

Eric Nelson Swedish American of the Year 2019

The Vasa Order of America is an organization founded in the United States in the late 19th century by Swedish emigrants. It initially functioned as an aid organization for Swedish emigrants. The Order has active lodges in the USA, Canada and Sweden. Since 1960, the Swedish Districts of The Vasa Order annually appoint the Swedish-American of the Year. A number of accomplished individuals have received the award. It is presented to someone who has excelled in their field of expertise. It can be a politician, an industry leader, an artist or an association representative. This year, the Vasa Order of America has appointed Eric Nelson, Executive Director of the National Nordic Museum in Seattle, Swedish American of the Year 2019.

Eric Nelson joined the Museum as Executive Director/CEO in January 2008; at that time, the organization was called the Nordic Heritage Museum. Since that time, he has overseen the expansion of the museum from a small and beloved local treasure into a nationally and internationally recognized center for sharing Nordic culture. Nelson also oversaw the development of the stunning new \$52.5M National Nordic Museum on Seattle's working waterfront, which debuted May 5, 2018 with a grand opening ceremony attended by Nordic heads of state, royalty, and other national and international dignitaries. The Museum was recently designated the National Nordic Museum through legislation approved by the US Congress and signed by the President earlier this year. The National Nordic Museum is the only museum in the United States – and indeed the world – that showcases the impact and influence of Nordic values and innovation in contemporary society, and tells the story of 12,000 years of Nordic history and culture, across all five Nordic countries: Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Norway, and Sweden.

In addition to its exceptional collection and exhibitions, the National Nordic Museum serves as a convener on critical issues including innovation, economic development, environmental policy, cultural identity, and societal issues. The Museum presents a wide range of vibrant programs including contemporary art exhibitions, outstanding concerts, lectures, and films, and a variety of special events throughout the year.

A native of Napa, California, Nelson previously served as Executive Director of the Napa Valley Museum from 1999 to 2007. Prior to this role, he was Curator of Exhibits and Collections and then Executive Director of the Sonoma County Museum in Santa Rosa for eleven years. Nelson is a graduate of the prestigious Getty Museum Leadership Institute and holds a Master of Art degree in History and B.A. in History from California State University. He has served as a guest lecturer at the University of Washington, California State University, Sacramento, and San Francisco State University.

Eric's father's family emigrated from Sweden towards the end of the 19th century. His father's paternal grandparents Olof Nilsson and Maria Gustafsdotter left their home in Kulleberga, a village in Bosjökloster, Skåne, just south of Västra Ringsjön, and emigrated to the United States (in 1873 and 1881), settling in Kansas where he changed the family name to Nelson. Eric's father's maternal grandparents immigrated to Durango, Colorado in the 1880s. His great grandfather Lars Magnus Larson (who changed his name to Louis Magnus Naslund) departed from Gräsmark, Värmland in 1882. His great grandmother, Christina (Kristina) Marie Nilsson, emigrated from the village of Hässjö close to Härnösand to Colorado in 1886. While they left Sweden to pursue new opportunities in the United States, their Swedish heritage and values remained an important part of their lives which has been passed on through the generations.

Many well-known names are found among the 60 Swedish American of the Year awardees: Glen Seaborg - Nobel laureate, Signe Hasso - actress, Wendel Andersson - Governor, Curtis Carlson - entrepreneur, William Rehnquist - Chairman of the Supreme Court in the US, Ann-Margret - actress, Buzz Aldrin - astronaut, Nils Lofgren - musician, Jan Eliasson - deputy general secretary of the UN.

Eric Nelson will be presented with the award in Värmland in connection with the Swedish American Day celebrated there. The day is named the John Ericsson Day after Swedish inventor John Ericsson and takes place on August 3. As part of the commemoration, the city of Filipstad arranges a reenactment of the Battle of Hampton Roads, where John's construction Monitor fought the Merrimac during the American Civil War. In Filipstad, the Swedish-American lays a wreath at John Ericsson's mausoleum. The remaining festivities are held in Karlstad.

The Swedish American of the Year Committee