

INSIDE AURORA: Twin Peaks

By Scott Johnston

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We've all seen the name of Leksand, Sweden on the signs leading into town.

Most Aurorans are, therefore, vaguely aware that it's our twin city, but what do we really know about it? To bring us up to speed, here are some fun facts for that inevitable lull in conversation at your next dinner party.

Leksand is not big?

According to Leksand's website, the town itself only has about 6,000 inhabitants, with the greater area boasting 11,500. Other websites, including the Town of Aurora's, suggest there are 16,000 residents. Whatever the actual number, it's a lot less than our 55,000 plus.

... but Leksand does things big

This area is the site of the largest meteor impact crater in Europe. Although somewhat eroded after 377 million years, the crater itself is 52 kms wide. For local comparison purposes, this is about twice the size of Lake Simcoe.

Leksand is also the home town of the 'Tallest Man on Earth'.

Okay, note the quotation marks. Kristian Matsson is not physically tall, being only 5' 7", but this is the professional name of this local singer-songwriter.

It's up north

Leksand lies at 61 degrees latitude, which is about the level as Yellowknife. This gives it up to 20 hours of daylight in the summer, and an equal degree of darkness in winter.

Not surprisingly, it also receives about three times the snowfall we see here in Aurora.

It's a clean place

Leksand participates in the wonderfully named Keep Sweden Tidy Foundation Rubbish Picking Days. This is similar to Aurora's annual Clean-up Day, except instead of taking place over a few hours, it runs for a full week, so when they're done the place must be reeeaaalllly spotless.

Leksand likes a variety of sports

Although hockey is popular, the town is equally well-known for baseball, with those local teams having won numerous national championships.

Leksand is fickle

Sadly, we're not the only municipality of Leksand's affection, as it has six other sister cities in Denmark, Norway, Finland, Estonia, the US, and Japan.

Of these, it appears Tobetsu is the most popular, as Leksand has close ties to Japan, with a Japanese-themed park, and over 400 jobs linked to that country's market.

In fact, the two towns celebrated their 25 year relationship in 2012 with extensive year-long cultural exchanges, including delegations to each country who participated in a variety of business, education and cultural events.

Not to be outdone, in December 2013 to celebrate our municipal relationship that began in the 1970s, Mayor Dawe had a two minute skype conversation with the Mayor of Leksand.

Leksand is musically inclined

Unlike Aurora, which seems to spawn a different music event every year, with the proposed second year of the Celebrate Aurora Music Festival currently in the news, Leksand hosts Sweden's oldest music festival, which has been running for 45 years.

Residents are passionate about their town

In fact, in many ways they kind of leave Aurora in their dust.

Examples? Like Aurora, the town is also looking at revitalizing and developing its downtown core. However, unlike our various public planning and feedback sessions, when Leksand held their meetings, the hall was packed, and hundreds followed the discussions on the web.

As for politics, in the last municipal election, they had a voter turnout of 83%. Cut that by at least half, and you have Aurora's turnout in 2010, which was only 38%, but still considered fairly well attended.

As for their ballot in that election, it must have required a number of sharpened pencils and the risk of writer's cramp to complete it. With our town looking at potentially reducing Council to seven members, including the Mayor, Leksand currently has 49 positions. Okay, so maybe council-size-wise, Leksand isn't perfect. But otherwise, it sounds like a very nice town.

Feel free to e-mail Scott at: machellscorners@gmail.com