High school students learn about the use of technology and the art of design at The LAB Theater as a part of the Technical Theater Laboratory, a new education program engaging youth in the creative process that backstage professionals use to tell unified and life-changing stories onstage.

Photo © Dan Norman.
Your support helps us comfort and inspire.

Through your steadfast support and belief in the power of music to bring us together, Minnesota Opera continues to be creatively vital. While keeping our communities safe during the COVID-19 pandemic by postponing performances at the Ordway, we’ve been able to pivot our operations and keep our eyes squarely focused on addressing community needs. In doing so, we rely on a tried-and-true tool: the restorative and transformative power of opera.

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11 Increasing Confidence and Creativity
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Our Mission
Minnesota Opera changes lives by bringing together artists, audiences, and community, advancing the art of opera for today and for future generations.

Our Vision
Minnesota Opera will sing every story.

Our Values
Innovation, Inclusivity, Collaboration, Purpose.
Changing Lives

MN Opera sews to save lives, joining forces with HealthPartners in the Twin Cities to create masks for four large hospital systems and a wide range of community partners.

Normally, the folks in the Minnesota Opera costume shop create works of art to dress the singers on stage. “Now,” says MN Opera Costume Director Corinna Bakken to the Star Tribune, “we’re sewing rectangles to save lives.”

With shows on hold, staff in the opera’s shuttered costume and scene shops turned to a new project: making face masks to protect people. The costumers sewed masks for patients and others facing shortages of personal protective equipment, according to patterns approved by HealthPartners, and scene shop staff did the pattern and tie cutting, and developed plans for material distribution and delivery of finished masks. After its launch, the operation—endearingly referred to as the “Mask Force”—expanded to organizing volunteers as part of MN Opera’s “Sew to Support” effort. MN Opera then partnered with the organization “Tickets for Kids” to directly donate masks to a wide range of community partners, giving aid to backline healthcare workers, senior living facilities, homeless shelters, food banks, and other organizations in need.

“You’ve got all these amazingly talented backstage workers who are creative and technical,” said MN Opera President and General Director Ryan Taylor to the Star Tribune. “Their whole life is about project management. If you needed an army of those people, they’re here in the Twin Cities. And they would do it with so much soul.”

In total, MN Opera manufactured 10,809 masks, and delivered 4,308 of those to HealthPartners before they were able to re-enter the commercial supply line. The initiative was featured in the Star Tribune, Pioneer Press, CNN’s Great Big Story, and The New York Times.

Bakken stressed the care that went into making the masks to the Star Tribune as her team created them from home, explaining that “they need to be finished beautifully, because you’re handing it to someone and telling them it’s going to protect them.”

“I hope all the love people are pouring into these masks helps them know we all appreciate them.”
10,809 Total Masks Manufactured

**Mask Distribution by Sector**
- HealthPartners
- Social Services
- Senior Living/Services
- Hunger/Food
- Other Health Care
- Youth Services
- Staff/Artists/Board
- Shelter/Housing Services
- Education
- Misc.

**Mask Recipients**
- 180 Degrees
- Ain Dah Yung
- Amherst H. Wilder Foundation
- Anoka County Partnership for Family Success
- Appetite for Change
- Arrowhead Economic Opportunity Agency/Grand Rapids
- Boys & Girls Clubs of the Twin Cities
- Capital Hill Magnet School
- Children’s MN - Department of Hematology/Oncology
- Cornerstone Advocacy Services
- Crossroads Elementary
- D.I.V.I.N.E. Institute
- Douglas Dayton YMCA at Gaviidae
- Essentia Health Virginia
- Fairbault Youth Services Center
- Fraser
- Friendship Academy of the Arts
- Gehrmann Animal Hospital
- Girls Are Powerful
- Gladstone Meals on Wheels
- Goodhue County Education District
- Gurlz in Action
- HealthPartners
- Heritage Meadows
- Hired
- Kanabec County Child Protective Services
- Keweydin Park – Mpls Parks & Rec Board
- Kids ‘n Kinship
- Lackey Academy
- Little Sand Group Home
- Lyngblomsten
- McLeod Treatment Programs Inc.
- Memorial Blood Center
- Metro Social Services
- MIGIZI Communications
- Minneapolis American Indian Center
- Minnesota Senior Living
- Minnesota Opera Board, Staff, and Artists
- Mobile Hope
- Mount Olivet Lab School
- NC Little Hospice
- New Creations Ministries
- Next Step
- North End-South Como Block Nurse Program
- Northfield Healthy Community Initiative
- Park Nicollet/HealthPartners Urgent Care
- Reach for Resources
- Roots for the Home Team
- Southwest Health & Human Services
- St. David’s Center Foster Care
- St. John Paul II Catholic School
- St. Therese’s Nursing Home
- The Noble Salvation Army
- The Sanneh Foundation
- TownePlace Suites
- University of Minnesota Department of Pediatric Ophthalmology
- Urban Ventures
- Venture Academies
- Waters Assisted Living - 50th & France
- Waters Assisted Living - Excelsior
- Whittier Rec Center
- YMCA of the Greater Twin Cities

