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SLOVAK-AMERICAN SOCIETY OF WASHINGTON

NEWSLETTER

October 2007

Long-time SASW Member Vincent Obsitnik Nominated as Ambassador to Slovakia

The SASW was pleased to learn recently that President George W. Bush announced his intention to nominate Vincent Obsitnik, of Virginia, to be Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary of the United States of America to the Slovak Republic. Mr. Obsitnik had his confirmation hearing before the Senate on October 17, and is awaiting confirmation. The current Ambassador, Rodolphe M. Vallee, who has been in the post since August 2005, will continue to lead the US Embassy in Bratislava until the US Senate confirms Mr. Obsitnik's nomination.

Vince is well known to many members of SASW as he was a long-time member prior to a recent move from the Washington area. Some will recall that he addressed the SASW Annual Meeting in November 2004. At that time, he spoke in his capacity as a Member of the U.S. Commission for the Preservation of America's Heritage Abroad—a Presidentially-appointed position. His talk dealt with his work at the Commission, which included efforts to preserve a number of old wooden churches in Slovakia. Vince's distinguished career included serving as Vice President of International Development at Litton/PRC Corporation. Prior to this, he served as President of the System Development Division at Unisys/Loral Corporation. Earlier in his career, he served as Director of Manufacturing for Latin America at the IBM Corporation. Vince received his bachelor's degree from the U.S. Naval Academy and his master's degree from The American University. Locally, he also served as a Deacon at Epiphany of Our Lord Byzantine Catholic Church in Annandale, Virginia.

As a person of Slovak heritage, who speaks Slovak, and with a distinguished business background, Vince is an excellent choice to serve as Ambassador to Slovakia. We wish him success in his new endeavor!

Changes to the Visa Waiver Program Become Law

In a previous newsletter, we reported on efforts to revise the U.S. Government's Visa Waiver Program (VWP). The VWP allows citizens of eligible countries to visit the U.S. without having to obtain a visa. However, many countries, including most Central European countries, such as Slovakia, the Czech Republic and Poland, do not qualify for the program. Such countries have been pushing very hard to be included in the program, thus allowing their citizens' access to the U.S. without going through a cumbersome process of visa application. There is some positive news to report as Congress recently passed and President Bush has signed the "Implementing Recommendations of the 9/11 Commission Act of 2007" which includes some revisions to the VWP.

A major provision of the new law revises the program's criteria relating to the "visa refusal rate." Slovakia was not included in the original VWP because its visa refusal rate considerably exceeded the 3% cutoff limit. The new law applies a 10% cutoff and, while Slovakia cannot currently meet this criterion, it is within a couple of percentage

points of qualifying. The new law also includes another provision that could give Slovakia the opportunity to qualify under a “maximum overstay” provision to be determined by DHS (Homeland Security) and DOS (State) once DHS establishes an airport exit verification system to keep track of visitor departures. So, while the visa situation is not completely resolved, the future looks better for Slovakia’s eligibility for the VWP.

President’s column

I hope you all had a good summer and are enjoying the beautiful fall weather! For SASW, fall is a busy time as we prepare to wrap up the years activities. Let me briefly run through a number of items that I want to tell you about.

First is our big event of the year, the **Svaty Mikulas Party to be held on Sun. Dec. 2**. Most of what you need to know is on the flyer on the opposite page. A small team headed by Viera Jamrich is planning the event and will soon be contacting those who have volunteered to help. We can always use additional help with specific tasks, so please contact either Anne Mckeown or Helen Fedor as indicated on the flyer and offer your assistance. This will help to make the event go more smoothly. In any case, please consider attending and supporting the event. SASW’s goal is to keep the local Slovak American community vibrant, and we can’t continue do so without YOU!

The second item that is standard on the fall calendar is the **SASW Annual Meeting**. The details are given below.

Slovak American Society of Washington --- Annual General Membership Meeting

Saturday, November 17, 2007

1:30 p.m.

Thomas Jefferson Library

7415 Arlington Blvd. (Route 50)

Falls Church, Virginia

The TJ Library is located on the south side of Rt. 50, just inside the beltway. The library phone is 703-573-1060.

The SASW by-laws require that the Board hold an Annual Meeting for the membership. At the meeting, the Board typically presents an annual report on the Society’s activities, a new Board is elected (or re-elected as the case may be), and the membership has an opportunity to bring up any issues or ask the Board any questions. In the past, we have scheduled a speaker. This year will be a little different, as the Board has been considering some by-law changes and these must be voted on (and hopefully approved) at the meeting. As required by the existing by-laws, the proposal is published in this newsletter with a brief explanation of the changes and the procedure used to approve them. While by-laws and other technical organizational matters don’t exactly excite most people, I hope you will at least give them a review. More importantly though, we hope you will come to the meeting, as it will provide an opportunity to interact with the Board and other members. This year, we are foregoing a scheduled speaker in order to shorten the length of the formal meeting and to increase the time for informal interaction. Small refreshments will be available, so we hope you can take even a few minutes to drop by the meeting, and share your thoughts and interests. Also, I should add that if you would like to discuss serving on the SASW Board, please call Steve Matula (703-671-3013) to discuss your interest.

