

# AMERICAN FRIENDS OF THE CZECH REPUBLIC

Spring 2013

NEWSLETTER

Volume XIX, Number 1

## Chicago Celebrates Prague Days in September



*Downtown View  
from Chicago  
River  
Photo Credit:  
Lillis Werder*

AFoCR is proud to announce its involvement and participation in the upcoming 2013 Prague Days in Chicago, a Festival to be held under the auspices of the City of Prague, the City of Chicago, the Czech Consulate in Chicago, the Prague Committee of the Chicago Sister Cities International Program (CSCIP), and AFoCR.

The first Prague Days in Chicago was held in 2007. This year's Prague Days are scheduled to open on September 28<sup>th</sup> with a ceremony including the dedication of a Wax Heart sculpture, the heart being a favorite symbol of the late President Václav Havel. The Wax Heart was molded from wax remaining from candles lighted at Prague Castle after Havel's death in December 2011. The sculpture will be presented by the Lord Mayor of Prague, Bohuslav Svoboda, to Mayor Rahm Emanuel and the City of Chicago.

Other events to be held from September 27<sup>th</sup> to 30<sup>th</sup> will be centered around Havel's vision and legacy. They will include a jazz concert, a photo exhibition, the performance of an operetta, and street theatre performances, a symposium, a business leadership reception, and a closing gala dinner. All performers and exhibitions are coming from Prague.

The symposium will be held on September 28<sup>th</sup> at the Harris School of Public Policy, University of Chicago, at 1155 East 60<sup>th</sup> Street, Chicago, IL 60637, from 10 AM to 12 PM. A panel of four speakers will focus on Havel, his legacy, and his vision of a civil society. They will discuss who he was, what he did, his outreach to trapped countries, and lessons learned. A special focus will be Cuba.

The Business Leadership Reception will be held also on September 28<sup>th</sup> in the Richard H. Driehaus Museum (<http://www.driehausmuseum.org/>) located at 40 East Erie Street, Chicago, IL 60611. This event will provide an opportunity for visiting members of the Czech and American business communities to network.

The Prague Days in Chicago 2013 gala dinner will be held at the Woman's Athletic Club (WAC) on September 28<sup>th</sup> with cocktails beginning at 6 PM. The gala will celebrate the Havel legacy and will include the presentation of the Václav Havel Civil Society Vision Award for 2013. Event proceeds will support activities to advance Havel's vision and legacy, including creation of a memorial to him, tentatively planned for the campus of Georgetown University in Washington, D.C.

AFoCR hopes that you will be interested in participating in this wonderful celebration of President Václav Havel's legacy and the close ties between the Czech Republic and the U.S.

## Disaster Strikes Texas Czech Community of West Damage Substantial; Many Dead from Explosion and Fire



*Housing  
Complex  
Completely  
Destroyed by  
the Explosion  
in West, Texas*

*Photo credit:  
thenation.com*

The small farming town of West, Texas was rocked by a major industrial explosion and fire on April 17 that originated in a fertilizer plant. Nearly 20 lives were lost, many of them first responders to the fire that preceded the explosion. A major section of the town was damaged by the blast's initial impact and subsequent fires. Nearly 20% of the town's buildings and structures were severely damaged or a total loss, including two schools, a retirement home, and two buildings of Sokol West.

West, a town of 2,800, located on the main highway between Dallas and Waco, was settled by Czech immigrants in the early 1890's. West's unique Czech character makes it a special place to live and draws visitors to the area.

AFoCR Chairman Fred Malek and Vice President Phil Kasik visited West shortly after the accident and met with local officials and leaders. They viewed the most devastated areas of the town escorted by the local Texas Emergency Management Official. They called the experience sobering and heartbreaking.

### **AFOCR Establishes Disaster Relief Fund for West, Texas**

AFoCR has offered Czech Ambassador Petr Gandalovič cooperation with the Embassy of the Czech Republic to coordinate donations and aid to assist the town of West, Texas which was severely damaged by an explosion and fire.

Please consider donating through our Click&Pledge feature on our web site for disaster aid for the town of West. Your donation is tax deductible. Your contribution, no matter how small, makes a difference. Thank you!

