Standing with Ukraine - Prague Experience

by Mia and Olga Mendel

In the days leading up to the invasion of Ukraine, life in Prague was nothing out of the ordinary. The city was filling up with tourists, bars were open and COVID restrictions were being lifted. Sure, there were a few protests against Russia’s stationing troops along the Ukrainian border, but they were greatly overshadowed by the mobs of people squeezing into the 22 tram at 22:22 on 22.2.22. No one was expecting to wake up on an ordinary Thursday to headlines like “RUSSIA ATTACKS UKRAINE.”

The Czech Republic and Slovakia, along with other countries neighboring Ukraine, are experiencing the biggest refugee crisis in their history. The exodus we are seeing is the biggest since WWII and the numbers of refugees grows rapidly each day. In just 2 weeks over 2 million people have fled Ukraine to neighboring countries. The Polish and Slovakian borders are filled with volunteers who wait for refugees who finally make it through the long lines of those waiting to exit Ukraine and enter the European Union. Slovakia, it seems, is more of a transit country, while the Czech Republic is more a final destination.

Ukrainians are our friends, neighbors, and coworkers. They represent the second-largest minority group in the Czech Republic, after Slovaks. The generosity of people is

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CALENDAR OF EVENTS

REGULARLY SCHEDULED ACTIVITIES

CHILDREN'S LANGUAGE SCHOOL
In the spring semester we continue with our virtual classes. Beginners or fluent speakers are welcome to join us regardless of where they live.
- Czech Classes are held on Thursday or Friday evenings based on skill level
- Slovak Classes are held on Sunday mornings.
You can enroll at any time. Check CSHA’s web and Facebook pages for details and schedule or email us at info@cshtamaryland.org.

ADULT LANGUAGE SCHOOL
CSHA is one of the few organizations in the USA that offers language instruction for adults. Beginning, intermediate and advanced classes are offered virtually at this time. They are held on Saturday mornings. To register or ask questions, please contact Lois Hybl at 410-243-1710 or e-mail: LHybl@verizon.net or info@cshtamaryland.org.

HERITAGE SINGERS
Future rehearsals and events will be announced on the CSHA website https://cshamaryland.org and our Facebook page.

CSHA ONLINE - For more information about any of these activities or to register for classes, you can contact CSHA at: info@cshtamaryland.org. CSHA's Communication Committee will respond to answer your questions and provide information, and we are eager to hear your ideas and suggestions. Also, please check our website www.cshtamaryland.org and follow us on Facebook at Czech and Slovak Heritage Association of Baltimore.

JANUARY 2022
GENERAL MEETING - the last General Meeting was held virtually on January 23, 2022. The newly elected members Board members were introduced and started their work for the organization.

APRIL 2022
SPRING FESTIVAL AND CZECH & SLOVAK EASTER TRADITIONS – the event is planned for Sunday, April 3rd, 2022, Noon to 5PM at the MD State Game & Fish Protective Association, 8735 Honeygo Boulevard, Perry Hall.

MAY 2022
MEMORIAL DAY – future performances of the Heritage Singers at the Bohemian National Cemetery in Baltimore will be announced on the CSHA website and Facebook.

JUNE 2022
The Children's Choir Campanella from Olomouc, Czechia – Tentatively scheduled on June 25, 2022. Time and Location - TBD and will be announced on our website and Facebook.

SEPTEMBER 2022
ANNUAL PICNIC – Tentatively scheduled on September 11, 2022. Location - TBD and will be announced on our website and Facebook page.

OCTOBER 2022
THE 34th CZECH AND SLOVAK FESTIVAL is planned for October 23rd, 2022, Noon to 6PM at the American Legion Hall, 125 York Road, Towson. The CSHA Festival Committee is planning the annual event and welcomes any volunteers that would like to help with the preparations.
President’s Message

Dear friends,

I am sure most of you have been intently following the very disturbing news and horrific reports coming from Ukraine. The Russian invasion is growing into a terrible humanitarian crisis. As I write this, more than two million people have fled the warzone and are pouring into neighboring countries and beyond. The CSHA has issued an official statement, published on our website and facebook page, condemning the invasion. The association’s board is also coordinating an internal effort to provide financial support directed to those affected by the conflict. Please follow our announcement on how you can help.

