

Preserve Croatian Heritage Foundation Newsletter

Published for those interested in preserving St. Nicholas Church, N.S. and our Croatian Heritage

TRUSTEES

William Vergot

Peter Karlovich

Susan Petrick

Jane Sestric

TREASURER

Lynne Corsello

Inside This Issue

Croatian Heritage Collection Needs Your Home.....	5
It's Hard to Picture Future Without Shrine like St. Nicholas.....	6
Membership Reminder.....	7
Memorial Donation.....	4
Memorial Day Service.....	9
Memorial Fund.....	3
New Board Member.....	2
New Website.....	1
New Life for a Historic Landmark.....	4
Preservationist Remembered.....	5
St. Nicholas Day Banquet....	8
Tambura Mass & Dinner.....	7
Three Bags of Gold.....	3
Update on St. Nicholas.....	1

St. Nicholas Church Site Update

by Mark Fatla, Exe. Dir., NSLC

On Dec 7, 2011, the City of Pittsburgh's Historic Review Commission emphatically denied the Diocese' request for permission to demolish St Nicholas, concluding that the Diocese had not shown either imminent danger or economic hardship, and noting that the Northside Leadership Conference (NSLC), working with Preserve Croatian Heritage Foundation, was willing to purchase and restore the property.

The Diocese and NSLC, in a meeting facilitated by City Council President Darlene Harris, reached agreement back in August on price (\$1), the contingency (a geological-technical study of the hillside and retaining walls) and various other points. The Diocese delayed in sending a draft Sales Agreement until *just prior to the HRC*



decision. NSLC responded before Christmas with certain necessary changes to the language of the agreement. NSLC continues to work to obtain a fair and reasonable Sales Agreement, and dialogue with the Diocesan attorney is ongoing. Most recently, NSLC received another draft agreement from the Diocese that is in the process of being reviewed by the NSLC attorneys.

This effort has tested everyone's patience, but each obstacle presented to us has been overcome in time. Each discouraging development has been followed by a positive step forward. Throughout, the generosity of all who love St Nicholas and the story it can tell of our heritage has been a true blessing.

New Website for St. Nicholas

by Steve Willing



Preserve Croatian Heritage Foundation is proud to announce a re-launch of its website, www.stnicholasns.org. New and improved, our site has been updated to keep you informed about the latest news on St. Nicholas Church, North Side, and the ongoing efforts to save and preserve St.

Nicholas for generations to come.

You are just a click away from updates on the sales agreement negotiations and the geological technical study. The feasibility and market studies for turning St. Nicholas into a National Immigrant Museum and plans for a hiking/biking Trail are also

New Website for St. Nicholas cont'd. from page 1

available. Other features in the site include: amazing historical photos, a detailed history of the Church's architecture, its historical significance and merchandise that you can purchase.

For the first time, you will have the option of donating on-line through our new PayPal option which is easy to use and secure. PCHF Board members can now easily be reached by e-mail through the website.

The website was set up and is being maintained pro bono by Matthew Joseph. Matthew is a professional

software developer who has generously volunteered his time and talent to help save St. Nicholas through the new website, for which PCHF is most grateful.

Be sure to bookmark the St. Nicholas site on your computer, look for continued updates on the geo-tech study and more. We encourage everyone to share the link with their friends and supporters of St. Nicholas North Side. We are closer than ever to seeing our dream turn into a reality.

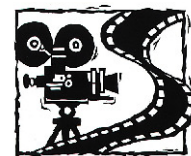
New Partner Welcomed to the PCHF Executive Committee

At the PCHF monthly meeting this past January 2012, new member, Stephen Willing was welcomed into the Preserve Croatian Heritage Foundation Executive Committee.

Steve Willing is a seasoned storyteller with over 30 years of experience in the television business working behind the scenes on everything from documentaries to news production and is currently a television news photographer at KDKA-TV in Pittsburgh. His passions include: photography, traveling, history, and architecture. He is a graduate of The University of Akron and resides in the Squirrel Hill neighborhood of Pittsburgh. Steve is married and is the father of three children.

