

**Bulgarian-  
Macedonian National  
Educational and  
Cultural Center, Inc.**

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*Preserving Tradition - Promoting Understanding*

*Winter / Spring 2011*

**The President's Corner**

*Patricia Penka French*

**BIG PLANS ARE IN THE WORKS FOR 2011!**



*Phase One renovations included the installation of new cabinets in the former dungeon area and in the museum. Pictured is Smilena Atanassova. (Photo: Kamen Bonev)*

In April of 2010 the Bulgarian Center celebrated a huge milestone - our 80th year of continuous operation. We sponsored a lavish banquet attended by many members, guests and government officials, published a comprehensive 100-page history book loaded with rare photos, and produced a video documentary featuring interviews with dozens of people, including our earliest surviving members.

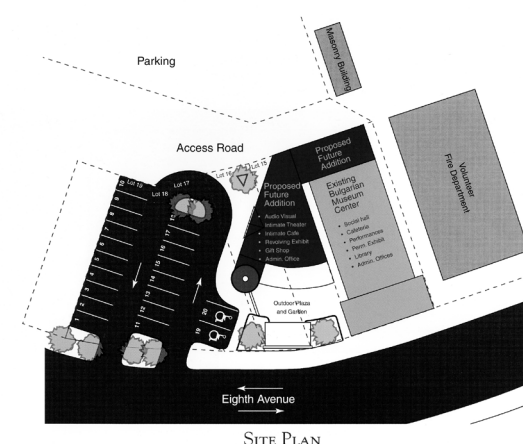
Now, in 2011, we continue to grow and pursue new opportunities that benefit our members and local community. Our most exciting news is our intention to acquire large adjacent properties.

Six years ago, with the assistance of the Steel Industry Heritage Corporation, the BMNECC created a multi-phased master plan to guide the Center in pursuing its capital improvements. During Phase One of the plan we added a new roof to the building, added a traditional Bulgarian-style facade, installed energy-efficient windows, added handicapped-accessible features, and turned the former dungeon area into a bright, organized workspace, complete with custom-built, archival-quality storage cabinets.

We're now gearing up for Phase Two, which proposes:

- a new facility housing a dedicated center for our Soup Segal program
- a *mehana* (Bulgarian cafe)
- an expanded museum exhibit space
- an improved gift shop area
- the addition of a large storage facility attached to our present building
- a new, safe parking area to serve club visitors and the general community
- active participation in the borough of West Homestead's plans to erase blighted property through the creation of a Town Center

Sound ambitious? You bet! But - as with past projects - we are committed to making these plans a reality. The BMNECC is expecting a large government grant of \$400,000 to kick-start the initiatives. And we will match these monies by implementing major fundraising projects in the coming year. We appreciate your support of our endeavors, and will keep you posted on our progress.



*Detail from the BMNECC's 2004 master plan, which shows the proposed areas for expansion*

Become a Member, Join BMNECC...



**Calendar of Events — Winter / Spring 2011**

[WWW.BMNECC.ORG](http://WWW.BMNECC.ORG)



Feb 5	Zydeco Dance with Zydeco Dogz	7:30 PM
Feb 12	Salsa Dance with D.J. Jeff Shirey	8:00 PM
Feb 19	Vecherinka with live music	7:30 PM
March 5	Mardi Gras Party with live music from Grand Bon Rien (come in costume!)	7:30 PM
March 11	Blues Dance with live music by Miss Freddye and the Blue Faze Band	8:00 PM
March 12	Salsa Dance with D.J. Jeff Shirey	8:00 PM
March 19	Vecherinka with live music	7:30 PM
April 2	Zydeco Dance with Zydeco Dogz	7:30 PM
April 9	Salsa Dance with D.J. Jeff Shirey	8:00 PM
April 16	Vecherinka with live music	7:30 PM
May 7	Cajun Dance with Grand Bon Rien	7:30 PM
May 14	Special Folk Festival Vecherinka	9:00 PM
June 4	Cajun / Zydeco Dance with Zydeco Dogz and Grand Bon Rien	7:30 PM
June 11	Salsa Dance with D.J. Jeff Shirey	8:00 PM

**Saturdays - Ongoing through May**

SOUP SEGA! - through May 2011	9:00 AM - Noon
Children's Dance and Cultural Program	10:00 AM

## CENTER COMMITTED TO LOCAL COMMUNITY

We have had a long association with Rainbow Kitchen Community Services, a Homestead-based organization committed to improving the quality of life for low income individuals and families through programs that address hunger, child nutrition and supportive services. In the past we have held food drives to benefit the Kitchen, have supported their annual winter coat drive, and donated items from our Soup Segal kitchen.



