

AMERICAN FRIENDS OF THE CZECH REPUBLIC

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NEWSLETTER

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Václav Havel Tribute Plaque Dedicated on Walk of Freedom



AFoCR Director Robert Doubek at dedication of Havel Plaque in Prague on 12/17/12

On Monday, December 17, 2012, the eve of the first anniversary of the death of former Czech President Václav Havel, AFoCR dedicated a plaque honoring Havel, as a tribute from the American Czech and Slovak communities. The plaque will be on the Walk of Freedom at the Woodrow Wilson Monument in Prague, the fundraising for which was led by AFoCR Chairman Fred Malek. More than 270 individuals, organizations, and companies from over 30 states contributed for the tribute.

AFoCR Director Robert Doubek served as master of ceremonies. The ceremony was opened with the national anthems of the Slovak Republic, the United States, and the Czech Republic. Remarks were offered by Peter Brňo, Slovak Ambassador to the Czech Republic; Joseph Pennington, Deputy Chief of Mission of the U.S. Embassy; Erika Olson, Political/Economic Counselor at U.S. Embassy in Bratislava; Oldřich Lomecký, mayor of the Metropolitan District of Prague 1; and former Czech Ambassador to the U.S. Martin Palouš, who is now International Program Director of Prague's Václav Havel Library.

In his remarks, Mr. Doubek noted that President Havel had restored both dignity and pride to Americans of Czech and Slovak descent and to all Americans who believe in the fundamental strength and character of the Czech and Slovak peoples. He remarked that the simple plaque would have pleased Václav Havel, because he himself was a modest man.

The tribute plaque was unveiled by Czech Foreign Minister Karel Schwarzenberg and former Czech Ambassador to the United States Alexandr Vondra. Also in attendance were former ice skating world champion Ája Vrzáňová-Steindler, who resides in New York; former Czech Ambassador to the United States Petr Kolář; Milena Vicenová, the former Czech Ambassador to the European Union, former Prime Minister Jan Fischer, and Sabina Tančevová, former personal secretary to President Havel. The event was widely covered by the Czech print and broadcast media.

The plaque will be stored until the weather in the spring permits its installation. It will be installed at the most prominent location on the Walk of Freedom, next to the pedestal. It will be the final plaque installed on the Walk.

Debut for New AFoCR Web Site

The new afocr.org web site boasts colorful images of Prague and Washington, D.C.



With the new year, AFoCR will show a fresh face on the internet as it unveils its completely re-built and engineered web site: afocr.org. It will be the "go-to" place for "all things Czech," and visitors will find interesting and useful information on education, foreign policy, business, travel, Czech history, language, music, ancestry, geography, climate, cuisine, fun facts on famous Czechs, and even sports figures. The site will be maintained current in real time to provide visitors up-to-date information about Czech-interest events in the US and events in the CR. The site will post late-breaking news events from Prague news sources, as well as events from active feeds from other sites such as czechevents.org, czechtourism.org, and the Czech Embassy web site. Recognizing the benefits and importance of travel to the Czech Republic, the site also will highlight things to know when visiting the CR, as well as when studying and working there.

This intensive project begun in May of 2012 is approaching its planned launch at the start of 2013. AFoCR's goals of strengthening ties between the United States and the Czech Republic will be significantly enhanced with the multifaceted features of the new site. The site will contain extensive photo galleries of both Prague and Washington, DC, and photos throughout the site will illustrate the attractiveness and fun of travelling to the Czech Republic and the DC area for an idyllic vacation. There are "top tens" listed in multiple categories to encourage visitors to discover destinations in Prague and beyond.

Feeds of current Czech news from sources such as the *Prague Monitor* and *Radio Prague* will tell what is happening and why. The site will serve as a vehicle to circulate the AFoCR newsletter to a worldwide audience. Through the site, AFoCR will be leveraging the power of social media by relaying events as they occur and are posted to the AFoCR FaceBook page. Overall, the site will take AFoCR and its effectiveness to a much higher level.

ANNOUNCEMENT

AFoCR is very pleased to say that this edition marks the final paper issue of the AFoCR Newsletter. All future issues will be provided to you electronically through the new AFoCR web site.

Letter from AFoCR President Tom Dine

Czech Republic: Close, Reliable Ally of the US and Israel



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

The United States and the Czech Republic maintain an intense and intimate relationship, particularly in the areas of security and diplomacy. This bilateral closeness was expressed most visibly on November 29, 2012, when the United Nations General Assembly voted 138 to 9, with 41 abstentions, to upgrade Palestine to a non-member state with observer status in the international organization, the same implicit recognition that the Vatican has. On the draft resolution before the world body, the Czech Republic voted nay as did Canada, the United States, Israel, Panama, and four other U.N. members. The Czech Republic was the lone European ally to join with the U.S. in this lop-sided, but important, vote on the question of Palestine in its bid for semi-statehood.