PCHF has decided to grow the Executive Committee in 2012 and be able to take on new endeavors with the talent our new member brings to the table. We welcome Steve and encourage you to come and meet him at the next PCHF monthly meeting. If you are interested in helping PCHF with the Immigrant Museum efforts, contact Susan Petrick at 412 821-3725.

by Jack Schmitt



Javor Croatian Hall EVENTS

"NIGHT AT THE RACES"

Friday, April 27, 2012

Horses are available for purchase - \$5/horse. Races set to start at 7:30 p.m. Admission - \$5.00, includes sandwiches, beer and pop. If you would like to purchase a horse, call Joyce Simunovic at 412 931-6991. Participation in this fund-raiser is important. If you cannot attend, please purchase a horse. If your horse comes in, you win \$25.

FISH FRY'S - every Friday during Lent, 4 - 8 PM

Dinner includes: baked or fried fish, mac and cheese, Croatian or American cole slaw, French fries, dessert & coffee. \$8 Take out available. Call Javor at 412 321-8104, 805 E. Street, Pittsburgh PA 15212

New Membership Cards

for the year 2012 are now available.

See any officer of the Club.

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 (boarding cost of St. Nick's Church, geo-tech study, & more etc.) 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. 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.

We encourage our members to continue supporting the 3 Bags of Gold Fund -- your donation will help defer future expenses in our goal of St. Nicholas Church becoming the home of a new, National Immigrant Museum.

Please use the form below when sending in your donation to the 2012 St. Nicholas 3 Bags of Gold Fund.

3 BAGS of GOLD FUND

Name _____

Address _____ City _____ State _____ Zip _____

Phone # _____ e-mail _____

Total Amount Enclosed _____ Date _____

Comments: _____ - _____

Send your suggestions and/or donation to:

Preserve Croatian Heritage Foundation, P. O. Box 5812, Pittsburgh, PA 15209

PCHF is a 501 (c) (3), non-profit, tax exempt organization

2012

PCHF Memorial Fund

by Susan Petrick



On December 2, 2011, Catherine (Persic) Vinski passed away. Catherine was a beautiful woman both inside and out. She was kind, admired, respected, faith-filled, inspirational and a real lady in every sense of the word. Catherine was an amazing

Christian role model not only for her family but for everyone who knew her. Catherine's family lived in the Mala Jaska area and was very active in St. Nicholas Church, N.S. for many years. Catherine and her daughter, Rita, (now deceased) were truly committed to saving

PCHF Memorial Donation cont'd.

and preserving St. Nicholas. So it was befitting that the Vinski children, Jim, Michael, Jeanne and Mary, requested friends and family to send donations to the Preserve Croatian Heritage Foundation in memory of their mother.

All the donations that have been made to PCHF through Catherine Vinski's Memorial Fund are deeply appreciated by the PCHF Board, and we would like to encourage other families to consider a

Memorial Fund in memory of a deceased family member.



PCHF Board members would also like to thank everyone who has made a donation(s) to PCHF in memory of a loved one. We are very grateful for all memorial donations and, once again, extend our sincere appreciation.

New Life for a Historic Landmark: The Rebirth of St. Nicholas Church

Sitting at the Base of Troy Hill and isolated from the community by a steep hill on one side and the busy thoroughfare of Route 28 on the other, some might wonder why Troy Hill residents would be concerned about the preservation of the former St. Nicholas Croatian Church.

That this building is a City of Pittsburgh Historic landmark is widely known; it is also eligible for National Historic Landmark designation. As part of the first Croatian parish in the entire Western Hemisphere, its continued presence serves as an important historical anchor to Pittsburgh's past; but there is more than that. This building complex includes a former church, rectory and a grotto, and the PCHF is working to allow this building complex to evolve into the twenty-first century as a living immigrants' museum. As such, it will not only commemorate the nationalities that settled in Pittsburgh in the past, but also actively serve the new nationalities settling in Pittsburgh now and in the future.