Most recently, our board of directors voted to further support Rainbow Kitchen's initiatives by "adopting" a family in need during the Christmas season. We are happy to announce that we helped brighten the holidays for a mother and her two children by donating pres-

ents tailored to their likes and needs - such as clothing, toys and books - plus a Giant Eagle gift certificate.

The Rainbow Kitchen is still accepting coats and winter outerwear accessories in all sizes (no clothing, please). You can drop items off at the Bulgarian Center or at the Kitchen's facility at 135 East 9th Avenue, Homestead, PA. If you would like information on ways to support the Rainbow Kitchen, please contact Program Director Lori Roadway at 412-464-1892, or visit [www.rainbowkitchen.org](http://www.rainbowkitchen.org).

## FALL CONCERT A SMASHING SUCCESS

The Performing Ensemble Otets Paissii performed to the largest and most enthusiastic crowd ever during its annual fall concert at the Carnegie Library Music Hall on November 20. This year's show, *Calendar Customs Alive*, highlighted songs and dances from traditional Bulgarian holidays and folklore events. From the high caliber dancing and music, to the inspired choreography and costume design, the program was a total win-

ner, generating a standing ovation. Special guest Guenko Guechev, bass baritone and head of Duquesne University's opera department, was especially impressive. This show featured the debut of a new set of

gorgeous Pirin costumes (above) designed and created by Wardrobe Manager Julie Rhyner. Special thanks to Artistic Director Bilyana Stoyanova Stafura, Managing Director Joy Holden, and Children's Dance Group Director Elsa Limbach.



## HOLIDAY SHOPPING NIGHT BENEFITS CENTER AND INTERNATIONAL ARTISANS

On December 2, the BMNECC took part in Ten Thousand Villages' Holiday Shopping Night program, which entitles local non-profit organizations to receive a percentage of all net sales made in the store during a two-hour period. Over two dozen organizations participate in this program, and for the third year in a row BMNECC shoppers generated the highest amount of sales for this non-profit, fair-trade store. Not only did this event raise funds for the Center, but our purchases helped support artisan groups in 30 developing countries. BMNECC Wardrobe Manager Julie Rhyner is shown above, trying on some of the lovely hand-made jewelry available at the store.



*BMNECC President Pat French is pictured here holding a plaque from The Society for Pennsylvania and Surrounding-Area History, which recently designated our 80-year-old Center a historic landmark.*

## BMNECC -- ALL AROUND THE TOWN

This past autumn we enjoyed one of our busiest seasons ever, as we took part in many local festivals, markets, and community events:

*Allegheny Regional Asset District's RADical Days* - Our Otets Paissii ensemble performed at the Senator John Heinz History Center and we offered free tours of the Center during this month-long event.

*International Food Fridays* - We served soup, gyuvech, and banitza at this new weekly market located at the Allegheny Courthouse courtyard.

*Heinz History Center Heritage Holidays* - We sold Bulgarian gift items, disseminated information and offered free samples of banitza at this two-day ethnic festival.

*Good Taste Pittsburgh* - We sold items from our Soup Segal kitchen at this Monroeville Convention Center food and cooking show.

*Rivers of Steel Holiday Market* - We sold traditional Bulgarian gift items plus a variety of our delicious Bulgarian soups at this annual Pump House event.

*QED Cooks with Chris Fenimore* - Soup Segal program manager Angèl Roy prepared a Bulgarian gyuvech (stew) from our Soup Segal menu for the show's *Soups and Stews Marathon* show. Check your local listings for repeat broadcasts of the program.