The reasons for Prague voting against this Palestinian initiative and isolating itself from the rest of Europe are several. On the day of the vote, the Czech Ambassador to the United Nations made it quite clear that his country supports negotiations at all levels between Israel and Palestine, which in turn will lead to a second state based on 1967 territories in the historic region between the Mediterranean Sea and the Jordan River. He said, "The State of Israel and the State of Palestine" would be in the best interests of his country, of Europe and the Middle East, and of North America. But the unilateral effort in the U.N. by the Palestinian Authority, argued the Prague government, was premature and counterproductive to the still incomplete negotiating process among the parties in a seemingly inconclusive conflict.

This U.N. vote came at a time that peace negotiations had stalled and amidst a cease-fire between Israelis forces and the Hamas movement in Gaza, and Prime Minister Petr Nečas's government believed that the controversial vote would only enflame the standoff. After all, the Palestinian Authority is financially strapped, dependent on American, World Bank, and other monies to pay its workforce. This controversy could stir up further restrictions, for instance on U.S. appropriations, at a time when the Ramallah government is already deep in the red and cannot afford to chance retribution.

The Czech government's top leadership, led by Prime Minister Nečas, also believes, that the new status of non-membership for Palestine amounts to little more than a symbolic victory with no realism attached to it, i.e. no change on the ground. Two other key reasons explain Prague's bold vote. First is the fact that the Czech government today conducts its foreign policy more in line with the United States than with the rest of the European Union. The center-right coalition now in power is determined to build stronger ties with Washington. This, plus the euro-sceptic tendency of the two main ruling parties, Nečas's Civic Democrats and Foreign Minister Karel Schwarzenberg's Top09.

The second reason involves the historic ties between the Czech Republic and Israel. For instance, in 1948, when nine Arab armies attacked the new nation-state, Czechoslovakia broke a U.N. embargo on Israel, sending arms such as helicopters and supplies such as Tatra trucks, and providing extensive training, including teaching Ezer Weizman to fly contemporary war planes. Weizman later became a cabinet minister and the seventh President of the State of Israel. The late Czech President Václav Havel had strong feelings toward Israel, visiting there on one of his first foreign trips. Prime Minister Nečas said, "We've got a special feeling for Israel's situation - that of a small nation surrounded by enemies."

Benjamin Netanyahu, Israel's Prime Minister, has called the Czech Republic "Israel's best friend in Europe," which the November 29th vote proved, and he believes their relationship goes even deeper. He said recently in Prague, "You were once surrounded by forces that were hostile to freedom, and you went through your own struggle, but you have emerged from a period of darkness, restored liberty, built up your society, and you're quickly catching up on the years that were lost. For us, the Jewish people, we lost thousands of years."

At the end of 2012, the U.S.-Czech, indeed the Israel-Czech relationships. are intense and intimate, bonded by shared values and history and allied by common security and political interests.

Tom Dine
President AFoCR

Havel Tribute Unveiling on Walk of Freedom Prague, December 17, 2012



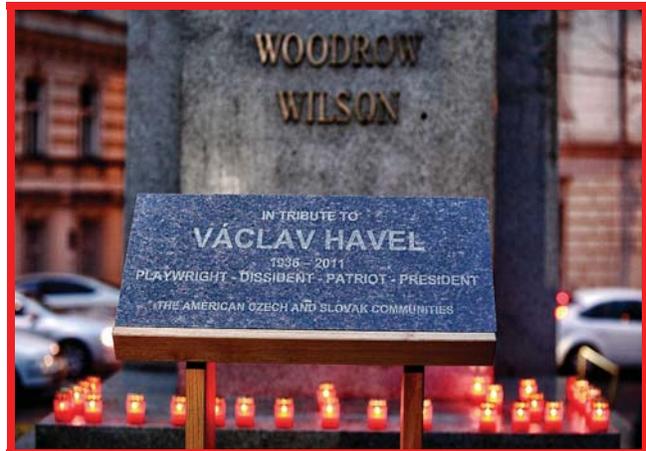
Czech Foreign Minister Karel Schwarzenberg, former Czech Ambassador to the U.S. Alexandr Vondra, AFoCR Director Robert Doubek, and interpreter Dr. Hana Kostohryzová



Ája Vrzáňová, Ambassador Vondra, and Former Czech Ambassador to the U.S. Martin Palouš



Oldřich Lomecký, Mayor of Prague 1; former Czech Ambassador to the U.S. Petr Kolář, Ambassador Vondra, Foreign Minister Schwarzenberg, and Ms. Vrzáňová



