

Leading Ukrainians to excellence and influence

By Daria Stec

TWG President (1986-1988)

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It was a great honor for me to serve as TWG's second president from 1986 to 1988. I was fortunate to succeed Natalie Sluzar, who did an amazing job of creating a strong foundation upon which to build.

Looking back on my tenure, I was struck by how much the world has changed in the past 20 years. At the time I became president, there was still a "USSR" and a "Soviet Union." Ukraine was not a household word, and we Ukrainian-Americans spent a lot of time informing people about Ukraine's existence and the fact that it was NOT the same as Russia. The Chernobyl nuclear disaster had occurred six months earlier. Nonetheless, there were stirrings of change. Mikhail Gorbachev's glasnost elicited hope and skepticism. Ukrainian political dissidents, such as Mykola Rudenko, Danylo Shumuk, Nadia Svitlychna, Nina Strokata, and Svyatoslav Karavansky, were being released from long prison terms and were coming to the United States to talk about their experiences. A big issue for Ukrainian-Americans was whether the U.S. would establish a consulate in Kyiv. A consul-general — William Courtney — was designated, but because of security problems, politics, and Chernobyl, the consulate was not formally established and the position was not filled until the later nomination of Jon Gundersen.

Now we have an independent Ukraine; the United States and Ukraine have reciprocal embassies and consulates; and the world knows about Ukraine. Who would have thought? As TWG president, I dreamt of these developments, but did not see them as realistic possibilities by the time TWG would be celebrating its 20th anniversary.

During my tenure, the Board of Directors and I had many aspirations. We wanted to continue to build the organization, and to reach out in all directions – to our members, to other Ukrainian-American professionals

and organizations, to government officials, journalists, academicians, scientists, and other influential persons - to inform them about Ukrainians, to voice our concerns on relevant issues, and to establish lasting contacts.

Our largest projects were the annual Leadership Conferences. I took over as president just in time to welcome over 150 participants to the October 1986 Leadership Conference at the Capitol Hilton Hotel in downtown Washington, so ably organized by Natalie Sluzar. The highlight of that Conference was a keynote speech by Prof. Zbigniew Brzezinski, a world-renowned expert on foreign affairs who served as Assistant to the President for National Security Affairs from 1977 to 1981.

Soon after the end of the 1986 Conference, the new Board of Directors began planning for the October 1987 Conference. Held at the Mayflower Hotel in downtown Washington, it was again a success, with over 250 participants. Richard Schifter, Assistant Secretary of State for Human Rights and Humanitarian Affairs, gave the luncheon address. The lectures, panels and workshops focused on perceptions of Ukrainians in politics, business, and government, and ways to enhance that image through the legal system, the media, and information dissemination. The Ukrainian American Bar Association joined us for one of the panel discussions and for the gala in the beautiful Mayflower Ballroom, with dinner and dancing to the sounds of Tempo.

Another undertaking during these two years was the weekend-long TWG "Camp David Summit" in Maryland's Catoctin Mountains. With Vasyl Kornylo, a management efficiency expert from the Xerox Corporation, the Board and interested members developed a guiding vision for TWG: "leading Ukrainians to excellence and influence," and a mission: "developing personal and professional growth of TWG's members and promoting issues of concern to Ukrainian Americans by influencing national policies through outreach efforts, professional and social networking, cultural, educational and information services."

Because of the recent Chernobyl disaster, much of our work focused on disseminating information about this horror outside the Ukrainian-American community. In December 1986, TWG sponsored a series of events on Chernobyl. Dr. David Marples of the Canadian Institute of Ukrainian Studies spoke about his book, *Chernobyl and Soviet Nuclear Power*, at the

Wilson Center. A symposium on Chornobyl included Dr. Marples; Dr. Larissa Fontana, Washington Ukrainian Community Network; Paul Goble, U.S. Department of State; Dr. Ihor Masnyk, National Cancer Institute; and moderator Dr. Andrew Hruszkewycz, George Washington University. We also arranged meetings for Dr. Marples with U.S. officials at the White House and U.S. Department of State, and meetings with scholars at the Kennan Institute of the Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars, and at other venues.

In April 1987, a consortium of Ukrainian-American community groups, spearheaded by TWG, sponsored several events to commemorate the first anniversary of the Chornobyl disaster. Highlights included a symposium with Dr. Marples, Swarthmore College physicist Olexa Bilaniuk and other experts; a prayer vigil in Lafayette Park; an Interfaith Memorial Service for Chornobyl victims sponsored by all three DC-area Ukrainian parishes and the Interfaith Conference of Metropolitan Washington; and a lecture by TWG member Oleh Weres of Lawrence Livermore Laboratories.