**Please send checks payable to AFoCR  
West, Texas Disaster Relief Fund  
4410 Massachusetts Avenue NW # 391  
Washington DC 20016-5572**

## Letter from AFoCR President Tom Dine

### Sense of Togetherness; The Tyrant State Is Still Challenging the Democratic State



*AFoCR President Tom Dine at the AFoCR Annual Directors Meeting in Cedar Rapids, Iowa 11/15/12*

Most definitions of leadership emphasize the quality of intuitive flexibility. This is certainly the case of a focused, albeit small organization, the American Friends of the Czech Republic. Less than 20 hours after the devastatingly destructive and death-causing explosion of the West Fertilizer Plant in West, Texas, AFoCR's board decided to switch gears and to concentrate its efforts over the next year or so in assisting citizens of West. These efforts will include rebuilding the field house, the center of community activity in this small, agricultural town that was founded by Czech immigrants from Bohemia and Moravia in the 1890s. This humanitarian move by AFoCR was sparked by a sense of solidarity with West's Czech heritage community, the predominant ethnic group. As the visit by AFoCR Chairman Fred Malek and Vice-President Phil Kasik demonstrates, unity on behalf of bringing a community back from tragedy is now a priority of AFoCR.

On the intellectual side, I would like to turn to the most important ideas afloat in our current global community - the everyday struggle facing billions of citizens: freedom and democracy versus tyranny and oppression.. Here, the symbolism and substance of the today's democratic Czech polity becomes critical. In the last decade of the 20th century, with the fall of the Soviet Union, it was thought that the liberal democratic state had triumphed over the tyrant state. The inseparable evils of history's caprice, Nazi power and Soviet domination, had crumbled in Central and Eastern Europe. But today's geopolitics reveals a continuation of the deep stains of dictatorship and the use of repressive force to smother peoples and their aspirations for liberty -- in Russia, China, Cuba, Venezuela, Iran, Syria, and lesser but conspicuous places such as North Korea. The rightward march of Hungary toward political centralization also is dismaying.

Three recent stimulating books have brought this message home, and I recommend them to those concerned with Czech history and the loss of freedom and democracy and with our current competition with China in Asia and other places in the world, where freedom and democracy are front and center issues in everyday life.

Two of the treatises concern Czechoslovakia's historical traumas from 1939 through 1989, the two bleeding into each other. The other one concerns the blood being let in current-day China. The mendacious and murderous records created are similar and so are the tales of resistance and heroism that are told. I recommend *The Taste of Ashes: The Afterlife of Totalitarianism in Eastern Europe* by Marci Shore, a history professor at Yale University, *Prague: My Long Journey Home* by Charles Ota Heller, a successful Czech-born engineer who pursues and recovers his grim and complex boyhood in German- and Soviet-occupied Czechoslovakia, and *Nine Days* by Fred Hiatt, the editorial page editor of *The Washington Post*.

Shore's trip starts in Prague and Bratislava, finds focus in Poland, and takes side trips to Bucharest, Budapest, Vienna, and Kiev. Unlike so many books about the communist era, particularly the Cold War, the author has interviewed former Communist officials who belonged to

the party elite, and thus the average Czech or Pole would not have known, and those in the intelligentsia connected to the regimes. The former elites are today, the professor shows, oblivious to the discredited Communist efforts and to its record of death and destruction that still haunt the societies that experienced the tyranny.

The upheavals in the Czech lands caused by the Nazi and Communist regimes totally altered the life of young Ota Karel Heller of Kojetice. His family was a mixture of Jews and Christians, which took him a lifetime to reveal and understand, quite similar to the experience of Madeleine Albright. His religious heritage split and killed his family; the heritage forced his mother to hide him from the two hateful predators that occupied and repressed wartime and post-wartime Czechoslovakia. His father, a Jew, escaped to England where he became a British Spitfire pilot. As Heller graphically notes, "Children of war are sentenced to lives filled with memories and nightmares."

Heller's highpoint came at war's end in May 1945 when he and a friend discovered a treasure trove of Nazi gas masks, bayonets, helmets, binoculars, clips with bullets, and guns. He picked up a black Walther pistol and later in the day shot an escaping German soldier. "I did not know if I had really killed the man, but hoped that I had. In that splendid moment, I felt I had single-handedly won the war...I had been running and hiding. Now, finally, I had struck back. I had taken revenge for everything the Nazis had done - for taking my family from me, for stealing our home and all our possessions, for forcing me to hide like an animal, for desecrating my beloved Czechoslovakia. I was nine years old."

