

noticed her proclivity for planning, and the name stuck. In 2016, in honor of the 50th anniversary, Oja was asked to plan the anniversary portion of the festival — to breathe new life into an old tradition.

“Our goal was to get more people,” Oja said. “I have co-workers who have never been to the festival, ever. Not even walked out there. So we want to get more people out there.”

Last year, Oja resurrected the tug-o-war (pitting the Finns, Danes, Swedes, Norwegians and Icelanders against each other), introduced eating contests (aebleskivers and Swedish meatballs) for the first time, and brought in “Arrival,” an ABBA tribute band from Canada. Arrival will return again this year; the same musical group will also perform as “Dreams,” a Fleetwood Mac tribute band.

“Carla brought back the Saturday evening program, which has been a thing in the past — it’s fun to have it back,” said Lorán Mathews, president of the Astoria Scandinavian Heritage Association, which formed in 2013 and serves as the fundraising arm of the festival. Mathews has been involved in the Scandinavian Festival for the last 48 years.

Enhancing tradition

The festival is also adding a Scandinavian spelling bee and a “Sven and Ole” joke contest.

The joke contest will debut during the concert’s intermission and feature back-and-forth jokes that highlight the quirky Scandinavian sense of humor. Anyone who has their family-friendly jokes approved ahead of time is invited to participate.

Traditional dance, food and national folkwear that represent each culture’s heritage is at the heart of the Scandinavian Festival, but when Oja decided to think outside the box, not everyone was convinced at first.

“I came up with all these ideas because I wanted something different,” Oja said. “I remember one committee member said, ‘Don’t give up — keep pushing. The momentum is changing.’”

The new activities — especially the aebleskivers eating contest — proved a hit. Aebleskivers are a traditional round Danish pancake, served with lingonberry jam and powdered sugar.

“Contestants had to eat a plate, and it is hilarious when you get powdered sugar up your nose,” Lampi said.

‘My festival family’

Leila Collier, principal of Hilda Lahti Elementary School, has attended the Scandinavian Festival for more than 40 years — first with her parents and in later years with her own children. She also saw the need for



COLIN MURPHEY PHOTO

The tug-o-war competition made a return to the Scandinavian Midsummer Festival in 2017.



COURTESY LIELA COLLIER

In 1980, Miss Finland Leila Collier and Junior Miss Finland Melissa Rose Schacher in the Loyalty Day Parade, Long Beach, Wash. Schacher is the mother of Miss Scandinavia 2017, Megan Schacher.

new ideas to keep the festival fresh.

“I think we try to bring something new to keep things moving forward. You have to build new excitement,” she said. “The tug-o-war is something that came back, and I love that it has come back!” Collier said.

Collier is a prime example of the multigenerational reach of the Scandinavian



COURTESY LIELA COLLIER

Leila Collier with her parents Vaino and Lempi Koskela along with Junior Princess Miss Finland Melissa Rose Schacher, 1980. Schacher’s daughter is Megan Schacher — Miss Scandinavia 2017.

Festival. In 1980, Collier was selected by the Finnish Brotherhood to be Miss Finland and was crowned Miss Scandinavia that year. In 1986, Collier was the junior court chaperone and then served again years later in 2012 as the Senior Court Chaperone.

Collier’s two children — both grown

IF YOU GO

What: 2018 Astoria Scandinavian Midsummer Festival

Where: Clatsop County Fairgrounds, 92937 Walluski Loop in Astoria, Oregon

When: 2 to 11:00 p.m. Friday June 15; 7 a.m. to 11 p.m. Saturday June 16; 7 a.m. to 4 p.m. Sunday, June 17.

Admission: 3-Day adult button: \$8; 3-Day Child button (6-12 yrs) \$3; age 5 and under free. Tickets to the festival are on sale at the door.

Parking: \$2 per day or \$5 all weekend pass

No pets

astoriascanfest.org

now — were Viking Nordic Dancers from the second grade through their senior year of high school. Her son was a “star boy” at the Santa Lucia Festival and her daughter served as Junior and Senior Miss Finland. Collier herself served on the Princess Committee off and on for many years and recently served as Chair of the Scandinavian Festival for three years. Collier’s parents, now in their 90s, still attend the Scandinavian Festival every year.

“I reconnect with special friends and past courts every year — my festival family,” she said.

Oja’s family also considers the Scandinavian Festival a family reunion of sorts. Her four children told her that they would rather miss Christmas than the festival each year.

“They all had Scandinavian costumes as little kids. They were in dance groups and my girls were junior Miss Denmarks, and my boys would carry the flags,” Oja said. “They were all involved in the festival each year; it’s a family reunion.”

One generation to the next

Many attendees proudly wear their national folkwear each year, and even treasured clothing is passed from one generation to the next.

“It’s not unusual to see a child wearing a grandparents’ traditional outfit,” Lampi said.

What started as a small Scandinavian Heritage event more than 50 years ago has evolved into one big family.

“We’re volunteers with a passion for this festival, and we want it to continue because we believe in our heritage,” Oja said.

“I think everyone is all part of one big family, anyway,” she added. 