

POLITIKA REPORTS ON SNF

Serbs in America Stood Up to Defend Sanctities in Montenegro

Since 1901, the Serb National Federation (SNF), the oldest Serbian-American fraternal organization in the United States, has gathered Serbs together and organized numerous events. For instance, during “Serbian Heritage Night” in Cleveland, Ohio, they cheered for Nikola Jokic, a National Basketball Association Denver Nuggets player, and bore inscriptions and banners defending the sanctities of the Serbian Orthodox Church in Montenegro.

In the 1920s and 1930s, accidents in the mines in the United States were not rare. In one of the casualties, 400 miners died. Although many Serbs were working in that mine, none of them died in that particular accident only because it took place on St. Nicholas Day, and most Serbs were at home to celebrate their Patron Saint Day. This was noted in archived issues of the “American Srbobran,” the oldest continuously published Serbian newspaper that is the official publication of the SNF.

Milos Rastovic, Cultural Outreach Coordinator of the organization, related this detail in a conversation with “Politika,” adding that the organization’s long tradition was founded precisely because of unfortunate events like the mine disaster.

A large number of workers in the mines and steel mills did not have health insurance. Their hard work was such that many often died prematurely in accidents like the one on St. Nicholas Day. In an effort to connect his compatriots and provide them with protection and financial security, Sava Hajdin of Pittsburgh traveled to New York in 1901, to present the idea of founding an association to enable Serbs to insure themselves and their families, to his famous compatriot Nikola Tesla. This idea was the beginning and founding of the Serbian Orthodox Federation Srbobran, which later evolved into the Serb National Federation. Tesla became honorary president in 1935 just as Mihajlo I. Pupin had been six years earlier.

“The Serb National Federation is the oldest Serbian Fraternal organization in America, providing life insurance



policies and annuities serving its members’ needs. Historically the SNF has helped Serbian Orthodox churches and children’s church camps; and sponsored athletic, cultural, and social events to preserve Serbian ethnic and religious identity in America. Unlike commercial insurance companies, the SNF is a non-profit organization whose income is dedicated to preserving Serbian culture and tradition, as it has for more than 100 years,” Rastovic told Politika.

In that long historical course, many of the original SNF-sponsored events continue to this day. Rastovic detailed how the SNF, since 1936, has organized and continues the oldest Serbian basketball tournament in America; winter and summer golf tournaments and bowling competitions annually. Since 1917, a celebration of Serbian Days has been taking place in Pittsburgh, and was proclaimed the oldest ethnic event by the City Council in 2016. Serbian Day was initiated by

Mihajlo Pupin to collect humanitarian aid for Serbian children who were in orphanages during and after World War I. The SNF also sponsors a Serbian Movie Festival. In November last year, in cooperation with the Republika Srpska Office for Cooperation, Trade, and Investment, they organized the exhibition “Jasenovac: Unspoken Genocides and the Holocaust, 1941-1945” at the US Congress in Washington, DC.

Other events are also organized by the Savez. “This year, we organized ‘Serbian Heritage Night’ in Cleveland’s NBA basketball arena to support our basketball player Nikola Jokic, who plays for the Denver Nuggets. A large number of our people came to support Jokic. The Serbian folklore group, ‘Morava’ from Cleveland, performed at the crowded stadium. Cheers of ‘Nikola, Nikola’ and ‘Serbia, Serbia’ were heard throughout the arena. As a sign of support of the defense of Serbian sanctities in fraternal

Montenegro, the members of the folklore group bore the inscription ‘We do not give our sanctities,’” Rastovic noted.

Every year, the SNF traditionally has followed and supported Novak Djokovic on his American summer tour. Djokovic is also an honorary member.

The *American Srbobran* is published twice a month. Since the 1930s, the newspaper added an English section in addition to the Serbian Cyrillic. “Famous Serbian writers have contributed to our paper and include Milos Crnjanski, Ivo Andric, Jovan Ducic, Desanka Maksimovic, Vojislav Ilic, Milan Rakic, Charles Simic, Vasko Popa, and others. The paper has published interviews with well-known Serbian scientists and inventors such as Mihajlo Pupin and Nikola Tesla as well as with athletes Djokovic. The newspaper is an award-winning publication, declared the ‘best newspaper’ at the Pennsylvania Fraternal Congress in 2001,” stated Rastovic.

In the last eight years, he added, the Serb National Federation has helped raise and donate more than \$1.5 million to Serbian Orthodox churches, children’s church camps, humanitarian organizations such as Lifeline Chicago, cultural societies, and more. “We respond to calls from the homeland to collect funds. This year, we awarded scholarships to students at colleges and universities valued at approximately \$78,000, and in this way help to educate our members,” he added.

Fighting Against the Nazis

The Serb National Federation also aided in the efforts of both world wars. Many Serbian volunteers from the United States went to Serbia to defend their homeland in World War I. More than half of them never returned to their families who remained on the American continent. In 1943, SNF members raised funds and bought a bomber plane that was donated to the US army to fight the Nazis. The aircraft was named “American Serbian,” Rastovic pointed out.

*Original work of
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