

Paal Berg
2006 Viking of the Year Award Recipient

In order to describe Paal's "worthiness" to receive the Viking of the Year Award, we must first examine the guidelines established by SNI in order to be nominated for this award. There are many worthy supporters of Nansen Field, but I think you will agree that Paal exemplifies SNI's intent for this honor.

- ✓ Initiative and leadership
- ✓ Impact on organization - direction - future plans
- ✓ Provide advice to leaders of Scan including legal and accounting
- ✓ Playing key roles in critical matters
- ✓ Chair fundraising activities and events
- ✓ Support for events, planning and organizing
- ✓ Public relations, printing, publish SCANner
- ✓ Physical work at Nansen Field

Paal, was born in Nittedal, a rural farming community just north of Oslo, Norway. He still recalls the newspaper want ad for Unitor Ship Service in January, 1967, as if it were yesterday.

"They needed a sales secretary in their Ships Service department in Oslo. What really caught my attention, however, was one little sentence stating 'possible assignment abroad.' Such a teaser made my imagination take a spin and put stars in the eyes. 'How exciting! Where would I go first? Rio or Hong Kong? When should I leave? How could I break such news to my parents?'" Paal took the job while attending evening classes at Oslo School of Marketing. Three years later a position opened in the Los Angeles office and he jumped at the chance.

"I was very, very excited about coming here! What I associated with California were the beaches, nice weather and Hollywood. When I arrived in June of 1970 I immediately found a hotel in San Pedro, dropped my luggage there, rented a car and headed for Hollywood. I saw the Hollywood sign and all (the tourist sights) and I was very impressed."

Paal thrived in the Los Angeles harbor area. In 1972, he met his future wife Phyllis, whom he married a year later. The couple bought their home around the corner from Miraleste Intermediate School, and has been there ever since. "We've been fortunate. We raised our four kids here in a beautiful, safe environment. The school district is excellent, so they had a very good start in life."

In 1993, the Norwegian government attempted to take control of Nansen Field, 9 acres of prime Peninsula real estate, with the intention of selling it on the open

market. Paal and the other four local, volunteer board members of SNI, Seamen of Norway, Inc. stood up against the land transfer. Despite an aggressive lawsuit targeting the individual board members, the SNI group held firm and triumphed in court. The end result was that Nansen Field would continue to be a strong magnet for the Scandinavian community, local youth and club soccer, and SNI would be haunted by a \$325,000 legal bill.

Paal is a big booster for his own homeland. As Unitor's man in LA, he would very often take inexperienced Norwegian consul generals under his wings and show them the ropes. And so his legal run-in with the Norwegian government over Nansen Field came as a supreme disappointment.

In 1996, in addition to his duties as North and South American manager for Norway's global ship supply company Unitor, Paal again came to the aid of Nansen Field as President of SCAN, Scandinavian Center at Nansen. In essence, he would act as volunteer operational manager of the field and clubhouse for the next decade, "because no one else would do it."

Paal, who continues to be Unitor's point man in the harbor, has come a long way from his youth in Nittedal. He admits to being more of a 'track and field guy' than a soccer player, enjoys running the horse trails and hills of the Peninsula. "You go up into one of those deep canyons up here and you wouldn't think you lived in the Los Angeles area. It's like you're in the wilderness somewhere."

His support of Nansen Field, while benefiting the local community, is very much a link to his Norwegian past. He has been involved with many organizations, Sportsklubben FRAM, Norwegian Seamen's Church, SCAN, Norwegian Fish Club, Norwegian American Chamber of Commerce, which all support his passion for Nansen Field and the Norwegian community.

A favorite memory of his early days on the harbor was the Fish Club's annual Christmas party at Nansen Field. "Once a year we'd invite people who had been important to Norwegian shipping over the year. We would serve "akevitt," a strong liquor made of potatoes. It kind of cuts the grease from all heavy meats that we eat around the holidays. You serve it ice cold and you chase it with beer. Some of those invited would stand up and... 'Whoo!' We had to drive them home."

In the end, was it worth it? Would Paal Berg do it again? "Yeah, I probably would."

His extended family of Scandinavians, Brits and other local soccer fans seem to make it all worthwhile. "We have a Danish player, Benny Andersen, who just

turned 70. And he was once quoted in the newspaper, `I don't need to go to church on Sunday mornings because I go to Nansen Field...and that's heaven.'"

We congratulate and thank Paal for his dedication and service to the Scandinavian Community in Southern California and Nansen Field.