

### **Welcome:**

Welcome to the 75th Anniversary of the American Finnish Club of Lake Worth, Florida!  
Tervetuloa Kerhotalon 75 vuotis juhliin! I am very happy to host the first portion of the evening during which I will be telling you some historical highlights from the past years. Since the time is limited, and we have a dance tonight, there are many names and many stories that simply won't be told. Please forgive me for those omissions and know that I am grateful for them and for all you. Olen iloinen etta voin kertoa teille taman illan aikana Kerhotalon historiaa. Aikamme yhdessa on lyhyt ja tanssit odottaa, joten suokaa anteeksi jos tarkeitä nimia ja tarinoita puuttuu illan ohjelmasta. Tietakaa etta olen kiitollinen heidan tyostaan Kerhotalon eteen kuten olen kiitollinen teista kaikista! Aika rajoituksen takia ohjelmamme on vain yhdella kielella. Due to time, we will only be using one language without translation except the greeting from the Honorary Consulate.

Thank you again for being here today. If you are able, please stand for the flag processional. Kiitos teille kaikille ja jos voitte, nouskaa lippu partion saapuessa.

Flag Processional

National Anthem & Kansallislaulu

Greetings from the Honorary Consulate - Peter Makila by our new Vice President, Barry Heiniluoma.

Finnish Greeting - read.

### **Short History of the American Finnish Club**

#### **The Beginning:**

Already by the year 1937, Finnish settlers to Lake Worth / Lantana shared in many social activities together. Different groups had picnics and coffee socials even during the war time when goods were scarce. People gave from their own pantries in order to have these activities. Today is the 19th of January so exactly 75 years and two days ago, there was a meeting at the home of Verner Beck on Davis Road, to establish an official club: "The Finnish Workers' Educational Club".

Within a few weeks the club had gained 44 members (more than I get at membership meetings today!) At the meeting of the founding mothers and fathers on March 5th, they wrote bylaws and planned their first upcoming activities!

In the beginning, they used to rent the Elk Hall and then the Lake Worth Casino for their Thursday night dances. Unfortunately a hurricane destroyed the Lake Worth Casino in 1948. There already was a committee in place for purchasing a property. The membership meeting

minutes from December 10th of 1945 reported about this very lot where you are today! Guess how much it cost? In those days the property was \$600.00 much less than all the expenses of building each part of the building and the improvements on the building during the early days. When you drove into the lot the houses surrounding the driveway were the lots sold in order to raise building funds. The kitchen was the first building built. Some things never change! Food is still the essential and famous element of our social gatherings to this day!

The first big event held on this property was an opening reception on April 7th, 1946. A poem written for the occasion said: "Niinpa kohos kurkihirret uutterall yhteistyolla, tyolla Lake Worthin Floridan suomalaisten oma yhteiskoti aivan ensimmäinen, josta piirrettiin muistot historian lehdille." Indeed, most of the work was done by volunteers. Among the volunteers were also some skilled workers donating their time and talents. Even women helped with building and they always made food and coffee for everyone. Many slept in their cars and in tents where some suspect the name "Kenttahaali" comes from. They decided to build the first hall February 2nd of 1949 and already at their March 12th meeting they were ready to invite the women's choir to perform at the inaugural event of the hall! (Imagine if government worked that fast! ?? ha ha ) The building of the large hall happened fast as well, after the decision was made. The opening event for the large hall was celebrated December 10th through 11th of 1955. The designer and main architect of the building Leo Maki passed away the summer of 1966.

It wasn't until 1973 when the first air conditioners were added but they didn't work very well for such a large space. The bigger units that were actually able to cool the room were installed in 1982. (Wait!?? Are these the units that were installed in 1982!?? Uhm, someone tell the President that UPgrade might be in place! :-D )

I was absolutely fascinated reading about the history of the American Finnish Club (LAST NIGHT...ehem)! No, really, I DO love history and some of you know I used to teach it!

I was enjoying reading about the fact that in the olden days there used to be many choirs! One of these pictures of the famous mixed choir had 54 people in it!! (It's true, I literally counted every single head.) Apparently, the influential choir director from 1955 to 1971 was Mamie Nukala. She not only directed the choirs who held concerts but accompanied the music in plays and other events.

You know the old saying that there's nothing new under the sun and that history repeats itself... A year ago, I became the President of this club and I wanted to establish work committees to divvy up the tasks and duties. The founding mothers and fathers had done the same thing 70 years ago! And some things never change: the most important committee then and now is of course the Programs Committee! I was super jealous that they had a slew of people to choose from to sell tickets and serve as greeters though! They even had a separate committee for dances! The first dance committee established in 1946 consisted of five men. (I think that is going to be my first official act as President this year to establish a dances committee. Hmmm,

the most capable man here could easily handle that all by himself... Kari! Can we talk afterwards??)