Foreign Minister Schwarzenberg and Ambassador Vondra



Mr. Doubek and Dr. Kostohryzová



Joseph Pennington, Deputy Chief of Mission of the U.S. Embassy

Annual Meeting Held in Cedar Rapids

AFoCR held the annual meeting of its Board of Directors in November in Cedar Rapids, Iowa. The directors were invited to a dinner held in the beautifully restored National Czech & Slovak Museum & Library (NCSML) to commemorate its reopening last summer. NCSML President & CEO Gail Naughton described the challenges faced in completing the Museum's major restoration project. AFoCR President Tom Dine welcomed as a special guest Jaroslav Zajiček, the Deputy Chief of Mission at the Czech Embassy in Washington. Mr. Zajiček and former U.S. Ambassador to the Czech Republic Bill Cabaniss spoke about the direction and progress in the U.S./Czech relationship. At the annual meeting, Chairman Fred Malek and President Dine presented a Certificate of Appreciation to Capt. Gene Cernan, who was leaving the Board after over 10 years of service. The Directors received reports on the successful project to place a plaque honoring Vaclav Havel on the Walk of Freedom at the Woodrow Wilson Monument in Prague, and reviewed preliminary plans for the future. John Kotouc, a senior bank executive from Omaha, Nebraska, was newly elected to the Board of Directors. Officers elected to serve in 2013 will be Fred Malek - Chairman, Tom Dine - President, Bill Cabaniss - Executive VP, Phil Kasik - Treasurer and VP, and Robert Doubek - Corporate Secretary.

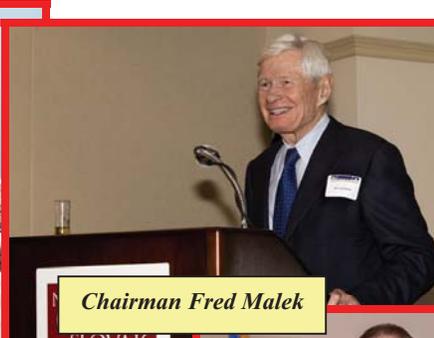


John Kotouc Joins AFoCR Board of Directors

AFoCR is pleased to announce that native Nebraskan John H. Kotouc, Executive Chairman of Omaha's American National Bank has been elected to the AFoCR Board as its newest Director. Mr. Kotouc graduated from Harvard University and did post graduate studies at Westminster Theological Seminary, the University of Nebraska Law School, and the YPO Executive Education program at Stanford Business School. As a third-generation banker, he is also a director of Western Bank of Saint Paul, Minnesota, and Co-Chairman and Co-CEO of American National Corporation, a \$2.5 billion regional banking company with operations in Nebraska, Iowa, and Minnesota. Mr. Kotouc and his wife Wende live in Omaha and have two children.

In 1882, the Kotouc family immigrated to Nebraska from Jitkov, Bohemia. The senior Frank Kotouc started a Czech language school in Humboldt, Nebraska, upon his arrival. John Kotouc sustains strong ties with his Czech heritage and is actively involved in Czech historical research. He is a lifetime member of the Nebraska Czech Language Foundation, the Czechoslovak Genealogical Society International, the Czechoslovak Society of Arts and Sciences, and CSA Fraternal Life.

Annual AFoCR Directors Meeting at the National Czech & Slovak Museum & Library, Cedar Rapids, Iowa– November 15, 2012



Chairman Fred Malek



President Thomas Dine and Chairman Fred Malek awarding AFoCR Certificate of Appreciation to Capt. Gene Cernan



Director Gail Naughton



Director George Drost



Czech Embassy Deputy Chief of Mission Jaroslav Zajiček



Director Patricia Stack and Jack Stack



Gail Naughton, Catherine Cabaniss & Executive Vice President Bill Cabaniss

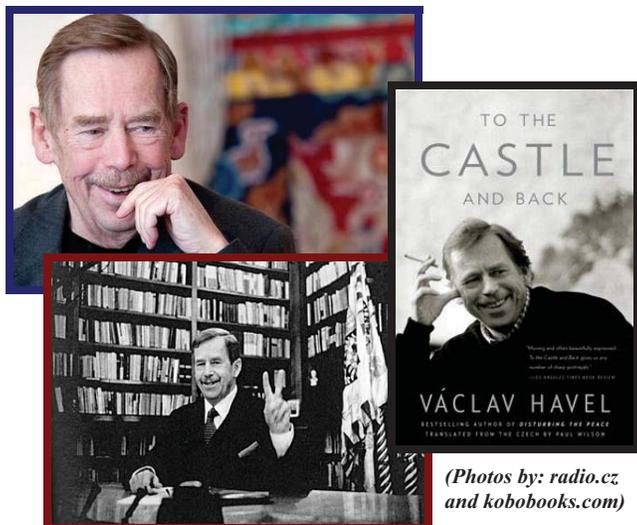


John Pellouchoud, Director Kristyna Pellouchoud Driehaus, & Director Joseph Balaz



