

## OUR VIEW



2017 photo contributed by Shannon Laing

The rebirth of Duluth's Lincoln Park Craft District was helped along by Rethos, a St. Paul-based nonprofit dedicated to preserving and reusing old buildings. Rethos plans to open an office in Duluth this summer to bolster its historic preservation work here.

## The power of preservation getting a boost in Duluth

It's safe to say that without the nonprofit Preservation Alliance of Minnesota — known now as Rethos, after a rebranding two years ago — historic Northland landmarks like the NorShor Theater in Duluth, Ely's Historic State Theater, and more, including countless old houses, likely wouldn't have been saved and would have been lost to history.

There's certainly no denying Rethos' role, via its Main Street program, in the continuing rebirth of the Lincoln Park Craft District.

So it can be seen as utterly good news and as a positive for all of Northeastern Minnesota that Rethos plans to establish an office in Duluth in July, stepping up its sharing of expertise here and its ability to attract dollars to save and restore old places. Its presence in Duluth promises to bolster the economic-development power of historic preservation throughout the Northland while saving even more of our priceless pieces of the past, the structures and places that define us and that contribute to what makes our communities unique and special.

"It just seemed that we kept, as a team, coming back to conversations around projects in Duluth. ... We realized that we need an easier reach and a better reach up into northern Minnesota," Rethos Executive Director Heidi Swank said in an interview this month with the News Tribune Editorial Board. "Historic preservation touches on people's lives and the ways they see themselves and their communities, so we would love to be part of those communities (in Northeastern Minnesota) and be a support for the things that are important for the people."

Rethos right now has offices in St. Paul and Winona, Minnesota. In Duluth, Rethos is still searching for a landing place, perhaps shared office space with another nonprofit. It expects to have one staffer stationed in Duluth to begin with, who'll lead the preservation work here and also serve as a liaison to city councils and others.

Expect the staffer to look also to the Iron Range and its many historic downtowns as prime candidates for its Main Street program. The program uses historic preservation as a central strategy for revitalizing small-city downtowns — and, now, commercial areas, too, beginning with Duluth's Lincoln Park. Don't be surprised if that's where Rethos' Duluth office ends up being located.

"This will give them an opportunity to sort of expand their reach here," Main Street Lincoln Park Program Director Shannon Laing said in an interview last week with the News Tribune Opinion page. "(With Lincoln Park) being a newly minted Minnesota Main Street community, we are excited about the prospect of having a Rethos office here in Duluth. They already provide

workshops and learning opportunities here, so it makes sense that they would expand here. ...

"Aside from having that long-term, institutional knowledge and their mission to preserve older buildings and to really be encouraging cities both from a reuse standpoint as well as a uniqueness standpoint, (Rethos) really lends itself to preserving the characters of our neighborhoods," Laing said.

In Duluth, Rethos is presently working with Saturday Properties, the St. Louis Park, Minnesota, developer that recently purchased Historic Old Central from the Duluth school district and is working to convert the treasured Duluth landmark largely into apartments. Rethos also has long been involved in the efforts to restore and find a modern use for the Duluth Armory on London Road, a project that received a huge boost at the end of 2021 when Twin Cities developer George Sherman signed on.

Historic preservation is shifting, the nonprofit said, from saving not only grand structures but more modest ones, too, which not only keeps them out of landfills but allows them to continue to help tell fuller stories about our communities.

A great example is St. Peter's Catholic Church, built in the 1920s in Duluth's Little Italy neighborhood by the same Italian immigrant stonemasons who built foundations for mansions in the east end and sturdy retaining walls across Duluth's hillside. They decided their families needed a place of worship. Closed by the diocese, the church was nearly torn down a few years ago before being renovated and reopened as the Great Lakes Academy of Fine Arts.

