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Learn about Skads Travel, a longstanding, three-generation family business in the Park.

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Roland Larson tells his granddaughter about his trip to Mexico with his new bride, Doris in 1948.

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Pulitzer Prize-winning *New York Times* columnist Tom Friedman will highlight a Society event on April 30.



# REeCHO

PARK HISTORY TODAY

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Volume 16.1 / WINTER 2017



## SKADS TRAVEL: OVER 60 YEARS IN THE PARK

BY JEANNE ANDERSEN

One of the oldest, continuously operating businesses in St. Louis Park is Skads Travel. This longstanding business was established by Will Skadsberg, Sr. in 1955.

In the early days of recreational and business air travel, airlines wanted to fill planes with the least amount of fuss and paperwork. They would accredit travel agents to check schedules and issue tickets on behalf of the airlines. For accreditation, travel agencies had to prove there was sufficient population in their area. Skads Travel files contain numerous lists of businesses and statistics about St. Louis Park. Many of these materials were from the Chamber of Commerce and used to show the airlines that there was a need for a travel agency in the area. Skads became the very first travel agency to become accredited in a Twin Cities suburb.

### WILL SKADSBURG, SR.

Will Skadsberg, Sr. was born in Norway in 1918 and emigrated with his family to Duluth at age 8. He graduated from the University of Washington and while serving in the Duluth naval reserve battalion, he saw action in both the Atlantic and Pacific Theatres in World War II. After the war he worked for American Overseas Airlines in several European countries. He was a district

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# A NEWLYWED ADVENTURE, LEARNING ABOUT RISK

BY MICHELLE STIMPSON AS TOLD BY ROLAND LARSON

In 1948, two young newlyweds set out in their used 1936 Dodge to make their way to Acapulco, Mexico – all the way from St. Paul, Minnesota. Doris and Rollie had been married just three short years. Rollie had recently completed his first year of teaching and was preparing to enroll in graduate school at the University of Minnesota that fall.

With extended time available to them that summer, Rollie had the idea of taking a big trip. He presented the idea to Doris. Together, they realized it would be the ideal time with no children yet. It turned out to be a six-week trip covering 8,550 miles, traveling and camping all the way to Acapulco and back.

The couple purchased a used two-person trailer they found for sale in the *St. Paul Daily News*. It was a nine-foot long, aluminum trailer for \$500. With their trailer and adventurous spirit in tow, they set out on their big journey!



Rollie and their little “casita”

Rollie recalls the trailer was a “perfect setup for two adventurous people.” They made all their meals in the trailer, which had a tiny built-in stove and a 14”x20” icebox. They slept in the trailer each night. Where did they park it? “Wherever we could find a place to sleep,” Rollie said. They took one night at a time and found themselves invited into various trailer parks, backyards, and other spaces. “We got to experience the goodness of our great country, traveling around with this trailer,” he said.

When Rollie was asked by his granddaughter, “Wasn’t it true that you had a flat tire on that trip?” Rollie’s response: “Not exactly – we had SEVEN flats, carefully logged by Doris!” The couple thriftily spent their money on this vacation. Their 39-day trip only cost a total of \$503.53, mostly for car maintenance and groceries.



Doris next to Cypress Tree in Mexico, 42’ circumference

And wouldn’t you know that when they returned home, they sold that cute little “casita” in excellent condition for \$500!

Rollie reminisced, “That vacation was a stunning adventure for a couple of newlyweds. Doris was such a wonderful companion as a new wife and she was so excited about it all.” Rollie went on to say, “In retrospect, everything fell into place beautifully. No major problems!”

Now in 2016, Rollie said he can scarcely believe that their frugal spending habits enabled them to have such a super vacation trip (39 days for just \$11.63 per day).

Doris logged their expenses and below is their trip summary and breakdown costs per day.