Finally, let me remind you that the end of year means it is time to **RENEW YOUR SASW MEMBERSHIP** for 2008 (unless you have already done so). You can do so by using the form at the end of this newsletter. Also, don’t forget that the end of the year is the best time to **SUPPORT OUR VSM/CITY UNIVERSITY SCHOLARSHIPS**. Donations are tax-deductible. You can also use the membership form to do this. These scholarships really make a difference to deserving Slovak students. Well, that’s it--hope to see you at the Annual Meeting and the Mikulas Party!

Ken Bombara



Svätý Mikuláš Party

Join us for a celebration of Slovak traditions, music, and food, featuring a buffet dinner of traditional Slovak food and the music of Pajtaši

Sunday, December 2, 2007, 2:00-5:00pm

The Embassy of the Slovak Republic
3523 International Court, N.W.
Washington D.C., 20008

RESERVATIONS REQUIRED: call Anne McKeown (703-533-0088) or email Helen Fedor <helenfedor@hotmail.com>, **by November 30.**

\$20 per person for SASW members, \$25 for nonmembers. children under age 10 free (To expedite entry, please have your check already made out, payable to SASW.)

We also request a food donation from members:

Last names beginning A through G, bring a dessert (homemade, please)
Last names beginning H through Z, bring a salad (no pasta salads, please)

Those bringing small children should bring one small gift per child (wrapped and clearly labeled with the child's name) to receive from Sv. Mikuláš.

* * *

Directions to the Embassy of Slovakia 3523 International Court NW, Washington D.C.:

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 Rd., 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: Parking should be available on International Ct. Limited on-street parking is also available on Van Ness and on 36th St..

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

SASW News and Notes

Kirschbaum Speaks at Embassy---The SASW Speakers' Series continued at the Slovak Embassy on October 6 with a talk by Prof. Stanislav J. Kirschbaum, who spoke on the topic, "*The Scope and Meaning of Contemporary Slovak Politics.*" Prof. Kirschbaum is a highly respected academic specializing in Slovak history and politics, and it was an honor for SASW to be able to bring him to Washington. The talk was well received and precipitated lively Q&A and discussion. Fortunately, Dr. Kirschbaum wrote a paper for the talk based on his recent research and this paper is available by sending an email to Helen Fedor at helenfedor@hotmail.com or, if you don't have email, drop her a note at the address found on the membership renewal form on the last page of the newsletter. Also, special thanks to Helen for her outstanding work in organizing the arrangements for Prof. Kirschbaum's talk.

History of Slovaks in America published (at last!)—Back in 2004, the SASW Speakers' was privileged to have Prof. Gregory Ference, of Salisbury University speak to the Society about Konstantin Culen's *Dejiny Slovakov v Amerike* and its forthcoming English translation. After various delays, the translation is now available from the Czechoslovak Genealogical Society International (go to www.cgsi.org). The *History of Slovaks in America* is a 411 page hard-bound English translation of the original Slovak language two-volume work published in 1942. Most of the original photos have been reproduced along with photos of the author and members of Matica Slovenska. In the book the original author, writer and historian Konstantin Culen (1904-1964), paints a vivid portrait of early Slovak life in the U.S., as Slovak-Americans fought to achieve unity and justice for the Slovak nation, both in America and in their oppressed homeland. Culen enables us to hear the "voice" of the Slovak immigrant generation, in an absorbing and often dramatic chronicle of the Slovak-American experience.

2008 Genealogy Symposium in Seattle -- The Czechoslovak Genealogy Society International, of St. Paul MN, has announce that they will hold their 2008 Genealogical and Cultural Symposium on Friday and Saturday, April 11-12, 2008, in Seattle, WA., at the DoubleTree Guest Suites Airport Southcenter. Registration for the event is open to the public. In addition to talks and presentations, the meeting will include tours of local sites and a dinner on Friday night. For additional information contact Paul Makousky or visit www.cgsi.org .

Pittsburgh Agreement Gets Permanent Home – On September 9, 2007 a ceremony was held in Pittsburgh PA to donate the historic Pittsburgh Agreement to the Senator John Heinz Regional History Center where it will be on permanent display. The Pittsburgh Agreement, signed on May 31, 1918, was a pact between Slovaks and Czechs to develop a federal state guaranteeing Slovaks a high degree of autonomy as part of an agreement to form the independent Czecho-Slovak state. An original of the Agreement has been in the possession of the Slovak League of America, which decided to retain the document in the U.S. and donate it to the Heinz Center. At the ceremony in Pittsburgh, which included many key Slovak American organizations and officials, the SASW was represented by President Ken Bombara, and Steve Matula, and SASW was cited from the podium as one of the participating organizations.

