In the Czech Republic and Slovakia, the tradition of Svaty Mikulas (Saint Nicholas) has always played an important role. Legend has it that St. Nicholas visits children on December 5, accompanied by an angel dressed in pure white and the devil dressed in black. The devil carries a switch and rattles a chain, while the angel consults a large book which lists the names of all good children. The children who have been good receive apples, nuts, gingerbread and candy from Svaty Mikulas, while the mischievous children get coal and onions from the devil. It pays to be good!

Svaty Mikulas will visit the Sokol Minnesota Children’s Holiday Party at 7 p.m., Friday, December 7, at the C.S.P.S. Hall. Before he appears, Taneční Mládež and the Sokol gymnasts will perform, and Czech songs and stories will be told. Children can see the angel’s book, sit on Svaty Mikulas’ lap and receive a bag of treats. Refreshments served. All are welcome.

If you look closely, you might think that Sokol Minnesota members Don Andrle, Pat Andrle and Dave Stepan are standing in as St. Mikulas, the angel and the devil. Indeed, they have enjoyed playing their roles at the Childrens’ Holiday Party for many years.

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The Mushroom Picker on CSPS Stage

By Patrick Dewane

Being Czech - and being American - is at the heart of my one-man show about Lt. Colonel Matt Konop, my grandfather and a WWII war hero.

In The Mushroom Picker, I will share his incredible journey as a Czech-American soldier fighting in Czechoslovakia, and how that untold story came to me years after his death.

Konop grew up in a Czech farming hamlet in the Upper Midwest, speaking only Czech until he was sent to school at age six. He soon learned assimilation was the quickest route to the American dream and that his Czech background was something to overcome as he made his way in the world. Like countless Americans before him, the military would be his means of upward mobility.

continued on page 7.
President Komentář/President’s Note
By Joe Landsberger

Pozdrav bratři a sestry/Greetings brothers and sisters!

October was a very interesting Sokol month for me, engaged as I was by the creativity of our members! First, I started a long-distance conversation with Wally Schovanec of Idaho about his family’s history in our hall. Wally is a brother of Senior Singer Rudy, Jr. His father was very active in CSPS theater, and that serendipitously connected with this issue’s announcement of the staging of Vaclav Havel’s play, the Memorandum, February 29 and March 1-2 in our hall.

Then, I attended the dramatic presentation of the Mushroom Picker, Sokol member Patrick Dewane’s story about his grandfather, Matt Konop, who led American troops who liberated Domažlice, the ancestral village of Konop’s father’s. This same story will be presented in our hall December 13! Patrick is also the Vice-President of the Minnesota Opera, which will perform Antonín Dvořák’s Rusalka April 12-April 20. Our Education Director Louise Wessinger is working to arrange a group rate for Sokol members, and also perhaps a benefit at our hall!

Doreen McKenney got us making potato dumplings for our Pork Dinner. I helped on Friday, but really I was there to learn how to make them so I could skip the class and save a dollar! Doreen combines efficiency with creativity in organizing these events, and I went home and promptly made a batch for that night’s dinner. mmm, mmm!

Off to Chicago via the Internet. Czech-out the imaginative imaging down there, and see what valuable features Czech-TV and website bring!

More Sokol art ties. Sokol member Jordan Šrámek is founder and Artistic Director of The Rose Ensemble, a highly touted Twin Cities vocal group. I recently enjoyed their newest program at Assumption Church just down the street from our Hall. In preparation for their Spanish tour, the Ensemble has a new program, Slavic Wonders, Feasts and Saints in Ancient Moscow, Krakow, and Prague, features early/medieval vocal music. Half of the program is of Czech origin. The soaring music took my heart along; I especially was taken by Bogoroditse Devo, Raduysia, an Ave Maria by Russian-Minnesotan composer Sergey Khvoschchinskiy. This piece was commissioned by the Rose Ensemble. Perhaps one evening the Rose Ensemble will return to the CSPS Hall?

As I write this, it appears Sokol will receive a small Star Grant from the City of St. Paul. I want to thank our City Council member Dave Thune for speaking up on our behalf. I will be working to make city officials more aware what Sokol Minnesota and the CSPS Hall offer to St. Paul, in hopes of improving our chances for future support.

That was quite a list! Of course, I am over-looking many other efforts. At our November membership meeting we will creatively decorate the hall for the holidays, helping us get in the spirit for our Sokol Members’ Holiday Party on December 9. Let me take this opportunity to also wish you the best for the Holiday, in whatever way you observe them.