The reunited Hellers escaped the Communists the day of Jan Masaryk's funeral in Prague, when fewer police and army personnel were on guard at the border. Father, mother, and son made it to the U.S. Zone of Germany. "We're free!" of the malign grip of authoritarian control became the motto of one more displaced family.

In school in Morristown, New Jersey, the renamed Charles dug deeply into his studies, particularly American literature and history. From biographies of early leaders to the novel Johnny Tremain and with special appreciation for a teacher, Miss Agnes Leonard, "not only did I learn about the struggle which led to the founding of the U.S., but I developed a deep and abiding love for my new country. To me, Johnny was not a fictional character; he became my hero and my role model." Today Heller is "living the proverbial American dream" in Annapolis, an educated engineer, quite successful in business, a grandfather who has helped replenish many of those Czech genes that those of the Tyrant State murdered. What a good read.

Death, destruction, censorship, imprisonment, and caprice are the timeless tools of dictatorships in the 20th and 21st centuries. An incomplete struggle against the tyrant state of China fills the partially fictive story of an attempt by the daughter of Chinese dissident and devotee to democracy, Wang Bingzhang. The activist, living in the U.S., went back to Asia and was in Vietnam when the Chinese kidnapped him, took him into China, and after a one-day trial, sentenced him to life in prison on spurious charges of terrorism. *Nine Days* by Fred Hiatt tells this terrifying tale of Ti-Anna Wang's attempt to find her father. In the fight for democracy, Ti-Anna Wang said, "Any government that jails its own people for political dissent still has a long way to go to become a respected member of the international community." Hiatt writes: "People all over the world, in every country and every culture, want to live in freedom, and many of them will take amazing risks to get there."

Again, what a good read.

*Tom Dine*

## Disaster in West, Texas - April 17, 2013



*(l to r), American Sokol Southern District VP Jerry Milan, President and Chairman of the Board of TCHCC Retta Chandler, AFoCR Chairman Fred Malek, State Coordinator Texas Division of Emergency Management Mike Miller, AFoCR Vice President Phil Kasik, Mrs. Clarice Snokhaus, Czech Consul Ray Snokhaus, (front row) Manager of Lone Star Hall Dale Berger, VP of Sokol West Laura Berger*

## Tomas Masaryk Birthday Celebration in Washington, DC



*Czech Ambassador Petr Gandalovič with AFoCR Chairman Fred Malek*



*Ambassador Gandalovič*



*Ambassador Gandalovič with AFoCR Director Robert Doubek*



*AFoCR Director Michael Rokos*



*AFoCR Directors Robert Doubek, Phil Kasik, Ambassador Gandalovič, AFoCR Chairman Fred Malek, AFoCR Director Michael Rokos, Frank Backer, and AFoCR Director Tom Gibian*



*AFoCR Director Phil Kasik*

## New Czech President Elected and Inaugurated

Miloš Zeman becomes 3<sup>rd</sup> President of  
the Czech Republic



*President  
Miloš Zeman  
Photo Credit:  
www.moddb.com*

On March 8, Miloš Zeman, following the terms of Václav Havel and Václav Klaus, was inaugurated as President of the Czech Republic.

Zeman holds the distinction of being the first directly elected president, as Havel and Klaus were both elected by the Czech Parliament. He narrowly won the first round of the highly publicized election, with 24.2% of the vote as compared to 23.4% for Foreign Minister Karel Schwarzenberg. In the second round, however, he won by a much more impressive margin: 55% to 45%.

Zeman previously served as an influential leader of the Czech Social Democratic Party in the 1990's, Chairman of the Chamber of Deputies from 1996 to 1998, and Prime Minister of the Czech Republic from 1998 to 2002.

The new president is known for his humorous attacks on opponents and outspoken nature. He will play a significant role in foreign policy and government formation over the course of his service. AFoCR looks forward to a good working relationship with President Zeman.

