A Very Special Year

We are well into our golden year, continually delighted and amazed to see how an early vision in 1974 (and far before) became such a splendid institution. We invite you to join us as we present a line-up of programs, workshops, exhibits, and signature events designed by our staff to carry out the Mission and Vision of NCSML. On the following pages, you will find an extended calendar of events, leading to a Grand Celebration the last week of October and the first week of November.

The Grand Celebration will feature multiple cultural programs, including a light show, fashion show, and presentation of Dvořák’s operatic masterpiece Rusalka.

2024 will see the debut of an exciting new vehicle to share the museum’s work, as we debut NCSMLTV, our Vimeo channel. It will feature classes (including our popular cooking school), concerts, lectures, and exhibit tours. Our goal is to make NCSMLTV attractive to all subscribers, whether they are based in Iowa, nationally, or internationally.

2024: THE YEAR OF CZECH MUSIC
visitors can enjoy special musical presentations throughout the year, as we also celebrate The Year of Czech Music. Hear a new take on Dvořák’s Symphony No. 9 in E minor, The New World Symphony. Learn about other major classical Czech composers in an exhibition by the National Museum, Prague, on loan from the Czech Center New York.

KEEPING OUR TRADITIONS ALIVE
NCSML is proud to host a robust lineup of hands-on workshops this summer. Artists from the Moravian Glory Foundation will conduct a week of decorating objects with Moravian folk motifs. Learn the basics of designing and creating your own personal kroj. Fine tune your kolache making skills. Enjoy the opening of a new art exhibit: Contemporary Takes on Moravian Folk Motifs. Study the Czech language, and receive foreign language credit. Immerse yourself in Czech and Slovak History and Culture.

Watch ncsml.org for online registration info, or call 319-362-8500.
Looking at Two Sides of the Same Coin: Preparing for the Next 50 Years and Beyond

Dear friends of the NCSML,

As we plan for the future, one of the most urgent needs to address is our 20-year-old, out-dated database system. For the past 15 months we have been planning to transfer all our data and clean it up, including our membership data. This is a huge task and our NCSML team has been working diligently and with extra focus to accomplish this incredibly big job. It involves all departments, including our store, finance, membership, communications, marketing, website, and programs/events registration.

On March 25 we began transitioning to Double-Knot and ClearView. Given the scope of this project, please be patient and understanding. Our membership mailings may be delayed and even incorrect. Please know that this is a data system challenge. If you get a duplicate or an incorrect date on a membership card, please call or write to our membership coordinator Mariah at 319-362-8500/mschleuter@ncsml.org. The job of data transfer is huge at all levels. Thank you for understanding. The important thing is that our NCSML team continues to do incredible programs, exhibits, events, and library outreach.

MOST, “the bridge,” is published semi-annually by National Czech & Slovak Museum & Library (NCSML). For additional information on NCSML programming and events, visit ncsml.org or follow us at:

MUSEUM HOURS
Monday - Saturday, 9:30 AM - 4 PM; Sunday, 12 - 4 PM

LIBRARY HOURS
Tuesday - Saturday, 9:30 AM - 4 PM
Appointments recommended for research.

1400 Inspiration Place SW
Cedar Rapids, IA 52404
319-362-8500
ncsml.org

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Please come to us often during our golden celebration!

Cecilia Rokusek
President and CEO

Dear friends of our golden NCSML,

We are off to a radiant year! Just read this outstanding edition of MOST that our team has put together. I am so excited to share with you all what we have been doing and all that we have planned for our year-long 50th Anniversary Celebration. We are truly preserving and expanding our Czech and Slovak imprints through the U.S. and beyond. I could not be more proud of all of you who support us and inspire us to grow and reach new audiences. Membership to NCSML is so important. We ask you all to spread the word about NCSML and expand our family through new memberships in 2024.

There are lots of surprises coming ... NCSTV and the completion of the Prague-style Orloj (the only one in North America). The Gazette’s Diana Nollen wrote a beautiful story about the project. To read, follow the link or scan the code.

https://tinyurl.com/qmfwwyk

Smithsonian Affiliate

IOWA ARTS COUNCIL
IOWA DEPARTMENT OF CULTURAL AFFAIRS

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Virginia Wilts, 2nd Vice Chair
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Lee Freeman, Secretary
Steve Michalick, Immediate Past Chair

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Director of the Slovak National Museum
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Gary Rozek
Dr. Jan Vlkcek
Marica Vlkcek
The Honorable Michael Zantovsky
NCSML is funded in part by a grant from the Cultural Enrichment Partnership Program administered by the Iowa Department of Cultural Affairs.

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<td>NCSML Cooking School: Vepřo-Knedlo-Zelo – Pork-Sauerkraut-Dumplings</td>
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<td>Embroiderers’ Guild Demonstrations</td>
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<td>Exhibit Opening — Václav Havel: From Dissident to President</td>
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<td>Economic Summit: Understanding the Past to Build the Future (International Partnership Forum) Registration and Networking</td>
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<td>2</td>
<td>Ribbon Cutting Ceremony for Václav Havel: From Dissident to President with Ambassador Palous Martin</td>
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<td>Let’s Talk Czech (in person or Zoom)</td>
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<td>Houby Days in Czech Village</td>
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<td>ZÚŠ Kyjov: Two performances by a 32-piece Children’s Cimbalom Band</td>
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<td>Czechém Out Book Club: The Shop on Main Street by Ladislav Grosman</td>
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<td>Let’s Talk Czech (in person or Zoom)</td>
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<tr>
<td>25</td>
<td>NCSML Cooking School: Loupáčky – Sweet Pastry Rolls</td>
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<td>25</td>
<td>Exhibit Closing — Postmark Czechoslovakia</td>
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### JUNE

