

SAVORING AND SERVING OUR FINNISH HERITAGE

By Anita Smiley, Immediate Past President, FFN

At FinnFest 2013, held in June in Hancock/Houghton, Michigan, a group of people representing three organizations which are celebrating significant anniversaries this year met to strengthen bonds. These organizations, individually and together, give Finland a strong voice. Finlandia Foundation National (FFN), headquartered in Pasadena, California, is celebrating its 60th anniversary. Suomi-Seura/Finland Society, located in Helsinki, Finland, is now in its 86th year. The League of Finnish-American Societies (LFAS)/Suomi-Amerikka Yhdistysten Liitto (SAYL), with offices in Helsinki, Finland, is celebrating its 70th anniversary. Each organization has a rich history and is working to build a stronger root system among Finnish nationality groups.

As each of these organizations works diligently to keep our Finnish heritage alive and strong, we salute all the tentacles around the world that are joining in this work. Each of us is a small part of a much larger network of people who are thankful for a rich heritage passed down through parents and grandparents, relatives, and friends and who do not want to have this heritage become just another vegetable in the pot of soup called ethnicity.

We paused that evening to reflect on how fortunate we are to have people throughout the world who care so deeply about this rich Finnish heritage that they devote a large part of their lives to looking to the future and sustaining this heritage.

The **Finlandia Foundation National** (www.finlandiafoundation.org) continues to grow as new chapters and individual members sense the importance of maintaining a link with one's heritage through an umbrella organization that has as its purpose the strengthening of the Finnish culture and heritage. With recent growth, FFN has over 7,000 members in 45 chapters located throughout the U.S. and individual members who do not have a Finnish-American organization in their area but who are desirous of being part of this important network.

The **Finland Society** (www.suomi-seura.fi)—an organization unlike any other in the world—is the voice of Finnish citizens and dependents throughout the world and welcomes members to the fold. A bi-monthly newsletter informs its wide readership of news of interest to Finns and keeps them in touch with the homeland.

The **League of Finnish-American Societies** (www.sayl.fi) has 54 local chapters in Finland with over 9,000 members. The League through its chapters works to maintain and promote friendly relations with the United States. It is important to nurture these ties and friendships.

Let's all, Finns and friends of Finns alike, continue to support our Finnishness in any way that we can, whether it be through monetary donations, sharing stories of Finnish heritage, encouraging younger generations to get involved, serving on committees, or even stepping into leadership roles. You are an important part of this worldwide network, serving to maintain pride in our Finnish heritage.

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