## AFoCR's Nicholas Winton Educational Project

In 2005, AFoCR embarked on an ambitious project to let American young people know about Nicholas Winton's daring rescue mission. Winton, then a 29-year old British stock broker, came to Prague in late 1938 when German occupation of the Czech lands became a real threat to many Czechs. Winton sacrificed his job and stuck with the rescue mission, thus saving 669 Czech children, most of whom were Jewish, by bringing them into British foster homes, thus saving their lives.

Matej Mináč, a Prague-based filmmaker, directed three films about Winton's exploits. "All My Loved Ones," is a Czech feature film starring the cream of the Czech film industry. His second film, "Nicholas Winton – The Power of Good," in 2002 won the International Emmy Award as the best foreign documentary film. His third film, "Nicky's Family," premiered in Prague in January 2011 and thus far has won 31 international prizes. Mináč, however, did not rest on his laurels. He established the Czech Winton Educational Project, which has educated tens of thousands of Czech students on Winton's heroic efforts. Some refer to Sir Nicholas as the "British Schindler." Mináč also authored a book titled "Nicholas Winton's Lottery of Life," and distributed thousands of copies free-of-charge to Czech high school students. AFoCR in turn had the book translated into English and has distributed thousands of copies in the U.S.

## Havel's Place at Georgetown University



*View of  
Georgetown  
University  
from Key  
Bridge  
Photo Credit:  
Lillis Werder*

On April 29, 2013, David Frous, Robert Řehák, and Mary Fetzko of the Czech Embassy, along with AFoCR President Tom Dine, met with officers of Georgetown University and were officially informed that John DeGiulia, Georgetown's President, had approved the Czech Embassy/AFoCR proposal to construct the Václav Havel bench and linden tree at a prime campus location. A University committee on public arts has recommended that the "Havel Corner" be in the intimate, student-focused, green Alumni Square, which is close to the traditional University entrance at 36th & O Streets. Three red-brick dormitories surround the spot.

A potential dedication date is October 1<sup>st</sup>, and events will include a ceremony, a lunch and/or dinner with students, faculty, administrators, and outside luminaries, a guest lecturer, and a panel discussion with distinguished faculty with expert knowledge of Central Europe. From the Georgetown end of things, the day and evening would be orchestrated by the University's new director of events, Melissa Bennet, who did the same job for President George W. Bush at the White House.



*The Linden tree which will  
be planted at Georgetown  
University, is known for its  
beautiful heart shaped  
leaves, and was a favorite  
symbol of Václav Havel.  
Photo Credit: 123RF.com*



*AFoCR Director Peter Rafaeli with Sir Nicholas  
Winton at Winton's Home in England, 2012*

## Promoting the Havel Legacy

AFoCR has originated two priority projects for the remainder of 2013. First and foremost is the effort to aid and show solidarity with the citizens of West, Texas, as this small band of farmers and entrepreneurs, predominantly of Czech heritage, go about recovering from the devastating fire and explosion of the West Fertilizer Plant in April. As reported elsewhere in this newsletter, 14 people were killed, 20 percent of the town's residences and the Sokol community center were destroyed, and the fertilizer operation that was the area's largest employer was leveled.

The second project is to collaborate with the Václav Havel Library Foundation (VHFL) of New York City, a tax-exempt entity, to help it create programs and institutions that would promote the legacy of this most noble Czech personality.

Václav Havel expressed a desire to create a modern presidential library in Prague -- not as a memorial to himself but as an archival, research, and discussion center dedicated to his life's narrative as playwright, poet, writer, dissident against and prisoner of the tyrant state, President of Czechoslovakia and of the Czech Republic, and global advocate and commentator on behalf of democracy, civil society, and human rights. He wanted this central repository of his work to be independent of state support and the programs of the Library to be based on open and objective scholarly research of the recent past and relevant to the present as well as the future of the freedom and democracy agenda.

The Václav Havel Library, occupying a rehabilitated Hapsburg era building in central Prague, is up and running. VHFL is closely associated with this enterprise; it will support a variety of programs that advance Havel's ideas and support repository and research institutions that focus on his work.

