



SLOVAK AMERICAN SOCIETY OF WASHINGTON, DC

NEWSLETTER

November 2019

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SASW Announces the Creation of the Matula Outstanding Achievement Award

In September, the SASW Board approved a new award in honor of our late member, Stephen Matula. This recognition will go to a member who has made outstanding contributions to the Society in multiple ways. The criteria could include board membership, committee assignments, leadership in SASW activities, and support of the SASW scholarship program, and contributions to the Washington-area Slovak American community, among others. Under extraordinary circumstances, the award can be presented to a non-member. The initial award will be made on December 8 at the Svätý Mikuláš party at the Slovak Embassy. Marie Parker, Steve's lifetime partner, will receive a posthumous award to honor the long-time Slovak activist and leader who passed away in 2017, at the age of 97.

Steve Matula was born in Middletown, PA, to Slovak parents who were active members of the First Catholic Slovak Union (Jednota). He would later become the president of local Jednota branch #856 for multiple years, following in his father's footsteps. After high school, he attended Penn State University until he enlisted in the Army Air Corps shortly before World War II. He became an aviation instructor in Texas and Louisiana. Steve was one of the initial instructors in the use of instrument flying. After the war, he graduated from George Washington University and became a colonel in the U.S. Air Force. Steve served in the Korean War and later as an executive at the Federal Aviation Authority. He later served as a Director and Treasurer at the Aviation Research Corporation which investigated plane crashes.

Steve was very active in all Slovak activities in the DC area. He was a founding member of SASW. He also served as Jednota branch president for 25 years and was on several by-laws committees at Jednota conventions. This experience helped him contribute, in conjunction with Kathryn Tatko, to the revision of our Society's current by-laws. In the year ahead, SASW plans to provide you more insights and achievements about this true officer and gentleman.

Annual Meeting Highlights

On October 19, 2019, SASW held its Annual Membership Meeting at the Slovak Embassy. SASW President Brian Belensky delivered the annual report to the membership, highlighting the status of the Society and its activities during 2019.

SASW's financial status is stable, with just over 100 total memberships (individual and family). The Society was able to donate five partial scholarships (totaling \$3,250) for students at VSM/City University in Slovakia, thanks to the generosity of our members. The SASW Speakers' Series completed its 17th year, with talks by Prof. Susan Mikula of Benedictine University, speaking on the events of 1939 in Slovakia; Dr. Luke Ryder of the U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum speaking about the Slovak National Uprising of 1944; and genealogist Paul Valasek giving a talk on "Immigrant Steamships: 1890-1950." President Belensky also reviewed the social/cultural activities of SASW, including the traditional activities of the Svätý Mikuláš Party and the Annual Picnic, as well as the new "Souper Bowl" event. He also discussed initiatives to increase membership and to improve outreach and communications, and announced the establishment of the new award for outstanding achievement on behalf of SASW, and named for the late Steve Matula (see article). He thanked member Ray Luca for proposing the idea for the award.

Elections were held for three Board members, and incumbents Helen Fedor and John Husovsky were re-elected to three-year terms. Tom Marton was also elected and returns to the Board. Tom was SASW's Treasurer for many years, and

will now fill the Board slot vacated by Marcel Lorincz. We welcome Tom back to the Board and look forward to seeing Marcel at events, while he tends to his growing family!

SASW News and Notes

30th Anniversary of the Velvet Revolution – This month marks the 30th anniversary of the events that brought freedom from communist domination to several central and eastern Europe nations. There are numerous events throughout the DC area marking the anniversary. October 22 saw the opening of a panel exhibit at the GWU Elliott School of International Affairs commemorating the Velvet Revolution, with a focus on Slovakia's role. Slovak officials, including Foreign Minister Miroslav Lajčák and Ambassador Ivan Korčok, provided remarks, as did State Department Assistant Secretary Phillip Reeker and others. On November 12, a forum will be held at Georgetown University – *Velvet Revolution@30: A Legacy to Uphold*. Secretary Madeline Albright will give the keynote speech. On November 13 the Annual Czech and Slovak Freedom Lecture will be held at the Woodrow Wilson Center for International Scholars, in Washington, featuring former Czech dissident Šimon Pánek and Katarína Cséfalvayová, Chairwoman of the Foreign Relations Committee of the Slovak Parliament. <https://www.wilsoncenter.org/event/2019-czech-and-slovak-freedom-lecture-30-years-czech-and-slovak-freedom> .