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<td>TBA</td>
<td>Week-Long Summer Classes; Smithsonian Leaders at the NCSML</td>
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<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Week-Long Immersion Classes — Czech and Slovak History and Culture</td>
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<td>1</td>
<td>Free First Saturday for Students</td>
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<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Exhibit Opening — Famous Czech Composers</td>
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<td>Embroiderers’ Guild Demonstrations</td>
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<tr>
<td>TBA</td>
<td>Week-Long Summer Classes; Smithsonian Leaders at the NCSML</td>
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<tr>
<td>TBA</td>
<td>Week-long art class on Moravian Art Motifs</td>
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<td>4</td>
<td>Closed for the Holiday</td>
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<td>Coffee &amp; Kolach</td>
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<td>6</td>
<td>Free First Saturday for Students</td>
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<td>Needlepoint Guild Demonstrations</td>
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<td>Embroiderers’ Guild Demonstrations</td>
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### AUGUST

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<th>Date</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>TBA</td>
<td>A week of Radost Theatre — Brno puppetry for children and adults</td>
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<tr>
<td>TBA</td>
<td>Kroej-making Workshop</td>
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<td>2</td>
<td>Coffee &amp; Kolach</td>
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<td>3</td>
<td>Free First Saturday for Students</td>
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<td>Needlepoint Guild Demonstrations</td>
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<td>Embroiderers’ Guild Demonstrations</td>
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<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Coffee &amp; Kolach</td>
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<td>7</td>
<td>Free First Saturday for Students</td>
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<td>Needlepoint Guild Demonstrations</td>
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<td>BrewNost 2024</td>
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<td>Embroiderers’ Guild Demonstration</td>
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<td>Exhibit Closing — Václav Havel</td>
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### OCTOBER

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<th>Date</th>
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<tr>
<td>TBA</td>
<td>Intensive Czech Language Class; Kolache Class: Foods to Treasure for Generations; Community Engagement Series and Events: Concert by Filip Pavlů of the Prague Opera and Vlado Chmelo, NCSML Cooking School</td>
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<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Coffee &amp; Kolach</td>
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<td>5</td>
<td>Free First Saturday for Students</td>
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<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Exhibit Opening — Modern Design</td>
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<td>12</td>
<td>Exhibit Closing — Famous Czech Composers</td>
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<td>16</td>
<td>Needlepoint Guild Demonstration</td>
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<td>Embroiderers’ Guild Demonstration</td>
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<th>Date</th>
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<tr>
<td>TBA</td>
<td>Community Engagement Series and Events; Children’s workshop featuring Czech children’s literature; Community workshop on Czech music</td>
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<tr>
<td>TBA</td>
<td>NCSML Cooking School: Buchty and Kolache demonstration</td>
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<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Coffee &amp; Kolach</td>
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<td>2</td>
<td>Free First Saturday for Students</td>
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<td>20</td>
<td>Needlepoint Guild Demonstration</td>
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<td>28</td>
<td>Embroiderers’ Guild Demonstration</td>
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### DECEMBER

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<tr>
<td>TBA</td>
<td>NCSML Cooking School</td>
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<td>6</td>
<td>Coffee &amp; Kolach</td>
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<td>7</td>
<td>Free First Saturday for Students</td>
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<tr>
<td>7-8</td>
<td>Old World Christmas Market, including concerts by local musicians</td>
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<tr>
<td>18</td>
<td>Needlepoint Guild Demonstration</td>
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<td>26</td>
<td>Embroiderers’ Guild Demonstration</td>
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### GRAND CELEBRATION

- OCT 28 AND 31: Immigrants to America video mapping light show on the NCSML building
- OCT 29: New World Symphony — new arrangement for guitar and piano, concert by Barbora Kubíkova and Ahmad Hedar
- OCT 30 AND NOV 3: Rusalka featuring Ester Pavlů of the Prague Opera and Vlado Chmelo, Metropolitan Opera artist
- OCT 31: Fashion Show: Our Czech and Slovak Kroje in the 21st Century by renowned Czech and Slovak fashion designer, Beata Rajška
- NOV 1: Dvořák and Korngold: a unique combination — a mezzo soprano, piano, and violin (Antonín Dvořák was Czech; Erich Korngold was a Moravian-born American composer)
- NOV 2: Film documentary — Peter Dvořský: Slovak opera tenor and his story

Please visit ncsmlo.org or call 319-362-8500 for more information on these events—more new programs to be announced throughout the year.
EXHIBIT HIGHLIGHTS

Please visit ncsml.org for more details on specific events.

Marj Nejdl: Master Folk Artist
Closes April 21, Anderson Gallery
Truly a national treasure, folk artist Marj Nejdl’s wonderful works are on display. The exhibit features decorated eggs, a quirky birdhouse, ceramics, aprons, book illustrations, paintings, and Christmas ornaments.

Václav Havel: From Dissident to President
April 27–September 29, Anderson Gallery
The exhibit chronicles pivotal moments in the life of Václav Havel as a pre-revolutionary dissident, playwright, and as the first president of the Czech Republic. Václav Havel was a playwright, essayist and philosopher, Charter 77 spokesman, prisoner of conscience, leading figure in the political changes of 1989, President of the Czech Republic, and a global political figure who played a crucial role in bringing the Czech Republic into NATO, marking the beginning of a new chapter in relations between the Czech Republic and the United States.

