

DOM LIPA - A MONUMENT TO SLOVENIAN HUMANISM

(Peter Cekuta, May 26, 1994)

INTRODUCTION

It is my pleasure to present to you a historic sketch of this institution, which, to many of our seniors, is a piece of Slovenia on the Canadian soil, their adopted land. It is difficult to present full and accurate stages of developments, there are so many of them, and with justice, without identifying individuals who were, and are, responsible in making this facility possible. Therefore with apologies to many, only the key players will be identified in this chronology.

Pravijo, da je grska zgodovina poezija, Rimska zgodovina umetnina in Moderna zgodovina kronika casa. Kar vam hocem danes zvecer povedati je le kroniko te vseslovenske zadruge zadnjih 20 let, z posebnim poudarkom na prva leta, ko se je ideja Doma Lipa oblikovala.

CHRONOLOGY

We will be entering the twentieth anniversary, when a seed for an old age home project in the Toronto Slovenian community was germinated and became this fruit - our Dom Lipa, a factor for this evening's celebration. Meeting to plant this seed was held in the presence of 85 people on Feb. 2, 1975 with representatives of our two slovenian parishes, of both religious and of lay leaders.

This project was an all slovenian process - with no political ideology, not a religious fervour, not an enterprise for self indulgence - but a collective process of an idea expressing a social need, and projecting it into the future.

Who were these original visionaries? Cerar, Blatnik, Babic, Novak, Trpin, Jereb, Kraljic, Kopac, Vovk, Vipavec, Hace, Kus and Arhars - names that are synonymous with the origin of this institution. These initial committee members, played many roles by being planners, financiers, and humanitarian idealists.

Preliminary work and research began immediately; exploring grant possibilities from Central Mortgage and Housing, visits of other ethnic old age homes, namely Ukrainian, Chinese and Polish and of the Slovenian old age home in Cleveland. Ideas were expressed on developing of a slovenian census and a survey on the need for an old age home. On October 8, 1975 name Dom Lipa for the seniors residence, and Slovenian Linden Foundation for its Board of Directors, begot its name.

Early in 1976, the first \$6000.00, as a result of a lottery, was given to our slovenian nuns in trust, for a future old age home - dollars which proved their weight in what we have here today.

It was the premise at the time, that our slovenian nuns will operate and serve in the proposed old age home. In due time this premise changed, by incorporating both the church and secular members who were to play a part in developing and managing Dom Lipa.

A first banquet was held on March 9, 1976 in the Slovenian Hall on Pape Ave. Since then there have been banquets held every year, which raised over 100,000. dollars. These banquets have also become an important forum for distribution of information on the progress of Dom Lipa. Likewise summer pic-nicks on various slovenian summer camps played an important part of planting the information and soliciting fund raising activities among various slovenian groups in Ontario. First such summer gathering took place on Holiday Gardens in Pickering in 1976.

The initiating committee held its first annual general meeting of the Linden Foundation on May 16, 1976, 18 years ago this month, and the first board of directors were elected. These were: Frank Cerar, president, Viktor Trcek, vice pres. Cveta Arhar, secretary, which function she performed for over 10 years, sister Teodora as treasurer, L. Babic, F. Kus, J. Muhic, F. Kraljic, A. Blatnik, V. Novak, F. Arhar, S. Vovk, J. Trpin, M. Jereb and M. Doma as board members. Since then most of these individuals performed a long standing service on Board of Directors and on various committees - some even to this day.

So desirous to achieve its goal were the founding board members that during early days of 1976, there was a serious debate taking place of buying and converting Rudy Kus's apartment complex next to the Slovenian Church on Brown's Line into a residence for seniors. Magnitude and practicality of the project, prevented this to happen.

In 1977, two main projects took place: 1. a concrete operational review of a potential home for the aged and its financial complexity for initial concept of 50 beds was developed and studied, and 2. organizational by-laws were prepared by Peter Cekuta. These by-laws then became the basis, when the Foundation became incorporated and received its Charter on August 3, 1977 as a Charitable Organization in the Province of Ontario.

