



# AMERICAN FRIENDS OF THE CZECH REPUBLIC

Fall, 2008

NEWSLETTER

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## AFoCR Hosts Star-Spangled Gala in Houston

### Awards Presented to Pioneer Astronauts Lovell and Cernan



Former President George H.W. Bush



Civil Society Vision Awards



Former President Bush presents the Civil Society Vision Awards to Capt. James Lovell (left) and Capt. Eugene Cernan (right)



AFoCR's gala dinner, held in Houston, Texas on November 12th was a significant success, graced with a star-studded group of speakers and honorees. Nearly 300 people attended from across the country and the Czech Republic. The main goal of the gala was to kick off the effort to raise the funds to rebuild the Woodrow Wilson Monument at Prague's main train station, and substantial funds were raised.

Mayor Bill White of Houston, the seventh largest city in the U.S. that was hit hard by two recent devastating storms, Katrina and Ike, welcomed the distinguished audience. Former President George H.W. Bush praised the Mayor as "truly a man for all seasons." President Bush called for a redoubling of Czech and American efforts "to strengthen our alliance and promote the common values that we share." He then presented AFoCR's Civil Society Vision Awards to two patriots of Czech and Slovak heritage who more than 40 years ago "pushed back the horizon of discovery" as American astronauts.

In an emotional acceptance, Capt. Eugene Cernan (USN, Ret.)

said that he had become what he had because of "what my great grandparents and grandparents believed they could be. I am the result of the dream that they had." He gave credit as well to "the American spirit and the American commitment, and the American belief in doing what most people thought was impossible, so that today I can call the moon my home." He told of taking his 16-year old granddaughter to Prague last June where she met people who had been the same age during the Velvet Revolution. "They explained to her what the significance and the importance of freedom is all about."

Capt. James Lovell (USN, Ret.) recounted two incidents from 1968. Then, he could not go to Czechoslovakia because of the Soviet invasion, but when he visited his relatives after the fall of the Berlin wall, they "were finally free." He also recalled his space flight around the moon that same year and as he gazed at Earth from space, "I could put the Earth behind my thumb, and everything I had ever known, loved ones, my country, the world, was behind my thumb." He concluded that we, as a nation, now are striving, "to make a strong, universal group and not just separate countries."

*See GALA, page 3*

## Czechs Celebrate Visa Waiver

November 17, 2008 marked a major milestone in US-Czech relations as travel by Czechs to the U.S. without visas became a reality. Deputy Prime Minister Alexandr Vondra highlighted the event's significance by traveling to the U.S. on the first flight of "visa-free" Czech travelers. On his way to Washington, Minister Vondra passed through customs in New York using his personal--not diplomatic--passport, inaugurating the new visa-free regime.

November 17, 1989 goes down in history as the date the Velvet Revolution began, and the double significance of the November 17 date was not lost as Minister Vondra spoke at a special reception celebrating the visa waiver hosted by Ambassador Petr Kolář at the Czech Embassy in Washington. Expressing his elation, Minister Vondra underscored the importance of the change and how it will affect all types of Czech travelers. Citing the removal of the "last cold war barrier in the relationship," Minister Vondra singled out AFoCR for helping bring it about.

*See VISA WAIVER, page 3*

Deputy Prime Minister Alexandr Vondra and Ambassador Petr Kolář at the the Czech Embassy in Washington



## Message from AFoCR President Peter Rafaeli



Dear American Friends of the Czech Republic,

This is my last message to you as your AFoCR President. It is an upbeat message because AFoCR's future is very bright. I am writing this on November 17, 2008, a significant day in Czech history, and a very happy day for AFoCR. This morning, a historic flight, Czech Airlines OK 50, departed Prague for New York. On board were Czechs who were jubilant to no longer be required to obtain visas to visit the United States. Amongst them on the plane was our friend and advisor Alexandr Vondra, Deputy Prime Minister and former Czech Ambassador to Washington. The U.S. finally removed the last remaining hurdle to eradicate the Czech visa requirement dating back to the days of the Iron Curtain. AFoCR is proud that our educational efforts toward this long-awaited outcome have finally paid off.

The last 18 months have been times of change. First, we elected Fred Malek as AFoCR Chairman. We also added several excellent new members to the Board and the Executive Committee including former Ambassador Bill Cabaniss, former Chairman of Česká Spořitelna Jack Stack, and Tom Dine, the former Director of Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty in Prague. Most recently, my friend, Joseph Balaz, President of New York's Bohemian Benevolent & Literary Association also joined the Board.

