

VIP CLUB
Established in 1980

CELEBRATING 45 1980 to 2025

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July 24, 1980, Millie Gignac invited Robert ‘Bob’ McDonald, who had just retired as President & Chief Operating Officer of Sperry Corporation, to take part in the retirees ‘Club Room’ opening ceremony and to cut the ribbon. This photo shows our first Club President, Al Mueller, with Mr. McDonald, and Millie. Ms. Mildred Gignac was Sperry’s first female director; after she retired; she served as the Club’s President for 1988 and 1989. The Club awarded her the *Member Emeritus* status in December 2008 in recognition of her **Founder** status.

CELEBRATING!

INTRODUCTION

Periodically we pause to celebrate events of our lives, i.e. birthdays, graduations, marriages, and achievements. As Americans we also recognize events that merited national or religious holidays. The VIP Club is no different than individuals in that we also recognize our history every five years plus aperiodic, opportunistic events. Over the decades we have participated in several events associated with our employment history. These are noted hereunder. Wow, it is a great feeling to have been associated with these events, people, and times!

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VIP CLUB

BIRTH OF THE VIP CLUB

Millie described the conception: “As I worked closely with employees getting ready to retire, I observed that many were reluctant to break the "Sperry-tie". So, in the fall of 1979, I started to plan a clubroom for our retirees. Our Plant Engineering Department was asked to draw up floor plans with cost estimates. I was allotted approximately 1,465 square feet in our Sheppard Road plant.



This plant was centrally located sort of "in the middle" of all our Twin City plant locations and was accessible by public transportation. Not only were top management supportive, but also our manufacturing management gave up prime space in a manufacturing facility.

Action on these plans started in early spring 1980. We opened a retirees club room in plant 1 as illustrated on the cover. The first general meeting was held on September 3rd, 1980, with about 75 in attendance. Officers were elected; plans were made for future monthly meetings and a set of rules were drawn up. Al Mueller was elected as the first President, and he started a newsletter to keep members informed about future activities.

Since beginning 45 years ago, the Club has had 23 Presidents; six served a single one-year term. Unfortunately, in Nov. 2023 Steve Koltes passed away just three days after being elected to a second term. The longest serving was Harvey Taipale (2018-22) as he steered us through the COVID 'pandemic'. 25 people have served as vice president, two left the board without becoming a president. We've had thirteen secretaries, eleven treasurers, and seven chief newsletter editors over 45 years. Who did what/when is on-line at www.vipclubmn.org/history.html#Leaders.

In 1984, we registered with the Internal Revenue Service as 'Sperry Retirees Club', a 501c (7) - non-profit social and services club. The VIP Club constitution states: "*The Club shall provide an opportunity for social interaction of its members.*" Events are planned at board meetings on the 1st Wednesday of even numbered months.

In October 2007: In response to an application coordinated by Lowell, the IRS accepted the Board's resolution to change the VIP Club name from "Sperry Retirees Club" to "VIP CLUB". Also, the board authorized combining the Club and Legacy project's web sites onto a Microsoft hosted 'free' site, the URL, <http://vipclubmn.org> was available.

In 2025 our membership dropped below 500 after reaching a peak of 1,400 in the early 2000s. About 85 (18%) are nonagenarians, i.e. LIFE members of the VIP Club!

SOCIALIZING

Yes, Millie recognized that people enjoyed getting together outside of the work environment. Each of the following social groups eventually became a part of the VIP Club's purview.

- 50s Geek Squad History – monthly, vipclubmn.org/activities.html#Geeks.
- 60s annual Unihogs/Uniturkeys, vipclubmn.org/activities.html#Hogs.
- 70s annual Syttende Mai, vipclubmn.org/activities.html#Mai.
- 80s annual UNIVAC Old Timers' Reunion, vipclubmn.org/activities.html#OTR.
- 90s UNISYS Retiree Breakfast Group – monthly, vipclubmn.org/activities.html#Unisys.
- 00s annual Roseville Good Old Days, vipclubmn.org/activities.html#RGOD.

The Club itself has hosted/sponsored an annual [Volunteer Recognition lunch/breakfast](#), a summer picnic, and a winter holiday party. The company for many years sponsored a photo club, an electronics club, a bowling league, softball league, golf leagues, Trap & Skeet Club, and the Sperryaires choral group. As we celebrate 45 years the Sperryaires has morphed into the Eagan Men's Chorus and only a combined company/retiree golf league (Unified Legacy Golf League www.ulglm.org) exists.