Personally, we have been trying to call our relatives in Czechia more often now. We want to comfort them and hear about their experience with the Ukrainian crisis. My mom told us stories about the support the war refugees are receiving in her region. One story was about a family from Ukraine that found shelter in a tiny Moravian village named Postoupky near my hometown Kromeriz. A local auto service owner had an unoccupied apartment right next to his shop and he offered it to the coordination center for Ukrainian refugees. Shortly after that, the place had new residents. While the father remained in Ukraine to fight the enemy, the pregnant mom and children quickly moved in. They received clothes, furniture, toys, food, and a lot of candy. They now have all they need for their soon to be born baby. These acts of kindness and generosity are happening all over Czechia and Slovakia and it is so heartening to witness that. European and other nations are rising to the occasion, but the situation is by no means ideal and will surely test the resolve and resources of everyone involved. All those hundreds of thousands of people escaping the war would surely rather be home, in free Ukraine, but uncertainty about the future haunts all of us. It is our hope that they will be able to go home soon and that there will be a country for them to return to and rebuild. The world is amazed and humbled by the bravery and resolve of the Ukrainian defenders and needs to do everything it can to stop the senseless violence and restore peace.

On a more positive note, the CSHA has scheduled a brand new event. It is called the Spring Festival and will take place on Sunday, April 3rd. This will be an exciting occasion to get together again. For a reasonable admission, everyone can expect a fantastic program, which includes live music by Orchester Praževica. Some of you know the location from the Annual Picnic in the fall. It has both indoor and outdoor space. We will have plenty of refreshments, delicious food, pastries, beer, soft drinks, coffee. And of course for our younger ones, there will be entertainment like various kids’ crafts, Easter egg coloring, pomlazka making, games, face painting, etc. Please come to have fun and support our mission.

Lastly, I would like to give thanks to Mr. Jan Woska, First Secretary and Cultural Attache of the Embassy of the Czech Republic. Jan was coordinating the provision of textbooks for our Adult Language School. These books will help support our students in their quest to learn the Czech language.

I would like to end with the words from John Lennon’s song that have been stuck in my head for days now: “All we are saying is give peace a chance.”

Petr Justin - CSHA president

CSHA Statement on the Ukraine Crisis

We All Stand with Ukraine

CSHA expresses its full support for the sovereignty, independence and territorial integrity of Ukraine and for the freedom and democratic aspirations of the Ukrainian people.

We condemn the Russian Federation’s unjustified military invasion of Ukraine and support the actions of the United States, the European Union and international institutions to hold the Russian leadership accountable.
outstanding. During the first days, people offered housing in apartments they owned or rooms in their family homes. Some took in friends, with their families, and offered them rooms in their apartments. Those are, however, the ones with friends and family here, so it is easier for them to find help; they have a place to go and stay.

A week later, the capacity of Prague is almost full, and more refugees are pouring in every day. Places that were previously COVID19 vaccination centers are now registration facilities for refugees, about 40% of whom are women and 60% children. Here and there are a few elderly men. At this point, there are over 200,000 refugees in the Czech Republic alone and since houses, apartments, and hotels are filling up, it is time to open up gyms and halls and convert them to shelters. Although they are less comfortable, they still offer safety, a bed, and food.

Many Ukrainian men worked in the Czech Republic to better provide for their families in Ukraine. Now the situation has changed. They have brought their wives, mothers, children to the Czech Republic and left to fight for their country. I still cannot believe I am writing these words in 2022, writing about neighbors, friends, and coworkers.

Czechs are all doing what we can:

Czech trains are running back and forth between Prague and the Slovak/Ukrainian border. Refugees travel free.

Hotels, motels and bed and breakfasts are opening up rooms to refugees and helping them to settle in.

We even had to buy fabric for a Ukrainian flag and sew it at home, because all the Ukrainian flags are sold out and my daughter Mia needed one for her school.

We sorted through and donated house goods, cloths, school supplies and toys and games for children pouring in the country every day.

There is a growing number of online Czech Ukrainian dictionaries free to download to help everyone navigate the new situation.

Even Czech news channels are starting to offer translation of their news for Ukrainians.

I knitted more than a dozen hats in Ukrainian colors and donated all the proceeds to People in Need, a Czech-based humanitarian nonprofit organization.

Do what you can to help and show solidarity

Czechs and Slovaks have our own experience with the “peaceful mission of the Soviet brotherly help,” going back to 1968 and Prague Spring. We, perhaps more than other countries, understand the Russians and their aggressive and expansive actions. I will be forever thankful to the former president Vaclav Havel for making us, the Czech Republic and Slovakia, a part of NATO and the European Union.