On November 12, we held our Gala in Houston, TX with former President George H.W. Bush and Czech President Václav Klaus as Honorary Co-Chairs. President and Mrs. Bush attended the formal portion of the event during which we honored two space pioneers with Czech and Slovak roots, Captains Eugene Cernan and James Lovell. Both received AFoCR's Civil Society Vision Award. The event in Houston was also a fundraiser for our ambitious Woodrow Wilson Monument restoration project in Prague. While the event was very successful, I hasten to add that our fundraising activities for this project must continue.

In our "Vision for the Future" plan, which we shared with you about 18 months ago, we expressed our goal to become a national organization. Although some modest strides have taken place, we are far from satisfied and much more needs to be accomplished. I know that my friend Tom Dine, AFoCR President-elect, shares that vision, and I am certain that he and the Board will pursue this goal with vigor and determination.

For the Nicholas Winton Education Project, we raised sufficient funds to print over 17,000 copies of the book which tells the Winton story. Since mid-summer we have distributed, free of charge, almost 4000 copies. Your help in spreading the word to educators will be much appreciated.

Finally, I want to express a note of personal thanks to my colleagues on the AFoCR Board and to all supporters of AFoCR for their advice and dedication. I will continue on the Board as a Vice President and Treasurer as long as possible.

Cordially,

Peter Rafaeli  
President

## Letter from Ambassador Petr Kolář



Dear Friends,

Let me convey my sincerest thanks to Peter Rafaeli who has served as AFoCR president since summer 2007 and is now retiring from this role. For many years, Peter has been a staunch and generous friend of the Czech Republic. His tireless enthusiasm and energy have been the engine behind so many projects, programs, and events to promote Czech issues in the United States, that they are too many to mention. He played a pivotal role in mobilizing the AFoCR grassroots effort to include the Czech Republic in the U.S. Visa Waiver Program. And in fact, during his tenure as President, the Czech Republic did achieve that goal, thanks in no small part to Peter and to all of you American friends. But Peter is more than an American friend. He is also a personal friend. Although I know he will remain active in promoting Czech-American relations, I will miss his energy and vision that have guided AFoCR so well these last two years.

As President Rafaeli hands over the mantle of AFoCR leadership, I can't help but remember the many advancements that have been made in Czech-US relations over the years with the support of AFoCR, and with the support of all our American friends. Many of you stood with us and had the courage and wisdom to support my beloved homeland even when it was not the most popular thing to do. Without American support, Czechs and Slovaks would not have won their independence in 1918, would not have regained our freedom in 1989, Czech national security would not be as solid as it is, Czech democracy would not be as cemented as it is, Czech prosperity would not be as dynamic as it is without U.S. investment and cooperation, Czechs would not have joined NATO, and Czech EU membership would have been delayed. And without AFoCR support, visa-free travel between our countries would not have been achieved. In other words, the Czech Republic would not be the success story it is today without the support of our American friends.

With 2008 coming to a close, we Czechs remind ourselves of the fateful significance of years ending with the number 8 throughout our history: the 90th anniversary of the 1918 founding of the first democratic Czechoslovak Republic, the 70th anniversary of the 1938 Munich Agreement which dismantled our democracy, the 60th anniversary of the communist coup d'état which brought on 40 years of oppression, and the 40th anniversary of the 1968 Soviet-led invasion of Czechoslovakia, which pushed us farther behind the Iron Curtain.

Throughout history, my country has always been better off with the United States on our side—with friendship between our people—and always worse off without the United States and our American friends. While politics and good relations between governments are important, people-to-people contacts are the real basis of friendship. AFoCR is the embodiment of that friendship.

Looking ahead to the new year, 2009 also will mark several important anniversaries for us, including the 20th anniversary of the Velvet Revolution, our 10 year anniversary as a NATO member, and five years of Czech membership in the European Union (EU). Also in 2009, the Czech Republic will hold the EU presidency. These important milestones, achieved in 20 short years since the fall of communism in our country, make us a success story indeed, one of which we all can be proud. I know that in 2009, AFoCR will again serve as our strong supporter and will help make our EU presidency even more visible and more successful. I am truly grateful to all of you at AFoCR. Your friendship has built and continues to build unbreakable bonds between our people.

Warmly,

Petr Kolář  
Czech Ambassador to the USA

**GALA, from Page 1**

Former Secretary of State Madeleine Albright, a previous recipient of the Civil Society Vision Award, offered a toast to the memories and legacies of Woodrow Wilson and Tomáš Masaryk as well as to the enduring friendship between the peoples of the Czech Republic and the United States. Picking up on James Lovell's theme of universality, she noted that Masaryk had "wanted more than an independent Czechoslovakia. He wanted to build a nation that, like the U.S., would inspire people everywhere who believed in justice and loved freedom. Tonight these leaders have proven that the sons and daughters of George Washington could make common cause with the descendents of Jan Hus." She concluded, "Our collective job in the years to come will be to support democracy in order to make the world safe."

