

September 1, 2023

TO: Eric Hockert, UMRA President  
Cherie Hamilton, Social Activities Committee Chair  
Julie Sweitzer, Program Committee Chair  
Cathy Lee Gierke, Webmaster and UMRA Continuity Committee

FROM: Jan Morlock

SUBJECT: End of year report on other social events in 2023

***I. Off-season special social events***

**Background.** Early in the program year, the UMRA board was interested in providing at least one social event during the summer months that could potentially accommodate a large number of our active members, and also considered a holiday/winter event beyond our normal calendar of luncheon forums. A special events planning group was formed that included members Will Craig, Cherie Hamilton, Eric Hockert, Cathy Lee Gierke, Kate Maple, Diane Young, and myself as convener. The direction from the board was to plan events that could accommodate as many of our members as possible, would be mostly social and light on formal programs, and that would be self-funded as much as possible through fees to members.

**Event results.** We offered two summer events and are continuing to work on a potential holiday/winter event for late 2023 or early 2024. Members of the UMRA Host Committee assisted with hosting, name tags, check-in table, greeting new members. The UMRA webmaster created and monitored the online registration function, and UMRA Treasurer assisted with accepting payments from members and making payments to vendors. For each event, we had a designated lead volunteer who was principal point of contact with the vendor, answered questions from members, and was gatekeeper on any registration waitlist. The events were promoted through all-member emails, UMRA newsletter and e-News, and the UMRA Facebook group.

<b>Event</b>	<b>Venue</b>	<b>Date</b>	<b>Time</b>	<b>Member price</b>	<b>Vendor /other party</b>	<b>Attendance</b>
Summer Social with picnic lunch	Como Lakeside Pavilion	Wed, June 28	11 a.m. to 2 p.m.	\$30/each	Lancer Catering (St. Paul Parks vendor)	80+ members and guests

Event	Venue	Date	Time	Member price	Vendor /other party	Attendance
Mississippi River Cruise with taco buffet and cash bar	Mississippi Queen, dock at Bohemian Flats Park, Mpls	Tuesday, Aug 29	5:30 to 8 p.m.	\$45/each; \$42 early registration discount	Paradise Cruises	89 members and guests
Winter Social	Campus Club, if available	Tentative: Dec	TBD	TBD		

These events all required advance registration and payment, handled through the UMRA website either via our existing forum registration system or via another third-party payment system.

**Conclusions/what we learned.**

Event	Our comments
Summer Social	Very well received. Third year for this event, so now something of an UMRA tradition. We researched several potential venues (public and private) and found this had the best location, price, and efficiency. Lancer Catering performed very well, following a rocky experience with them in 2022. We successfully broke even on the income/costs.
River Cruise	Sold out, with a wait list, so that we were able to “buy out” the entire boat, which gave us important flexibility on the cruise. Food and service were excellent. It’s been suggested we make this an annual end-of-summer event, possibly alternating cruise routes or destinations. We broke even on straight costs, but should have priced it a couple of dollars higher to cover gratuities.

Other learnings:

- As with the UMRA Forums, the Host team flagged new members with a symbol on their name tags so that hosts could give them a special greeting and introduce them to other members—much appreciated by new members!
- Remember to include tips/gratuities in financial projections for an event. And a corollary, build in at least a small extra cushion in the pricing to members to cover unexpected expenses.
- Make sure online registration system is set up to allow members to register non-member guests. Require the member registering to provide names of their guests.

- If it's a new venue, make at least one site visit to confirm road conditions, access, parking and other quality considerations.
- Have several members of the planning team or other volunteers to serve as hosts at the event and to help cover unexpected needs. For example, at the river cruise we found that there was just one kiosk to pay for parking, and it was clunky and slow. Nevin Young stepped up and positioned himself at the parking pay kiosk as guests were arriving to assist them to use the kiosk and keep the line moving so that the cruise could begin on time.
- Offer information to participants about any transit or bicycle access to the venue where appropriate.
- Consider what the cancellation and refund policy will be and publish it so that members know what to expect.
- Confirm handicap access information about the venue and include it in the description of the event. For example, the boat for the cruise may have raised thresholds, narrow doors, steps with no elevator, and a ramp to board that may be at a grade outside of ADA standards.

## ***II. “Cabinets of Curiosity” outings to University collections of note***

**Background.** Cabinets of Curiosity is a series of outings for UMRA members begun in 2023, and proposed and curated by retired Professor of the History of Science Sally Kohlstedt. UMRA members are invited to visit unique collections of the University of Minnesota, with interpretation by their curators. The outings are produced by Sally with a team including Cathy Lee Gierke, Kathy Jensen, and Jan Morlock.

Our goals for the Cabinets series have been:

- To learn and be delighted;
- To provide opportunities for UMRA members to get to know and enjoy each others' company in small groups;
- To offer access to fascinating University collections and interaction with their curators;
- To engage new UMRA members.

**Event results.** To date, each of the outings has “sold out,” with capacity ranging from 20 to 30 participants. On each occasion, we have offered an option to gather after the tour at an area restaurant for refreshments and conversation, with about half of the tour participants opting to remain for the social time. The outings are free, with participants responsible for covering their own parking and restaurant costs. All of the outings to date have been on the Twin Cities Campus proper. Sally has taken care to select destinations on both the Minneapolis and Saint Paul areas of campus.

The events have been promoted through articles on the website, the UMRA newsletter, all-member emails, and the Facebook group. On two of the three occasions to date we have reached out to new members by sending a “sneak preview” invitation to those who have joined

in the last 18 months. As a result, about one-third of the participants have been new members. Registrations for the events have been managed through the website.

Outings to date:

**February 8, 2023, Bell Museum** tour with retired curator and exhibit director Don Luce

**March 8, 2023, Wangensteen Historical Library of Biology and Medicine**

**June 21, 2023, tour of outdoor research areas on the St. Paul Campus**, with UMES Land Director Andrew Scobbie

Outings on the calendar for Fall, 2024 include an **October 3 visit to the Bell Library** of rare books and manuscripts on the West Bank; and a **November 7 visit to the Goldstein Museum of Design** on the Saint Paul Campus. Events being planned for Spring Semester, 2024 include a trip to the insect collection at the Entomology Department and to the Natural Resources Library special collections, all at Hodson Hall; and a curator's tour of the College of Biological Sciences exotic plant collection.

Conclusions/what we've learned.

- The relationship with and commitment of the curators is key to the success of these visits—special thanks to Sally! For curators, it may be a way to build constituency and support for their collection.
- Members enjoy the learning opportunities that come with these visits, and discovering more about the University of Minnesota.
- For some of the participants, the social time following the tour is part of the attraction—occasionally the curators are able to join us for this part of the outing.

*(End of report)*