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Learning Swedish the Sjölundén way

Spending some time in the summer learning Swedish can be a good way for youngsters to connect to their roots

BY ELSIE EKSTRÖM MARTIN

In the acclaimed “north woods” of Minnesota, youngsters between the ages of eight and seventeen come together each year to study Swedish language and culture. They are known as villagers, participants in the Swedish language village Sjölundén.

The history

Perhaps unknown to many Swedish/Americans, Sjölundén has been in existence since 1975. Gerhard Haukabo, a German professor at Concordia College, Moorhead, MN, originated the language villages. While raising his children, he recognized that they readily absorbed their bilingual heritage. Through his conception and direction, an immersion language program resulted in Concordia’s eventual 15 language villages. The Swedish language village, Sjölundén, became one of those villages.

Since the beginning of Sjölundén, interest has steadily grown. Parents in Minneapolis and St. Paul, MN, started an organization, “Friends of Sjölundén.” This group met at the American Swedish Institute and eagerly sought to raise funds through various promotional events in order to provide scholarships for young people to attend Sjölundén. “Friends of Sjölundén” functioned for approximately 20 years, but in the mid-1990’s the group disbanded when members’ children were no longer age-eligible.

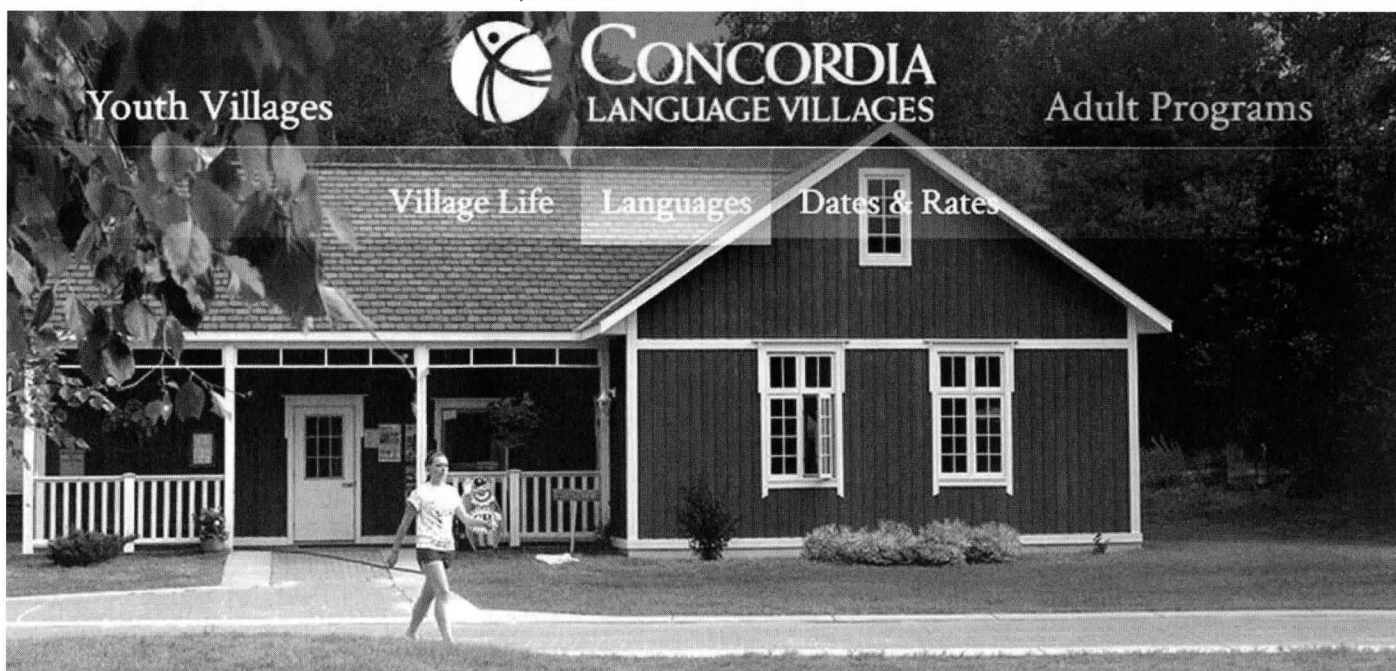
The American Swedish Institute took the initiative to continue support, and for a period, scholarship funds were available through the generous contribution of an anonymous donor. In recent years, the American Swedish Institute resumed awarding an annual scholarship, which is announced in its newsletter, *Posten*.