*Former Secretary of State Madeleine Albright offered a toast to the memory and legacy of Woodrow Wilson and Tomáš Masaryk and the enduring friendship between the United States and the Czech Republic.*



The Co-host of the evening with President Bush, Czech President Vaclav Klaus, sent a video message for the occasion. He described the effort to raise funds and reestablish the Wilson Monument in its rightful spot in Prague after its destruction by the Nazis in 1941 "a meaningful cause." He said, "I support this project which will further extend the strong historic bonds which exist between our two nations and countries." Czech Ambassador to the United States Petr Kolář gave a rousing talk on the extraordinary closeness and strength of the Prague-Washington relationship and between the two peoples as represented by the evening's audience and the work of AFoCR.

**VISA WAIVER, from Page 1**

For Czechs, joining the visa-waiver regime means they no longer need to go through the tedious and costly visa application process at the U.S. Embassy in Prague prior to making a trip to the U.S. In addition to enabling Czechs to make unencumbered tourist visits to the U.S., the change will enable them to more effectively conduct business, facilitate educational opportunities, and improve cultural ties. Artists, performers and scientists/professors will all be able to make visits for important technical meetings, performances and conferences. Visa-free travel truly strengthens the US-Czech relationship.

## Wilson Monument Project Moving Ahead

### Selection of Sculptor for Woodrow Wilson Monument in Final Phase

A major step in reconstructing the Woodrow Wilson Monument in Prague will be completed next February. One individual and two teams of Czech sculptors are now at work creating one-third size models of the statue of Woodrow Wilson. Based upon these models, one of the three will be awarded the contract to sculpt the full-size statue, which will

stand about ten and a half feet tall. The selection process began last June when AFoCR, through the Czech media, announced a tender (request for proposals) for sculptors to recreate the statue. As of the deadline on July 31, a total of thirteen proposals were received. Nine came from individual sculptors, and four came from teams of two or three.

The proposals were evaluated by a selection committee comprised of representatives of the stakeholders in the project. Committee members were architect Paul W. Beckmann for the Albin Polasek Foundation, architect Mikuláš Hulec for AFoCR, Karel Holub for the Capital City of Prague, architect Jaromíra Eismannová for the Metropolitan District of Prague 1, Czech sculptor Ivan Kalvoda, and Dr. Jan Koblasa, a Czech-born sculptor who lives in Germany. The committee's deliberations were moderated by Robert Doubek, who is leading the Wilson project for AFoCR.

After evaluating the quality and experience shown in the proposals, the committee invited five of the individuals and groups for interviews in Prague on September 29. The level of expertise of the artists proved to be very high, so the committee decided to invite the three best to prepare plaster models in a 1:3 scale before the final selection. The three finalists are: Jiří Kašpar (individual), Zdeněk Hošek and Kryštof Hošek (team), and Václav Frýdecký, Michal Blažek and Daniel Talavera (team). The models will be completed early in 2009, and AFoCR plans to make the final selection by the end of February 2009.

In a related development, the Czech Technical University in Prague completed its work of developing a virtual model of the statue by digitally imaging photos of the original. CTU then used the virtual model to derive basic dimensions of the statue to guide the three finalists as they make their models.

**Sculptor Selection  
Committee: (front)  
Robert Doubek &  
Jaromíra Eismannová -  
(rear l to r) Karel Holub,  
Dr. Jan Koblasa, Ivan  
Kalvoda, Mikuláš Hulec,  
Daniel Špička, & Paul  
Beckmann**



## AFoCR Elects Officers for 2009

At the annual meeting of the AFoCR Board of Directors, held this year on November 13 in Houston, TX, the following officers were elected for 2009:

Chairman of the Board: Fred Malek  
President: Tom Dine  
Executive Vice President: Bill Cabaniss  
Vice President: Peter Rafaeli  
Treasurer: Peter Rafaeli  
Secretary: Robert Doubek

The current Directors who were re-elected are Peter Bisek, Bill Cabaniss, Gene Cernan, Tom Dine, Bob Doubek, George Drost, Phil Kasik, Gail Naughton, Fred Malek, Peter Rafaeli, Mike Rokos, Dick Schubert, Jack Stack, and Jack White. A new Director, Joseph Balaz, from New York was also elected.

