoln, $1,100 for books and journals for its “Tree Top Education” elementary school reading and writing program. • Lincoln Commission on Human Rights, $300 to provide honoraria to students who participated in the Martin Luther King Jr. “Living a Dream” arts competition. • Nebraska Deaf Heritage Museum and Cultural Center, Omaha, $1,500 to help fund speakers and storytellers for the Deaf History Month kickoff event. • Nebraska Journalism Trust, Omaha, $1,925 supporting a forum on the future of journalism in Nebraska. • Nebraska Poetry Society, Omaha, $625 in support of five virtual educational events scheduled for spring and summer 2022. • O. NE Mentoring Academy, Omaha, $1,250 in support of four six-week programs mentoring underserved students in grades 4-12. • Platte Valley Literacy Association, Columbus, $2,000 for books and other materials for a citizenship class. • Robert Henri Museum and Historical Walkway, Cozad, $2,000 to help fund construction of a new exhibit titled, “Boyhood on the Prairie: Robert Henri’s Early Years in Nebraska.” • Social Action Committee of Unitarian Church, Lincoln, $2,000 in support of its winter lecture series, “Conflicts within Nations and the Right to Protect.”

• Southern Heights Food Forest, Lincoln, $1,500 to help fund speakers for its “Cultural Foodways” presentations. • Together We Achieve Miracles, Inc., Omaha, $1,750 to help fund an in-person and online townhall sharing the history of Saratoga and the Beltline Railroad. • Tri-Faith Initiative of Omaha, $1,000 to help plan for its upcoming “Race, Religion, and Social Justice” series. • University of Nebraska at Omaha Board of Regents, $36,300 in support of a “Living Library” in which experts on various topics were available for one-on-one discussion; $1,900 for the ArteLatinX exhibit; and $2,000 for programming related to the “On the Inside” exhibition. • University of Nebraska-Lincoln Board of Regents, $2,000 in support of a Native American exhibit and programming titled “Contemporary Indigeneity 2022.” • Vision Maker Media, Lincoln, $2,000 to help fund its 2022 filmmaker summit. • Willa Cather Foundation, Red Cloud, $2,000 supporting speakers and film screenings in conjunction with the Smithsonian’s touring exhibition, “Crossroads: Change in Rural America.”
Nebraska’s cultural sector is recognized as strong throughout the nation, in large part due to the close working relationship of Humanities Nebraska, the Nebraska Arts Council, and the Nebraska Cultural Endowment (NCE).

This spring, the three organizations bid farewell to NCE executive director Kyle Cartwright, who for the past four years helped guide this unique public-private partnership, and welcomed Maggie Smith as the new director.

Maggie was most recently Director of Operations at KANEKO in Omaha, where she co-led fundraising and development strategy while overseeing marketing, communications, programming, and operations. Prior to joining KANEKO in 2019, she taught college writing courses while working in innovative product and program management at Yahoo!

“NO OTHER STATE IN THE COUNTRY PROVIDES ENDOWMENT DONORS A GUARANTEED $10 MILLION STATE MATCH THE WAY NEBRASKA DOES, SO MY GOAL IS TO MAKE SURE EVERYONE IN NEBRASKA KNOWS ABOUT IT AND IS AS PROUD OF IT AS I AM!”

— MAGGIE SMITH

In addition to her tech industry experience, Maggie also co-founded a nonprofit in Dublin, Ireland, focused on creativity and writing. Maggie will lead NCE’s continuing efforts to raise private donations that are matched by state support, ultimately leading to combined endowment funds of more than $40 million, with increasing annual distributions that benefit arts and humanities programs across the state. We are thrilled to work side by side with her, and she is eager to experience humanities programs across the state.

Learn about NCE’s funding for the arts and humanities at NebraskaCulturalEndowment.org.

MAKE A DIFFERENCE

GIVE NEBRASKA is a coalition of 74 diverse nonprofits working to build a vibrant, creative, and healthy community. Humanities Nebraska greatly appreciates donors who designated gifts to us through their Give Nebraska workplace giving campaigns. To learn more visit givenebraska.org.

SOWER AWARD NOMINATIONS

Nominations are welcome for the 2022 Sower Award in the Humanities, presented in conjunction with the Governor’s Lecture in the Humanities.

Anyone may nominate an individual who has made a significant contribution to public understanding of the humanities in Nebraska via a commitment of time, expertise, resources, or any combination of the above.

PAST HONOREES INCLUDE:

• Talented humanities faculty or educators who reach beyond their classrooms
• Committed volunteers or philanthropists who enhance cultural life of the state
• Journalists, filmmakers, or authors who shed light on important public issues

PREVIOUS INDIVIDUAL RECIPIENTS

Marian Anderson • Robert Audi • Keith Blackledge • Marion Marsh Brown • Gene Bunge • Jack Campbell • State Sen. Lavon Crosby • Nancy Duncan • Walter Friedlander • Judi gaia'hkibos • John Gottschalk • Natalie Hahn • Richard Holland • Jane Renner Hood • Ron Hull • Ted Kooser • Frederick Luebke • Robert Manley • Jack McBride • Gary Moulton • Ron Naugle • Robert Nefsky • Paul Olson • Don Pederson • Rhonda Seacrest • Todd Simon • Joe Seger • Bernice Slote • Annette and Paul Smith • Pamela Hilton Snow • Joe Starita • E.N. “Jack” Thompson • Charles “Chuck” Trimble • Morrie Tuttle • Don Welch • Larry Wewel • John R. Wunder

Due Jun 17
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In the aftermath of these and other weather disasters that are impacting our people and our agriculture-based economy, Nebraskans look at the future with concern as projections for increased extreme weather events are posited as part of climate change. How can we prepare for the future? How can we protect people and property from the unpredictable?

The “Weathering Uncertainty” discussion on June 15 will include panelists Mark McHargue, president of the Nebraska Farm Bureau; Dr. Hannah Birge, director of agriculture for The Nature Conservancy-Nebraska; Josh Moenning, mayor of Norfolk, and Jesse Bell, director of the Water, Climate, and Health Program at the University of Nebraska Medical Center. The program will be moderated by Nebraska State Climatologist Dr. Martha Shulski, and will include audience Q&A.

Follow HN’s website and social media for this and other “Weathering Uncertainty” programs in the works.

“Weathering Uncertainty” is funded in part by the Mellon Foundation’s “Democracy and the Informed Citizen” initiative, administered by the Federation of State Humanities Councils, and by Rhonda Seacrest.

Are you curious about what climate change means for Nebraska, and how different sectors in our state are responding? Put June 15 on your calendar for the opportunity to hear from leaders in agriculture, the environment, local economies, and public health. Humanities Nebraska and a variety of partners will present “Weathering Uncertainty: Conversations About Climate” June 15 at 7:00 p.m. Central at the Lied Center for Performing Arts in Lincoln. The program will also be live-streamed statewide.

In 2019, Nebraska sustained a record $2 billion in damage from a devastating storm system that combined blizzard, rain, and widespread flooding, receiving national attention as a “bomb cyclone.” In 2021, Nebraska figured into three (out of 20) billion-dollar national weather disasters: severe cold in February that led to rolling blackouts across the state; July storms that knocked out power to a third of Nebraskans and included massive hail damage; and severe weather in December that brought a record number of tornadoes and a first-ever winter derecho. As this newsletter goes to print, weather has led to numerous wildfires around the state.

For more information about this program, visit humanitiesnebraska.org/weather