For those who want to contribute to humanitarian help directly, I recommend People in Need. They are a Czech based, world-wide humanitarian organization established soon after the Velvet Revolution. They are sending trains with humanitarian help from the Czech Republic in collaboration with Czech and Slovak railways.
Controversy and questionable decisions by the International Olympic Committee detracted from the 2022 Winter Olympics. But the Czech and Slovak athletes who participated this year honorably represented both countries and had a successful Olympics with each country winning a gold and a bronze medal. The Czech Republic’s Ester Ledecka won gold in the Snowboarding Women’s Parallel Giant Slalom and Martina Sablikova won bronze in the Women’s 5000 Meter Speed Skating. For Slovakia, Petra Vlhova won gold in the Alpine Skiing Women’s Slalom. But possibly the biggest thrill of the Olympics, at least for me, was seeing the Slovak Men’s Hockey Team win convincingly over Sweden 4-0 in the bronze medal game.

The 2022 Olympic Hockey Tournament did not include NHL players this year, which meant that traditional powerhouses like the United States and Canada were at a disadvantage. Although Russia, Sweden and Finland were the favorites, this did open the door for the Czechs and Slovaks to make another run for a medal. Traditionally, when the two teams were combined, and representing Czechoslovakia, they enjoyed a large degree of success: 4 silver medals and 4 bronze medals between 1920 and 1992. The Czech Republic also won gold in Nagano, Japan in 1998 and bronze in Turin, Italy in 2006. Slovakia has not been as successful recently, just missing out on a medal in Vancouver, Canada in 2010, after losing to Finland in the bronze medal game. This year, though, both countries had dreams of winning another medal in Olympic hockey.

Slovakia started the tournament with big losses to Finland and Sweden (getting outscored 10-3), and needed to mix things up to stay alive. Coach Craig Ramsey decided to switch to their third-string goaltender, Patrik Rybar, against Latvia. Rybar provided the needed spark and much needed defense as Slovakia won 5-2 to close out the preliminary round in 8th place. The Czech Republic also had a rough start, with a surprise loss to Denmark, before winning in overtime against Switzerland. But, against Russia in the final game of preliminary play, the Czechs played their best game, beating Russia in overtime 6-5. It was a great win and propelled the Czechs to 6th place going into the medal round.

In the medal round, both teams’ fortunes seemed to diverge. After the Slovaks beat Germany 4-0 behind the excellent goaltending of Rybar, the Czechs were upset by Switzerland 4-2 in a rematch. Although the Czech medal hopes were over, they did have several players who did really well. They included David Krejci who had one goal and three assists in the tournament and Roman Cervenka who had two goals and an assist. Slovakia did advance, but to the huge task of getting by the top seeded United States.

In their quarterfinal game against the United States, Slovakia found itself down 2-1 late in the game, despite another goal from 17-year old phenom Juraj Slafkovsky. With under a minute left in the game, Slovakia pulled their goalie with the hope they could tie the game with an extra attacker. The strategy worked; their captain Marek Hrivik scored the tying goal with 44 seconds left, sending the game into overtime. In overtime, neither team scored, setting up a shootout to determine the winner. In the shootout, Rybar was perfect, stopping all five United States attempts. The shootout score by Slovakia’s Peter Cehlarik resulted in a joyous celebration for Slovakia as they advanced to the semifinal round.

After losing 2-0 to Finland (the eventual gold medal winner), Slovakia had one last chance to win their first Olympic hockey medal as they met Sweden in the bronze medal game. Although they had lost 4-1 to Sweden earlier in the tournament, Slovakia was ready for the challenge and dominated the bronze medal game. Rybar recorded another shutout in the 4-0 win, and Slafkovsky scored two more goals, including the game winner. He led all goal scorers with 7 total goals for the tournament. Slovakia had won its first bronze medal in Olympic hockey, a truly historic moment for the team.

As the Olympic Games demonstrated again, the Czechs and Slovaks continue to produce elite hockey players and teams. Along with Slafkovsky, who is widely believed to be a top
Frantisek Priedhorsky, born in 1928, was one of five children born in Predhorie, a village in the Pružina district of Northwest Slovakia, to Vendelin Priedhorsky, a stonemason and sheep farmer, and his wife, Katarina. In his late teens Frantisek, my father, was conscripted into the Russian Army and stationed as a guard on the triangle of the Czech, Austrian, German border.