The St. Nicholas complex of buildings has tremendous importance for the identification of the neighborhoods of Troy Hill and East Deutschtown, two city communities increasingly isolated from their North Shore neighbors by highway construction. This building complex is the single most prominent feature of both communities. Visible from across the river, from Polish Hill and from Bigelow

Boulevard, it proudly announces both of our neighborhoods to greater Pittsburgh and, for travelers coming from the north, it serves as the gateway to Pittsburgh itself.

On Troy Hill, we see the development of the living immigrants' museum as an important "anchor tenant" to draw outside interest to our community. We have St. Anthony's Chapel and the Western Pennsylvania Firefighters Memorial. For us, the St. Nicholas museum would be the third and the most distinctly visible member of this triad.

An independent study estimated that as many as 25,000 visitors a year could be drawn to the St. Nicholas living immigrant museum. Even if only half of that projected traffic occurs, those 12,000 visitors will double the visitor traffic already drawn to the area by St. Anthony's Chapel. When combined with the planned hillside walking trail which will connect to the existing riverwalk trail, the potential of this site within the city takes on an even greater importance. Already pleasant places to live, this activity will also advertise our two neighborhoods as pleasant destinations for others to enjoy some of what our city has to offer

by Anthony Benvin, Chairman Board of Directors, Troy Hill Citizens, Inc.

Preservationists Saved Taxpayers Millions

Several years ago, a retired civil engineer and preservationist derived a plan for the Rt. 28/E. Ohio Street Project that saved Pennsylvania taxpayers \$40 Million dollars. This gentlemen was Dr. George White.

George was a resident of Pittsburgh and a Board member of Pittsburgh History and Landmarks Foundation (PHLF) who continuously worked to preserve numerous Pittsburgh, historical buildings for adaptive use, and St. Nicholas Church was among them. Preservation Pittsburgh and Preserve Croatian Heritage Foundation preservationist, Jack Schmitt, encouraged George to find a way to save St. Nicholas Church, N.S. from the wrecking ball *before* PennDOT finalized the highway plans for this Project. Both men worked endlessly on getting the railroad to move the train tracks towards the Allegheny River, thereby alleviating the need to demolish the Church, as well as numerous 60ft. tall retaining walls along the hillside of Troy Hill.

Dr. White funded 50% of the legal costs to write the model for a proposed Bill to save St. Nicholas Church. He also lobbied PHLF to donate thousands of dollars to help fund this Bill. You might say George and Jack were like salesmen -- writing and visiting local and state politicians, as well as the vice president of the Norfolk Southern Railroad to propose the Bill to save St. Nicholas.

PennDOT continued the negotiations initiated by these

preservationists, and the need to raise St. Nicholas Church, N.S. was definitively eliminated from the Project. Dr. White's redesign of this highway project

became Alternative 7, the final PennDOT plan which spared St. Nicholas Church from the wrecking ball and greatly reduced the impingement on the hillside, homes and businesses feared by Troy Hill residents.

Unfortunately, the story of how preservationists were responsible for Alternative 7 that saved millions in tax dollars is a news story reporters rarely, if ever, share. Even today, the news media continues to erroneously report that St. Nicholas Church is standing in the way of the Rt. 28/E. Ohio St. Project.

The PCHF Executive Board was greatly saddened to learn of George's death in January after battling a long illness.

The fact that St. Nicholas is still standing is largely due to George's vision, perseverance and dedication to preservation. PCHF owes Mr. White a great deal of gratitude for his insight on this Project, and we will remember him fondly for years to come.

by Susan Petrick



Croatian Heritage Collection Needs Your Home by Jack Schmitt

Members of PCHF and others from across the City have been giving artifacts from St Nicholas Church, N.S. to PCHF over the years, and the collection is growing. It includes old and new photographs of the interior and the exterior, of weddings, First Communion, celebrations at the Grotto, family items, former Christmas cards, pieces of the original Church roof tiles, and other Croatian heritage memorabilia.

