

## *Danish Club of Houston*

### President's Report To The Annual Meeting – June 4, 2000

The 1999-2000 season was a busy year for The Danish Club of Houston. In its third season the club either arranged or was invited to approx. 15 events, with especially March and April being very busy.

A club like ours will naturally experience a lot of “hello’s and goodbye’s”. We have said hello and welcome to many new members in the last year, and have said goodbye and farewell to many friends. Our President John Moyell and his wife Gurli were transferred to the Bahamas, our Board substitute Erik Eriksen and his wife Chris moved to Canada, Karen and Tonny Jensen left for Florida, our Danish Catering company was closed, and the Broberg’s returned to Denmark. I could go on.., the list of people coming and going is much longer.

Talking about saying goodbye to friends, I shall mention the tragic loss of our member Lise Leseq. The Danish-American community mourns her death, and our thoughts are with her sons, now living in California with their grandmother. We were glad to be able to support the boys fond with more than 1,000 \$, and I know many of our members also supported the fond privately. Thanks to vice consul Anna Thomsen for being the link to the children and the family, we know how hard it was for Anna, being a close friend of Lise for many years. The court case is over, sentence has been served, let us pause for a moment in Lise’s memory.

The 1999-2000 season started with a great concert in Jones Hall with Victor Borge. A wonderful event with many of our members in attendance. We were all moved, when Victor Borge played his medley over Danish Folk Songs as a gesture to the Danes in attendance. After the concert, Mr. Borge and his son joined us for a late night reception. – The 90 years old entertainer really impressed us with his stamina and humor.

October meant Viking Cup at the Norwegian Seamen’s Church, combined with a big cook-out competition. Our soccer team won over Sweden, but took a serious beating against Norway, who won the tournament for the second year. Our cooking-team “The Danish Deep Friars”, headed by Jan Mogensen, took second place in chicken and did a great job on the half-

barrel grill among the large professional BBQ-trucks, looking more like locomotives.

In November the Danish singer Bo Skovhus was back in town for the great opera Don Giovanni. Only a few dedicated members went to the performance, - and also the reception, hosted by Aegis and Lotte Optekamp, could have had more participants. Thanks to Lotte for sponsoring the event.

It was now time for the great month of December. We started early with the Holiday party at Quasimodo's, a success with some 105 in attendance. Good food and a nice party, but a little crowded, so we look forward to having this year's party at more roomy facilities at Rice University. Thanks to the Christmas Committee, who again this year did a great job, and also thanks to all our sponsors who participated with gifts for raffles and auction.

Mid-December brought pastor Torben Poulsen from the Danish Seamen's Church in Brooklyn back to Houston for the traditional service, which this year included baptizing of four kids as well as a confirmation. The church was filled to capacity, and all the kids were also excited about Santa's visit and the dance around the Christmas tree, while the adults enjoyed all the "aebleskiver". We all had a very nice Sunday, and we really do appreciate the hospitality of the Norwegian Church. We thank Torben Poulsen for once again making the trip to Houston.

Early January meant goodbye to the Moyell's and many members showed up at the farewell reception for a glass of beer and a hug. John was named lifetime member of the Danish Club and received a Texas-shaped plaque with inscription. We owe John one more Thank You for all he has been to the Danish-American community in Houston over the last 20 years.

Last Sunday of February meant Fastelavn in Bear Creek Park with Carl's hand decorated and very sturdy barrels. Weather was gorgeous, the "fastelavnsboller" were great, and all the kids wore great costumes.

March was very busy for our friends at the Royal Danish Consulate. First the Fotofest with artists from Scandinavia, and a reception at the Winter Street Art Gallery. Thereafter a reception at the Holocaust Museum in connection with a symposium, focusing on the rescue of Danish Jews to Sweden in October 1943. At the reception, the Danish Club presented a

commemorative poster to the Holocaust Museum, and we have later received a very nice thank you letter from the Museum Director.

Last year we had to cancel a visit to Rice University because of lack of interest. So this year we wanted to go ahead. With a Danish Church Vesper followed by reception and Danish food in a nearby church after the tour, we thought that it would be possible to attract a decent crowd for the Rice visit – and all the 12 people in attendance had a nice afternoon. Thanks to Hannes, The Jensens (Al & Bridget) and to pastor Kirsten Drigsdahl from Alleroed, being in Houston on a sabbatical leave. Too bad that the program did not attract more members.

The five-a-side soccer on the first Sunday in April at the Norwegian church was a total rain-out, and only one team represented the Danish colors. The games went on through rain and thunder – hindsight I believe the weather in between was too dangerous, but apparently our Norwegian friends have good connections above, thunder was not followed by lightning. By the way, our team got beaten.

A group of people in the Danish Heritage Society in Danevang has been working very hard for years raising money for a Museum and Cultural Heritage Center to be built in Danevang. Groundbreaking took place together with the celebration of the Queen's Birthday, and our club was invited for the big event. Everybody had a great day with Lunch, Scandinavian Folk Dancing, Hayrides and games. Too bad Danevang is more than 90 miles away from Houston, we would love to have some of our arrangements in the "Forsamlingshus" in Danevang. We appreciate the great relationship between our club and the Heritage Society, and we wish all the best for the new Heritage Center. It is going to be tough to attract visitors to the remote location south of El Campo, and we admire your dedication.

Finally our calendar had a recent visit to St. Arnold's micro brewery, where we took the big tour of the brewery - one big warehouse only -, followed by sampling of the great products. We may repeat that some other time, a fun and interesting way of spending a couple of hours.

Looking ahead, we have some arrangements in preparation for the fall season. Unfortunately we have seen a rather low attendance and must question, whether we have been offering too many activities this year, - or maybe not the right activities. We get many pat's on the shoulders for our e-mail Newsflashes, our web-site and our Newsletters, and I do believe that we have the best information system of any Danish club in the USA.

However, one of the reasons we keep a good information link is to encourage and remind our members about all the things going on in the club.

We need some more good ideas from the members, and are planning to launch an activity committee for the "kids" – that means the au-pair's, the trainee's and all the other "kids" between 20-30. We do have some volunteers to get that going. Maybe we should also try some teenage activities, - although being a parent to a teenager makes me wonder, if we can attract their interest. Send us an e-mail with your ideas and comments, it does get a little frustrating when board members and their family constitute more than half of the attendees at many arrangements.

I should not complaint too much, though, - we have a lot of fun in the Danish Club, and I believe we have come a long way in our three years of existence. We are not big, about 100 families, when people finally cough up the membership fee after a few reminders.

With our members living often more than one hour of driving apart, and everybody being settled in their local communities, maybe we shall just enjoy when we have time to get together, and be "Danes" together, and be happy and thankful that we are part of a thriving and busy American community in the Greater Houston Area.

I would like to thank my fellow Board members as well as our "extra" Board member and webmaster Hannes for their support to the club. A special thanks to Johnny Larsen. who has decided to take a break from the position as Treasurer after having kept the books in good order since day one. We are also thankful for the great cooperation with The Danish Consulate with consul Ray Daugbjerg and vice consul Anna Thomsen, - you guys are worthy representatives of Denmark and great friends. Also thanks to the Danevang community and all their hospitality, we admire Bridget and Al Jensen for their dedication and hard work for the Danish Heritage in Texas.

Finally, thanks to all our members and sponsors for a good and busy year with the Danish Club, enjoy the hot summer, we won't bother you for a couple of months, just stay in the shade whenever possible!

*Niels Kastrup*