Wow! I am speechless! We are over the moon to receive these masks.
—Andrea Lewandoski, Director of Lifelong Learning and the Arts at Lyngblomsten: Senior Housing, Healthcare, & Services

As we face an unprecedented crisis, Minnesotans are stepping up with unprecedented compassion and heroism. Thank you, Minnesota Opera.

With photos on hold, workers in the Minnesota Opera’s shuttered costume and scene shops have turned to a new project: making face masks to protect people. strib.mn/2W75600
Music has always served as a shining beacon of healing, refuge, and hope. During this time when we’re more isolated than we’ve ever been, MN Opera felt that it was important to do everything that we could to help lift up the community that has so steadfastly supported the organization for nearly 60 years. The result was “At Home with MN Opera,” a multi-platform digital initiative designed to help MN Opera artists, patrons, and staff stay connected with the art form and with each other. Staff members from every facet of the organization joined together from home to create special opera-related content to help everyone share in music-making once again while we wait for the all-clear. These projects included everything from one-of-a-kind musical performances, educational opportunities for adults and children, and even opera-themed quizzes and games.

In May, the Opera partnered with Classical Minnesota Public Radio to create the 2020 Digital Opera Series, an on-demand weekly audio series that runs through July, comprised of five of our most popular recent operas, each broadcast in their entirety. MN Opera also partnered with PBS to re-broadcast our 2013 world premiere Doubt as part of their Great Performances series. The education, artistic, and marketing teams came together to create fun and informative experiences like a 360-degree virtual tour of the MN Opera Center, an online version of library storytelling program Stories Sing!, and an interactive voice lesson with Chorus Master Andrew Whitfield. Opera production staff provided mask-making patterns and instructions to those interested in joining the “Mask Force” from home.

Perhaps the most popular offering was a filmed rendition of “The ‘Sleep’ Chorus” from 2011 Pulitzer Prize-winning world premiere opera Silent Night. Recorded remotely by members of the Minnesota Opera Chorus and then produced by members of the artistic and communications staff, this chorus is a piece that highlights opera’s power to comfort, inspire, and bring us closer together. So far, the video has garnered upwards of 40,000 views across all our platforms and has earned rave reviews from opera industry leaders and the public alike. One Facebook commenter posted, “This is so beautiful and for some reason makes me cry. Thank you for bringing some joy!” A commenter on YouTube said, “My eyes are welling with tears. Thank you so, so much—I’ve never been prouder to be a MN Opera subscriber. See you next season!”

When MN Opera decided to cancel the remainder of the 2019–2020 Season due to the COVID-19 pandemic, artists, designers, and administrators immediately came together to figure out how to support our community in isolation.

Captivate, Surprise, and Inspire
Creative and Artistic Excellence

MN Opera’s multi-year workshop process ensures that artists can do their best work and world premiere productions are worth the wait.

The creation of a new work is a major production that involves a huge number of artists working over a long period of time. For the performers, it’s months of learning and memorizing for two multi-day piano workshops and one week-long orchestra workshop before rehearsals and opening night. For the composer and librettist, it’s the culmination of around three years of work. And for the artistic team at MN Opera, the opening night of a new opera can be ten years in the making.

