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Slovenefest opens the reign of Miss SNPJ 2026

by COURTNEY KOENIG
Fraternal Director

IMPERIAL, Pa. — A warm hello from the Fraternal Department! I hope everyone had a fantastic time at the 42nd annual Slovenefest this year.

This year's Miss SNPJ Pageant contestants gathered Friday afternoon at their lodgings for the weekend and were treated to a welcome dinner before heading to the Recreation Center to begin rehearsal for the Saturday competition. After practice, the contestants enjoyed the rest of the evening dancing and socializing, setting the tone for a weekend of excitement and camaraderie.

The 67th Miss SNPJ Pageant was held Saturday, July 12, in The Alpine Room at the SNPJ

Recreation Center. A large crowd filled the room to support and celebrate five remarkable young women as they showcased their personalities and talents.

Miss SNPJ 2020 Daniella Volpe served as the pageant emcee and did a wonderful job welcoming the audience, expressing gratitude for their support, and introducing each contestant with warmth and enthusiasm. I had the opportunity to greet the crowd and explain the judging criteria and point system used throughout the competition.

Miss SNPJ 2025 Erin Lawrence performed one of her final official duties by reading the selected fishbowl question to each contestant. Once each contestant finished her question, all contestants exited the room, returning one at a

time to answer the same universal question as read by Erin.

After a brief intermission, the audience enjoyed an impressive array of talent presentations. Alexis Trout, representing Lodge 6 in Sygan, Pa., shared a powerful presentation about living with a blood disorder and how knowing her blood type has saved her life on multiple occasions. Juli Kurta from Lodge 715 in Universal, Pa., presented her knitting, a craft she's been dedicated to for several years.

Jami Meglich of Lodge 604 in Cleveland introduced her service dog, Persius, who she has trained since a puppy, and demonstrated how a service animal can assist with daily

SEE MISS SNPJ PAGEANT
ON PAGE 8



All pageant photos
© Tim Cimperman, 2025.

Miss SNPJ 2026
ELLEN KOCI (786)
receives her crown from
Miss SNPJ 2025 **ERIN LAWRENCE** (138).



The 2025 Miss SNPJ Pageant field: [from left] **JULI KURTA** (715), Miss Talent and Miss Fraternalism 2026 **JAMI MEGLICH** (604), Miss SNPJ 2026 **ELLEN KOCI** (786), Miss SNPJ 2025 **ERIN LAWRENCE** (138), Miss Activity 2026 **ALEXIS TROUT** (6), and **LAUREN HUDSON** (564).

The SNPJ Heritage Center season drawing to a close

by KATHY PAULENICH (776)
SNPJ Heritage Center Director

BOROUGH OF SNPJ, Pa. — Another wonderful Slovenefest was held at the SNPJ Recreation Center. We had great music at all the venues throughout the weekend to keep everyone smiling.

It was a hot and humid weekend, but the Culkar Building offered a welcome place to rest, with the air-conditioned Alpine Room, Gostilna and Heritage Center. And for the younger generation, the swimming pool was open all weekend and very busy! Mark your calendars for next year's Slovenefest, July 10-12, 2026, as a must-attend event.

The SNPJ Heritage Center was busy all weekend. We had several new items available for purchase. We sold out of the doggie bandanas, but we'll have more in a few weeks. Don't forget, the gift shop is open on Saturdays in August from 1 to 5 p.m.

Our last day this season is Saturday, Aug.

30. If you didn't have a chance to visit our museum and use the new QR codes while viewing the displays, please do so. You can learn more about Slovenia and just visit that side of the museum. If you're interested in the history of SNPJ, that material is displayed in the left side of the museum.

The patio outside the Heritage Center welcomed visitors at the Marketplace outside gift shop on Saturday and Sunday afternoons during Slovenefest. Thank you to the presenters participating in our "Closer Look at Slovenia" program.

Sarah Loudon is always busy at her make it/take it tent with a craft for visitors of all ages. Joe Valencic had a computer hooked up to a television, displaying videos from the Kurentovanje Festival. Lucija Lindav Heindel from the Slovenian Consulate in Cleveland was well received as she presented the Slovenian language and travel.

On Sunday, we were honored to have two

former Miss SNPJs as presenters. Selena Progar, a pastry chef in Pittsburgh, shared a potica recipe in The Alpine Room; and Betty Hartman read a story, complete with puppets that were given to us by Terry Steffl. Terry was part of the Pittsburgh Folk Festival many years ago.

If you missed the "Closer Look at Slovenia" presentations this year, watch for them in the Slovenefest flyers next year.

With Slovenefest concluded, summer is now half over and we're looking toward the end of our season at the SNPJ Heritage Center. We hosted our annual wine and cheese reception on July 30 during Family Week. Family Week is always a fun event as our returning SNPJ families enjoy the facilities at the Recreation Center.

This brings us to the close of summer with the National SNPJ Days (Labor Day) weekend celebrations. The Gostilna will host the Garrett Tatano Band on Friday, Aug. 29, from 8

SEE HERITAGE CENTER
ON PAGE 4

PERIODICAL MATERIAL

August merger unites SNPJ Lodges 8 and 449

IMPERIAL, Pa. — On Aug. 1, 2025, SNPJ Lodge 8 will merge into SNPJ Lodge 449; the remaining Lodge will be SNPJ Lodge 8.

The members of both Lodges have been notified by mail of this merger and provided with the name, address and phone number of the Lodge secretary, Tina Rigler.

We thank the officers and members of both Lodges for their cooperation, and for their many years of service and dedication to their Lodges and the Society.

KAREN A. PINTAR
SNPJ National Secretary/COO

Lodge 776 slates picnic, baseball outing in Aug.

BOROUGH OF SNPJ, Pa. — SNPJ Lodge 776 will hold its annual youth fishing tournament and Lodge picnic at the SNPJ Recreation Center on Sunday, Aug. 3. The fishing tournament will start at noon; the picnic will follow at 2 p.m.

Lodge members will also be attending the Mahoning Valley Scrappers baseball game on Wednesday, Aug. 13, at Eastwood Field in Niles, Ohio. The game starts at 7 p.m. Lodge members and their guests who would like to attend the game should contact Ed Snyder at (330) 565-6276. Tickets will be paid for by the Lodge.

RICH DOMBROSKY
Lodge 776 Recording Secretary

Lodge 31 discussing the holidays at Aug. meeting

SHARON, Pa. — The next SNPJ Lodge 31 meeting will be held Thursday, Aug. 21, starting at 6 p.m. at the Slovenian Hall, 1037 Baldwin Ave., Sharon, PA 16146. Members attending should walk up the ramp to the second floor. Lodge business and our holiday dinner will be discussed. Contact Barb Bogolin at (724) 347-1197 with any questions.

BARB BOGOLIN
Lodge 31 Secretary/Treasurer

THE DEADLINE

The next two *PROSVETA* issue dates are Sept. 1 and Oct. 1. All material must be received by noon on Monday, Aug. 18, for the Sept. 1 issue, and by Monday, Sept. 15, for the Oct. 1 issue. If you're concerned about making the deadline, send an e-mail to prosveta@snpj.com or submit your material via the publications area of our website, snpj.org.



Slate Todd Musser
Born Feb. 3, 2025
St. Marys, Pa., Lodge 581

SNPJ Lodge 581 welcomes Slate Todd Musser as the newest addition to the Lodge. Slate is the son of Terry and Paige Musser, the grandson of Todd and Cheryl Musser, and the great-grandson of Lodge 581 officers John and Patricia Moore. We welcome Slate to the Society and extend our best wishes to his entire family.

PROSVETA
ENLIGHTENMENT
(USPS 448-080)
(ISSN 1080-0263)
The Official Publication of the
**Slovene National
Benefit Society**
247 W. Allegheny Road
Imperial, PA 15126-9774
Phone: (724) 695-1100
Toll-Free:
1-800-843-7675 (THE SNPJ)
Fax: (724) 695-1555
e-mail: prosveta@snpj.com
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Subscription rate is \$8 per year for non-SNPJ members in the United States (Fla. subscribers, please add 6 percent sales tax). Canadian and foreign subscriptions, \$50 per year. Advertising information available by contacting our office. Material concerning the official workings of the Slovene National Benefit Society is given publication priority. Unsolicited manuscripts returned only if a self-addressed, stamped envelope is enclosed.

Postmaster: Send all address changes to:
**PROSVETA, 247 W. Allegheny Rd.,
Imperial, PA 15126-9774**
(Published monthly)
(Periodical postage paid at Imperial, Pa.,
and additional mailing office.)

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Have something for
Up-and-Coming?

Lodge/Organization _____

Type of Event _____

Site _____

If a concert or dance, who is
performing? _____

Date _____

Time _____

Who to contact _____

Phone () _____

E-mail _____

Complete and return to:
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Photo by Tim Cimperman
SNPJ Lodge 142
members pictured with
Miss SNPJ 2026
ELLEN KOCI (786) at
the conclusion of the
67th Miss SNPJ Pageant,
held July 12-13 during
Slovenefest weekend.

For SNPJ Lodge 142, a river and lake cruise on the August schedule

by KARA MARUSZAK
Lodge 142

CLEVELAND — Another successful Slovenefest is now behind us, and it was great catching up with friends from far and wide. Many Lodge 142 members attended or volunteered at Slovenefest, and from the entry gate to the dance floor, a Lodge 142 member always seemed to be near.

A highlight of the weekend was watching the 67th Miss SNPJ Pageant, and we commend all the young ladies who participated in this year's pageant. Following the crowning, we were lucky to get a group photo with Miss SNPJ 2026 Ellen Koci.

Our next Lodge event will take place aboard Cleveland's largest cruise ship, the Goodtime III, on Sunday, Aug. 24, from 3 to 5 p.m. and will feature a two-hour narrated

cruise along the Cuyahoga River and Lake Erie. The cruise provides an in-depth look at Cleveland's history and provides spectacular views of downtown Cleveland, the Flats, and all of the surrounding areas.

Passengers will enjoy the quickly changing panorama of Cleveland's skyline as they listen to the narrator point out many sights and little-known historical facts about this all-American city. We invite everyone to join us for a fun day on Lake Erie.

For Lodge 142 members, the cost is \$10 per adult, free for youth members. For non-Lodge members, the cost is \$30 for adults (ages 13-59), \$25 for seniors (ages 60+), \$15 for children (ages 5-12), and free for infants (ages 0-4). Contact Carol Maruszak at (440) 655-8776 for more information and to register.

Lodge 449 welcomes an upcoming merger with SNPJ Lodge 8 members

by TINA RIGLER
Lodge 449 Secretary/Treasurer

CICERO, Ill. — Lodge 449 members held their most recent meeting on June 21 on the rooftop at Lanie Maresh's residence in Chicago, across the street from the lake. It was a beautiful, sunny day with temperatures in the 90s and a strong wind.