## THANKS TO ALL WHO DONATED ON DAY OF GIVING

The BMNECC wants to thank all who pledged money online during the Pittsburgh Foundation's 2010 *Day of Giving*. The Foundation allocated \$500,000 in matching dollars for non-profit organizations such as the BMNECC. This program enabled BMNECC supporters to enhance their contributions to the Center.

## PLANS FOR FOLK FESTIVAL UNDERWAY

We're gearing up to participate in the 54th Pittsburgh Folk Festival, May 13 through 15, at the Monroeville Convention Center. We'll need help in many areas, so please contact us if you'd like to volunteer. Also, mark your calendars for our Folk Festival Vecherinka on May 14. It's our liveliest dance party of the year and a true Pittsburgh tradition!

## CHILDREN'S DANCE CLASSES BEGIN

Classes for children who are interested in dancing with our performing ensemble will begin on Saturday mornings at the Center, beginning in mid-January. Contact Elsa Limbach at [elsa.limbach@verizon.net](mailto:elsa.limbach@verizon.net) for more information.

## Member Profile ELSA LIMBACH

Most BMNECC board members have become devotees of Bulgarian and Macedonian culture through the years, and quite a few have traveled to that part of the world on numerous occasions. However, few members have spent as much time living and working in Bulgaria as Elsa Limbach.

Elsa is an award-winning dancer, instructor and choreographer. For many years we have benefited from her immense experience in the movement arts. She was a driving force behind the establishment of our children's cultural program and has long directed our children's dance ensemble.

Elsa's introduction to Bulgaria began nearly 30 years ago, when she visited Sofia, the Pirin Mountains and Black Sea region as a tourist - back in the Communist era, when few Americans ventured into that part of the world. Through her contacts in the international dance community, she returned to Bulgaria at the onset of its liberation in 1989 - this time to teach dance technique, history and choreography. She ended up living and teaching there for much of the next five years - thanks in part to her receipt of a prestigious Fulbright scholarship.

Elsa specializes in contemporary dance and was a founding member of Pittsburgh's Dance Alloy Theater, a professional performing company and dance school. "Bulgarians are among the world's greatest folk dancers," said Elsa. "But most of the emphasis at that time was on traditional folk or ballet

technique. One of my goals was to help introduce contemporary approaches to the Bulgarian dance community."

Although her transition to life in Bulgaria was a bit daunting at first, Elsa immersed herself in the local language and customs and made good connections in the arts community. In time she was able to bring together dancers from difference organization to collaborate on major productions. She taught at the renowned National Academy of Theater and Film Arts and the State Choreographic School, and worked with most of the major dance companies in Sofia. She also instructed actors in the art of movement at the National Academy and in numerous theaters large and small.

Elsa lived and worked in Bulgaria during a time of great change. "I was there when the Berlin Wall came down," she said. "I was fascinated by the enormous political and economic shifts occurring day by day in that part of the world, and I observed at close range all kinds of social and political discussions and events. It was a very exciting time."

Elsa has been a BMNECC board member for 10 years and has helped organize many of the Center's major events, such as anniversary galas. She co-chairs the art committee, organizes exhibits, and oversees the restoration and preservation of the Center's art collection. However, she is happiest when working with the Center's youngest members - introducing them to the intricacies of Bulgarian rhythm and dance and teaching them how to work together in true ensemble fashion.

"I'm very pleased that in some small way I can help young people - from the tiniest dancers to the young teens - appreciate and take part in this rich cultural heritage, whether they are of Bulgarian descent or not," said Elsa. "In this high tech world of non-stop media, it's important to show children that they can enjoy something real and lasting - something that they will carry with them forever."

Elsa's 12-year-old daughter Karolina - whose father hails from Bulgaria - has been taking part in these programs since she was 3 years old. Thanks to the children's language classes that Elsa helped organize, she is fully able to communicate with her relatives in Bulgaria.

Elsa holds a degree in political science from Chatham University and has studied dance in New York and Philadelphia. She has served on the board of the Society for Contemporary Craft, is a trustee at the Winchester Thurston School, and is active in the Women's Campaign Forum. She continues to perform, and in 2008 choreographed and performed a multi-media dance event in Costa Rica. She enjoys teaching movement classes to students of all ages, including those who take part in the University of Pittsburgh's Osher Adult Learning Institute.

