

## Spirit of Finland Stands Quietly and Proudly

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The Spirit of Finland is tangible piece of aluminum, but by its formation it shows S's: Suomi, Sisu, Swan, Sibelius, Sun, and of course, Sauna. These are some of the intangibles that the Finnish Heritage Museum's new sculpture invokes. The new, recently installed, 14 foot abstract aluminum piece graces the front of the Museum on High Street in Fairport Harbor, Ohio.

During Fairport Harbor's yearly Community Days celebration, the Finnish Heritage Museum dedicated the Spirit of Finland sculpture. The dedication/celebration had two distinct segments. The first took place in Veterans Memorial Park in Fairport Harbor. Beginning at 10'clock Lasse Hiltunen, President of the Museum, gave a welcoming announcement in both Finnish and English to the spectators. That was followed by keyboardist Heikki Perttu's renditions of "God Bless America" and, of course, "Maamme".

Hiltunen then introduced the keynote speaker, Dr. Peter Lillback, the President of the Westminster Theological Seminary. He spoke of the spirit of people as it relates to their own well-being and to the groups of people who exhibit that spirit. No speech about Finns could go on very long without mention of Sisu, and Dr. Lillback highlighted that word. He spoke of Fairport Harbor and its unique place in Ohio history and of the Finnish forces who contributed so much to Fairport's development. Lillback challenged the Fairport Finns to continue to contribute to the development of Northeastern Ohio, since this year is the 375th anniversary of the landing of Finns in the United States.

After Dr. Lillback's speech, the Finnish contingent assembled in the south-west corner of the park in preparation for a short, one block march down the middle of Third Street to the museum. Several people came dressed in their Finnish nationality costumes, which made for a very colorful sight.

At 2 o'clock, to open the second half of the celebration, Master of ceremonies Lasse Hiltunen gave the welcoming address at the Museum. He recognized the front row dignitaries. These included Heikki Penttila, architect; Rev. Dr. Peter Lillback; Rev. Hannu Vepsalainen and his wife Leena; Terry Vale, President and CEO of Harbor Roofing; Artist and Sculptor, Ken Valimaki and his wife Lin; Rev. Pentti Maki, chairman of the sculpture committee and his wife Leena; and Ken Quiggle, Vice President of the Finnish Heritage Museum.

The Rev. Pentti Maki led the invocation followed by introductions of the sculpture committee members who have been laboring furiously for the past six months. Serving on that committee were Ken Quiggle, Ailiin Andrews, Linda McAdams, Sharon Mackey, Lasse Hiltunen, Jovette Hiltunen, Linda Penttila, Heikki Penttila, and Tim Hadden.

Hiltunen acknowledged the corporate and organization sponsors who contributed greatly to the project. They are the Finlandia Foundation, the Knights and Ladies of Kaleva, Harbor Roofing Inc., and Osborne Inc. Additionally, Hiltunen acknowledged the anonymous matching gift of \$10,000.00 which was instrumental in realizing the sculpture.



**Ken Valimaki (picture above)** spoke of the complexities of producing the actual sculpture itself. He related that he chose Aluminum 50/52, which has a high tensile strength, but is still malleable. Using five by ten, 3/16 inch thick aluminum sheets, Valimaki employed a CNC plasma cutter and a metal roller to shape each separate piece. Those pieces were then tack welded together to form a “leaf-like” form. Those welds later were re-enforced with stitch welding, covering the entire joint with a MIG weld. Each leaf form was also highly polished on the outside-facing surfaces, while the inside-facing surfaces received only a brush technique. All the leading edges were treated with a grinder to assure a visually pleasant and artistic brim.

After consultation with the committee, a “wave” suggesting Finnish waters, and the “sun” were added to the sculpture. Those two forms are found in the base, with the wave gently curving in front, while the sun brightens the left side with its higher arch. The welding was accomplished by the Valimaki’s Columbus studio team of Mike Liscano, Bob DeStefano, and Kin Yu. And now, the moment of anticipation arrived. Chairman Pentti Maki and Artist Ken Valimaki directed the cover to be removed to unveil the sculpture. An audible sigh and sustained applause followed.