Our extensive workshop process—the road map for creating a hit new opera honed over years of practice—fosters creative and artistic excellence, developing artists in the process. Thankful for the time and space to tackle a project of this size and scope, Julliard-trained Edward Tulane composer Paola Prestini described the workshop process to Opera News as “a real opportunity to learn the ropes.”

Expressing gratitude for the ways that the workshop process has helped her develop her own artistic language, Prestini continued, “The only way you train to write big work is by doing it. You become more attuned to your language, to timing, to all sorts of rhythms—rhythmic rhythm, lyrical rhythm, harmonic rhythm—and they become very intuitive. The changes that you’re making tend to be more about how to evolve your sound, which is such a luxurious place to be—to be able to say, ‘I identify with my voice, but how can I grow it?’” Trust yourself that you have enough skill to attack certain frameworks. That’s the lifelong school that you’ve subscribed to if you’re going to be a practicing artist.”
Building the Profession

Flourishing in the opera industry and beyond, the MN Opera Resident Artist Program turns budding artists into rising stars.

From debuting at the Metropolitan Opera to winning awards for their teaching expertise, participants in Minnesota Opera’s season-long Resident Artist Program have found fulfillment in a wide variety of artistic and professional endeavors—made possible by the artistic, personal, and professional growth fostered during their time with MN Opera.

NADIA BENAVIDEZ
In her first year of sharing her passion for music with kids by teaching at the Harmony School of Enrichment in Houston, a public charter school, Resident Artist Program and Project Opera alum Nadia Benavidez (’16–’18, previously Nadia Fayad) was honored to be named Teacher of the Year.

GERARD D’EMILIO
Gerard D’Emilio (’14–’15) graduated with highest honors from the University of Oklahoma College of Law and now serves as a litigator. He also recently performed in an opera with his wife, a professor of voice at Oklahoma Baptist University and former MN Opera chorus member.

JENI HOUSER
During her time at MN Opera, Jeni Houser (’15–’16) sang the pivotal role of The Queen of the Night in the unforgettable, groundbreaking production of Mozart’s The Magic Flute and in January 2020 made her Metropolitan Opera debut in the same role.

ANDREW LOVATO
Recently named a “winning baritone” by The New York Times and coming off performances of Carmen at the Rohm Theater in Kyoto, Japan, baritone Andrew Lovato (’14–’16) has also begun to cultivate a career in painting. To view all his work, follow him on Instagram @andrew.lovato.

CORTez MITCHELL
Cortez Mitchell (’06–’07), MN Opera’s first Resident Artist countertenor, who recently starred as the Refugee in Jonathan Dove’s Flight, is in his 13th season with Chanticleer, the famous full-time classical vocal ensemble based in San Francisco.

ANDREW WILKOWSKE
Andrew Wilkowske (’97–’98, ’02–’04) recently presented his signature show Guns N’ Rosenkavalier, “a riot of rule-breaking, genre-bending tunes from the worlds of art song and rock” (Milwaukee Journal Sentinel) featuring the music of Schubert, Schumann, Fauré, Madonna, Kate Bush, and Van Halen.

ADRIANA ZABALA
Since leaving the program, Adriana Zabala (’99–’01) has performed with renowned ensembles across the country including MN Opera, and has served on the voice faculty at the University of Minnesota. She was recently appointed to the voice faculty at the Yale School of Music.
“Flight” is an object lesson in how Minnesota Opera nurtures new talents”
—Star Tribune

121
Resident Artists since the program’s inception in 1997

10
Resident Artists during the 2019–2020 Season

8
current and former Resident Artist Program participants involved with Flight

The footing and exposure I got here was very important, the stage performances and the language coaching. I don’t know how much more valuable a hands-on experience you can get.”
—Cortez Mitchell, ’06–’07
A key goal of the program is to show students that there are many ways to be involved in the arts. “Not everyone is interested in becoming an onstage performer, and just because you’re not a performer, it doesn’t mean there isn’t a place for you in the performing arts,” says MN Opera Assistant Production Director Julia Gallagher. That said, the program has also broadened the perspectives of those students who do wish to be performers, enhancing their own performances by giving them a deeper, more holistic understanding of the roles and responsibilities of the backstage artists supporting them on stage.

