Mr. Thomas M. Hricik

The Jednota is saddened to report the passing of one of its most distinguished members, Mr. Thomas M. Hricik. The following is the obituary lovingly compiled by his family:

Thomas M. Hricik, 79, of Greensburg, died Tuesday, Jan. 5, 2010. Born Sept. 22, 1930, in Pleasant Unity, he was a son of the late Michael and Cecilia Takac Hricik. Tom attended Pleasant Unity Elementary School and graduated from Hurst High School, Norvelt. He was honorably discharged from the Army of Occupation, having served with 14th Armored Cav. Regiment on the Russian Border Patrol in Germany during the Korean War. He studied under the G.I. Bill and earned an accounting certificate from Westmoreland/Greensburg Business School. He also took additional courses in the purchasing field from the University of Pittsburgh and Duquesne University. Tom had been employed by Teledyne Vasco for 34 years, attaining the position of director of purchasing. As a member of Jednota Branch 181 KJ United, Tom served his branch and district as financial secretary and president of the George Onda District. He then served as national president of the First Catholic Slovak Union of the United States and Canada for 12 years. Tom was named President Emeritus. He was a lifelong member of St. Florian Catholic Church, United, and the church choir. Tom also had a lifelong love of Byzantine Catholic Church. He attended the annual pilgrimage at Mt. St. Macrina in Uniontown each year with his family. In 1997, he received the Ellis Island Medal of Honor for his humanitarian efforts and outstanding contributions to America representing the Slovak community as a distinguished fraternalist. In 2006, he was nominated by Bishop Lawrence E. Brandt to the Equestrian Order of the Holy Sepulchre of Jerusalem, one of the highest papal honors. He participated in the investiture ceremony at St. Patrick’s Cathedral in New York City. Tom was a member of the board of directors of Slovak Catholic Federation and the Slovak League of America. He was also a member of the board of directors of the Jankola Museum, Library of Sisters of St. Cyril and Methodius and a member of the following organizations: National Fraternal Congress of America, Slovak Catholic Sokol, First Catholic Slovak Ladies Association, National Slovak Society, Zemplin Club in Cleveland, Ohio, and Kosice, Slovakia, Western Pennsylvania Slovak Cultural Association, First Catholic Slovak Union of the United States and Canada and a past member of the Slovak World Congress. Tom was proud of his Slovak heritage and was fluent in the language. He traveled extensively in Slovakia and much of Europe. He also was an avid reader, especially on historical topics. Tom loved when his family could all be together, especially during the holidays. Tom is survived by his wife of 53 years he was a top Recommender and was in fact a Million Dollar insurance producer. He was very proud of his family, including his wife Gerry, children and grand-children and his nephew. He talked of them frequently. As with any person of accomplishment, vision and energy he was not afraid to make tough and sometimes controversial decisions. In 1995 when he first became President of the Jednota, the Society was, for a number of reasons, facing financial problems. The Society surplus was down to three million dollars. When he left the office in 2006 our surplus was eleven million dollars and in spite of the greatest financial crisis the World has experienced since the Great Depression, that still is not totally resolved at this time, the Society’s surplus still stands at over eleven and one-half million today. Those controversial, although necessary decisions, included closing the old Jednota Ora...

Message from the President

Thomas M. Hricik passed from this Earth on Tuesday January 5, 2010. I along with several other Board Members attended his funeral on January 8th and 9th, 2010. On behalf of the First Catholic Slovak Union and myself I gave the following eulogy at the Funeral Mass:

It is with great sadness that we observe the death of Thomas M. Hricik, past President of the First Catholic Slovak Union, the Jednota, where Tom served as its President for twelve years, until his retirement in 2006. Prior to serving as President, Tom spent many years working diligently for the Society both as an elected National Officer and as a Member and Officer in Branch 181 and in the George Onda District. He was especially proud of his service to Branch 181, where for many years he was a top Recommender and was in fact a Million Dollar insurance producer.

As with any person of accomplishment, vision and energy he was not afraid to make tough and sometimes controversial decisions. In 1995 when he first became President of the Jednota, the Society was, for a number of reasons, facing financial problems. The Society surplus was down to three million dollars. When he left the office in 2006 our surplus was eleven million dollars and in spite of the greatest financial crisis the World has experienced since the Great Depression, that still is not totally resolved at this time, the Society’s surplus still stands at over eleven and one-half million today.

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A familiar expression states, “A picture is worth a thousand words.” Many of us thoroughly enjoy a good picture book, and we often preview the books we read by glancing at its photographs. The recently published Cleveland Slovaks is history at its best – through the lens of the camera. The work is a sparkling accomplishment of several years of splendid research to document the history of one of America’s largest ethnic communities, Slovak Americans in the Cleveland area.