President Justin Rigler called the meeting to order. All officers were in attendance, either in person or by phone.

Secretary/Treasurer Tina Rigler reported on correspondence received and sent out since the last meeting. The Lodge sent in a donation to the SNPJ Young Adult project for this year, which was Special Olympics. Tina also gave a financial report which included receipt of the Lodge check from the Home Office for the member award.

Lanie Maresh reported on the 2025 Young Adult Conference, at which she served as conference chairman. Also attending from Lodge 449 were Robert Rigler, Jason Rigler and Alenka Rus.

Lanie reported on the activities held during the weekend and the projects that were completed around the SNPJ Recreation Center by the 35 young adults in attendance. The projects included the annual road cleanup, painting the pool bath house, and weeding the vineyard. Liz Smrdel (158) was elected chairman for the 2026 Young Adult Conference.

Tina Rigler also reported on the Chicago Federation and the 91st annual Memorial Day Service that was held May 26. Member Alenka Rus and youth members Jake Rus

and Adam Rus, all from Scout Troop 33, participated in the flag ceremony. Federation President Edward Dabrowski (449) welcomed everyone in attendance, and the national anthems and musical selections were performed by Vince Rigler (449). Our Lodge members are very active participants in the Chicago District Federation.

A discussion was held regarding a Lodge 8 request to merge into our Lodge. Tina Rigler reported that she was asked if we would accept Lodge 8 members into our Lodge.

After much discussion among the members, it was approved to let the Home Office know that we are willing to accept the members of Lodge 8. We're looking forward to the merger and welcoming them to our Lodge meetings and activities. Tina will contact National Secretary/COO Karen Pintar at the Home Office regarding the merger.

The next Lodge meeting is set for Sunday, Sept. 28, starting at 1 p.m.; the location and activity to be determined.

Several Lodge 449 members attended Slovenefest at the SNPJ Recreation Center. Vince Rigler and His Polka Pals performed at Slovenefest again this year.

Following the meeting, a barbeque luncheon was served on the rooftop, offering a scenic view of the beach and Lake Michigan. Everyone brought a dish to share and enjoyed the beautiful day. Sergeant-at-Arms Lanie Maresh reported that Jan Maresh and Meredith Maresh won the meeting awards.

For more information regarding our next meeting, contact Lodge Secretary/Treasurer Tina Rigler at (708) 257-8312.



The rooftop of member Lanie Maresh's residence provided a stunning view of Lake Michigan and the beach for the Cicero Neighbors Lodge 449 June meeting.

Yukon Slovenian Hall playing host to 2025 American Slovene Day

by JOANN KRANCE
Lodge 729 Secretary/Treasurer

YUKON, Pa. — The Yukon Slovenian Hall is sponsoring this year's American Slovene Day on Sunday, Aug. 3, from 2 to 6 p.m. Music will be performed by the Jack Tady Bears and Jack's Guys & Dolls. Garrett Tatano will be featured as a special guest.

The kitchen will be open, serving hamburgers, hot dogs, klobase, haluski, pierogies and Slovenian potato salad. Plenty of good refreshments will be available from the bar, and a bake sale and Slovenian basket drawing are planned.

Mark your calendar and join the fun — everyone is welcome to attend!

Lodge 518 holds fourth annual summer picnic

by BILL KRZISNIK
Lodge 518 Secretary/Treasurer

MELVINDALE, Mich. — On June 8, SNPJ Lodge 518 members enjoyed another summer picnic for the fourth year, complete with authentic Slovenian food, cornhole, swimming and balina. Additional games introduced this year by Mary Beth Krzysnik included a bubble challenge and Nerf ball toss. Also new for this year were prizes (lottery tickets and theater box candy) which were awarded to the champions of each event.

The event was hosted at the country home of Lodge President Irene Kovac. The

meat was provided by the Lodge, and each member brought various dishes to share. Authentic food served included potato salad, coleslaw, burek, potica and apple strudel.

We also celebrated the 13th birthday of member Emilia Yuvan and conducted a quarterly Lodge meeting during the picnic.

With more than 20 participants, this was our best-attended picnic. Members from as far as Saginaw and Lansing, Mich., took part, in addition to members from the Detroit area. Those attending ranged in age from 8 to 100 years old.



Lodge 518 members ranging in age from 8 to 100 took part in the Lodge's fourth annual picnic held June 8.



A bubble challenge [above] and Nerf ball toss [left] were added to the SNPJ Lodge 518 picnic activities for 2025.

Up-and-Coming... A look at events planned by the Slovene National Benefit Society

- AUG. 10 SNPJ Spartans Lodge 576 annual picnic at the SNPJ Farm, Kirtland, Ohio. Entertainment by Joe Novak & Friends from 3-7 p.m., Lou Novak Balina Tournament, and basket drawings. For more information contact Karen Novak at (216) 965-3181.
- OCT. 10-12..... SNPJ National Bowling Tournament co-hosted by Sygan, Pa., Lodge 6 and Strabane, Pa., Lodge 138 at the Sygan Lodge 6 Bowling Center and the Strabane Lodge 138 Lanes. Entry forms available online at snpj.org.
- OCT. 26..... Westmoreland County Federation of SNPJ Lodges Fall Dance at the Yukon Slovenian Hall, Yukon, Pa.; 2-6 p.m. Music by the Heritage Band; food and refreshments available. For more information contact Lois Denning at (412) 554-7404.
- AUG. 29-31 National SNPJ Days weekend at the SNPJ Recreation Center. For more information phone the SNPJ Recreation Center toll-free at 1-877-767-5732 or e-mail snpj@snpjrec.com.

We've Got You COVERED



by DAVID GOMBKOTO
SNPJ Sales Director

Why referrals matter: Growing the SNPJ family, together

At the heart of Slovene National Benefit Society is a mission grounded in service, community and mutual support. As a not-for-profit fraternal benefit society, our strength lies in our members, not in corporate shareholders. And one of the most meaningful ways we can continue to grow and sustain our mission is through the power of member referrals.

While many companies pour vast amounts of money into advertising and aggressive marketing campaigns, SNPJ has always taken a different path. As a fraternal organization, we are committed to operating efficiently and investing in what truly matters – our members. That's why we spend very little on traditional advertising. Instead, we rely on the voices and actions of our members to help us grow. This not only keeps our costs down, but it allows us to offer what many others cannot: the lowest premiums in the market for life insurance coverage.

Our nonprofit structure means we're not here to profit off our members – we're here to protect them. That's why we can offer affordable life insurance options with flexible underwriting, helping us meet members where they are in life. Whether someone is young and just starting a family, or older and thinking about legacy planning, we have products tailored to a wide range of needs. And because we aren't driven by profit margins, we have the flexibility to offer personalized solutions without the layers of red tape common at larger commercial insurance companies.

But there's more to SNPJ than insurance. Much more. Our members gain access to a rich fraternal community that includes scholarship opportunities, youth programs, cultural events, member gatherings, and a variety of no-cost benefits – benefits offered simply because someone chose to become part of the SNPJ family. These are the kinds of resources that build not just financial security, but lifelong connection and support.

That's where you, our members, come in. We know that the most trusted recommendations come from those closest to us – our friends, family and neighbors. You know what SNPJ stands for. You've experienced the value of our benefits, the affordability of our coverage, and the strength of our community. You're in the best position to share that with others. Just think about how you first became a member. Was it through a family member or friend who referred you? If it was, there should be a feeling of obligation to pass that on to someone else and keep the tradition alive! And when you refer someone to SNPJ, you're doing far more than helping them find insurance – you're helping them find a place where they can belong. Oh, and by the way... you can easily earn money while doing it! Earn \$10 per qualified referral through our Recommender Program. Additionally, each referral gets you one entry into our quarterly drawing for \$100!

Referrals aren't just helpful – they are essential. In fact, for fraternal societies like ours, they are one of the most effective and important tools for growth. Every new member who joins through a referral helps strengthen our entire organization. As membership grows, so does our ability to expand fraternal programs, increase benefits, and invest in more resources for all members. It's a virtuous cycle: the more we grow, the more we can give back.

We also make it easy. If you know someone who could benefit from what SNPJ offers – affordable life insurance, flexible underwriting, and a supportive fraternal community – we encourage you to introduce them to us. Whether you help them connect with one of our agents or simply share your story, your recommendation goes a long way. Simply go to snpj.org and click the "Refer A Member" link, or fill out a paper form at your local Lodge. Easy! And we're happy to support you with materials and guidance to make that process smooth and effective.

At SNPJ, we're not just a benefit society – we're a family. And like any strong family, we rely on each other to thrive. When you refer a friend or loved one, you're helping ensure that SNPJ remains strong, vibrant, and ready to serve the next generation.

We thank you for your continued support, and for being part of something greater than yourself. Together, we can grow our membership, strengthen our benefits, and build a future where SNPJ continues to be a beacon of security, culture and community for years to come.

To learn more about our products or how to refer someone, please call 1-800-843-7675 or visit us online at snpj.org.



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New emergency alert system to launch in Sept.

LJUBLJANA (STA) — SI-Alarm, a new national natural disaster alert system, will be up and running by the end of September, the authorities announced as they presented the progress of the system's development. The new system will enable four levels of warning, an upgrade to the existing notification system.

Digital Transformation Ministry State Secretary Miroslav Kranjc said that based on the contract, the system of public information and warning by means of notifications must be established by the end of September. He added that SI-Alarm will be a high-quality, secure, and user-friendly way to communicate important notifications and alerts about events that might affect people's health or property across the entire country.

"The warning system via public mobile networks will upgrade the existing alert system," added Leon Behin, the director of the Civil Protection and Disaster Relief Administration.

The new system will make it possible for individuals in specific areas to be notified in the event of a natural disaster or impending danger. "It will be clear from these notifications what exactly is happening and how to act in a particular incident or event," Behin said, adding that the system would also enable better notification of people with hearing or vision impairment.

People will receive notifications from the Civil Protection and Disaster Relief Administration on their mobile devices in the form of push notifications, rather than SMS messages. Notifications will be classified into four levels which are compliant with EU standards, with the first level, representing a nationwide warning, being the top level.

This notification will be accompanied by an audible warning at the highest volume of the device, regardless of whether the user's device is set to silent. The device will also vibrate in Morse Code for "SOS." It will not be possible to switch off first-level notifications; however, users will be able to do so for lower-level notifications in their device system settings. "The first-level warning involves life-threatening risks and important notifications for property and people's lives," Behin said.

Potential events or events that are not directly threatening will fall into the second- or third-level categories.

All notifications will be sent in multiple languages. Slovenian will be the primary language and English the secondary language. In the areas populated by the Italian and Hungarian minorities (Primorska and Prekmurje), notifications will also be sent in Italian and Hungarian.