Postmark Czechoslovakia:
Every stamp tells a story
March 23 – May 25, Skala Bartizal Library
Why a stamp collection at the National Czech & Slovak Museum & Library? It is one more way to tell the stories of the Czech & Slovak people. Stamps reflect the historical, political, social, and cultural aspects of Czechoslovakia and the present day Czech and Slovak Republics. Thanks to the efforts of three members of the Cedar Rapids Stamp Club, we have been able to organize our numerous stamp donations to make this exhibit possible.

Exhibit Revisit
February 10–April 14, Petrik Gallery
In honor of our 50th anniversary, NCSML presents a retrospective on past exhibits, featuring interactives, games, and artifacts. Relive a little piece of Gridiron Champs, Pop-Ups from Prague, Chihuly, Bohemian Boudoir, and Beer, Please, plus many more!

Famous Czech Composers
June 1–October 12, Skala Bartizal Library
Immerse yourselves in the life stories of four phenomenal composers and their classical music works in an exhibition by the National Museum, Prague. On loan from the Czech Center New York, this exhibition uses the graphic novel format to tell the stories of four great Czech composers: Antonín Dvořák, Bedřich Smetana, Leos Janáček, and Bohuslav Martinů.
Alphonse Mucha: Master of Art Nouveau
May 4 - September 1, Petrik Gallery

Presented are 75 works including rare original lithographs and proofs, paintings, drawings, posters, books, and portfolios from the Dhawan Collection, one of the finest private collections of Mucha’s works in the U.S. Mucha is most often remembered for the prominent role he played in shaping the aesthetics of French Art Nouveau at the turn of the 20th century.

The National Collection: 50 Years of NCSML
March 16–January 12, 2025, Smith Gallery

NCSML has been collecting significant Czech and Slovak artifacts and archival materials for 50 years. Highlights from the collections are featured, including the rare fish-scale kroj, an original Andy Warhol silk screen, stunning garnet jewelry, beautiful porcelain and glass, a motorcycle, and much more.
Miss Czech-Slovak U.S. and her Royal Court Have a Mission

Each August, the rural community of Wilber, NE hosts the annual Wilber Czech Days Festival to celebrate their Czech and Slovak cultures. During this festival, the Miss Czech-Slovak U.S. pageant is held, and elects three young women as cultural ambassadors, representing their Czech and Slovak communities throughout the U.S. To learn more about the pageant, you can visit their website at https://www.missczechslovakus.com/.

This year’s court is proud to be offering free Czech and Slovak language and cultural lessons via Zoom. The lessons, which are beginner-level and child friendly, are offered the second Monday of every month from 6-7 p.m. CST. Each lesson is accompanied by a lesson plan that is emailed along with the Zoom link. The plan includes much of the information covered during the session and provides links for participants to access and refer to as resources while studying.

The court covers a range of topics and dives into their cultural, historical, and linguistic significance. At the end of each lesson, they pronounce that month’s vocabulary words. A variety of activities for each lesson can printed and filled out during or after the lesson.

If interested, contact Destiny at destihollings@yahoo.com, or scan the QR code to register.

The Sokol Museum and Library: an Online Resource

“Sharing the story of Sokol’s contributions to gymnastics, culture, statehood and democracy”

Sokol Museum and Library is a non-profit organization that provides a virtual museum and library materials as a component of the National Czech & Slovak Museum & Library. These printed materials serve educational, cultural and historic purposes. SML is the only organization with the sole purpose of preserving the history of the Sokol movement that originated in Prague in 1862.

Now Available — the Virtual Museum (it’s free)
The museum links Sokol and Czech history, and features Sokol’s role in World Wars I and II, and in immigrants’ lives in the U.S. Exhibits include Slets (festivals), gymnastics, treasures, buildings, and Sokol’s role in international gymnastics. The museum traces Sokol’s story, which began in Prague in 1862, to the present time. Currently, 12 exhibits are available.

This painting by Stephen Bar, a gift to Jerry Milan, depicts Sokol gymnasts soaring along with the falcon, Sokol’s symbol.

The information for this article was provided by Dr. Robert Tomanek, emeritus professor of anatomy and cell biology at The University of Iowa, and author of numerous books on Sokol.
Youth Cimbalom Music of The Elementary Art School Kyjov (ZUŠ Kyjov)

U.S. Tour to Make a Stop at Cedar Rapids to Perform Twice at NCSML During Houby Days

Folklore is an integral part of the cultural heritage of the Kyjovsko region in southeastern Czechia, and cimbalom music is a significant part of it. The pupils at ZUŠ Kyjov are instructed not only in classical music, but also folk music, in the form of lessons in cimbalom music.

Ensembles from the school regularly perform and compete at folklore and non-folklore events in the Czech Republic and Central Europe. This coming May, a 32-piece ensemble of ZUŠ Kyjov students will embark on a U.S. tour, where they will perform at the consulate of the Czech Republic in Chicago, and in the beautiful Bohemian Hall in the Czech Center New York. NCSML is thrilled to announce that they are also scheduled to perform twice at the museum (on the roundabout) — Saturday evening, May 18, and Sunday afternoon, May 19, at NCSML — in conjunction with Houby Days. This is indeed a special treat for 2024: The Year of Czech Music.

The future is ours to make for the next 50 years and beyond. We will grow and our impact will be there for generations yet to come.

