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## **PRESERVING SLOVAK HERITAGE AT THE HOLIDAY FOLK FAIR INTERNATIONAL**

### *100<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Year of the Slovak League*

MILWAUKEE – Keeping the Slovak culture alive is the mission of the Milwaukee Assembly 20 of the Slovak League of America – a task they have been doing for 100 years since their founding April 12, 1916. So the group is especially excited to extend their Centennial celebration at Holiday Folk Fair *International*, Nov. 18-20 at State Fair Park.

It will be the 61<sup>st</sup> consecutive year they have delighted foodies with home-baked goods and traditional Slovak dishes and 45 years of performances by the Tatra Slovak Dancers.

This year's menu at their booth in the World Café includes cabbage rolls (ground chuck, spices, rice, and onion rolled in a cabbage leaf), hulushky (featherweight dumplings), klobasa (pork sausage with salt, garlic and pepper) sandwich with kraut and pickle, lentil soup, chicken paprikash, and assorted bakery.

Overseeing this is Elizabeth (Betty) Valent, who is a Folk Fair veteran dating back to the 1960s. "I came to America from Communist-run Czechoslovakia in 1964 when I was adopted by my aunt and uncle. I became involved in the Slovak League and Folk Fair a short time after that. I helped whenever I could, but it was after my children were in high school I became more involved with the Slovak League and became an officer."

Valent has been described as "the backbone" of the Slovak community, working hard all year long recruiting and organizing volunteers for the various annual events she is involved with, including the Slovak American Day picnic in July, the pre-Lenten dance (Fasiangy), and pilgrimage to Holy Hill, to name a few.

For Holiday Folk Fair, she recruits volunteers to bake and cook, does the shopping and stocking of food, and can be found every Saturday from September on organizing and supervising the kitchen at Blessed Savior School. "The school serves hot lunch to the students during the week, so we can only use the kitchen on weekends. They also allow us to store the food we make in advance in their walk-in freezer," she said.

"On Saturdays, we start at 9 in the morning and work until 3 or 4 in the afternoon. We make all our food from scratch, except for bread and buns. The food that needs to be served fresh, like the lentil

soup, chicken paprikash, and 14 gallons of chicken gravy is prepared the day before Holiday Folk Fair opens. The klobasa sandwiches with sauerkraut are made on Friday,” she said.

Bakery items, also homemade, include butterhorns filled with walnuts, fruit and cheese, apple strudel, cream horns, and a Slovak specialty, “walnut in a shell.”

“I’ll be in the kitchen all three days, but I enjoy every minute of it,” Valent said.

A program of the International Institute of Wisconsin, Holiday Folk Fair *International* celebrates the cultural heritage of the people living in southeastern Wisconsin. This year’s theme, “Celebrate the Culture of Water,” will allow Fair-goers the opportunity to learn the ways in which water and its symbolism is incorporated into the music, food, dance, arts, and crafts of Holiday Folk Fair.

Special attractions in 2016 include invited international performers and artisans, including the Schlitzlerländer Trachten- und Volkstanzkreis musical group from Schlitz, Germany, a World Heritage Japanese photographic exhibit, the Sisters Cities International 2016 Young Artist and Authors Showcase, The United States Department of State “*Faces of Diplomacy*” exhibit, the Artisan corner sponsored by Debra Stefl and Katherine Kral, Financial Advisors with Morgan Stanley, the Kohl’s Color Wheels display, the Wisconsin Woodturners, and a bonsai exhibit.

The three-day event features the All Nations Theater with traditional music and dance, the World Café offering traditional dishes, the International Stage where young people perform their ethnic dances, the Tanzhauz (Music Pavilion) where attendees dance and sing along with a variety of musical styling’s, the Coffee House where patrons enjoy a beverage and baked goods while listening to talented musicians, Heritage Lane, presented by Weather Tight Corporation, with unique traditions and customs through interactive exhibits, the International Bazaar, sponsored by Leaf Filter, where cultural artifacts create a unique shopping experience, and the Callen Construction Chef’s Stage featuring local chefs preparing traditional cuisine.

Hours on Fri., Nov. 18 are 2 p.m. – 10 p.m.; 10 a.m. – 10 p.m. on Sat., Nov. 19; and 10 a.m. – 7 p.m. on Sun., Nov. 20.

Advance tickets will be sold for \$10 each, with family four-packs for \$36, and available for purchase on-line at [www.folkfair.org](http://www.folkfair.org). Admission at the gate will be \$12 for adults; \$8 for children ages 6 to 12; children under the age of five will be admitted at no charge. Those 62 and over will be admitted for \$10, and all military personnel with a military ID card will be admitted free.

For more information on the 2016 Holiday Folk Fair *International*, visit [www.folkfair.org](http://www.folkfair.org) or call the International Institute of Wisconsin at 414-225-6225.

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