Meanwhile, over the years, other Scandinavian language villages flourished; namely, the Norwegian (*Skogfjorden*) and Finnish (*Salolampi*) villages.

With community support, they succeeded in establishing permanent sites along the Turtle River Lake in Bemidji, MN. They were joined with already committed villages: German, Spanish, French, and Russian. It was a disappointment for the “Friends of Sjölundén” that the Swedish village did not have the economic backing to promote a permanent site. Nevertheless, a lingering wish for a future Sjölundén village was not forgotten. It was only a matter of time for Sjölundén to gain permanency.

The Sjölundén experience

Meanwhile, the exceptional experience enjoyed at Sjölundén and cher-





Instructions on how to spend Midsommarafton (Midsummer Eve).

ished by staff and alumni did not diminish. Remembered were the twice daily formal language lessons that were taught by native Swedes or Americans with extensive language training. In addition, folk dancing and singing in a new language fortified a young person's ability to remember and pronounce the new sounds.

Former Dean Linda Wallenberg, who even in 2014 continued on staff, promoted language learning in a traditional "total physical response." This technique manifested itself in numerous ways: morning gymnastics

were incorporated into flag raising, cheers (involving gestures and songs) were vocalized at meal times, and competitions throughout the day resounded in accomplishments between inspired groups. Evening programs often celebrated Swedish holidays by producing skits involving both staff and villagers. Sjölundén, as a positive Swedish encampment, has reflected itself in annual repeat attendance. It is a village with one of the highest retention rates among Concordia's language villages. A quote from a former ten-year villager reinforced the feeling shared by many, "There was never a bad day at Sjölundén!"

Donations help!

Opportunities to assist in developing Sjölundén have come to fruition. The Todd Bachman and Fred Nelson families, both former participants in "Friends of Sjölundén," have donated decorative landscaping and library furnishings respectively. The Raymond and Florence Berglund Foundation, St. Paul, MN, through a kinship relationship with staff and villagers, has honored its connection by providing generous funding for capital investments. Much to the gratification of former "Friends of Sjölundén," funding from the Berglund Foundation resulted in finally actualizing Sjölundén as a perma-



The new Sjölundén library.

nent site on Turtle River Lake, Bemidji, Minnesota.

To summarize development, which began as a *vävstuga* (weaving studio) constructed along the architectural lines of a Swedish coastal village, Sjölundén now includes a *båthus* (boat house), a haven of *stugor* (cabins), and recently the *bibliotek* (library). The addition of the *bibliotek* in the month of August, 2014, addressed the next step in language learning and augmented traditional oral/aural instruction. Swedish, with its phonetic spelling, aides a villager's ability to sound out words, which results in increased vocabulary and greater reading comprehension. The acquired reading skill invited villagers to explore the extensive collection of classical and folkloric materials in the *bibliotek*. Available to villagers and Elderhostel attendees alike, the Sjölundén *bibliotek* is considered unique in that it contains more Swedish young people's books than any similar collection outside of Sweden.

Scholarships

For a Swedish/American parent and/or grandparent, tuition for Sjölundén is relatively costly. More scholarships are needed for young people to participate in this enriching experience. In communities throughout the United States, Vasa Order of America and local Swedish/American clubs have promoted scholarships designated for Sjölundén. Doris and Kenneth Berglund, along with other private donors, have contributed scholarship funds. These contributions are funneled to Concordia College's Passport Scholarship Program and retrieved as "Sjölundén"



Sports are important. Counselors versus villagers in brännboll!

scholarships for applicants to access. The American Swedish Institute also offers an annual \$1,000 scholarship.