According to State Secretary Kranjc, before the system is up and running it will be publicly tested, which is expected to take place in September. Slovenia is among the few EU member states that have yet to introduce such a system, which has been mandatory in the EU since 2022.

Ljubljana U closer to a top 500 world ranking

LJUBLJANA (STA) — The University of Ljubljana has improved its position in the international Quacquarelli Symonds World University Rankings 2026, moving closer to the world's top 500 universities. From 596th place in 2025, the university advanced to 355th place, its highest ranking since 2015.

University Rector Gregor Majdič expressed satisfaction with the result, describing it as a reflection of the school's progress. "In the past two years we have climbed almost 100 places on this list, and it should be noted that more universities are included in the evaluation each year, so this rise is actually even more significant," he said. "This achievement is proof that the university is on the right track as an institution," he added.

Ljubljana University placed 41st in employment outcomes, which measure the employability of graduates. However, this is a drop from last year. Despite this drop, the university improved its ranking in international research network participation (241st), academic reputation (414th), faculty/student ratio (431st), and sustainability (619th).

According to the university, Quacquarelli Symonds is considered among the most recognized and prestigious university ranking systems, this year ranking 1,501 universities with 8,467 universities included in the evaluation process.

Two other Slovenian universities are included on the list: The University of



Maribor placed in the 901-950 group, and the University of Primorska in the 1,201-1,400 group.

Maribor hospital takes a lead role in cancer project

MARIBOR (STA) — UKC Maribor, Slovenia's second largest hospital, has become a coordinator in an EU-funded project that aims to create a screening system for pancreatic cancer, which at present has a survival rate of less than 10 percent and is the third-leading cause of cancer deaths in Europe.

Pancreatic cancer is usually detected rather late, and the main objective of the four-year international project is to increase the five-year survival rate to 30 percent by 2035.

Dubbed SHIELD, the project launched in May, bringing together 26 partners from 13 EU countries. It is funded by the Horizon Europe-Cancer Mission. Slovenia is one of seven countries in the project where pilot and clinical studies will be conducted.

The project will identify and test healthy individuals who are at a higher risk of pancreatic cancer, mainly family members of pancreatic cancer patients, as well as people recently diagnosed with diabetes. "In addition to regular follow-up tests, which are already available, these healthy individuals will be able to undergo additional testing and blood tests, mostly looking at proteins, which could help us predict cancer development," said lead researcher and UKC Maribor oncology chief Maja Ravnik.

UKC Maribor Director Vojko Flis said that pancreatic cancer was one of the most malignant types of cancer. "We don't have a clear understanding of the biology of this cancer. We don't really know why it is this malicious. But we believe this study... can help us understand this cancer and lead to better prognoses for our patients."

Ravnik said the project will help develop the basis for future screening protocols using innovative diagnostic methods based on repeated blood testing. At least 5,000 individuals will be included in the project across all partner countries.

Roof replaced on the Babič floating river mill

VERŽEJ (STA) — As part of a broader Slovenian-Hungarian project to create a cross-border milling museum, Babič's Mill, the only floating river mill still in operation on the Mura River, now has a new roof.

The Mura, which flows through the far northeast of Slovenia, used to drive a hundred mills. Now, however, Babič's Mill in Veržej is the only working mill still providing a living for its owners by crushing and grinding grains such as wheat, maize and buckwheat.

Another floating mill has been restored in Ižakovci on the other bank of the Mura on what is known as the Island of Love, but the mill serves mainly as a tourist site. That mill was reopened last year.

The new roof of Babič's Mill, estimated at just over EUR 27,000 (approx. \$31,800) was completed in late June. All wooden elements of the mill's roof structure and roof covering were replaced, and the upper portion of the walls were renovated under the guidance of Slovenia's Institute for the Protection of Cultural Heritage.

At more than 100 years old, the original roof structure was in dire need of repair and its poor condition was threatening the mill's equipment, which is considered an important part of its cultural and technical heritage.

The roof repair is a key milestone in the broader cross-border project known as "From Mill to Mill," the goal of which is to create the first cross-border museum of milling. The Slovenia-Hungary Interreg project, which is running through April 2027 and includes five partners from Slovenia and Hungary, deals with the disappearance of mill history in the wider European area.

Simon Balažic, a representative of the mill, said the restoration of the roof is only the first step. "The mill was damaged in the 2023 floods, so further restoration of the wooden [structure] and the surrounding area will be needed to ensure its full preservation."

As part of the same project, the drive system of the Filo Mill, the only Slovenian mill on the Hungarian side of the border, has been restored. The mill was operated by the Filo family for more than a century, from around 1870 until the late 1980s, before it shut down and changed hands several times. Now owned by a Slovenian minority organization, Filo Mill is expected to become a major tourist attraction in the area.

Museum space planned at Ptuj castle granary

PTUJ (STA) — Renovation work will start this year to transform the dilapidated granary of Ptuj castle into an exhibition space for the Ptuj-Ormož Regional Museum. Some EUR 12 million (\$14.15 million) have been earmarked for the project, which will also include landscaping work on the castle hill.

Presenting the project in early July, Culture Ministry State Secretary Matevž Čelik Vidmar said the funds were secured under the Flood Recovery Act. "Ptuj Castle is one of our largest cultural monuments of national importance, and this project is one of the key cultural projects of this government term," he added.

As part of the project, EUR 8 million (\$9.43 million) will be spent to renovate the castle granary and EUR 4 million (\$4.72 million) on landscaping.

The granary, first built in the 18th century to store grain and wine, will be renovated to offer 1,000 square meters (10,800 square feet) of exhibition space, according to Aleksander Lorenčič, the director of the Ptuj-Ormož Regional Museum, who added that [the new space] will be an important asset for the museum.

The basement of the new exhibition space will host a permanent exhibition, the ground floor will be dedicated to temporary exhibitions, and the first floor will provide additional storage space.

Ptuj Mayor Nuška Gajšek said the project represented exceptional added value for Ptuj and the broader region. "It will allow the public to once again see many valuable objects that have been in storage for decades," she said. The building will also offer insight into the museum's art conservation and restoration efforts.

Construction is expected to start this year and be completed by 2027; the castle hill landscaping project is planned for completion by 2028.

National archives marks Slovenian film milestone

LJUBLJANA (STA) — An exhibition marking the 120th anniversary of film production in Slovenia and the 80th anniversary of the national archives as an independent institution opened in early June in the new premises of the Archives of the Republic of Slovenia in Ljubljana. Titled "From Film to Archive," the exhibition presents the first four decades of filmmaking in Slovenia through screenings, billboards and exhibits.

At the opening, Matevž Čelik Vidmar, a state secretary at the Culture Ministry, said that "... in a time when motion pictures are an integral part of everyday life, we tend to forget what a revolution the emergence of film was 120 years ago." He praised the contribution of film to the history of humanity and culture, noting that film emerged as one of the most democratic forms of art, which it still is, and added that film is a means of connecting people.

Tatjana Rezec Stibilj, the director of the Slovenian Film Archive and co-author of the exhibition, said that in the first four decades of filmmaking in Slovenia, the foundations were laid for film production that came after World War II.

The exhibition presents a valuable part of the film archive that is not only a key source for studying the history of Slovenian film, but also an exceptional source for broader understanding of history in general.

The central part of the exhibition are screenings of 12 films that trace the development of Slovenian cinematography: from silent to sound film, from black-and-white to color film photography, and from short newsreels to feature-length films. The films and their creators are presented on billboards, which also include photographs and newspaper clippings, while archival items, documents and museum items are also featured. The exhibition will be displayed through Sept. 30.

The articles comprising this feature have been reprinted with permission from the Slovenian Press Agency (STA).

Lodge 5, Lodge 604 hosting combined picnic and Polka Mass at the SNPJ Farm Aug. 3

by JOE VALENCIC
Lodge 5 President

KIRTLAND, Ohio — Enjoy polka music at its finest as the Anthony Culkar Orchestra takes the stage at the SNPJ Farm in Kirtland for a Polka Mass and dance on Sunday, Aug. 3. Anthony delights dancers and fans with his Cleveland-Style entertainment.

The members and friends of SNPJ Naprej Charter Lodge 5 and Utopians Lodge 604 welcome you with a Polka Mass in the pavilion starting at 1 p.m. The Polka Mass brings a new spirit to worship with hymns set to favorite polka and waltz melodies. Fr. Norm Gajdzinski and Fr. Bob Kraig grew up with polka music and are the

guest celebrants for this unique expression of faith based upon Slovenian-American musical traditions. Sing-along sheets are provided.

The Anthony Culkar Orchestra is one of the freshest bands on the scene, with a lively take on polkas that makes you want to get up and dance.

With Anthony on the accordion, the band boosts the classic Cleveland-Style with rock, pop, country and show tunes you know and love. It's just about the most versatile band on the polka scene. Anthony and his musicians will perform for dancing from 3 to 7 p.m.

The special of the day is Chef Dean's mile-high fried

bologna sandwich, stacked with pepper jack cheese, lettuce and tomato. Dinners and sandwiches are served from 2 p.m. on, with your choice of smoked Slovenian sausage or home-style roast beef. Admission is \$8 for four hours of live music; guests age 18 and under admitted free. Phone (216) 481-1379 for picnic details.

The SNPJ Farm, the recreation center for Cleveland-area SNPJ Lodges, opened to the public in 1939. The Farm is located at 10946 Heath Road in Kirtland, off Chardon Road (Route 6), three miles east of Route 306 and six miles west of State Route 44.

Chardon Road is closed at the Chagrin River, so east-



Anthony Culkar and his orchestra will perform for the Polka Mass and dance co-hosted by Lodge 5 and Lodge 604 at the SNPJ Farm on Sunday, Aug. 3.

bound guests on I-90 should exit south at the Route 306 exit and turn left (east) on Chardon Road.

Lodge 449 members share in the fun of Slovenefest

by TINA RIGLER
Lodge 449 Secretary/Treasurer

CICERO, Ill. — Lodge 449 members took a road trip to the SNPJ Recreation Center for Slovenefest the weekend of July 11-13. It was a great weekend, though with some very hot weather.

Slovenefest opened Friday evening with some great entertainment, and we had the chance to meet some of the pageant contestants as well. My brother, Edward Dabrowski, took many photos and videos, and was able to capture the entire weekend.

I was able to meet up with many friends I have met through the years, and now my sons, Justin, Robert and Jason, along with my niece, Alenka Rus, who have attended Young Adult Conferences, have long-lasting friendships as well. It's always nice returning to the Recreation Center to catch up with friends we may only see once or twice a year.

