Banquet speaker bridges past to future, encourages full participation

Macedonian Tribune Editor Virginia Ninisoff Surko was speaker at the Grand Banquet of the 87th Annual MPO Convention held Labor Day Weekend in The Westin, Indianapolis. I recently saw the play Fiddler on the Roof, the story of Jewish families living in early 20th Century Russia. Once again, I am struck by the parallels between Golde and Tevia’s people of Anateumpka and our people who lived in the villages of Macedonia – both lived under oppressors and did the best they could.

Both were financially poor, but rich in heart.

Both were fatalistic about life.

Both relied on the guidance of their spiritual leader and the Bible.

Both were bound by the family – both tradition-bound.

Both immigrated to places where other family members were already had settled.

Stories of the lives of our people in Macedonia under the Ottoman Empire are the fabric of Dimitrie Talev’s trilogy – The Iron Crown, People and Blood. If you haven’t already done so, read them to learn what our families endured in Macedonia during these times of subjugation under the Ottoman Turks.

Read about the constant fear when they had to walk by the home of the Turkish lords or pass a group of Turkish soldiers on the street, or when a Turk entered their shop to purchase something.

It was times like these that made our people want to leave Macedonia.

Begin to understand that during these times minarets on mosques had to be higher than crosses on churches so buildings were built below ground. Today, if you visit Ohrid, you will no doubt see the church of St. Clement on a hill known as Plaosnik.

It is built on the ruins of a mosque, which was built on the ruins of an earlier church. The architects left remnants of both earlier structures as part of the foundation. You can also see beautiful mosaics that date back more than 2000 years ago to Roman days.

I recently saw the play Fiddler on the Roof, my baba and deda, Dine and Georgia Doucleff of Selò Patale, Leriniko, were among those brave people who left their homes by ox cart or on foot, and traveled halfway around the world so that WE can be free.

My dedo settled in St. Louis and helped build the railroads. When I speak about young Macedonians now is the time for them to come back to Macedonia and to help Macedonia.

The Iron Crown, People and Blood. If you haven’t already done so, read them to learn what our families endured in Macedonia during these times of subjugation under the Ottoman Turks. It was times like these that made our people want to leave Macedonia.

When I speak about young Macedonians, I tell the story of one Macedonian who came back in 2000. He was born in Sweden. His father and mother are from Ohrid.

He started a company with four people; now he has 400 people working for 10 of the Fortune 500 companies, and he continues to operate offices in two in the US. Ninety-five percent of his product is sold all over the world. This is just one of our young Macedonians.

As a finish, because my youngest son says I speak too much, I want to say how proud I am of the achievements of young Macedonians. Last year I received an invitation from the president of Ohio University at Athens to invite me to the graduation ceremony. The letter indicated two Macedonians were among the top ten in the graduating class.

When I called his office to ask how many Macedonians were in the graduating class, he said, “just two.”

I am sure this government will continue to invest a lot in education. We have doubled our budget for education. We are opening a new IT [information technology] University in Macedonia where half of the professors will be from the US and we will lecture only in English. We hope to have more universities where all lectures will be in English. This will allow your daughters and sons to come to [Macedonia] for a year to study, and allow their credits to be accepted here in the states.

The embassy is organizing two business forums this fall. One will be held in Silicon Valley, the other in Chicago. The one at Silicon Valley is Nov. 11 and the one at Chicago is Nov. 15.

In Chicago, we will also open a Macedonian Consulate on Nov. 14. That night, Macedonian piano virtuoso Simon Trpceski will perform. During this time, we shall begin Days of Macedonian Culture in Macedonia with a number of events in Washington and the other place in the US.

And through Virginia [Surko], I will make sure you get the program and please feel free to come to these events and enjoy Macedonian culture and learn about Macedonian business also. So as not to make this too long, I wish you all the best, and I want you to know the Embassy in Washington is open. You are welcome.

Thank you very much.

Ambassador Jolevski and wife Jole have a painting of Ohrid for the Embassy. He is shown with MPO President George A. Lebamoff, his wife Rosie and keynote speaker Virginia Ninisoff Surko (right). The painting was created by Donna Starallo Barry, Columbus, and commissioned by Vanya Dumas, Detroit.