New Director of Slovak Studies Program Appointed – The University of Pittsburgh recently appointed a new director of its Slovak Studies Program, Dr. Marcela Micháľková. The Slovak Studies Program, is part of the Department of Slavic Languages and Literatures, and is the only permanent program of Slovak Studies in the U.S. Dr. Micháľková succeeds Dr. Martin Votruba, who passed away unexpectedly in late 2018.

Dr. Micháľková has a PhD in Slavic Languages and Cultures from Ohio State University. She taught Czech, Slovak, and Russian languages and cultures at Ohio State, the University of Pittsburgh, and Indiana University. At Ohio State, she coordinated the Czech program, developing collaborative programming between the OSU Foreign Language Center and the NHL Columbus Blue Jackets Foundation (player program “Czech Mates”). She also worked as assistant professor of American studies at Prešov University, Slovakia, and as a communications strategist for an international organization based in Germany. She looks forward to working with the Slovak-American community and building on the legacy of the Slovak Studies Program at Pitt.

SASW membership for 2020 – If you have not already renewed your membership for 2020, please use the form on the back of this newsletter or download it from www.dcslovaks.org. Also, consider telling a friend or colleague about SASW, and encourage them to join the Society. Such support is crucial to maintaining the activities we sponsor. While you're at it, **please consider a donation to the SASW Scholarship Fund** to support Slovak students at VSM/City University in Slovakia. You can influence the lives of young Slovak students and create goodwill toward Americans!

75th Anniversary-Slovak National Uprising Memorial Weekend Slovenské Národné Povstanie (SNP)

By Kathryn Tatko

During August 24-25 a day-and-a-half conference and remembrance of the Slovak National Uprising (SNP) was held in the Twin Cities of Minnesota. My husband, Jack Richards, and I attended the conference. Following are some of the highlights. Several of the presentations dealt with the personal stories of people who experienced this turmoil, their sacrifices, and their courage.

During the first afternoon, the conference was held at the Minnesota Genealogy Society Conference Center in Mendota Heights, about 15-20 miles outside of St. Paul. The main event was a viewing of Dušan Hudec's documentary film about the Uprising. The film showed many of the survivors talking about what happened to them and how they felt they were poorly treated by the Czechoslovak government after World War II.

The all-day Sunday program was held at the Czech and Slovak Sokol Hall, not far from downtown St. Paul. John Palka, grandson of Milan Hodža, was the first speaker. He spoke on how the Slovak State (Slovenský štát) came to be and why it provoked an uprising.

The seeds of the Uprising were sown when Germany invaded the Czech lands (Bohemia and Moravia), which became a German Protectorate. The Slovak State (independent and under German control) became totalitarian and nationalistic, expelling about 9,000 Czechs from Slovakia to the Czech Protectorate. Many people collaborated with the Nazis. About

two-thirds of Slovak Jews were shipped out of Slovakia; the government paid the Germans 500 Reichsmarks per person and for "shipping costs." Most of these Jews did not survive. The Slovak State also did not want Hungarians in the country. It sent 10,000 Slovak troops to support the invasions of Poland and Russia. At the start of the Uprising in 1944, 60,000 Slovak troops, 10,000 partisans, and thousands of civilians from all walks of life, secretly worked against their government. These civilians collected information, and used secret radio transmitters and other means to receive information from the West and to send information to their countrymen in exile. Many were caught by the Germans and tortured or executed.

The next speaker was Nadya Nedelsky, Chair of the International Studies Department at Macalester College. She spoke on "Nationalism, National Identity, and the Slovak National Uprising." The Slovak State was in power 1938-39; its capitol was not Prague. The party became the nation, and the nation became the party. There was no room for dissenting opinions and no freedom for individuals – all were subordinate to the state, especially the Jews, whose properties were confiscated. Dr. Nedelsky made an interesting comment: "Some folks asked if it was Christian to kill the Jews."