Saturday was a long day, starting with the Miss SNPJ Pageant competition. The contestants did a great job and had very different talents. Each girl presented her own unique talent, and I was quite surprised to see the variety — I enjoyed them all!

With the warm temperatures on Saturday, it was nice to take a break and enjoy the

cool water at the swimming pool — along with many others who were trying to cool off from the heat. The pool area was buzzing with families, and of course you can't leave out the awesome drinks served at the Tiki Bar.

Music was pouring out from all areas of the Recreation Center. Lodge members Vince Rigler and Justin Rigler performed in the Gostilna on Saturday evening as the group Vince Rigler & His Polka Pals. At dusk, a nice display of fireworks filled the sky.

The weekend passes by much too quickly when you're having so much fun. Sunday activity started in The Alpine Room to see who would be announced as the next Miss SNPJ. I had the pleasure of announcing the runner-up to Miss SNPJ, Jami Meglich from Lodge 604 in Cleveland.

Congratulations to Ellen Koci, who was announced as Miss SNPJ 2026. Ellie is from Lodge 786 in Orange County, Calif. Additional titleholders include Miss Activity Alexis Trout from Lodge 6, Sygan, Pa., and Miss Talent and Miss Fraternalism Jami Meglich.

After lunch, it was time for everyone to say their goodbyes and head home. We're looking forward to next year's Slovenefest, scheduled July 10-12, 2026 — save the date!



[Above] While at Slovenefest, SNPJ Lodge 449 members had the opportunity to meet newly-crowned Miss SNPJ 2026 **ELLEN KOCI** (786).

[Below] Lodge 449 young adults joined SNPJ friends from across the country at the Tiki Bar during Slovenefest.



Lodge 449 members Vince Rigler and Justin Rigler performed at Slovenefest as the group Vince Rigler & His Polka Pals.

SNPJ Membership Anniversaries August 2025

70-Year Members

Lodge	Member	Lodge	Member
2	Robert N. Kavisic	158	Alice D. Skoda
120	Roberta J. Stauder	604	Donald E. Pirc
138	Henry F. Mikec	749	Olga J. Slenska

60-Year Members

Lodge	Member	Lodge	Member
6	Gloria J. Okorn	564	Thomas L. Hostnik
6	Marcella Bushmire	584	Sharon L. Jeampierre
6	George R. Reutzel	584	Karen Kropusek
8	Eileen Lochiskar	584	Helen M. Lund
34	Victoria L. Fahim	715	Larry A. Rea
87	Janice J. Holan	723	Marcia Leathers
87	William L. Rumshock	723	Hubert J. Ursich
106	Glenn R. Pregel	729	Charmaine J. Clark
113	Sandra D. Perri	749	Connie L. Huffman
126	Jeffrey A. Nank	770	Joanne R. Zorinich
153	Nancy A. Roseman	771	Ronald N. Lombardo
174	Harry J. Korber	782	Anita M. Chiaro
225	Mary J. Lipasek	A02	Michael A. Phelan
371	Edward T. Juth		

50-Year Members

Lodge	Member	Lodge	Member
1	Robert T. Stariha	223	Paul A. Niemiec
2	Mark F. Franzen	223	Janet M. Lingelbaugh
2	Penny L. Cooper	223	Leslie A. Ban
5	Laura M. Englehart	225	Myra R. Harold
8	David L. Borngreaver	225	Karla Cizerle
8	Sally A. Martino	277	Patricia A. Watkins
8	Djuro Manojlovich	576	Louis Azman
31	Edward G. Cvelbar	584	Janet M. Kazik
34	Laura L. Zahn	584	Mary J. Poklar
41	Melvin L. Bohince	603	Ann M. Hensley
87	Randy Havey	677	Andrea L. Hill
87	Donna M. Schneider	715	Bruce Bahor
87	Bruce W. Flesik	715	Brian Bahor
87	John P. Prystupa	721	Joyce M. Davis
106	Frank W. Papciak	776	Anna M. Bach
138	Anthony P. DeLost	782	Mary J. Kunycky
138	George A. Yates	782	James L. Prasnikar
142	Cynthia M. Smith	782	Harry L. Carson
158	Valorie L. Kiefer	782	Cindy L. McKinney
174	Donell F. Jacoby		

information at your fingertips

Looking for information on your SNPJ life insurance and annuity policies? Visit snpj.org, click the **"SNPJ Portal"** link, then follow the step-by-step instructions.

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Make check or money order payable to **SNPJ Heritage Center**

SNPJ Heritage Center season coming to a close Aug. 30

HERITAGE CENTER
FROM PAGE 1

to 11 p.m. The Sunday picnic in the Heritage Pavilion will feature Klancnik & Friends alternating with Veseli Fantje

(Frank and Darryl Valencic) from 1 to 6 p.m.

Those in the Johnstown, Pa., area are preparing for their annual Slavic Festival the weekend of Sept. 19-20. SNPJ

Heritage Center Committee members will be returning to the festival on Saturday, Sept. 20, to display our traveling museum of Slovenian artifacts on and offer items for purchase

from the Heritage Center gift shop.

We're looking forward to seeing our SNPJ friends from the Johnstown area. Be sure to stop by and say hello.

PROSVETA Crossword

Back To School (#0825) by StatePoint Media

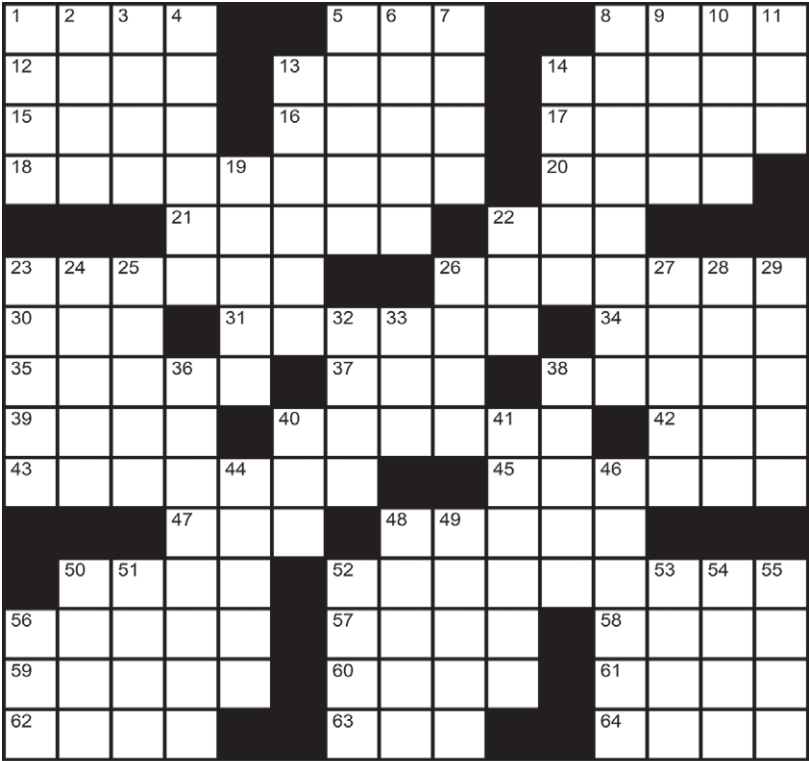
- ACROSS**
- Soothing concoction
 - *The Magic School ride
 - Mama's husband
 - Dwarf buffalo
 - Moneyed one
 - "M*A*S*H" extra
 - Soon, to Shakespeare
 - Sheltered, nautically
 - *Abacus user, e.g.
 - *School jacket-wearer
 - TV classic "Happy ____"
 - What hoarders do
 - Speech-preventing measure
 - *Pencil end
 - Deep regret
 - Indian restaurant staple
 - What cobblers often do
 - Mother Earth, _____ to Ancient Greeks
 - Embedded design
 - ____ Khan
 - Contending
 - *Don't forget to cross them
 - Plural of flora
 - Rolodex abbr.
 - Sultry or carnal
 - *Rydell High School movie
 - Defensive one on the gridiron
 - Oodles
 - *Some PTA members?

- *It involves elements
- Cuban dance
- Burkina Faso neighbor
- Opera solo
- Boot-shaped European country
- Oil org.
- Review a service
- Say "No!"
- Animal's nose
- Perceives with an eye

- DOWN**
- Jezebel's idol
 - Beheaded Boleyn
 - Plunder
 - Certain rays
 - Plural of #1 Across
 - Part of an eye, pl.
 - Witnessed
 - *Field of education
 - ____ Walker, American Girl doll
 - *Inspiration for circular charts, pl.
 - Acronym, abbr.
 - Zimbabwe's capital
 - Address to a woman

- Nail salon file
- Toothpaste type
- *Marks in English
- Hindu queen
- "Hannah and Her Sisters" director
- End of line
- Yogurt-based dip
- *Opposite side over hypotenuse, pl.
- Bald symbol
- *____ monitor
- Bigheadedness
- *All-school get-together
- Giuseppe ____ of opera fame
- Temporary craze
- Parthenogenetic
- Recant or retract
- *English homework, pl.
- *Circle, e.g.
- Paparazzi's target
- Remote control option
- Middle Eastern sultanate
- "Follow me!"
- Genealogy plant
- Agitate
- Puppy barks
- Antonym of keep

The solution to puzzle #0825 will run in the Sept. 1 issue.



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SNPJ FRATERNAL HONOREES

Members celebrating 50, 60, 70 and 80 years with the Slovene National Benefit Society

by JOSEPH C. EVANISH
SNPJ National President/CEO

Of the 2,000 life insurance companies and fraternal benefit societies operating in the United States, fewer than 100 have been in existence as long as the SNPJ. As a not-for-profit fraternal benefit society, we have successfully provided life insurance to our members since 1904, along with a full package of social, athletic and cultural programs, scholarships, community service projects, and much more. SNPJ also offers annuities that can be used for IRAs and Roth IRAs.

Our more than 115 years of longevity and success have been made possible by the loyalty and dedication of our members. The SNPJ's engine may have been built and its direction set by its founders and subsequent leaders, but its path has been traveled, cleared and paved by our dedicated members.

As a way to show respect and appreciation to our longtime and loyal members, we recognize mem-

bership milestones with a custom gift. The years of membership are counted in terms of adult membership years, not including youth enrollment years. These milestones of recognition include 50, 60, 70 and 80 years of adult membership.

We ask our Fraternal Honorees, once they have received their awards from the Society, to submit a short report on their past and present lifestyle, including their Lodge affiliation, hobbies and any other information that might be of interest to our readers.

In acknowledging these dedicated members, it is our privilege to show respect for these honorees by offering our thanks and appreciation for the loyalty they have shown the SNPJ for so many years. In this small way, through our official SNPJ publication, we can etch their names even deeper into the archives of the Slovene National Benefit Society.

