The Estonian American National Council (EANC) brought its annual meeting and festive awards gala to San Francisco for the first time on November 4 and 5, 2016. EANC council members, fellow Estonian-Americans and friends from across the U.S. gathered to celebrate Estonian-Americans for their service and excellence, explore topics of interest and urgency, and share EANC’s work with West Coast Estonian-Americans.

The EANC held its annual business meeting on Friday, November 4.

On November 5, public sessions featured plenary session speaker U.S. Ambassador to Estonia James D. Melville, and several panel discussions on topics such as transatlantic security, U.S.-Estonia relations, engaging with Estonian-American history, and EANC’s strategic future. Enterprise Estonia Silicon Valley hosted a luncheon panel with local Estonian entrepreneurs and investors.

In addition, editor Priit Vesilind gave an overview of the newly-published book “Estonians in America, 1945-1995: Exiles in a Land of Promise.” The audience also heard from Merilin Piipuu, the director of the Tallinn Museum of Occupations, about the museum’s future plans.

The gala awards dinner that evening honored five Estonian-Americans and organizations for their service and excellence, plus a new “Estophile” award honoree. Former Estonian foreign minister Marina Kaljurand was keynote speaker; her speech can be found at www.estosite.org.

“The speakers really reminded me of what a huge, really huge effect the occupation had on my family both here and now scattered all over the world. Frankly devastating, however good the U.S. has been for us... Particularly Priit Vesilind really moved me and reminded me of the realities of what occurred to Estonia and to our family. These are things I don’t usually think about but they are vital.”

- Nora Laasi
This new "Estophile" award honors non-Estonians who have contributed to the Estonian American community. Lonnie Cline, who has for over 20 years instilled thousands of singers with the beauty and joy of Estonian choral music, is the first recipient.

Cline, then choral director at Oregon’s Clackamas Community College, heard Estonian choral music for the first time in the early 1990’s, and instantly fell in love with it. In 1996 he founded the now internationally recognized Unistus chamber choir, forging lasting ties between Oregon and Estonia, and spreading Estonia’s Singing Revolution story to ever broader audiences. Unistus has performed at three Song Festivals in Tallinn, the 2000 ESTO in Toronto, 11 West Coast Estonian Days festivals, 22 Estonian Independence Day celebrations in Portland, and hosted and collaborated with visiting Estonian choirs and directors.
The awards presented to the mother-daughter team Lehti Merilo and Liina Teose recognize their many years of leading the Portland, Oregon, Estonian folk dance troupe “Tulehoidjad” (Keepers of the Flame). Through folk dancing and music, they have been instrumental in keeping Estonian culture alive and have played a major role in introducing Estonia to Portland and other West Coast cities in the U.S. and Canada.

Lehti Merilo founded Portland’s first Estonian folk dance troupe “Tulehoidjad” in 1950 and was its leader for 35 years (1950-1985). Ms. Merilo also taught folk dancing to children when the Portland EstonianSupplemental School started in the 1960’s. Tulehoidjad performed at numerous venues including the biennial West Coast Estonian days (1953-1985) and at the Portland International Folk Festival in 1980. In 2015, Lehti Merilo received the gold badge award from the Estonian Folk Dancing and Folk Music Society.

Liina Teose, Lehti Merilo’s daughter, made her debut at age 2 in the Estonian children’s folk dance troupe led by her mother. In 1985, she took over leading Tulehoidjad and is in her 31st year as director. Tulehoidjad has continued performing at the biennial West Coast Estonian Days; in 1995 and 2003, Liina was the producer of the Folk Festival program for the event. Tulehoidjad performed at ESTO 1996 in Tallinn, Estonia, and in 1984 and 1996, Ms. Teose produced the folk dance portion of the ESTO programs. In 2013, Liina Teose received the Estonian Foreign Minister’s Certificate of Recognition for her work in promoting Estonian culture. In 2015, Ms. Teose received the silver badge award from the Estonian Folk Dancing and Folk Music Society.

EAN C News & Activities, continued from page 1

ERKÜ aastakonverents ja Gala San Franciscos: ülevaade


Eraldi paneelis arutleti julgeoleku ja päevapoliitistest teemadest transatlantilise koostöö Eesti ja USA suhete kontekstis. Tutvustati mõningaid Silicon Valley’s tuule tõibadesse saanud eesti päritolu idufirmad. Lõpuks toimus ülevaade Okupatsioonide muuseumiplaanidest.

Programmi avas ERKÜ esimees Marju Rink-Abel ning Eesti-USA suhetest andis ülevaate USA suursaadik Eestis James Melville.


Suur tänu ERKÜ liikmetele Mai-Liis Bartling, Marit Davey ja Mati Otsmaa, kes korraldasid programmi, San Francisco Eesti Seltsile ja kõikidele kes vabatahtlikult aitasid!

– Kärt Ulman, Vaba Eesti Sõna toimetaja

”EANC's weekend in San Francisco...brought together global Estonians and friends of Estonians in a collaborative, intergenerational, social environment in which many thoughtful, interesting and pertinent topics were shared and new friendships blossomed. It was truly inspiring listening to the passionate Estonian entrepreneurs on the startup panel and hearing about Estonia’s growing footprint in Silicon Valley.”

– Karl Grabbi

“The words of Marina Kaljurand were both heart-warming and encouraging, especially when she said that every individual with connections to Estonia acts as a good-will ambassador in their own right. Often people’s first impression of Estonia is made by personal contact and this can have a more lasting and powerful effect than any efforts made by politicians.”