— Dr. Cecilia Rokusek, speaking at the International Meeting of the Forum of Slavic Cultures and the 2023 Ziva Awards Ceremony in Bratislava, Slovakia, in October 2023.

Youth Cimbalom Music of The Elementary Art School Kyjov (ZUŠ Kyjov)

OUR LOVE AND PRAYERS FROM CZECH AND SLOVAK AMERICANS

NCSML joined others in paying respects to the families and friends of 14 victims who were shot and killed in a mass shooting December 28, 2023. This wreath was laid on the campus of Charles University in Prague, where the attack took place. It was the deadliest mass murder in the Czech Republic since its independence in 1993.

SUPPORTING NCSML’S ACADEMIC MISSION

Dr. Cecilia Rokusek, President and CEO, NCSML; Dr. Martin Prochazka, Rector/President, Palacký University, Olomouc, Czech Republic; and Dr. Douglas Kristensen, Chancellor University of Nebraska at Kearney, sign a major affiliation agreement. The three institutions have maintained an outstanding working relationship for more than 16 years, enhancing and broadening opportunities for student, faculty, and scholar exchanges among the three institutions.
A unique forum for delegations from the U.S., Czech Republic, and Slovakia will discuss the currents of modern history relating to WWI, WWII, 1968, 1989, and recent times. Participants include Miloslav Stašek, Czech ambassador to the U.S., and Radovan Javorčík, Slovak ambassador to the U.S. The forum will be held at NCSML on Thursday and Friday, May 2-3, 2024.

This gathering will provide an opportunity to learn more about present-day possibilities for specific industry clusters, university research areas, and topics of freedom, democracy and immigration in the concerned states and regions. The ambassadors will be joined by other high-level American, Czech and Slovak business leaders, university leaders, state policy makers, local policy makers, government representatives, politicians, artists, scholars and educators visiting the area to attend NCSML’s Annual Preciosa Gala on Saturday, May 4, 2024.

The National Czech & Slovak Museum & Library in Cedar Rapids, Iowa is looking forward to building more Transatlantic partnerships.

SCAN CODE TO REGISTER

This year we are commemorating the 25th anniversary of the Czech Republic’s accession to NATO, which marked a watershed moment on the path to ensuring our national security.

We are a country with tragic historical experience related to the expansionism of our neighbours, both close and further afield; the wheels of foreign armoured vehicles repeatedly trampled our land and our hope of a free and independent life. In the twentieth century, we stood alone against Nazi and Soviet aggression. For us, the years 1938 and 1968 marked the beginning of deeply traumatising and humiliating periods. Joining NATO gave not only Czechia but also all of Central and Eastern Europe the greatest guarantee of security in its entire history. The family of countries united in the Alliance share more than an interest in the security of Europe and North America; in the words of Article 2 of the North Atlantic Treaty, they are also dedicated to “strengthening their free institutions” and thus contributing to “the further development of peaceful and friendly international relations.” Joining NATO therefore unequivocally helped to anchor our values. It was a fitting end to a story that included the trauma of the Munich Agreement, the seemingly futile hope of many Czechs and Slovaks for our country to develop freely — but also the fall of the Communist regime and the subsequent withdrawal of the occupying Soviet troops. The Alliance, too, wrote its own story; by opening up to the states of Central and Eastern Europe, it proved its ability to respond to changes in the international setting and to take on a new security role.

To read or hear the rest of President Pavel’s article, go to https://tinyurl.com/562fyhv6

On March 4, 2001, Czech Ambassador Alexander Vendra and Slovak Ambassador Martin Butora were featured in a Gazette article. Guests at the NCSML, the diplomats participated in a forum discussing the impact of NATO membership on the Czech Republic, and actions required for Slovak admission. (On March 29, 2004, Slovakia officially became a member of the alliance.)
NEW PLACES, CHERISHED TRADITIONS

Dr. Cecilia Rokusek is joined by Representative Ashley Hinson on the dais at February’s naturalization ceremony. Judge Mark A. Roberts swore in 54 new U.S. citizens from 30 counties. NCSML is proud to host this ceremony each year, as its own founding 50 years ago was by second and third-generation descendants of Czech and Slovak immigrants. Congratulations to all!

Vitáme Vás Srdence: We Heartfully Welcome You

Excerpted from Dr. Rokusek’s welcome: In our native Czech and Slovak language, we “heartfully welcome you” to our national museum and library. We want our national museum and library to be your national museum and library, as we tell the stories of Czech and Slovak immigration to America. We want you to take your stories of immigration and pass them onto your children. In a few minutes, you will be a proud American who has worked very hard to become a legal citizen in Iowa, the heartland of the United States. Thank you for making this important choice. America will be made even better by your citizenship.

The memories you cherish from your cultural past — traditions, music, literature, food, diplomacy, and celebrations — are important to preserve. That’s what America is about. The beauty of America is our diversity and what we can learn from each other. We are more alike than different.

Embrace the American culture, and celebrate your own cultures for future generations. I always say, “I am an American citizen with Czech and Slovak heritage.” I hope that you will proudly do the same with your cultural and ancestral homelands.

America is one nation of many backgrounds, but we are all bound together by certain key principles: freedom, democracy, equality, and justice. We all share responsibility to each other, and to future Americans, to preserve those precious rights. You are all part of America’s future.

A Proud Moment: Passing on Traditions to Family and Community

It’s been a big year for Marj Nejdl. Her solo exhibition, Marj Nejdl: Master Folk Artist, opened in the Anderson Gallery on January 27 (closes April 21). She was honored with a reception attended by friends and family, and the mayor of Cedar Rapids, IA issued an official proclamation designating the day as “Marj Nejdl Day.”