Speaking of dances, I'll mention one of the best musicians for dances among Finns according to the history books was Viola Turpeinen. She kept a peppy beat even when she got ill. The powerhouse women of this club are quite impressive (and intimidating...)

As a librarian I must mention the surprising statistic of 100% literacy rate of Finns from very early on. Thank God for the requirement of reading the catechism if you wanted to get married!

The first bookshelves here were donated by a club in Connecticut. Over the years they received donations from other associations and individuals. During those years numerous individuals had the title of "Librarian" or more correctly an individual who took care of the library and lending of material to members. (Technically, you need a Master's Degree in Library and Information Science to be a Librarian...) The activity of the library ended and some of the books were donated to the Lake Worth City Library and to Finnish patients in hospitals. However, as we all know: Florida weather is not the best for storing books especially if the A/C gets turned off for the summer... so

In conclusion of the early years, music and fun programs were always a part of this club. On that note, I will invite our awesome Florida Accordion Ensemble to perform for us a few songs!

Welcome Floridan Harmonikka Kerho - Tervetuloa!

History - AFC 50 years:

For their 50th Anniversary, Finnish Worker's Educational Club/ Kenttahaali produced a very informative booklet about its history. The work of volunteers comes up over and over again and we do have someone here who is featured in this book. He is an active volunteer who does all kinds of work around the club to this day. You may not know him but you see the beautiful photographs all around the club about all the activities and people that have enjoyed their time at various events here - this is the handiwork of Dennis Tero who literally looks like a baby in the booklet as one of the board members at the 50th Anniversary! Beverly Tero is also mentioned in the book as a volunteer who often ran the kitchen. She works also to this day quietly behind the scenes and is one of the people who make things happen here!

The booklet included a greeting from the Ambassador of Finland in Washington D.C. where he recognized the significant contributions of the club to the surrounding community, preservation of Finnish culture as well as contributing to the U.S. Finnish relations in a positive way. In its early years, even the game clubs that collected a meager participation fee donated their funds to a variety of charitable causes and civic organizations. Jukka Valtasaari writes: "Finns, like other immigrants to this country, learned that you have to have something of your own to be

able to give and to be accepted as valuable members of the community.” If only people this day held these same values of hard work and altruism.

One of the organizations that the club collected and donated to was the Finnish American Rest Home. The first representative from the club to the rest home was Jalmari Peltola.

The rest home later offered a practice space for our pride and joy: the Katrillit folk dancers. The group started in the 70's but there are people here present today who can tell you much more about the history of the group.

(I'm sorry I didn't attend the 50th celebration in 1994 but I was in the middle of my studies in Tampere, Finland. However, a few months later, I did return to Florida and my family rented the hall for my wedding! he he he but really... ehem... )

The most exciting thing for me personally while reading the 50th year Anniversary booklet was perusing through the congratulations from different local Finnish organizations and businesses. Then, I saw: "Manner Design" - my heart skipped a beat! This was the business card of my Dad, Reijo Manner! He had made some architectural renderings for updating the building. Unfortunately he is in Finland right now but I am very glad to have his brother, my dear Uncle Harri here today singing for us after the following Tango demonstration.

Thank you to our good partners who host Tango in the small hall every Saturday all year long except during Finnish American tori weekend this year on February 9th.

Tango Demonstration (this was actually moved to later in the program...)

Male Singers of Florida - Tervetuloa Floridan Laulumiehet

History to the Present Day:

Ten years ago, the club hosted the 65th Anniversary and produced another nice booklet with interesting history.

There was an excerpt from a 1994 newspaper article that said: "the 50th anniversary committee is said to have a time capsule which would be opened in 2044"! (Uhm, was anyone going to tell me about this!?? )

I was delighted to read about engagement with other cultures and countries in 1997. 1999 saw the first weeklong celebration to raise awareness and continued preservation of the club. They even had Ambassador as a guest speaker and big name companies sponsoring the event!

There was also an excerpt of a newspaper article about the visit of the Finnish Past President Martti Ahtisaari in 2001 written by none other than one of my childhood friends, Robert Nieminen.

In 2004, at the 60th Anniversary Celebration it was said that: "the American Finnish Community Club - Kerhotalo - continues to promote Finland and its culture as it has for the past 60 years, not only within the Finnish community but also in the local area..." The document mentions of support and partnerships with the two Finnish churches and the Finnish American Rest Home. In addition to many happy things like hosting a violinist from the Sibelius Academy, a successful fundraiser for the St Andrews Church, (the birth of my son... oh ehem...) 2004 also brought hardships like the destructive hurricanes and dealing with the aftermath.

