



# LÖGBERG HEIMSKRINGLA

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PHOTO COURTESY OF LEIC

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PHOTO COURTESY OF HRAFN JÓKULLSSON

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## Opening some artistic doors



PHOTO: DAVID JÓN FULLER

Winnipeg artist Inga Torfadóttir recently opened the doors of her home as part of a unique tour, and is experimenting with new media / page 10

## Number of passengers at Leifur Eiríksson airport expected to continue increasing

KEFLAVÍK — Passengers at Leifur Eiríksson Airport increased about 11 per cent in 2006 compared against 2005, or from at least 1,817,000 passengers to about 2,019,000 passengers. The increase in passengers to and from Iceland amounts to at least 15 per cent; passengers on stopovers in Iceland on their way across the Atlantic Ocean decreased by about seven per cent.

In news from the airport it was announced that this is consistent with a passenger prediction which the British company BAA Plc., which operates the largest airport in

Britain, made in the beginning of 2005. A roughly six per cent increase is predicted for 2007 and by the year 2015 the increase in passengers should be well over 3 million, which amounts to a twofold increase each decade. Organizational specialists at BAA look to various factors which have effects on economic growth in Iceland, fares, marketing initiatives and popularity of Iceland as a stopover for travellers.

To accommodate this increase in passengers, work is being carried out to enlarge the air terminal and the aim



A drawing which shows how the air terminal building will look after the changes.

is to finish development of the air terminal by 14 April 2007.

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MBL-IS / GUBMUNDUR RÚNAR GUBMUNDSSON

## 51 buildings torn down in Reykjavík over the past year

REYKJAVÍK — The year 2006 was a record year for building demolition in Reykjavík. Fifty-one buildings were torn down over the past year; in 2005, which was also a record year, there were 47.

“An increase in the large number of demolitions has been constant from the turn of the century, but I expect that the high point has now been reached,” says Erpur Snær Hansen, Health Representative with the Reykjavík City Environmental Health and Protection Office, on the organization’s website.

Among the buildings which were torn down over the year were Hamiðjuhúsið, the old cod liver oil plant, Faxaskála, the freezing plant on Mýrargata, a bonded warehouse and oil supply station on Héðingsgata. An enormous quantity of building waste was produced in 2006 and it is for the most part buried in a landfill at Faxaflói harbour.

“Extensive asbestos demolition, such as in the Brokeyjar building on Austurburg and oil station on Héðingsgata, should be noted,” according to the website of the Protection Office. “Asbestos was used in buildings right up until 1970 in Iceland and is found in many places. When asbestos breaks, glass fibres are stirred up, which can lodge in the lungs after inhalation and lead to death 30 to 40 years later. Asbestos from demolition is buried in Álfsnes.”

Hamiðjuhúsið in Þverholt was torn down in the last year.

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# Bringing more Icelanders west

## Jónas Þór plans cultural trips to North America

David Jón Fuller

The year 2007 may prove an auspicious one for Iceland-North America travel, if Jónas Þór has his way.

Jónas, who has taught courses on Icelandic immigration, settlement and history for many years, and is the author of *Icelanders in North America: The Early Settlers*, among other books, formed a new travel company, Vesturheimur hf. (Thorstravels in English) last year, with the express purpose of bringing more Icelanders to the Icelandic settlements in Canada and the US.

Jónas had already been organizing similar trips for INL-Iceland for years, but says there were difficulties working through existing Icelandic travel agencies, "which in many cases lacked necessary understanding and knowledge of the North American Icelandic community. This often complicated the planning."

From now on, all INL-Iceland tours will be planned by Vesturheimur.

Jónas hopes that many Icelanders will show interest in these specialized packages — more involved than a simple trip to New York or Florida. "The tours have been quite popular, which is borne out by the fact that quite a few people have gone on more than one tour, a few as many as four," he says. "Our reputation is good, and more and more individuals and large groups have approached us to ask the agency to plan their tours. More people will visit Icelandic communities in 2007 than ever before."



Writer and teacher Jónas Þór founded Vesturheimur hf.

Attitudes in Iceland towards Icelandic emigrants to North America and their descendants have changed a great deal since the 19th century, when the majority of people who emigrated from Iceland to the United States and Canada made the journey.

At that time, Iceland was still fighting for independence from Denmark, as it had been

since the middle of the century when the earliest emigrants left to settle in Utah.

"During the Emigration Period, from 1870 to 1914, when people left Iceland for the New World every year, few stood on the docks, wishing them well just before they sailed," says Jónas. "Their decision to emigrate, to leave Iceland, their homeland, in the hope of find-

ing a brighter future in America, was met with hostility by so many in the country. Some went as far as calling them traitors.