Few months later, on April 6, 1978, Federal Ministry of Revenue gave us a status as a Canadian organization and a right to have donation to the Foundation as income tax deductible.

First honorary membership to the foundations were bestowed to Bishop Amborzic, to Rev. Kopac and to the slovenian Nuns in our midst. Life membership was given to Mr. Janez Muhic for his foresight, by making the initial financial contribution towards making a slovenian old age home a reality.

By March of 1979 a census of Slovenians was undertaken and by the next annual general meeting I had the task of formulating and presenting these results. Demographic estimates were based on 1016 respondents who were over 60 years of age at the time and some 120 expressed an interest and a desire to live in an old age home as long as it had a Slovenian ambience.

By autumn of 1979, 6 acres of land with a house at 52 Neilson Dr, this address, was purchased, for a price of \$330,000. of which \$150,000. was paid immediately and a major financial campaign was under way under the chairmanship of Rev. Kopac. In a matter of few months, this campaign raised an additional \$150,000 towards the land purchase. Subsequent special fund raising campaigns in 1985, '86 and '87, raised an additional \$900,000.00 towards capital costs in shaping Dom Lipa. For the first time, meeting of the Board of Directors was held on the Foundation property on December 12, 1979 in the house still adjacent to this building. Linden Foundation became the property owner of a land, the future site for this magnificent building. Land surveying was prepared by Peter Pavlin and all legal work was coordinated by a long standing supporter of the Linden Foundation, our solicitor Karl Vipavec.

During 1980, there was also a short lived experiment of a day-care activity program for our senior citizens living at home, by providing them with opportunities for various social and recreational activities on the Foundation property.

Zoning application with City of Etobicoke was made, and the initial architectural drawings for the facility of 100 beds; 30 for extended care and 70 for residential care were prepared by Mr. William Cekuta (who happens to be my father). By January of 1981 formal application is made to the Ministry of Community and Social Services.

As outlined above, five years have passed and 50 Foundation board of directors meetings with numerous accomplishments; from the original concept to research and planning, to land purchase. to various fund raising and social events, zoning application and preparation of preliminary building designs. Enormous undertakings by a voluntary body of committed individuals!

It was time for a reflection. On May 3, 1981 some 30 Board and committee members met on a Saturday for a day away from concrete decision and planning, to attend a workshop and seminar on the meaning of an old age home, and on the services to the senior citizens. Workshop took place at the Slovenian Hall on Pape Ave. This all day seminar and group discussions were led by me. Discussion groups produced some common concrete thoughts on social and ethical questions on geriatric care and on services for our slovenian seniors.

During discussions the meaning of individualism and institutionalism was studied and concluded, that our proposed home will concentrate on the individuality, on the social needs and community services; Dom Lipa is to have minimal barriers to human needs, be they financial or physical. Advocacy for our seniors shall be our top priority.

City of Etobicoke holds a public hearing on Feb.9, 1981 in the municipal council chamber with some 300 slovenian people in attendance. The conceptual drawings, designs and plans for the home are decorating the chamber walls. A scale model of the proposed residence made by William Cekuta is in circulation among the municipal politicians on the review committee.

There was no opposition from the neighbours. The municipal political process under mayor Dennis Flynn and councillors at the time, Sinclair and Worsta, friends of the slovenian community in this area now for many years, was very supportive of the presentations made by Karl Vipavec and Peter Cekuta. One of the municipal politicians was overheard saying, that if the building will be as attractive as the architectural model represents, there will be no problems in approving this project.

Because time was of essence formal building and structural designs were undertaken by Simon Davis Architectural firm with Frank Levec; it is decided the supervision of the construction will be under Joe Kastelic's scrutiny.