On behalf of the entire membership, we extend our congratulations to those members reaching these anniversary milestones.

• **Sis. CHERYL DeFIGIO**, a member of Lodge 106 in Imperial, Pa., celebrated her SNPJ 60-year membership anniversary in May. In a note of appreciation addressed to SNPJ National President/CEO Joseph C. Evanish, she writes:

"Thank you so much for acknowledging my 60-year membership with the special pen. I have always been proud of my affiliation with the SNPJ.

"The organization was a big part of my family's life as I was growing up. My grandfather, Jakob Zitko Sr., was a Lodge officer at one time, and my uncle, Frank, played Santa Claus at the Christmas programs.

"I am especially proud that my uncle, Edward Zitko, was instrumental in having the SNPJ headquarters located in Imperial. The building has been named after him in recognition of his effort. I have fond memories of holidays and dances spent at the old SNPJ building during my youth.

"Since those days, I raised my family away from the Pittsburgh area and have not been able to participate in the SNPJ offerings. As a retiree, I look back on a career as a biology teacher, potter and administrator. Currently, I volunteer for cultural and political

Sis. CHERYL DeFIGIO
FROM PREVIOUS COLUMN

activities, and enjoy gardening and traveling the world.

"In the early 1900s, the SNPJ was a haven for immigrants, such as my grandparents. I will always be grateful for the services and sense of community it offered them as they transitioned to their new life in America. May the SNPJ continue to thrive in the future."

Sis. CHERYL DeFIGIO
Imperial, Pa., Lodge 106
Bridgeville, PA

• Girard, Kan., Lodge 225 member **Sis. ANNA M. LOMSHEK** celebrated her 50-year SNPJ membership anniversary in March. In a note of appreciation addressed to National President Joseph C. Evanish, she writes:

"Thank you so much for the 50-year SNPJ pin.

"I was born in 1951 in Edison (Edison), Kan., the daughter of Joseph and Frances Pecnik, and was raised in Pittsburg, Kan. My parents immigrated from Yugoslavia, now Slovenia, from the Skofja Loka area, in 1950.

"I graduated from St. Marys-Colgan High School in 1969, and from the Mt. Carmel School of



Sis. CHERYL DeFIGIO (106)

Sis. ANNA LOMSHEK
FROM PREVIOUS COLUMN

Nursing in Pittsburg in 1973. I married Jerry D. Lomshek, who is also an SNPJ member, in May 1974. I worked as a registered nurse for many years and retired five years ago. We have three children and 10 grandchildren, all of whom are members of SNPJ. We've visited Slovenia, where we have numerous relatives, many times.

"Thank you again for recognizing my 50-year membership."

Sis. ANNA M. LOMSHEK
Girard, Kan., Lodge 225
Chicopee, KS

A summer picnic on the Lodge 581 August schedule

by MARCIA KLANCER BLEGGI
Lodge 581 Secretary/Treasurer

ST. MARYS, Pa. — The SNPJ Lodge 581 and North Central Pennsylvania Slovene Polka Boosters joint picnic is planned Sunday, Aug. 17, from 2 to 6 p.m. at the Kersey Fireman's in Kersey, Pa. This year, the Polka Classics from Pittsburgh will be providing entertainment. The meal will include lasagna, barbecued chicken, parsley potatoes, broccoli, salad and cake.

Admission for members is \$15, non-members will be charged \$25; drinks are extra. The meal will be served at 4 p.m. For reservations, contact Pat Moore at (814) 598-2269.

Be sure to bring an item for the Chinese auction. Lodge 581 will be donating four poticas for the auction. We hope to see you at the picnic.

Bring your friends – the picnic is always a wonderful time!

Lodge 581 will hold a quarterly meeting on Sunday, Aug. 31, starting at 12:30 p.m. at the Wildwoods in St. Marys. All SNPJ members are invited to attend the meeting. Following the meeting, Larry Lewicki from Olean, N.Y., will perform from 2 to 5 p.m. The dance is open to the public.

If you are planning your dance schedule for September, the Polka Boosters have dances scheduled Sept. 7, 14 and 21. Check the North Central Pennsylvania Slovene Polka Boosters Facebook page for more details.

For more information about SNPJ Lodge 581 activities, contact Marcia Klancer Bleggi at (814) 335-4983.

Spartans Lodge 576 picnic at the SNPJ Farm includes Lou Novak Balina Tournament

by LINDA GORJUP
Lodge 576 Secretary/Treasurer

CLEVELAND — Come one, come all, to the SNPJ Farm on Sunday, Aug. 10, for the Spartans Lodge 576 summer picnic. What better way to spend a Sunday afternoon, seeing old friends and making new friends.

We're hoping and praying for a beautiful summer day with no rain or humidity. Last year we had to cancel our picnic due to massive thunderstorms and no electricity. C'mon, Lou – bring us a great day!

The gates at the Farm open at 1 p.m. The gate fee is \$8 for adults; children age 16 and under are admitted free of charge.

Food service begins at 2 p.m. with the SNPJ Farm Ladies Auxiliary at the helm. Our delicious menu choices consist of stuffed cabbage (by chef Betty Young) or Slovenian sausage dinners. All dinners include two sides (Slovenian potatoes, sauerkraut or salad), dinner roll and butter, krofe, and a cup of coffee. We will also have several a la carte items for purchase as well. You can wet your whistle by bellying up to the bar to cool off.

From 3 to 7 p.m. you can enjoy all of your favorite Slovenian polkas and waltzes performed by Joe Novak & Friends. Please remember that the SNPJ Farm is a *cash-only* venue!

We are continuing with our Lou Novak Balina Tournament starting at 1 p.m. All are welcome to participate, so grab your friends and family and let's have a rolling good time. Teams will consist of four members; the entry fee is \$20 per team or \$5 as a single player (we'll make a team for you). You can register to play in advance or on the day of the tournament by contacting Karen at (216) 965-3181 or Linda at (216) 650-1279.

As in the past, we will hold a basket drawing with proceeds going to rebuilding the balina courts, which was a dream of Lou Novak. So let's come out to the SNPJ Farm on Aug. 10 for a fun-filled day.

The Spartans Lodge will host a casino bus trip in November. Watch *PROSVETA* for the date and location.

Happy birthday wishes go out to Donna Sebusch (April 4), Lauren Sebusch (May 22), Sammi Caronite (June 8), Christian Thomey (July 3) and Patty C (July 26). Happy anniversary wishes are extended to Charlie and Toni Thomey – and congratulations to the newly wed Mr. and Mrs. Sal Caronite.

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Rec Center Cabin Renovation Donations for the month of June 2025

Elaine Cropper (158), Avondale, Ariz. \$500 <i>In memory of Linda Hlebak</i>	Eti Kontel Zangrando (715), Pittsburgh \$50 <i>In memory of Anna Evanish</i>	Archie & Aggie Engel (138), Canonsburg, Pa... \$25 <i>In memory of Kenny "K-Matt" Mavrich</i>
Barb Wojtila (158), Mentor, Ohio \$100 <i>In memory of the Kochevar and Wojtila families</i>	David & Peggy Cushman (138), Houston, Pa... \$25 <i>In memory of Robert Zagar</i>	Cathy Kalenits (776), Poland, Ohio \$20 <i>In memory of Anna Evanish</i>
Joan Proto (6), Pittsburgh \$100 <i>In memory of the Proto family</i>		

SNPJ National Balina Tournament

WOMEN: Saturday, Aug. 30, 2025

MEN: Sunday, Aug. 31, 2025

at the SNPJ Recreation Center, Borough of SNPJ, Pa.

Name	Lodge Number
1.	
2.	
3.	
4.	
Team name _____ Team captain's name, phone number & e-mail address: _____	

\$20 per team entry fee for men's and women's competition.

ENTRY DEADLINE is Aug. 22, 2025

Return this form, along with entry fees, to:
SNPJ Recreation Center
270 Martin Rd., Enon Valley, PA 16120
Phone: 1-877-767-5732

Make checks payable to SNPJ

Tournament Secretary:
Denny Brand, SNPJ District 2 Athletic Director
e-mail: dhbrand3517@gmail.com

The Home Office will verify all memberships.

SNPJ National Bean Bag Toss Tournament

MEN/CO-ED: Saturday, Aug. 30, 2025, starting at 3 p.m.

WOMEN: Sunday, Aug. 31, 2025, starting at 3 p.m.

at the SNPJ Recreation Center, Borough of SNPJ, Pa.

Select Entry Division:
Men's/Co-ed ☐ Women's ☐

Name	Lodge No.
1. (Team 1 captain)	
2.	
1. (Team 2 captain)	
2.	
Team 1 captain's name, phone number & e-mail address: _____	
Team 2 captain's name, phone number & e-mail address: _____	

Entry Fee: \$10 per two-man team

Return this form, along with entry fees, to:
SNPJ Recreation Center
270 Martin Rd., Enon Valley, PA 16120
Phone: 1-877-767-5732

Make checks payable to SNPJ

Tournament Secretary:
Jason Cadez, SNPJ District 1 Athletic Director
e-mail: cadez138@gmail.com

The SNPJ Home Office will verify all memberships.

dp

Traditional Apiary,
Stična, Slovenia,
19th century

Simončič's Hayrack,
Bistrica, Slovenia, 1936

Damjan Popelar's

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scale-model reproductions
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SNPJ fraternal sympathies

Sis. KATHERINE F. MIKESKA • LODGE 715 •

UNIVERSAL, Pa. — The members of Lodge 715 sadly report the March 19, 2025, passing of Sis. Katherine F. Mikeska, 104. Katherine was an Honorary SNPJ Member, having outlived her SNPJ life insurance policy in November 2016.

Sis. Mikeska was born July 27, 1920, in Canton, Ohio, a daughter of the late Louis and Lena Monsanty. She lived a vibrant life marked by her deep love for family, community, and the joys that brought people together.

From 1959-1972, Katherine was the proud owner of Kay’s Candies where she showed her skill for crafting sweet treats. She created joyful memories for countless families, embodying the warmth and spirit of a true entrepreneur. She then went on to work at Davis Candies, and upon retirement worked in the family business well into her late 80s.

In addition to her SNPJ membership, she was also a member of St. Francis of Assisi. She loved attending local Italian festivals and was an avid reader.

Katherine could often be found dancing the polka at the Polish Club into her final years. Her lively spirit and style were a true testament to her zest for life. From every holiday feast meticulously prepared in her kitchen to the comfort she provided as the family’s cornerstone, she was the steadfast glue that held the family together, embodying strength and boundless love.

Katherine was preceded in death by her parents; her husband, Frank J. Mikeska; a son, Frank D. Mikeska; a grandson, Shannon Mikeska; and siblings Rudy, Johnny and Gloria.