With a hearty holiday Nazdar!
Joe Landsberger
Bake and Take for the Holidays
A special two-part holiday baking series will feature traditional ginger cookies and the famous Czech Christmas bread. Students can register for one or both classes by calling Louise at 651-452-6240, or see the Sokol Minnesota website www.sokolmn.org Each class has a limit of 10 students.

Zazvorniky/Slovak Ginger Cookies
Instructor: Kevin Hurbanis
Wednesday Dec. 5, 6:00-8:30 PM
Fee: $12 for Sokol Members; $15 for non-members
Cooks should bring their own aprons, rolling pins, and containers for their cookies.

Vánočka/Christmas Bread with raisins and nuts
Instructors: Hana Matousek
Wednesday Dec. 12, 6:00 to 8:30 PM
Fee: $18 for Sokol Members; $20 for non-members
Cooks should bring their own apron, mixing bowl, large spoon, bread board or baking sheet. (you will take Vánočka to bake at home)

Sokol Members’ Holiday Party
Sokol Minnesota members are invited to a festive afternoon of Holiday Cheer Sunday, 1 p.m., December 9, at the C.S.P.S. Hall
The afternoon will commence with hors d’oeuvres and a social hour, followed by a catered meal of beef goulash over spatzel dumplings, with vegetable and rolls. Following the meal, newly elected officers and directors will be installed. The meeting will close with dessert, coffee and a Holiday carol sing-along.
Members should check their mail for a postcard announcing the menu, cost, and reservation instructions. If you have not received the postcard, call Nancy at 651-481-7949.

Roast Duck Dinner
Saturday • January • 26th • 2008
Soup
Roast Duck
Potato Dumplings and Gravy
Sweet and Sour Red Cabbage
Apple Sauce
Caraway Rye Bread
Coffee and Dessert
Tap beer and pop will be available for sale
5pm - $22.00 per person

Limited Seating RESERVATIONS ONLY
Make check payable in advance to Sokol Minnesota
Please send check no later than January 21st 2008
To: Doreen McKenney
7301 West 101st Street Unit 211
Bloomington, MN 55438
Historic CSPS Sokol Hall 383 Michigan Street - St. Paul, Minnesota www.sokolmn.org
PUBLIC WELCOME

Sokol’s annual Šibřinky celebration is slated for February 9 at the CSPS Hall. Guests will dance to live music by the popular Dale Pexa band starting at 6:30 p.m. Šibřinky is a Czech Mardi Gras-style festival. The evening will feature Czech beer and eats. For more information, call Tim at 651-274-5486 or visit www.sokolmn.org
Song of the Month

Submitted by Georgiana Dolejsi

We will be going to Bethlehem together,
Duj, daj, duj, daj, daj, da!

Tiny Jesus, little lad!
I will be rocking You.
Tiny Jesus, little lad!
I will be rocking You.

Verse 2
Zacni, Kubo, na ty dudy…
Kuba, start playing the bagpipes…

Verse 3
A ty, Janku, na pist alku…
And you, John, on the whistle…

Verse 4
A ty, Miksi, na houslicky…
And you, Michael, on the violin…

Verse 5
A ty, Vavro, na tu basu…
And you, Vavra, on the bass…

Donations

Sokol Minnesota thanks the generosity of donors. All donations are to the general fund, unless otherwise indicated. Only amounts over $100 or more are reported. Names are withheld at donor’s request.

August
Embassy of Czech Republic, $9,384
SVU
Joanne Parvey

September
In Memory of Ladd Loss:
Rosemary Bodien, $1,000
Western Fraternal Life Association, Lodge#181

In Memory of Verona Verchota:
Georgiana Dolejsi, elevator fund
Ken and Sharon Wyberg
Elsie Roepke, elevator fund

October
Pat & Don Andrle, Czech-Slovak Festival
In Memory of Ladd Loss:
Frank Loss, $100
Bessie O’Neill
Florence Haselbauer
Don and Catherine Haselbauer
Wallace Oliva

Correction
The lovely young women pictured in kroje in the October Slovo were Anne Loss Neubauer and Valeria Kuisle. We mistakenly identified Val as Vlasta Hanover. Our apologies.

