



## FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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## NEARLY A CENTURY OF WORK EXPERIENCE ENSHRINED IN GRANDMA'S MARATHON HALL OF FAME

*Longtime Employees Bergen, Culver, Hanson are Class of 2026 Inductees*

**(DULUTH, MINN.)** – Three of the longest-tenured employees in the history of Grandma's Marathon – they've combined for 85 years of work experience with the race – were fittingly on stage together as they each received the event's highest honor.

Laura Bergen, Sarah Culver, and Linda Hanson make up the Class of 2026 and were officially inducted last week into the Grandma's Marathon Hall of Fame.

"The trajectory of the race and our whole organization would look entirely different if these three women aren't involved," Executive Director Shane Bauer said. "To have their talents and work ethic with us for decades has certainly helped Grandma's Marathon, but they're all such good people on top of that, as well. We really owe them a lot."

Bergen, Culver, and Hanson were officially inducted during a dinner and ceremony on Wednesday, May 20 at the St. Louis County Depot in Duluth.

### LINDA HANSON

Hanson, who was raised in West Duluth and graduated from Duluth Denfeld High School, started with Grandma's Marathon in 1987 and worked nearly four decades as the organization's Finance & Operations Director.

In addition to handling the event's multi-million-dollar annual budget, Hanson played an instrumental role in the event's race operations as well as the annual spaghetti dinner and race weekend entertainment.



“Everything I ever did at Grandma’s Marathon was super fun,” Hanson said. “They say that if you love your job, you’ll never work a day in your life, and they’re right. I was extremely fortunate to have one of the absolute best jobs on the planet, and it was truly an honor to be part of this organization.”

## SARAH CULVER

Culver first moved to Duluth after graduating from Central Michigan University and worked for nine years in the hospitality industry, after which she was hired as the marathon’s Administrative Assistant in 2000. In 2014, she became the Hospitality and Elite Athlete Director and will continue in that role until her planned retirement in September 2026.

“I’m so fortunate to have worked in the running industry, and especially at Grandma’s Marathon, for most of my career,” Culver said. “I’ve had the pleasure to work with so many incredible coworkers and community members who all come together to put on one of the best marathons in the country.”

## LAURA BERGEN

After graduating from the University of Minnesota Duluth (UMD) in 1999, Bergen first started with the marathon as an intern before accepting her first full-time job as Public Relations Director in 2000. She became the Director of Event & Program Development in 2006 before leaving the race in 2011, only to return four years later, in 2015, as the Registration & Expo Director.

Bergen was diagnosed with pancreatic cancer and passed away in October 2025. Through her entire 3.5-year battle, which was extremely physically and emotionally taxing, Bergen continued to show up and work for the marathon – it was one place she could feel some normalcy, she often said.

“The marathon really just become part of who I am, and it’s hard to imagine not being involved in some capacity,” Bergen said in November 2023. “I’m so proud to be part of this great event in a city that I love. There’s nothing else like it in the world.”

## GRANDMA’S MARATHON HALL OF FAME

### Class of 2026

Laura Bergen *Longtime Employee*  
Sarah Culver *Longtime Employee*  
Linda Hanson *Longtime Employee*

### Class of 2025

Dave Malban *Board of Directors*  
Dominic Ondoro *Elite Runner*

### Class of 2024

Greg Helgeson *Start Line Volunteer*  
Paul Iversen *Start Line Volunteer*  
Bob Larkin *Start Line Volunteer*

### Class of 2023

Elisha Barno *Elite Runner*  
Dan Dock *Finish Line Volunteer*  
Barb Korte *Board of Directors*

### Class of 2022

Glenn Evavold *Board of Directors*  
Jim Greenfield *Media Vehicle Driver*  
Monica Halligan *Finish Line Balloons*  
Deb Pawlowicz *Bus Transportation Dispatcher*  
Rick Recker *Race Referee*  
Dick Skogg *Heatsheets*



