Canadian Slovak League celebrates golden jubilee

The golden jubilee of the Canadian Slovak League (CSL) commenced recently with a special reception by Gov. Gen. Edward Schreyer at Government House. Among those in attendance were John Hudak of Welland, general secretary of the CSL and his wife, Margaret, a member of the advisory council on multiculturalism and citizenship. The Governor General was presented with a hand-carved wooden plaque depicting musicians of the Deva region of Slovakia.

The league, which was formed in Winnipeg in 1932, during the difficult times of the pre-war years, organized a branch in Welland eight years later. In 1961, the Slovak Hall was purchased and the national home became the centre of cultural and charitable activities. In 1963 the purchase of two additional lots expanded the hall to facilitate further activities and begin its popular catering service. For the past 27 years, money has been raised with bingos for contributions to local universities, hospitals and charitable agencies.

The Bratislava dance group and Slovak Heritage Dance Ensembles, sponsored by the Welland branch, have performed in Canada and the U.S.

EARLY YEARS

In the early years of the CSL, the support systems of helping immigrants in need came from amongst themselves. From the meagre beginnings of 50 years ago when aid to the needy and sick and funeral costs were defrayed by collection among its members, the CSL has grown into Canada's largest Slovak fraternal organization with solid financial foundation.

In March 1953, the league was received in a special reception by Prime Minister Louis St. Laurent in Ottawa. This event was the first such occasion in which a Canadian ethnic group was received by the Prime Minister and the federal leaders in Canada.

The following year, the CSL was recognized and incorporated by a special act of Parliament. The 55 branches throughout Canada have built community and cultural centres, organized youth groups, dancing ensembles and cultural clubs.

GOVERNOR GENERAL ED SCHREYER welcomes Welland residents John and Margaret Hudak to a reception for members of the Canadian Slovak League at Government House. At right is Margaret Dvorský of Montreal, president of the CSL. Mr. Hudak is general secretary of the CSL while his wife, Margaret, is a member of the Ontario advisory council on multiculturalism and citizenship.

In 1967, Canada's Centennial Year, more than 11,000 participants took part in a Slovak festival at Man and his World in Montreal.

YOUTH CONTRIBUTES

Today, many of the younger generation are actively contributing to the professional and technical workforce of the nation, as well as actively participating in the people's voice on the federal and provincial advisory bodies.

The Canadian Slovak Youth demonstrate their determination to know and live their Slovak heritage. The youth groups, which form cultural ensembles, have performed at home and abroad with such performances as at a papal audience before Pope John Paul II and before President Ronald Reagan during the presidential campaign in 1980.

Historical milestones continue to occur in the CSL which now owns its own home office located in Toronto. It is also the sponsoring organization for the Slovak Villa, a senior citizens residence in Cambridge.

In this, its 50th year, the CSL elected its first woman president at its 21st convention. Margaret Dvorský of Montreal assumes the responsibilities and the challenge of leading the Slovak organization into its second half century.

Highlighting the year's events will be a banquet and anniversary festivities, Oct. 2 at the Royal York Hotel.

The Welland branch will hold anniversary celebrations Nov. 6 at the Slovak Hall.