

# Preserve Croatian Heritage Foundation Newsletter

Published for those interested in preserving the memory of St. Nicholas Church, N.S.

## PCHF OFFICERS

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## PA Historical Marker Dedication & Ribbon Cutting at St. Nicholas R.C. Croatian Church, N.S., Historic Site

By Steve Willing



Under gray and cloudy skies, with occasional rain drops, over 100 people attended the PA Historical Marker Dedication and

Ribbon Cutting at the site of the former St. Nicholas Church, North Side.

Dressed in colorful Croatian costumes, members of the Junior Tamburitzans of Duquesne, PA, handed out keepsake programs to the event at the entrance to the sidewalk trail, across the street from Penn Brewery.

As guests walked along the trail adjacent to Route 28, they viewed six murals sandblasted into the retaining wall, which commemorates the history of Pittsburgh's North Side, with the largest image being that of St. Nicholas Church.

**Bill Vergot, Co-Chairman of Preserve Croatian Heritage Foundation ("PCHF")**, emceed the event.

**Reverend Phillip Pribonic**, who presented the invocation, blessed the site with holy water.

**The Junior Tamburitzans of Duquesne, PA**, then sang the National Anthem of the United States and the National Anthem of Croatia. Some remarks from the program:



**Susan Petrick, Corresponding Secretary of PCHF**, reflected on the fight to save St. Nicholas saying: We want you to know that Preserve Croatian Heritage Foundation board members fought with every ounce of our being to save and preserve Saint Nicholas Croatian Church, but the owners of this building made it very public that it would be better served if St. Nicholas was demolished, and so it was. The loss of St. Nicholas is devastating, to say the least, and it is heart-wrenching for many of us standing here today on the very site where our church once stood, knowing we will never enter its doors again, attend Mass, receive sacraments, have celebrations, witness its beauty or feel its holiness."

(see Page 2)

## St. Nicholas Day Banquet December 5, 2015



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Come and celebrate the Annual St. Nicholas Day Banquet to be held **Saturday, December 5, at Javor Hall**. Enjoy sumptuous food, fabulous listening and dancing music by the Mikey Dee Band, a beautiful performance by the Javor Pittsburgh ensemble, and a visit from Saint Nicholas. View copies of the interpretive panels (St. Nicholas Church, the Grotto and Mala Jaska) from the St. Nicholas Church Historic Site. Saint Nicholas note cards, post cards, photos and ornaments will be available for purchase. (See Page 7 for more details.)

# Traditional Advent Festival of Lessons & Carols

As many of you know, the Festival of Lessons and Carols was a beautiful, long-standing, traditional Advent Service at St. Nicholas Church, N.S. It was a special service where people took time away from the hustle/bustle of the holiday season to reflect on the true meaning of Christmas with beautiful hymns and biblical readings of Christ’s birth.

On Sunday, **December 13, 2015, at 1 PM** the Most Holy Name Church choir, including members of the former St.

Nicholas Church, N.S. choir, will carry on this beautiful tradition. Come and ready your hearts and minds for the coming of Christ during the Advent season.



Most Holy Name Church is located at 1700 Harpster Street, Pittsburgh, PA (Troy Hill) 15212.

A reception will follow the Service in the school hall with delicious, homemade appetizers and baked goods. **All are welcome to attend!**

## PA Historical Marker Dedication & Ribbon Cutting at St. Nicholas R.C. Croatian Church, N.S., Historic Site

Cont'd. from Page 1

**His Excellency, Josko Paro, Croatian Ambassador to the United States**, commented: “This is supposed to be a celebration ... it is also a very sad occasion ...



because the church that used to proudly stand here has been demolished. I have been part of the attempts to prevent it. I wrote a letter to the Papal de Nuncio in Washington. He sympathized very much with the idea of keeping the church in place as a museum of immigration, but it was all of no avail, eventually.”

**Pittsburgh Mayor, Bill Peduto**, said: “The green domes are gone and they were beautiful, but St. Nicholas never leaves if it doesn’t leave our heart. It’s what they built with their hands. They didn’t have

much; and what they did have, they sacrificed to build this. But they didn’t build it to be a building - they built it to be a community - a little part of Croatia that would stay right here in Pittsburgh and be there to share with their children, and their grandchildren. As long as you keep that in your heart, as long as you are able to say that I’m proud of where I’m from, then you’ve lived their dream.”