## **Class of 2019**

Kevin Peterson *Board of Directors*

## **Class of 2018**

Jeff Frey *Race Photographer*

Lizette Mitchell *Water Station Volunteer*

Deanna Nordeen *Water Station Volunteer*

## **Class of 2017**

Adele Hartwick *Board of Directors*

Amanda McGrory *Elite Wheelchair Athlete*

Doug Nelson *Race Communications*

## **Class of 2016**

Joe Hietala *Activity Lot Construction Crew*

Erik Nelson *Activity Lot Construction Crew*

Kraig Rudstrom *Activity Lot Construction Crew*

## **Class of 2015**

Tim Hollis *Start Line*

John Kessler *Start Line*

## **Class of 2014**

Scott Keenan *Founding Executive Director*

## **Class of 2013**

Carol Gallinger *Hospitality Committee*

Mike Krois *Bus Transportation Coordinator*

Rudy Lundahl *Bus Transportation Coordinator*

Saul Mendoza *Elite Wheelchair Athlete*

## **Class of 2012**

City of Duluth *Host City*

City of Two Harbors *Host City*

## **Class of 2011**

Ron Francisco *Auxiliary Police Officer*

Steve Harrington *Medical Director*

Ed Hermel *Longtime Participant*

GB Leighton *Postrace Music Headliner*

Chelly Townsend *Volunteer*

## **Class of 2010**

477th Medical Company *Medical Team*

Chuck & Sally Hegg *Water Station Volunteers*

John Leppi *Founder*

Bill & Nancy Olsen *Water Station Volunteers*

Kevin Pates *Newspaper Reporter*

## **Class of 2009**

John Docter *Media Vehicle Driver*

Steve Greenfield *Media Vehicle Driver*

Kellie Luedloff *Water Station Volunteer*

Bill Wenmark *Longtime Participant*

## **Class of 2008**

Sharon Buchanan *Volunteer*

Jerry Frederick *Race Communications Director*

Jeno Paulucci *Sponsor*

Mary Spiering *Volunteer*

## **Class of 2007**

Neil Franz *Longtime Participant*

Greg Haynes *Volunteer*

Dale Kusnierek *Board of Directors*

## **Class of 2006**

North Shore Striders *Founding Organization*

## **Class of 2005**

Candy Furo *Board of Directors*

Taire (Lind) Suliin *Water Station Volunteer*

## **Class of 2004**

Don Fennessy *Board of Directors*

Gino & Kathy Goedel *Start Line Directors*

Michael Pinocci *Race Announcer*

## **Class of 2003**

Candace Cable *Elite Wheelchair Athlete*

Ken & Mona Rae Cich *Volunteers*

John Kulick *Sports Massage Therapist*



### **Class of 2002**

Rick Jackson *25-Year Participant*  
Joe Johnson *25-Year Participant*  
John Naslund *25-Year Participant*  
James Nowak *25-Year Participant*

### **Class of 2001**

Brian Daugherty *Founder*  
Jan Eittle *Elite Runner*  
Brian Larsen *Founding Volunteer*  
Paul Van Winkel *Elite Wheelchair Athlete*

### **Class of 2000**

Joan Dahlstrom *Volunteer*  
Herb Dillon *Medical Team*  
Cindy Nelson *Race Packet Coordinator*  
Mac Welles *Finish Area Coordinator*

### **Class of 1999**

David Eckstrom *Elite Wheelchair Athlete*  
Doug Kurtis *Elite Runner*  
Lorraine Moller *Elite Runner*  
Tami Oothoudt *Elite Wheelchair Athlete*

### **Class of 1998**

Dick Beardsley *Elite Runner*  
Peter Graves *Race Announcer*  
Barney & Janis Klecker *Elite Runners*  
Wen Shi Yu *Elite Runner*

### **Class of 1997**

Gerald Church *Start Line Director*

### **Class of 1996**

Andy Borg *Founding Sponsor*  
Garry Bjorklund *Elite Runner*  
George Fink *Founder*  
John Foschi *Board of Directors*  
Mickey Paulucci *Founding Sponsor*  
Alex Ratelle *Elite Runner*  
Dorothy Spencer *Founder*

For any questions or interview requests, please contact Marketing & Public Relations Director Zach Schneider via phone at (218) 343-9874 or via email at [zach@grandmasmarathon.com](mailto:zach@grandmasmarathon.com).

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### ABOUT GRANDMA'S MARATHON

Started by a local group of runners in 1977, Grandma's Marathon has grown from just 150 participants its first year to now one of the largest and best-known marathons in the United States. Widely regarded as a world class event with small town charm, our race has now added the Garry Bjorklund Half Marathon and William A. Irvin 5K to its weekend offerings.

With all three races combined, our race weekend welcomes more than 20,000 participants – usually from all 50 states and from 70+ different countries – and brings with it close to \$40M of economic impact to the region.

The race got its name from the Duluth-based group of famous Grandma's Restaurants, the first major sponsor of the marathon. As the popularity of Grandma's Marathon weekend has grown, our mission has stayed the same – to organize, promote, and deliver annual events and programs that cultivate running, educational, social, and charitable opportunities to our communities.

Grandma's Marathon-Duluth, Inc. is a 501(c)(3) tax-exempt nonprofit organization with a 10-person, full-time staff and a 17-member Board of Directors.



Advantage Embroidery & Screen Printing | Anderson's Maple Syrup | Black Woods Grill & Bar | Circle K | Cirrus Aircraft | City of Duluth | CM2 Supply  
Country Hearth Natural Breads | Dasani | Duluth Economic Development Authority | Duluth News Tribune | Essentia Health | Grand Casino Hinckley/Mille Lacs  
Grandma's Restaurant Co. | Holiday Inn & Suites | Jamar | maurices | Michelina's | Michelob Ultra | Minnesota Pork Board | Minnesota Power/ALLETE  
Napa Auto Parts | Northland FAN 106.5 | Powerade ION4 | Storm Creek | Stryker | Super One Foods | WM | WDIO/WIRT-TV