

Chicago Showcases the Best of Ukraine for Independence Day

Chicago marked Ukraine's 15th independence anniversary with a variety of events including the Ukrainian Days Festival attended by the governor of Illinois, the official celebration at Chicago's centrally located Daley Plaza, a reception for the Ukrainian community hosted by Chicago's Mayor Richard M. Daley and a reception hosted by Ukraine's Consulate General of Chicago, as well as countless celebrations at local organizations and homes.

This year's festival was held on August 19-20 at Smith Park. Over 15,000 people attended the festival and enjoyed the continuous entertainment on two stages which hosted a lineup of song, dance, poetry, humor, music and enthusiastic greetings from participants and guests.

The opening of the festival became a solemn occasion with the participation of clergy, government and community representatives. Illinois Governor Rod Blagojevich, Lieutenant-Governor Patrick Quinn, Cook County Treasurer Maria Pappas, Alderman Manny Flores and Consul General of Ukraine Vasyl Korzachenko addressed the audience.

The local community orchestra "Berkut" played the national anthems and various marches, the local Ukrainian American veterans presented the color guard, Most Reverend Bishop Richard S. Seminack delivered the opening prayer, and as the host of the Festival, Pavlo Bandriwsky, the president of the Illinois Division of the Ukrainian Congress Committee of America delivered the opening comments to mark this occasion.

Government representatives greeted the large crowd on a sunny warm day with remarks addressed at community concerns. Governor Blagojevich delighted the audience with an unexpectedly thorough and personal account of his own Serbian background, his identification with the immigrant experience as well as the needs of the community.

Chicago native Myron Kuropas, former advisor on ethnic affairs to President Ford and a regular columnist of the Ukrainian Weekly, delivered the keynote address. His remarks addressed the current problems in Ukraine as well as in the diaspora candidly, eloquently, with humor and optimism. He reflected on the many challenges faced in a new Ukraine and in a new diaspora with a philosophical outlook based on his many years of observation and experience in the community. Bohdan Melnyk, UCCA Vice President, gave a patriotic and insightful speech on the progress Ukraine has made in its short tenure of independence.

The two day festival-in-the-park was filled with activities. There were many booths and displays representing local organizations, artists and businesses, as well as numerous food stands with choices of delicious traditional and non-traditional delicacies. A two day non-stop program of entertainment by Ukrainian singers, dancers, humorists and actors was coordinated by Bohdan Buchwak, who chaired the program committee.

A significant component of this year's festival included sports. The continuous tournaments of soccer and volleyball teams attracted hundreds of spectators and fans. It was exciting to see

these athletes who played at a high level of proficiency and enthusiasm with the winning teams taking awards of recognition. Also attracting many spectators were the chess, checkers, children's art, embroidered shirts and many other contests which displayed high-level proficiency by participants.

Every year the festival grows in numbers and participants, but this year the interest and attendance topped all expectations. It demonstrated the desire of the community to gather and celebrate together, to unite in the name of their mother country, and to simply have a good time on this joyous occasion. As Ukraine has changed in 15 years so has the diaspora with its large numbers of new immigrants, known as the "fourth wave", most of whom stayed and intend to make America their new home. The Ukrainian Days Festival brought together the people of all "waves" whose roots are Ukrainian, and also attracted their friends and neighbors.

The Independence Day celebrations were not confined to the park. On August 22 Mayor Richard M. Daley held an official reception to honor Ukraine's independence at the historic Chicago Cultural Center, the building where the "Ukrainian Modernism 1910-1930 Exhibit" is currently on display until October 15 to media and public acclaim. The huge banners and posters on each side of the building with the words "Ukrainian Modernism" emblazoned on them are viewed by the continuous flow of hundreds of thousands of traffic viewers and pedestrians and stand out during Ukraine's 15th anniversary of independence.

Mayor Richard M. Daley delivered a speech that astounded the audience in its thorough understanding and dimension of the current situation in Ukraine. Marking the 15th anniversary of the Chicago - Kyiv sister cities relationship, Mayor and Mrs. Richard Daley recently visited Kyiv with a delegation on a fact finding mission. The mayor spoke about his observations in Kyiv and the educational, cultural and business ties between the two sister cities and he did not shy away from the current controversial political issues. The mayor drew from his own experience as he stated that one of the most difficult dilemmas for a leader is the necessity to make unpopular decisions when they will ultimately result in a benefit for all. He emphasized that a leader's first priority is not popularity, but it is responsibility. The mayor shared his belief that the current situation in Ukraine will stabilize and will result in a better life for the country's people.

Chicago's Mayor Richard Daley presented awards to Mrs. Vera Troshchuk, Dr. Daniel Hryhorchuk, Mr. Mykola Mischenko, Dr. Vasyl and Dr. Roksolana Lonchyna for their respective contributions to the city and the community.

On August 24, the Ukrainian flag was raised at the Daley Plaza, the central square of the city, at an official ceremony attended by several hundred participants and many more spectators. Pavlo Bandriwsky, president of the Illinois UCCA and Consul General Vasyl Korzachenko delivered keynote speeches.

Chicago's round of independence celebrations was completed with the reception hosted by the Consulate General of Ukraine held at the Ukrainian Cultural Center on August 29. Representatives of the Consular Corps, city government and civic organizations, as well as

guests from the community came together to mark this year's commemorations at this consular event.

The success and vitality of Ukraine's independence celebration in Chicago was due in no small measure to the enormous work of the organizing committee of the local Ukrainian Congress Committee of America, the Ukrainian-American umbrella entity which represents our community's organizations and speaks on behalf of its interests and concerns.

The 15th anniversary of Ukraine's independence is a good time to reflect on the changes that transpired within this brief period of time. In spite of the many problems and disappointments, it is fair to state that much has been accomplished which has been positive and nation-building.

There are three events which mark achievements of historic proportion. First - the national referendum for independence which was supported by 90% of the voters from both the east and west of Ukraine, second - the result of that vote in the declaration of independence followed by the approval of the new Constitution, and third - the Orange Revolution. These events will be judged by generations to come as the building blocks of the nation.

It will take time, patience, goodwill and willingness to work together for the common good to insure Ukraine's independence. It will take a constructive, legitimate, democratic political engagement that will build a bright future for generations to come. With these challenges in mind, this year's Chicago independence celebrations underscored more than ever before that by coming together the community participated in Ukraine's nation building process in its unique Chicago way.

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