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**SLOVAK-AMERICAN SOCIETY
OF WASHINGTON**

NEWSLETTER

March 2007

**The SASW Speakers' Series presents a talk and book
discussion by**

Mr. Jim Lukach

Author of

Lost Inside the Happy Noise

Saturday, March 17, 2007, 2:00pm

at the Slovak Embassy (admission free)

SASW is pleased to present a talk that celebrates the historic events of 1989 that brought freedom to Czechoslovakia, and which subsequently brought many Americans in contact with Slovakia and other Central European countries. Mr. Lukach will discuss his experiences and his recent book. We also hope that some of those who participated in the unique events of the post-1989 era will come and share their own experiences.

Book Description

Pushed into action by Jane Pauley's voice and a television image of a pack of cigarettes being handed through a hole in the Berlin Wall, author Jim Lukach set off for Eastern Europe. *Lost Inside the Happy Noise* is a collection of essays that capture the heady days of post-revolution in a small city in western Slovakia, days measured out in half-liter beer glasses and startling self-discovery. Holding a mirror to the past--wild boar hunting safaris, a Slovak television appearance, autograph sessions after teaching a successful English class--Lukach reflects on how something as simple as dancing the polka can reach far into the future and questions whether life could ever feel so full again.

In *Lost Inside the Happy Noise*, Lukach evokes with the realism of a dream the atmosphere of a time that passed too quickly by, days outside the norm spent tramping through Slovakia or watching his train leave seven times without boarding. But most of all, it is about the small moments teaching English and discoveries made in the most surprising places.

President's column

We are finally digging out from the winter and are starting 2007 with what we hope you will find to be an interesting event with author Jim Lukach, which you just read about on the front page. The Board is continuing to plan the years' agenda, which we expect will include two or more additional speakers, the picnic and the Sv. Mikulas party in December. This involves a fair amount of work and we are always grateful for the help of members in pitching in to help put on these events. Your continued support is necessary and it can occur on a number of levels.

First, if you have not renewed your **SASW membership for 2007**, please do so ASAP. Please refer to your mailing label and if it says "paid for 2007" (or later), you are OK—otherwise please forward your 2007 dues with the membership form to Helen Fedor.

Secondly, since spring is here it is time to focus on our **VSM/City University scholarships**, which are awarded in May. We are still a few hundred dollars short of our annual goal of two \$500 scholarships---so please consider a donation. We have been able to maintain this level of support for many years now, and it is much appreciated by the scholarship recipients and the City U. administration. Slovakia has made great strides in recent years, and the key to maintaining this momentum is its young people. Supporting the kind of career-oriented education Slovak students receive at VSM/City U. prepares them (and Slovakia) to compete in the global economy. Please consider including a donation with the membership form in the newsletter or, forward a check to SASW Treasurer, Tom Marton, 4004 Isbell St., Silver Spring, MD xxxxx.

Finally, we continue to encourage you to support the Society's activities with your active participation. The fact that you are reading this newsletter is an indication that you have some interest in Slovakia, either due to your heritage, or to some cultural or current interest. SASW's mission is to support that interest, and your active participation in the events we sponsor helps to maintain a vibrant Slovak-American community in the Washington-area. But your ideas and feedback also matter. Those of us responsible for running the Society need to know what your interest is, and what you think, because that is how we can keep the organization relevant. We value the time that you 're able to devote to SASW matters, given all the competing demands you face day to day. Your ideas and suggestions help us foster those interests and keep the Society vibrant. Best wishes in 2007!

Ken Bombara

Slovak Language Opportunities

The Board is continuing efforts to provide opportunities for Slovak language in the Washington-area. Since we sponsored classes several years ago, it has been a challenge to put a viable arrangement together. There are some obvious reasons that this is the case. Our members are spread over a wide geographic area, and not only is it a challenge to find the time and energy to attend classes, but also, trying to get around this congested area doesn't help. So, even if we get sufficient response to form a class, finding the right location is another challenge. But we continue to try. One effort we have underway is to setting up and publicizing a "Meet-up" group, arranged via the Internet, for persons interested in either conversational or more instructional gatherings. This effort is being organized by one of our newer members, Ludmila Sujanova. You can email her at ludisuska@yahoo.com. Also, if you are interested in formal classes, please let her know, because we have an individual who is willing to teach a class once we can put one together.