PARTIES

2005, 25 YEARS.

The Unisys/Lockheed Martin VIP Club commemorated a major milestone, its 25th Anniversary with a picnic in Highland Park. Past Presidents in attendance were: Ray Miller, Millie Gignac, Warren Becker, Chuck Homan, Barney Buss, Bernie Jansen, John Dufour and Hank Dotzler. It was good to see the support for the club from these past presidents. A special gold imprinted VIP Club 25th Anniversary pen was presented to each member in attendance. Everyone had a chance to look at the collection of memorabilia that was displayed on a table – there was a lot of history for us to reminisce about. Even though it was a very warm July night, the attendance was the largest I have ever seen at a VIP Club Picnic. Everyone had a good time socializing and eating the wonderful potluck food along with the grilled hamburgers and soft drinks and 25th Anniversary cake provided by the Club.

Special “thanks” are offered to: 1) Jim Larson, Chuck Homan, and Paul Lindholm for their preparation of 160 hamburgers in 90 degrees plus weather; 2) Ruth Phelps. Sanborn, Marion Scott, Dorothy Becker, Midge Homan, Geri Dotzler, and Lynn Lindholm for their layout of all the potluck items, table prep and the cleanup of the kitchen and tables after the picnic; 3) Nick Benson for taking photos of the picnic highlights; and 4) Chuck Homan for reserving the pavilion back in January.

I personally want to thank everyone who helped make this 25th Anniversary party a big success. I can say it was a big success with all the support we had. Respectfully, *Dale Phelps*, VIP Club President – report from www.vipclubmn.org/Newsletters/Enews0508.pdf

2010, 30 YEARS.

In October 2010, the Club celebrated 30 years with a [history booklet](#) distributed to members attending a special program at the UNISYS, Roseville facility. CBI's Dr. Tom Misa was the featured speaker, Minnesota's [Hidden History of Computing](#) as presented at the VIP Club's celebration. Thanks to Quint Heckert for developing the booklet, thanks to LMCO for the printing and binding. We also awarded a [Member Emeritus](#) certificate to Marion Scott in recognition of her 29 years coordinating Red Cross blood drives.

Club presidents enjoyed the annual picnic at the Highland Park Pavilion. In the following picture: seated are Millie Gignac, 1988-89 and Chuck Homan 1995-96. Immediately behind them is Bernie Jansen, 1998-99 & 2006. Then, clockwise from the left: Tom Turba, 2009-10 & 2012; Warren Becker, 1990-92; Hank Dotzler, 2002-03; Barney Buss, 1997; Brian Berggren, 2007-08; and Owen Scharf, 1993-94. Photo by LABenson, 2010 Vice President.



2015, 35 YEARS.

We were delighted to highlight and share these results of our Lawshe Memorial Museum volunteers during the Club's 35th anniversary year.

In cooperation with the museum staff, we hosted a private function open only to VIP Club members, museum staff, and invited guests. On Tuesday, September 8th from 6:30 to 9 PM:

- Viewed a multitude of educational computer history posters developed by museum staff and Club volunteers as part of a recently completed Minnesota Legacy Grant; “The Birth of Minnesota’s Computer Industry – A Photo Essay,”
- Observed many of the donated hardware artifacts positioned around the great hall periphery,
- Saw the workstations' area where Club volunteers continue to identify and catalogue the ~20,000 media donations of the Legacy committee, and
- Enjoyed cheese, wine, and light refreshments while mingling with other attendees.

40 YEARS!

We originally planned a celebration at the 2020 picnic; it had to be cancelled because of COVID gathering restrictions.

So, This Finally Happened! One hundred and two individuals celebrated the VIP Club's 40th Anniversary on September 14th, 2021, at the Royal Cliff Banquets and Weddings venue in Eagan. As Lockheed Martin employee Laura Traeger noted when posting pictures (one included here), "What a heritage of brilliant people with amazing accomplishments!" The video put together by Keith Myhre was great per attendee feedback. A special thank you to Keith Behnke and Keith Myhre for the wonderful event and all the hard work they expended over the last two years! The only disappointment was that 33 people who signed up couldn't make it. The VIP Club's cost was approximately \$40 per person. Board members did not hear of anyone who was unhappy. See more pictures online (40th Anniversary Party Photos www.vipclubmn.org/Gallery/Pics40thAnniversary.pdf).