## SIX-WEEK MEXICO TRIP EXPENSES

Film	\$ 50.00
Gas, oil, grease jobs	\$ 84.55
Rent, trailer space	\$ 29.22
Mexican articles, souvenirs	\$ 53.37
Groceries, etc.	\$163.53.
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>\$503.53</b>

### Average Costs Snapshot

Day = \$11.63 (food, lodging, car, etc., except film)

Gasoline: 16¢/gallon

Rent & trailer space = 74¢/night

>> MORE ON PAGE 5

## LETTER FROM OUR PRESIDENT

Happy New Year! It's a time to take stock of one's blessings, gather with family and friends, reflect on the past and plan for the future. We are doing all of these things at the Historical Society. In this edition of the *ReEcho*, we will share stories about our city's past and update you on our efforts to realize our goals, including finding a permanent home for the Society.

Our focus the past two years has been increasing membership and raising our profile in the community. We raised membership 30 percent in our first year and are pleased it has held in year two. I'm confident our new programs — the *Historic Connections* discussion series, antiques appraisal event, and the Depot open houses and holiday lighting events — generated awareness of our group in the community and helped boost membership. I want to thank Discover St. Louis Park for their financial support, and you, for your continued support.

We will continue to maintain and build on our membership and programming successes. However, our primary focus shifts to finding a permanent home for the Society. We are stewards of St. Louis Park's rich history — its railroad heritage and industrial roots, commitment to inclusion and diversity, iconic businesses and famous alumni, and consistently high-achieving schools. Without the security of a permanent home, we hesitate to expand our collection beyond what we can store today, or create permanent exhibits to share and celebrate this history and strengthen our city's identity.

Practical realities also dictate we find a permanent home. Renting office space is not fiscally healthy in the long term, as nearly half of our operating budget goes to rent. The existing space also has accessibility issues. My goal for the Board, in partnership with the City, is to determine our best option to secure space that is financially feasible in the short and long term.

There are a few steps in this process. First, ensure we have a clear vision for a new space and our organization and priorities are aligned. Next, share this refined vision with City staff and solicit their guidance on space options and better understand funding needs. Finally, once we have coalesced around an idea, raise the required money.

I welcome your participation in this process! If you're interested, please reach out to me. This will be a critical year for the Society, and we'll need support at every stage. A major fundraising event is already scheduled for April 30. Tom Friedman comes back to town — I hope to see you there!

I look forward to continuing our good work together.

Warmest regards,  
Ted

## CONNECT WITH US

**Stop by:** 3546 Dakota Ave. S., Suite C  
St. Louis Park  
Saturdays, 1-4 p.m.,  
and by appointment

**Call:** 952-583-9893

**Email:** [history@slphis.org](mailto:history@slphis.org)

**Visit online:** [www.slphistory.org](http://www.slphistory.org)

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Founded in 1971, the St. Louis Park Historical Society collects, preserves and shares the history of St. Louis Park. The *ReEcho: Park History Today* is an official publication of the Society.

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## SHARE YOUR PARK STORY!

Do you have a St. Louis Park story to share with our readers? We would love to hear from you! We're looking for articles, stories, reminiscences and photos.

### Submission Guidelines

- Articles are relevant to the St. Louis Park Historical Society audience
- 1,000 words maximum
- Articles are published at the discretion of newsletter staff and may be gently edited to accommodate space limitations
- Submit your article to [slphs.newsletter@gmail.com](mailto:slphs.newsletter@gmail.com) — include your name, email address and phone number

sales manager for American Airlines in Minneapolis and a sales representative for Trans World Airlines. His real ambition was to be in the legal field and used his earnings to enroll in the Minneapolis-Minnesota College of Law (now Mitchell Hamline School of Law). Meanwhile, his wife Bonnie worked for Cargill.

In 1955 Will Sr. and Bonnie opened Skads Travel in the Lilac Way Shopping Center on Excelsior Boulevard and Highway 100, across from Miracle Mile. Built in 1941, Lilac Way was one of the first of what would come to be called “strip malls” in the State. Skadsberg selected the location because it was at the busiest intersection in the State – and in those days, it was an at-grade crossing. The shopping center’s anchor, of sorts, was The Lilac Way Bowling Alley (with Lilac Lanes Café). Skads Travel occupied an office on the second floor.



