

ANYBODY FOR A COLD MOOSE HEAD? AMERICAN HOSPITALITY IN NORWAY OSLO NATIVE USES BAY AREA EXPERIENCE IN OLYMPIC JOB

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LILLEHAMMER, Norway – The clerk at the electrical supply store in Hamar, where the Olympic figure- and speed-skating competitions will be held, was explaining the value of Norwegian coins and pointed to the smallest, a 50-ore half-crown piece worth about seven cents.

"You can't buy much with a half-crown," she said. "Maybe a Swede."

Had Gerhard Heiberg overheard the remark, he would have winced. The fervent wish of the Lillehammer Olympic Organizing Committee president is that the Winter Games, which open today, will brighten his fellow Norwegians' dour faces and replace their defensiveness with a new acceptance of the outside world.

Heiberg, an Oslo native, hopes the thousands of visitors to the Gudbrandsdalen Valley over the 16 days of the Olympics not only will learn of Norway's winter sports heritage – which is why Norwegians supported a \$1 billion government subsidy for their second Winter Games – but will be made to feel as welcome as he was for the two years he lived in Mountain View, worked in Newark and attended San Jose State.

"I have very good and strong memories of the hospitality and friendliness of the people," he said of that period in 1963 and '64. "That's not the way Norwegians usually are. So to me, it's very important to get the American way of meeting strangers. To be open, frank, smile, be helpful. That's the way you are. That's the way I felt it very strongly in California.

"I've tried to force the Norwegian people into it. What I say in this region, what I say on Norwegian television, is that the most important part for me here is to make the Norwegians smile for 16 days. People think I'm crazy, but now they are following me."

Difficult to push change

Heiberg, 54 and board chairman of Aker, Norway's largest privately owned company, knows how difficult it is to change old ways.

He had just gotten his master's degree in business administration from Copenhagen's School of Economics and Business Administration in 1963 when his girlfriend, an Oslo travel agent, said she wanted to take him to dinner with some clients from the United States.

"I said, 'To hell. I don't want to meet some Americans.' She forced me to meet them. They invited us to dinner. They turned out to be some very, very nice people."

So he accepted Bob and Sue Cornell's offer to visit Los Altos. Bob Cornell helped him get a job as an accountant at Guardian Packaging Corp. in Newark and Heiberg rented a place on Rich Avenue in Mountain View. He enrolled in an SJS night class, Human Relations in Business and Industry, and decades later became the school's second alumnus – after 1984 Los Angeles Games head Peter Ueberroth -- to run an Olympics.

"He was really impressed with the variety of people on campus," said Pete Zidnak, a now-retired professor who taught the business course and still writes to Heiberg.

"There were blacks and browns and all in between. He said in Norway there were all blonds."

Before coming to SJS, Heiberg had never spoken a word in class, had never been asked a question by a professor. Before his job in Newark, he had not expected to be asked his opinions by his boss at work, nor did he expect to be invited to dinner by his neighbors.

"This is not just true of Scandinavia," he said. "It is very European."

His fascination with the America he found in San Jose was the seed for the kind of Games he hopes to put on and the Norway he'd like to see.

"This is an experiment in Norwegian society," Heiberg said of his Olympic organization, known as LOOC (pronounced "look").

"A lot of organizations, the government, the parliament, are following very closely how we are tackling these problems, how we organize, how we work. If this will be a success, then we will have an example for the future. If this will be a failure, then they will say, 'All right. They tried, but that is not the way.'

"So I have to make it a success."

Some are smiling

There are smiling townspeople along the Storgata, Lillehammer's main shopping street, pushing the sleds in which they carry children and bags from the *supermarkedd*.

But there also are the conservative Christians who want the Olympic hymn banned for its references to the gods of Greek mythology.

And there is Vegard Ulvang, the cross-country skier and national hero who will take the athletes' oath at the opening ceremonies. Ulvang told Norway's TV2 that International Olympic Committee President Juan Antonio Samaranch, once Spanish dictator Francisco Franco's ambassador to the Soviet Union, should not be allowed in the country because he is a "fascist."

Heiberg and Norwegian Prime Minister Gro Harlem Brundtland went on national television to apologize.

"We have invited the world to come to us," Heiberg said. "We have to treat everybody coming – whether they are socialist or communist or capitalist – with the same kind of openness and willingness to meet them and try to understand and smile. There are some cultural collisions here.

"And I tell Norwegians we need (Samaranch). We need the outside world. We are part of Europe. We should get closer. And this is a fantastic possibility, not only for persons but for our industry, for our agriculture, for our arts and culture, for our fisheries."

So Heiberg brought the king and queen, Harald V and Sonja, to open the Main Press Center on Wednesday and impress those who will shape the world's impression of Norway. There was a cold buffet of local specialties – Jarlsberg cheese, reindeer, moose, half-fermented trout and salmon prepared five ways – and stamped postcards for reporters to send home.

Heiberg, fluent in English, German, French and Spanish as well as both of Norway's two official languages, has visited the Bay Area annually since moving back to Oslo, once lecturing at SJS on industrial democracy in Norway and participating in a business conference at Stanford. He has taught business courses, American-style, in Europe.

In 1972, after stints with companies in France and Austria, he became an assistant managing director of Norcem, a Norwegian cement company. By the time it merged

with Aker in 1987, he was Norcem's president. Aker now has ownership interests in 13 companies in 40 countries, including the United States.

"He is the ideal man for the Winter Olympic Games," said Osmund Ueland, who was a 17-year Aker executive before taking the job overseeing transportation and environmental protection for LOOC. "He is not the European-boss type. He listens to everyone. He gets communication from everyone."

American-style office

Heiberg's Lillehammer office, where he has worked several days each week since being named LOOC president four years ago, is small and Spartan, decorated only with some posters from past Winter Games. He welcomes visitors downstairs.

"This American style has been received very, very well at LOOC," he said. "We have a lot of young people, and they, of course, are much more flexible in their minds and in their mentality than when you work with 60-, 65-year-old people. "Everybody eats together. We are very, very informal. That door is always open. You walk in and disturb each other. You talk together and take a Coke together. It's very good for motivation. When you want people to work almost 24 hours a day, you have to give them motivation."

After the Olympics, and then three weeks of mostly sleep, he says he's uncertain what he will do. He won't return to Aker full time, but after years as a public person as LOOC president, he won't go into politics.

"If things go well, then I will be asked about a lot," he said. "If things go to hell, nobody will ask for me any more, and I don't deserve any opportunity."

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