

Celebration of Finland's independence

December 3, 2017

[AS PREPARED FOR DELIVERY]

Good afternoon everyone, Hyvää päivää. It's a great pleasure to be here and join you to celebrate the 100th anniversary of Finland's independence.

I want to recognize some of the dignitaries here with us today – Veli Pekka-Kaivola from the Finnish Embassy in Ottawa, Raimo Viitala, the Honorary Consulate for Finland in Sault Ste. Marie and his wife Anne-Marie.

Thank you all for being here with us and a special thank you to the hard working volunteers who make celebrations like this possible.

Many people in our community have strong ties to Finland and I am no different. As many of you know, I married into the Finnish community. My wife and I refer to our two daughters, who are here with us today, as Finntalians. And every time we gather as a family, I have the great fortune of seeing and spending time with Mary Ann Markkula, known to my daughters as Eso – Mummi, and Soili Mutakainen. Having lost all of my grandparents earlier in my life, I feel blessed to have Mummi and Soili in my life.

As our country celebrates its 150th anniversary of confederation, our friends in Finland are celebrating their centennial.

Not only are these two countries marking milestone anniversaries this year, 2017 is the 70th anniversary of the establishment of diplomatic relations between Canada and Finland.

Along with an embassy in Ottawa, there are 13 honorary consulates across the country – including right here in Sault Ste. Marie.

People like Raimo and Veli play an important role in promoting the friendships and shared values linking our two countries, which have much in common:

A love of hockey, an understanding of what it means to survive and thrive during a real winter, a commitment to multiculturalism, a commitment to take an active role in promoting and protecting human rights and providing humanitarian assistance, internationally.

From my perspective, most impressively, both Finland and Canada make outsized contributions to the world. And you can very clearly see the outsized contribution that the Finnish community has made to our own community here in Sault Ste. Marie.

Organizations like the Ontario Finnish Rest Home Association and the facilities that it has built are shining examples of the Finnish community's tremendous contribution to SSM.

Back in 1971, the Ontario Finnish Rest Home Association was started by a group of Finnish individuals who embarked on a mission to build a home for seniors of Finnish and Estonian descent.

They wanted to provide their elders and seniors with a home-like setting rich in Finnish culture and traditions.

It is no secret that Sault Ste. Marie — like most of Canada — has an aging population. As our population ages, we must adapt our services and our housing offerings in response.

We want our older citizens to be able to remain in our community. We want our older citizens to continue enjoying a high quality of life. We want our older citizens to live in accommodations that are comfortable, dignified and suited to their needs.

Uusi Koti – the newest phase of this development is an example of the type of state-of-the-art accommodations we need. I thank you, on behalf of the community at large, for addressing that need.

The Ontario Finnish Rest Home Association's four locations in our city don't just help people live comfortable lives, they help keep culture alive, so traditions can be passed on to the next generation.

The preservation of such traditions is a responsibility we all share and the example set by staff and residents here is one members of our community at large would be wise to follow.

Most good things, the important things, the ones that last, they start with strength, kindness and ambition.

This to me exemplifies the Finnish community here in SSM: strength, kindness and ambition. We see it in what you accomplished here, all around us. We see it in your larger involvement in our community. And, most importantly, we see it in how you take care of each other.

Thank you for that example. And thank you for the opportunity to be here this evening to share these comments.

Kiitos.