In the summer of 1982 the first walk-a-thon is held with several young and old participants who walked various distances from 50 to 10 kilometres. This initiative came from Miro Rak and from the Slovenian Hunters and Anglers club in Alliston. Since then, there have been frequent walk-a-thons which raised close to 1/2 million dollars over past several years.

TOWARDS FACTUAL REALITY

After numerous submissions and lengthy reports and meetings, Ministry of Community and Social Services gave approval in principal to the development of a slovenian old age home. By mid 1983, land is fully paid, zoning approved under Charitable Institutions Act, and preliminary building permit is given, subject to protecting of the flood-lands along the creek on Foundation property to the south.

During the visit of his holiness Pope Paul II to Toronto on September 14 and 15, 1984, a corner stone and plate is blessed by his holiness which now forms the cornerstone of Dom Lipa.

By the 100th board meeting on Feb. 14, 1985, ten years since the inception of the Slovenian Linden Foundation, 85% of detailed architectural blue prints are complete and construction for a hundred (100) bed facility is ready to begin.

By now, various Ministries and government officials gave their preliminary approvals. Extended care service with 30 beds finally became a reality some eight years later on March 1, 1993. Ministries of the Environment and of Transportation had their say, due to the aircraft flight path over this property to Pearson international airport; various Etobicoke City Hall planning officials, fire marshall's office and the neighbourhood, all played an important part in formulating and realizing the dream of an old age home for the slovenians in Toronto and Ontario. Ten years after planting the seed, Dom Lipa is a factual reality.

TOWARDS OPERATIONAL REALITY

In order to maintain a regular cash flow and ongoing donations, by 1985 there are annual picnics, fashion shows, bazaars, banquets, breakfast meetings, \$50.00 clubs, traditional slovenian cook book publication and sale, walk-a-thons; regularly there was also Christmas gatherings for the seniors of our community. Events, which still to this day are an important element in making this organization a vital part of our slovenian community and making it, above all, financially stable.

Most Board meetings often diverged from the routine discussions of planning, managing and fund raising issues, to some serious debates of who will coordinate the purchase of the sausages or hamburgers of beer or wine and pop, for the next fund raising event; should we also have that all slovenian delicacy "blood sausage" on the menu (I guess many paid, just not to eat it), who is going to cook, serve, sell tickets or who is going to be the BBQ chef. Very important issues for a healthy organization and community involvement, as we were often reminded by Lojze Babic. He was right, look what this community produced!

Construction, which took about 20 months to complete, was done by the slovenian workers, artisans and professionals. Masons, plumbers, bricklayers, carpenters, dry wall installers, painters all came and provided by the slovenian entrepreneurs in this city and beyond. They worked on various shifts and schedules as monitored on sight by Tone Muhic and under the watchful eye of Joe Kastelic. So enormous was this voluntary work force, that it is difficult to estimate a true value of capital cost savings for this facility and grounds around it.

Building is completed by Christmas of 1987. First slovenian residents, moved into the new home during January 1988.

Names like Petrovic, Stezinar, Bratuz, Matjasic, Mr. and Mrs. Rotar were some of the first residents of Dom Lipa. There were 6 staff to help them establish and make them comfortable in a new surrounding. Slovenian Reverend sisters also played an important part during those initial days. Dom Lipa is now an operational reality.

OTHER PERSPECTIVES

The greatest pillar of strength to the Board of Directors over all these years has been Joe Kastelic. During the time of low monetary means, and the reluctance of the Bank to give the Foundation treasurer a line of Credit for various activities, one visit to the Bank by Mr. Kastelic and the matter was settled. It was Mr. Kastelic who also took a personal risk and signed for a mortgage of a significant amount in order that the construction activity can progress and be accomplished. This will never be forgotten by a grateful Slovenian community! Mr. Kastelic is still involved and continues with his contributions to the activities of the Linden Foundation to this day.

It is important to note, that for significant capital expenditures, there was no government funding - so this building truly is a slovenian enterprise. Although we must not ignore the assistance from Provincial Ministry of Community and Social Services and Ministry of Health, which to this day provide the necessary grants as operational per-diems dictate.