When I went to our website, the dearth of stories and references to the era of the 1980's was a pretty big surprise. I recall many interesting projects and events happening in the 1980's, yet not too many people have made the effort to document them. You have all heard my previous pleas to get our history documented. 'Nuff said. *Harvey Taipale*, VIP Club President

AWARDS

October 22, 2020: The club recognized founder Millie Gignac's 100th birthday with flowers, cards, and congratulations messages from members collected via Evite.



MEMBER EMERITUS

In 2008 Bernie Jansen completed his third 'term' as immediate past president. He expressed a desire to keep involved with the club, however asked what title he could have. Lowell suggested that Member Emeritus would be appropriate – somewhat analogous to Professor Emeritus awarded to university personnel who retire. Since then, the Club Board has named several others as Member Emeritus!

December 2008, the board granted [Member Emeritus](#) awards to Millie Gignac, John Dufour, and Bernie Jansen for their long term service to the board and Club. Millie as the founder, John for shepherding the club through the merging of UNISYS and LMCO retirees, and Bernie for coordinating Volunteer recognition breakfasts for over a decade. Each had also actively supported the board after their office terms.

June 2009, the board granted a Member Emeritus award to Charles and Midge Homan for their long-term service to the Board and Club, specifically picnic coordination during and after Chuck's board presidency.

December 2009, the board granted a Member Emeritus award to Warren and Dorothy Becker in recognition of their decade of coordinating the annual Christmas party as well as serving on the board of directors, continuing after Warren's board presidency.

October 2010, we awarded a Member Emeritus certificate to Marion Scott in recognition of her 29 years coordinating Red Cross blood drives.

April 16, 2014, the Club granted a Member Emeritus award to Tom Turba in recognition of his creation of and continuing coordination of the Roseville Good Old Days annual event as well as his numerous years serving on the Board.

January 7, 2018, The Club granted a Member Emeritus award to Dale Phelps in recognition of his decade plus serving the board as VP, President, Past President, and Director for program planning.

February 6, 2019, the Board resolved to grant Member Emeritus status to Joseph Schwarz in recognition of his nearly 20-years as chief editor of the Club's newsletter and other board activity support.

April 17th, 2024: The club board granted Keith Behnke a member emeritus certificate recognizing his continuing support of the Club after his decade of board positions.

June 19th, 2025: The club board granted John Westergren a member emeritus certificate recognizing his decade⁺ coordinating the Club's annual picnic.

VOLUNTEER EXTRAORDINAIRE

April 16, 2015, the Club awarded the first Volunteer Extraordinaire certificate to Keith Myhre recognizing his skill and initiatives in support of the Lawshe Memorial Museum. This recognition is named the Jansen Certificate, recognizing Bernie and Kathy Jansen's decades of support to the Club's volunteerism as well as their work for the Dakota County Historical Society getting a permanent exhibit of ERA-LMCO-Unisys artifacts and documents.

April 19, 2016, the Club awarded the second Volunteer Extraordinaire certificate to Richard 'Dick' Lundgren recognizing his decade of newsletter Legacy articles and newsletter program articles plus his initiation of our interactions with the Charles Babbage Institute in 2006 and the Minnesota Sesquicentennial Commission in 2007.

April 19, 2017, the Club awarded the third Volunteer Extraordinaire certificate to Donald Weidenbach recognizing his decade supporting the Legacy committee, his Airport Guide volunteering, and appliance repairing at his retirement facility.

April 11, 2018, the Club awarded the fourth Volunteer Extraordinaire certificate to Allan Douglass recognizing his 1,000⁺ hours of service to Boy Scouts and his church's organizations.

April 15, 2018, the club awarded the fifth Volunteer Extraordinaire certificate Honoring Tom Turba's dedication to the Boy Scouts, the VIP Club, and his Roseville community, delivered posthumously to Virginia Turba at Tom's Celebration of Life.

April 10, 2019, the Club awarded the sixth Volunteer Extraordinaire certificate honoring Patricia Myhre's five-plus years of Photo ID work at the Lawshe Memorial Museum and other volunteerism; delivered posthumously to husband Keith at the Volunteerism Recognition Luncheon.