By exposing kids to a variety of disciplines through the Technical Theater Laboratory, Gallagher says, “We’re really hoping to inspire interest and wonder and excitement about technical theater … and about this whole world we get to create.” And the program is doing just that: With a number of participating students indicating after the program that they want to pursue this work as their career, this new education initiative is having a positive impact and directly inspiring the next generation of theater artists.
Increasing Confidence and Creativity

Music Out Loud, MN Opera’s intensive long-term afterschool music curriculum, is still teaching kids the value of teamwork, resilience, and self-expression after five amazing years.

For many students in Music Out Loud, an afterschool program led by Minnesota Opera Teaching Artists, this is their first time participating in a staged production with costumes, lighting, and sets. The creative process of developing individual characters provides new and engaging challenges for the students. For instance, in the fall of 2019, the group chose to write their own play about a group of middle-schoolers organizing a climate change protest. Through the rehearsal and performance process, students were able to use their art to have broader conversations about their place in the world.

Heading into its sixth year this fall, Music Out Loud is an opera-based, El Sistema-inspired, free initiative for more than fifty 4th-8th graders. Students at Folwell Elementary School in Minneapolis and the St. Paul Music Academy meet Monday through Thursday throughout the school year to learn about singing, acting, and technical theater.

While hundreds of El Sistema-inspired programs have successfully launched around the world focusing on orchestral and choral music, MN Opera is the first opera company in North America to use the multimedia operatic art form as the primary teaching tool.

“Our approach is to deconstruct what opera education has traditionally looked like and engage students through the various components of the art form. This provides a wealth of opportunities to engage students in connecting with their passion and talents, whether it is music, design, visual art, theater, direction, composition, or production,” says MN Opera Chief Learning Officer Jamie Andrews. He continues, “The curriculum is designed to allow all students to learn about every aspect of opera creation and production, then provide opportunities to dig deeper and hone specific skills that will prepare them for future studies and employment.”

In addition, the program’s artistic objectives, as well as its emphasis on leadership, teamwork, and perseverance, are important social-emotional learning goals. As the founder of El Sistema José Abreu said, “We’re working on the future here. Most of these kids won’t be full-time musicians, but they will be full-time citizens.” Teaching the skills to succeed in the rehearsal room, the performance stage, and life are what makes Music Out Loud so unique.

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Teaching artist Rebecca Blackwell with Music Out Loud students © Dan Norman
As the definition of the concert stage expands during the COVID-19 pandemic, an organizational capacity to think beyond the traditional stage becomes more important than ever. Throughout MN Opera’s history, the fourth wall has often been broken down, bringing opera into the community and introducing the art form to more people than can be done in a traditional theater setting. Focused first on awareness and then fostering a deeper engagement with the organization, offstage work extends an invitation to a life-long relationship with the performing arts. But it starts with the all-important introduction—that unexpected moment when opera appears in one’s consciousness. There couldn’t be a more important time to continue this tradition of catalyzing the discovery of opera in unexpected places. From sports stadiums to YouTube ... opera has no limits!
1 MN Opera performs at Twin Cities Pride as a follow-up to our production of *Fellow Travelers*, the story of a love affair between two men in 1950s Washington DC. 2 MN Opera artists perform at the State Fair for an annual audience-favorite act: “Opera on a Stick.” 3 Floral artists create an installation inspired by MN Opera’s *Thaïs*, a partnership that included live performances at the kick-off of Mia’s popular Art in Bloom. 4 Mezzo-soprano superstar Denyce Graves gets ready to perform the national anthem for the Minnesota Twins’ Diversity Day at Target Field. 5 MN Opera’s world premiere productions of *Silent Night* and *Doubt* have been on PBS’ Great Performances, a series that brings the best in the performing arts from across America and around the world to a US television audience. 6 Andrew Wilkowske creates a viral digital performance as he serenades the people of Minnesota from the State Fair Ferris wheel. 7 Resident Artist Lisa Marie Rogali performs at a MN United playoff game.
Now in its third year, Voices of Opera is MN Opera’s Creative Aging program that encourages older adults to join with fellow musicians for eight rehearsals and two public performances of famous operatic excerpts and other choral favorites. Chosen from a highly competitive national field of more than 200 grant applicants, Voices of Opera is one of 15 projects that formed the first group of grantees to partner with Aroha Philanthropies in its Seeding Vitality Arts initiative, designed to support the development and expansion of successful Creative Aging programs. Since the success of the pilot program, MN Opera has gone on to organize a total of eight Voices of Opera cohorts serving more than 536 participants.