**Ed Pazo, National President of the Croatian Fraternal Union**, said: “I am proud to be standing on this hallowed ground where we and thousands of Croatian immigrants and families before us gathered — joined in faith and unity, celebrating the joys of numerous occasions, marking the Sacraments of Baptism, First Holy Communion, Confirmation, and Marriages, as well as bidding mournful farewells to

loved ones who have passed before us. May God’s blessings shine upon all gathered here together as we dedicate this historic site in tribute to the hard-working Croatian people

who built St. Nicholas Croatian Church with love, labor and pride.”

**Councilwoman Darlene Harris** was unable to attend. In her place, staff person **Doug Shields** read a City of Pittsburgh Proclamation declaring that **June 20, 2015, is St. Nicholas R.C. Croatian Church Day**.



**Jim Ferlo, Retired State Senator, and founding member of Preservation Pittsburgh**, remarked: “Demolition is not the only danger to historic preservation and historic properties, as we know. Neglect can be just as harmful as well as renovations that destroy the integrity of the original structure.”

**Mark Masterson, representing North Side Leadership Conference**, said: “We all had such high hopes...but we had some very powerful detractors. ... I wish we could have had a better outcome.”

**Dan Cessna, District Executive, PennDOT District 11**, said: “This



memorial wall that surrounds us actually outlines the octagonal shape of the dome and spires that had been on the former church as does the brass ring in the middle of the seating area that exists here...



(see Page 3)

## PA Historical Marker Dedication & Ribbon Cutting at St. Nicholas R.C. Croatian Church, N.S., Historic Site

Cont'd. from Page 2

The (interpretive panels) text, I cannot explain to you the dedication, the effort that went into what the words are that share that history from the past. It wasn't a simple task, but it was with love and dedication that came upon us here today and hopefully shares that history for the future."



**Members of the PCHF board** then cut a Croatian-colored ribbon that stretched in front of the memorial wall, held by two members of the Junior Tamburitians. Board members then presented pieces of the ribbon to the dignitaries in attendance.

**Andy Masich, Chairman of the Pennsylvania Historical and Museum Commission** remarked that there are over 2,000 Pennsylvania Historical Markers across the state.



Then, the raindrops turned into sunshine.

**Stephen Willing, Co-chairman of PCHF**, commented before he unveiled the PA Historical Marker: "We gather here today on this sacred ground, just as generations before us have, to honor the memory and

historical significance of St. Nicholas Roman Catholic Croatian Church, North Side, the first Croatian Parish in America, with a Pennsylvania Historical Marker.

Where we are standing today is where parishioners came together in happy times, as well as challenging times, with St. Nicholas bringing us hope and strengthening our faith.

For more than a century, generations of Croatians celebrated thousands of Masses, Weddings, First Communion, Confirmations, Baptisms, Novenas, Rosaries, and Funerals. In the social hall, there were bridal showers, wedding receptions, school plays, bowling leagues, banquets, graduation parties for the students of St. Nicholas School and CFU local lodge meetings...

Although the bricks and mortar are gone, this Pennsylvania Historical Marker marks this special space where the memories of St. Nicholas will live on.

May the memory and spirit of St. Nicholas live on in your hearts forever and ever."

**Reverend Lawrence Frankovich** closed the program with a prayer.

Over 110 Guests then gathered at the Croatian National Hall "Javor" for food, drink and music.



To view more photographs from the June 20 event, go to our website, [www.stnicholasns.org](http://www.stnicholasns.org)

## Candlelight Prayer Service at St. Nicholas Church Historic Site

After St. Nicholas Church was abruptly closed in 2004, PCHF began holding candlelight prayer services at the foot of the steps to the church on the feast day of Saint Nicholas and during the Easter season. We plan to continue this tradition, and we invite you join us on Sunday, **December 6**, at 5:30 p.m. for the candlelight vigil to be held at the St. Nicholas Church Historic Site.



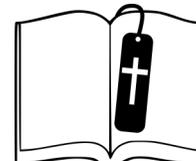
We will reflect on the feast day of St. Nicholas, the patron saint of St. Nicholas Church. The service

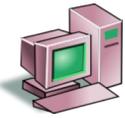
will include: biblical readings, Croatian Christmas hymns and a short history on St. Nicholas.

We want to convey our love and commitment for St. Nicholas Church, N.S. to the general public.

Votive candles will be lit as a symbol that St. Nicholas Church lives on in our hearts and in our minds.

Please plan to join us and be a part of this traditional service.