Letter to Editor
Thank you so much for printing the Sokol article about my father, Ladd Loss. The layout was super!!!! I hope it will start an interest in the Sokol history which is so rich.
Sincerely,
Rosie Bodien

Thank you
Thank you to all who attended the presentation of the Cernin Palace Award to me recently - a sincere thank you to everyone who has expressed congratulatory wishes.
Libby Imbrone
Havel’s *The Memorandum* on CSPS Stage

By Marshall Toman

Vaclav Havel’s best known and well received play, *The Memorandum*, will be staged at the CSPS Hall February 29, and March 1-2. As usual, Havel draws upon absurdist traditions in theater. The play is set in Communist-era bureaucratic offices in Czechoslovakia, where the bureaucrats attempt to devise a politically approved, simple, un-nuanced language in which to communicate the New Order. Humorous and sad, the play contains timeless themes of opportunism, honesty, loyalty, and courage, while remaining rooted in the specifics of Communist Czechoslovakia.

Lex-Ham Community Theater Company will produce the play. Sokol volunteers will provide delicious and authentic refreshments. Friday and Saturday evening performances will be followed by a 2:00 matinee on Sunday. Ticket prices will be $5 for students, $10 for Sokol and Czech and Slovak Cultural Center members, and $15 for the general public.

World’s largest book – and its Czech!

A new exhibit at the National Czech and Slovak Museum in Cedar Rapids, Iowa, is really big! At six feet-high and 210 feet-long, *The History of the Brave Czech Nation*, by Czech artist Lucie Seifertova, is the largest book in the world. It is actually a fold-out book that visitors can walk through, experiencing the large and small joys and miseries of cartoon characters winding their way through the labyrinths of time. The book has been exhibited at the National Museum in Prague, as well as at international book fairs in Italy, Luxembourg, Italy and Slovakia. Seifertova’s book Childrens’ Book of the Year. The Museum’s describes her drawing style as playful and her affection for little people caught up in history endearing. Of particular interest is her take on the events of the 1989 fall of communism. The exhibit runs through January 27. It is sponsored by the Czech Ministry of Culture.
However, by the end of WWII his entire concept of himself turned inside out. What he had fled became what he pursued. When he came home from the war he grew to be more intentionally Czech than anyone in his hometown. He brewed his own beer, researched his family’s genealogy decades before such things became fashionable, and picked wild mushrooms. While everyone called him “The Colonel” he rarely spoke about the war. And when the CB radio craze of the 1970s hit, he chose as his handle “The Mushroom Picker,” much to my disappointment.

As a boy, I loved war movies and would beg him to tell me a war story. But The Greatest Generation didn’t do much of that, especially modest Czechs. He’d change the subject or make a joke, so I concluded he spent most of the war peeling potatoes. I had no idea how wrong I was. In 1983 I was a pallbearer at his funeral and figured we buried his war stories with him.

Then a few years ago my sister Jane found a pile of type-written papers in a box in a basement. It turns out, in the last years of his life my grandpa spent dozens of hours in the furnace room of his house clacking away on a Remington manual typewriter, chain-smoking Camel straights, racing time to get down onto paper what he had experienced. My sister was shocked by what she found, incredible stories written on the backs of blank insurance forms, on scrap paper or anything else he could find to hold onto his thoughts. She made copies and gave them out as Christmas presents. And the ghosts I met in those stories have changed my life.

My grandfather had a Forest Gump-like knack for accidentally being where the action was. One example is he helped liberate his family’s Czech hometown, walking the same cobblestones that his grandfather had walked eighty years earlier on his journey out of Bohemia to America. But while his grandfather’s journey was but another departure by an anonymous peasant, the grandson’s homecoming was met with flowers and flags and kisses from pretty girls. He was shocked by the reception he received, and it awakened in him a curiosity about all things Czech that became the greatest passion in his life.

People respond to this story in wonderful and unpredictable ways. I’ve had WW II veterans thank me for telling it like it was. I’ve had young people tell me they had no idea that the war was so all-encompassing. And I’ve had many people in their sixties, folks for whom WW II is the beginning of time, tell me they want to see the show again. It seems the further we get from WW II, the more relevant it becomes. For more reactions to the story, please check out the website www.themushroompicker.com

We Czechs have assimilated so well that many of us hardly know where we came from, or why that would even matter. That was my case. But I believe my grandpa wrote his stories in his basement for me, so I can tell them to you. So I invite you to come hear my story about my grandpa, which is also about me, and maybe all of us.

