

# ASTORIA SCANDINAVIAN MIDSUMMER FESTIVAL TURNS 50

CO-FOUNDER SHIRLEY TINNER REFLECTS ON FESTIVAL'S ORIGINS AND HALF A CENTURY OF HONORING HERITAGE

By **ERICK BENDEL**  
FOR COAST WEEKEND

Shirley Tinner, the honorary grand marshal at the 50th annual Astoria Scandinavian Midsummer Festival, has not missed a single festival since she helped found it half a century ago.

A lifelong Astoria resident, Tinner has watched the event become the North Coast's premier celebration of Astoria's Scandinavian heritage — a salute to the Swedes, Finns, Danes, Norwegians and Icelanders who emigrated to the Columbia-Pacific region in the late 1800s and early 1900s, helped build the town and shape its industrious Old World character.

This year's festival takes place Friday through Sunday, June 16 through 18, at the Clatsop County Fairgrounds.

Visitors can feast on Scandinavian cuisine, collect handcrafted items and enjoy musical performances by Scandinavian bands.

For the 50th anniversary, a reunion of past Scandinavian princesses and queens, and festival dance groups, will take place Saturday afternoon. The entertainment centerpiece is Arrival, an ABBA tribute band from Canada, who will perform Saturday evening in the fairground arena. (The original ABBA hailed from Stockholm, Sweden.)

## The founders

The three-day gathering would not exist without a trio of women, including Tinner, who founded the festival as a fundraiser for their daughters' Brownie troop-turned-Scandinavian folk-dancing group.

Tinner, 80, is unable to walk in Saturday's Optog Walking Parade, but her daughter, Kim Supple, will represent her, along

with members of the original troop.

"It's an honor to have been asked to do that," Tinner said.

Tinner, whose father was a Swede-Finn and mother a pure Finn, can still speak the "Uniontown" Finnish she learned as a girl.

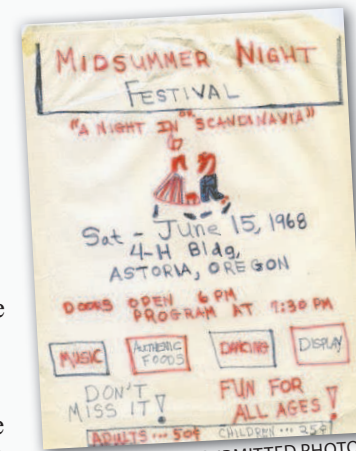
The festival's other two founders, Carol Obie and Nelly Norrman, can no longer tell the story of the event's founding: Obie passed away in 2009, and Norrman, who lives in Sweden, is in her late 90s and in poor health. "We're extremely grateful to them for starting this festival 50 years ago," Janet Bowler, the festival's entertainment coordinator, said. "We hope these traditions will continue for future generations of Astorians, Scandinavians

and people who are interested in diverse cultures."

## Brownies to folk dancers

In the mid-1960s, the Girl Scouts were organizing an international festival recognizing the organization's founder, with each troop representing a country. The first- and second-graders of Astoria's Brownie troop — a pre-Scouts ensemble that included Supple — took Norway.

They memorized a Norwegian song and dance, borrowed costumes from a vocal group and performed in the old 4-H building (where the Astoria Aquatic Center now stands) for International Scouting Day.



SUBMITTED PHOTO  
An original program flyer for the first Scandinavian festival.



Shirley Tinner, one of the founders of the Scandinavian Midsummer Festival in Astoria, shows off a photo of some of the original performers of an event that is celebrating its 50th anniversary.