

SLOVAK AMERICAN SOCIETY OF WASHINGTON, DC

Annual General Membership Meeting November 1, 2008 Embassy of Slovakia, Washington, DC

Report to the Membership

The year 2008 has been a successful one for the Society as it continues to pursue its main purpose of fostering awareness and appreciation of Slovak culture and current affairs. The Society sponsored a number of activities locally, supported scholarships at VSM/City University in Slovakia, and supported other causes nationally. The Society's membership was maintained at a stable level, as was its financial status, thanks to the volunteer efforts of the Board and active members. The Society has been important in helping to foster and maintain a vibrant Slovak American community in the Washington DC area. Yet, the Board continues to face the challenges of maintaining this relatively small, low-budget organization while encouraging greater participation from the membership. This report summarizes the reports of the officers and the committees, and discusses year 2008 activities.

Membership

In 2008 to date, the Society has maintained a level of 113 memberships (54 individual and 59 family) for a total of 172 members. This level is a decrease from the 2004-2007 figures, but the earlier numbers may reflect some non- or late renewing members that had been kept on the rolls. After a careful review, the 2008 figure represents only members whose dues are current or paid-in-advance. SASW memberships are concentrated in Virginia (55%), with Maryland representing 22% and DC 10%. There are also 15 memberships (13%) in states outside the Washington area: AZ, CO, DE, IL, IN, KY, NV, OH, PA, and WV. Three-quarters of members have email.

SASW Membership 2004-2008

	<u>2004</u>	<u>2005</u>	<u>2006</u>	<u>2007</u>	<u>2008</u>
# of Memberships	126	123	125	127	113
Total Members (Indiv.=1; family=2)	189	188	192	193	172

Financial Status

The Society continues to maintain a sound financial status. As of the end of September 2008, the Treasurer's Report shows the Society with total assets of \$12,059.81. The Society maintains two accounts: a business checking account with Bank of America (\$8,763.64) and a CD account with Lafayette Federal Credit Union (\$3,296.17).

Programs and Activities

In 2008, the Society continued to offer its program of activities focused around the Speakers' Series and the Svätý Mikuláš Party. SASW also continues to benefit from a very cooperative relationship with the Slovak Embassy, which provides the venue for most of our events. Slovak Ambassador Rastislav Káčer, and Culture Attache Stella Kukučková, were always very supportive of SASW and we were sorry to see them finish their assignments and depart Washington. We hope and expect to continue our cooperative relationship with the Embassy and the incoming Ambassador and staff. The Society's major activities for 2008 are summarized below:

SASW Speakers Series

We completed our sixth 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 presented a particularly interesting and varied program. The speakers and topics were as follows:

- On April 12, Ms. Margarete Hurn, a young author from California, gave a talk based on her recent book *The Foreigner's Guide to Living in Slovakia*. Her book is a great resource for information about living in contemporary Slovakia. The attendees enjoyed her personal story: not of Slovak origin or background, she was introduced to Slovak culture through a dance troupe, became enamored with the culture, and went on to live in Slovakia for several years, which inspired her to write her book.
- On September 20, Professor Martin Votruba, Director of the Slovak Studies Program, University of Pittsburgh, gave a talk on *Crossing the Continents and the Atlantic: An Early Slovak Account*. The talk focused on the handwritten account of an early Slovak immigrant's actual journey from Europe to Wisconsin. Prof. Votruba was the opening speaker for the current Speakers' Series in 2003 and we were happy to have him return for another excellent, and well-received talk.
- On October 9, author Michael Genelin, spoke about his new novel *Siren of the Waters*, which is a crime mystery novel featuring the character Jana Matinová, a commander in the Slovak police force. Mr. Genelin spoke about his interesting career background, including working in Slovakia, and how it inspired his work.
- On November 1, Professor T. Mills Kelly, of George Mason University spoke on the topic, *1989 in Slovakia: Why Communism in Czechoslovakia Failed So Spectacularly*. With the 20th anniversary of the historical events of 1989 approaching, it helps to look back to those exciting days and see what we have learned from them.

Social/Cultural Activities

During the past year, we continued SASW's traditional premier event--the Svätý Mikuláš Party. The Board decided not to hold an annual membership picnic this year, but instead focused on exploring other events. One idea we explored was a bus trip to the New Jersey Slovak festival, but not enough interest was generated to justify the cost. However, with more lead time, it may be possible to pursue some type of bus travel-related event in the future.