Did you know? By Josef Mestenhauser

Václav Klaus remains the only announced candidate for the President of the Czech Republic, only 4 months before the indirect elections that will be held in Feb. by both houses of the Parliament. Among other potential candidates, Dr. Jan Svejnar, Professor of Economics at the University of Michigan, and a dual citizen of the Czech Republic and the US, is considered the most and just viable.

Skoda sold almost half a million automobiles just during the first three quarters of the year, a 12.6% increase over last year. Skoda sold 150 trolley buses to Riga – first few have already been delivered.

Skoda is developing its own schools and technical college to train its future employees.

The projected building of a new International Center of Clinical Medical Research in Brno (with participation of the Mayo Clinic in Rochester, MN) has run into difficulties because of disagreements between the Czech and US sides on how to spend the 2 billion crown investment.

Despite excellent harvest, cost of bread and bakery goods will increase as much as 20% in the Czech Republic.

The revised estimate of growth of the GDP of Slovakia moved up to 8.8%.

Despite an effort to curb its budgetary deficit, Slovakia may not be able to join the EURO zone in 2009 as predicted.

There may be a new political party in the Czech Republic, called “Party of Dignified Living.” It can appear on the electoral lists only after 2008.

The statue of U.S. Pres. Woodrow Wilson that once stood in front of the main Railroad Station named after him will be reconstructed and returned a location somewhere near the station. The statue was sculpted by the famous Czech artist Albin Polacek, who lived and worked briefly in Minnesota. Several of his statues are still here.

Czech Company Gufex is the exclusive supplier of ice hockey pucks for the Olympics and World Ice Hockey championship.

“Czech The News” – the official bulletin of the Czech Embassy – will now appear in electronic format. Interested subscribers should write to JoAnn M. Cooper at jcooper@linguabohemica.com

Italy is the leading source of foreign investment in Slovakia.

Canada just lifted visa requirements for Czechs and Latvians, but not others, on condition that no more than two percent of visa free visitors will apply for permanent residence in Canada.
A Sokol Family Story
By Wally Schovanec

Milý Bratrí a Sestry from Boise, Idaho! I was reflecting upon my family’s history on the recent occasion of my 80th birthday on September 22. I celebrated with my wife of 59 years, Louise; my son, Michael, and my daughter, Barb. I am thankful to still be blessed with abundant good health which I owe to my father, who enrolled me in Sokol at age six in 1935, as well as my mother, who cooked good healthy Czech meals as we grew up.

My father, Rudolf Schovanec, and mother, Antonia Kavřik, arrived on the good ship George Washington a year apart, in 1910 and 1911, respectively. They arrived in Ellis Island, and the ship’s manifest lists “Rudy” with $6.00 in his pocket. They were childhood sweethearts born four doors apart in Kluky u Čáslavi. On my first visit back to their village, I was told they were called Romeo and Juliet since they loved each other, despite the disapproval of their parents.

They married in New York City in 1913 during my father’s volunteer service in the army. Their first son, my brother Rudy, was born at the home of their sister in Connecticut. In October 1920, they moved to St. Paul, where mother feared there was an Indian behind each tree!

My father learned tailoring in Vienna, and quickly was hired in downtown St. Paul at Maurice L. Rothchild’s men’s and women’s clothing store, along with 40 to 50 other tailors! Rudy, Jr. also learned the trade from Dad, joined Sokol, and is still a very good tailor, and is active in the senior singers.

Rudy, Sr. was very active in Czech plays at the CSPS Hall, and was the personification of the Good Soldier Švejk (an unfinished satirical novel by Jaroslav Hašek, illustrated by Josef Lada, about the misadventures of Cvejk during the Austro-Hungarian war.) He was humorous, creative, devilish, and a patriot who truly loved life and his fellow man. He died at age 56 in 1948.

Rudolf Schovanec and Antonia Kavřik were married in 1913 in New York City. Rudy is wearing his World War I uniform. Photo courtesy of Wally Schovanec.

Soldier Švejk (an unfinished satirical novel by Jaroslav Hašek, illustrated by Josef Lada, about the misadventures of Cvejk during the Austro-Hungarian war.) He was humorous, creative, devilish, and a patriot who truly loved life and his fellow man. He died at age 56 in 1948.

Czernin Palace Award to Libby Imbrone

Long-time Sokol Minnesota member Libby Imbrone received the Czernin Palace Memorial Bronze Medal and Diploma in November for “her great and significant contribution to the progress of Czech-American relations.”