Of all the beautiful artwork Marj has shared with the community and the world, perhaps the most charming is her stunning collection of decorated eggs. A perennial favorite at NCSML, Marj has been conducting workshops on Kráslice (Czech egg decorating) for several decades.

Marj learned the art form from her uncle, and has passed the tradition on to her family and many eager students. This year, she was very pleased to sit back and watch as her grandchildren, Tom and Emily Nejdl, led the Nejdl Family Egg Decorating Workshop.
MOST continues to highlight our valued fraternal partners, celebrating the roles they played in the Czech and Slovak immigrant experience, and how they evolved from protective associations into financial institutions. In this issue, we highlight our friends in Texas — three fraternals, and a farm mutual insurance company, all of whom provide both financial security and cultural enrichment to their members. Please contact Rick Martin, Director of National & International Development, at rmartin@ncsml.org, for more information on fraternal partnerships.

Czech and Slovak Immigration to Texas

According to the Houston Institute for Culture, “Czechs first settled in Texas in the 1840s, traveling from Bohemia, Moravia, and Austrian Silesia. Like the Germans, they sought to improve their economic situation. Chiefly, famine, disease, poverty, and unemployment pushed Czechs to emigrate. Farmland prices in Texas were attractive compared to their homeland.” Carl Postl and the Rev. Josef Arnost Bergmann were two of the first Czech settlers to write about their experiences in Texas, which motivated fellow countrymen to make the trip to America. Josef Lešíkar (1806-1887) organized two groups of Czechs to come to Texas in 1851 and 1853. Lešíkar bought farmland in Austin County. He wrote periodical articles for both American and Czech audiences and helped originate Czech journalism in America.

According to the Texas State Historical Association, “Two basic characteristics of the Czechs in Texas lie at the heart of their social structure: the extremely close-knit family unit and the attitude toward land. The typical Czech farm family was a largely self-contained economic and social unit whose main purpose was to cultivate the land. Farming was a way of life not clearly separated from other life goals and not seen merely as a way of making money. The rural Czech settlements were characterized by such cooperative institutions as the beef club, designed to provide each member family with a supply of fresh beef weekly during the spring and summer. Settlements also often had an egalitarian social structure, a characteristic that helps to explain the Czechs’ pronounced enthusiasm for American democratic ideals. Communities became established, and social clubs and organizations began to proliferate, first on a local, then on a state, level. The result was the establishment of fraternal organizations such as the SPJST (Slovakovská podporující jednota statu Texas, known in English as the Slavic Benevolent Order of the State of Texas) in 1897; the KJT (Katolická jednota texaská) in 1888; and the KJZT (Cesko-rimská katolická podporující jednota zen texaských) in 1897, Czech Catholic organizations [providing] for both men and women. . . Each of these organizations grew out of a national Czech fraternal order but split away to become a Texas institution.”

Slavic Organizations in Texas

The letters “KJT” stand for Katolická Jednotá Texaská, which means “Catholic Union of Texas” in the Czech language. The initial meeting and election of provisional officers was held in Bluff, Texas (now Hostyn) on March 24 and 25, 1889 by a group of male Czech immigrants. KJT initially accepted only Catholic men into the Union but on January 1, 1979, KJT began accepting women as well. KJT now has over $150 million of insurance in force. The KJT home office is located in La Grange, Texas.

Katolická Jednota Zen Texaských — Catholic Women’s Union of Texas — was organized in September 1894 at St. Joseph’s Parish in Yoakum, Texas. They continue to support the Catholic traditions of their founders, with faith and service at the heart of their offerings, and more than $150 million in assets. With the revenues generated through the sale of life insurance products and annuities, they enhance the lives of their membership and the communities in which they reside through the development of numerous benefits and service projects. With the help of Father M. Vvulivk, their first Society of Czech Catholic Women was organized in 1894. Anna Jakubik was elected President, and Magdalena Prajer was elected Recording Secretary.

SPOTLIGHT: Four Friends in Texas

The letters “KJT” stand for Katolická Jednotá Texaská, which means “Catholic Union of Texas” in the Czech language. The initial meeting and election of provisional officers was held in Bluff, Texas (now Hostyn) on March 24 and 25, 1889 by a group of male Czech immigrants. KJT initially accepted only Catholic men into the Union but on January 1, 1979, KJT began accepting women as well. KJT now has over $150 million of insurance in force. The KJT home office is located in La Grange, Texas.
We are pleased to announce another successful joint partnership of Czechs and Slovaks made possible by the efforts of the NCSML. A member of NCSML’s board of Trustees, Dr. Sharon Schweitzer, resides in Austin, Texas, and is active with the Czech Center Museum Houston. With the collaboration of Miroslav “Mirek” Konvalina, Executive Director of the Czech Center New York; Dr. Cecilia Rokusek, President and CEO of the National Czech & Slovak Museum & Library; and Dr. Sharon Schweitzer, Vice Chair of NCSML Board of Trustees; a Memorandum of Understanding was executed in late 2023. This MOU was signed by Ms. Kerry Mazoch, Chair of Board of Czech Center Houston, and Miroslav Konvalina.

The Czech Center Museum Houston provides unique educational experiences based on authentic objects, art, music, stories, and lives of Czechs, Slovaks and people of all cultures who left their country to seek liberty and democracy in the United States of America.