She is survived by her sister, Delores Vanderwall; her devoted bonus daughter and best friend, Sharon Mikeska; a daughter-in-law, Pamela Mikeska; two grandchildren, Melanie (Kim) Mikeska and Davena (Scott) Howell; five great grandchildren; and several nieces, nephews, and their extended families.

Funeral services for Sis. Mikeska were held March 29 at Reed Funeral Home, Canton Chapel. Interment followed in Forest Hill Cemetery, Canton.

On behalf of the members of Lodge 715 and the Slovene National Benefit Society, we extend our condolences to Sis. Mikeska’s family, relatives and friends on their loss.

Sis. JANICE A. MARTINCIC • LODGE 138 •

STRABANE, Pa. — The members of Lodge 138 sadly report the April 15, 2025, passing of Sis. Janice A. Martincic, 76, of Harrisville, Pa., formerly of Meadowlands, Pa., in PAM Health Specialty Hospital, Oakdale, Pa., with her family at her side.

Sis. Martincic was born March 31, 1949, in Canonsburg, Pa., a daughter of the late Frank and Olga (Piechnik) Martincic. Janice was a 1967 graduate of Chartiers-Houston High School. Following high school, she went to work for Fairmont Supply, retiring in 2011 after 43 years of service.

A 58-year SNPJ Lodge 138 member, she was also a member of Holy Trinity National Catholic Church in Washington, Pa.

Surviving are two brothers, Frank (Wanda) Martincic of Meadowlands and Wesley Martincic of Canonsburg; three nephews; a niece; and several great-nieces and great-nephews.

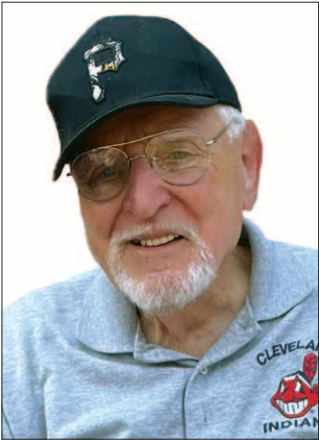
All services were private. On behalf of the members of Lodge 138 and the Slovene National Benefit Society, we offer our condolences to Sis. Martincic’s family, relatives and friends on their loss.

BRO. ALFRED A. SAVARN • LODGE 158 •

EUCLID, Ohio—The Savarn family and the members of Lodge 158 sadly report the April 18, 2025, passing of Bro. Alfred A. Savarn, 87, of Saybrook, Ohio, at Sycamore Run Nursing and Rehabilitation Center.

Bro. Savarn was born Dec. 23, 1937, the only son of the late Anthony and Hedie (Skerly) Savorn of Cheswick, Pa. After graduating from Springdale High School in 1955, Al joined the Air Force and served as a C-124 cargo plane mechanic, traveling all over the globe until 1959. He then worked at Zagar Tool in Euclid as a tool and die maker for 30-plus years.

Al enjoyed the customs of his Slovenian heritage: polka music and dancing, sausage and sauerkraut, balina, bowling leagues and golf tournaments. A 69-year SNPJ member, he was very active in Loyalites Lodge 158. He was also an active member of the former Club 59’ers and the Euclid Slovenian Men’s Club. He loved parties, traveling to visit friends and family, telling jokes and being a “prankster.”



Bro. ALFRED A. SAVARN (158)

He tended bar and booked polka bands for Frankie Kramer at Kramer’s Lounge/The Spotlight, and also for Simcic’s Tavern. For many years his local “Cheers” hangout was Cebar’s in Euclid.

For several years he served as commodore for Wildwood Yacht Club. He loved going out on his boat fishing for perch and walleye in Lake Erie and Canada. He made his own lures which were the envy of many. His other hobbies were visiting his local gun club and gardening.

Lovingly known as “Pittsburgh Al” to his many close friends, he was an avid Pittsburgh sports fan, loving football, baseball and hockey. His wish for Cleveland friends is for them to win a Super Bowl before the Steelers win their next one!

Al loved annual Air Force reunions with the “Flyboys” from his company. In a local Memorial Day newspaper issue, Al was quoted saying, “I was very fortunate to serve. It’s really something to see and be with these guys, and to honor them.” He was a longtime member of Ashtabula American Legion, VFW and Geneva Eagles.

For the last eight years, the highlight of his life was serving in the Military Honor Guard at Western Reserve National Cemetery in Rittman, Ohio, through the Polish Legion of American Veterans, George Washington Post 31, where he was a past commander. He will be remembered for his fun-loving spirit, faithful service and generous heart.

Al was preceded in death by his sister, Valerie (Joseph) Krall, and his beloved partner of 32 years, Joanne Skaggs.

He was Uncle Al to Linda Krall, Dan (Lisa) Krall, Judi (Bob) Kohlbacher and John (Stacey) Krall. He was a great-uncle to 11 nieces and nephews, and had a great-great-niece and nephew. He was loved and adored by many cousins and extended family, especially

his uncle, Henry Skerly; his aunt, Olga; and their daughters, Norene Henderson and Debbie Rooney.

The family expresses a special thank you to some of Al’s closest friends who provided continued support: Sue and Dennis Gargiulo, Phil and Donna Yan, Greg Volpe, and Rich Harwood.

Private interment was in Western Reserve National Cemetery, Rittman, Ohio, with a Military Honor Guard.

On behalf of the members of Lodge 158 and the Slovene National Benefit Society, we offer our condolences to Bro. Savarn’s family, relatives and friends on their loss.

Sis. DOROTHY M. KURRENT • LODGE 604 •

CLEVELAND — The Kurrent family and the members of Lodge 604 sadly report the June 13, 2025, passing of Sis. Dorothy M. (Ogrinc) Kurrent, 102, at the Slovene Home for the Aged in Cleveland.

Sis. Kurrent was born Nov. 9, 1922, the daughter of the late Ludwig and Mary (Cesnik) Ogrinc, and grew up with her late brother, Ronald, in the Collinwood neighborhood of Cleveland. She spent her childhood roller skating, riding her bike and reading.

Dorothy would often meet her grandfather, Paul Cesnik, after his work at the Collinwood Railroad Yards and walk him home. On school breaks or during the weekend, she would spend time on the family farm with her grandmother, Barbara.

How can you grieve for someone who lived 102 years? Dorothy lived a life full of love, laughter and fun. She had a lifelong love of nature, spending time exploring the farm, watching butterflies or admiring daffodils in the spring. Music was a big part of Dorothy’s life too, be it singing in the kitchen with the family or as a member of the Jadran Slovenian Singing Society.

Enrolled as a youth member of the former SNPJ Lodge 53 in 1927, Dorothy became an adult member of the former Lodge 614 in 1940 at the age of 18 and was a member for 84 years. She outlived her SNPJ life insurance policy and was recognized as an Honorary Member in November 2023.

Dorothy met her husband, Joseph, at a dance at the Slovenian Workman’s Home on Waterloo Road in the Collinwood neighborhood. Married for over 70 years, they raised



Sis. DOROTHY M. KURRENT (604)

three sons, James, David and Stephen Kurrent.

Her family includes granddaughters Megan Fargnoli and Amanda Kurrent, and step-granddaughter Judie Morton; and great-grandchildren Jarrod Perkins and Caitlyn and Thomas Fargnoli, and step-great-grandchildren William and Westley Morton. Extended family includes her sister-in-law, Arlene Ogrinc, as well as several generations of cousins and many friends.

Family was always important to Dorothy, as were crossword puzzles, cards, singing, or gently teasing anyone she cared for. Dorothy often said she was lucky to have the family she had. She was very proud of her Slovenian heritage, be it making potica or strudel, or reading the latest issue of PROSVETA.

As a fitting end to her long life, Dorothy was able to share her last afternoon with

her three sons. During the visit, her boys sang to Dorothy, said goodbye, and made sure she knew how much she was loved. She passed peacefully and quietly the next morning.

Waiting to have that special moment together one final time with her sons is all you need to know about Dorothy. Her sharp wit and gentle humor never faded, nor did her voice, especially when singing “You Are My Sunshine.”

The family would like to thank the wonderful and caring staff of the Slovene Home for the Aged, as well as the staff from Hospice of the Western Reserve, for making her final years comfortable and full of love and laughs.

So, you see, you really can’t grieve someone like Dorothy because she lived a full and wonderful life. To celebrate her memory and her love of nature, take a moment to look at the clouds in the sky, take a moment to smell a flower, or take a moment to listen to the song of a bird, for that’s how to forever remember Dorothy. Mom, you are our sunshine, always.

To honor Dorothy, the family asks you to consider a gift to the Slovene Home for the Aged, 18621 Neff Rd., Cleveland, OH 44119.

On behalf of the members of Lodge 604 and the Slovene National Benefit Society, we extend our sympathies to Sis. Kurrent’s family, relatives and friends on their loss.

DEATHS REPORTED
For the month of June 2025

LODGE	NAME	DATE OF DEATH	CITY, STATE
A02	Edna R. Roberts	04-24-2025	Warminster, Pa.
6	Keith J. Kovalic	05-07-2025	Georgetown, Pa.
6	Albert H. Saussol	05-10-2025	McDonald, Pa.
6	Cynthia A. Dolinar	04-13-2025	Bridgeville, Pa.
33	Carole M. Zappie	06-12-2025	Aliquippa, Pa.
89	Mary Diamond	06-01-2025	Burgettstown, Pa.
89	Kenneth W. McElhane Jr.	06-10-2025	Southview, Pa.
106	Cecelia Lee Yarosz	04-19-2025	Coraopolis, Pa.
138	Thomas E. Hartzog Jr.	04-17-2025	Washington, Pa.
158	Florence D. Dezelon	05-26-2025	Mentor, Ohio
158	Jeffrey A. Volpe	04-08-2025	Landenberg, Pa.
158	Marilyn Vidmar	05-31-2025	Wickliffe, Ohio
158	Nada A. Kustis	12-12-2024	Columbus, Ohio
158	Alfred A. Savarn	04-18-2025	Ashtabula, Ohio
216	Gene C. Skarja	05-08-2025	Pittsburgh, Pa.
225	Jaxen Lee Bird	05-06-2025	Pittsburg, Kan.
371	Robert K. Lickar	01-31-2025	Mayer, Ariz.
449	Seng O. Chanthachone	04-10-2025	Elgin, Ill.
518	George M. Szabo	05-02-2025	Port St. Lucie, Fla.
518	Josephine M. Gillespie	12-14-2024	Southgate, Mich.
518	Paul J. Renko	04-06-2025	Brownstown Twp., Mich.
559	Robert Goste	05-09-2025	Downers Grove, Ill.
564	Robert Stefanich	02-13-2024	Fruitport, Mich.
581	John E. Bizzak	03-29-2025	James City, Pa.
581	Mary T. Majewski	05-25-2025	Swoyersville, Pa.
584	Marlene F. Burn	01-22-2025	White Bear Lake, Minn.
584	Albina J. Opeka	05-25-2025	Beach Park, Ill.
629	Loretta Kuzins	05-27-2025	Trafford, Pa.
715	Edwin H. Taylor	03-10-2025	Easton, Md.
715	John Kraynak	05-27-2025	Youngstown, Ohio
715	Helen Haney	06-08-2025	Monroeville, Pa.
749	Ida E. Millward	02-20-2020	Clover, S.C.
749	Agnes T. Ceslovnik	06-14-2025	Johnstown, Pa.
770	Anna Byers Fox	05-12-2025	Enon Valley, Pa.
776	Amanda L. Guiste	05-07-2025	Grove City, Pa.
782	Susan J. Bozich	05-21-2025	Hixson, Tenn.
782	Norman R. Cracraft	05-25-2025	Bessemer, Pa.
782	Beverly Ann Umek	05-21-2025	Harwick, Pa.
782	Rita V. Weiss	05-13-2025	Medford, N.J.
782	Helen M. Cavanaugh	05-31-2025	Gibsonia, Pa.
782	Charlene H. Smarick	03-05-2025	Lower Burrell, Pa.

