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More than 30 years later, the founders are still amazed. “Well, I might have started the spark plug and had the vision, but the support was overwhelming,” Holway said.

## Devoted to education

This year, the biennial festival’s theme is “Finnish 101,” which encompasses the ways the festival teaches Finnish heritage and culture and pays homage to the 100th anniversary of Finland’s independence, plus one year.

One such example of “Finnish 101” are various “classrooms” set up like mini museums and devoted to education.

Bjornsgard — who, along with her sister founded Finnware in downtown Astoria before it was sold eight years ago — will set up a room she calls “Finnish Design 101.”

The room will feature vin-



DAMIAN MULINIX PHOTO

The Sami flag waves next to the Finnish flag during the opening ceremony of the Naselle Finn Fest in 2014. The Sami flag is the flag of the various Nordic countries, including Finland.

tage to modern Finnish textiles, woodwork, glassware, clothing, jewelry and knives. Some notable names include Iittala and Arabia glassware,

Aarikka wooden jewelry and Marimekko fabric design — all originating from Finland.

## For the playful at heart

Anita Raistakka, who was born and raised in Naselle, is yet another Finn whose sisu

has helped Finn Fest thrive over the past three decades. She is the chair of the Cultural Programming Series, which hosts a lecture series. The educational talks are a unique part of Finn Fest that sets it apart from the Scandinavian Midsummer Festival in

Astoria.

While not a comprehensive list, a sampling of visiting speakers includes Sámi Tromsø and John Stephens from The University of Helsinki; Dan Karvonon from the University of Minnesota; and Tuomas Holvi from the University of Turku in Finland.

For the more playful at heart, Raistakka recommends a lesson in Finnish humor with events like the “Wife Carry,” the “Nokia Phone Toss” and “Molkky,” an outdoor bowling game.

“Little kids to grandparents can participate in any of these fun events,” she said. “The Nokia phone toss is a lot of fun, and anyone who can throw a Nokia phone the (farthest) is the winner.”

## Finn for a day

Mike Swanson, chair of the Finn Fest, and his wife, Barb Swanson, bring their own sisu to Finn Fest; Mike Swanson’s mother, Sally Manula Swanson, was one of the original founders. Manula’s parents — Swanson’s grandparents — came over from Finland around the early 1900s and eventually settled in Naselle.

Mike considers Finn Fest a


reunion of sorts “with a lot of people wearing blue” — and with something for everyone. He recommends Friday: “It’s the very best day to come out and see the exhibits, tour the “tori” (marketplace) with more than 20 vendors, and check out the various events.”

“And everyone can be a Finn for the day, so to speak,” he said.

Swanson expects a large turn-out this year, especially on Saturday night when Giants in the Trees, a local band headed by former Nirvana band member Krist Novoselic, will perform. “If you’re coming for Giants in the Trees, I suggest (coming) early because we may have a big overflow crowd,” Swanson said.

But even with the crowds growing year after year, Finn Fest is still small enough to retain its original charm, and still crucial enough for the community of Naselle to invest in every other year.

“Once we start something, we’re going to ‘Finnish’ it,” Mike joked.

“Sisu is guts and fortitude. My wife would say it’s actually stubbornness, but she’s not a Finn,” he smiled. “We stick to the job and get it done.” 

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