The Czech Center New York, one of the most active Czech institutions in the U.S., had already signed a Memorandum of Agreement with the National Czech & Slovak Museum & Library in Cedar Rapids, encouraging joint cultural programs, exhibits, educational projects, and exchange of information and ideas for residencies and resources.

We look forward to bringing joint programming to our respective audiences and members with live and on-line events. Stay tuned!

Three-Way Agreement for Cultural Cooperation Signed

Miroslav Konvalina, Czech Center New York; Dr. Cecilia Rokusek, NCSML; and Dr. Sharon Schweitzer, Vice Chair of NCSML Board of Trustees, celebrate new opportunities and connections that a Memorandum of Understanding between CCNY and Czech Center Museum Houston will promote.

So Much More Than Businesses

Originally established as Rolnický Vzájemně Ochranný Spolek Statu Texas, RVOS is commonly known by the English translation of its original Czech name, Farmers Mutual Protective Association of Texas. RVOS is in fact a member-owned farm mutual insurance company — and thus a bit different from a fraternal organization. Founded in 1901 by nine citizens of Czech descent, RVOS still provides property protection and peace of mind to members, supporting and promoting Czech heritage and cultural activities in similar fashion to their fraternal counterparts. In 2023, RVOS had over $15 billion of insurance in force, and more than 60,000 members.

SPJST is an acronym for Slovanska Podporujici Jednota Statu Texas — approximately translated as “Slavic Benevolent Order of the State of Texas.” Organized officially on July 1, 1897, with 866 members and 25 charter lodges, there are now approximately 37,000 SPJST members in 102 lodges throughout Texas. Recent SPJST statewide initiatives include the November 5, 2009 Fort Hood Memorial, dedicated in 2016, and the West Benevolence Fund. In 2022, SPJST members contributed more than 50,000 hours and more than $250,000 to charitable causes and programs helping local communities. Local lodges sponsor an impressive array of family-oriented activities, including community service projects, recreational events, dances, picnics, and musical and choral groups. SPJST’s youth program provides boys and girls with a wealth of opportunities to achieve personal growth, fun, and scholarships. In 2023, SPJST presented over $60,000 in scholarships.
These new members of the NCSML Board of Directors bring a unique combination of talent and experience, to enrich the museum’s ongoing work in cultural awareness and cooperation.

Alex Gagamov was born in Brno, Czech Republic (then Czechoslovakia), and came to the United States after completing high school (Gymnazium) in Brno, following his dream to study in the United States and experience living abroad. His journey from that point on has been shaped by meeting remarkable people who helped define his next steps in life.

When studying for a year of high school, Alex met George Drost. A proud Brno native himself, George introduced Alex to Augustana College, IL, where he graduated with Political Science and Business Administration degrees in 2000. Alex joined the Board of the Council of Higher Education (CHE) as a Trustee in 2002, to promote his native culture by supporting higher education through scholarship awards to American students of Czech, Slovak, and Ruthenian heritage. His wish is to continue this mission by supporting NCSML.

In 2017, Ashley Vanorny became the second-youngest Council member to serve Iowa’s second largest city, Cedar Rapids, where she was born and raised. She is currently serving her second term and sits on the Development Committee, Public Safety and Youth Services Committee, and Area Ambulance Board of Directors. She is a Corridor Municipal Policy Organization member. She also serves as the Iowa League of Cities Board President.

Ashley completed her master’s degree in healthcare administration (MHA) from Des Moines University in 2021 and currently serves professionally in Healthcare Administration. She is active in philanthropy and serves on the Linn County Foster Care Review Board, the Linn County League of Women Voters Board, and the University of Iowa Political Science Advisory Board. She is also Education Vice President Advisor to Rho Chapter of Gamma Phi Beta.

She learned the value of hard work by helping on the Century farm where her family has lived since emigrating from Lidice, Czechia.

Richard Vavra is a life-long resident of Berwyn, Illinois. He is a graduate of DePaul University College of Commerce and DePaul College of Law. He is licensed to practice law in Illinois, in the Northern District of Illinois, Eastern Division, and before the U.S. Supreme Court.

Richard worked for Allstate Insurance Company in Illinois for more than 30 years. Currently in private practice, Richard is associated with a Chicago transactional law firm. He also is an arbitrator for the Circuit Court of Cook County and American Arbitration Association, and an insurance litigation consultant and expert witness. He is the current treasurer and former president of the Bohemian Lawyer’s Association of Chicago.

Angel Thomas is a dynamic and accomplished leader, charting an impressive career trajectory with BetterLife since assuming the role of Senior Vice President of Member Experience in 2020.

With a proven track record of driving customer growth through delivery excellence, Angel is a catalyst for positive change, adept at enhancing member and employee engagement while transforming profit and expense results.

Beyond her professional achievements, Angel is deeply involved in community leadership. She currently serves as the President of the Wisconsin Fraternal Alliance and has contributed her expertise as a board member for the Heart of The Valley YMCA. Her involvement extends to the Financial Council and Pastoral Council, where she chaired children’s activities at her local parish.

In mid-February, the National Czech & Slovak Museum & Library was invited by the U.S. Embassy in Prague to participate in a wreath-laying ceremony commemorating U.S. Presidents’ Day. NCSML Director of Community Outreach & Development Andy Whiting traveled to Prague to represent the museum, and was able to meet U.S. Ambassador Bijan Sabet, who was hosting the event.