The future

Regarding further development of the village, monetary contributions to the permanent site are welcome. Since the year 2007, the Raymond and Florence Berglund Foundation has accounted for ongoing develop-

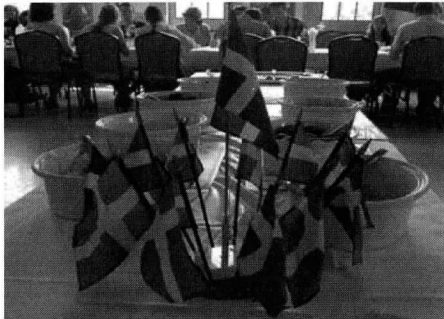
ments of the staff cabin, a villager cabin and a library. In all, the Berglund Foundation has contributed over \$1,000,000 to Sjölund through its yearly matching philanthropic grant. In the future, buildings projected for the permanent site are a dining hall and an additional cabin.

To learn more about Sjölund and Concordia College Language Villages, log onto the web site (*see page 30*) or call: 218-299-3094.

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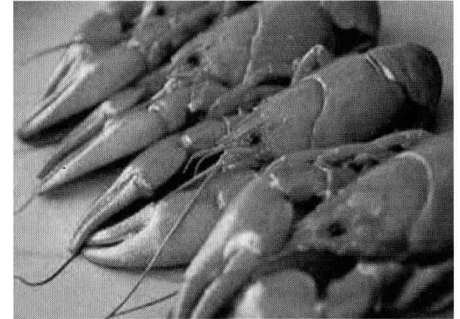
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Editor's note: On the Sjölund Swedish web page, go to *Music* and then to *Song Posters*, and scroll down a bit. There you can listen to Swedish songs.



Villagers sample traditional Swedish food as well as international cuisine enjoyed in modern Sweden. Köttbullar (meatballs), kräftor (crayfish), pannkakor (pancakes, here as pannkakstårta), and kanelbullar (cinnamon buns) are a few examples of traditional Swedish fare.

Villagers eat three main meals each day at Sjölund. Classical Swedish food is typically hearty and varies according to region.



Bishop Elizabeth Eaton and the Augustana Choir to join the Augustana Reunion at Jenny Lind Chapel April 25-26, 2015 ~ Andover, Illinois

In 1849, a Lutheran pastor from northern Sweden named Lars Paul Esbjörn was joined by more than 100 Swedish pioneers in leaving their homeland and sailing for seventy days on the crowded freighter *Cobden* to New York. From there, they continued their journey along waterways of the Hudson River, the Erie Canal, around the Great Lakes, to Chicago and then by canal boats to Peru, Illinois. From Peru, the baggage, the women, and the children were put on wagon trains to Andover, Illinois. The rest of the party went on foot.

Due to illness, lack of food, and lodging, the majority left the group

in Andover and went their separate ways. Only Pastor Esbjörn and a handful of his faithful followers remained in Andover to build the first church. Construction began in 1851. Cholera struck the community and the basement of the church became a hospital for the people with cholera. There is no steeple because the wood was needed for coffins.

On April 25 and 26 of 2015, this legacy will be celebrated during a reunion in Andover. Presentations on the history and legacy of the Augustana Synod will be offered on the first day of the gathering, with worship services on Sunday featuring Evangelical Lutheran Church in

America Presiding Bishop Elizabeth Eaton and Northern Illinois Synod Bishop Gary Wollersheim.

The Augustana Choir will perform both during worship and at a special concert on Sunday at Augustana Lutheran Church in Andover.

Registration is open to all interested persons, and more information can be found at our web site, *see p. 30*.