Creative Aging programs inspire and enable older adults to learn, make, and share the arts in ways that are novel, complex, and socially engaging. The work is driven by teaching artists whose creative process brings joy, connection, improved health and well-being, and a renewed sense of purpose to people in community and residential settings.

“It’s one thing to walk around and sing in your most operatic voice, but it’s another thing to participate with 100 other people and really enjoy it,” said program participant Louis Tiggas. “I think Voices of Opera is a great outreach program in that it allows us to come together as a group.”

“This program goes beyond opera education by recognizing older adults’ capacity to make a tremendous contribution to local culture, not just as a passive audience, but as thinkers and makers of art, thereby positively altering public perception around age,” said MN Opera President and General Director Ryan Taylor. “I’m proud that Minnesota Opera can be a leader in the Creative Aging educational movement.”

Voices of Opera, MN Opera’s opera chorus for older adults shows that it’s never too late to cultivate new ideas, make new friends, and create indelible works of art.

**Personal Development**

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It’s a lot of fun. It’s nice to be part of something that’s supported, encouraged, and in the creative aging business.”
—Maryanne Hurby, Voices of Opera Participant

I love seeing older adults in performance pushing their boundaries. It gives me inspiration for myself.”
—Voices of Opera Concert Audience Member

This program is a true gift to the community. Thank you!”
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© Chap Achen

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For the 2019–2020 Season, MN Opera became the first opera company to employ an Intimacy Director for all mainstage productions, cementing a reputation as a safe and welcoming place where talented performers can do their best work.

It is often assumed that when a scene involves violence or extreme physicality, a Fight Director will be hired to ensure the safety of the performers. When a scene involves physical intimacy, however, it can become less clear who’s responsible for making sure performers feel safe. Sometimes when asked, for the sake of the art, to participate in scenes that cause physical or emotional distress, artists can feel as though they can’t stand up for themselves. This feeling can also extend to members of the creative team in the room, who may also feel physically or emotionally unsafe. Who is empowered to step in when an intimate scene as scripted or staged crosses a boundary?

This is where intimacy direction comes in. An Intimacy Director is a trained professional hired to oversee scenes where intimacy, nudity, and love scenes are involved. Intimacy direction informs all interactions, whether it’s a physical touch between characters who are “friends” or “family” (i.e. throwing an arm around someone’s shoulders, hugging, holding hands, dancing together, etc.), scenes with “sexual chemistry” in which no physical touching occurs, and of course, scenes of sexual intimacy. The goal is to create a safe vessel in which to participate in the work, establishing a culture of consent where all participants are empowered to have bodily autonomy and to honestly communicate personal boundaries—and have those boundaries respected. An Intimacy Director is responsible for setting the intimate choreography and working with performers to develop closure techniques that keep the work from continuing outside of the rehearsal room.

Intimacy Director Doug Scholz-Carlson, who first brought the principles of intimacy direction to MN Opera for 2018’s production of Dead Man Walking, recently told the Star Tribune, “The training has completely transformed the way we work ... Everyone has a tendency to be careful around this stuff, but this gave us a way to set boundaries, know what they were, and then, once we had a very clear box, be free within that box to create something really powerful.”

For the 2019–2020 Season, MN Opera became the first opera company to make intimacy direction a part of the regular practice for putting on a show by hiring Mr. Scholz-Carlson to oversee intimate scenes in all mainstage productions.

“Intimacy direction has empowered our performers by giving them the tools to communicate honestly and effectively and establish freely given consent in their interactions onstage,” says MN Opera Production Stage Manager Kerry Masek. “For all of the company members in the rehearsal room, it has enhanced our shared understanding of the stories we are telling, and why and how we are telling them. Ultimately, this creates a safe and healthy working environment and results in engaging, dynamic, and moving productions for our audiences.”

“We are proud to be on the forefront of a movement that empowers our artists to tell stories in profound new ways, while emphasizing the importance of their physical and emotional safety,” says MN Opera President and General Director Ryan Taylor. “It is our hope that MN Opera will continue to be a welcoming space where artists will want to return to again and again to share their talents.”

