

Lina Belar receives Northern Lights Library Network Life Achievement Award

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Lina Belar of Wadena was recently honored with the Northern Lights Library Network's Life Achievement Award in recognition of more than 50 years of service to libraries, museums, historical preservation and the arts across Minnesota. Belar helped establish the In Their Own Words Museum in Perham and has spent decades preserving local history while also earning recognition as a poet and author.

Wadena Pioneer Journal file photo

By Pioneer Journal staff report

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WADENA — The Northern Lights Library Network has named Lina Belar as the recipient of its 2026 Life Achievement Award, recognizing more than 50 years of extraordinary service to libraries, museums, history and the arts throughout Minnesota.

The NLLN Life Achievement Award honors individuals who have made significant contributions to citizens across the Northern Lights Library region through a lifetime of dedication and service. The award is presented annually or less frequently upon recommendation of the NLLN executive director or governing board.

Belar's career has spanned more than five decades of work preserving local history and expanding access to cultural resources. Early in her career, she helped establish the In Their Own Words Museum in Perham and the History Museum of East Otter Tail County. She also served as executive director of the Wadena County Historical Society. All three museums became special members of Northern Lights Library Network.

A graduate of Columbia University, Belar played a key role in developing the In Their Own Words Museum, which documents the oral histories of American veterans and provides immersive exhibits depicting wartime experiences. Among its exhibits is a World War I bunker designed to replicate the combat conditions faced by American soldiers in France. Belar was instrumental in bringing the museum to life, often contributing her own resources to support its development.

In addition to her work in museums and historical preservation, Belar is an accomplished poet and author. She has published several books, including *At the Crossroads* and *Rural Score*. Her newest book, *Rift in the Universe*, is currently in press.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, Belar facilitated the publication of two poetry anthologies featuring Minnesota writers: *Poems of Hope and Reassurance* and *More Poems of Hope and Reassurance*. Her own poetry has been translated into Slovenian and was celebrated during a ceremony at Triglav National Park in Slovenia.

Belar has also written extensively about Minnesota history, publishing articles in regional newspapers and contributing research to the Minnesota Historical Society. Her historical works include studies of the Little Round Hill Trading Site, Cadotte Trading Post and Joseph Reaume's Trading Post.

Her contributions have earned numerous honors over the years, including the Perham Area Chamber of Commerce Leadership Award in 1999 and the Minnesota Library Association's Distinguished Achievement Award, Category II, in 2000. She currently serves as honorary chair of the Heartland Symphony Orchestra.

For many years, Belar represented special libraries on the Northern Lights Library Network Board. According to NLLN Executive Director Kathy Enger, Belar's leadership, creativity and commitment to preserving Minnesota's history have left a lasting impact on communities throughout the region.

"She has always been kind-hearted and brilliant in her willingness to share ideas that bring humanity to our collective lived experience," Enger said. "Lina is deserving of this recognition for her outstanding work preserving Minnesota collections."