

SLOVAK AMERICAN SOCIETY OF WASHINGTON

Annual General Membership Meeting

November 17, 2007

Thomas Jefferson Public Library, Falls Church, VA.

Report to the Membership

The Society continued in 2007 to pursue its main goals of fostering awareness and appreciation of Slovak culture and current affairs by successfully sponsoring and supporting a number of activities. The Society's membership level remains at a stable level, and its financial status is sound. The Board continues to address the challenges of maintaining a strong organization and a vibrant Slovak American community in the Washington D.C. area. The Board seeks, and the Society will need, stronger support from the membership to continue its' success in 2008. This report summarizes the reports of the officers and the committees, discusses year 2007 activities, and goals for 2008.

Membership

In 2007 to date, the Society maintains a level of 127 memberships (61 individual, and 66 family) for a total of 193 members. While this is slight increase over last year, most notable is the stability in membership level over the past several years. SASW memberships are concentrated in Virginia (55%) with Maryland representing 22% and DC 11%. There are also 15 memberships (12%) in states outside the Washington area, which reflects partly members who have moved, and partly a broader appeal of the Society. Now, over three-quarters of members have email and this is important as the Internet has become a more important means by which we communicate with the membership. The Board encourages members to renew memberships early, and to recruit new members as well.

Financial Status

The Society continues to maintain a sound financial status. The most recent Treasurer's Report (September 2007) shows that the Society had total assets of \$11,635. The Society has maintained two bank accounts with Bank of America. However, it was decided to close the "business investment" account, which garnered only a small amount of interest, and redistribute its' funds between the regular checking account and the CD (certificates of deposit) account which had been previously established with Lafayette Federal Credit Union. This move provides more available funds for cash flow purposes, while the CDs will provide a modest amount of interest on reserve funds. As of September 2007, the checking account had a balance of \$8,493 while \$3,142 was invested in CDs.

Programs and Activities

In 2007, the Society continued to offer a program of activities similar to previous years and generally had a good response to the events. We also continued to enjoy a very productive and

cooperative relationship with the Slovak Embassy, Ambassador Kacer, and his staff. The Society's major activities for 2007 are summarized below:

SASW Speakers Series

We completed our fifth year of the Speakers Series program, in cooperation with the Slovak Embassy. It continues to showcase the variety and richness of Slovak culture for the Washington-area Slovak community and helps the Society enhance its reputation and visibility in the broader Slovak community outside Washington. This year, we pursued a somewhat less ambitious schedule of topics and sought to shift the Series toward topics focusing on contemporary Slovakia. The speakers and topics were as follows:

- On March 17, Mr. Jim Lukach, an author from New Jersey, gave a talk based on his collection of essays, *Lost Inside the Happy Noise*. The book deals with the author's personal experiences as a young teacher of English in the heady days of the post-1989 era in Slovakia.
- On October 6, one of foremost North American scholars of Slovak history and affairs, Professor Stanislav J. Kirschbaum, of York University, Toronto, Canada, gave a lecture on "*The Scope and Meaning of Contemporary Slovak Politics*." He also provided a copy of his paper on which the talk was based, which was circulated to those who requested it.

Social Activities

During the year, we continued the long-time SASW tradition of holding the Svätý Mikuláš Party and an annual membership picnic. Hospitality Chair Viera Jamrich was responsible for organizing these events, and other Board and Society members also contributed their time and energies to helping make these events successful. Thanks and congratulations to Viera Jamrich and all those who contributed and participated.

- The SASW Svätý Mikuláš Party was held on Sunday, December 3, 2006 at the Slovak Embassy. It featured an excellent buffet of Slovak and other foods, the music of the New York-area Slovak band Pajtasi, and a visit by Svätý Mikuláš. The event also helped the Society raise some funds for VSM/City University scholarships. It was well attended with a slight (somewhat expected) decline compared with previous years.
- The SASW Annual Membership Picnic was held on Sunday, June 24, at a new location. The past several picnics had been held on the property of Millie Schoepe-Evans and Jim Evans, in Fairfax. However, in 2007 a transition was made to the property of Viera Jamrich, off Prosperity Ave., in Fairfax. Despite the change, the event came off well, with the Slovak food and beer as popular as ever. Also, Mr. Bob Rychlik, *fujarista*, gave a very nice performance.