A sampling of organizations that booked tours with Skads are:

- Suburban Newspapers
- Sons of Norway
- The Shrine
- Kiwanis
- Lutheran Brotherhood Insurance
- WCCO, Dave Moore as host
- Super Valu Stores
- Control Data
- Coast to Coast Stores
- National Food Stores

## GOING PLACES?



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**ARRANGE YOUR NEXT BUSINESS OR VACATION TRIP IN SUBURBAN CONVENIENCE AT**

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travel service



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### SERVICES

Then, as now, there was no charge to use the service to book travel. The agency’s income was derived from commissions paid to them by the airlines, hotels, and other services they represented. Customers purchased transportation from Skads at regularly published tariff rates.

Although Skads handled individual trips, organized tours were their emphasis – and often to exotic foreign lands. At the time, airlines restricted these types of tours to “affinity groups,” which were often church, civic, or other groups of people who were already known to each other. Airlines could not organize tours of people who did not know each other. The agency could book up to 800 people on tours, and even provide guides.

### FAMILY BUSINESS

After working at Northwest Airlines in Washington, DC, Will Sr. and Bonnie’s daughter-in-law, Kathy Skadsberg, started working at Skads in 1967. Their son Will Skadsberg, Jr. worked with Pan American World Airways in Hawaii before joining the agency in 1970. Will Jr. and Kathy specialized in international and domestic golf trips and created unique, custom itineraries that covered the globe.

### THE AGENCY TRAVELS

Lilac Way was on its way to demolition and redevelopment in the 1980s, but Skads still had a lease and Will Jr. says that the company stayed at the location until forced to move when the building was condemned. “We were actually the only occupants for about two years after the restaurant closed. It was spooky sometimes! There was only cold running water and the main building was not heated, so we used the electric heaters, which cost a fortune.”

In November 1987 the company moved to the Boulevard Professional Building at 6250 Excelsior Boulevard. The building had been built in 1985; previously it had been a driving range and then a gas station.

### THREE GENERATIONS

Will Skadsberg, Sr. retired in 1983 and died in February 1994. His wife Bonnie, who worked at the agency from 1956 to 1999, died in 2012 at the age of 90. Kathy and Will Jr.’s daughter Jenny has worked at Skads since 2002, making it a third generation St. Louis Park business.

Even in today’s travel site and online booking experience, using a travel agency can simplify the decision making process – especially when planning a trip to an unusual destination or a trip for a large family or club. Travel agents also have access to specials and wholesale rates. While Skads can’t get you to the moon (they considered the possibilities in 1960) the world is their oyster!

## MEMBER SPOTLIGHT: Roland Larson

BY MICHELLE STIMPSON

The article on page two in this issue, *A Newlywed Adventure, Learning About Risk* was written in honor of my grandfather Roland's 95th birthday in April 2016. "This story became the most wonderful and exciting travel adventure in the 68 years I was married to my wife, Doris. We were fortunate enough to have a life of travel."

Longtime resident Roland Larson raised a family of four in St. Louis Park and served as the head of the guidance department for St. Louis Park Schools in the 1950s and 1960s.



Roland sitting on the couple's memorial bench in Wolfe Park.

Photo credit: Jane Larson Wipf

# A GOY, GAS STATION AND HOLIDAY GALA NEAR THE 'GAZA STRIP'

BY PAUL LINNEE

Growing up in The Park in the '50s and '60s, I lived on what I (or others?) called the 'Gaza Strip.' Allow me to explain: Back in the '50s, St. Louis Park was a popular destination for Jewish families migrating from North Minneapolis to the suburbs. The reasons for migration were many and complex, but from what I am told, one factor was that The Park did not have what were called 'restrictive covenants'. These were odious clauses in land deeds mandating, among other things, that Jews could not own the described property. Before they were outlawed by action of the U.S. Supreme Court in the late 1940s, more forward-looking property owners and developers stopped including these 'covenants' in deeds. As such, Jews seeking to find and buy property could find it in St. Louis Park.