In 1986, Dr. Stane Bah from Windsor who has retired from his profession, joined the Foundation and to this day regularly travels from Windsor and often stays in Toronto for several days to work on complex submissions to various Government offices. He has managed the affairs of the home during the construction period and during the phasing in of the first residents and employees. Even now Dr. Bah is still an active member with the Foundation and has proven to many in our community that retirement is not an obstacle but it can become a time of positive constructive contributions of ones knowledge, experiences and know-how.

Likewise we must not forget one of the original instigators for this institution and who was its first president, Frank Cerar. Until most recently he was also the administrator of Dom Lipa. He too proves that retirement should not be a passive nor a morbid period, but time, when the intellectual spirit can be most creative. These two retirees, Bah and Cerar can put many to shame with their dedication and inspiring work habits.

After Mr. Cerar stepped aside as an administrator and now continues to help with Dom Lipa in many other capacities, the board hired, due to a legislated need for a qualified director, Ms Patricia King.

Ms King has been the administrator and director of nursing care in Dom Lipa, since May 17, 1993. Her probationary period has just been completed.

As reported at the annual General Meeting for the years 1992 and 1993, Dom Lipa and Linden Foundation, has a deficit of about \$1,600.000.00, and is able to manage the flow of its annual debt payments, primarily through fees, grants and donations.

Funeral and memorial bequests and numerous annual and ongoing fund-raising events are still very important. Yet it is never enough.

Dom Lipa also has a permanent spiritual leader, a great slovenian homilist, writer, a humanist and a contemplative, himself a resident here, Rev. Franc Sodja. A physiotherapist also makes regular weekly visits. Three doctors perform their medical duty with ongoing visits and consultations using these facilities.

On an average, with some fluctuation from month to month, the home is occupied with 60% slovenian senior citizens and the other 40%, to keep the beds occupied, being the individuals who are of slavic origin. Currently Dom Lipa has on its staff approximately 20 full time employees, 17 part time staff and the facility also provides training opportunity for students. Some 14 volunteers on a weekly basis assist in daily operation by making Dom Lipa a fun place to be. Here, both mental and physical recreational activities are abundant.

As indicated above, Dom Lipa has recently been certified by Ministry of Health for 30 extended care beds to provide those with medical, rehabilitative and palliative care in a Slovenian milieu. Renovations of about \$360,000.00 to accommodate this nursing service, have recently been completed.

CONCLUSION

I have been involved with the board of directors of this Foundation starting in the spring of 1977, and was the president from March 1979 to December 1982. I have found, as I am sure have other presidents, France Cerar, Viktor Trcek, Albin Blatnik, Rev. Janez Kopac, Rev. Ivan Plazar and now Darko Medved, the congeality of the board members, the spirit of their drive and their determination to achieve.

g. Ivan Plazar je na obcnem zboru 28. februarja 1993 takole porocal: "mislím, da smo lahko ponosni, da imamo tak dom. Kajti ako se vprasamo, kaj bi pricakovali ako bi v tem domu zivel jaz, ali kdo od mojih dragih? Potem bi gotovo odgovorili, da bi rad imel cimbolj prijeten in domac dom. Ponosni smo lahko, da taksen dom imamo."

In conclusion, after personal reflection of the events, and review of the available past Foundation minutes in preparation for this historical overview, I am able to state that all activities and functions related to developments and operations culminating into Dom Lipa, have been an inspiration in seeing a classical example of community participation in action. This participation and involvement of slovenians also reaches communities beyond the borders of Toronto.

Whether they are hunters or folkloric dancers, Primorci or Prekmurci, labourers or professionals, a business community or a scouting movement, all continue to contribute and participate in making this old age home - Dom Lipa, truly Slovenian.

This facility is in honour to the Slovenian spirit and a monument to Slovenian humanism.

Peter Cekuta
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