April 20, 2022: the Club awarded the seventh Volunteer Extraordinaire certificate honoring Lowell Benson's two decades of volunteerism with the Club, the Legacy Committee, and his Church support.

April 2023; The Club awarded the eighth Volunteer Extraordinaire certificate honoring John Westergren's Legacy Support, picnic planning, and previous board service.

April 17th, 2024: The club board made two awards at the Volunteer Recognition luncheon: 1) Awarded the ninth Volunteer Extraordinaire certificate honoring Les Nelson's continuing support of the Legacy project at the Lawshe Memorial Museum and 2) Awarded the tenth Volunteer Extraordinaire certificate honoring Bob Pagac's decade⁺ support of the Legacy project, for picnic cooking help, and serving the board as the 2014 Vice President.

April 16, 2025: we awarded Volunteer Extraordinaire Certificates to Jon Simon recognizing his 12 years cataloguing at the Lawshe Memorial Museum and to David Wilhelm in recognition of his photos from the RGOD celebrations since 2008.

LEGACY COMMITTEE

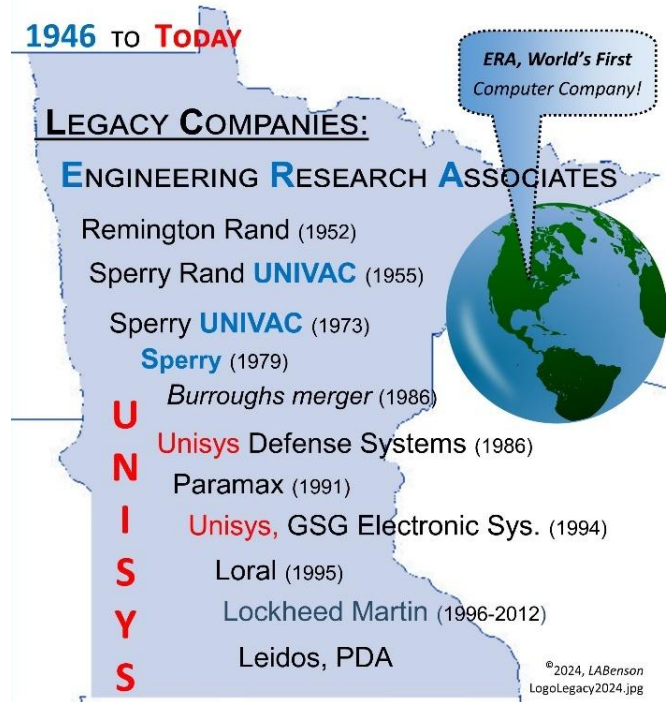
Our **Legacy** theme consists of **People** at **Locations** in Minnesota who **Engineered Computers** and **Systems** used throughout the world. This is implemented in a 60-chapter 'live' website Legacy Anthology, vipclubmn.org/Legacy.html. This site has been hosted on www.webhostinghub.com since 2011.

ONSET

What is this *Legacy* ‘STUFF’? Almost 20 years ago at the October 2005 VIP Club board meeting, visiting guest Richard ‘Ole’ Olson asked retirees to help Lockheed Martin document the Twin Cities corporate history. We formed a small committee, then Dick Lundgren arranged a January 2006 meeting with Dr. Arthur Norberg, original director of the Charles Babbage Institute at the U of MN. Dr. Norberg retired, then Dr. Tom Misa became director of CBI and served as our advisor for 11 years. Ole retired and John Westergren became LMCO’s Executive of Interest and has helped lead efforts for over a dozen years. Our volunteers have

donated thousands of hours over these 19 years, resulting in the following information, all with numerous embedded links to articles, interviews, posters, videos, etc.:

- Anthologies Tell the Story is a history synopsis at <http://vipclubmn.org/Articles/Anthologies2Go.pdf>.
- Lawshe Memorial Museum Exhibits at <http://vipclubmn.org/Articles/ArtifactsOnDisplay.pdf> has more defense computer items than any other museum in the world.
- See <http://vipclubmn.org/OurStories.html> for over 225 Articles for the Month since April 2007 by about 150 people.
- YouTube video links collection: http://vipclubmn.org/Articles/CHAP_Summary.pdf.