President Thomas Dine, Director Robert Doubek, and Vice President Phillip M. Kasik

Havel Library Foundation



(Photos by: radio.cz
and kobobooks.com)

The US based, Havel Library Foundation is moving forward. The Foundation, which is now incorporated as a public charity under IRS Code 501(c)(3), intends to assist the Library in Prague in collecting relevant documents in the U.S., digitizing copies of Václav Havel's papers and putting them in the public domain. Working out of its headquarters at the Bohemian National Hall in New York, the Foundation will also act as a branch of the Václav Havel Library in the U.S. by serving as a center of Václav Havel research, a depository for archival records, and a venue for discussion and debate.



*Captain
Gene Cernan
speaks at the
Chicagoland
Czech-
American
Community
Center
11/14/12*

Chicago Czech Center Opens

The new Chicagoland Czech-American Community Center held its grand-opening event on November 14 at its new facility on Cermak Road in Berwyn, Illinois. State and local officials were on hand to mark the event as guest of honor Capt. Gene Cernan spoke about his Czech heritage and connection to nearby towns where he grew up before entering the Navy and eventually becoming one of the most celebrated of U.S. Astronauts. The Czech Center will work closely with Czech and American individuals, and organizations and institutions, which support the Czech Republic in the USA. The Czech Center in Chicago will have informative displays about the Czech experience in the Chicago area, as well serve as a central place for historic books and documents of local interest. The organization's founders also intend to serve as a resource for creating opportunities for Czech and U.S. businesses.

The Nicholas Winton Educational Project



*AFoCR Director
Peter Rafaeli,
Professor Anne
Dutlinger, and Sir
Nicholas Winton
on September 28,
2012, in London,
England*

In the fall of 2007 AFoCR's Board of Directors approved the Nicholas Winton Educational Project. In late 1938, Sir Nicholas Winton, then a 29 year old British stock broker, came to Prague at the suggestion of a friend posted at the British Embassy. At the time, Czechoslovakia faced an imminent threat of German occupation, which in fact occurred in March 1939. Winton single handedly saved 669 children, most of whom were Jewish, from the Holocaust. He returned to his home in Britain and never spoke about it to anyone, including his own wife, for 50 years.

Film director Matej Mináč, now living in Prague, made four films about Winton's story. The first one was a Czech language feature film entitled "All My Loved Ones," in which some of the best of Czech actors and actresses participated. The second film was a documentary, entitled "Nicholas Winton – The Power of Good." This exceptional documentary in 2002 won an International Emmy Award. Most recently his third film, "Nicky's Family," premiered in Prague in January 2011. This film received rave reviews and thus far has won 29 Czech and International awards. The most recent one came in London on September 29th at the British Film Institute.

Mr. Mináč wrote a book about his work on Winton's heroism, and thousands of copies were distributed in Czech Republic high schools. In 2007 Peter Rafaeli, an AFoCR past president and current Director, translated the book into English. AFoCR has thus far distributed, free of charge, 8,000 copies to educational institutions in the United States and Canada. The photograph shown with this article was taken on September 28, 2012, of this year during a visit by Mr. Rafaeli to Sir Nicholas. Also pictured is Prof. Anne D. Dutlinger, formerly of Moravian College in Bethlehem, PA. Dr. Dutlinger made major contributions to the project by arranging a screening of the documentary in Bethlehem in 2002 and providing major support for the publication of the U.S. edition of the book. AFoCR is most grateful to Prof. Dutlinger for her untiring support of the Winton project. For information on how to obtain copies of the book please contact us by e-mail at czconsulphl@gmail.com or by phone at 215-805-7777.



*AFoCR President Tom Dine Greets
Martin Bútora at the Czech and
Slovak Freedom Lecture, held at the
Woodrow Wilson International
Center for Scholars, Washington,
DC, on 11/16/12.*



*Martin Bútora, Honorary President of the
Institute for Public Affairs in Bratislava
and former Ambassador of the Slovak
Republic to the United States (1999-2003).
Ambassador Bútora delivers keynote
address at the 13th annual Czech and
Slovak Freedom Lecture - "Twenty Years
of Independence: Reflections on Freedom
and Democracy."*

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*Tomáš G. Masaryk
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*Woodrow Wilson
 Monument in Prague with
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 Václav Havel*

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