



Abby Makay / WDAY News

Maija Lindaas, a Moorhead native now living in Norway, plays the 2025 Hardanger fiddle, which hundreds of people had a hand in creating. It started as a block of wood and will debut Thursday night at Concordia's Centrum. All part of the 200th anniversary of Norwegians arriving in the Midwest.

Handmade Hardanger fiddle puts F-M at 'epicenter' of an epic project

BY KEVIN WALLEVAND
WDAY

MOORHEAD

This week all over Fargo-Moorhead and in Norway, people are celebrating the bicentennial of Norwegian immigration to the United States.

Two hundred years after nearly a third of Norway came to America and this part of the Midwest, one project here at home has caught the eye of a global audience: the making of a Hardanger fiddle from scratch.

People around the Midwest and in Norway played a role in bringing the handmade piece of musical art to life in preparation for Thursday night's big Hardanger Fiddle Concert at Concordia College, celebrating the bicentennial.

Maija Lindaas never dreamed of a moment like this.

The 2012 Moorhead High School grad now lives in Norway but returned home to witness one thing: A handmade Hardanger fiddle, more than a year in the making.

It started off as a block of wood, but for the last several months, it traveled all over the Midwest, where artists helped turn

that block of wood into the Hardanger fiddle.

A Hardanger fiddle appears similar to a standard violin but has eight strings rather than four and is made with thinner wood, both of which alter the sound it emits. The instrument is also highly decorated, with a scroll at the top depicting a dragon's head.

"Everyone across the country is doing things to celebrate (the bicentennial)," said Rinita Dalan, who helped lead the fiddle project. "When we tried to think of something local we could do, we really wanted that experience of the music and the players, but also the experience of having your hands on this beautiful folk instrument and saying you were a part of it."

That fiddle even made it home to Scandinavia, a reversal of when immigrants 200 years ago brought their steamer trunks and fiddles to Minnesota and North Dakota.

"There is a phrase I like, that if you ask a fish to describe its environment the last thing they will say is, water. I think we take this Scandinavian heritage for granted a lot — strange for me to say when I am surrounded by all these Scandinavian artifacts, and a

building with a Viking ship and a Stave church," said Markus Krueger, member of the Fargo Spelemannslag group, which builds and plays Hardanger fiddles. "But it is something that makes us unique, along with being a Kurdish town and a Sudanese town and a Somali town, too,"

But Fargo-Moorhead is re-inventing the art of making and playing Hardanger fiddles, and the rest of the world is taking note. The Fargo Spelemannslag has nearly 20 people making their own fiddles, under the watchful eye of longtime fiddle maker Bud Larsen, who learned the art from a violin shop owner in Fargo back in the day.

"This is the most involved art project I have ever done in my life, and it's also something that has given me ... a community that I've never really had before," Krueger said.

"Being a part of this group of Hardanger fiddlers and fiddle makers is a feeling like there is a renaissance going on in America, and the epicenter is Fargo-Moorhead," he said.

After traveling across an ocean and back again, hundreds have touched this fiddle as it transformed from a block of

wood to this magnificent piece. It's made from maple and spruce from trees right here at home, along with antlers and clam shells from the Red River. Those local materials came together as part of this fiddle, which is about to debut on Thursday night at Concordia.

"Sometimes it makes me feel kind of weepy, because to know that, as a whole, we all put it together and did our part to finish it," Lisa Stein, member of the Spelemannslag, said.

Two hundred years after those immigrants took the big gamble, sailing to America and arriving in the Midwest, a fiddle and a song to remind so many of us, who first plowed the fields and built communities still standing today.

The Hardanger Fiddle event is free and starts at 6:30 p.m. at Concordia's Centrum on Thursday, Oct. 9.

The concert is timed to match the arrival from Norway of the boat "Restauration" in New York City on Thursday, 200 years after the first boatload of Norwegians came to America.

Reach WDAY reporter Kevin Wallevand at kwallevand@wday.com.



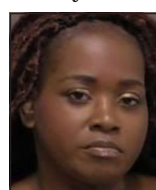
Anna Paige / Forum file photo

Faith Shields-Dixon speaks at the Fargo City Commission meeting in the Commission Chambers in September 2024.

