

A Festive Weekend at Northland College, Ashland, Wisconsin Honoring Sigurd F. Olson

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THE SIGURD OLSON ENVIRONMENTAL INSTITUTE was formally dedicated on a "wild and wooly day," May 9, 1981. The passive solar/earth sheltered building is tucked into the Bay City Creek ravine on the Northland College campus in Ashland, Wisconsin. "It is a good day," said Gaylord Nelson, chairman of The Wilderness Society, "because I am on the shores of Lake Superior because this dedication honors the name and the work of Sigurd F. Olson, one of the giants of the conservation movement for over half a century." An estimated 500 persons heard Nelson proceed to challenge government policies which he said threaten water, air and soil resources of the world.

The presentation of the first Robert Marshall Award to Sigurd Olson for exceptional contributions to the conservation movement was made by Harold Jerry, President of the Governing Council of The Wilderness Society. Marshall founded The Wilderness Society and was a contemporary and friend of Olson.

The Institute was presented with a lifetime membership to the Audubon Society (the first ever awarded to an institution) by Les Blacklock, noted nature photographer and close personal friend of Sigurd and Elizabeth Olson. Blacklock also shared "three warm experiences" from his years of friendship with the Olsons.

Dr. Rick St. Germaine, President of the Great Lakes Inter-Tribal Council spoke on the interrelationship between human beings and the environment. "Today," he said, "we cannot help but acknowledge the commonality by which we work together to restore peace and harmony in the world."

"A common ground approach to public education and awareness of environmental issues highlight the Sigurd Olson Environmental Institute," Sigurd Olson Environmental Institute Board Chairman Bruce Blackburn noted in his remarks.

Keynoter Gaylord Nelson received the U.S. Forest Service 75th Anniversary Award for contributions to the preservation of the environment, but the most emotionally moving moment of the ceremonies came as the audience read a selection from Olson's writings ("the way of the canoe is the way of the wilderness and of a freedom almost forgotten") followed by the portaging of his pre-1900 canoe into the building. The canoe was raised up the side of the main conference room to the accompaniment of songs from the voyageur era of this region's history.

Friday's pre-dedication ceremonies opened with a synopsis of the history of the Institute from its founding Director, Robert Matteson. Festivities included the unveiling a bronze bust of Olson created by Minnesota sculptor George Bassett and of a portrait of Olson by St. Paul artist Barbara Peet. Nina Leopold Bradley officially dedicated the Aldo Leopold Meeting Room as she read from her father's writings. "I like all trees, but I'm in love with pine." The room is paneled with white pine planted by Aldo Leopold and donated to the Institute.

At a Lumberjack Dinner that evening, Jack Lorenz, Executive Director of the Izaak Walton League spoke words of optimism for a pessimistic world, "The hopes of yours are in you and up to you." A film, "The Wilderness World of Sigurd F. Olson," capped the pre-dedication activities. On the screen Olson echoed Lorenz's remarks, "The hope of the world is in this young pine tree as it is in the young people. You, the next generation."

It was truly a weekend to remember: to celebrate the expression of the philosophy of Sigurd Olson; to appreciate the passive solar/earth sheltered building named for him; had to understand the interrelatedness of all things on this earth.

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