

The Enduring Finnish-Canadian Legacy of the Koski Family

Since forming in 1958, the Finnish Canadian Rest Home Association has been very fortunate to have its core vision shared by literally thousands of dedicated volunteers who have contributed countless hours and capital to advance its worthy cause: to provide superior care of elderly Finns, Estonians and other seniors in need who have reached that point in their lives when they are no longer able to look after themselves.

As the FCRHA is about to embark on its new expansion strategy in Coquitlam, it is only appropriate to remember and honour the family whose unwavering commitment to the B.C. Finnish community, and to FCRHA's vision in particular, made today's plans feasible. Without Kusti and Leonda Koski's generous and farsighted bequest, our ambition to develop independent living, supported/assisted living and a residential care facility for the benefit of hundreds of seniors and their families would not be possible.



Mrs. Leonda Koski in 1967.

Coquitlam in the 1960s was relatively rural and Kusti and Leonda Koski raised turkeys on their 1226 Johnston Street property. When Christmas arrived each year, their five acre farm was a popular destination to pick up turkeys for the festive season. The Koskis were known to be a delightfully sociable couple. Their outreach and commitment to the local Finnish community came naturally. In fact, the very

The Koskis clearly valued their Finnish roots in the community and believed that helping seniors in need would be a worthy and lasting legacy.

first coffee gathering of the Association took place on their property. In the very early days of founding the Association, the Koskis made their home available to regularly host fund raising coffee gatherings, picnics, and other activities. No doubt, we suspect the Koskis' on-site sauna probably held some special allure for these initial gatherings.

Mrs. Koski is remembered as being quick to admonish the Board members if they appeared to be wavering from the Association's vision. It is clear that the Koskis were committed to the Association's vision and took a very personal interest in supporting its formation.

In the spring of 1967, Mrs. Leonda Koski made an extraordinary gift that will be remembered by many generations of Finns and others who place value in providing specialized care to seniors in need. Specifically, she donated her home, including the five acres of land where it was situated to the Association. According to Mrs. Koski, she and her husband had decided to gift their property to the Association before he passed away. The Koskis clearly valued their Finnish roots in the community and believed that helping seniors in need would be a worthy and lasting legacy. It was an incredible gift at

the time, but one that would eventually provide a much greater boost to FCRHA's vision than they could have possibly imagined at the time.

Two years earlier, in 1965, the Association had commissioned the striking of silver lapel pins which incorporated the Association's logo to recognize those who contribute to the Association. A select few pins were also struck in gold at that time. Recognizing and appreciating the enormity of Mr. and Mrs. Koski's gift, the Association awarded one of these gold lapel pins to Mrs. Leonda Koski.

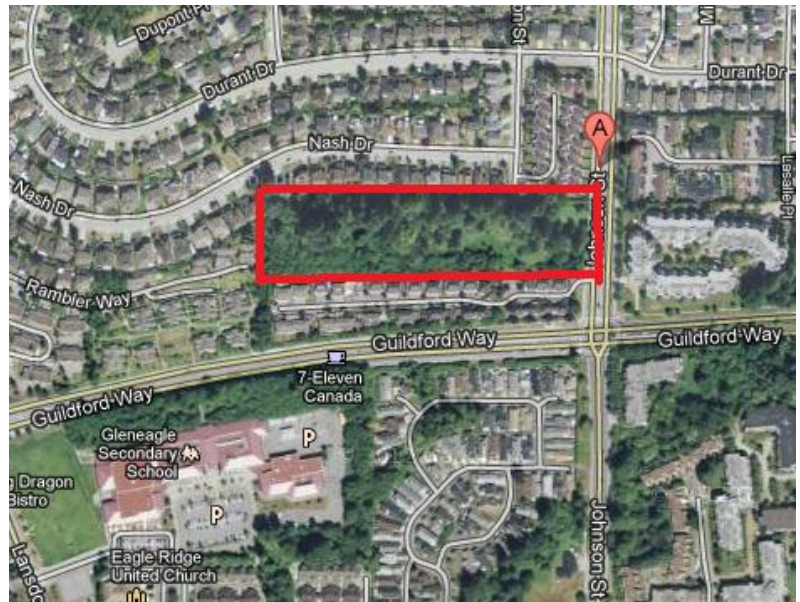


Then and Now: Koski family home and farm in rural 1967 Coquitlam. Today, the well-located five-acre property on 1226 Johnston Street will provide housing for our growing seniors' population in the heart of an urbanized Coquitlam Town Centre.

Coquitlam was a small community in 1967, but Greater Vancouver's ongoing growth gradually pushed its population outwards and towards greater urbanization. It is noteworthy that the five acre parcel now sits in the middle of Coquitlam Town Centre and is located very close to the new Evergreen Line Rapid Transit Project which is scheduled to connect to Vancouver in the summer of 2016. Step by gradual step, the remarkable story of the Koski family reminds us about how the commitment of few individuals in a greater vision can eventually benefit hundreds of families in their time of greatest need.

As we reflect about the extraordinary contributions of the Koskis and the other early FCRHA visionaries, we are reminded of the following quote:

Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful committed citizens can change the world. Indeed. It is the only thing that ever has. – Anonymous.





Members of the Board of Directors greet Mrs. Leonda Koski outside her Johnson Street property and offer their gratitude for her far-sighted bequest. In the photo from left to right are Helmi Laila, Liisa Maunus, Mrs. Koski, Niilo Itkonen, Mrs. Itkonen, Pentti Mikkola, Ray Rinta and Hannes Varila.

A warm thank you goes out to Veikko Pajunen and Kay Mikkola for their invaluable contributions in bringing this article to life. In addition, Ray Rinta's book "10 vuotta suomalaista lepokotityötä Vancouverissa" (10 years of the Finnish Rest Home in Vancouver) provided important historical background for this article. Collectively, their memories and writings about the Koskis and their appreciations of the enduring legacy of the family enable this story to go out to you.- Pasi Närhi

This article first appeared in "Lepokodin Joulu 2012."

Arial map view: Google Maps