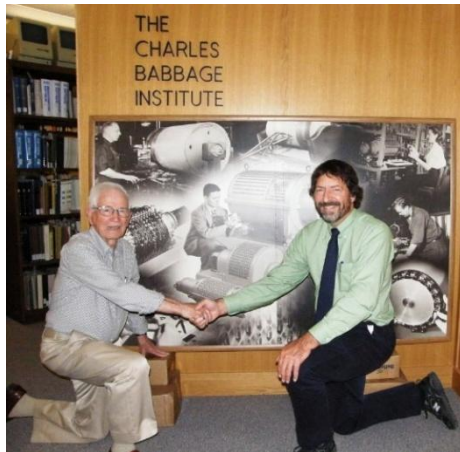


EVENTS

2006: www.vipclubmn.org/Articles/FirstVisitToCBI.pdf authored by Dick Lundgren.

2008: [It's A Wrap](#) - A project report about our Sesquicentennial Team activities by Lowell A. Benson. This report and a few selective artifacts are in the MN time capsule to be opened in 2058 during the state's bi-centennial celebrations.





When Mr. Norris left UNIVAC with others to found Control Data Corporation; plant maintenance cleaned out his office - giving the drum collage to [Don Weidenbach](#), the young engineer shown kneeling in the picture.

2011: After being in Don's home office for over 50 years, Don donated the drum collage [right] to the Charles Babbage Institute - Dr. Tom Misa, Director of CBI [2006-17], is shown accepting the collage on behalf of CBI. An interesting part of our legacy is that the CBI Director holds the Engineering Research Associates Land Grant Chair for the History of Technology at the University's College of Science and Engineering.

2013: [Realization of a Dream](#) - The 1st report about our Legacy exhibit at the DCHS Lawshe Memorial Museum by Lowell Benson with editing by Bernie Jansen, John Westergren, and Dick Lundgren plus photos by Keith Myhre.

2015: www.vipclubmn.org/Articles/LegacyPartnerships2.pdf, The Club's interactions with the Charles Babbage Institute and the Dakota County Historical Society.



2017: August: August: [Through the Ages](#) - A handout developed for visitors at the upcoming 13 September Open House and Legacy Exhibit in Eagan.

2019: Twin Cities Public Television down streaming of a documentary and outtake video clips, MN Legacy Grant managed by MHTA, <http://vipclubmn.org/Articles/TPTclips.pdf>.



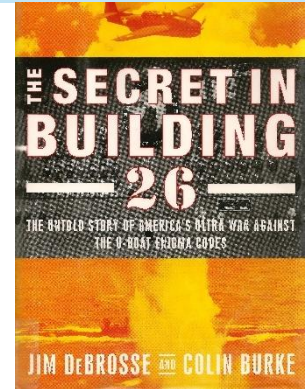
2023; One month into 2023, Director Mark Greenia began making the Computer History film **PLAYLISTS**. The first one updated and posted was the ERA / UNIVAC playlist. VIP legacy committee members have helped with the development of several of these {CHAP/Club paper, http://vipclubmn.org/Articles/CHAP_SummaryRev1.pdf.} These YouTube videos provide a fascinating early history of ERA / UNIVAC / Unisys family of computers from the beginnings of "Engineering Research Associates" (1946), the EMCC UNIVAC I of 1951, and into the 60's and beyond.

2024: January 14th WWII Round Table at the Minnesota History Center had two parts. First, Marc Wortman presented his book *The Greatest Capitalist Who Ever Lived*, T. Watson of IBM. Second, Lowell presented [Born of a Wartime Necessity](#).

We are not done yet: 1) • Articles for the Month need new items. 2) Tuesday morning cataloging at the Lawshe Memorial Museum needs new volunteers.

ENGINEERING RESEARCH ASSOCIATES**PRELUDE**

During the summer of 1945 the Navy's Op-20 organization could see an end to WWII, but wanted to continue their code breaking activities that had been housed at National Cash Register in Dayton OH since the mid 30's. About the same time, Northwest Aeronautical Corporation President John Parker started seeking what to do with the WWII glider factory and personnel as the war was ending. John Lindley's unpublished 2016 manuscript, WWII Gliders and Northwest Aeronautical Corporation (NAC) "Born of a war time necessity", has details. Lowell extracted the NAC to ERA sections from Mr. Lindley's manuscript, www.vipclubmn.org/Articles/NACbecameERA.pdf.



Engineering Research Associates filed MN incorporation forms 12/27/1945;
then, upon approval opened for business in St. Paul on January 8, 1946.

