

Speech, Jesper Greth, Mayor of Rebild Municipality, July 4th, 2024

Dear Everyone,

A very warm welcome to the lunch and the Rebild Festival 2024. I am truly delighted that so many of you have once again prioritized attending this traditional celebration, where we honor Independence Day and emphasize our collaboration and, most importantly, the friendship between our two nations.

This friendship and partnership began way back in the 1820s when the first brave Danes undertook the long journey across the Atlantic to start a new and better life in the unknown, when life in Denmark became too difficult. This bond was significantly strengthened when Max Henius, with a Ph.D. in chemistry and great determination, made his first trip across the Atlantic in 1881. As many of you may know, he initiated the purchase and transfer of this area in Rebild Bakker, where we stand today, to the Danish state in 1912. He did this with the goal of what we are doing together today: preserving and strengthening the friendship between the USA and Denmark through an annual celebration for Danish-Americans.

I could share many amazing stories about Max Henius, but I will spare you that and instead mention just one thing: between 1881 and 1935, when he passed away in Denmark, he crossed the Atlantic no less than 80 times! This was at a time when the journey took about 14 days. We can reflect on this when we occasionally find ourselves stuck in traffic or waiting in line at the airport check-in.

The Rebild Festival is an event of international significance. The festivities have gained a reputation as the largest 4th of July celebration outside USA, and every year, there is a special official greeting from USA. As previously, there is a greeting from the President, Joe Biden, delivered once again by the US Ambassador, Alan Leventhal, who we will hear from along with several other notable speakers later when we head down to the hills. Among the speakers, we have the American keynote speaker, Dr. Rachelle Keck, President of Grand View University, the only remaining university in the USA founded by Danish immigrants. The Danish keynote speaker this year is Denmark's first astronaut, Andreas Mogensen. Naturally, there will be great musical performances as always.

The day will conclude with a Summer Party, where we will meet the Danish-American brewer Eddie Szweda. This is very fitting for the occasion, since Max Henius also engaged in brewing beer during his time in America – he even obtained a patent for a new brewing method, and invented various brewing appliances, all of which significantly impacted the development of the American brewing industry.

As in previous years, I will finish with perhaps the most important message: Today is also a day to celebrate democracy and the privilege of living in a free and secure society. A society where we can think, speak, and generally express ourselves as we wish, without the risk of sanctions and punishment. I want to emphasize the word privilege – because, when we look around the world, we must unfortunately acknowledge that neither democracy, freedom, nor security are guaranteed. Sadly, I must repeat this year that we do not need to look further than Ukraine to see the terrible consequences of war and oppression. Additionally, the conflict between Israel and Hamas shows how fragile the peace that we take for granted can be.

This should remind us of how crucial it is to build friendships across national borders and how important it is to maintain and strengthen these friendships – this is the very essence of the Rebild Festival.

Now, I would like to thank you for your attention, thank the Rebild Society, and especially extend a big thank you, to all the volunteers who have worked hard once again this year so that we can all enjoy an amazing day here in one of Denmark's most beautiful natural areas.

I wish you all a wonderful Rebild Festival!