"I suppose this common attitude here made many emigrants all the more determined to maintain as strong bonds with Iceland as possible, to remain as Icelandic in the New World as they could."

Jónas says the negative opinion of the emigrants among Icelanders lasted well into the 20th century, with many families forbidding any mention of relatives in North America.

"In the last 10 or so years, this opinion has completely changed," says Jónas. "Today, more and more people in Iceland eagerly search for their relatives in North America."

This change in perception is due to a number of things. One factor are two novels by Böðvar Guðmundsson, which told the story of Icelandic settlers in North America and which were very popular in Iceland.

Another is support from the Icelandic government, says Jónas. "The present government of Iceland, which has been in power for 12 years, has strongly supported all efforts made by organizations or individuals here in Iceland to strengthen the bonds between Iceland and these communities.

"We always had the support of the Government of Iceland and in the beginning Atli Ásmundsson, the present Consul General for Iceland in Winnipeg, was in the Ministry for Foreign Affairs and has always been most supportive."

He also mentions the work of Markús Örn Antonsson during his tenure as President of INL-Iceland, when Jónas proposed teaching the courses on Icelanders in North America. Antonsson is currently Iceland's Ambassador to Canada. "He remains just as enthusiastic and supportive today," says Jónas.

"His successor, Almar Grímsson, took this one step further and has spent considerable time and energy in visiting each community, establishing

strong links with Icelandic associations, and thus paving the way for our visits. His work is invaluable."

Other developments, such as the Vesturfarasetrið, or Western Emigration Centre, in Hofós, have enriched Icelanders' awareness of the bonds between their country and Canada and the US. "Many a participant [on the tours] spent some time there before travelling with us," says Jónas.

He adds that Icelandic organization in North America have been just as important in making connections for the visitors from Iceland.

Jónas is no stranger to the Icelandic community in North America. He studied history at the University of Manitoba in Winnipeg in 1977, graduating with an M.A in 1980, and was Editor of *Lögberg-Heimskringla* from 1981 to 1987. He says in every community to which trips are planned, the intent is to coordinate with members of the community.

"I am in touch with Icelandic organizations in the communities we intend to visit, seeking their advice and help in preparation for each tour. We always try to have local people join us on the bus as we tour their community. It makes little sense driving through these communities without hearing what the locals have to say about them. How did the descendants of the pioneers carry on?"

He adds that he is "deeply indebted" to many people in Canada and the US for their time and effort assisting with the tours.

Icelanders going on the tours are becoming more proactive as well, he says; many "do their homework" before the trip and make efforts to connect with relatives in the communities they visit. Some even make return visits on their own. "We had a family of eight from Akureyri last summer visiting relatives in Wynyard, a most successful family reunion," he says. (See *Lögberg-Heimskringla* No. 18, 15 September 2006, for the whole story.)

Continued on page 4

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# Confusion in the Great White North



**David Jón Fuller**  
Managing Editor

At the recent opening of Inuit artist Abraham Anghik Ruben's show, *Iceland 900 A.D.*, I had an inter-

esting conversation with Linda Sigurdson Collette. The show examined contact between Inuit and vikings in the north.

The question concerned the use of the word "Nordic." I have tried over the last few years to be careful throwing around words like "Nordic" and "Scandinavian."

The terms "Scandinavian" and "Nordic" are often used interchangeably to refer to anything relating to Denmark, Sweden, Norway and Iceland. Sometimes Finland is caught in that net as well, even though its culture and

language are very different from those of the others.

"Scandinavia" is more properly a geographic term, pertaining to the peninsula occupied by Norway and Sweden. It is sometimes used to include Denmark, Iceland and Finland.

"Nordic" is more problematic, since it is often applied to culture, especially language and literature, when it just means "Northern." That is perhaps a comforting vagueness, since it could be applied to all the peoples of the mid- to far north... though it still strikes a viking-

like note to my ear. "Norse" is more specific, pertaining directly to a language group.

A look in the dictionary doesn't clarify everything, and I catch myself second-guessing this even now. "Nordic"? "Scandinavian"? Or, God help us, "Viking"?

I think I'll stick with "Nordic" in most cases, and if I need to get geographical, say "Northern Europe" when called for.

Directions are often relative to the speaker or culture anyway, as any "Western Ice-lander" should know...



