

# AN ANALYSIS OF THE SIDRABENE SURVEY RESULTS

## by Gail Ozolins

Sylvia Shedden needs to be thanked for the time and effort that she put into this project. Her purpose was to help us better understand the future needs of Sidrabene's key stakeholders in order to guide the planning of future programs and initiatives.

The survey had 211 respondents.

The percentage of responses from cottagers was almost 150%.

The percentage of responses from non-cottagers was less than 10%.

Interest in filling out the survey was in the 41 to 80 age group or 66% of the respondents. Only 21% of the respondents were in the 17 to 40 age range, and to me, these are the people who represent the future of Sidrabene.

Over 85% of the respondents say that they speak and understand Latvian. Breaking it down further, 93% of those 41 and over speak and understand Latvian; however, only 61% of those aged 17 to 40 speak and understand Latvian. This is a drop of over 30%.

Question #20 asks: How many times did you visit Sidrabene during 2015?

10% of the respondents did not visit at all.

30% visited 1 to 3 times.

That is 40% of the people answering the questionnaire visited Sidrabene 3 times to not at all. That leaves us with 126 respondents who visited 4 or more times. The answers ended at 10 or more times. No answer was provided for those who live here all summer or only every weekend because of work commitments. Cottagers who live here for the summer or every weekend are not visitors. This is their summer home. I am not sure how many of us there are.

Because of the relatively few respondents in general and the fact that only 126 visited more than 3 times in 2015, it is hard to base future decisions on this survey; however, the survey does bring up some very important points.

I think Sylvia's concluding comments, page 23, are instructive and I want to expand on them but in a different order:

- Sidrabene is a place that is deeply loved by the great majority of the responders.  
*Comments contain words like: quiet, relaxing, secluded, the camp, memories, fellowship, the pool, space, safety, Jani, cafe, Latvian heritage, peaceful, welcoming, old friends, Latvian focused, Latvian culture, well-maintained, It's my home away from home, a little Latvian village, I cannot imagine Sidrabene not existing, To many Sidrabene is "a little piece of heaven on earth."*
- More than half of the responders were interested in more cultural and educational events and more than half of the responders were interested in courses where they could learn about Latvian cooking, arts and crafts.  
*By age group, those who gave this category the highest rating were the responders aged 26 to 40. Most of these people would have had their schooling exclusively in Canada, and their Latvian language skills are not as good as the more senior Latvians; however, these people*

want to learn more about their Latvian roots, and this has to be a big plus for those wishing to maintain the Latvian culture. Many people who had Latvian parents did not have the opportunity to attend Latvian school and learn the history, geography and traditions that those attending Latvian school would have learned.

- Sidrabene's facilities require significant improvements.  
*Comments were made on page 21. While parvalde is aware of all the deficiencies to the property, we are presently try to prioritize the renovations needed and do them in order and as they can be afforded. Many cottagers are putting thousands of dollars into renovating their cottages and many work on beautifying the common grounds, not only during the Talkas, but at other times because they feel like Sidrabene is their home and like good homeowners they want the place to look nice. We are so blessed to have Andy. I don't know how he puts up with us sometimes. He works so hard to keep on top of everything that needs to be done.*
- While a great majority of responders understand the need to rent out Sidrabene's facilities to external users, there is a significant concern that strangers on the property may impact its future safety and the current sense of family.  
*64% think it makes good use of the property because it generates income, the comments on page 19 suggest otherwise. More than one response was allowed to this question. About 100 responders indicated that they either don't want non-Latvians on the property at all, or the non-Latvians should be limited to week days. We are doing renovations here and there to be able to raise the rent we charge; however, if given a choice, and if we didn't need the money, it seems that the most would be happier to **not** have non-Latvians on the grounds.*
- Information about events/rentals needs to be publicized more widely within the Latvian community and among cottagers.  
*Right now, Valdis, our chairman notifies the church office so they put an event in the newsletter, he puts the event in the LA newspaper and he notifies the cottagers by email. Volunteers make up flyers for various events. Cottages that are for sale are advertised on the Sidrabene website. There might be a better way.*
- The children's summer camp is viewed by all groups and ages as perhaps the most important component of Sidrabene; responders believe it should be more Latvian-centred and better promoted.  
*In order to give this presentation, I talked to Linda Lakats to try to get some information about the children's camp, the nometne. The camp is challenging for the teachers, since there are all levels of fluency in the Latvian language, starting at none. If instruction is given in Latvian, it is expected that the children who understand better will assist the children who are not as fluent. Latvian is used as much as possible, but the goal is to be inclusive and welcoming. All instructions on safety issues are delivered in English and all the Bible study lessons conducted by Pastor Ilze are in English. Singing and dancing are Latvian. Latvian crafts, cultural components, Latvian geography and history are taught.*