While in Prague, Andy had several other productive meetings, including meeting with Pavla Niklová, the director of the Jewish Museum in Prague, to discuss possible future collaboration. Andy was also interviewed by Ian Willoughby of Czech Radio–Radio Prague International about all of the great work going on at NCSML (the interview is archived here: tinyurl.com/3annat7r). We are so proud of NCSML’s international presence!

Andy Whiting, NCSML director of community outreach and development, recently visited Prague and met with Pavla Niklová, Director of the Jewish Museum in Prague (top right), and U.S. Ambassador Bijan Sabet (near right). The wreath commemorates U.S. Presidents’ Day.
Personal library of Dr. Miloslav Rechcigl, Jr.
In August 2023, NCSML acquired the personal library of Dr. Miloslav Rechcigl, Jr. It consists of books, periodicals, newspapers, and additional educational resources: maps, rare books, and collections related to Americans of Czech, Moravian, Slovak, Carpatho-Rusyn and other ancestry.

Dr. Rechcigl, who escaped communist Czechoslovakia and later graduated from Cornell University, was a founder and past president of the Czechoslovak Society of Arts and Sciences. He worked for the National Institute of Health, the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, and the State Department, where he became chief of the Research and Institutional Grants division. His involvement with the Czechoslovak Society of Arts & Sciences (SVU) dates back to 1960, when he became secretary of the society’s Washington, DC chapter. He was president of the international organization between 1974 and 1978, and again between 1994 and 2006. The NCSML interviewed Dr. Rechcigl as part of its oral history project — see www.tinyurl.com/4jhk9yfw.

NCSML Signs Letter of Intent to Acquire Jankola Library collections
NCSML has entered into an agreement with the Sisters of Saints Cyril and Methodius in Danville, PA, to acquire the resources of the Father Matthew Jankola Library. The two groups share a commitment to honoring those who immigrated to America and contributed their hard work, skill and vision to the growth of our nation. Father Jankola was the founder of the Congregation of the Sisters of Saints Cyril and Methodius, which was created to fulfill a need for teachers in the Slovak immigrant community.

In December 2023, we traveled to Danville and retrieved the contents of the periodicals collection, which is named in honor of Father Stefan Furdek. The materials were packed into 200 boxes and filled a 16-foot Penske box truck. We will return in August to retrieve the book collection, and make a final trip in the fall to retrieve boxes of library materials that were transferred to Danville from the old Jednota Printery. These collections will enrich the NCSML’s Slovak-American representation of culture and history. On May 3, we will formally acknowledge this acquisition in the presence of representatives from the Sisters of Saints Cyril and Methodius.

Considered the most important Slovak leader in the U.S. at the turn of the 20th century, Father Stefan Furdek was a true leader coming from the remarkable Orava region in present-day Slovakia. He emigrated to Cleveland in 1882, and for 33 years he was the parish priest in one of the most significant Bohemian parishes, Our Lady of Lourdes in Cleveland. It was under Furdek’s leadership that the First Catholic Slovak Union (Jednota) and the First Catholic Slovak Ladies Association were founded. He also served as the first President of the Slovak League of America, which later advocated for an independent Czechoslovak nation. What a Slovak and Czech story at the same time!

While in the area, we took the opportunity to visit a number of Slovak and Czech organizations and sites. We were kindly allowed into Furdek’s Our Lady of Lourdes Church by a parish associate, who also presented us with publications about the history of the parish. We said hello to the staff at the Czech Catholic Union, and were delighted to meet the Sokol Greater Cleveland President, Paul Burik, at the Bohemian National Hall in Cleveland, where the significant Cleveland Agreement was signed by the Czech-American and Slovak-American representatives in 1915.

Paul took us to the Cleveland Cultural Gardens, which honors the most significant Czech, Slovak, and Carpatho-Rusyn leaders, as well as those of other nationalities who settled in Cleveland. Our final stop was at St. Andrew Abbey in Cleveland, which has preserved the Slovak cultural heritage for many decades. ■

You Too May Be a Writer: The NCSML Guild Writers
The Guild Writers, organized a decade ago as an interest group of the NCSML Guild, published an anthology in December 2018, and have also published several memoirs of their members. Three more memoirs are planned for 2024.

In addition to entertaining one another with their stories, they also occasionally use a meeting to watch a feature film about writing or writers—films like Shadows in the Sun, Cross-Creek, Midnight in Paris, and Finding Forrester.

Sandra Hudson of the Guild Writers says, “When I retired, an acquaintance invited me to join a writers’ group. I told her, ‘I’m not a writer!’ Her response was, ‘How do you know? Have you tried it?’ Two decades and many stories later, I am now the one doing the inviting. If you are a Most reader who would like to explore something new, I invite you to be our guest for two or three Guild sessions. Who knows, you might surprise yourself and discover that you too are a writer.”

You are welcome to visit the group anytime. They meet every fortnight in the NCSML Board Room from 2-4 pm. Our next meeting is Monday, April 8. If you have questions, please contact Michelle Simoneau, Executive Assistant to the President and CEO, at (319) 362-8500, Ext. 200, or msimoneau@ncsml.org. The group welcomes, and is pleased to answer, your questions. ■
A TRIBUTE TO WOMEN WHO ENRICHED OUR LIVES

Our staff, volunteers, and International Board of Trustees are deeply saddened by the passing of three beautiful women. We are deeply grateful for their profound contributions to the cultural fabric of our museum, our community, and our lives.