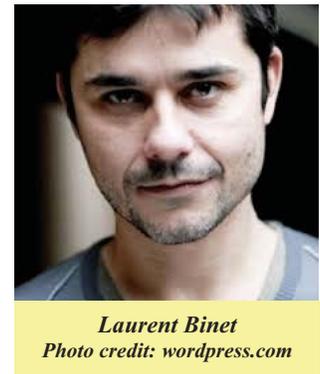
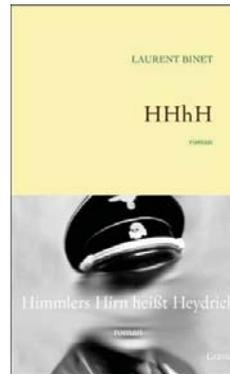
One program is already functional -- the Václav Havel Center for Human Rights and Diplomacy at Florida International University in Miami. President Havel visited this campus, the most populated site of higher education in the Sunshine State. The Center has targeted for study dictatorships such as Cuba and post-dictatorships, focusing on transitional democratic governance and human rights. Former Czech Ambassador to the U.S. Martin Palouš is a prominent faculty member.

Two other programs are still on the drawing board. An important one is a potential long-term partnership with the world famous New York Public Library (NYPL). Recently the NYPL's Baltic and Slavic Center reopened. Programmatic plans are evolving to include engaging librarians from urban public and university libraries, plus presidential library professionals. Havel-related materials would be exhibited at the NYPL, emphasizing Václav Havel as a global citizen.

Another prospective effort would be an oral history project to interview all living American Presidents about the late Czech President and the importance of close and strong U.S.-Czech relations. An expert in the area would be engaged to visit and converse with Presidents Jimmy Carter, George H.W. Bush, Bill Clinton, George W. Bush, and Barak Obama about their recollections of dealing with Václav Havel.

Promoting the life and legacy of Václav Havel is in the interest of the American Friends of the Czech Republic, the peoples of the two countries, and the transcendent international values that he so strongly lived and articulated and today represents.

## Book Review – *HHhH* by Laurent Binet



Recently published is a novel entitled *HHhH*, by Laurent Binet, a young French author. Originally written in French, it has been translated into Czech and English. Readily available from numerous sources, it can be downloaded as well. Both the novel itself and its English translation have won awards.

*HHhH* stands for “Himmlers Hirn heißt Heydrich” or “Himmler’s brain is called Heydrich.” This is the story of the “Butcher of Prague” Richard Heydrich and the Czechoslovak parachutists who carried out his assassination in 1942.

The novel deals with a piece of history that today is not as well-known or appreciated as it should be. The western powers were not convinced that the Czechoslovaks were serious about resisting the Nazi occupation. While Czechoslovak airmen who fled to England played an important role in the Battle of Britain, there did not appear to be much resistance in Bohemia and Moravia.

Tall and blond, Heydrich was considered by many to be the ideal Nazi based on his physical appearance alone. He was a principal author of the Final Solution, the plan to exterminate all of the Jews and other undesirables in the German Reich. Recent research has shown that the extent of concentration camps and ghettos throughout the conquered territories was far greater than previously known. The death and suffering brought about by Heydrich cannot be underestimated.

At the time of the attack, Heydrich was scheduled to be transferred within days to Paris to continue his work. The assassination outside of Prague by a Czech and Slovak who were parachuted into Bohemia to rid the world of this man is an amazing story that needs to be retold and remembered. The world owes the Czechoslovaks who carried out the assassination a debt of gratitude. Had Heydrich lived, the death toll and horror of World War II would have been even greater, as hard as that is to imagine.

Of course, part of the story is the retribution carried out by the Nazis on the Czech people, notably the residents of the village of Lidice. The American Secretary of the Navy Frank Knox said “If future generations ask us what we are fighting for [in World War Two], we shall tell them the story of Lidice.”

I commend this novel to you. It is a piece of history that needs to be better understood and appreciated. It is a piece of history that we can all be proud of and speaks to the true character of the Czech and Slovak peoples.

**American Friends of The Czech Republic**  
**4410 Massachusetts Avenue, NW #391**  
**Washington, DC 20016**

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*Tomáš G. Masaryk  
 Memorial in  
 Washington, DC*



*Woodrow Wilson  
 Monument in Prague with  
 Candles Lit in Memory of  
 Václav Havel*

- |   |   |
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