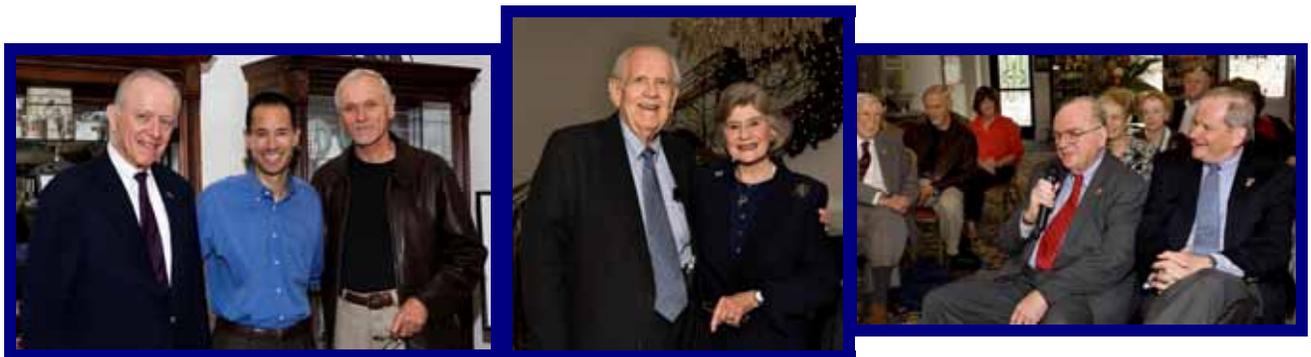
# **AFoCR November 12, 2008 Pre-Gala Activities**

*Photography by Lillis Werder*

## **Reception at the Home of Nanette and Jerry Finger**



## **Tour and Luncheon at the Czech Cultural Center with Effie and Bill Rosene**



## **Business Seminar at the J.W. Marriott with Bill Cabaniss and Jack Stack**



# AFoCR November 12, 2008 Houston Gala

Photography by Lillis Werder and David Shutts



## NCSML Recovery Making Progress; Opens Temporary Facility



*NCSML Temporary Location at Lindale Mall*

The June floods in Cedar Rapids, Iowa dealt a devastating blow to the National Czech & Slovak Museum & Library (NCSML). Yet, after four months of intensive clean-up efforts, emergency fundraising, crisis communication and the re-establishment of basic operations, the NCSML has taken an impressive step on the path to recovery. On October 24, the NCSML opened an interim space at Lindale Mall, in Cedar Rapids, Iowa.

"There's no place like home, but we're glad to have a physical presence in the community again," said Gail Naughton, the President and CEO of the NCSML. The NCSML is renting a 3,200 square foot space, called "NCSML at Lindale," containing three main sections. The first, housing the museum store, offers imported Czech ornaments, hand-crafted jewelry, hard-to-find books and other unique gifts.

Naughton explained that revenue from the museum store is critical, and she hopes that the new venue will increase sales. "Of course, we're a museum first," reaffirms Naughton. "We are using our time at Lindale to introduce new audiences to Czech and Slovak culture."

Staying true to the NCSML mission, the second section in the new space holds an original exhibition entitled, *Pack Your Bags: Journey to America*. On display are both the ornate and ordinary belongings brought to America by Czech and Slovak immigrants. Visitors are encouraged to consider the choices they faced when forging new lives for themselves in unknown places.

Adjacent to the exhibition space, NCSML at Lindale also has a gathering space for programs, events and meetings. Although programming has been pared down since the flood, the NCSML staff is eagerly planning for 2009. Jan Stoffer, museum educator, put it this way, "We need to be seen and heard, we need to engage our community, and we do that through programs." Of course, the question on everyone's mind is when will the NCSML rebuild its national museum campus? Says Naughton, "We're recovering in phases."

The museum board and staff are continuing to work with local, state and federal officials as they draft mid-term and long-term operating plans. "In the wake of this disaster, we have been presented with new opportunities for growth. And with the continued support of our members and friends, we'll be poised to spin a few dreams into reality."

For more information, visit [www.NCSML.org](http://www.NCSML.org).

## AFoCR Co-Sponsors 8<sup>th</sup> Annual Freedom Lecture

The Czech and Slovak Gibian Freedom Lecture, an annual event co-sponsored by AFoCR, was delivered in November at the Woodrow Wilson Center for Scholars. This year's speaker was Slovak Foreign Minister, Jan Kubiš. His talk focused on the excellent state of relations between Slovakia and the U.S. and highlighted some important achievements. Mr. Kubiš pointed to visa waiver for the Czechs and Slovaks as a solid achievement that will help people from both countries, and thanked AFoCR and Friends of Slovakia for their efforts on this behalf.