Support and Other Activities

The SASW also supported activities that are of interest to the Slovak American community and/or that help Slovakia to build a strong and vibrant society. In 2007, we supported the following:

- VSM/City University Scholarships -- We again met our standard goal by raising funds for two \$500 scholarships to support Slovak students in continuing their studies, thanks to the generosity of a number of our members. City University officials, including Former Ambassador and current VSM/City U. Rector Branislav Lichardus, have expressed appreciation for our efforts. Due to a modest decline in donations, we had to use carry-over funds from prior years to fund the scholarships, so enhanced efforts to raise funds for 2008 are necessary. Nevertheless, we continue to seek ways to expand this effort.
- Slovak League Anniversary -- 2007 is the 100th anniversary of the Slovak League of America; a number of events were held to commemorate it. The SASW supported these events as follows:
 - SASW took out a small ad in a special edition of the newspaper *Slovak v Amerike* ;
 - Dr. George Mesko represented SASW at a gala dinner celebrating the League's Anniversary which was held in New Jersey;
 - President Ken Bombara represented SASW at a ceremony celebrating the donation of the original historic 1918 Pittsburgh Agreement to the Heinz Regional History Center in Pittsburgh, where it will go on permanent display.
- MeetUp Group -- SASW continues to be interested in reaching out to younger and newer Slovak émigrés or those with an interest in Slovakia. With this in mind, SASW provided a modest amount of funds to sponsor a MeetUp group, which is a means for people with common interest to “meet up” via the Internet. Ludmila Šujanová has organized a group in the Washington area and several meetings have been held. This structure could also possibly be a means of re-establishing Slovak language activities, or lessons, in the Washington area.

Board members continue to represent the Society at numerous cultural events sponsored by the Slovak Embassy and other Slovak-related organizations both locally and nationally. In addition to providing the SASW quarterly newsletter, we also provide information and assistance to those who contact us throughout the year, and we also maintain contacts with other Slovak American organizations. For example, SASW regularly provides announcements of Friends of Slovakia events, which includes the Slovak Film Series. We also supported FOS' efforts to raise awareness of the Visa Waiver issue, which resulted in legislative changes that could eventually benefit many Slovaks.

Looking Ahead to 2008

During 2007, the Board met or made progress on the goals listed at last year's annual meeting. We continued to present the Speakers Series, the Mikuláš Party, and the annual picnic. Last year's annual report also discussed the goal of improving the structure of the Board and the Society operations generally. With some considerable effort, the Board has approved a set of proposed revisions to the by-laws, which it hopes will help set the structure for SASW to continue to progress. If approved at the annual meeting, the Board will begin a transition to the new structure during 2008.

The primary goal of the by-laws revision is not just doing a technical exercise, but rather establishing a basis for strengthening and rejuvenating the organization. For example, the current Board has been incredibly dedicated and hard working but moreover, has been operating at the full capacity of its available energies. As a membership organization, if the Society is to move forward, it will need a few new, capable, individuals to join the Board. This can provide the basis for new energies and new ideas to foster the interests of the membership. Thus, in 2008, a major focus of the Board will be succession planning.

Another goal is to improve communications and outreach for SASW. The main communication vehicle has been the newsletter, but increasingly we use email to provide timely updates of information and event announcements. It is becoming increasingly less practical to provide information in hard-copy newsletter format. One goal in 2008 will be to make substantial progress on developing an SASW website. While we have had a website address with the very rudimentary webpage, we have not moved to commit a large amount of funds to such a project. However, thanks to a recent volunteer, we believe that we will have a functional website by early 2008. This will be a priority.

Finally, despite the challenges of maintaining a small, volunteer organization, the Board expects to offer an interesting set of activities for the membership and broader Slovak American community. There remain a great number and variety of opportunities to engage and celebrate Slovak culture.

The SASW Board of Directors thanks the membership for its support in 2007, and asks for your continued support in 2008.

SASW Executive Committee

Committee Chairs

Ken Bombara, *President*
Anne Gornal McKeown, *Vice-President*
Linda Trout, *Secretary*
Thomas Marton, *Treasurer*

Helen Fedor, *Membership*
Viera Jamrich, *Hospitality*
Rebecca Labuda-Hindrichs, *Programs*