In the meantime, other options include the formal classes in Baltimore that are sponsored by the Czech and Slovak Heritage Society of Maryland, which we have listed in previous newsletters. Another possible option that we have recently learned about is a Slovak language course on the internet that is being developed by Comenius University in Bratislava. You can access it at www.e-slovak.sk. Our understanding is that access is free for now, as it is being developed, but there may be a fee in the future. Please let us know of any experiences you have with either the Baltimore courses or the Internet course,

Efforts Underway to Push Visa Waiver Expansion

As many of you may know, Slovaks who wish to travel to the U.S. must apply for a visa, which can be a costly and time consuming process, and some may be denied entry. While the visa requirement applies to most individuals outside the U.S., currently, 27 countries are part of the Visa Waiver Program (VWP) which allows their citizens to obtain visas, good for up to 90 days, for purposes of tourism or business. Most Western European countries, Canada, Japan and several others are eligible. For some time, there has been a desire on the part of many countries, particularly from the former Soviet-block, to become a part of the VWP. Post 9-11 and immigration concerns have been largely responsible for the reluctance of the Congress to expand the program. However, on a recent visit to Europe, President Bush called upon Congress to extend the VWP. As a result, there has begun to be some movement in Congress to consider expansion.

Recently, Sen. George Voinovich of Ohio, along with 4 co-sponsors including Sen. Mikulski of Maryland, introduced a bill(S.653) to expand the VWP to up to thirteen countries, including Slovakia. The bill, called “The Secure Travel and Counterterrorism Partnership Act of 2007”, would provide the Secretary of Homeland Security, in consultation with the State Department, the necessary authority, flexibility, and discretion to expand the existing VWP, as long as certain security and immigration criteria are met. The executive branch would certify that the criteria are met by each country applying for the waiver. The co-sponsors cite several benefits that expanding the program would bring to the U.S., including economic benefits, accelerating cooperation on information sharing and counterterrorism, and improving security and immigration procedures.

Slovakia very strongly supports expansion of the VWP and a big push is currently underway to persuade Congress to pass the expansion. The Friends of Slovakia, in cooperation with other groups, will sponsor a forum on the visa waiver program on Capitol Hill in March, that will be open to the public. SASW will try and provide details by email as they become available. If you don't have email. Drop us a note and we will try and get you details. Some Slovak-American organizations are encouraging their members to call, write or email their Congressmen and Senators to urge their support for the Voinovich legislation. We encourage SASW members to do so as well.

SASW News and Notes

Books for Sale—Due to the generosity of publisher Lou Bolchazy of the Slovak American Cultural Foundation, SASW received a generous donation of books dealing with Slovak topics. We were able to sell many of these books at the Sv. Mikulas party, which helped us turn a profit on that event. We still have a number of books available at a discount price, and we would like to sell them to support SASW activities. If you are interested in what we have available drop an email to Helen Fedor at helenfedor@yahoo.com and she can forward you a list. If you don't have email, call her at 703-437-0228.

Czech movies in DC—The Czech Embassy is sponsoring a movie series, “Lions of Czech Film.” All the movies are being shown at the Avalon Theater, 5612 Connecticut Ave., N.W., WDC 20015. The movies will be shown on Wednesdays at 8pm on the dates indicated. The schedule is as follows: Wed., March 14, “The Year of the Devil (Rok dabra); April 11, “Brats”; May 9, “One hand Can't Clap”; June 13, Return of the Idiot. For further information go to the Czech Embassy website www.mzv.cz/washington

Pittsburgh Document Finds its Way Home

By [Andrew Conte](#) (reprinted with permission from the 2/24 edition of the Pittsburgh Tribune-Review)

So it wasn't signed at Independence Hall, and Thomas Jefferson didn't write it.

But for Czechs and Slovaks, the Pittsburgh Agreement -- signed in 1918 at the former Loyal Order of Moose Building, Downtown -- means as much as the U.S. Declaration of Independence.

And it's coming home. The Slovak League of America plans to donate its original copy to the Senator John Heinz Pittsburgh Regional History Center in September.

"It was a big deal for both nationalities," said John Holy, the league's honorary national secretary. "I would compare it to the Declaration of Independence because that's where the independence was declared formally."

The one-page document cleared the way for Czechs and Slovaks to form their own democratic country, free from the Austro-Hungarian Empire, at the end of World War I. The uneasy alliance of the groups ended in 1993. But the agreement has value for both nationalities, said Dave Muhlena, director of the National Czech & Slovak Museum & Library in Cedar Rapids, Iowa. "It involves a certain measure of politics, religion and patriotism," he said. "You had the American democratic ideals involved."