For the 2019–2020 Season, MN Opera became the first opera company to employ an Intimacy Director for all mainstage productions, cementing a reputation as a safe and welcoming place where talented performers can do their best work.

Artistic and Technical Growth

For the 2019–2020 Season, MN Opera became the first opera company to employ an Intimacy Director for all mainstage productions, cementing a reputation as a safe and welcoming place where talented performers can do their best work.

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In making the necessary decision to cancel the performances of *Edward Tulane* and *Don Giovanni*, we recognized that many of our artists and artisans were dependent on the income they would have received for their already completed or upcoming work on the cancelled performances. In signing their contracts, MN Opera made a commitment to supporting our artists—guest artists, chorus, orchestra, directors, conductors, set builders, stage managers, costumers, hair and makeup artists, supernumeraries, designers, and creatives—during this extraordinary circumstance. The Artist Support Fund was created to help us deliver on as much payment as possible for those contracts despite the loss of ticket revenue.

### Artist Support Fund

Your support keeps MN Opera and its artists strong through this difficult time.

**2,759 TICKET HOLDERS DONATED 6,128 TICKETS**

from *Edward Tulane* and *Don Giovanni* to the Artist Support Fund.

**OVER 200 ARTISTS**

supported by the Fund.

**MORE THAN 80%**

of expected artist income honored by MN Opera.

THANK YOU to all the donors who supported this fund with donations of tickets and special gifts. You made a difference in the lives of hundreds of artists and their families!
Your commitment to us as humans and artists is bold and brave, and I am so grateful … I will look forward to the time when we can come together and make music again.

—MN Opera Guest Artist

You have taken me and my family into your family and I will hold this incredible act of kindness and generosity close to my heart for the rest of my life.

—MN Opera Guest Artist

I can’t quite express how grateful I am for this gesture. All I can really say is thank you so much.

—MN Opera Guest Artist

I am unemployed like so many others, and this will be a great help! I appreciate it so much! Yet another reason why I love this company.

—MN Opera Chorus Member

I will not forget this immensely humanitarian gesture and hope that I will be able to express my gratitude personally and musically to the Minnesota Opera community and the donors as soon as possible.

—MN Opera Guest Conductor

I am blown away! Thank you so much!

—MN Opera Chorus Member

It’s very powerful and uncommon to see an organization value artists like this.

—MN Opera Chorus Member
THANK YOU!

In addition to the 2,759 ticket holders who donated their tickets, over 150 individuals and institutions gave special gifts to the Artist Support Fund and Minnesota Opera. Thank you for your emergency grants and donations.

Anonymous
Vanessa Abbe
Harvey Abrams
Sean Akins
Stephen Anthony
Aroha Philanthropies
Karen Bachman
Thomas Bailey
Barbara And George Barany Fund
Thomas J. Basting Jr and Rebecca Arons
Ariel Begley
Michael C. Benchetrit
Ruth Bengtson
Denise and Rawdon Bergquist
Elizabeth Black
Stephen and Constance Blader
Sharon Bloodworth and Barrett Johnson
Susan Bloyer
Susan Boren King and Steve King
Nancy Brown
Mark Campbell
Mrs. Taylor Coffin
Jane M. and Ogden W. Confer
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Stephen and Joan Costello
Chris Coughlin
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Joan Laes
Karen Sonia Lee
Tian-Jun Li
Manuel Lopez
Joan and Matthew Macheledt
Julia Madore
Rachel Maki
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Kerry A. Masek
Veronica Mason
Betty and Matthew McConnell
Anne McNerney
Allison McMenimen
Robert E. Meyerson
Kathy Miller
Leslie Miller
Jacqueline Moen and Steven Bailey
Patricia Moen
Douglas Moore
Russell Needham
Richard and Nancy Nelson
Kathryn Nettleman
Richard and Nancy Nicholson
Norbert Niembowski
Curtis Nordling
Midge Olsen
George and Katharine O’Neill
Pat Owen
Elizabeth Parker
Miriam Perriello
Leif Peterson
Ronald Peterson
Jan M. Phillips
Mary Pieh
Michele Pierce
Anne and John Polta
Matthew Porter
Julie and Leslie Prahl
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