Closing comments were delivered by Vice President Ken Quiggle, who thanked all for participating and invited people to join us in the work of keeping our heritage alive. Near the base of the sculp-

ture a round blue table with cups of blue sand sat throughout the ceremony. Ken explained that the sand was for each participant to pour into the bottom of the sculpture atop the white sand already surrounding the sculpture. The blue sand stood for each person’s family member. Charles A. Hilston, a family member of the original Fairport Finns, came from Minnesota to witness the unveiling and took part in the blue sand pouring.

The idea for a sculpture came about when Ken Valimaki offered to design a sculpture for the Finnish Heritage Museum. Ken is a 1955 graduate of Fairport Harding high school in Fairport Harbor. This offer came during the summer of 2007 but the idea lay dormant until May of 2012, when Rev. Maki introduced the idea of erecting a second monument. That provided the catalyst for Heikki Penttila to resurrect it and resubmit the idea to Valimaki. The revitalized idea took the forms of paper models, which were presented to a committee that agreed to look into the project. At that time no one on the committee had any idea how wonderful the actual sculpture was to become.

After much discussion and good-natured bantering about which paper model would best serve our interests, one was chosen. The group also discussed where the sculpture was to be placed. Options included the Finn Hollow Park to the south of the museum building or directly in front of the museum. After much discussion, the front of the museum was chosen so the sculpture would serve as a focal point for the museum. A problem associated with that choice was that there is very little room between the front of the museum and the road. However, through careful design and calculations, it was decided that it could be done. There were many consultations between artist and architect. The placement was critical and had important ramifications. The sculpture would stand in front of the museum’s massive window, and could be seen from both the outside of the building and the inside of the main display area. It would serve as an eye-catching focal point to the museum building.

The concept to place the sculpture in front of the museum was embraced by the membership and received approval from the Fairport Harbor Village Council. Letters of support also were received from Fairport Harbor Village officials including May-

or Tim Manross, Superintendent of the schools Domenic Paolo, and our neighbor museum to the north, the Fairport Harbor Lighthouse and Marine Museum and its President, Dan Maxson. The project also had to clear the legal hoops of accurate drawings, building permits, zoning permits, and clearances from all the appropriate agencies.

The sculpture has been named Spirit of Finland. In a broader sense, its purpose is to honor the innumerable achievements of Finnish immigrants who came, and will continue to come, to the United States; and through their resilience, persistence and endurance have left a lasting legacy of which successive generations of Finnish Americans can be proud.

Ken Valimaki summed up the experience: "I was impressed with the dedication of your members, their innovation and creativity to support the project. Everything from preparing the brochure, the website with the pictures showing the progress of the sculpture, the design of the wall architecture, the building of the base, the design of the tee shirts, the community parading from the park to the viewing area, and the children adding the blue sand to the base was special."

After thinking of the day I've got to thank everyone again because nothing compares. I've done sculptures for Ohio Aerospace in Cleveland, Wright State University, and the National Education Association in Washington, D.C. with large groups that included staff, architects and students. These groups were all wonderful, but can't surpass the Spirit of Finland committee. Doing a sculpture for a muse-



um in Fairport that honors Finnish immigrants and descendants, including my parents, was a once in a lifetime project for me. There were wonderful people who came to say hello – some knew my parents, others knew me. It was something I'll never forget."

The committee also had to tackle the important and daunting task of fundraising. The sculpture originally was estimated to cost \$20,000, but that price tag expanded to closer to \$30,000. The funds could not come from Museum coffers and had to be raised outside of activities usually done by the Museum. With this daunting task the committee rolled up its sleeves and began work. A real shot in the arm came when an anonymous donor chose to match funds up to \$10,000. Incredibly, that sum was quickly reached. However, other issues reared their ugly heads and had to be solved. Those included additional costs for materials associated with the base of the sculpture, lighting, security cameras, and a plaque which was to be installed to honor our donors.

For additional information, please consult the FHM website:  
[www.finnishheritagemuseum.org](http://www.finnishheritagemuseum.org).

A story was also presented in the local paper, the News-Herald found here:  
[www.news-herald.com/general-news/20130916/finnish-heritage-museum-unveils-spirit-of-finland-sculpture-in-fairport-harbor](http://www.news-herald.com/general-news/20130916/finnish-heritage-museum-unveils-spirit-of-finland-sculpture-in-fairport-harbor)

Anyone wishing to donate to the museum is invited to do so. Contact the museum through the website.  
 The Spirit still needs lighting to illuminate it at night.