

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

449 - 451 West Eighth Avenue
West Homestead, PA 15120
Phone: (412) 461-6188
Web: <http://www.bmnecc.org>
E-Mail: bmnecc@gmail.com

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Preserving Tradition - Promoting Understanding

Spring / Summer 2011

The President's Corner

Patricia Penka French

EXPANSION PLANS ARE FINALLY A REALITY



For the past several months we've been telling you about our exciting plans for expansion. For years we had hoped to acquire the properties adjacent to our Center in order to serve you better -- to provide enhanced parking for our guests, to develop an ethnic Bulgarian cafe and to enlarge our museum, gift shop, kitchen and storage areas.

Now we're happy to announce that we are finally in the process of closing on these adjacent properties on West Eighth Avenue! The properties now include an unattractive vacant lot and several dilapidated buildings that have long been an eyesore (see photos at left).

We have drawn up sales agreements and are moving to satisfy all of the legal requirements for the transfer of these properties to the Center. Title searches and surveys are taking place. Prior to closing we must meet all environmental engineering requirements. This involves determining the existence of any hazardous materials that might be present in the vacant buildings. We are also drafting plans for the layout of the new parking area and the eventual demolition of the blighted buildings.



We have been fortunate to receive a major grant of \$150,000 from the Community Infrastructure and Tourism Fund (CITF) of the Allegheny County Redevelopment Authority to assist in the acquisition of the properties and to begin work on Phase I of the expansion project.

The Bulgarian Center has been a familiar fixture in West Homestead since 1935. Through the years we've worked hard to renovate our facility, making it safer, more comfortable and more attractive, and more handicapped-accessible for the thousands of people who visit us each year for dances, tours and special events. Grants from organizations such as the Allegheny Regional Asset District, the Steel Industry Heritage Corporation, and the Pittsburgh History and Landmarks Foundation helped make these improvements a reality and we are grateful to all who contributed. Now we will finally be able to fulfill the final part of our strategic plan, and to help the Borough of West Homestead in its redevelopment programs.



We will be launching a major capital campaign to support the development program and will keep you posted on these exciting initiatives.

Become a Member, Join BMNECC...

Calendar of Events

WWW.BMNECC.ORG



May 14	Special Folk Festival Vecherinka	10:00 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

Coming in Fall 2011

SOUP SEGA! - Begins September 10	9:00 AM - Noon
Fall Concert - Performing Ensemble Otets Paissii - November 19, 2011	7:00 PM
Vecherinka - third Saturday of each month beginning in September	7:30 PM
Cajun / Zydeco Dances - first Saturday of each month beginning in September	7:30 PM
Salsa Dances - second Saturday of each month beginning in September	8:00 PM

TOUR GROUPS CONTINUE TO VISIT THE CENTER

This past spring we've continued to stay busy hosting visitors from many different local and national organizations - from Rivers of Steel tour groups to ethnomusicologists. One of the largest groups included 105 choir group members from southeastern Pennsylvania who produced a program known as "Behold The Lamb: A Visual Oratorio for Easter." This is a collaborative project of Berks Christian School, Conestoga Christian School, Eight Voices A Cappella, and other dedicated individuals. The choir presented concerts in various various Pennsylvania cities during the month of April in order to raise money for an Evangelical Christian Church in Bulgaria.

Following the group's April 15 performance at the Pittsburgh Mennonite Church, they visited the Bulgarian Center, where our staff gave them a tour of the building, taught them a Bulgarian song and dance, and showed the members how to



write their names in Bulgaria's Cyrillic alphabet. To date, the group has raised over \$14,000 to send to Bulgaria. [Photos show BMNECC Board Member Polina Hristozova and Executive Director Walter Kolar instructing the students.]

BMNECC NEVER MISSES A YEAR AT THE FOLK FESTIVAL

As we go to press, we are preparing to participate in the 54th Pittsburgh Folk Festival at the Monroeville Convention Center, May 13 through 15. Our Performing Ensemble Otets Paissii will perform on Saturday evening with a portrayal of Macedonian songs and dances from the Pirin region of Bulgaria. Our Children's Cultural Dance group will perform on Saturday afternoon at 1:00 pm. Our ethnic display booth will feature storytelling, based on the Folk Festival's theme of Fairy Tales and Legends. We hope to delight audiences with tales of legendary Bulgarian folk heroes Krali Marko and Hitar Petar. We will also participate in the Marketplace area, where we will sell a variety of Bulgarian gifts, such as our lovely ceramic kitchenware.

And, as always, we are hosting the annual Folk Festival Vecherinka, our liveliest dance party of the year. The event will begin at 10:00 pm on Saturday, May 14, at the Bulgarian Center. Food and beverages will be available throughout the evening.

DONATIONS MADE TO CENTER ON DAY OF GIVING

On May 11, the public had an opportunity to enhance their contributions to the BMNECC by taking part in the *Pittsburgh is Art* Day of Giving, a 24-hour online donation match campaign. Every organization that received funds during the match period received a portion of the match pool. We thank everyone who contributed to the BMNECC on May 11.

