

Kristine Leander's talk at the dedication of the Leif Erikson Plaza. October 7, 2007

Thank you everyone, it's a pleasure to be here welcoming you today.

The good thing about working on a project for over five years is that you get to think a long time about what you're going to say.

But no matter whatever else I considered talking about, this project is really all about the people. And, there are several groups of people I want to thank.

First and foremost, the Port of Seattle. We thought it would be like dancing with an 800-pound gorilla. You know the story, "the gorilla leads." On the contrary, the Port of Seattle has been an exceptionally good partner in this project. They seemed to be having as much fun over Leif as we were, and we appreciate them very much. Thank you, Port of Seattle, and to every one of you individual people from the Port who worked on this with us. We are deeply grateful for our partnership with you.

Secondly, perhaps hundreds of professional people became involved along the way, from sculptors and artists to landscapers, engineers, stone masons, a printing company, sign maker, plaque installer, caterers, musicians, the singers who are here today, and so on. You'll read about them in the program and we thank them from the bottom of our hearts. It takes a village to move a statue, and we appreciate all the professional people whose skills made this happen.

Another group of very special people we want to thank are the individuals who were here on June 17, 1962, for the first unveiling. We thank the many people who stepped forward with memories and offers of drawings of the original design and so on. They're sitting here in front. Let's give a round of applause for those who were here when this statue was unveiled.

We give a big thanks to the donors who joined in our vision and gave in memory of their loved ones. Maybe now it's time to tell you what this project is not. It wasn't the sort of situation where a bureaucrat in an office hired an artist from out of town and paid for it with funds already set aside. Instead, this was the sort of project that arose out of the community's deep affection for this statue. (And, we might add, we learned last spring that Leif was equally connected to us and unwilling to leave!) After giving replicas of this statue to Norway and Greenland, the Leif Erikson Int'l Foundation heard that the Port was planning to renovate Shilshole. We began showing up at the Port's meetings, simply putting our foot in the door. We contacted local artist Jay Haavik whose roots are deep in Ballard, and the plans for runic stones with names of immigrants immediately began taking shape. Meanwhile, the Port, which had been politely saying yes to our inquiries, was suffering from post 9-11 problems and finally said a big no to our idea. Now, if you heard that the gift of a bottle aquavit to a gentleman with a Scandinavian last name was involved in the sequence of events that changed their minds, I'd have to deny it. Our only regret was that we didn't know he was Danish and we took him *Linje* and not *Jubilaem*, but I deny it ever happened. Whatever it took, the Port finally said yes, the

project began taking hold, and you donors began calling and sending in money. We have about 850 names at this point and there are spaces for about 1400. Thank you to each of you who donated, passed flyers to your friends, called your relatives, pooled your money, announced it at your Scandinavian meetings, and so on.

Lastly, of course, the people we want to salute today are the people whose names are on the plaques. Their years of immigration range from the earliest who came in 1844 to someone in 2004. One hundred and sixty years of Scandinavian immigration represented here. I'd like to read some quotes about them that we felt were representative of the feelings we and others have about them.

Rev. Burton W. Smith, pastor of Ballard First Lutheran Church on the statue's first installation, June 17, 1962:

*"Dedicated to those who risk their lives for the unknown and unseen."*

Thomas DuBois, UW professor, 1997:

*"Every family has their Leif Erikson—an ancestor who founded something, or settled in a new place, or became a part of local history."*

Someone else said:

*"Scandinavians they came, tied by culture, language, longing for their homeland, and loyalty to each other. But Mother America—as she has for others and always will—adopted them as her own."*

Donor Harold Edwards 1997:

*"They came with hope, seeking opportunity. But they found hard work and often hard times."*

Someone else said:

*"They formed this land with their longing for a better future. But they never lost their love for home and what they left behind."*

Thank you to everyone who is making this day happen. From the Port of Seattle, to the craftsmen and professionals, to the donors and other supporters. But, most of all, to the people whose names we hold dear in our hearts and are now on display. We dedicate this plaza to you.