– Andres Renss
**EANC Supports Two Important New Projects**

The following two projects will receive a portion of the proceeds from the November 5 Gala, as well as additional support in 2017.

- **Singing Revolution Digital Library** – a new streaming website containing the films “The Singing Revolution” and “To Breathe As One” by Jim and Maureen Tusty, plus interview segments and commentary, newsreels, original documents, and many additional video segments not in the films. The site is intended for academics, “Estophiles”, film fans, music fans and others to delve into the Singing Revolution, Laulupidu and Estonia’s Soviet Occupation.

- **East and West Coast Estonian children’s choirs’ song festival participation** – Choirs on both the East and West Coasts are preparing to attend next year’s Noorte Laulu- ja Tantsupidu in Tallinn, Estonia. EANC’s grant will help defray the expenses of families, so that more of these hard-working children and their music directors can participate.

“**Estonians in America, 1945-1995: Exiles in a Land of Promise**” has been published! The hard-cover book has over 560 pages, and provides details and photos on the history and activities of Estonian refugees, and their descendants, who came to the U.S. after Estonia was occupied by the Soviet Union.

The cost per book is **$97.50 (includes $7.50 shipping within the U.S.).** You can pay by check made out to “EANC” and mailed to: Linda Rink, 1420 Locust St., Suite 31N, Philadelphia PA 19102. **Please include your mailing address, phone and e-mail.** You can also pay by credit card via PayPal at a cost of **$100.50** (to cover PayPal fees) including shipping: go to [www.estosite.org](http://www.estosite.org) and click on the “DONATE” button. Expedited shipping is available for an additional cost.

Contact: Linda Rink, EANC Executive Director: 215-546-5863, erku@estosite.org.

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**Upcoming Events**

The Joint Baltic American National Committee’s Twelfth Baltic Conference will take place in Washington DC in late spring 2017, featuring foreign policy and world affairs experts. Contact JBANC at 301-340-1954 or jbanc@jbanc.org for exact dates and more information.

![LEP 2017](http://lalep2017.com/)


On Facebook: [https://www.facebook.com/events/2077770759115496/](https://www.facebook.com/events/2077770759115496/)

Questions or ideas? Contact Renee at 818-300-6417.

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The EANC Newsletter / ERKÜ Teataja is written predominantly in English for an important reason – we want to inform and engage as many Estonian Americans as possible. Due to the cost of printing, we cannot publish the entire newsletter in both English and Estonian. In the future we may consider less expensive electronic distribution, so please write your e-mail address on your donation form for inclusion in our database.
EANC Update from Washington DC

Karin Shuey, EANC’s Washington DC Director, reports:

EANC Hosts Successful Policy Discussions in San Francisco

The EANC Gala in November included plenary remarks and a high-level panel on U.S.-Estonian policy and transatlantic relations. Special guests included Ambassadors James Melville, Eerik Marmei and Kurt Volker. Although the event occurred pre-U.S. election, the discussions offered insights that carry over into the new administration’s transition period.

As plenary speaker, Ambassador Melville highlighted the defining aspects of U.S.-Estonian relations for the next decade. He sees Estonia as a capable partner and ally to the U.S., both bilaterally and multilaterally through NATO, the EU and other international organizations. He called Estonia “...as solid a partner and ally as we have. Estonia’s interests and values line up with ours exceedingly well.”

He affirmed the U.S. and NATO commitment to defend every ally’s security and territorial integrity, noting that Estonia is on the front line of the West’s struggle with Russia. He ended his remarks by acknowledging that the Estonian-American community has a continuing role in supporting Estonia through its external and internal challenges. Ambassador Melville’s full remarks are available at www.estosite.org.

The afternoon panel featured experts on transatlantic relations, Russia’s recent behavior, and advocacy in Washington. Estonian Ambassador to the U.S. Eerik Marmei began with an overview of Estonia in NATO and U.S.-Estonian relations. Kurt Volker, former U.S. Permanent Representative to NATO and expert on transatlantic relations, shared his perspective on challenges for the next administration, including his belief that Trump’s policy won’t follow his campaign rhetoric and that Russia doesn’t want a strategic partnership with us, even if they seem encouraged by Trump’s election. He also reminded us that Congress can exercise its power to check any reckless policy proposals from the White House. Marcus Kolga, expert on the media, communications and disinformation, painted a sobering picture of the Kremlin’s extensive foreign and domestic disinformation campaigns. Karl Altau of the Joint Baltic American National Committee rounded out the discussion with his recommendations for legislation we can support to send our message to the new President and Congress.

Ambassador Melville in his closing impressions echoed the speakers and reminded us that fundamental national interests don’t change. He has been encouraged by the recent uptick in congressional interest in the Baltic region and cited recent and upcoming productive delegation visits. He added that many problems have been recognized and diagnosed, which is halfway to fixing them. Now the U.S. needs to ensure that resources align with priorities to make those fixes.

Estonian-American constituents can indicate interest in getting involved help by voicing support on these issues by taking EANC’s survey at https://s.zoometer.org/r/EANcpoliticalaction (also linked on the EANC homepage under EANC News). EANC looks forward to providing information as the new administration’s policy evolves and to working with constituents and officials in Washington to keep Estonia on the radar screen.
Perhaps the most refreshing aspect of the event was a matter of demographics. Among the attendees, multiple generations of Estonian-Americans were represented. Both young and old, Estonian-speaking and non-speaking, west coast and east coast. It felt very inclusive, vibrant, and current...

- Leif Fritzell

The thought and planning that went into the EANC meeting/gala was impressive and appreciated. I found the panel discussions thought provoking...

- Honorary Consul Jaak Treiman