



President Sauli Niinistö Visits Finntown in NY

The Consul General of Finland to New York, Mika Koskinen, requested that I accompany the President of Finland, Sauli Niinistö, on a tour of Finntown Sunset Park Brooklyn NY, on Monday, Sept. 21, 2021.

The President requested the tour to take place when he would have an opportunity to make time for it, while he was in New York for the United Nations General Assembly meeting. Because of his brief visit and very busy schedule, the actual tour had to be limited to 30 minutes.

Plans were made and coordinated for a driving tour with brief stops at the following: (1) Alku 1, the first not-for-profit coop in the USA which received historic designation; (2) Finlandia Street sign, memorializing the street where the Finn Halls used to be; (3) the former Imatra Hall; and (4) the courtyard at 673-683 41st Street, Sun Garden Homes, one of the many Finn coops surrounding Sunset Park. Unfortunately, due to the strict time constraints, this stop had to be aborted, although the drive by presented a view of the two Finnish flags at the two building entrances, and the courtyard. There was an additional Finnish flag at the Finn coop, Riverview Homes, at the corner of 41st Street and 7th Avenue, clearly visible for the President to see as the motorcade proceeded to go around the park.

It is quite significant that there are 21 plaques scheduled to be installed

in October 2021 on the walls at the entrances of the former Finn coops, as well as at the former Imatra Hall and the Finnish newspaper. The wording for each plaque varies to suit each building. However, each one sets forth that over 30 coop buildings were built or converted into coops by the Finns in the early 1900s, and that the Finns brought the concept of cooperative ownership to the United States. That fact was the reason why the plaque at Alku 1 was chosen as the first stop for the President to see. All of these plaques will exist for future generations to see.

The two separate buildings, Alku 1 and 2, were placed on the National Register of Historic Places by the United States De-

partment of The Interior on May 20, 2019. That designation resulted only after extensive documentary proof was submitted to confirm the significant contribution to American society made by the Finnish immigrants.

It is indeed a source of pride for all Americans of Finnish descent, and for Finns visiting from abroad. Actual plans are being made by Finlandia Foundation National, a supporter of this project, to enable visitors to Finntown to have an audio tour via an application to be downloaded into their smart phones. The concept of Finntown as a tourist stop is no longer a fantasy!

The President read the plaque at Alku 1. He took particular interest in the



The president of Finland, Sauli Niinistö (2nd from left) visited the Finnish co-op building in Sunset Park, Brooklyn with Robert Saasto, Board President John Amberman and architect Valerie Landriscina.

photos presented of the original building, when Alku 1 and Alku Toinen were the only buildings on the block in 1917. Valerie Landriscina, the architect who is to be credited for her tremendous work on the application for historical designation, and John Amman, the Board President, were present and answered questions that the President posed about the buildings.

I had the opportunity to ride with the President and present background information about Finntown as it was, while pointing out the numerous Finn coop buildings surrounding Sunset Park. A brief stop was made at 40th Street and 7th Avenue to see the Finlandia Street sign, which I had secured in 1992 when Imatra Hall celebrated its 100th year of existence.

At the dedication ceremony, I had noted then, in a speech before numerous dignitaries including the then Ambassador of Fin-

land to the United States, that one day the Finns would be gone, but the sign would remain. The thought never entered my mind then that almost 30 years later, I would be showing that sign to the President of Finland!

It was indeed a pleasure to tour the former Imatra Hall, where my grandmother was the cook and my grandfather the bartender when I was a child. The building is the same except for the façade with the wording Resurrection Church, which bought the building in 1994. The dance floor, kitchen, and back offices are still the same as years ago on the main floor; however, the bar no longer exists.

The basement area, where there was a hall that was rented for events in the last years of Imatra, was converted to classroom cubicles. From the main floor, I accompanied the President up the stairs to the second floor main

hall with the stage, all of which remained the same! I advised the President that in addition to plays and beauty contests (many of which I was the Master of Ceremonies), that President Kekkonen had given a speech at this hall before an overcrowded audience.

The President commented on several occasions throughout the tour that the buildings, including the Imatra Hall, being over 100 years old, were good examples of the skills and good workmanship of the Finns, a trait that we know extends to the present day.

It was indeed an honor not only for me to conduct this tour, but an honor that the President of Finland visited Finntown and recognized the achievements of the Finnish immigrants, who left a legacy worthy to be proud of.