His sights were always centered on the West, and as a fellow border guard raised his rifle to shoot at a fleeing family, my dad knocked him unconscious and fled with the family into Germany. There he was taken to a German police station from which he was transferred to a US Army post in Straubing. After being interrogated, he was taken to their motor pool where he was put to work for several weeks making camouflage nets. From there he traveled to Nuremberg to a refugee camp where he stayed for about eight months. Free to leave that camp at any time, he caught a train to Schwetzingen, Germany where there was a Polish Labor Service which hired displaced persons. Their mission was to guard material belonging to the US Army. Perhaps because of his language skills, he spoke five languages and quickly learned English, he was offered a chance to join the US military, and on May 15, 1956, Frantisek Priedhorsky was sworn into the US Army and shortly ordered stateside.

After a two-week voyage from Bremerhaven, he arrived in the US and reported for duty in Tacoma, Washington. In 1960 he married Mary Lou Ponton and on June 6, 1965, still on active duty with the Army, he became a US citizen. He saw active duty in Viet Nam and concluded his military career in the National Guard.

It took more than thirty years, and the fall of Communism, before Frantisek Priedhorsky was able to return to his family home in Slovakia and a joyful reunion with his mother for the first time in all those thirty years. Sadly, his father, my grandfather, died before he was able to reunite with his son. My father did not like to speak of all the trials of survival and war, but I know how lucky he felt to come to America and become a U.S. citizen. He passed away in 2003; my dad and Mom had been married for 43 years.

I am so happy that I have found the Czech and Slovak Heritage Association and especially the Slovak Language School. Now I feel so much closer to my Slovak family and my Slovak roots; I want to learn as much as I can about the history of this great country and of my ancestors. I have searched for a long time and now I feel like I have family in America once again.
prospect in the upcoming 2022 NHL draft, Slovakia’s team included another top NHL prospect, defenseman Simon Nemec. Filip Mesar is another Slovak forward who did not play in the Olympics, but is expected to be a high NHL draft pick this year. For the Czechs, David Jiricek is considered a top 10 prospect in this year’s NHL draft. Czechia has 37 players in the NHL and is the 6th most represented country in the NHL. Current top Czech players include Jakub Voracek (Columbus Blue Jackets), David Pastrnak (Boston Bruins) and Ondrej Palat (Tampa Bay Lightning). There have been a total of 248 Czechs who have played in the NHL, the most notable being Jaromir Jagr and Dominik Hasek. Slovakia has 11 active players in the NHL including Zdeno Chara (Boston Bruins) and Tomas Tatar (Montreal Canadiens). Since 1980 over 80 Slovaks have played in the NHL, including Peter Stastny, Marian Hossa and Peter Bondra, making them historically the 8th most represented country in the NHL. Truly, both nations have contributed greatly to hockey in the NHL and on the international level.

I could not end this article without recognizing Pavol Demitra and everything he did for Slovak hockey, including leading the 2010 team that just missed winning a medal in Vancouver. At the time, Dmitra was playing for the hometown Vancouver Canucks, and his play in that Olympics was an inspiration for me as a fan of the NHL and Slovak hockey. Unfortunately, Pavol died a year later in a plane crash in Yaroslavl, Russia while playing in the Russian KHL league. His leadership in Slovak hockey has continued through other former NHL players including Miroslav Satan, who currently serves as the President of the Slovak Ice Hockey Federation and was instrumental in bringing in Craig Ramsay as the current coach for the National Team. I truly believe Pavol is smiling from above and celebrating their historic bronze medal and great Olympic run, right along with the Slovaks.
SPRING FESTIVAL - Czech and Slovak Easter Traditions

The Czech and Slovak Heritage Association invites you to the SPRING FESTIVAL - Czech and Slovak Easter Traditions.

The event will take place on Sunday, April 3, 2022 from 12 noon to 5pm at the Maryland State Game & Fish Protective Association.

CSHA will provide live music (Orchester Praževica), delicious food, pastries, beer, soft drinks and coffee. The program also includes traditional Easter activities for children: egg coloring, pomlazka making, egg hunt, face painting, games, etc.

The admission is $5 for Members, $10 for Non-members and is free for children. You can renew your annual membership or become a new member for only $25 per household at the event.

The event’s location has ample outside seating, a large banquet hall, and free parking. The address is: Maryland State Game & Fish Protective Association, 8735 Honeygo Blvd, Perry Hall, MD 21128.

Hope to see you all there.