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100-283 Portage Avenue  
Winnipeg, MB R3B 2B5  
Phone: (204) 284-5686  
Toll free: 1-866-LOGBERG  
(1-866-564-2374)  
Fax: (204) 284-7099  
www.lh-inc.ca  
lh@lh-inc.ca

Office Hours:  
9:30 a.m. - 5 pm. Mon. - Fri.  
MANAGING EDITOR:  
David Jón Fuller  
(204) 927-5645 • david@lh-inc.ca  
LAYOUT EDITOR:  
Lesley Hunter  
(204) 927-5644 • lhunter@lh-inc.ca  
ADVERTISING and  
MARKETING MANAGER:  
Catherine Lambertsen McConnell  
(204) 927-5643 • catherine@lh-inc.ca  
BUSINESS MANAGER:  
Audrey Juve Kwasnica  
(204) 927-5642 • audrey@lh-inc.ca  
ADMINISTRATIVE ASSISTANT:  
Karen Bowman  
(204) 284-5686 • karen@lh-inc.ca  
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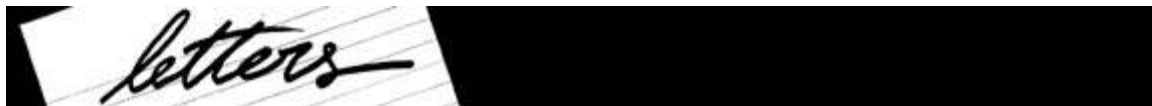
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Dear Editor:

Thank you for Brian Bjarnason's article about the Höfn residence on Osler Street in Vancouver (*Lögberg-Heimskringla*, 1 January 2007). It brought back many memories for me because I lived there from the summer of 1947 until the fall of 1948. I was completing my B.A. at UBC; my mother, Bjorg Thompson, was the first matron of Höfn.

I had never before lived in a beautiful house and the Osler Street house was spacious

and beautifully finished, with stained glass windows, wood of a great variety, a wide entrance hall with a fireplace, a large living room and a solarium. My mother and I had a room, a den with a fireplace, off the entrance hall.

I am delighted to read that the present owner is restoring the house to resemble its original condition. You ask about photographs; unfortunately the only one I have is the one you reproduce, taken from the out-

side. I remember well sitting in the spacious kitchen, with a pantry. The first cook was Kristina Skordal, my mother's dear friend, whom I had known and loved since childhood.

The year I spent there, in this gracious dwelling, in the company of Icelanders of an older generation, was extraordinary. My grandfather and grandmother, Jon and Markusina Thorsteinson, were residents there and my mother remained matron until my grandmother

died in 1951.

Yours,

**Anna Jean Mallinson**  
West Vancouver, BC

\* \* \*

Dear Editor:

I love the recipes and try many with excellent results. Keep up the good work — we find the paper very enjoyable.

**Dallas Bjarnason**  
Golden, BC

## Icelanders west

Continued from page 2

Vesturheimur will offer a variety of tours to North America in 2007. There will be "open tours" available to the general public.

The first is a tour in April to Winnipeg for the INL Convention. "Several people have signed up but plenty of seats are still available," says Jónas.

The second will include the two major Icelandic celebrations in August: August the Deuce in Mountain, ND and Íslendingadagurinn in Gimli,

MB.

The third is an eastern Canada tour in late August, which will take travellers to Icelandic settlements in Markland, NS, and Toronto, Kinmount and Rosseau in Ontario.

Other tours for particular groups include those for teachers and staff of a Gardabær High School; a number of choirs; and Iceland's Quilt Association.

The emphasis is on making connections between Icelanders and people living in the communities today. "It is great to know some of the his-

tory of these places but nothing matches meeting the people living there," says Jónas. "It is very special to sit with people in Lundar or Seattle and share stories over a cup of coffee, or the meals we have had in Arborg or Hnausa and in the basement of Gardar Church in North Dakota or the salmon in Blaine. And the wonderful receptions in Saskatchewan and Alberta, I can add so much to this list.

"It is during such times when you feel the bonding; you can sense on the bus after such occasions as we return to our hotel or continue our drive,

how touched the visitors from Iceland are. It is quite moving to everyone to witness such devotion to Icelandic heritage from people who may never have been to Iceland. To hear the old-timers speak the language so well yet never having had any proper instruction or a chance to visit Iceland.

"You really feel that these people have accomplished what the Icelandic settlers hoped for in the beginning. That the Icelandic heritage would never be lost on the North American continent."

For more information on Vesturheimur hf., visit [www.inl.is/vesturheimur.htm](http://www.inl.is/vesturheimur.htm). If you are interested in assisting in your community, contact Jónas Þór at [jonas.thor1@gmail.com](mailto:jonas.thor1@gmail.com).

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Honorary Consul of the  
Republic of Iceland

17703 - 103 Avenue  
Edmonton, Alberta  
T5S 1N8

Tel: (780) 408-5118  
Fax: (780) 408-5122  
E-mail: [gord@rentcash.ca](mailto:gord@rentcash.ca)