*Since most of our youth do not attend church regularly, it is interesting to note that almost 75% of the 16 and under age group rated Sid as being important as a religious/spiritual retreat, higher than any other age group.*

- At the core, Sidrabene already encompasses most of what everyone wants; responders are not looking for great changes to what they currently experience.  
*Since 40% of the respondents either didn't visit in 2015, or visited 3 times or less, I don't know if they realize what the current experience is. I don't know how to interpret this sentence. Does this mean that the respondents are happy with the events, or does this mean that they are content that the parvalde meetings as well as our AGM are conducted in English with the minutes in English? Are they content with the fact that the Cottager Handbook was distributed only in English? Are they aware? Does anybody care?*
- There is a significant difference between how cottagers rate the Sidrabene experience vs. how members of St. Andrew's Church who are not cottagers rate it. This is to be expected, as had the latter group been more interested in Sidrabene, its members would have acquired cottages.  
*On page 9, mention is made of the founding fathers' vision for a "Latvian-centred camp." I thought the founding fathers' vision would have been for a "Christ-centred camp" since the camp was purchased by a Christian church. I have questioned people who were around when Sidrabene was started and it has been described to me as a party place rather than a place of Latvian culture and Lutheran Christianity. If, right in the beginning, Sidrabene acquired the reputation of being a place for partying this might go a long way to explaining why some St. Andrew's people never visit Sidrabene, or don't want to support Sidrabene.*
- There is a great diversity of views in the opinions that were expressed. The differences in how Sidrabene is perceived between the two groups (cottagers and non-cottagers) may pose a challenge for St. Andrew's Church padome as it plans for the future.

Sylvia sums it up very well in an email she sent me:

*We are no longer in the same world we were in when Sid was purchased in 1953. At that time, the purpose of Latvian schools & camps was to prepare the next generation so that children could return to Latvia, when it was free again, and fit right in with their language and cultural knowledge. That didn't happen, but having a Latvian community throughout the free world helped Latvia as it regained its independence. No amount of education here can prepare someone to fit right into the world of Latvia today. .... Culturally, in many ways, we are more Latvian here than they are in Latvia. My relatives there think it is crazy that I have a 'tautas terps', as they don't, and I know a lot more Latvian songs than they do. But the pressure is off -- we have a free Latvia that can maintain and evolve its culture and identity without our help.*

*That being said, we are now in a different phase of our Latvian-Canadian cultural development... we have inter-married, are strongly Canadian, our kids don't speak Latvian well, but we still like to celebrate some of the elements of Latvian culture at Sid, like song festivals and other events. That is good enough and I think, an appropriate ongoing role for Sid. Most of the survey responders were very happy with Sid as it is today. On a broader basis, we are no longer preparing for a wholesale "return" to Latvia, but will continue to be mindful of our background, keep our eyes on the political situation in Latvia. and do the best we can for Latvia from here.*

*I will always be Latvian, but I am also very proud to be Canadian. I enjoy visiting Latvia, but I couldn't live there. I think Sid, the way it is now, is perfect for people like me, to enjoy a reasonable amount of Latvian language and culture, within a Canadian context.*