

Hipp, hipp for Sigdalslag

100 hundred years old and getting stronger



Photo: Gary Erickson

From left: Earl Knutson, Karen Olson, Judy Sosted and Donna Kuhlenskamp.

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Norwegian *bygdslag* (area associations) are functioning well in America. They serve as a Gordian knot, something difficult to untie. *Bygdslags* here were created by Norwegian immigrants as a means by which to bind families and friends together who stemmed from similar locales in Norway. Judy Sosted, the president of Sigdalslaget, testified to their effectiveness: "We're 100 years old! That's an accomplishment," she declared.

Interviewed at the July 2011 *Sju Lag* (Seven-lag) *stevne* (annual meeting) in Fargo, N.D., Sosted stated: "Considering (our) *lag* almost disappeared some years ago, it fell to just eight members, it has recovered."

In fact, this *lag's* membership provided a phenomenal number, 200-plus, of the 500 total registrants for this centennial *stevne*.

"We have Sigdalslag members in 20 states and in Canada," pointed out Sosted. She attributed her *lag's* recovery to the fact Sigdalslag became conjoined with six other lags to form *Sju Lag*.

Sigdalslaget was formed in 1911 in Fergus Falls, Minn. Its continuity becomes more evident with the knowledge that charter members of 1911 have descendants today who are maintaining that family's membership. Sigdalslag vice president, Earl Knutson, stated that, although he can't be absolutely certain as to having a continuous chain from charter membership involving his Sigdal antecedents, very early *lag* pictures exist which verify his great-grandfather, grandfather and another relative as being Sigdalslag *stevne* attendees.

The purpose of a *stevne* includes in part forming events and experiences which make it possible for members to participate in collegial socialization, education and sometimes

just entertainment. More than 130 Norwegian citizens came from Norway. During this *Sju Lag stevne*, more than 18 workshops and presentations were scheduled. These ranged from Rev. Grant Aaseng, Alexandria, Minn., speaking on his experience as a participant in the Norwegian reality TV show, "Alt for Norge," to an abundance of subject material including "The Kensington Rune Stone," "Skogfjorden, the Norwegian Language Camp," and genealogical workshop topics.

Vice president Knutson provided anecdotal proof of the level of contemporary interest in the *lag*. A visit to the *stevne's* genealogical research room opened the door on the image of more than 100 individuals actively engaged in family history research and in the use of the *Sju Lag's bygdebøker* (area farm and family published histories and genealogies) collection. The level of activity was observed to be fairly constant throughout.

Sju Lag provided a well thought out process for promoting socialization: a hospitality room. It was inventoried with free, freshly made coffee, cookies, cakes and bars. On the opening morning, Hadeland Lag's Doris Cleveland offered her fresh *vaffelhjertter* (heart waffles) each waffle topped with a huge dollop of whipped cream and a strawberry as large as a small child's fist.

During her interview, Sigdalslag president Sosted expanded on the subject of her *lag's* resilience in developing *lag* growth. She vocally highlighted with pride the attention the *lag* is directing to youth. Childhood development of shared-through-time, cultural values begins at the *lag* level with unique classes. "*Sju Lag* has developed daily work-

See > SIGDALSLAG, page 15



Photo: Gary Erickson

Hadeland lag's Doris Cleveland shared her Norwegian vaffelhjertter (heart waffles) with the *Sju-lag stevne* attendees.

< SIGDALSLAG

From page 13

shops for children, workshops during the *stevne* that introduce them to music, dance and Norwegian literature – folktales," she said. Children's groups this year were to be taught the classic story of "The Three Billy

Goats Gruff." Later on, a children's ensemble would present the story in the form of a short play at one of the evening banquets. Instruction of this nature not only fills in the *stevne* day for children with extended, attention holding time, but lays the foundation for a future tradition of attendance, participation and cultural assimilation.

The three Sigdalslag vice presidents, Earl Knutson, Karen Olson and Donna Kuhlenskamp, sat together with president Sosted during one quiet moment and contemplated the exquisite, hand-embroidered *lag* banner hanging before them. Crafted and paid for by Sigdøler in Norway, a *prektig silkefane* (a splendid silk banner) was presented in 1914 as a gift to visiting Norwegian-Americans. The banner was given in part in appreciation for the more than NOK 20,000 that had been raised by Sigdøler in the U.S. and sent to the needy in their old home areas. President Sosted pointed to the names of three distinct geographical areas appearing on the same line embroidered upon the face of the banner. "The *lag* decided to elect one vice president to represent each of the three areas," Sosted said. The officers were asked what they might say to charter members if they could experience such a opportunity. "Thank you!" said vice president Earl Knutson. "Tusen takk," said vice president Karen Olson. "We kept the history alive," said president Judy Sosted.