Many Jews moving to the Park during this period bought houses in the area north of Minnetonka Boulevard between Highway 100 and France Avenue. Highway 100 in 1950 was (even then) somewhat of a barrier to passage, it became a virtual western border to the Park's Jewish quarter – hence, the reference to the 'Gaza Strip.' My family moved to the 2700 block of Toledo Avenue, just east of Highway 100. We belonged to the Union Congregational Church and were hardly Jewish.



"You can trust your car to the man (Paul at age 16) who wears the Star!"

I was unaware at age 4 of the concept of Christianity, much less the concept of Judaism, and I don't know what my parents knew or how they thought about it. Our block had a few Jewish families, and as one went east to Salem, Raleigh and on to Ottawa Circle, the concentration of Jewish families became greater. I attended Kindergarten at Fern Hill School – now Torah Academy at 28th and Joppa. While I have no hard data on the



percentage of Jewish students at the school (I wonder if anyone collected such data then), my sense is a great number of our student population was Jewish. Enough, at my young age, to discover how cool Hanukkah was and how lucky my Jewish friends were to receive presents on each of its eight days – unlike my single day of Christmas!

I also recall the many Jewish friends I had as a grade schooler. Boys like Buzz Levitt, Dick Saliterman, Ronnie Goodman, Billy Evans and Nick Segal. And one cannot forget knock-out girls like Ricky Abrams, Ellen Beugen, Diane Winter – and Jane Grossman, my first real crush in the fifth grade.

By the early 1960s, I had become a teenage hot-rodder. It was natural that I was attracted to a place called Norm's Texaco at 5125 Minnetonka Boulevard (Salem and Minnetonka next to what was then Kay Motors). The older (17-21 years old) hot-rodgers hung out and worked. Like Howie Riechert ('59 red Chev Impala lowered so much in the front that he had to slow down for man-hole covers!), Jerry Thompson (cool '41 Chev coupe street rod, and later one of the first V-8 Barracudas in town), and 'Hoot' Gibson and his red '57 Chev Bel Air with the first set of chrome, reversed wheels I had ever seen.

Norm Walensky (1914-1984) lived in a nice house on The Park's side of France Avenue, probably in the 2800 block. A Jew owning and operating a gas station seemed like a rarity to me. Based on our largely Jewish customer base at Norm's – mostly professional types with Cadillacs, Buicks, Pontiacs and Oldsmobiles (not a Ford in the bunch, but that's a story for another day). It seemed odd to see Norm in his Texaco uniform and dirty hands, but he was a happy man then. He called me "Pauly" but it didn't keep him from hiring me and entrusting me with customer's cars, station keys, and secret hiding place for the cash drawer for closing (the old-fashioned Pepsi machine).

I worked at Norm's from about 1961 until 1967, even after Norm sold the station to become a (more fittingly?) liquor store owner downtown Minneapolis. He seemed happy there, too. Until April 10, 1968 when he learned that his son Gordy had been killed in Vietnam.