Honorary Consul Josef Mestenhauser presented the award on behalf of Dr. Petr Kola, Czech Ambassador to the United States. The award is granted based on nominations from Honorary Consuls and Honorary Consuls General.

Libby Rybnicek Imbrone was raised in a family of Czech immigrants near Mandan, North Dakota. Her parents nurtured her interest and appreciation of Czech language, literature, art music and civic affairs, as well as cooking and sewing. Her father and grandfather were accomplished stone cutters. Libby’s only brother was killed while serving in the armed forces in Okinawa. Libby is retired after a long career, culminating with a position in the Minnesota Attorney General’s Office. She and husband Albert of 54 years have five children and four grandchildren.

After retiring, Libby remained as an active volunteer with Czech and Slovak Sokol Minnesota, organizing many outstanding activities including receptions, cultural programs and exhibits. She welcomed dignitaries and student visitors, befriended all newcomers, and demonstrated her hospitality through cooking. She is a founding member of the Czech and Slovak Cultural center, and co-chaired a splendid reception for President Vaclav Havel when he visited Minnesota.

Libby is known as a highly organized, personal, intelligent, creative, hard working dedicated, responsible, reliable and sophisticated – in short, she is a wonder and an inspiration. Knowing no bounds to her pursuits, she once persuaded the University of Minnesota to grow flax so she could demonstrate the making of a linen apron from plan to finished product for an exhibit at the Festival of Nations.

A full account of her accomplishments would be as voluminous as it would be rich, but to conclude in her own modest words, Libby “always intended to do projects that would make people happy to attend, and to leave them with good feelings about their heritage and a new knowledge of our culture and intellect.”

Former Ambassador Martin Palous initiated the award while he was Ambassador. The award is named after the Czernin Palace, location of the Czech Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

Editor’s note: This article is drawn from materials provided by the Honorary Consul, Josef Mestenhauser. See www.sokolmn.org or the full text of Libby’s moving speech.

Flash News…

Dr. Martin Butora, former Ambassador of Slovakia to the United States, just accepted the invitation to be the “Scholar-in-residence” and speak at the 2008 Vaclav Havel Symposium on Civil Society. His wife, Dr. Zora Butorova, was also invited. The dates of their arrival are being negotiated. The Vaclav Havel Symposium on Civil Society is a collaboration of St. Thomas University and the House of Hope Presbyterian Church, with participation of the Minnesota Czech and Slovak community.
Sokol Minnesota News

By Marlene Hinshaw

Ahoj! Thanks to all who worked on Roast Pork Dinner in October. Nancy Imbrone chaired the event, and Ray Vanyo was the head chef. The Vanyo family and friends presided over the kitchen. Thanks to Bobby Jo Chandler for hours of dishwashing. Thanks also to the ladies who made the delicious raised bread dumplings. It was a joy to see so many familiar faces. Dan Washick from Darwin, Minnesota, was there. He’s bicycled 2,000 miles so far this year. Way to go Dan!! It was also nice to see Norm and Joyce Sladek again, as well as Hana Matousek, recently back from the Czech Republic.

I also met an impressive young lady, Autumn Martin, age 9, a new member of our Tanečni Mládež childrens’ dance group. Autumn helped in the dining room, where chaos rules during serving time. She remained calm, perceived what had to be done and did it with little supervision. What a great kid! As an older Sokol member I’ve had the pleasure of watching Sokol kids grow to adulthood. They’re an impressive group. For instance, the Cahill girls: Colleen, Megan and Carolyn. Colleen is in her second year of teaching English near Seoul, South Korea. She’ll work at Kangnam University until March of 2009. Megan graduated from the College of St. Catherine in May after earning a Doctorate in Physical Therapy. She works at Regions Hospital in St. Paul. Carolyn graduated from Central High in June and is attending the College of Wooster in Wooster, Ohio. She’s interested in the health sciences. All the girls have been active in Sokol and still help out whenever they’re home. Mary, Dennis and Grandma Val Kohler Kuisle, we share your pride. Another young person on my mind is Christian Hall, son of Jean and Larry Hall. Christian was a Tanečni Mládež and Teen dancer from age 9 till high school graduation. Christian was also a member of the St. Francis High School Madrigal Singers. You may remember them performing for us at our Christmas parties in 2004 and 2005. As a high school junior, Christian signed on with the U.S. Army, and upon graduation was called into service. He’s already served 7 months in Iraq. This September he was home on two weeks leave, and is now back in Iraq for another 7 months. Hopefully, his service time will not be extended. I’m sure he would enjoy getting mail from his Sokol friends. His address is: PFC Hall, Christian D/CO, 1-15 IN Unit #5956 APO AE 09308-5956