# PCHF UNVEILS NEW WEBSITE

After several months of hard work by Susan Petrick, Steve Willing and Kathleen Buric, Preserve Croatian Heritage Foundation is proud to announce the redesign and launch of our PCHF website, [stnicholasns.org](http://stnicholasns.org). Croatian web designer, Deb Cavrak, combined the existing elements from our previous website and blended in new photographs and graphics to create a fresh, updated look.



We are most excited about the home page that fills the screen with a large, compelling color photograph of the former St. Nicholas North Side Church. Above the Church is an enlarged version of the colorful mosaic that once greeted visitors above the main entrance, which proclaimed St. Nicholas Church, North Side, as the “First Croatian Catholic Church in America, established AD 1894, The Mother Croatian Parish.”

Easy to navigate with the click of a mouse, the site takes you to recent newsletters, current news and events.



The photo albums that have been added to the Gallery tab provide a multitude of vivid images of St. Nicholas’ rich, historic past. Extensive time and effort was spent gathering and adding photos to several existing and new photo albums under that heading. View the people, the events and the neighborhood that was Mala Jaska. Admire the architecture, paintings, statues and stained glass that created a sense of awe to all who entered under the mosaic that claimed, “First Croatian Catholic Church in America”! Experience the heartbreak of its



destruction and the joy of its continued renown as a PA Historic Site. But most of all, feel the heartbeat of all the Croatians who lived, worked and worshipped in this tiny portion of America that they all so much loved.



The wide collection of photographs should be of interest to people of all ages. (If you have photos that you would like to be included in our gallery, please send them to the email or P.O. Box address listed on the back of this newsletter.)

The site also contains an online store, where note cards, Christmas postcards, and a St. Nicholas Christmas ornament can be purchased. For those wishing to donate to PCHF, become a member of PCHF, or make a donation in memory of a loved one, please click on the Donate website Tab.



Please take a moment to experience our new website, [stnicholasns.org](http://stnicholasns.org), and then share a link with a friend, relative, or someone you know so that they, too, can experience the beauty and historical significance of St. Nicholas Church, North Side.



## City Steps Reopened to St. Nicholas Church Historic Site

By Susan Petrick

The city steps connecting Troy Hill to St. Nicholas Church Historic Church have been reopened.

The City of Pittsburgh closed these city steps for quite some time until repair work could be completed and to keep pedestrians from entering the construction site during the Rt. 28/E. Ohio Street project. The steps were opened for the June 20 St. Nicholas Church Dedication and Ribbon Cutting and are being used on a daily basis.

On Saturday, July 25, a group of 40 members of the Urban Hike <http://urbanhike.com/> organization gathered at Troy Hill for a walk down the city steps to visit the St. Nicholas Historic Site. After visiting the site and reading information on the church, grotto and Mala Jaska interpretive panels, as well as viewing the six large, 30-ft. tall, sand-blasted images, some proceeded to walk south toward the Penn Brewery and back up Troy Hill Road. Others took the path from the historic site, heading north to venture up Rialto Street (Pig Hill) and back to Troy Hill. The most energetic group hiked the quickest route back up the city steps. Other groups have followed suit with these same routes, and the city steps are once again being used regularly.

Troy Hill residents are delighted that these city steps have been repaired and are reopened. Hikers and walkers from the Troy Hill neighborhood along with residents from other parts of the city have

adopted the city steps as a part of their physical activity and a means to visit the St. Nicholas Church Historic Site.

In years past, these same city steps were used by parishioners going to and from Mass at St. Nicholas Church and to attend St. Nicholas School. Young men ascended and descended these city steps as part of their route to and from North Catholic High School. The traffic light at St. Nicholas Church on East Ohio Street was a Port Authority Transit bus stop that was used by residents and North Catholic students as they ventured up the city steps on school days.



North Catholic students climbing the city steps from East Ohio St. to Troy Hill. – Photo from Pittsburgh National Bank's 1966 calendar

Can you guess how many steps make up the city steps from the top of Troy Hill to St. Nick's? The answer is on Page 8.

## Saint Nicholas 3 Bags of Gold Fund

By Jack Schmitt

The 3 Bags of Gold Fund was initiated in 2009 for the purpose of helping to offset on-going PCHF expenses. The three-dollar (\$3.00) donation requested from each person of Croatian ancestry coincides with the feast day, December 6, of our patron saint and the three bags of gold St. Nicholas anonymously gave to a peasant man to help his three daughters gather a dowry and avoid being sold into slavery.