"It's a really fantastic use of an amazing sanctuary space and one that's really inspiring for the artists," Rethos Deputy Director Erin Hanafin Berg told editorial board members. "Historic preservation has gotten much better at recognizing that not everybody lives in a fancy old mansion. Not everybody works in a high-rise office building downtown. (We need to do a better job of) telling the stories of ordinary Americans, people who are working and living in more humble neighborhoods, who go to a factory, or who do a labor that is part of our American story. We need to do a better job preserving the places that are associated with those stories, too, because they're still part of our society and culture, and they should be recognized and preserved also."

With Rethos' coming arrival in Duluth, more of northern Minnesota's stories and structures from times past can be saved and celebrated while also boosting economic activity, attracting investment, and preserving important old places.

That can only be seen as a positive — and as utterly good news.

## IN RESPONSE

# Column critical of Twin Metals was just more misinformation

The Feb. 4 commentary in the News Tribune, "Magical thinking not a plan for Twin Metals, acid rock drainage," was another example of the misinformation that continues to be spread by mining opponents about the copper-nickel industry and about the proposed Twin Metals Minnesota project.



RENS VERBURG

(The commentary was in response to my column in the News Tribune on Jan. 14, headlined, "Acid rock drainage a nonissue with Twin Metals mine.")

First, the suggestion in the Feb. 4 column that Twin Metals does not have a plan was both false and disrespectful to the communities, employees, and contractors the company has supported through its investment of \$530 million to date. In fact, Twin Metals spent more than a decade developing a plan to mine, which was submitted to state and federal agencies in 2019.

Ironically, the actions of opponents have prevented the publication and evaluation

of Twin Metals' plans, as they would be available for all to review as part of the multiyear state and federal Environmental Impact Statement process. Opponents aim to prevent the very process designed to analyze all the scientific data for which the opponents are calling.

Implying that Twin Metals has no details about its mineral deposit was also misleading. The geochemical characterization program conducted to date of the ore, waste rock, and tailings is highly comprehensive and exceeds global guidelines. The purpose of the environmental-review process is for agencies to review this and all other data submitted by the company, in detail.

The column mentioned issues with tailings ponds, which is irrelevant for Twin Metals, because it will have no tailings ponds and no tailings dam. Instead, filtered tailings will be placed and compacted as an engineered landform, which eliminates the potential for tailings flow. This methodology meets the recommendations from the investigative panel that studied the Mount Polley tailings breach. Contrary

to the column's assertions, the design of the dry stack is considered "Maximum Credible Earthquake," and the dry stack would not experience liquefaction or flow. Additionally, Twin Metals' tailings do not have the potential for acid rock drainage generation.

Finally, suggesting concentrates from the Twin Metals mine could hypothetically create an acid mine drainage problem for someone else was nonsensical. The concentrates containing the sulfur are shipped off-site to processing facilities for refinement to ultimately be used as a commercial product.

The Twin Metals project and the copper-nickel industry have the potential to bring tremendous growth and benefits to northern Minnesota. Therefore, it is important for all of us to better understand the facts that show how modern mining can be done safely and responsibly.

Rens Verburg of Redmond, Washington, is a principal geochemist at Golder Associates USA (golder.com), with more than 30 years of experience in the geochemical evaluation of mining issues. He was project director for the development of the Global Acid Rock Drainage (GARD) Guide for the International Network for Acid Prevention. The GARD Guide (gardguide.com) is a worldwide reference for best practices in preventing acid rock drainage.

## READERS' VIEWS

### African Heritage Commission story was appalling

As a former commissioner on the African Heritage Commission in Duluth, I was appalled at the lack of journalistic investigation displayed in the Feb. 17 story, "Pandemic made for rocky launch of Duluth's African Heritage Commission."

Each and every member of the commission who resigned is approachable and available to be interviewed and to offer perspective as to the reason or reasons for their resignations. Even if those who resigned are not willing to participate in an interview, the Minnesota Data Practices Act allows access to factual information involved with the proceedings of our last meeting, at which commissioners stated the reasons for their displeasure with serving on this inaugural commission.

