

Carpatho-Rusyns of Minnesota gather for annual Duchnovich Day celebration

by Luis de Leon

On a quiet Saturday in February, tucked away in an event space at the St. Mary's Orthodox Cathedral Parish Center, Karen Varian, alongside her colleagues and friends, was putting the finishing touches on information boards and setting tables for the annual Duchnovich Day Celebration.

The room would soon be filled with a community that's called Northeast Minneapolis home for more than a century.

The celebration aims "to get people together, and it's a fundraiser for us," Varian said just before the event on Feb. 7.

Varian is also the President of the Rusin Association of Minnesota, which has hosted the annual event for over 40 years. The event brings together the Carpatho-Rusyns (also referred to as "Rusins") of Minnesota.

Carpatho-Rusyns, as explained by the association, are "linguistically and culturally an East Slavic people," with their homeland located on the southern and northern slopes of the Carpathian Mountains, at the intersection of the borders of Slovakia, Poland and Ukraine.

They also have their own language, Varian explained, which uses the Cyrillic alphabet. The association follows the Byzantine Greek Catholic, or Eastern Orthodox, religion. However, Varian says the association is not tied to any religion — providing, as they see it, a chance to network with their community.

Alexander Duchnovich was a priest, poet and preserver of the Rusin culture.

"Our event is actually more of an opportunity for people who don't go to some of the Rusin churches to get together," Varian said before the event kicked off.

As for how many ended up in Minnesota? The association says many found it difficult to make a living in their area back in the late 1800s. While 250,000 Rusyns immigrat-

ed to the United States from 1880 to 1920, the association estimates that 1,200 of them settled in Minnesota in primarily three areas: Northeast, Browerville-Holdingford and Chisholm-Hibbing. More than 750,000 Americans have at least one Carpatho-Rusyn immigrant ancestor, according to the association.

Varian says they try to get a speaker from out of town every year to educate the community about the history of Carpatho-Rusyns. This year, they had Dr. Nicholas K. Kupensky, an associate professor of Russian and Foreign Area Studies at the United States Air Force Academy in Colorado. He also lectures at a school in Slovakia in the summertime.

Speaking at the event in his personal capacity, Dr. Kupensky gave a presentation using an English-language anthology of prose

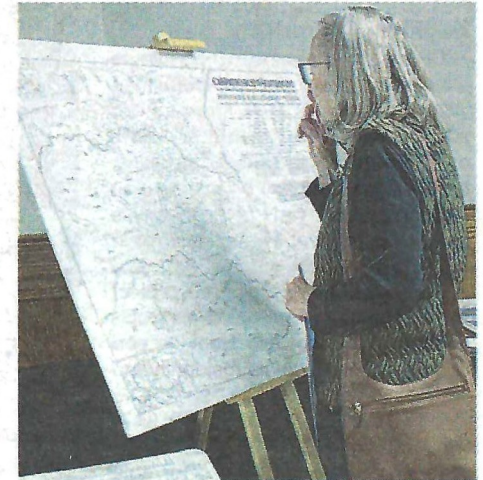
and poetry of Carpatho-Rusyn authors to help explain the history and complexities of their language.

"This is the only time during the year that we bring in a speaker from out of town," Varian said.

A dinner followed the presentation. The sights and sounds of community gathering, laughter and old friends catching up continued.

As for Varian, she said she felt it was especially important to gather during an unsettling time in Minneapolis amid the controversial rise of federal immigration enforcement operations.

"To me personally I think that's important ... to be normal if we can," she said.



Top, an attendee looked through materials that detail the history of Rusin people in Northeast Minneapolis at the annual Duchnovich Day celebration at St. Mary's Orthodox Cathedral Parish Center. Bottom, Dr. Nicholas K. Kupensky, an associate professor of Russian and Foreign Area Studies at Colorado's United States Air Force Academy, lectured at the event. (Luis de Leon)