These donated artifacts will be important to house in the



National Immigrant Museum and Cultural Center. But in the meantime, PCHF would like to put of these items in one safe place, a room that is secure from damage. There is not enough to fill even a small room, but PCHF thinks it is wise to keep all these things in one location. Your help would be appreciated in providing that space in one of the rooms in your home or business. These items do not need to be fed, nor do they bite.

They just need a little space to be together. Please call if you think you can help, 412 322-8223.

It's hard to picture future without shrine like St. Nicholas



The following story appeared in the Pittsburgh Post Gazette Newspaper, Sept. 28, 2011, and was written by Stephen Willing of Squirrel Hill, a television news photographer at KDKA-TV who can be reached at stephenwilling@hotmail.com

My life flashed before me last March as a man approached me in a secluded spot on East Ohio Street on the North Side, atop the steps of the deserted St. Nicholas Croatian Catholic Church.

Although he was a good distance away, I had no exit. Was he homeless or maybe a thief? Scruffy and unkempt, he yelled out, "Who are you with?" I replied, "Just taking pictures." His rough appearance worried me. I had nowhere to go but down, and he was headed right toward me.

I had been to this very location several times, having started a personal project photographing the former church. What ultimate purpose this adventure would hold I wasn't even sure myself.

Standing squarely between the statue of the Virgin Mary looking over my shoulder and the boarded-up entrance to the 110-year old church, I wondered what the outcome would be as he approached. To my quick relief, I learned he was a workman, responsible for checking on the security of the church.

A pair of decorative pedestals that once held statues on the altar were lying outside a doorway. Annoyed that another break-in had occurred, he said he needed to check the inside before boarding it back up.

"Do you care if I come I with you and take a few pictures?" "There is really nothing to see inside," he replied. But to me, there was everything to be seen. I had driven past St. Nicholas and the neighborhood more times than I could remember, always amazed that the houses, now gone, were built so close to the road. Who lived here? And why?

Built in 1901, St. Nicholas became home to the first Croatian Catholic parish in the Western Hemisphere, anchoring a neighborhood known as "Mala Jaska," Pittsburgh's Little Croatia. St Nicholas was the centerpiece of Croatian life, complete with a neighborhood school and merchants.

We would all like to think churches and neighborhoods stay the same and last forever, but changing demographics, shrinking congregations and consolidation of ethnic parishes eventually took a toll. The church closed on Dec. 7, 2004, a decade after consolidation with its sister parish in Millvale.

St. Nicholas faced its biggest challenges plans progressed for the expansion of Route 28. It was clear the neighborhood around it would not survive, as homes were being acquired and demolished.

Some proposals involved moving the structure, but ultimately the highway project was reconfigured to save the building. Receiving local historic status in 2001, it was the last church to be historically protected in Pittsburgh.

Its future remained uncertain, however, and on a bitterly cold Christmas Eve in 2004 I stood on the steps outside the church with my girlfriend, Martha, who would later become my wife. She had talked me into going to a midnight candlelight vigil to save the church. We observed the passionately dedicated group praying in Croatian and singing carols.

I returned in late 2009 when a Croatian preservation group held a press conference outlining a proposal to repurpose the church into an immigration museum, to tell the story of all immigrants. That idea remains alive, though it's unclear if agreement to acquire the building from the parish can be reached.