The reporter failed to produce a scintilla of evidence linking our resignations from this commission to the COVID-19 pandemic. As a physician, I have been practicing medicine in a hospital setting since the very beginning of this public health scourge. I hardly found it difficult to attend virtual commission Zoom meetings or to serve my community due to the coronavirus.

In this era of rampant misinformation and deliberate disinformation, the News Tribune has a professional responsibility and obligation to its readers to promote journalistic integrity. Do better.

Verna Thornton, M.D.  
Hermantown

### Rough play by East hockey no surprise

Why were Duluth school district administrators seemingly surprised at the descent into serious physical bullying by some Duluth East hockey players ("After violent game, Duluth schools address

sportsmanship," Feb. 16)?

Checking Mike Randolph from his successful and thoughtful guidance as head coach of the Duluth East hockey program started the puck moving in this direction, I feel. Student athletes imitate how they perceive the operations of the adults around them. Sadly, they don't always have the ability or can't stop at the vocal bullying level.

Anne Velasco  
Duluth

### Art leaves teenagers better off

Teenagers need art in their lives because it gives them a chance to use the right sides of their brains, and art gives them an opportunity to be creative.

Teenagers spend most of their days sitting behind desks learning about things they may or may not need for their futures. Typical high school students spend their school days in classes that are more analytical, which uses the left sides of their brains.

If a student is involved in an art class, such as drawing or music, the student is able to think creatively. Scientists have revealed that creativity and emotions are controlled by the right hemisphere of our brains. The left hemisphere of your brain is also used for studying, another school-related practice. It's shown that kids who use both sides of their brains during school are able to come up with answers to questions more quickly and more thoroughly. Not only do art classes help teenagers become more intelligent, they help them cope with things outside of school.

Art gives them a place to channel their emotions without the fear of judgment. Many scientific studies have shown that teenagers who have some sort of art in their lives are less likely to have high stress levels because they can focus on their art.

All artistic outlets — like drama, music, and drawing — make it easier for any kid to be able to fit in and do something they love and are interested in. Art also allows young people to find where they fit in.

Overall, teenagers involved in art are better off, because they are being exposed to their creative sides.

Taryn Snetsinger  
Grand Rapids

### Protected BWCAW a boost to local economy

Protecting the Boundary Waters Canoe Area Wilderness is critical to Minnesota's local economy. The Boundary Waters is the most-visited wilderness in the U.S. According to the Ely Chamber of Commerce, every year, approximately 250,000 people visit the area for camping, fishing, hunting, hiking, and more.

The numerous visitors to the Boundary Waters have created a strong outdoor recreation economy with thousands of jobs and generating millions of dollars a year from local resorts, lodges, campgrounds, and more. My family's business is one of those local businesses dependent on the wilderness remaining just the way it is, unpolluted. We are thriving and will continue to grow, creating even more jobs and attracting many more visitors to the Ely area.

Like many Minnesotans, I was so relieved when the administration of President Joe Biden announced its decision to cancel Twin Metals' mineral leases, related to the company's risky proposed mining project near the Boundary Waters. This was a win for our local economy. I applaud the Biden administration and Sen. Tina Smith for standing up for the place we all cherish.

Elli Piragis  
Ely

The writer's family owns and operates Piragis Northwoods Co. (piragis.com).

## Readers' Views and Local Views

Letters to the editor are a critical part of the community dialogue, and the News Tribune attempts to publish all letters of opinion meeting our requirements. Letters are limited to 300 words, must be the original work of the author and must be exclusive to the News Tribune. Letters are edited for style, space, accuracy and civility. Letter writers are limited to one published submission every 30 days.

With rare exceptions, the News Tribune does not publish poetry; letters that are anonymous, libelous or attack other writers; consumer-complaint letters; thank-you letters; or letters generated by political or special-interest campaigns. We will consider exclusive Local View columns of 600 words or fewer. Authors should possess unique insights, and their commentaries should demonstrate greater

knowledge of their subject than letters.

Email submissions to: letters@duluthnews.com.

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