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# TOM FRIEDMAN TO HIGHLIGHT HISTORICAL SOCIETY BUILDING FUNDRAISER

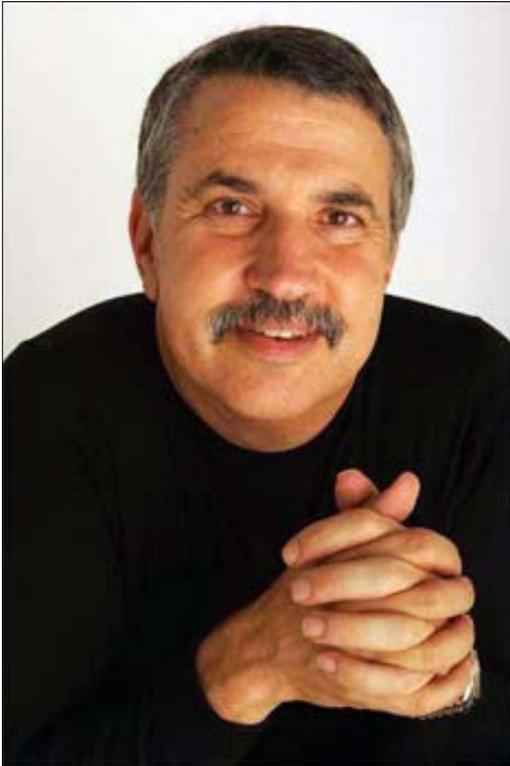


Photo credit: Greg Martin

We are thrilled to welcome Pulitzer Prize-winning *New York Times* columnist and Distinguished Alum of St. Louis Park High School, Thomas L. Friedman. He has agreed to highlight the Society's Building Fundraiser in April 2017.

The Society worked with Tom as he researched his time in the Park for his new book *Thank You for Being Late: An Optimist's Guide to Thriving in the Age of Acceleration*, released in November. He explores how growing up in the Midwest, Twin Cities and St. Louis Park shaped his world view.

The Society's fundraiser will feature another globe-trotting journalist and Distinguished Alum of St. Louis Park High School, Susan Linnee. She will interview Tom, journalist to journalist.

**7 p.m., Sunday, April 30**  
**Sabes Jewish Community Center**  
**4330 Cedar Lake Road**

Get your tickets quickly - limited seating! Go to [eventbrite.com](http://eventbrite.com) and search 'Tom Friedman.'

## SPEND A SATURDAY AFTERNOON WITH US!

Come visit us at the office! We're open Saturday afternoons from 1 p.m. to 4 p.m. Although we currently have only a few of our fun artifacts on display, we have many resources that you can use for research purposes — or just to look and reminisce about growing up in the Park. Stick around and learn about Park history from resident experts.

### Newspapers

This is where the history is! Week by week, the *Dispatch*, *Sun*, *Sailor*, and *Sun-Sailor* recorded issues of the day.

Some of our newspapers are in bound volumes, some are in our newly-acquired microfilm collection. Use our digital microfilm machine to look at them. See an article you like? Save it to your flash drive for free, or print a copy for 10 cents each.

### Plat Maps and Aerial Photographs

Filed by location, so you can find a specific area and

see it grow and develop before your eyes. Maps go back to 1938, and the aerials to 1951.

### Photographs

Our collection includes photos of schools and class pictures, housing and buildings, and subjects like sports, hotels, grain elevators and railroads.



### High School Yearbooks and Newspapers

We have all years of *Echowan* yearbooks except for 2005 and many issues of *The Echo* student newspapers.

We're always glad to have visitors, because we always learn something from you!

The office is upstairs (no elevator) in Suite C, at 3546 Dakota Avenue S., just west of the Center.

One of the most enduring memories of my time at Norm's was the annual Ecumenical Holiday Feast Norm threw for his customers and employees. We'd spit-shine the station, raise one of the old-fashioned drive-on hoists up to table height and lay tablecloths on them. Norm would pile on goodies from the original Lincoln Del at Minnetonka Boulevard and Huntington. Dozens of Jews and Goyim (slang for gentile) customers, workers and hangers-on gathered, swapped tales, enjoyed food, beer, if I recall, and fellowship – just one block east of St. Louis Park's 'Gaza Strip.'

I like to think that the foundation for which people of different backgrounds got along with each other and formed a community during those decades in the Park, is what makes it the wonderfully diverse place it is today, and I am glad I experienced it.