On that day inside the church two years ago, I could see a door was broken, a stained glass window smashed, the downstairs social hall severely damaged. It was shocking to see what vandals had done while in pursuit of copper and other valuable metals.

see Page 7

It's hard to picture future without shrine like St. Nicholas from page 6

But as I entered the church with the workman last March, I also saw that though stripped bare of its religious artifacts, the structure remains stunning. Stained glass windows illuminate the interior with a kaleidoscope of hues. Seven different kinds of Italian marble adorn the interior of the sanctuary. It is one of Pittsburgh's most sacred spaces.

St. Nicholas will soon be anchoring a ghost neighborhood. The parking lot is overgrown with weeds. Trees have replaced parking places.

Still, with its green onion domes, it stands like a guardian of

the hillside. Its beautiful grotto still speaks to the thousands of motorists who pass by every day on Route 28. Perhaps the statue of Mary is a reminder of hope and faith.

After heated debate, the Historic Review Commission recently denied a demolition permit to level the church, but its time is running out. A savior is needed.

After spending all of five minutes photographing it this year, I left wondering if it would be the last time I would stand in this sacred space.



Croatian Tambura Mass & Dinner



On **Saturday, April 21, 2012**, Most Holy Name of Jesus Parish will hold a Tambura Mass and Dinner in their Church and School Hall in the Troy Hill Section of Pittsburgh.

Dinners will be served in the Most Holy Name School Hall, 1515 Tinsbury Street, Pittsburgh, PA 15212 from 4 - 8 PM at the cost of \$10/person. Dinner tickets will be pre-sold beginning on March 12. The dinner consists of delicious Homemade Stuffed Cabbage, Breaded Chicken, Mashed Potatoes, Green Beans, Tossed Salad, Bread, Dessert and Beverage. Beer and wine will also be available for purchase. In addition, mouth-watering, homemade strudel, nut roll and more will available to purchase.

The music for the Tambura Mass will be provided by the Visitation of the Blessed Virgin Mary Croatian Choir from Rankin, PA. You won't want to miss out on the beautiful arrangements this group performs. They will not disappoint. The Mass will be said in English. After Mass, come down to the school hall and dance a Kolo or two.

So mark your calendars and join us at this event on Saturday, April 21, 2012. You'll be glad you did. To obtain tickets, or for more information, please



call Becky Hurst at the Most Holy Name parish office at 412/231-2994, Ext 0.

PCHF Membership Reminder

Don't forget to send in your 2012 PCHF Membership Form. Membership Contribution - \$15. Simply mail your check made out to **"PCHF", P. O. Box 5812, Pittsburgh, PA 15209** along with your name, address, phone number and, if applicable, your email address.

PCHF is a non-profit 501 (c) (3) organization. All donations and dues are tax deductible.

ST. NICHOLAS BANQUET AT JAVOR GREAT SUCCESS

The following story appeared in the Zajednicar Croatian Newspaper on December 21, 2011, and was written by Bill Vergot, Lodge 541

Pittsburgh, PA - The Croatian National Home, Javor, was bursting at the seams on Saturday, December 3, 2011, for the annual St. Nicholas Day Banquet. The Event was special as it also celebrated the life of Bob Sladack who passed away a few months earlier and who conducted and managed the annual celebration as long as anyone could remember.

Bernice Goyak started the evening with an eloquent prayer before the guests started eating a sumptuous meal of stuffed cabbage, chicken roast beef, mixed vegetables, salad and a beautiful and delicious assortment of homemade desserts provided by the ladies of PCHF.

Following the meal, Susan Petrick, Secretary of PCHF, recounted the many accomplishments of Bob and presented Helen Sladack, Bob's wife, and children, David and Debra, with beautiful photo books depicting the life of Bob and his contribution to St. Nicholas Church, N.S., Pittsburgh and to the Preserve Croatian Heritage Foundation that Bob co-chaired..

This was followed by Mark Fatla, Executive Director of Northside Leadership Conference, who presented a summary of the progress of converting St. Nicholas Church into a National Immigrant Museum and Cultural Center.