SASW Losses ---It always is sad to hear of the passing of SASW members or members of their families. Unfortunately we learned of several losses over the summer. SASW extends condolences to the families of the following:

Helen Stipkala -- passed away on June 28 at age 102 (mother of Joseph Stipkala of Cleveland, OH)

Andrea Carlin Sallberg – passed away on August 17 at age 44 (daughter of Millie-Schoepe Evans)

Florence Timko –passed away on September 3 in Batavia NY.

Other Losses – Also from time to time we learn of other notable Slovaks and Slovak Americans who have passed away. Often this might be from obits in the Washington Post. Recently we learned of two:

Hana Ponicka – Anti-Communist – She was a Slovak writer and former anti-communist dissident who helped found the Christian Democratic Movement political party. She died Aug. 21 in Bratislava at age 85. In 1977, Ms. Ponicka signed the Charter 77 human rights manifesto. She was arrested by communist authorities in August 1989 for commemorating the 21st anniversary of Czechoslovakia's 1968 occupation by Warsaw Pact armies and released three months later. She died on the 39th anniversary of the invasion.

Dr. Michael Sumichrast –World Renowned Housing Economist – He was an internationally known housing economist who was Chief Economist of the National Association of Home Builders in Washington for more than 20 years. He passed away on September 4 at the age of 86. He lived in Potomac MD with his wife Eva. Sumichrast wrote a number of books and was widely quoted in the media. He was known for his credibility and honesty in talking about economic and housing industry activity. He was born in Trencin, Czechoslovakia on March 31, 1921. When the Nazi invaded in 1939, he participated in the underground resistance and eventually escaped to Australia and then the U.S. He eventually earned a doctorate from Ohio State and made his way to Washington, and a distinguished career. His obit is in the September 5th Washington post and includes a very interesting story of his escape from Czechoslovakia in 1948. View it at www.washingtonpost.com and search on “sumichrast.”

Holiday Book Sale – The Slovak American Cultural Foundation is having a Holiday sale of Slovak-themed books, with discounts up to 25%. Visit www.slovakculture.org or call 847-526-4396 x17 or x2 .

Slovakia Struggles to Find, Keep Workers – A number of stories have appeared in the international media regarding the difficulty that Slovakia has been having recently in obtaining skilled workers. While Slovakia has been a remarkable success in attracting foreign investment, particularly in the auto sector, its membership in the E.U. has made it easier for skilled workers to go to other countries, where wages and opportunities are better than in Slovakia. There are efforts underway to attract workers from other neighboring countries, such as the Ukraine and Bulgaria. An interesting story can be found at <http://news.bbc.co.uk/go/em/ft/-/1/hi/world/europe/7058803.stm>

Don't Forget to:

- **Attend the 2007 SASW Annual Meeting**
- **Reserve your place at the Svaty Mikulas Party, Dec. 2**
- **Renew Your SASW Membership for 2008**

Thanks for your Support in 2007!

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

Board of Directors:

Ken Bombara, President;
Anne McKeown, Vice-President;
Tom Marton, Treasurer;
Linda Jo Trout, Secretary.
Helen Fedor,
Viera Jamrich
Rebecca Labuda-Hindrichs

Correspondence should be addressed to:

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Centreville, VA 20120-1727
Phone 703-851-6035
bombarak@verizon.net

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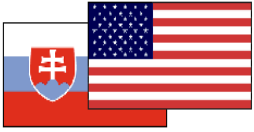
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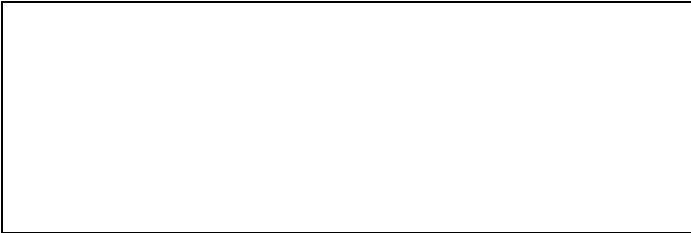
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**SLOVAK-AMERICAN SOCIETY OF WASHINGTON
 MEMBERSHIP RENEWAL/APPLICATION/DONATION FORM**

New membership or renewal runs thru the end of **2008**

___ 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**

NAME(s) _____

ADDRESS _____
 CITY/STATE _____ ZIP+4 _____

TELEPHONE Home: () _____ - _____ Work: () _____ - _____

E-MAIL _____

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