On Sunday, November 4, as part of the commemoration of the Czech National Independence Day, Libuse Rybnícek Imbrone received the Czernin Palace Memorial Bronze Medal and Diploma from the Czech Republic “for her great and significant contribution to the progress of Czech-American relations.” For many years, Libby organized numerous receptions and programs. She welcomed dignitaries, visitors and students. She co-chaired events preceding and during Vaclav Havel’s visit to Minnesota, and was Sokol’s liaison with St. Thomas University, Macalester College, The House of Hope Church and Czech communities. She coordinated a great reception for President Havel, his wife and Czech dignitaries. Our Sokol unit has been enhanced by her good work. Congratulations Libby! We’re so very proud of you!

Lou Pavlicek wrote to say thanks for your cards, letters and visits. She uses a wheelchair now, but plays the piano daily and is taking art classes. Lou celebrated her 90th birthday on November 11. We send her birthday greetings and our best wishes. Her corrected address is:

Episcopal Church Home, 1879 Feronia Ave., Room #238, St. Paul, MN 55104.

We also send our best wishes to Tom Pallo who is ill.

After 100 years, Jerabek’s New Bohemian Bakery, on the West Side of St. Paul is up for sale, and may be sold by Christmas. Jerabek’s is known for its Bohemian kolace houska, breads and cakes. After 23 years, Melissa Deyo, grand-daughter of founder Ed Jerebek, wants a less demanding schedule. I’m so disappointed! I love that bakery! I might have to sign up for a kolače making class.

Veselé Vánoce!

Sokol Welcomes New Members

By Norm Petrik, Membership Director

At its October membership meeting, Sokol Minnesota accepted one new member: Denis Novak. He lives in Cottage Grove, has five adult children, and is interested in cooking classes, history, and various Sokol events. Welcome, Denis!

Judy Metcalf, whose membership was received in September, was installed in October. She is a member of the adult dance group, has a child in our childrens’ dance group, and is taking Czech language classes. Georgiana Dolejší gave her the traditional Sokol new-member hug!

All new members are encouraged to attend one of our monthly membership meetings to be installed and meet fellow Sokol members. Meetings are usually the fourth Friday at 7:30 p.m. The November meeting this year is on the 30th, to avoid the Thanksgiving Holiday weekend.
Czech Road Warriors

By Mark Bigaouette

In October, my mother Marcy and I attended the 2nd North East Wisconsin Czech Festival in Green Bay, Wisconsin. I recommend it highly. On the way, we stopped at Cadott in search of the old Czech hall. We found it about five miles north of town on highway 27. It’s quite large, and in fairly good shape.

Because it was a Green Bay Packers home game weekend, we had to stay in Shawano, about 30 miles West of Green Bay. Our great find in Shawano was a small German restaurant called the “Hunters Haus” on Road K, just south of town. Wow, was it good: cheap, but excellent food. Sunday, we drove to Eastern Green Bay for the festival held at a banquet hall. It included lots of entertainment, two very good bands, dancing, and a wonderful, huge meal. The bands were both from Wisconsin — the Newtonburg Brass band and the OK Band. The place was packed, and everyone had a wonderful time.

The Festival was sponsored by the Wisconsin Czech’s organization, which is planning to launch a web site soon. Until then, for information write to: NE Wisconsin Czech Festival, 337 Brookridge St., Green Bay, WI 54301 If you go, bring your dancing shoes.

Give now for tax breaks

This December is the last chance for individuals 70 ½ or older to reap special tax savings when making charitable gifts from their IRA funds.

Through December 31, 2007, individuals 70 ½ and older can make a tax-exempt charitable contribution up to $100,000 directly from their traditional IRAs to an eligible charity. If done before December 31, this qualified charitable distribution (QCD) satisfies the minimum distribution rule, and these monies are excluded from taxable income.

Unfortunately the Pension Protection Act of 2006, which allows donors to use this deduction, ends December 31, so people wishing to use this special tax-savvy opportunity need to act now. If you would like to make a gift to Sokol Minnesota, or you have questions, please contact Sokol Minnesota Finance Chair Joyce Tesarek at 612-822-6147.