Robert A. Saasto, Esq.
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The Finns built over 30 co-op houses early 1900s in Sunset Park, Brooklyn, NY.

• FLORIDAN SUOMALAISALUE

Kolmas rokotuskierros vuorossa Lepokodilla

Lake Worth, Florida
Amerikan Uutiset
Mikko Koskinen

Koronapandemian valtakunnallisten lukujen kääntyessä hiljalleen positiiviseen suuntaan, myös Lake Worthin amerikkansuomalaisella Lepokodilla on tilanne parantumassa.

Alkuvuodesta Pfizer-rokotteen saivat sekä asukkaat että henkilökunta, ja parhaillaan käynnissä on eri henkilöstöryhmien kolmannet eli booster-rokotukset.

-Toistaiseksi henkilökunnastamme on rokotuksen saanut noin 70%, mutta viime viikkoina rokotustahti on kiihtynyt rokotattomien joukossa parikymmenen prosentin kasvuvauhdilla viikossa,



Lake Worthin amerikkansuomalainen Lepokoti perustettiin 1970-luvun alussa.

sanoo Finnish-American Rest Home Inc:n administrator Dan Benson. Varsinaista syytä rokotustahdin kiihtymiseen hän ei osannut nimetä, mutta asialla lienee jotakin tekemistä Yhdysvalloissa terveydenhoitoalalla käytöön otettujen ankarien määräysten kanssa.

Washingtonista saapuneiden määräysten

mukaan Yhdysvalloissa terveydenhoitoalla työskentelevien on otettava Covid-rokotus erottamisen uhalla. Esimerkiksi New Yorkin osavaltiossa rokottamattomat terveydenhoitoalan työntekijät – samoin kuin opetustyössä olevat – on jo sanottu irti.

-Me emme ole vielä saaneet selviä toimintaohjeita Floridan osavaltiolta

siitä, kuinka rokotuksista kieltäytyy terveydenhoitohenkilökunnan kanssa olisi meneteltävä, Dan Benson sanoo.

Lepokodilla työskentelee hoitoapulaisina ja muissa avustavissa tehtävissä Karibian saarilta kotoisin olevia, joiden kulttuurilliseen ja uskonnolliseen taustaan rokotukset eivät perinteisesti kuulu.

Osavaltion republikaaninen kuvernööri Ron DeSantis vastustaa liittovaltion määräyksiä ja vastustaa lain edellyttämiä pakollisia rokotuksia. Benson yhtyy kuitenkin yleiseen käsitykseen siitä, että esimerkiksi rokottamattomat sairaanhoitajat ovat suuri ja tarpeeton riski asukkaille ja muulle henkilökunnalle. Puo-

lentoista vuoden aikana Lepokodilla on koronaviruskuolemien määrän pienentämiseksi asukasta. Sekä lepokodin (ALF) että hoitokodin (SNF) puolella on noudatettu tarkoin annettuja käyttö- ja vierailuohjeita. Vierailurajoitukset ovat edelleen voimassa, eivätkä ulkopuoliset pääse vierailemaan kodilla ilman erityistä lupaa.

-Testaamme edelleen henkilökuntamme kahdesti viikossa, eikä sairaustapauksia ole ilmaantunut. Kaikkiaan nyt alkaa näyttää siltä, että pahin on ohitettu. Kaiken kaikkiaan kulunut pandemia-aika on ollut terveydenhoitolalalle merkittävä episodi ja vaikuttanut sen kehitykseen ja käytäntöihin, Benson toteaa.

1970-luvun alkuvuo-

sina alueen suomalaisjärjestöjen perustama Finnish-American Rest Home, Inc., kansankielessä Lepokoti, on tarjonnut vuosikymmenten aikana turvallisen ja kulttuurisesti aktiivisen kodin amerikkansuomalaiselle väestölle.

Vaikka ensimmäisen polven suomalaissiirtolaisten määrä laskee jatkuvasti Yhdysvalloissa, Lake Worthissa sijaitseva Lepokoti on selvinnyt kurimuksista lähes kuivin jaloin.

-Hoitokoti on ollut jatkuvasti täynnä, mutta lepokodin puolelle on syntynyt korona-aikana jonkin verran vajausta. Onneksemme tämäkin tilanne alkaa hiljalleen muuttua ja paikat jälleen täyttyä, Benson kiittelee.