## ARTIFACTS WANTED

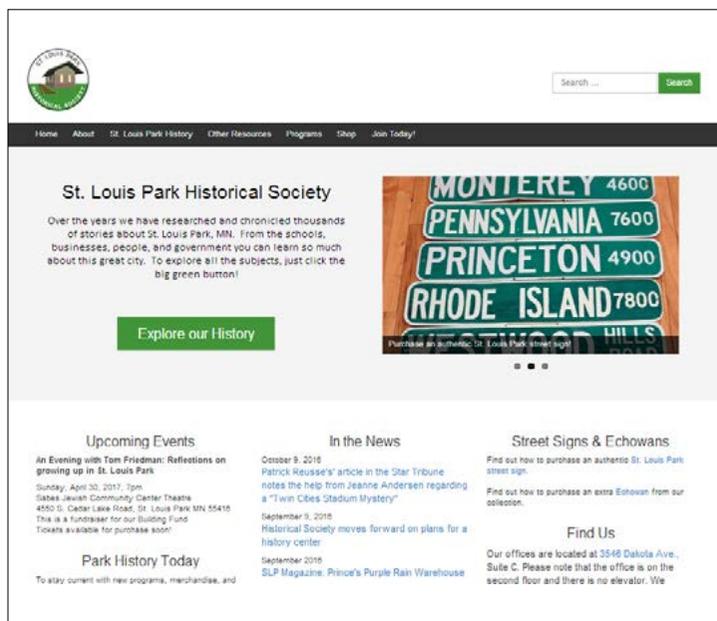
A snow day is a great time to sort through all those boxes sitting around and get rid of clutter. But wait! Some of that clutter translates to valuable artifacts here at the Historical Society.

Have an old yearbook or phone book you don't know what to do with? Find an old Homecoming button from Park High or a rival school's Homecoming button against Park? Copies of the *Echo* student newspaper and even things like graduation programs have a place here. Currently, we can't accept donations that are too bulky, due to space constraints, but please contact us if you have something that you think should be saved. We especially like the old school photos – our only complete collections are from Brookside, Lenox, and Ethel Baston.

If you're not sure your trash is our treasure, send us an email to [history@slphis.org](mailto:history@slphis.org) and we'll let you know. Thank you!

## KEEP UP WITH EVERYTHING GOING ON AT THE SOCIETY

It's easy to stay in the know. Subscribe to *Park History Today*, an email newsletter that President Ted sends every month. And bookmark our website, [slphistory.org](http://slphistory.org)!



Follow St. Louis Park Historical Society page on Facebook, Twitter and YouTube.



## An Evening with St. Louis Park Native Tom Friedman



Get tickets to our fundraising event on Sunday, April 30. Hear Tom Friedman talk about growing up in the Park, his new book, and views on current events.

Tickets are available at [Eventbrite.com](http://Eventbrite.com) (search 'Tom Friedman')  
\$100: Private meet, greet, and book signing before the event  
\$35: General admission  
\$20: Senior/Student admission (limited availability)

Sabes Jewish Community Center Theater, 4330 S. Cedar Lake Road



## HAVE FAMILY COMING TO TOWN? HAVE THEM SLEEP IN THE PARK.

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# SHOP AT AMAZON AND SUPPORT THE SOCIETY

