

# Novak Djokovic Honored at Serbian Cultural Garden

by Milos Rastovic

CLEVELAND, OH – On September 11 a bust of the famous Serbian tennis player Novak Djokovic was unveiled at the Serbian Cultural Garden, a part of the International Gardens in Rockefeller Park. The event was hosted by the Honorable Alex Machaskee, founder of the Serbian Cultural Garden and Honorary Consul of the Republic of Serbia.

Novak Djokovic was born in Belgrade, Serbia, in 1987. He won 90 Association of Tennis Professionals (ATP) singles titles including 21 Grand Slam singles titles and 38 ATP Masters titles. He won a bronze medal at the Beijing Olympic Games in 2008. The Serbian Orthodox Church awarded Djokovic the medal of the Order of St. Sava of the First Degree in 2011. He is one of the best players in the history of this sport.

Alex Machaskee welcomed all guests and introduced Andjelina, Anastasija, and Teodora Kotic, who sang the American and Serbian anthems. After a prayer led by V. Rev. Dragoslav Kotic, Machaskee, and Serb National Federation President Dane A. Medich, unveiled Djokovic's bust. The stand reads: "Novak Djokovic is a great Serbian professional tennis player who has ranked world no 1 for a record of 373 weeks as of August 2022. He won 88 career singles titles and 21 Grand Slam tournaments. Novak is the first and only man in tennis history to be the reigning champion of the four major tournaments at once across three different surfaces. Novak and his wife, Jelena, through the Novak Djokovic Foundation have directed their humanitarian efforts to creating a lasting change in the lives of children in need in Serbia through childhood educational projects. Twenty-one Grand Slam Victories: Australian (2008, 2011, 2012, 2013, 2015, 2016, 2019, 2020, 2021), French Open (2016, 2021), Wimbledon (2011, 2014, 2015, 2018, 2019, 2021, 2022), and US Open (2011, 2015, 2018)."

Among the guests were representatives of the Embassy of the Republic of Serbia in Washington, D.C., Ms. Jovana Nedic, First Counselor, and Mr. Radomir Ilic, First Counselor. Mr. Ilic said he was proud to be at the Serbian Cultural Garden for the first time. According to him, Serbs settled in the United States in the nineteenth century and became a prominent and respected community. They preserved their culture and heritage on this continent. As a result, Serbs worldwide have common ground, from the holy Nemanjic dynasty to the modern Serbian liberators. He also revealed the Embassy's plans for future events.

President Medich of the SNF expressed the importance of preserving Serbian heritage and tradition: "We hope that young people will carry on our tradition and legacy. I became a big fan of Djokovic because of what he represents in the world: a good and true Serb and a humanitarian person. As a result, Djokovic became an SNF honorary member in 2015." Medich also took the opportunity to invite other people to join the SNF.

Dr. Wael Khoury, Chairman of the Cleveland Cultural Garden Federation (CCGF), recognized the importance of the Serbian Cultural Garden and its hall of fame of famous people. The Serbian Cultural Garden challenges all other gardens. He said, "Only Cleveland has a park to celebrate notable people worldwide."

On behalf of the Tesla Science Foundation (TSF) and its President Nikola Lonchar, V. Rev. Kotic expressed the importance of Djokovic's bust in

the Serbian Cultural Garden: "Djokovic's bust will remind us of our proudness, uniqueness, ethical and spiritual qualities that we have been nurturing for centuries. Djokovic's bust is installed in the Serbian Cultural Garden because of his athletic achievements, firm principles, and humanitarian work... We are all Djokovic." He addressed his wish to deliver awards to great Serbian people who promote the Serbian culture annually. Milana Mim Bizic and the Honorable Alex Machaskee received the Tesla Spirit Awards this year. Both are past SNF Persons of the Year in 2008 and 2021, respectively. Also among the guests was Simo Kraguljac who was SNF Person of the Year in 2020.

Lonchar said that Mim Bizic is "the greatest alive museum and honorary ambassador of Serbian people." So many small and big stories from the Serbian-American community would have been forgotten if Bizic did not pass them on to people. "As Milunka Savic with a gun fought for Serbian people in World War I, Bizic is fighting in her way to show the spirit and greatness of Serbian people."