MARY KAY NOVAK McGGRATH
1955–2024

Mary Kay McGrath — cherished friend, NCSML board member, community leader, and loving mother and wife, is often referred to as the angel of Czech Village, New Bohemia, and the National Czech & Slovak Museum & Library. The pride she felt with her Czech ancestry is seen everywhere and by everyone, especially in Czech Village and New Bo, a neighborhood she was passionate about revitalizing. About the angel wings that appeared in the neighborhood, she said: “I thought it would be fun to have an ‘angel trail’. I want it to be fun where people will come look for it.”

A NEW ANGEL IN HEAVEN
by Cecilia Rohusek

Our heavenly Father blesses us so much by putting angels on earth to brighten our days and radiate goodness to all.

Mary Kay McGrath was that earthly angel we loved so much.

She was kind, generous, loving, and above all genuinely beautiful to all who knew her. Her passion for her family, community, and Czech ancestry shined through all she did.

She was an angel whose presence was felt by all.

Her impact on all those who knew her will be felt for generations to come.

She truly left her angelic and symbolic immortality throughout Cedar Rapids and Linn County.

One can only ask why God took her away from this earthly home. He must have needed her in heaven.

She is looking down on all of us now and doing many good deeds in heaven.

There is no doubt that her prayers, positive thoughts, and continued good deeds will be showering down from heaven to her loving family and to everyone in the entire community.

God’s new angel is our Cedar Rapids angel too. She is forever in our hearts and minds.

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Janis Kazamour (left) and Carey Downs Gibson (right) with former CEO and President Gail Naughton, at a Cedar Rapids Museum of Art event in the late 2000s. Both women generously volunteered their individual skills and talents to myriad boards and causes, from the arts to human services. NCSML was very lucky to benefit from their dedication, and 21 years ago, they were instrumental in launching the fundraiser Brewnost, which became the Midwest’s premier international beer festival, supporting the educational and cultural mission of NCSML.

Janis had a saying: “You volunteer because you want to. You don’t expect any recognition. You do it because you like to. Plus, you always have job insurance.” Her Czech heritage found expression in her active participation on the National Czech & Slovak Museum & Library Board of Directors, serving as president, and contributing to the creation of the Brewnost fundraiser, now in its 21st year. Beyond the accolades, Janis was defined by her quiet acts of kindness and her willingness to support others. Her mentorship, financial assistance, and compassionate ear were a source of solace for countless individuals both locally and beyond.

CAREY DOWNS GIBSON
1938–2024

When Carey moved to Cedar Rapids, she immersed herself in and developed a love of Czech culture. She served as the Chair of the Board of Trustees of the National Czech & Slovak Museum & Library, overseeing the rebuilding and significant expansion of the museum following the Iowa flood of 2008. Carey was a warm, extroverted, social woman, known for her sense of humor and joie de vivre. She loved laughter, art, and gardening and could be counted on to bring a spark of joy and mirth to her social interactions.
In Our Award-Winning Museum Store, It’s a Very Special Year!

Celebrate the 50th Anniversary of NCSML with a fun mug! Just pour a hot liquid to reveal the colorful logo custom-designed by Barney Studios of Slovakia! (They designed our Folkjord print and t-shirt designs too!).

ALPHONSE MUCHA EXHIBIT
As has been mentioned elsewhere, we are beyond excited to host another exhibit of the world-famous Moravian native, Alphonse Mucha. Our store is more than ready to complement the private collection with a variety of merchandise items featuring Alphonse Mucha’s art. We are going to offer a beautiful selection of jewelry (including imports from the Czech Republic), stationery, books, prints, some apparel and puzzles.

SHOP IN PERSON OR ONLINE AT STORE.NCSML.ORG, OR CALL US AT 319-362-8500, EXT. 100.
National Czech & Slovak Museum & Library
1400 Inspiration Place SW
Cedar Rapids, IA 52404

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Please follow us on Facebook and check our website for more details as they become available.

CORPORATE SOCIAL WEDDINGS

Plan your next event at NCSML, and we’ll provide the old-world charm!

Not to mention complimentary indoor and outdoor parking, full accessibility, tables and chairs, and full setup and tear down. A full-service bar with bartenders can be added to any rental agreement, as well as discounted admission to the galleries. Wedding party dressing rooms are provided for on-site ceremonies. Our experienced event coordinators will be there for you during every step of your event — start to finish.

Choose from these beautiful spaces

WFLA/ZCBJ Heritage Hall Host up to 400 guests in this art nouveau-inspired space with state of the art A/V equipment and internet access. This space may also be divided into two rooms, if desired.
Naxera Terrace Ideal for cocktail receptions or outdoor ceremonies, Naxera can seat up to 200 guests.
Rozek Grand Hall This space, featuring the Preciosa chandelier, can accommodate up to 250 guests and be configured for a broad range of purposes.
Hemphill Theater Equally appropriate for business or social gatherings, Hemphill contains 55 comfortably upholstered and permanently affixed chairs (with ample space for wheelchairs), making it ideal for presentations and film screenings.

JUST ANNOUNCED!
During Houby Days, on Saturday, May 18 at 4 p.m., “Cimbalom Guy” Matěj Číp will be presenting a solo cimbalom performance and lecture in our WFLA/ZCBJ Heritage Hall. The performance is sponsored by Jeanne Trachta and Sharon Curtis.

NCSML is the ideal setting for meetings, weddings, recitals, corporate, or social events. Whatever the occasion, we can assist in making it just right for your needs.

For facility tours, contact the museum at 319-362-8500 or info@ncsml.org
For catering information, contact Carrie at Peppercorn Food Company: 319-743-5111 carrie@peppercornfoodcompany.com