Regarding the importance and responsibility of advocating for democracy, Mr. Kubiš noted the efforts by the Slovaks in support of democratic initiatives in the central Balkans, Ukraine, and in Cuba. He also pointed out with some pride that Slovakia is poised to enter the Euro zone next year, the first former Communist country of Central Europe to do so.

## Business Developments in the Czech Republic

A business seminar was conducted by AFoCR Directors Jack Stack and Bill Cabaniss at Houston's J.W. Marriott Hotel on the afternoon of November 12. The strong economic performance of the Czech Republic was discussed in detail. The speakers noted that the Czech Republic attracted CZK 132 billion in foreign direct investment in the first nine months of 2008, up 11% over 2007. The continued attractiveness of the Czech Republic is reflected in expected Gross Domestic Product (GDP) growth in 2008 of 4.5%.

Thus far, the Czech Republic has experienced limited impact from the global economic recession. The financial system in the Czech Republic is less vulnerable than in other countries for a number of reasons. Loans are financed by domestic deposits rather than by foreign funds. The banking sector is highly profitable, and the share of "toxic assets" in the financial system -less than 1% of total assets -is negligible.

With a strong financial sector supporting the economy, GDP is forecasted to grow 2.9% in 2009 and 3.1% in 2010 with inflation remaining in the 2% range in 2009 and 2010, according to the Czech National Bank. The Czech Republic is and will be affected by the global economic slowdown. However, with a healthy banking system and an attractive business environment, the country is well positioned to weather the economic downturn and to be successful as the global economy recovers.



*AFoCR Directors Bill Cabaniss and Jack Stack Conduct a Business Seminar at Houston's J.W. Marriott Hotel*

## New Czech Cultural Center Opens in New York



*Joseph Balaz,  
President of BBLA*

*Newly Renovated Ballroom of BNH*

On October 30, 2008, the Bohemian National Hall (“BNH”) in New York City was reopened to the public after many years of renovation and refurbishment. It was originally built in 1896 by the Bohemian Benevolent and Literary Association (“BBLA”), an umbrella organization representing at that time more than 80 Czech cultural, political, sports and business groups. Located in the heart of Little Bohemia on Manhattan’s Upper East Side, the BNH played a very significant role in the lives of the new immigrant community. The construction of the neo-renaissance design by architect William C. Frohne was financed by donations from the community in the same spirit that the National Theater was built in Prague years earlier. A sign “Narod Sobe” (The Nation for Itself) in the Grand Ballroom of the Hall resembles the one which adorns the National Theater. The BNH bustled with life for many generations. It was the venue for appearances made by the first Czechoslovak President, Tomáš G. Masaryk, and by his son, Jan, who served as the country’s foreign minister.

In the sixties of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the Czech and Slovak community began to move out of Manhattan. The activities held at the BNH dwindled, and the building fell into disrepair. Ten years ago the trustees of the BBLA decided to deed the building to the newly democratic Czech Republic for a symbolic \$1.00, with the understanding that the Czech government would completely renovate this national treasure and together with BBLA use it as a platform for the presentation of Czech heritage, culture and business for years to come. Today the BNH houses the Czech consulate in New York, the Czech Center, and the BBLA. It has a magnificent two-level ballroom, several conference rooms, galleries, a sophisticated screening room, and a roof terrace. In the near future it will also have a small Czech restaurant.

On behalf of the Bohemian Benevolent and Literary Association, as well as friends in the Czech government, AFoCR Director and President of the BBLA, Joseph Balaz, invites you all to visit. He looks forward to conducting interesting and meaningful programs and events at the Hall in the years to come.

## Ambassador Kolář Celebrates National Day with Wreath Laying at Masaryk Memorial

On October 28, 2008, representatives from the Czech Embassy in Washington, D.C. and AFoCR gathered at the Tomáš Garrigue Masaryk Memorial to celebrate Czech National Day. Beautiful floral wreaths were laid at the foot of the Memorial to honor the founder and first president of Czechoslovakia. It was a day of commemoration and inspiration, as Ambassador Petr Kolář spoke to the group about the significance of this day in Czech history.



*AFoCR Directors Phil Kasik and  
Jack White at the Masaryk Memorial in Washington, D.C.*



*AFoCR Director Phil Kasik, President Peter Rafaeli, Ambassador  
Petr Kolář and AFoCR Director Tom Dine at the Czech Embassy  
in Washington, D.C. during a reopening celebration after Embassy  
renovations on 10/23/08*



*AFoCR President Peter Rafaeli (left) and Director Phil Kasik  
discuss issues with candidate advisors at CSIS Conference in  
Washington, D.C.*

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