The Honorable Machaskee also made a significant contribution to the Serbian cause. He is a great entrepreneur, benefactor, Honorary Consul of the Republic of Serbia, and founder of the Serbian Cultural Garden. "He dedicated all his work to serve to the Serbian people and strengthening the ties between the United States and Serbia... Although he is the second generation of Serbian-Americans, he is dedicated to the Serbian Orthodox faith." He was a great benefactor of the Hilandar Monastery and Serbian people and cultural heritage in Kosovo and Metohija.

During the program, Andjelina, Anastasija, and Teodora Kotic sang famous Serbian traditional songs. The audience enjoyed every moment of their excellent singing. Fr. Gavriilo from the Monastery Djurdjevi Stupovi closed the event with a prayer.

The Serbian Cultural Garden includes terraces with great busts of famous Serbian people throughout history. In the center of the Garden is a bronze icon of St. Sava, Serbian Enlightener, Prince, and first Archbishop of the autocephaly of the Serbian Orthodox Church. It is a reproduction of mosaics from Hilandar, the Patriarchate of Pec, and Zica Monasteries. Also included are busts of Nikola Tesla, Serbian-American scientist, and inventor; Mileva Maric, Serbian scientist and wife of Albert Einstein; Mihajlo I. Pupin, Serbian-American scientist and inventor; King Peter I, Liberator of Serbia; Petar Petrovic Njegos, Serbian Poet, an Orthodox Prince-Bishop and Ruler of Montenegro; Stevan Stojanovic Mokranjac, Serbian composer; Vuk Stefanovic Karadzic, founder of Serbian grammar; Milutin Milankovic, Serbian scientist; Nadezda Petrovic, Serbian painter of Twentieth Century; Desanka Maksimovic, Serbian poet, Jovan Ducic, Serbian poet, novelist and diplomat; a plaque of George V. Voinovich, US Senator; and now Djokovic.

Visiting the Serbian Cultural Garden is encouraged to learn more about Serbian history and our legacy. To support the Serbian Cultural Garden projects, preservation, and renovation, don't hesitate to contact Serbian Cultural Garden, P.O. Box 91896, Cleveland, OH 44101. The Serbian Cultural Garden is a part of the Balkan Heritage Preservation Foundation.

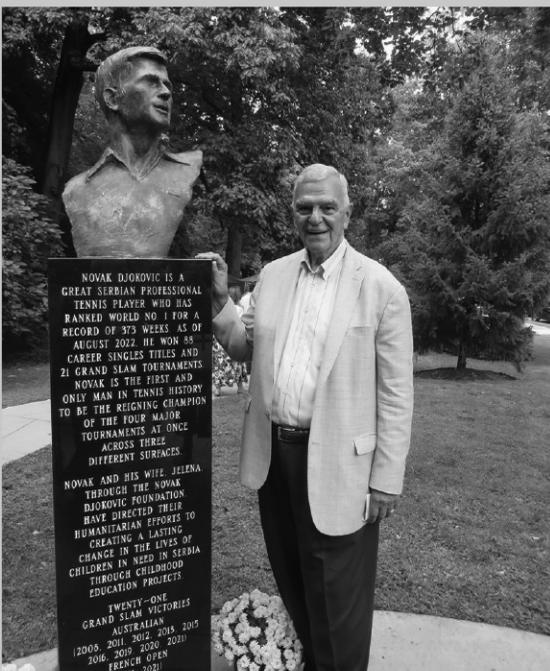
More about the event at the Serbian Cultural Garden is available on YouTube.



From left are Dane A. Medich, President of the SNF; Radomir Ilic, First Counsel of the Embassy of the Republic of Serbia; Milos Rastovic, SNF Cultural Outreach Coordinator; and Jovana Nedic, First Counsel of the Embassy of the Republic of Serbia



Dane A. Medich, SNF President, left, and the Honorable Alex Machaskee unveiling the bust of Novak Djokovic



The Honorable Machaskee, hosting the event



Serbian Clergy in attendance for the unveiling