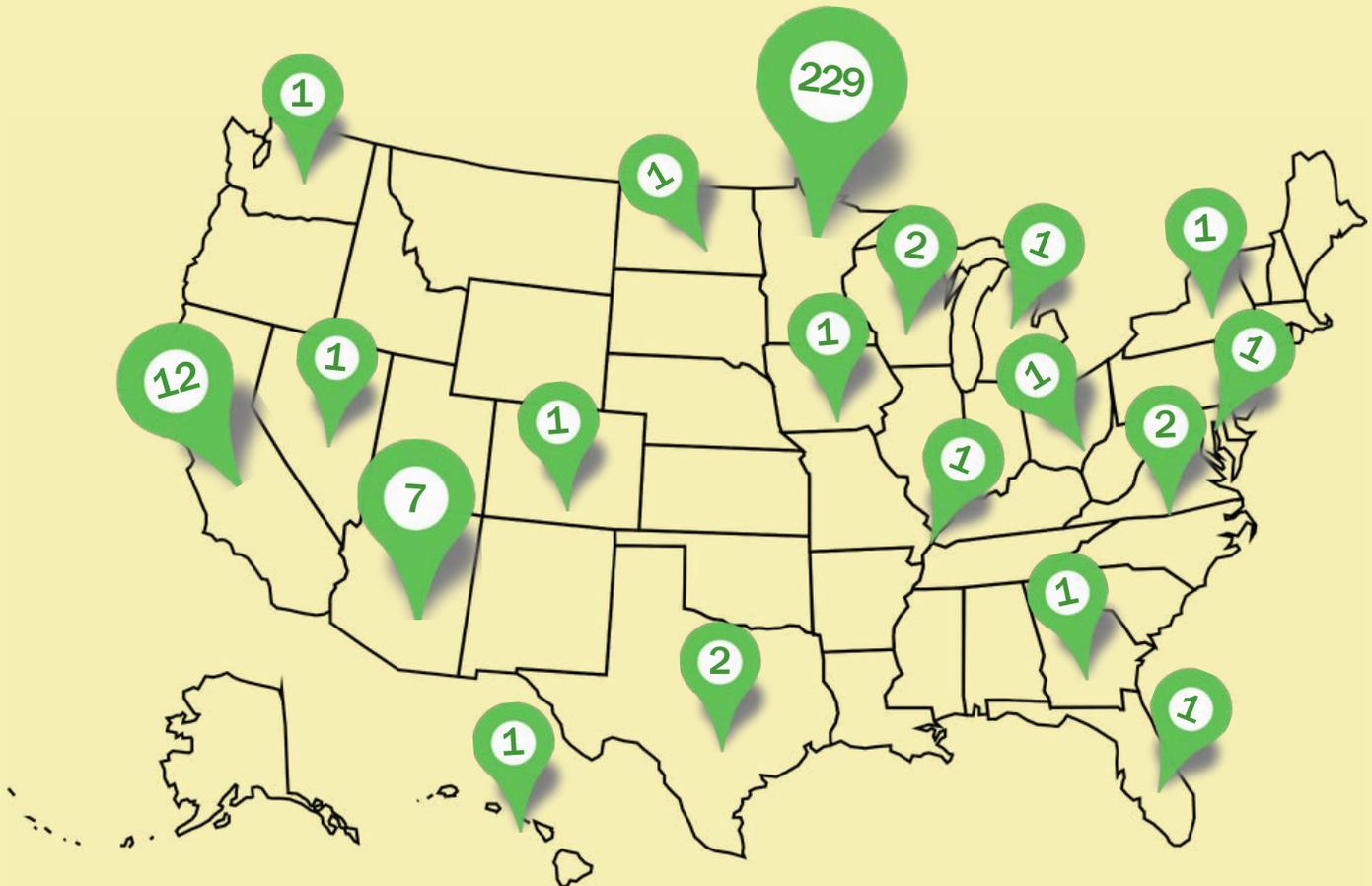
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## MEMBERSHIP ON THE MAP



## WELCOME NEW MEMBERS

William Beyer  
Chris Burbul  
Ron Cushman

Lois Zander and Daniel Kriete  
Peter Linder  
Peggy MacMillan  
Laura Aintsen and Mike Siegler

Rob Skoro  
Jon Wallin  
Todd Wildermuth

## MYSTERY PHOTO REVEALED



The mystery photo in our last issue featured this unique and colorful sign. Now why would a dry cleaning business have this sign in front of its building? The sign was left from when the building at 4801 Excelsior Boulevard (at Princeton) was the Donut Tree — which makes a lot more sense!

A person could choose from 75 different kinds of donuts here in 1963. But despite the great sign, the Donut Tree didn't last long and the building became Park Avenue Dry Cleaning.

In 1979 it became the home of the Loffhagen Insurance Agency, which it remains today.

No one solved the mystery this time, but try the new one below for a chance to win a Target® GiftCard!

## WINTER MYSTERY PHOTO

This mystery building still stands today, much in its same appearance. It's no longer a café, as it was in this photo from 1960, but in the late '60s it was an exciting place to be!

Where is this building and what kind of business was it in those groovy times?

Solve this mystery and you can win a Target® GiftCard.





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PARK HISTORY TODAY

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