BULGARIA'S ANNIVERSARY CELEBRATED

On March 4, the Bulgarian Embassy in Washington DC hosted a celebration to commemorate the 133rd anniversary of Bulgaria's liberation from Ottoman rule. BMNECC President Patricia French and board member Dana Spiardi attended the gala, which was held at the historic building that houses the Organization of American States. The top photo shows Pat French with Bulgarian Ambassador Elena Poptodorova. Standing with Pat in the bottom photo are BMNECC members Mary and Nick "Tircho" Markoff and Attorney Laurie Sherman, wife of the late Harvey Feldman, former Deputy Chief of Mission of the U.S. Embassy in Bulgaria.



HEINZ ENDOWMENTS SPOTLIGHTS BMNECC

The Heinz Endowments has been a major supporter of BMNECC artistic programs for many years. Recently, the Endowments' website added the BMNECC to its list of featured organizations. From April 25 through May 8 the Center was the featured Spotlight on the site: www.heinz.org. Visitors to the website can view stories and videos describing our organization by clicking on the Spotlight section: View All Spotlights. We thank the Heinz Endowments for this opportunity.

SOUP SEGA! ITEMS DONATED TO EMPTY BOWLS DINNER EVENT

The BMNECC's Soup Segal kitchen donated more than 18 gallons of delicious homemade soup from its Soup Segal kitchen to the 16th annual Empty Bowls Dinner at the Rodef Shalom Synagogue on Sunday, March 6. Empty Bowls is a major Pittsburgh event that draws over 1,200 people annually. Over the past 15 years it has raised more than \$425,000 to fight hunger in our communities.

PUMP HOUSE SPRING MARKET A SUCCESS

The BMNECC took part in the annual Spring Heritage Market at the Rivers of Steel National Heritage Area's Pump House on Saturday, April 23. We sold a variety of our delicious ethnic soups, plus traditional Bulgarian gift items, such as our beautiful ceramic kitchenware. Pictured in the photo are Julie Rhyner and Pat French.



Member Profile:

JEFFREY SCHLEICHER

What are your current responsibilities at the Bulgarian Center?

I've been a Board member since about 2004. I also feel the responsibility to volunteer in other ways, particularly by helping out with the Saturday morning Soup Segal program and bartending at events at the Center.

How and why did you become involved in the BMNECC?

My wife and I found out about BMNECC via a Google search in early 2001. We were in the late stages of adopting children from Bulgaria and we were looking for a place where we could learn more about the Bulgarian people and culture and also keep our kids "plugged into" their Bulgarian heritage. Mission accomplished!

What do you like most about being involved with the BMNECC?

My family and I like the fact that we can keep our kids' Bulgarian heritage alive through the center, its activities, and its diverse members and associates.

Do you have any special memories from the Center?

My special memories include getting to know the older members of the organization, some of whom were active near the beginning of the Center's formation. Having become a member while in my 30s, I hope to be able to provide a link to the early part of this century when I'm in my 70s and 80s.

Do you have goals for the BMNECC?

I would like the Center to continue to be a place where people with connections to and/or affections for the Bulgarian and Macedonian cultures and people feel comfortable coming to meet others with these same connections and affections, to learn together, work together, and have fun together.

What kind of work do you do?

I'm a Director of Finance, Managerial Accounting, and Financial Reporting for PPG Industries. I work in the large PPG One Tower in downtown Pittsburgh. Previously I worked for Del Monte Foods, Elliott Turbomachinery Company, and the Parsons Corporation.

Do you belong to any other social/professional organizations?

I'm a member of the Institute of Management Accountants.

Tell us about your family.

My wife, Maureen Ticich, and I have seven children. Four of these children are siblings that we adopted from Bulgaria, and three are sisters that we adopted from Haiti. We also have one dog, five cats, one bird, some assorted fish and hermit crabs.

Where did you grow up and go to school?

I grew up in the South Hills section of the city and graduated from Carrick High School in 1982. I have a B.A. in Criminology from Indiana University of Pennsylvania, an M.A. in International Business Management from the University of Maryland, and a Post-Bachelor Certificate in Accounting from Robert Morris University.

What are your hobbies?

I enjoy running road and trail races, and I enjoy most other sports and activities that give one a good physical workout in the process (e.g., basketball, squash, football, swimming).

Have you been to Bulgaria or any other countries?

My wife and I are native Pittsburghers. We have traveled to many other countries, and visited Bulgaria three times. Through my work, we have lived in a handful of locales, including Alaska, Texas, Kazakhstan, Saudi Arabia, Singapore and Malaysia.

What would people be surprised to know about you?

Since it was before my affiliation with the center, my BMNECC friends may be surprised to know that I was an officer in the Marine Corps for four years (1987 - 1991).



Schleicher Family. Front row, left to right: Neissa, Maureen, Aaron and Jeff. Back row, left to right: Ani, Chalinda, Sonise, Evan, Gregory.