RECOGNITIONS

AUGUST 19, 1986

Dick Lundgren wrote:
"While visiting the Minnesota Historical Societies archives, I found a relevant newspaper article:

St. Paul Pioneer Press. In the 1986 index, I looked up Engineering Research Associates and found an article 8/20/86 about the 40th anniversary of ERA. Then I went to the microfilm for that



newspaper and was able to read the article which included a photo of Rolland Anderson, Bill Geiger, Jack Nichols and Bob MacDonald, and unveiling the plaque at Plant 2. It also contained the exact wording on the plaque which is: "*Engineering Research Associates, the forerunner of Sperry's Minnesota presence, is the acknowledged parent of some 100 Twin Cities computer firms. In commemoration of the 40th anniversary of ERA's founding, this plaque is placed on the company's original manufacturing site this 19th day of August 1986.*" [rfl]

JUNE 15, 2023

On June 15th, 2023, Ramsey County Historical Society unveiled the second ERA commemoration plaque at the original ERA site. A report, [ERA History Talk](#), discusses the history leading up to this plaque. The new plaque theme is, “*ERA and spinoffs’ technologies came to rival agriculture and mining as a leading industry in the state.*” “*From this plant, an enormous contribution was made to human welfare throughout the world, and the benefits to the local economy are almost beyond measure.*” Don Hall, author of *Generation of Wealth - the Rise of CDC*, was the principal sponsor and emceed the program.



Figure 1, Left is RCHS President Chad Roberts, right is benefactor and event Emcee Don Hall.

2.3 COMMEMORATIVE PLAQUE LOCATION



SPECIALS**1985 – SPERRY CORP. 75-YR HISTORY.**

2007 – CSE’S 40-YR RECOGNITION

The 40 Years of Excellence [booklet](#) from the U of MN's Computer Science and Engineering Department relates a beginning with the ERA 1103 (ATLAS II) computer. Posted with permission from the CSE department head, Dr. Vipin Kumar

2021 – ERA’S 75-YR HISTORY

During the VIP Club ZOOM board meeting on December 2nd, 2020 we discussed how to publicize ERA’s 75th anniversary. The next week, Club Director Gish Devlaminck suggested reaching out to Mr. Curt Brown who writes articles for the Minneapolis Star-Tribune’s Sunday papers. Lowell reached out, then Mr. Brown gladly responded and interviewed ex-ERA engineer Don Weidenbach: “Hi Don and Lowell: Thanks for letting me share Don’s tale on the 75th anniversary of ERA pushing the power button to ignite MN’s computer age” www.vipclubmn.org/Articles/75-Years_Ago.pdf was posted as Don Weidenbach was featured in a January 10th Minneapolis Star tribune article; peruse the request communications and reader feedback (even former MN Governor Arne Carlson).

EPILOGUE

Need Something to Celebrate? From the Club’s October 2006 newsletter: This year is the 25th anniversary of the Personal Computer, the origin of which is generally defined as the introduction of the IBM PC in 1981. Most of us will remember the announcement of the Sperry PC in 1984 and the employee purchase option via payroll deductions. Sperry’s introductory ad featured in cartoon form a svelte cosmopolite sashaying her way into a soiree already well in progress. She was carrying, of course, the new Sperry PC, which drew approving and appreciative glances. The caption read something like, “It’s OK to be late to the party if you bring something really good.” Well, sometimes it’s OK to just not go to the party. It’s a long shot, but if a reader out there still has the technical data/features sheet (short form) for that Sperry PC, it would be fun to publish it here. Submitted by Dick Lundgren, rflundgr@aol.com.

Our career summaries of 200⁺ employees, www.vipclubmn.org/People.html, include many with over three decades of time with our direct lineage companies. If you are not included therein; send your name, years of service, and a paragraph or two about your project and/or program experiences, email to webmaster@vipclubmn.org or to la.gj.benson@comcast.net.

To monitor future Club and Legacy activities; point your browser to www.vipclubmn.org/membership.html, then

join us as a *former employee* or as a *friend* and be a celebrant of our 50th anniversary in 2030!

The logo consists of two rectangular boxes side-by-side. The left box is red with the text "VIP Club" in white serif font. The right box is blue with the text "Newsletter" in white serif font.

VIP Club Newsletter

Respectively, *Lowell A. Benson*
BEE UofMN, 1966