The two authors, John T. Sabol and Lisa A. Alzo, were both eminently qualified for this task. A native of Cleveland and long-time parishioner of the Nativity of the Blessed Virgin Mary parish, Sabol has written a number of church histories and has published articles on genealogy. His co-author, Lisa A. Alzo, is a free lance writer and lecturer who has published six books and many magazine articles. Her works include the award winning Three Slovak Women: A Family History that mirrors the experiences of many Slovak-American women over three generations, and the wonderful cookbook, Baba’s Kitchen. She also serves on the board of directors for the Czechoslovak Genealogical Society International, and both authors appeared at the CGI’s recent conference in Independence, Ohio.

Their book appears at a most auspicious time, for the Diocese of Cleveland has been closing the Slovak parishes which served the immigrants and several generations of their descendants. As more and more parishioners moved to the suburbs and attendance dwindled, the memory of their churches and their vibrant life needed to be preserved, for, they depict a story not just for historians, but for all interested in immigrant history and the Slovak-American experience.

The book also helps bring life to several of my articles which I wrote on Cleveland Slovaks, including the chapter in “The Slovaks,” in Identity, Conflict, and Cooperation: Central Europeans in Cleveland, 1850-1930 (Cleveland: Western Reserve Historical Society, 2003); pp. 249-306. Many of my research I did was in 1988-89, and the book was finally published over a decade later. Unfortunately, my chapter contained only one photo, for at the time, we authors were told that photos would make the book too expensive. Since that time, technology has reduced costs and has made the publication of photography much more affordable. A few years after my research, Cleveland native Joe Hornack helped arrange the translation and publication of the best early history of Cleveland Slovaks, Ján Pankuch’s History of the Slovaks of Cleveland and Lakewood, translated by Rasto Gallo. (Minneapolis and Cleveland: Czechoslovak Genealogical Society International and the Western Reserve Historical Society, 2001). Hornack, who has worked with Andrew Hudak at the Slovak Institute at the Slovak Benedictine Abbey, also offered considerable assistance to Sabol and Alzo in obtaining photos and information for the Cleveland Slovaks book, so his contribution merits recognition as well.

The story of Slovak Cleveland deserves attention, for according to the 2000 U.S. Census, about 93,500 people from the region confirmed their Slovak ethnic background. The book documents their history in photographs with full explanations of each scene, which the authors meticulously researched for accuracy. Prominently featured are Slovak neighborhoods, the ethnic churches, and family and fraternal life. The book also offers a fine introduction to the history of early Cleveland Slovaks, beginning with a brief summary of the story that Jacob Gruss told to Pankuch about the first settlers who established communities near the mills and factories where they labored.

Thanks to Arcadia Publishing, many communities and ethnic groups throughout the country are documenting their story and history in pictures. Arcadia has assumed the role as the leading publisher of local and regional history in the United States. It aims “to make history accessible and meaningful through the publication of books on the heritage of America’s people and places.” Arcadia has published more than 6,000 local history titles. For further information or to purchase this book or others, one may also visit the website: www.arcadia-publishing.com, or one may write to:

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Author’s Notes:

- The two authors, John T. Sabol and Lisa A. Alzo, were both eminently qualified for this task.
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In July of 1948, Jan Kocur died of pulmonary disease exacerbated by his exposure to poison gas during WWII. His funeral was attended by dignitaries and representatives from every Slovak organization in the US including Jednota and the National Slovak Society.

The funeral Mass was conducted by no less than 9 priests. It was presided over by Fr. Theodore Kojis, Abbott of the Cleveland Benedictines. Burial took place in the Slovak cemetery in Tarentum, Pennsylvania.

This 256-page book is a glowing tribute to the man whom Carol Sidor dubbed as “a gallant secretary.” The 20 short chapters read quickly, although sometimes the text gets bogged down with too many details like in the chapter “Citizen Kocur,” and the “Doughboy” chapter reads like a textbook at times. Yet one cannot fault Kocur, Jr., for his diligent footnoting work; he has certainly done his homework.

The use of diacritical accents is uneven throughout the book, such as the back is missing from the “C” in Konstantin Culen’s name. And the spelling of Masaryk in the book—Masaryk—is unusual, indeed. I found it curious as to items left out of this biography like mention of the 1915 Cleveland Agreement, Milan Stefaník’s mysterious death in 1919 and the Slovak National Uprising in 1944 which spelled and the end of the Slovak statehood.

A brief account of the history of the SLA would have been appropriate at the outset of the story and I would have liked to read more about Andrej Hlinka and the People’s Party’s role in Slovakia during this timeframe. Another person I’d have liked to learn more about was Amelka Kocur, Jan Kocur’s daughter who stepped in to help with the secretarial role when Kocur fell ill.

The use of the hyphenated form of Czech-Slovakia throughout most of the story is problematic, for the hyphenation was “officially” dropped from the name in 1920. These quibbles aside, Jan Kocur is a paen to a grandfather who achieved much in his lifetime and has proven to be a true Slovak patriot.

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**Book Review: Cleveland Slovaks**

Michael J. Kopanic, Jr., Ph.D.


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**Answer to Puzzle**

Solution to Puzzle from page 11

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