

Trying to get Ukraine past the Threshold

By Orest Deychakiwsky

TWG President (1998-2000)

The two years from May 1998 to May 2000 were very productive and exciting for TWG. We staged many high quality, varied and well-attended events. TWG played a key role in the unprecedented June 1999 Joint Conferences of Ukrainian-American Organizations, and the TWG conference held as part of the Joint Conferences, with its substantive, well-remembered attendance. During these two years, membership reached historically high levels. TWG's infrastructure was enhanced, including the creation of a web site and the institution of corporate sponsorships. One of the strengths throughout the two years of my presidency was an exceptionally committed Board which truly functioned as a team and exhibited strong camaraderie. We truly were a team!

TWG Events can be divided into three broad categories: political, social and cultural. The Board made a conscious attempt to provide events that would appeal to TWG members' varied interests.

One of the highlights of my tenure was the June 1999 Joint Conferences of Ukrainian-American Organizations, under the chairmanship of Dr. Roman Goy of the Ukrainian American Medical Association of North America (UMANA). An integral part of the Joint Conferences, the TWG conference with its five substantive, well-received panels, enjoyed record-breaking attendance. The TWG conference was called "At The Threshold" and panels were held on: U.S.- Ukraine Military Cooperation, Ukraine's Role in International Space Projects, Ukraine on the Eve of the Presidential Elections, U.S.-Ukraine Business Cooperation, and Trafficking of Women from Ukraine. The Joint Conferences was an unprecedented undertaking in recent Ukrainian-American history. Nearly 1,000 people attended at least one Joint Conferences event. Many hours were also devoted by me and other TWG Board Members, as well as leaders of the other organizations involved in preparation for this truly ambitious undertaking, including several planning meetings I attended in Delaware.

TWG events held during this time included, but by no means were limited to: hosting a meeting and reception with Ambassador to Ukraine Steven Pifer; an evening and reception with Special Advisor to the President on the NIS Ambassador Steven Sestanovich; cosponsoring with the Kennan Institute the appearance of former Ukrainian Rada speaker Oleksandr Moroz; a meeting at Johns Hopkins SAIS with Commercial Attaché at the U.S. Embassy Andy Bihun; a Ukrainian Embassy meeting with Ukrainians Oleksandr Rodniansky of Studio 1+1 and Ilko Kucheriv of the Democratic Initiatives Foundation; cosponsoring a banquet for departing Ukrainian Ambassador to the U.S. Yuri Shcherbak; cosponsoring with UMANA an evening forum with Dr.

Richard Cassucio, president of the Virginia chapter of Interplast; cosponsoring a dinner with members of the Ukrainian delegation to the 1999 NATO summit; cosponsoring a Ukraine bankers event at Meridian International Center; and the Hrushevsky book launch at the Ukrainian Embassy.

The TWG Cultural Fund, under the able leadership of Laryssa Courtney, staged a wide variety of high quality events, including "Paris to Kiev" at the French Embassy, several art exhibits, two chamber music concerts featuring the Kyiv Camerata and Leontovych String Quartet, the Horowitz piano competition recital, a Solomiya Soroka concert, and a Chornobyl evening of literature and music at the Ukrainian Embassy.

An important component of TWG's activities were social events. These included Independence Day picnics, Happy Hours at various taverns, a Valentine's Day party, a Christmas party, several TWG parties, including a TWG Spring Fling and Halloween Party at the homes of TWG Members, an excursion to Virginia wine country, a canoeing trip to Annapolis, a TWG Jazz Night at LaPorta restaurant in Alexandria, an exclusive tour of Scythian Treasures from Ukraine at the Walters Art Gallery in Baltimore, and the showing of a film by Slavko Nowytski following the Annual Meeting.

During this time, the TWG Fellowship fund expanded its activities. In addition to funding summer internships at the Ukrainian Embassy, it partially funded internships at UACC and UNIS, the two Ukrainian-American offices in Washington, thanks to the generosity of Maria Kulczycky.

A strong infrastructure is key to any organization, and efforts were made to strengthen TWG's infrastructure. These included the creation of the TWG web site by Steve Boyduy, the release of a Membership Directory under the leadership of Mike Drabyk, the creation of a new, and overdue, TWG brochure, the successful recruitment of Ukrainian credit unions as corporate members, thanks to Marta Zielyk, and, of course, publication of our monthly TWG News by Yaro Bihun.

While President, I represented TWG at various meetings and events outside the Washington area, including the New York/New Jersey Ps and Bs 20/20 conference in October 1998, as well as a February 1999 conference in Chicago on the future of the Ukrainian- American community in which I delivered a presentation on TWG and the ingredients of our success.

I also represented TWG at least one-half dozen times at meetings at the State Department concerning U.S.- Ukraine relations (sometimes wearing my TWG hat along with that of my day job as staff advisor for the U.S. Commission on Security and Cooperation in Europe (Helsinki Commission)). In September 1999, along with other Ukrainian-American community leaders, I met with Vice President Gore. Other meetings at which I represented TWG were two telephone conference calls with the Vice President's National Security Advisor and several U.S.A.I.D. briefings. Some of these meetings were

connected with the Ukrainian presidential elections of November 1999, at which I was an OSCE international observer. I also represented TWG at meetings of Ukrainian-American community leaders with Ukrainian Ambassadors Anton Buteiko and Kostyantyn Gryshchenko.

Ukraine was indeed, as our 1999 TWG conference title implied, "At the Threshold" at that time. Shortly after President Leonid Kuchma's victory, we thought that Ukraine had begun to cross the threshold as Viktor Yushchenko became prime minister in December 1999. However, his government's reforms were thwarted a little more than a year later as he was seen to be too much of a threat to the ruling oligarchic powers. Unfortunately, the situation in Ukraine deteriorated during the second term of the Kuchma regime and, as a result, U.S.-Ukraine relations suffered.

What made TWG a strong and viable organization during my tenure as President was that we had an active board where more than just one or two individuals were shouldering the entire burden. We met on a regular basis

and communicated frequently, including via E-mails, and this, in my view, was a key to success.