

# ***Expanding the range of our relationships***

**By George Masiuk**

## **TWG President (1995-1997)**

I was president of TWG during an auspicious time for the Ukrainian-American community in Washington. The enthusiasm generated in the community in the wake of Ukraine's independence was still going strong and it infused me, the TWG board, and our membership.

The major goal that I wanted to achieve as president was to expand the range of relationships in which TWG engaged. My first priority was to establish a close relationship between TWG and the Embassy of Ukraine. This effort was greatly facilitated by Ambassador Yuri Shcherbak, who wanted to establish close relations with our community and by Vasyl Zorya, the Embassy's press attaché, with whom I spent many hours in conversation. The tangible results of this relationship were the establishment of the TWG Embassy internship, our Leadership Conference Friday evening receptions at the Embassy, a regular appearance by Ukraine's ambassador at our conferences, and regular participation of TWG members in Embassy sponsored events.

TWG was also able to expand its relationship with the U.S.-Ukraine Foundation and the Meridian House, resulting in a number of joint events.

In addition to expanding TWG's relationships, promoting close U.S.-Ukraine relations was a top priority. Multiple TWG events promoted this, by creating a forum for a dialogue between influential speakers and a well-informed audience. Influential speakers, such as Deputy Secretary of State Strobe Talbott, Ambassador Jeanne Kirkpatrick, National Security Council members William Courtney and Coit Blacker, U.S. Ambassadors to Ukraine William G. Miller and Steven Pifer, and Ukraine's Ambassador to the United States Yuri Shcherbak, not only spoke at TWG events but also engaged in vigorous dialogue with our community during the Q&A sessions.

Toward the end of my presidency, I proposed and TWG adopted an important change in its by-laws that I hope will have a positive effect on

TWG's current affairs. This change opened TWG membership to anyone who is interested in promoting Ukrainian culture and issues.

Let me share some personal reflections on my presidency in the hope of encouraging others to seek a leadership position in our community organizations. In a humorous test that I took on my job, my leadership skills were rated comparable to "can't lead a hungry pack of wolves to meat." So it was with some trepidation that I took on the TWG presidency. However, with solid support from the Board, with some vision of what I wanted to accomplish, and a generous reliance on flattery (trust me, it works — despite what textbooks say), I not only survived but I learned a lot about myself and others and enjoyed the experience immensely. Among the interesting experiences I had were my regular invitations to the Department of State, which I received together with other Ukrainian-American community leaders. My preconceived notion was that the American foreign policy Establishment was hostile to Ukrainian issues. On occasion that may be so, but I felt that I was always treated with respect and that we always got to express our views and concerns. If our community was better organized, my experience suggests that the door of our Government is quite open to hear what we wish to say.

The one regret that I have is that, as president, I was not able to build a solid infrastructure for TWG. We were not able to organize an office with a paid staff to conduct all of the day-to-day activities that the maintenance of a large organization requires. Unfortunately, this is still the case today and it seriously affects the long-term viability of TWG.

I had a sense of accomplishment and relief as I made my way to the TWG annual meeting that would elect my successor, Orest Deychakiwsky. On the way, I ran into Yaro Bihun, the editor of TWG News, with whom I was in constant contact, and whose efforts over the years meant so much to TWG. He congratulated me and in the same breath told that he had removed my name from his speed dial. His comment had an unanticipated sting to it. I had not realized how much I had gotten used to the position of TWG President.