Tax-deductible contributions from donors of any age are always welcome. To qualify for tax deductions on 2007 taxes, gifts must be made by December 31.

An energetic and youthful group of novice dancers has been learning Czech folk dance steps at the CSPS Hall this Fall. On the last night of class, Leah wore her costume and crown as Miss Czech Slovak MN. The class went so well that our teacher Charlie volunteered to offer another class in January.
What can we learn from history?

By Josef Mestenhauser

I would like to devote this column to a bit of a historical reflection, and invite readers to join me. Three occasions prompt me to do so. The first is the selection of Derek Seyers’s book, The Coasts of Bohemia, for our Literary Ventures series. Literary Ventures is a joint venture of the Czech and Slovak Cultural Center and Sokol Minnesota. This book, in my opinion is one of the best books for gaining understanding of the history of the former Czechoslovakia. Admittedly, it is not easy bedtime reading because it requires constant attention to names, events and connections between them. Still, members of the Literary Ventures reading group were apparently impressed with the depth of information it provides about the history of Czechoslovakia.

Ethnic Americans have the double burden of knowing well not only the history of the US, but also the history of the countries of their origins. Programs such as the Literary Ventures can help accomplish both goals – for knowing both where we are and where we came from is essential to claiming our identities as either Czech- or Slovak-Americans, or American Czechs or American Slovaks. Books of this caliber help us see the complexity of issues that, though originating in distant past, are still active today. They also show how inter-connected the histories of our countries are.

I had a second reason for reflection. The National Czech and Slovak Museum and Library in Cedar Rapids, Iowa, just announced the last of a three-part series of programs on the meaning of the 20th Century. This last program, scheduled for March 6-8 in Cedar Rapids, is devoted to the years following the Prague Spring. It promises to be the most important of the series, primarily because much of the politics and events of the Czech and Slovak Republics have been, and are still, dominated by the “generation of 1968.” I encourage people to attend, and thus strengthen our knowledge about what happened during our own lifetime.

Still, there was third set of reasons: two significant anniversaries that took place in October and November. The first is the birth of Czechoslovakia, celebrated on October 28; the other is the double November 17 anniversary of the Nazi suppression of Czech Universities in 1939, and the famous November, 1989, “velvet revolution.” Both anniversaries are remembered, but they are the cause of more than mere commemorations and celebratory parades. The birth of Czechoslovakia was by Cesarean operation; law and order collapsed with the monarchy and members of Sokol played a very important role in insuring a smooth and peaceful transition. Armed interventions were required to stop efforts of some German, Hungarian and Polish elements to secede from Czechoslovakia.

The Slovaks do not celebrating this anniversary because it did not give them the promised autonomy. As some claimed, the seeds of destruction of Czechoslovakia that came in 1938 were already present at its birth, and are yielding outcomes still today. Sudeten German elements in Bavaria continue to press for return of confiscated property and for redress of atrocities committed against them during their forced expulsion from Czechoslovakia. A newly formed radical Hungarian group demands autonomy of one third of Slovakia.

The closing of Czech universities and mass executions and imprisonment of many student leaders and faculty also require some reflection. Slovak universities escaped the fate of Czech universities and continued to produce new talents for the future development of Slovakia that was denied the Czechs. The year of 1968 included all collective memories, and created new ones.

Most people do not know enough about history of their own countries. Yet, while historical memory gives people a sense of collective identity, it often hides dark baggage that lives on. So, it was very fitting for the Czech Government to donate to the German Federal Republic a sculpture produced by a Czech artist Miroslav Vocht that was unveiled recently at the Prig Plats in the Scharlottenburg-Wilmersdorf district of Berlin. This impressive sculpture is devoted to reconciliation by moving beyond the past and looking forward to a better future.

As we look at the glory and gory of history, this gesture may offer a very important lesson for the future. The Europeans have an advantage in that the new Union provides an umbrella under which the future direction can be negotiated. The question for many of us is not about reconciliation and understanding among nations of Europe, but about whether the same lessons of remembering and moving forward can be applied to the communist rule of Czechoslovakia during the last 45 years. Can it work despite the arrogance of the Communist Party, its persistent adherence to Marxism-Leninism, and its complete denial of responsibility for their atrocities against life, liberty, property, and minds? I will let you decide that question.

How about more people joining the Literary Ventures reading group, or attending lectures, films and programs that help us reflect on these and other questions?

see page 7 for Did you Know by Josef Mestenhauser
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