KAREN A. PINTAR
National Secretary/COO

PROSVETA Crossword
THE 4TH OF JULY (#0725) solution

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PROSVETA 2025 Publication Dates

JANUARY 2025

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Several soups were offered for the “Taste of Slovenian Soups” served during the Indianapolis SNH celebration of Slovenian Independence Day in June.

Indy Lodge 34 prepares for upcoming SNH activities

by JERRY WATSON
Lodge 34 Secretary/Treasurer

INDIANAPOLIS — *Dober dan!* On June 21, SNPJ Lodge 34 was well represented at the Slovenian National Home (SNH) celebration of Slovenian Independence Day. Lodge officers were busy with the “Taste of Slovenian Soups.” I made *močnik* (dumpling); *bučna juha* (pumpkin) and *goveja rezanci* (beef noodle) were also available. The overwhelming response was great, and the soups brought back many memories of “grandma made soup like that.” The krofi that our Lodge provided were also enjoyed by many. Lodge members held their second quarterly meeting on June 28 at the SNH. At that meeting, it was approved that our Lodge would sponsor two holes in the SNH golf outing. Two of our Lodge officers, Jozef and Jennifer, participated in the outing. It was also approved that our Lodge would provide 200 krofi for the Aug. 31 Slovenski Fest at the SNH. SNPJ member Vince Rigler and his band will be performing at Slovenski Fest, which will make it extra special this year. Please come and enjoy the fun. Our next quarterly meeting will be held Sept. 26 starting at 7 p.m. at the SNH. Our Lodge will be providing the Friday night dinner. If you would like to help, it would be appreciated. We hope to see you at Slovenski Fest or at our September meeting.



Lodge 34 Vice President **JOZEF WATSON** readies to tee off at one of the holes sponsored by Lodge 34 for the SNH golf outing.

Her reign concluded, Miss SNPJ 2025 looking ahead

by ERIN LAWRENCE (138)
Miss SNPJ 2025

STRABANE, Pa. — As the 42nd Slovenefest came to a close, so too did my reign as Miss SNPJ 2025. What an unforgettable journey it has been, supplying me with a lifetime of memories. This year has left an indelible mark on my heart, and I’m so honored to have had the opportunity to serve the SNPJ. People often say, “When one door shuts, another door opens,” but to me, it doesn’t feel like this door is closing – it feels like this path is branching off into a new chapter. Serving as Miss SNPJ has taught me that this journey is more than just having fun with friends and family; it’s about growing a deeper love for our culture, building community, and sharing that love everywhere we go. Reflecting on this past year, I still remember the anticipation and nervousness I felt the moment before being crowned. At the time, I couldn’t fully grasp the life-changing journey that awaited me. When the time came for Miss SNPJ 2024 (and one of my best friends) Morgan Sinan to pass the crown to me, I knew the year ahead was truly going to be something special. Each experience has now become some of my favorite stories to tell, and I would like to thank everyone who welcomed me to their events and Lodges. I was lucky enough to have been able to spend my first event as Miss SNPJ at my home Lodge for the annual Duck Race. Nostalgia was pulsing through me as I walked through the event, knowing that the little girl who grew up there is now walking through with a whole new purpose and perspective. I was also invited back to my Lodge to join them, doing what I do best, for the National Bowling Tournament! I would like to mention the best fraternal team, in my opinion, that I had the pleasure of bowling alongside: Daniella Volpe, Morgan Sinan and Lexy Trout. Thank you to all of the Lodges that welcomed me to events throughout the year: to Lodge 6 in Sygan, Pa., for celebrating the 120th anniversary of their Lodge and the SNPJ; to Lodge 603 in Samsula, Fla., for the invitation to Florida SNPJ Days; to the SNPJ Farm in Kirtland, Ohio, for the invitation to the Slovenian Sausage Festival; to the Polka Hall of Fame for allowing me to present at the Polka Music Awards Show; and to the SNPJ Recreation Center for hosting the annual National SNPJ Days. A special shout-out to Lodge 564 in Detroit for introducing me to one of my new favorite activities, feather bowling! To further explain, imagine balina, but instead of a pill ball, you use a feather that is stationary, and instead of balls you are using a medium-sized wooden cheese wheel. The catch is, the lane you are throwing on is concave, making you play strategic shots. It was so fascinating and such a fun game! Another highlight of my year as Miss SNPJ was attending Kurentovanje, a parade held in Cleveland. This experience was unlike any other as we marched the street that was flooded with the SNPJ community, surrounded by Kurents whose job it was to scare away winter. As cold as it was, the community who attended warmed my heart. Each event I attended brought me so much joy, and I will carry these memories with me forever. Representing this organization has been one of the greatest honors of my life. But I couldn’t have done any of this without the best support system I know. To our leadership, President Joe Evanish and Secretary Karen Pintar, thank you for being the greatest backbone of the SNPJ. You are among my biggest supporters, and I’m so grateful to have been able to grow up knowing you. To the women behind the Miss SNPJ Pageant – Daniella Volpe, Liz Smrdel, Morgan Sinan, Shannon Muraco and Kristen Barnot – thank you for your dedication, guidance and kindness. Your encouragement meant the world to me throughout this journey. And to Courtney Koenig, thank you, so deeply, from the bottom of my heart for cornering me in Shop ’n Save just before the deadline to enter the pageant last year and convincing me to do it. I heavily believe that coincidentally running into you in a grocery store that day was fate. Your support from that day forward carried me through this experience, and I am so grateful to have you in my life. To my amazing family, my aunts, uncles and cousins who have always loved and cared for me, thank you for being my constant cheerleaders. I am so lucky to have grown up surrounded by such unwavering love and support. To my brother, Robert, and his girlfriend, Lauren, you are my best friends. Thank you for always having faith in me and sharing in my joy. Grammy and Pap, Rose and Bob Lawrence, thank you for passing down this beautiful legacy. You are my biggest inspiration, and I love you both immensely! Mom and dad, Jan and Bob, thank you for growing me to be the person I am today. I have been blessed with the



ERIN LAWRENCE (138)
Miss SNPJ 2025

most amazing, caring, loving parents anyone could ever ask for. Thank you for joining me at almost every event I went to this past year, and watching me grow in this heritage. I love you both more than words can describe. I would also like to honor the memory of the late Kevin Richards, a man whose fraternal spirit was unmatched. He embodied everything the SNPJ stands for, and I strive to carry forward that same passion and heart in everything I do. And to the lovely ladies who entered the pageant this year – Lauren Hudson (564), our Miss Activity 2026 Lexy Trout (6), Juli Kurta (715), and our Miss Talent and Miss Fraternalism Jami Meglich (604) – I am so insanely proud of all of you for putting yourself out there and showing the SNPJ what you got. Slovenefest weekend was one of the best weekends ever, and I’m so blessed to have formed a beautiful sisterhood with all of you. Never forget how special this experience was. Finally, I want to congratulate our new Miss SNPJ 2026, Ellen Koci (786). Ellie, you are so wonderful. I know you will carry this legacy with love and pride throughout your reign this year. I’m so proud of you. You will make an excellent Miss SNPJ! Take in every moment, live it to the fullest, and learn from every experience. This year has shown me that we, the youth, are the future of the SNPJ. Our energy, our involvement, and our voices are what will carry this organization forward. I will never stop sharing stories from this chapter of my life. Being Miss SNPJ wasn’t just a title; it was a life lesson, a growth experience, and a celebration of my heritage. So to anyone out there standing on the edge of a decision – take the leap. Life is far too short not to. You may just find yourself on the most beautiful path imaginable. Thank you all for the endless support along this wonderful journey. I am so honored to say goodbye for one final time as Miss SNPJ 2025.

Their summer break over, Samsula Lodge 603 resumes meeting schedule

by JEANNETTE HUMPHREY
Lodge 603

SAMSULA, Fla. — SNPJ Lodge 603 in beautiful downtown Samsula has been on “vacation” for a few months, with no meetings scheduled in June, July and August. This break has given us some time for needed repairs to be completed at the Lodge hall. The new fire suppression system has been installed under the direction of John and Rhonda Tesauro, along with some repairs to the exterior of the building. Hannah Jones worked to clean up and organize the bar area. Jordan Tomazin added some driveway sod which was donated by Sula Sod. Pressure washing of the entrance way was completed by Jennifer Babb. The Samsula Woman’s Club donated \$500 to the Lodge hall. Stuart and Lisa Sixma donated a new money box for the bar. We appreciate everyone who helps out. We had such a nice polka festival in February, and welcomed Miss SNPJ 2025 Erin Lawrence from Pennsylvania. Erin and her parents, SNPJ National Treasurer Robert Lawrence and his wife, Jan, were also in attendance. Erin did an outstanding job promoting SNPJ during her reign. While visiting our Lodge, she helped with the drawings and extended fraternal greetings to all in attendance. We were fortunate once again to have SNPJ National Secretary Karen Pintar in attendance. During the Saturday program, Karen spoke about SNPJ and presented our Lodge with a \$200 check from the Home Office for our continued activities. We also welcomed quite a few visitors from Pennsylvania who always come to support our festival. Congratulations to Ellen Koci from California who was crowned Miss SNPJ 2026. We look forward to meeting her at Florida SNPJ Days next February. At our May meeting, appreciation was extended to Dr. Ashley Benedict of Gainesville, Fla., for her generous donations to our polka festival. Ashley also served as chairwoman for our Easter dinner, which brought in a profit of \$900. She had several members helping with the Easter dinner. Angela Bronbold of Michigan donated several Easter baskets that were awarded as prizes for the Easter egg hunt. Our Lodge provided money-filled eggs for the children to find. Our Lodge extends sympathy to Ray and Paula Budd and their family as Ray’s father Larry passed away following

an extended illness. A celebration of Ray’s life, and the life of Ray’s mother Joyce, was held in June at Spruce Creek Baptist Church. Get well wishes go out to past president Joe Benedict III who underwent shoulder surgery. He is now healed and doing well. Paulette Smithmeyer had a knee replacement and is doing well. Glenn Farmer, who underwent heart surgery, and is back at work and doing very well. Marshall Massey had extensive ankle surgery several months ago, and is still recuperating and taking physical therapy to help him heal. Get well wishes also go out to Dede Pleterski who is recuperating from a fractured femur. Bill Tomazin welcomed another great-grandson, Cash Woods Tomazin, who was born in May. Marge and John Ferreira welcomed their first grandchild, Weston Tomazin Ferreira, born June 12. Sara and Steve Brown of Double Oaks, Texas, have made several trips to Samsula to visit Sara’s father, Jack Pleterski, who also welcomed a great-granddaughter to the family this year. Mac and Barbara Turberville welcomed a great-grandson, Landon Hunter. They were happy to make a trip to Ohio to see the newborn. Congratulations to all!