- The SASW Svätý Mikuláš Party was held on Sunday, December 2, 2007, 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 (a new) Svätý Mikuláš. The event also helped the Society raise some funds for VSM/City University scholarships. The party was well attended, with more children attending than in past years.
- On June 14, SASW, together with the Carpatho-Rusyn Society, National Capital Chapter, co-sponsored a showing of the film "Ine Svety" (Other Worlds) at the Slovak Embassy. This documentary, set in the Šariš region, portrays the lives of Šariš residents who represent different ethnic groups in the region: Slovaks, Rusyn, Roma, and Jewish. The film was a fascinating and realistic look at contemporary Slovakia. This was the second event we have co-hosted with the C-R Society; both have been successful. Such events help SASW reach out to a broader community.

Support and Other Activities

SASW also supports 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 – SASW was able to support three \$500 scholarships this past year. While donations fell off this year, Millie Schoepe-Evans and her husband Jim donated the funds for two scholarships in memory of Millie's daughter, Andrea. The support SASW provides to VSM/City U. is much appreciated by Former Ambassador and current VSM/City U. Rector, Branislav Lichardus, and of course, the students themselves. The scholarships are one way for SASW to continue to support the advancement of Slovakia and her people. With economic conditions declining, it will likely be even more difficult to raise funds this year, so we will be looking for individuals with vision and a generous spirit to provide support for this worthy purpose.
- The Board approved a \$250 donation to help rebuild the National Czech & Slovak Museum & Library, in Cedar Rapids, Iowa, that was tragically devastated by flooding in June.
- MeetUp Group -- SASW continued to provide funds to sponsor a MeetUp group, which is a way for younger and newer Slovak émigrés or those with an interest in Slovakia to "meet up" via the Internet. The organizer, Ľudmila Šujanová informs us that over 50 individuals have signed up and a number of them meet in person from time to time.
- Farewells: Ambassador Rastislav Káčer finished a five-year term in Washington, and the SASW Board, on behalf of the membership, presented him with a gift at a farewell reception in June. Also, Cultural Attache, Stella Kukučková, with whom we worked very closely on most of our events, finished her four-year term at the end of August. The SASW Board treated Stella to dinner and presented her with a gift on behalf of the Society.
- Web site: The Board was very gratified to announce that SASW has been able to launch a newly developed Web site, dcslovaks.org. A young Slovak professional, Jan Markuš, designed and developed the site with input from the Board. We expect that the Web site will be a means of more timely and effective communication with members and the "outside world." Development activities will continue in 2009 and comments and suggestions are welcome.

- Ambassador Obsitnik: The Board was extremely proud to learn of the appointment of former SASW member Vincent Obsitnik as ambassador to Slovakia. President Ken Bombara was honored to attend the swearing-in ceremony at the State Department.
- President Gašparovič: A number of SASW members attended a reception for Slovak President Ivan Gašparovič, who was in Washington in early October to meet with President Bush. At the meeting, President Bush informed the Slovak president of his intention to add Slovakia to the Visa Waiver Program. This was a major success for Slovak-US relations and is a goal that SASW has long supported.
- Board Transitions and New Board Structure for 2009: During the year, the Board welcomed Dr. Jerry Rich as an at-large member. In August, Ken Bombara stepped down as president after six-plus years, and Kathryn Tatko was named interim president for the remainder of the term. In late 2007, the SASW approved revised by-laws that will change the way that the Board is elected and officers are chosen. Up to nine members may serve on the Board and all will be elected on an at-large basis. Then, the elected Board will meet and choose the Society's officers from its ranks. When the new structure is fully implemented all Board members will serve three-year terms.

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 newsletter, we also provide information and assistance to those who contact us throughout the year. We also maintain contacts with other Slovak-American organizations, such as Friends of Slovakia, the Czech & Slovak Heritage Society of Maryland, Slovak fraternal, and others.

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During 2008, the Board met the challenges of maintaining a small volunteer organization and offered an interesting and varied program of activities for the Washington-area Slovak-American community. The future success of the Society will depend on the active involvement and support of its membership. We enrich our own lives when we join others in engaging and celebrating Slovak culture.

The SASW Board of Directors thanks the membership for its support in 2008, and asks for your active and continued support in 2009.

SASW Executive Committee

Kathryn Tatko, *Interim President* (Aug. 2008-present)

Anne Gornal McKeown, *Vice-President*

Linda Trout, *Secretary*

Thomas Marton, *Treasurer*

At-Large Members

Ken Bombara (President, Nov. 2007-Aug. 2008)

Helen Fedor

Dr. Jerry Rich