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Lakewood man chows down for charity

Finlander feasts on franks at eating contest

Story and photo submitted by Steve Ballas

YourHub.com user

Although born in Jakobstad, Finland, 33-year-old **Tuukka Laitinen** is a naturalized United States citizen living the American dream.

Steve Ballas and his wife Linda own Steve's Snappin' Dogs.

Outside of a faint accent, the blonde, blue-eyed Lakewood resident is just like any other American. He loves the great outdoors, married to a beautiful woman named **Ingrid**, owns a small business and enjoys eating hot dogs just like any other American.

Laitinen proved his love for the almighty frank by entering Steve's Snappin' Dogs Chow Down for Charity hot dog eating contest qualifier on July 13. Laitinen was just one of 10 contestants on the day's competition and the first foreign born contestant to enter the event. Participants were given three minutes to eat as many hot dogs as they could with the top two of each of the four qualifiers advancing to the Elite Ate finals on

July 27.

Laitinen was a crowd favorite, proudly wearing a Finland Olympic hockey jersey, and one could see the Finland flag waving in the audience during the event.

"Too-ka, Too-ka," was heard from his cheering section as Laitinen downed his dogs. Nicknamed "The Teemu Selanne of Salami," by someone in the crowd, others were prematurely busy finding a title for the contest's article such as "Fin Finishes First," or "Tuukka Goes Banana's for Hot Dogs," in reference to Laitinen's Web development business named Bantzu, which is slang for banana in Swedish. All was for naught, however; although he kept the contest close, he ultimately lost out to the two top competitive eaters at the event.

For more information on Laitinen's participation or to view videos on the event, visit Steve's Snappin' Dogs Web site at www.stevessnappindogs.com.

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What: Chow Down for Charity hot dog eating contest finals

When: 1 p.m. July 27

Where: Steve's Snappin' Dogs, 3525 E. Colfax Ave., Denver

More information: Call 303-333-SNAP



PHOTO BY CAROLYN WHEATON

Tuukka Laitinen, of Lakewood, competes in the hot dog eating contest qualifier July 13 at Steve's Snappin' Dogs, 3525 E. Colfax Ave., Denver