Fargo activist to plead guilty in misappropriation case

BY APRIL BAUMGARTEN
The Forum

BISMARCK — A Fargo activist will admit to misappropriating state funds to businesses owned by family members.



Shields-Dixon

Faith Monique Shields-Dixon, 46, signed an agreement on Oct. 1 that says she will plead guilty

to three of five felony counts of theft. Prosecutors agreed to recommend she serve 11 months in jail, with the opportunity for work release, according to the agreement.

Shields-Dixon's attorney, Dane DeKrey, will ask that the charges be reduced to misdemeanors, with a sentence of no less than four months in jail, according to the plea agreement.

The plea agreement also calls for the other two counts of theft to be dismissed. Burleigh County District Judge Bobbi Weiler must accept the plea agreement before it is finalized.

A change of plea hearing is scheduled for 2:30 p.m. Oct. 20 in Mandan, according to court records.

DeKrey and prosecutors have asked that Shields-Dixon's sentencing hearing be scheduled for 90 days after she pleads guilty so she can find a job in Bismarck, according to court documents that requested the plea hearing. She initially requested to serve her time at the Cass County Jail in Fargo, but the jail doesn't allow work release, according to court documents.

Shields-Dixon will surrender herself to jail custody immediately after she is sentenced, the document said.

Prosecutors in Burleigh County accused Shields-Dixon and her husband, Charles Dixon, 52, of Moorhead, of giving state grant money from the North Dakota Department of Public Instruction to Shields-Dixon's family. She started a nonprofit in 2016 called the Faith4Hope Scholarship Fund, which was meant to help low-income families reach long-term independence, according to the organization's website, which is no longer available.

Shields-Dixon applied for \$1.5 million from the grant program in October 2021, according to

court documents. She received a three-year grant for \$350,000 in January 2022, but reimbursements showed \$124,000 went to businesses owned by Shields-Dixon's family for service payments, according to court documents.

Those businesses included her father's food stand, Diezel Double Barrel BBQ; her brother's music and production company, Revolution Records; and Be The Light Dance Studio, which is owned by Tekeema Shields, according to court documents.

By signing the plea agreement, Shields-Dixon admits to "knowingly" misappropriating funds to the three businesses "by using deception and violating the terms of the grant when applying for and receiving" the state funds. Charging documents said she agreed to pay Diezel Double Barrel BBQ \$22,000 a year plus \$12,000 for catering, as well as \$38,000 to Be The Light and \$50,000 to Revolution Records.

Charles Dixon also faces two felony theft charges. His trial is scheduled for Nov. 11.

Prosecutors filed charges against the couple in October 2024.

Shields-Dixon and her husband have lived in the Fargo-Moorhead area for more than 20 years. She is a prominent business owner and activist who fought for the rights and voices of people of color.

In a statement sent Wednesday to media after this story published, Shields-Dixon asked residents to "withhold judgment regarding the details of my case until my sentencing hearing." Several media outlets wrote stories about the plea agreement.

Shields-Dixon claimed "some, but not all, of what was published was either misleading or inaccurate."

"There, my attorneys and I will explain exactly what did and did not happen with respect to the grant funding I accepted from the city of Fargo and state of North Dakota," she said in the statement. "Then — and only then — should anyone draw any conclusions about me, my family and the decisions I made in this matter."

Readers can reach Forum reporter April Baumgarten at 701-241-5417 or abaumgarten@forumcomm.com. Follow her on the social platform X @ [aprilbaumsaway](https://twitter.com/aprilbaumsaway).

Law enforcement identifies man who died in Walsh County Jail

WALSH COUNTY, N.D. — Authorities have identified the man who died Sunday, Oct. 5, at the Walsh County Jail in Grafton.

Patrick Donald Aune,

39, Park River, died while in custody, according to a Walsh County Sheriff's Office news release.

Aune was noticed by correctional officers shortly after 10:30 a.m. Sunday, apparently suffering from a medical emergency, according to the sheriff's office. COs,

along with deputies, began life-saving measures. Other agencies were called to assist with medical intervention, but their attempts were unsuccessful, and Aune died in custody.

No further information is being released because the North Dakota Bureau

of Criminal Investigation and North Dakota Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation are continuing to investigate. More information will be released, when available, through either the BCI or Walsh County Sheriff's Office.

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