An estimated 20,000 people turned out for a Downtown march and rally that preceded the May 31, 1918, signing. At the time, the United States and its allies were at war with Austria-Hungary, Germany and Turkey. Austria controlled the Czechs, while the Hungarians had hold of Slovakia. If the 29 signers had attempted to make their case at home, they would have been shot as traitors, said Joe Bielecki, president of the Czechoslovak Nationality Room at the University of Pittsburgh. Too weak to form their own independent countries, the Czechs and Slovaks pooled their resources. Pittsburgh, with a large Slovak population, served as a central meeting place. Today, Allegheny County's 1.2 million residents include 53,314 Slovaks and 7,523 Czechs, according to the U.S. Census Bureau. "(The agreement) was developed through a network of both Czechs and Slovaks," said Carol Hochman, honorary consul of the Czech Republic for Western Pennsylvania and Eastern Ohio. "People of some stature at the time came together here in Pittsburgh."

The Heinz History Center plans to make a "big deal" out of the document's arrival, said CEO Andy Masich. The agreement likely will go into the museum's permanent archives or special collections gallery. "That was a world-changing kind of event that Pittsburgh and Pittsburghers played a seminal role in," said Masich, whose father's family emigrated from Eastern Slovakia. "They wanted to change their old world from their new headquarters in the new world."

For about the past decade, the document has been stored in a safe at the Slovak League's offices in Passaic, N.J. Before that, the agreement spent some time in Cleveland, and it traveled to the former Czechoslovakia on the document's 20th anniversary in 1938. Members of the Slovak League, a civic group that turns 100 this year, nearly voted to send the agreement to Slovakia permanently. But by a slim margin, they decided it belongs in Pittsburgh, Holy said. "That's where it was signed, first of all," he said. "Secondly, we feel that it should be preserved professionally. It belongs in a museum now."

SLOVAK-AMERICAN SOCIETY OF WASHINGTON
MEMBERSHIP RENEWAL/APPLICATION/DONATION FORM

New membership or renewal runs thru the end of 2007

____ Individual membership (\$15/year) ____ Family membership (\$20/year)

Optional Tax-deductible donation: City U. fund ____; SASW general fund ____

Total amount enclosed \$ ____

Mail your check made out to the Slovak American Society of Washington, and this form to: Helen Fedor, 11914 Winstead Lane, Reston, VA 20194-1518

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Yes! Please contact me to help out with Society events
Please do NOT include my phone number in the Membership Directory (03/07)

The **Slovak-American Society of Washington** is a tax-exempt 501(c)(3) not-for-profit organization. Contributions and dues are tax-deductible.

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Directions to the Embassy of Slovakia

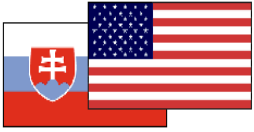
3523 International Court NW, Washington DC

From the Beltway north of DC: Take Wisconsin Ave. south to Van Ness St. NW. Turn left onto Van Ness and proceed east, crossing the intersections of Van Ness with 38th St., 37th St. and Reno Road. Just east of Reno Road, turn left (north) onto International Court. If you reach Connecticut Ave., you have gone too far on Van Ness. The Slovak Embassy is on the east side of the cul-de-sac at the north end of International Court, directly across from the Austrian Embassy.

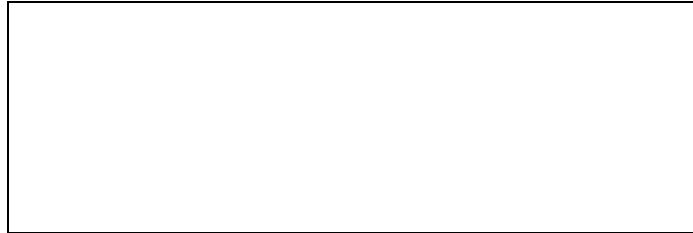
From downtown DC: Take Connecticut Ave. north to Van Ness St, NW. Turn left onto Van Ness, proceed west about 500 yards, and turn right onto International Court (see above, if you reach Reno Road you have gone too far).

Parking: Garage parking is available at the Van Ness Center on Connecticut Ave. Limited on-street parking is available on Van Ness and on 36th St.. Some street parking may be available on International Court.

Metro: The Van Ness-UDC Metro stop on the Red Line is just north of the intersection of Van Ness and Connecticut.



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