The first keynote speaker was Juraj Lepiš, an historian and researcher, at the Museum of the Uprising, in Banská Bystrica. He spoke about the importance of the Uprising after 75 years, showing 37 minutes of historic film from actual battles of the Uprising. The resistance started the moment the Slovak State was created. Very few countries recognized the Slovak state. (Thirty-three nationalities were involved in the Uprising). The communist resistance was the smallest, but the best organized. The Uprising was launched prematurely, on August 29, 1944 (it had been planned for October 1944), in response to the occupation by German troops, who were welcomed by the Slovak government. The Soviets had offered help, but the German Army wanted to slow the action of the Soviet Army. Mr. Lepiš gave a very detailed talk about the Uprising – the reasons for it, military and economic planning, military movements, territory preserved and territory lost, and the end of the resistance, when 20,000 soldiers and 12,000 partisans went into the mountains to fight a guerilla war until 1945. After the war, other Slovaks and, in 1948, the communists, went after Uprising participants, accusing them of being traitors to the communist government's foreign policy campaigns.

The conference continued with the awarding of the 15th annual Milan Hodža Prize, given by the Slovak Republic to four organizations and two individuals. After lunch, we saw director Dušan Hudec's movie, "The Final Mission." Between 1943 and 1945, 46 U.S. bombers and eight fighter aircraft crashed in Slovakia (one of the instrument panels was on display). Eighty-eight airmen were killed and 380 were captured as prisoners of war after parachuting or landing. Some crews escaped with the help of Slovak villagers and partisans.

Several speakers followed, including: Cecilia Rokusek, President and CEO, National Czech & Slovak Museum & Library, who spoke about "Keeping Our Commitment to Never Forget the SNP"; Karen Varian, President, Rusin Association of Minnesota, who spoke about the role Carpatho-Rusyns played in the resistance movement; eighty-five-year-old Demeter Kokosh spoke about his experience as an 11-year old boy living in the village of Becherov, near the Polish border; and Maria Gulovich, who worked with the resistance and helped save the lives of several OSS (Office of Special Services) officers who were secretly flown into Slovakia.

The second keynote speaker was Dr. J. Luke Ryder, an historian at the U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum. His topic was "Meaning and Learnings from the Uprising." He gave two examples of persons striving for human dignity, and the choices they made. One was a couple living in the mountains of Slovakia, who found a young Jewish boy, Gideon Frieder, and took him in, as 1944 was worse for Jews than earlier. His father, a rabbi, had disappeared in Bratislava and his mother and sister were killed by Allied bombing in Bratislava on June 16, 1944. The couple were aware of the risk they were taking. The second example was of Ladislav Nižňanský, a Slovak collaborator and war criminal who wanted to deport Jews. He chose to collaborate rather than go to a camp in Germany.

Dr. Ryder then talked about the legacy of the Uprising. On August 25, 1945, on its first anniversary, the view was that the Uprising had restored respectability to the communist party and the democracy. After 1948, the communist government used the events of 1944 to accuse political enemies of being traitors to the Uprising, and to promote their own economic agenda and pro-Soviet foreign policy campaigns. After 1989, the SNP became about "openness" and unity with the rest of Europe, although some nationalist elements renewed nostalgia for the Tiso regime. The symbolism of SNP is greater than the Uprising itself.

If anyone would like more information, please contact me (ktjr89@verizon.net), as I have a list of the conference sponsors and a YouTube URL to view the complete talks of four of the participants. Jack and I certainly learned a great deal more than we knew about the SNP, why it happened, and some of its participants. ~



**SLOVAK AMERICAN SOCIETY OF
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The **Slovak American Society of Washington, DC**, is a tax-exempt 501(c)(3) not-for-profit organization. Contributions and membership dues are tax-deductible.

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New membership or 2020 renewal runs through 12/31/2020.

Individual membership (\$25/year)	\$ _____
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