

# ***Fostering Change in the Ukrainian Community***

**By Natalie Sluzar**

**TWG President (1984-1986)**

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I was honored to be elected TWG's first president. It would be a personal challenge for me, yet one which I was eager to take on. We all had a lot of plans for TWG, but bringing them to fruition was something else. There was no guidebook, no "how to" manual. Although we met with and admired the Canadian business and professional organizations, we would be on our own.

I was lucky to have the first Board of Directors consist of dynamic community activists, committed and dedicated to making TWG a success: Ihor Procinsky, vice president; Marta Pereyma, secretary; Yaro Bihun, treasurer; Orest Deychakiwsky, membership; Eugene Iwanciw, public relations; Wolodymyr Sulzynsky, special projects. Auditors were Halyna Breslawec, Jurij Petrenko and Daria Stec. It's because of them that TWG formulated such an impressive list of objectives and set out to make them happen.

From the start, TWG was innovative in the caliber and diversity of programs it provided. A monthly Friday Evening Forum was initiated, where prominent guests from government, academia, industry and the art world were invited to speak. Paula Dobriansky from the National Security Council, Kiev Consul-Designate William Courtney, Marco Carynnyk, Bohdan Bociurkiv, Marta Bohachevsky-Chomiak and Oleh Wolowyna were among the early guests. They spoke on a variety of topics: a review of the International Women's Conference in Kenya, the Millennium of Christianity in Ukraine, the 1932-33 Famine in Ukraine, foreign policy decision making, intelligence in national security policy, and an assessment of what the most recent census statistics revealed about Ukrainians in the United States.

On a lighter note, TWG members could improve and enrich themselves personally by listening to Don Omeck talk about investing and financial

planning, or find out how to buy real estate from brokers Tamara Powstenko and Anna Worobij. Olena Boyko gave a fascinating account of her sailing trip around the world.

Promoting Ukrainian artists and musicians was another of TWG's goals. Concerts by noted pianists Juliana Osinchuk and Daria Telizyn introduced audiences to a wide repertoire of Ukrainian composers. Larisa Pastuchiv gave a stirring bandura performance, introducing this magnificent instrument to many for the first time. A visit to the studio of artist Orest Polischuk enabled TWG members to view a contemporary artist incorporating traditional Ukrainian themes in his works.

Renowned Smithsonian discographer and folk music expert, Richard Spotswood, described the rich contribution Ukrainian music made to the U.S. record industry prior to the Depression.

To commemorate the 50th anniversary of the 1932- 33 Famine in Ukraine, major Ukrainian organizations planned a series of events in Washington, including a rally on the Mall, a march to the Soviet Embassy, concerts at the Kennedy Center and the DAR Auditorium. TWG members participated actively in the planning and execution of these events.

On a smaller scale, TWG did its share to bring the Famine to the American consciousness. Robert Conquest's monumental work on the Famine, *Harvest of Sorrow*, had been recently published. TWG organized a lecture and book signing for Dr. Conquest at the prestigious Wilson Center.

Supporting efforts spearheaded by Victor Rud and the Ukrainian Famine Research Committee of Toronto, TWG members worked tirelessly to interest the national media in Slavko Nowytski's new documentary on the Famine, *Harvest of Despair*. Through luck and persistence, PBS finally agreed to air this film, but insisted on presenting "diverse viewpoints." William Buckley's "Firing Line" television show was the venue chosen for a two-hour special program on which the documentary was shown, followed by a discussion that included Robert Conquest, Sovietologist Harrison Salisbury and Christopher Hutchins, editor of *The Nation*.

TWG organized additional viewings of *Harvest of Despair*, and sent over 300 press kits and many copies of the video to the media. Leasing the

Biograph Theater in Georgetown, which had a devoted clientele among Washington's elite, TWG organized a Washington premiere for the documentary. Mr. Nowytski was on hand for questions and answers following each of the three sold-out performances.

In April 1986, another tragedy hit Ukraine, the Chernobyl nuclear disaster. As usual, the Soviet propaganda machine totally distorted and hid the facts, in an attempt to downplay the tragedy. Initially, the Ukrainian-American community was not prepared to take on the major efforts that such a tragedy required.

But it soon rallied and took decisive actions. An informal National Action Network was formed, chaired by Larissa Fontana. Since TWG's membership was nationwide by this time, its members proved to be invaluable contacts for conveying and exchanging information, and coordinating their actions.

Another of TWG's objectives was to reach out to other Ukrainian organizations and become all-inclusive. In cooperation with numerous local and national Ukrainian organizations, TWG sponsored a Congressional reception to celebrate the 100 years of Ukrainian immigration to the United States. We would also go on to co-sponsor, with the Ukrainian-American Army officers, an annual commemoration of the January 22 Ukrainian Independence Day.

The first major banquet TWG organized was done jointly with the Ukrainian-American Bar Association (UABA); it was a benefit to raise money for our respective scholarship funds. Assistant Attorney General William Bradford Reynolds was the keynote speaker. This event was a tremendous success. For its part, TWG expanded its scholarship program into the Fellowship Fund.

Informal meetings were held with other Ukrainian business and professionals' organizations, including the New York and New Jersey B's and P's, the Technological Society of Pittsburgh, and the Young Professionals at the Ukrainian Institute of America. Discussions involved coordinating actions against the defamation of Ukrainians and organizing a federation of Ukrainian B's and P's, similar to the successful Canadian organization.

There were many social events sponsored by TWG. Picnics, parties, bike trips, outdoor concerts at Wolf Trap, day trips to Atlantic City, and a ski trip to Hunter Mountain were just a few of the fun activities.

During these two short years, I believe a solid foundation was laid for TWG to succeed. A monthly newsletter, TWG News, became a much-read important source of information and a forum for TWG members to present their views. Under the able editorial talents of Eugene Iwanciw, and, later, Maria Rudensky and Irene Jarosewich, TWG News was a big hit. It was professionally done, interesting, informative, and thought provoking. It was also during these first two years that TWG published its Membership Directory. Amazingly, TWG's membership skyrocketed to over 200 members by the end of the first year.

I felt a tremendous amount of personal satisfaction and fulfillment during these two years as TWG's president. It provided me with an opportunity to challenge and test myself, be creative, think quickly, and act with deliberation. Above all, TWG was able to foster a change in the Ukrainian community at large. When I turned over the presidency to Daria Stec, I had confidence in her able stewardship that TWG would continue to be successful.