For the first time, in 1987 — and subsequently in 1988 — the Annual Convention of National Religious Broadcaster of the U.S. featured a booth with information about the state of religion in Ukraine, as well as consciousness-raising about the upcoming Millennium of Christianity in Ukraine. TWG worked with other organizations and individuals, particularly Andrij Bilyk, to prepare information and staff the booth.

In further cooperation efforts, TWG helped out with various events. For example, it sponsored receptions for the Antonovych Awards, the Virsky Dancers, and visiting scholars taking part in conferences on the Millennium at the Kennan Institute and the Library of Congress. During Millennium commemorations in October 1988, TWG hosted a midnight reception at Constitution Hall after the Millennium Concert. The Board made a conscious attempt to have TWG representation at all events sponsored by other Ukrainian organizations or relating to Ukraine.

During 1986-88, we continued the popular “Friday Evening Forum” series on a panoply of topics. For example, Ambassador Stephen Rhinesmith, head of the President’s U.S.-Soviet Exchange Initiative, and his deputy, Gregory Guroff, spoke about opportunities for participation in cultural exchange programs in the U.S.S.R. U.S. Ambassador to the Soviet Union

Jack Matlock told us that Ukraine is “one area affected least by the winds of change” that are taking place in Gorbachev’s U.S.S.R. Danylo Shumuk, the longest serving political prisoner in the Soviet Union, urged the press to focus more on Ukraine and warned the West not to be taken in by Gorbachev’s glasnost policy. Other speakers included Mike Edwards, National Geographic senior editor; Roman Popadiuk, deputy White House press secretary for foreign affairs; Wolodymyr Mokry, professor of Ukrainian literature and languages at Krakow’s Jagellonian University; and Peter Potichnyj of the Canadian Institute for Ukrainian Studies. We also reached out to the varied backgrounds of our members and had forums on topics such as mixed marriages, working at U.S. Information Agency exhibits in the Soviet Union, living and working in Lviv, Ukrainian traditions, and the like.

The years 1986-88 were not devoted just to serious matters. We continued the tradition of an Annual Christmas Party. We began the tradition of “Tabir TWG” at Dr. Oleh Hudyma’s property near Assateague, an annual gathering that continues to this day. For several summers, TWG members Paul and Lillian Kritsky graciously hosted pool parties at their home. We also went ice skating, cross-country skiing, paddle boating, polka dancing, organized tours at Washington’s museums and monuments, and attended concerts at Wolf Trap and the Birchmere.

The Board of Directors constantly strove to solidify the organization. In these two years, as the result of outreach efforts and regular reminder letters, membership swelled to over 300 members in 24 states and 5 countries. The TWG News was published monthly as a 10-12 page double-sided newsletter, thanks to the dedication of Maria Rudensky, editor; George Masiuk, associate editor; Bohdan Kantor, design editor; Chrystia Oryshkevych, Halyna Breslawec, calendar editors; and Irene Jarosewich, Spotlight editor. In addition to articles about TWG events and issues of interest, the newsletter included a one-page Spotlight on a member, Notes on Members, a list of new members, minutes of the monthly Board meetings, and Ukrainian Trivia contests. We continued regular publication of the TWG Membership Directory. TWG member Andriy Mostovych established the Fellowship Projects Committee, which granted its first two awards in August 1987. TWG member Pat Onufrak established a TWG Job Bank. In addition, we established a TWG Hotline, a telephone line with

recorded messages about upcoming events in the Ukrainian American community.

One of my best memories of my tenure as TWG President is the incredible dedication, motivation, perseverance, enthusiasm and camaraderie of the TWG Board of Directors. Everyone, to a person, gave his or her best to this volunteer effort. My heartfelt thanks to: Rostyk Chomiak — vice president; Darian Diachok, Helen Chaikovsky — secretary; George Hnatiw, Julia Tereshchuk, Myron Maslowsky — treasurer; Marta Pereyma, Anya Dydyk — special projects; Al Kapusta, Yaro Bihun, Lydia Chopivksy — public relations; Halyna Breslawec, Andrew Rylyk — membership; Julia Tereshchuk, Mark Bilowus, Anna Worobij, Olha Holoyda — events; Anna Worobij, Olha Holoyda — business; Natalie Sluzar, Ihor Vitkovitsky, Andrew Rylyk, Jurij Dobczansky, Larissa Fontana — auditing committee.