In 2006, the Midnight Sun Festival was here! I don't really remember those years... What was I doing, Oh yes, I was teaching... and grading papers for nearly 180 kids every day... and did I mention I had a baby... he he

Still the most well-known faces of Kerhotalo are Kari and Eva Repo who have kept the club going to this day! Their friendliness and dedication is a testament to the passion they have for us all. Kari, was the President at the time of the 65th Anniversary and in his greeting he said: "we are still a vibrant community of Finns". I echo his sentiments that "I am grateful for the opportunity to thank the members and volunteers who have been such a big part in maintaining the building and keeping the Finnish culture alive".

Another couple who have worked tirelessly for the club are Kaija and Kaarlo Kalervo. After the super successful cabbage roll luncheon this past Wednesday, I met with the new board and there were Kaija and Kaarlo - still cleaning up in the kitchen! I salute your service! But Did you know that Kaija was awarded the Ellis Island Medal of Honor in 2002 when she was President? "The Ellis Island Medals of Honor are presented annually by the National Ethnic coalition of organizations (NECO) Inc. ... The coalition was formed with the intention of educating and encouraging cultural unity... Designed to pay homage to the immigrant experience, as well as individual achievement, medals are awarded to U.S. citizens for various ethnic backgrounds. The honorees are distinguished Americans who exemplify outstanding qualities in both their personal and professional lives, while continuing to preserve the richness of their particular heritage." In 2005 she organized a children's concert to help the children who lost their parents in the Tsunami. What a lady!

Some things have not changed in 75 years! Bingo started December 3rd 1944. We still have Bingo every Sunday during season except during Finnish American Weekends.

The exercise association was established in 1949. It was named Kontys which is a very odd and funny word even in Finnish but apparently it referred to the mature age of the members. Even though their association ended, we still exercise at the club every Thursday except on Thanksgiving, Christmas or during Finnish American week! Each week the dollar exercise is led

by a different instructor and all classes can be done at different levels so everyone is welcome to join! I would like to give a special thank you to the other volunteer teachers who faithfully share their talents and time all year long: Minna Tervola would you please stand and be recognized. She is our fearless leader and present here tonight. Our other volunteer teachers are Hanna Kiuru, Jessica Grotke, and Marianna Helin.

There is currently no theatre committee but it doesn't mean we have not enjoyed some plays during the past decade. With the power house volunteer and past board member Anita Tarvainen, we brought on full 3-act play with a cast of talented actors, a fun skit which gave me forever the name of Mrs. Garrity and I why I call Irmeli Laine "Tolly dear" as well as a Murder Mystery dinner which my friend Joe keeps pleading we do again soon!

Speaking of special performances: In 2013 we had the reunion of the St. Andrews Lutheran Church youth group band: Voices of Thunder later renamed Axiom. We celebrated Vappu or May Day by playing for the crowd. Two of us here today: Welcome to our church organist Mika Poutiainen, who played the electric guitar - rock and roll!

The Katrillit were officially registered by Sauli and Pirjo Sillanpaa. Pirjo, Tuula Rajasaari and Sinikka Tenlen have been pillars of the group for decades! Eino and Virpi Lehtonen have been the leaders ever since I got more involved here and we are happy to have them back as they have a wonderful show for us today. I had the pleasure of dancing with them the past two years not only during Finnish American Week but also on the West Coast, the Palm Springs Public Library, Lake Clark Gardens clubhouse and even the Midnight Sun Festival. I have to say, they are made out of a tougher material than myself. It must be the real Finnish rye bread that I didn't get to grow up with as my family moved to the States in the mid 80's.

Katrillit - Welcome, take it away.

#### History to Present continues:

Volunteers still work hard to bring on the best programs and events! A film committee was founded in 1963 and to this day we show movies. If you have not attended yet, we have a Nordic Film Series going on Tuesday nights sponsored by the Finlandia University and of course our club. Barry Heiniluoma and Ray Ritari have been instrumental in cultivating this relationship with The Finlandia University in Michigan.

Since I mentioned them, I would like to recognize the board from last year 2018 without whom I would have not been able to get through the year! Ray Ritari, Vice President, Glenn Beckman, Treasurer, Pat Ritari, Secretary and Board Members Tuula Rajasaari, Barry Heiniluoma, Elina Aarnio and Irene Volanen. To my dismay, Ray and Pat have stepped back but they continue to work hard. Pat has been instrumental in keeping me on track as my brain can only hold so much information at one time. Her service on the board will be greatly missed as will the wisdom and guidance of Ray. We were blessed to have had the expert help of John Aho with our finances this past year. He has now agreed to serve on the board as Treasurer. Pirjo Sillanpaa

has also joined the board for which I am very grateful. Continued thanks to Tuula, Elina and Irene for staying on the board.

Greetings from Finlandia University and Finnish American Heritage Center.

We invite you all to the opening of Finnish American Week in two weeks for our Flag raising ceremony, February 2nd at Noon followed by a luncheon. There will be a dance that evening and the famous tori with all our Finnish organizations and groups the following weekend!

Thank you to all the other local organizations present today.