Many donors have contributed to this Fund in memory of their deceased loved ones each year. Others have sent in donations to acknowledge living, family members. Whatever your intention, this is a wonderful way to let your family know that you remember them and to pay tribute to the person, St. Nicholas.

If enough people donate only \$3.00 per Croatian in their family or as a memorial each year, PCHF can afford to: update the [www.stnicholasns.org](http://www.stnicholasns.org) website, keep you informed of St. Nicholas events with our newsletters and cover Javor Hall rental donation and liability insurance costs. (Donation form can be found on Page 6.)

# 3 BAGS of GOLD FUND

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Address \_\_\_\_\_ City \_\_\_\_\_ State \_\_\_\_\_ Zip \_\_\_\_\_

Phone # \_\_\_\_\_ Email \_\_\_\_\_

Total Amount Enclosed \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

Family members or friend for whom are sending your memorial donation \_\_\_\_\_

**Mail your donations to: PCHF, P.O. Box 5812, Pittsburgh, PA 15209**

*PCHF is a 501 © (3) Non-profit, tax-exempt organization.*

## Memorial Day Service 2015

Under beautiful, sunny skies, friends and family members gathered for the annual St. Nicholas Croatian Church, N.S., Memorial Day ceremony on Monday, May 25, in Shaler Township.

The ceremony honored all 27 parishioners of the North Side parish who were killed or are listed missing in action during their service to our country. This year, Jim Vinski tolled the bell as each of the North Side Church veterans' names who died in wartime were read.

Flags were flown and candles were lit to remember those who paid for our freedom.

PCHF appreciates Deacon Greg Jelinek of Most Holy Name of Jesus Parish who offered scriptural reading and reflections about the importance of this day of remembrance

Led by Bernice Goyak, God Bless America was sung by the crowd of over 70 people.

PCHF thanks all those who helped to make this annual event possible. It is though your generous support and volunteerism

that we are able to continue this most important tradition.

We see the Hahn Road Cemetery as an important part of our heritage and as holy ground, and we invite everyone to join us for the 2016 Memorial Day Service, on Monday, May 30.

by Jane Sestric



# St. Nicholas Day Banquet

Saturday,  
December 5, 2015

Javor Hall

805 East St., Pittsburgh, PA 15212

*Doors open at 5 PM  
Hot Dinner Buffet at 6 PM*



Special Guest Visit By  
Saint Nicholas

**\$20 per Adult**  
**\$10 per Child**  
(10 yrs of age and under)  
**Cash Bar**

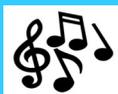
Fabulous listening and  
dancing pleasure by  
**MIKEY DEE BAND**



**Sumptuous Hot Buffet**  
by  
**Nova Café Catering**

*Stuffed Cabbage, Oven Baked Chicken,  
Kolbassi/Sauerkraut, Pirogies, Tossed  
Salad, Rolls/butter, Coffee/Tea and a  
Wide Variety of Homemade Desserts*

Special Presentation  
by  
**JAVOR PITTSBURGH**



Samples of the **Interpretive  
Panels** (St. Nicholas Church, Grotto and  
Mala Jaska), installed on the  
**St Nicholas Church Historic Site,**  
will be on display.



**St. Nicholas Christmas Cards, Note Cards & Ornaments** make  
great Christmas gifts and will be available to purchase .

The Preserve Croatian Heritage Foundation (PCHF) and Javor Hall will again sponsor the  
St. Nicholas Day Banquet. **Everyone is invited to join us!!**

**All reservations must be paid in advance by December 1, 2015**

Please make checks payable to PCHF and mail to:

**PCHF**

c/o Bernice Goyak  
254 Arlington Street  
Pittsburgh, PA 15209

For more information, call **412 335-2780**





Preserve Croatian Heritage Foundation

P. O. Box 5812

Pittsburgh, PA 15209-0812

Address Service Requested

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**How to Reach Us**

**E-mail us at [pchf@stnicholasns.org](mailto:pchf@stnicholasns.org)**

You may call any of the following Executive Committee Members by telephone as shown below:

Bernice Goyak	412 335-2780
Bill Kurtek	724 625-0145
Susan Petrick	412 821-3725
Pat Polaritz	412 341-4324
Francis Schmitt	412 322-8223
Jane Sestric	412 231-8134
Bill Vergot	724 941-8673
Steve Willing	412 527-5764

**Answer :** There are **188** city steps from Troy Hill to the St. Nicholas Church Historic Site.