Macedonian Ambassador greets banquet attendants

Following are the words of H.E. Zoran Jolevski, Macedonian Ambassador in the US, given at the Grand Banquet of the 87th Annual MPO Convention.

George [Lebamoff], dear Macedonians, it is my privilege and honor to be with you here tonight on this solemn occasion of your annual meeting.

I have been in Washington only one and a half years. On my second day I was faced with a huge problem. One of the senators introduced a resolution using the acronym FYROM in the NATO Freedom Consolation Act 2007, which is very offensive to all of us.

And then, I called George and managed to get it. Macedonians together for conference calls.

I found out we Macedonians can work together because we all love our country.

Macedonia is on the road to become a strong, developed European country. As you know, parliamentary elections were held this year. We have a young and energetic government that knows what to do.

The Vardar, once the largest river in Europe, has been transplanted to the Danube. We are now the 14th largest country in Europe.

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The Iron Crown, People and Blood. If you haven’t already done so, read them to learn what our families endured in Macedonia during these times of subjugation under the Ottoman Turks.
The Nizamoff and Dimitroff families would typeset the of Shenna Grammaticoff. Every year when mentioned. Along with the one or two that are often in ice and drinks. No task was too menial. Tickets, set up the tables and chairs, lugged hometowns and the conventions no matter after all, it was the headquarters.

The worker bees made the MPO and many more during these last 21 years. The editor Luben Dimtroff and MPO President Peter Atzeff both were accomplished artists. By the way, did you know that TRIBUNE editor Luben Dimtroff and MPO President Peter Atzeff were both accomplished artists. While still in grade school, I often "worked" in the TRIBUNE office. I learned how to mix flour and water and paste to make the paper to use in the Addressograph Machine, now displayed in the Macedonian Museum, and I learned to type on a typewriter. The office always smelled like newspaper, ink and charcoal. I still love the smell of newspaper. In the summer, it was hot, very hot, there was always a charcoal fire burning in the Linotype Machine to keep the lead melted. In winter, it was wonderfully cool.

The office was generally noisy with keys clacking on two-three typewriters in addition to the Linotype. Visitors from everywhere -- from my hometown to Washington, DC came to see what was happening.

I remember the first two offices best. That's where I got my first taste of Indiana Historic Marker yesterday. The best way to describe the office is that it was much like a garage of today -- cement floors with the linoleum tiles, with the flag above the door that said "John's Church", perhaps you have seen the tall stele a half block from here. It was more spacious, the second floor overlooking the church garden.

Luben, Chris, Peter, Stereo Nicoloff and I worked long hard hours. Tuesday, we got the paper out. We'd mail the wood types and the paper to the printer. The men went home dog-tired.

Stereo lived at the Vasileff's because his family was stuck in stari kus (old country). They never re-united.

A very interesting part of the day was eating lunch in the back room of Bob's Tavern, a couple of blocks from the original maltai (office) just down the street from here. Teta Tijana made lunches, and I got plenty of bread from a Macedonian bakery. At a makeshift table large enough for a dozen or so to dine; meanwhile, Cheche (uncle) Dine tended bar and poked his head conversation every couple of minutes. I knew him because I knew her story, but also because my father's position at the MACEDONIAN TRIBUNE, hers was an almost weekly contribution to the newspaper. She often told the story of a new bride -- married just a few weeks, when her husband called to say he was bringing seven special eggs. The only thing missing was his miter. He was very dramatic in presenting his life -- how they traveled by bus from city to city -- how they lived in the mountains of Macedonia.

She certainly never would have imagined such men and women who helped change ethnic relations in Indianapolis. I was born during the Great Depression, the lonely years of World War II and the商城的 years that followed. It had to continue. Macedonia had to be free.

The Macedonian American Federation -- this weekend we celebrate their feat of continually publishing the MACEDONIAN TRIBUNE for more than 82 years.

The Macedonian American Federation was established in 1927. It was so important to those early MPO people of vision that they took out a mortgage on their homes to buy the presses rolling and the organization alive through the hollow years of the Great Depression, the lonely years of World War II and the商城的 years that followed. It had to continue.

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