

Week of September 10/18

## ESTONIAN CENTRE PROJECT UPDATE

### **New International Estonian Centre will propel community toward a bright future**

The International Estonian Centre will be the first new facility built in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century in North America dedicated to the promotion of Estonia and the sharing of its language and culture. A new and modern building will give a major boost and breathe new life into the programs that have built and allowed the community to flourish in the Greater Toronto area over the last 60 years.

### **Edgar Marten: A community builder**

Edgar Marten is a leader in the Estonian Canadian community. His vision and tenacity helped sustain the Estonian language and culture in the difficult early years of settlement in a new country.

Edgar was principal of the Toronto Estonian Supplementary Secondary School for 43 years. Through determination and commitment, he created the school's education curriculum and led the way in its ultimate success. Over 3,000 Estonian youth attended the school in Toronto to study the Estonian language, participate in its culture and learn about the country's complex and often tragic history.

He shares his thoughts on how our community can move forward in a new International Estonian Centre. Edgar believes the key to a bright future for the Estonian community is the development of a new and vibrant centre.



*Edgar Marten and his grandson Eric Sehr, who is an Estonian House board member.*

*Suur tanu!*

“There is no other purpose-built Estonian centre in North America,” Edgar said. “All the other houses have been in older buildings. We need a new and modern facility that suits our culture and lifts the Estonian identity. This is very important from both an economic and political standpoint.”

Edgar, who is 98 years of age and a resident of Toronto’s Ehatare, went on to explain that raising awareness of Estonia’s accomplishments and achievements is essential in helping maintain the country’s visibility and independence and to grow the community here in North America.

“The new centre is a relatively modest space in square footage but it can be large in its intention if it is presented and used in the right way,” he said. “We will be able to show the world what Estonians can do and how forward-thinking we are in key areas such as technology.”

Edgar said that the time is right to move out of the Estonian House on Broadview Avenue.

“It is an old building that does not serve the community any more. It’s simply not suitable as a school facility. It’s now time for the next generation to take on the responsibility of preparing for and managing the future.”

Edgar has been following the planning process for the new centre with great interest. He envisions many different uses for the building and the types of activities that can take place there.

He said it will be important to create a vibrant program of activities where there are interesting offerings presented on a frequent basis. It’s important to create programming that interests younger people, and to have members from that generation involved in the planning.

He also said it might be time to rethink the timing for Estonian school classes. The city has grown and instead of mid-week school nights that are tiring for everyone, it may be easier to bi-weekly for 3.5 hours on Saturday mornings with a lunch break and activities for parents to do while waiting for their children.

Edgar believes it’s important to work hard and be patient with the process of attracting users and visitors because creating a community of interest takes time. Ultimately the work and effort will pay off, as it did in the early days of the Estonian school when its

popularity grew to such an extent that parallel streams had to be created in order to meet interest and demand.

Edgar is enthusiastic about the future. “My generation has done its job. We now hand the mantle of responsibility for creating the vision for the future - for what our community can evolve into - to the next generation. What my generation can do now is to support them wholeheartedly in every possible way.”

“What I can see from the work that has been done for this new centre is that they have this well in hand. Tublid olete! (Well done!)”

“It will be very valuable to show the world that there is this very small country across the ocean that is rich in ideas and accomplishments.”

### **Building our community**

As the project moves forward with design work, a community engagement session is scheduled to be held later this fall. Input from those who use the current Estonian House will again be sought to advance the design requirements. The capital campaign will soon be underway and more details will be available soon. To find out more, please check the website at <http://www.estoniancentre.ca> and connect with the Facebook page.