Dr. ASHLEY BENEDICT (third from left) welcomed SNPJ National Treasurer/CFO **ROBERT LAWRENCE**, Miss SNPJ 2025 **ERIN LAWRENCE** and **JAN LAWRENCE** to Florida SNPJ Days hosted by Samsula Lodge 603 in February.



SNPJ members and friends from the northern states enjoy the sunshine and the hospitality of Lodge 603 members during the annual Florida SNPJ Days festivities.

We still have members who haven’t sent in their Lodge dues for the year. Dues are \$10 per year; payment should be sent to Ruth Benedict, 3605 Darby Rd., New Smyrna Beach, FL 32168. Congratulations to Kathy Hammond, Charlene Hutchinson, Marina Dyett and Ann Heasley who are celebrating 50-year SNPJ membership anniversaries this year; to 60-year members Joann Weaver and Margaret Rodgers; and to 70-year members Edward Smith and Rose Sloan. The Home Office sent congratulatory letters and awards to each honoree. Our next Lodge meeting is scheduled Monday, Sept. 8, starting at 7 p.m.; a covered dish meal will be served at 6:30. A discussion of upcoming holiday events is on the meeting agenda.

2026 Miss SNPJ Titleholders

Miss SNPJ ELLEN KOCI (786)
Miss Activity ALEXIS TROUT (6)
Miss Talent JAMI MEGLICH (604)
Miss Fraternalism JAMI MEGLICH (604)



Miss SNPJ 2026 ELLEN KOCI (786)
with SNPJ National President/CEO Joseph C. Evanish



Miss Activity 2026 ALEXIS TROUT (6)
with SNPJ National Secretary/COO Karen A. Pintar



Miss Talent 2026 JAMI MEGLICH (604)
with SNPJ National Treasurer/CFO Robert Lawrence



Miss Fraternalism 2026 JAMI MEGLICH (604)
with SNPJ Fraternal Director Courtney Koenig

The Society’s newest Miss SNPJ crowned during Slovenefest weekend

MISS SNPJ PAGEANT FROM PAGE 1

tasks. Lauren Hudson of Lodge 564 in Detroit impressed the crowd with a demonstration on how to change a belt on her UTV/side-by-side. Ellen Koci of Lodge 786 in Orange County, Calif., recited a heartfelt original poem.

Each presentation was unique and inspiring; a true testament to the talent and spirit of these young women.

We extend our sincere appreciation to our panel of judges: Dr. Helen McCracken, owner of Pageant Winner Consulting and former superintendent at two Western Pennsylvania school districts; Elissa McCracken, Miss Ohio 2012; and Samantha Roth, Miss Red Rose City 2025. The judges scored contestants in categories that included poise and appearance in an evening gown, personality and communication, talent, and extracurricular/community service.

Additional points were awarded based on SNPJ activity, reviewed by the Executive Committee through submitted Miss Activity forms and personal interviews. Special thanks to National President/CEO Joseph C. Evanish, National Secretary/COO Karen Pintar, and National Treasurer/CFO Robert Lawrence for their expertise in the activity division.

I would also like to thank everyone who helped ensure the weekend’s success. David Jones of Jones Creations provided snacks and floral arrangements for the contestants. SNPJ Recreation Center Director Jerry Volpe assisted with stage setup and lighting. Tim Cimperman of Cimperman & Co. Photography captured so many beautiful moments from both the pageant and Slovenefest weekend. R.J. Likovic and his brother, T.J. Likovic, from Lodge 158 assisted with audio needs; and Kenna McCormack, along with Amelia Lawrence, helped the contestants on and off the stage.

A special thanks also goes to Miss SNPJ 2020 Daniella Volpe for her professionalism and energy as our emcee.

Several former Miss SNPJs also returned to help behind the scenes, and I am truly grateful for their support. Thank you to Shannon (Fetcko) Muraco, Miss SNPJ 2006; Kristen (Cushman) Barnot, Miss SNPJ 2013; Liz Smrdel, Miss SNPJ 2019; and Morgan Sinan, Miss SNPJ 2024. Your presence and assistance made a difference.

On Sunday, July 13, the pageant crowning ceremony opened with a moving performance of the Slovenian and U.S. national anthems by Vince Rigler (449). We made sure to recognize the 15 former Miss SNPJs in attendance, each

called to the stage by Miss SNPJ 2025 Erin Lawrence.

Erin then gave her farewell address, an emotional and heartfelt reflection on her year as Miss SNPJ. She highlighted some of her most memorable moments and offered warm wishes to the contestants. Erin has been a shining representative of our Society, and we know she will continue to make us proud in the years ahead.

Following Erin’s address, SNPJ National President Joseph Evanish welcomed and introduced the Consul General of the Republic of Slovenia, Suzana Česarek, who offered a thoughtful greeting to the audience.

One of the most meaningful traditions of the pageant is the awarding of the Miss Fraternalism title, which isn’t based on judges’ scores, but rather selected by the contestants themselves. Each young woman votes for the peer who best exemplifies fraternal spirit and camaraderie. I had the honor of announcing the title of 2026 SNPJ Miss Fraternalism to Jami Meglich (604).

Region 2 Vice President Jason Cadez announced the runner-up to Miss Talent as Ellen Koci (786). National Treasurer/CFO Robert Lawrence then awarded the title of Miss Talent 2026 to Jami Meglich.

Region 1 Vice President Maury Sinan announced Ellen Koci as the runner-up to Miss Activity, followed by National Secretary/COO Karen Pintar announcing Alexis Trout (6) as Miss Activity 2026.

Region 4 Vice President Tina Rigler announced Jami Meglich as the runner-up to Miss SNPJ. Finally, the moment everyone had been waiting for arrived as National President/CEO Joseph Evanish introduced Miss SNPJ 2026 Ellen Koci of Lodge 786.

We are incredibly proud of all five contestants. Their dedication, courage and passion were evident throughout the weekend. Each of them should be proud of the hard work they put in, and the way they represented themselves and our Society.

We look forward to a wonderful year ahead with Ellen Koci as our new Miss SNPJ. Her reign is sure to be filled with meaningful moments and memories.

Finally, thank you to everyone who supported the 67th Miss SNPJ Pageant, whether through donations to the Miss SNPJ Pageant Booster Fund, volunteering your time, or attending the event. Your involvement makes this program possible, and we truly couldn’t do it without you.
Hvala lepa in na svidenje!



The 2025 Miss SNPJ Pageant contestants and members of the Pageant Committee:

[Standing, from left] Miss SNPJ 2019 ELIZABETH SMRDEL (158), JULI KURTA (715), Miss Fraternalism and Miss Talent 2026 JAMI MEGLICH (604), Miss SNPJ 2025 ERIN LAWRENCE (138), LAUREN HUDSON (564), Miss Activity 2026 ALEXIS TROUT (6), and Miss SNPJ 2024 MORGAN SINAN (782).

[Seated, from left] Miss SNPJ 2006 SHANNON FETCKO MURACO (138), Miss SNPJ 2020 DANIELLA VOLPE (158), SNPJ Fraternal Director and Miss SNPJ 2004 COURTNEY PABIAN KOENIG (138), and Miss SNPJ 2013 KRISTEN CUSHMAN BARNOT (138).



Miss SNPJ 2026

Miss SNPJ 2026 ELLEN KOCI is a member of SNPJ Lodge 786 in Orange County, Calif. She is the daughter of Teresa and Kenneth Koci, and the granddaughter of Jean and the late Arnold Koci, and Rosemary and the late Joseph Mlakar Sr. Ellen has been an SNPJ member since birth, born into a family where SNPJ isn’t just a tradition, but a way of life.

Ellen’s parents met through the SNPJ, and her mother, Teresa (Mlakar) Koci, was crowned Miss SNPJ 1989. Her grandfather, Joseph Mlakar Sr., was recently inducted into the Polka Hall of Fame. With deep SNPJ roots on both sides of her family, she was born into a lifelong love of Slovenian culture, service and celebration.

Ellen was an active member of Youth Circle 104 from birth until age 18. During that time she not only participated in Circle activities, but helped organize countless

events. She performed and assisted with youth activities at annual Christmas parties, attended Lodge wine tastings, and every Black Friday she participated in the SNPJ Family Twosome Bowling Tournament. Ellen attended California SNPJ Days every year, and this year she assisted with the California SNPJ Day Revival held in April. She volunteered for the Harvest Festivals and button box club contests held at the former Slovene Hall in Fontana, Calif., a second home throughout her childhood.

As a teenager, Ellen proudly represented her Lodge in the Teens Experience Leadership (TEL) Workshop, forming deep bonds with fellow SNPJ youth members. Once eligible, she became a regular attendee of the Young Adult Conference at the SNPJ Recreation Center. Ellen also assists at Pust celebrations in San Francisco, and she fondly remembers

taking charter bus trips to San Francisco to attend Pust.

Ellen is a proud graduate of Saint Mary’s College, Notre Dame, where she earned both the Presidential Scholarship for Academic Excellence and the Mother Pauline Award for Academic Merit. She made school history as the first nursing student to graduate with three minors, biology, psychology and sociology. She was active outside the classroom as well, participating in the Saint Mary’s College Los Angeles Alumnae Club, the Student Nurses Association, and the Notre Dame Neuroscience Club.

In everything she does, whether organizing a fundraiser, representing her Lodge, volunteering behind the scenes, or simply sharing her heritage, Ellen remains proudly rooted in her Slovenian identity. It has shaped her values, her friendships and her sense of community.