With the New Year – new opportunities, new and higher goals

by Roma Lisovich

UNA Treasurer

The Executive Committee of the Ukrainian National Association (UNA) is pleased to share good news with the community and our membership. Finally, after years of planning and preparation, which were outlined in previous communications over the last few years, we have realized our goal of a charitable 501(c)(3) status for Soyuzivka Heritage Center. With the beginning of 2015, the Ukrainian National Foundation Inc. (UNF), a 501(c)(3) non-profit organization became the owner of Soyuzivka. As background, the UNF was established as the charitable arm of the UNA in 1992.

Today, Soyuzivka Heritage Center, with its myriad camp programs and cultural activities, fully meets the requirements mandatory for organizations with charitable status. The status has many advantages, two of them most important: the ability to apply for government and private grants, and the ability to attract higher donor dollars as donations carry a tax-deductible benefit. These advantages have assisted many diaspora groups (Ukrainian American Youth Association, Plast Ukrainian Scouting Organization, Ukrainian Congress Committee of America and others) in their fund-raising campaigns. Until this change was implemented, the center, which was owned and operated directly by the UNA could not take advantage of the benefits the 501(c)(3) status offers. Now Soyuzivka will enjoy these same benefits.
Today, the central activities of Soyuzivka Heritage Center are children's and youth camps, cultural workshops, heritage awareness programs, courses on Ukrainian folk dancing, sports and an array of cultural educational activities with the purpose of preserving and promoting the Ukrainian cultural heritage here in the United States. Each summer more than 600 children participate in the various sports, cultural and heritage camp programs. It is noteworthy that there are also camps for children who do not speak Ukrainian _ for the descendants of earlier immigrants from Ukraine or children of mixed marriages.

The number of children in our camps is growing each year, and they come from all parts of the United States, Canada and other countries. Waiting lists are the norm, as Soyuzivka Heritage Center does not have enough accommodations to house all the children who want to participate. That is a good thing. It shows that the interest in learning about Ukraine and one's ancestry is flourishing. Last summer, for example, more children participated in Soyuzivka's camp programs than ever in its 62-year history.

Maintaining this hub of the Ukrainian diaspora, which is at present only a seasonal business, is expensive. Without the ability to attract high donor dollars, operating the facility was a challenge for the UNA. The situation was complicated even more by the global financial crisis of 2008 when, as a result, the government introduced stricter requirements in the financial and insurance sectors. In accordance with new regulatory requirements, insurance companies, including fraternal organizations, like UNA, were expected to increase their reserves and surplus positions, as well as reduce expenses. In this environment, development of the facility was not possible.
The new organizational structure provides the opportunity for the board of the UNF, with help of professional specialists, to develop and implement a concrete development plan for Soyuzivka Heritage Center. We are excited about the prospects.

What are the factors that led to these changes?

Toward the end of last year, the proceeds from the sale of an asset maintained in partnership with another non-profit organization allowed us to take some very positive steps for the benefit of the UNA, the UNF and Soyuzivka.

As you may know, the UNA is a fraternal organization, with an IRS not-for-profit designation of 501(c)(8). In accordance with current laws and regulations that related to this transaction, the proceeds had to be distributed to a charitable corporation with a 501(c)(3) charitable status. For this reason, the UNA's portion of the proceeds was transferred to the Ukrainian National Foundation. These proceeds allowed Soyuzivka Heritage Center to be transferred to UNF, which will now take possession and responsibility for the facility.

To facilitate this change, a number of important changes were made to the organizational structure and mission of the UNF that extended its charitable purposes and expanded the board. The new year has brought in a new era of broad-minded leadership for the UNF and an expanded community outreach.

In order to increase community involvement in the Ukrainian National Foundation, its Board of Directors was expanded to seven members, including four independent members representing various segments of the Ukrainian “hromada.” We are pleased to announce the new Board of Directors of UNF as
follows: Stefan Kaczaraj, president; Roma Lisovich, treasurer; Christine Kozak, secretary; Roman Hawryluk, Mark Olexy, Dr. Wasyl Szeremeta and Taras Sochan.

The new board members bring with them new thinking, broad experience, insights and knowledge. With the assistance of professional expertise, a strategic plan will be developed not only for Soyuzivka Heritage Center, but for numerous targeted projects that will benefit the Ukrainian community.

We look forward to active participation and support from the community. Please be generous when approached for new fund-raising campaigns. We will need the community’s support to ensure our collective success.

For the UNA, this transaction and these changes allow us to pursue strategies that enhance our financial security and build prosperity for the future. The UNA will continue to carry out its mission, as it has since 1894, partnering with other diaspora organizations. Together, the UNA and the UNF will continue to help preserve our unique Ukrainian heritage and be a unifying and prosperous voice in the community.

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Youngsters at Soyuzivka Heritage Center’s 2014 Discovery Camp and Heritage Camp.

credit: Tania D'Avignon