The highlight then of the evening was the appearance of St. Nicholas (young, Matthew Bonicky), who greeted the guests with coins of gold. The celebration continued with the singing of Croatian Christmas Carols backed up by the musical genius of Mikey Dee and his combo who donated 10 of their new CD's for sale which benefitted PCHF.

The evening continued with the serenading of the guests by Mikey Dee Band who provided the music for the dancing and listening pleasure for all attendees. It was a night to remember as the food, entertainment and activities were perfect. Bill Vergot, Co-chairman of PCHF, thanked all for their participation in this outstanding event.



St. Nicholas with Mr. & Mrs. Majcen



Sladack Family



Christmas carolers accompanied by the Mikey Dee Band



Guests at St. Nick Banquet

Memorial Day Ceremony Set for May 28, 2012, at St Nicholas Cemetery

On Memorial Day we are gathering to honor members of the Armed Forces who gave their lives for their country during wartime and all the men and women who served their country at home and abroad. This year, the ceremony is scheduled for Monday, May 28, 2012, at 11 a.m. at the St. Nicholas Cemetery on Hahn Road. This is the eighth year PCHF members have honored veterans of St. Nicholas during this service held at the St. Nicholas Church, North Side, Hahn Road cemetery.

Each year Bill Vergot, Chairman of PCHF welcomes those attending. Then Joseph Belobrajdic and Rich Sestric raise the colors. All join in the singing of "God Bless America", led by Bernice Goyak. We continue with a eulogy in tribute to those who sacrificed their lives for their country. This past year, David Sladaek took the place of his father, Bob Sladaek, to reflect on the sacrifices of so many as David read the names of each serviceman from the St. Nicholas, North Side parish who died in service to their country, and Joseph Belobrajdic rang the large cemetery bell one time for each decedent.

Lt. Colonel John W. Trubic U.S. Army (retired), and Elmer Sestric, Korean War veteran, light a candle for each service person listed on the St. Nicholas Church, N.S. Veterans' Memorial Plaque during the calling of the names.

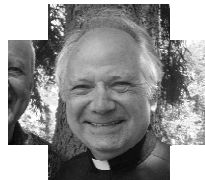
During a moment of silence, in memory of those who gave their lives, those present express their own prayers for deceased family veterans and those in service around the world today. The ceremony concludes with a prayer service, and inspirational music.

We hope to have young buglers, Joseph and Anthony Belobrajdic, joining the 2012 ceremony play a tribute to the servicemen and women who served from St. Nicholas Parish and offer a favorite hymn in their honor. The ceremony will conclude with a prayer service.

During the past few years, attendance at the Memorial Day services has been very strong, and we hope that you can join us this year. Preserve Croatian Heritage Foundation extends sincere appreciation to the pastors, numerous volunteers who have prepared the grounds, candles, and flags and those who have attended this ceremony each May to honor our family members who put their lives on the line to safeguard our freedom.

We hope you can join us and raise your voices and prayers for our Veterans and those who serve around the world on Monday, May 28 at 11 a.m. at the Hahn Road Cemetery in Shaler Township.

by Jane and Rich Sestric





Preserve Croatian Heritage
Foundation
P. O. Box 5812
Pittsburgh, PA 15209-0812

Address Service Requested

How To Reach Us

If you have any questions or would like more information on P.C.H.F., please email us at pchf@stnicholasns.org or feel free to contact any of the following Executive Committee Members by telephone as shown below.

Bernice Goyak	412 821-1106
Bill Kurtak	724 625-9145
Susan Petrick	412 821-3725
Pat Polaritz	412 231-4324
Francis Schmitt	412 322-8223
Jane Sestric	412 231-8134
Bill Vergot	724 941-8134
Steve Willing	412 527-5764

UPCOMING PCHF EXECUTIVE AND GENERAL MEETING

All are welcome to attend!

Tuesday, March 6, 2012 at 7:00 P.M.

JAVOR HALL

805 EAST STREET, PITTSBURGH, PA