

Montreal Estonian Society Gala Dinner Dance

Saturday, September 5, 2015

Sixty years ago, with meagre resources but boundless energy and enthusiasm, the Estonian community in Montreal acquired land in the Laurentian countryside north of the city near Lachute. Over time, through the countless hours and days of toil and sweat of numerous volunteers, the land was cleared and buildings erected as Lättemäe came into being and developed as a youth camp and a gathering place for Montreal Estonians seeking outdoor recreation. The work that created the landscape and structures of Lättemäe also gave birth to a special sentiment, the spirit of Lättemäe. This spirit, which took root from the work of that generation sixty years ago, has been nurtured by Lättemäe's nature and lives on now among the children and grandchildren of the "pioneer" generation. This spirit brought together people from many corners of Canada and the United States to the Montreal Estonian Society's Gala Dinner Dance on Saturday, September 5th in Lachute, at the Golf & Auberge Oasis not far from Lättemäe.

Toil and sweat are still needed to maintain and keep Lättemäe as a gathering place for the Estonian community and its friends, but reality dictates that funds are also needed to pursue such work. Thus, the gala was organized to help raise funds to carry out work needed at Lättemäe and ensure its future for many years to come. Perhaps the present generation of Estonians, in the best tradition of their parents, does not easily part with its money. There are times, however, when one gladly donates to a worthy cause, especially when in return one is able to enjoy fine dining and dancing. This was the case at the gala attended by many who came from far and wide, New York, Toronto, Ottawa and Vancouver, to reacquaint with friends not seen in many years and demonstrate that the spirit of Lättemäe lives on and is dear and near to many.

Guests at the start of the evening were serenaded by Armas Maiste who joined the pre-dinner jazz Quintet made up from members of the Preville Big Band. A silent auction, with donations from several Montrealers, was a big hit. One of the most sought after items was the team hockey stick signed by members of the Montreal Canadiens.

The guests feasted on a gourmet meal prepared by celebrity chef Peeter Tammark from Vancouver and his sous-chefs. The choice and variety of appetizers, main courses and desserts brought much deserved praise and applause to Peeter's culinary talents and his tireless assistants. After the meal, and despite many having participated in the Montreal Estonian Society's tenth annual golf tournament the previous day, everyone still had the energy to dance to the music of the seventeen member Preville Big Band. If someone didn't have the inclination at first, the band's lively music and exquisite song stylists, soon drew even the most reluctant gala participant to the dance floor until midnight. The excellent band was clearly one of the highlights of the evening, with the dance floor always crowded.

There is little doubt that everyone in attendance thoroughly enjoyed the evening, the golf the previous day and the chance to visit Lättemäe. For their many weeks of preparation to ensure the success of the gala and the whole weekend, the executive of the Montreal Estonian Society, led by Karl J. Raudsepp, deserve the praise and gratitude of all who attended. The devotion and support of Lättemäe's friends will help to guarantee its existence and keep its spirit alive for many years to come.

As an endnote, the fundraising campaign initiated by the MES last spring, is an ongoing one, to which everyone can still contribute. Together MES members, as well as their friends nearby and abroad, can have a positive impact on the future of the Estonian community in Montreal.

No donation is too small, the MES asks one and all to consider giving generously. Donation forms can be found on the MES website at www.mtlmes.ca along with an abundance of photos from the MES Gala Dinner Dance.

Tõnu Onu