

Call for candidates to the National Athletic Board

by COURTNEY VALENCIC
Fraternal Director

IMPERIAL, Pa. — The SNPJ Fraternal Department is currently accepting nominations for the SNPJ National Athletic Board. This is the body that regulates and manages the Society's athletic programs, tournaments and related activities.

The National Athletic Board is a five-member body that meets twice each year via conference call. The current SNPJ National Athletic Board includes District 1 Director Jason Cadez, District 2 Director Den Brand, District 3 Director David Sankovich, District

4 Director Brad Stroth, and District 6 Director Mary Donovan.

Candidates to the National Athletic Board must be a member of SNPJ in good standing for at least two years. He or she must also have a practical knowledge of the Society's major athletic activities.

Athletic directors play an important role in our Society, are aware of athletic needs in their district, and encourage participation from youth and adults in all areas, from local to national competition. They oversee all regional and national tournaments, and they report their activities at the two Athletic Board meetings.

SNPJ has six athletic districts, which are as follows:

DISTRICT 1: Cambria, Somerset, Luzerne, Fayette, Washington, Westmoreland, and Elk counties in Pennsylvania; and the state of Florida

DISTRICT 2: Allegheny and Beaver counties in Pennsylvania

DISTRICT 3: The Borough of SNPJ and Mercer County in Pennsylvania; and Mahoning, Trumbull, Columbiana, Belmont and Stark counties in Ohio

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A Rec Center Committee member now the Recreation Center Director

by JOSEPH C. EVANISH
SNPJ National President/CEO

IMPERIAL, Pa. — SNPJ is pleased to announce that Megan Spieler has been hired as the new SNPJ Recreation Center Director.

Megan is a longtime member of SNPJ Lodge 782 in Glenshaw, Pa., and is very passionate about the Recreation Center. Her participation in SNPJ activities and programs dates back to her childhood and has continued through adulthood. She and her family have been part of the Recreation Center Trailer Park for decades.

Megan has run her own business for more than 20 years and has past experience working at the Recreation Center. She and her husband Brian have volunteered there on numerous occasions over the years.

Last year she was elected by the SNPJ National Board to serve on the SNPJ Recreation Center Committee; she now takes over the top management position at the SNPJ Recreation Center.

We welcome Megan to this important position and look forward to her leading the Recreation Center team.



MEGAN SPIELER (782), the new director at the SNPJ Recreation Center, started in the position on Jan. 30.

Lodge 786 readies for the second Calif. SNPJ Day Revival in April

by KEN KOCI
Lodge 786

ORANGE COUNTY, Calif. — As winter lingers, plans are heating up for the second California SNPJ Day Revival, set for Saturday, April 11. Last year, people from across California – and beyond – gathered for a vibrant, heartwarming celebration of Slovenian music and fraternalism. This year promises to be just as special.

Get ready to dance once again to the music of local favorites and legends Fred Mlakar, Frank Rote, and friends while enjoying great food, refreshing drinks and wonderful company.

Planning continued at the most recent Orange Coast Lodge 786 meeting on Jan. 25, held at the

home of Fred Mlakar in Irvine, Calif. Members and guests enjoyed a potluck gathering prior to the first Lodge meeting of 2026, and the annual financial audit was successfully completed thanks to auditors Don Milek, Christie Udovch-Gott Dank, and Miss SNPJ 2026 Ellen Koci.

Orange Coast Lodge 786 and Fontana Lodge 723 are proud to co-host this highly anticipated second annual SNPJ Day event at the Phoenix Club, located at 375 W. Central Avenue in Brea, Calif, beginning at 2 p.m. Last year's event sold out, so advance paid reservations are strongly encouraged.

For just \$10 per person, this event offers a

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Lodge 142 joins in the 14th annual Cleveland Kurentovanje festivities

by KARA MARUSZAK
Lodge 142 Vice President

CLEVELAND — SNPJ participated in the 14th annual Cleveland Kurentovanje Festival on Feb. 14 at the Slovenian National Home on St. Clair.

There was no better day to showcase the love that is in every SLOVENIAN. It was a beautiful day, with unseasonably warm temperatures in the 40s (that's a heat wave in Northeast Ohio!) and sunny skies, bringing out a record crowd for the event to chase away any remnants of winter.

This year, SNPJ participated in the parade with two vehicles. Lodge 142 led the group with a

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SNPJ members participating in the 14th annual Cleveland Kurentovanje Festival on Feb. 14.



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briefly

Home Office closed for the Society anniversary

IMPERIAL, Pa. — The SNPJ Home Office will be closed Monday, April 6, in observance of the Society's 122nd anniversary, which we celebrate each year on April 6. Normal office hours, 8 a.m. until 5 p.m., will resume Tuesday, April 7.

Heritage Center sold out of cookbooks temporarily

BOROUGH OF SNPJ, Pa. — The SNPJ Slovenian Heritage Center is currently sold out of the "Cook Eat Slovenia" cookbooks. We will be ordering more copies in the spring for our opening of the 2026 season in May.

KATHY PAULENICH
SNPJ Heritage Center Director

Policy owners, register to access the SNPJ Portal

IMPERIAL, Pa. — The Home Office staff encourages all SNPJ members and agents to register for access to the online SNPJ Portal. The portal can be used by policy owners to review information about their SNPJ life insurance policies and annuities. Agents can use the portal to check on their existing business, pending policies and updates.

To register for the portal, you must access the SNPJ website, snpj.org, and click on any of the "SNPJ Portal" links. You must be a policy owner or an agent to register for the portal. Once enrolled for the SNPJ Portal, members can access policy information that Home Office staff cannot provide over the phone.

We hope you enjoy your SNPJ Portal experience!

THE DEADLINE

The next two *PROSVETA* issue dates are April 1 and May 1. All material must be received by noon on Monday, March 16, for the April 1 issue, and by Monday, April 13, for the May 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.



Hadley Rose Cadez Born Sept. 16, 2024 Strabane, Pa., Lodge 138

Hadley Rose Cadez is the newest member of Strabane Lodge 138. Hadley, a fifth-generation SNPJ member, is the daughter of Chris and Margaret Cadez; sister of Hudson Cadez; granddaughter of Ronald "Buzzard" and Debbie Cadez, Andrew and Polly Maletta, and Darlene Malizio; great-granddaughter of the late Rose and James Cadez, and Patricia Malizio; and great-great-granddaughter of the late John and Mary Cadez, all members of Strabane Lodge 138. We welcome Hadley to the Society and extend best wishes to her entire family.



Call for Candidates SNPJ Recreation Center Committee

This announcement serves as a call to all members interested in serving on the SNPJ Recreation Center Committee. One position for 2½ years of a three-year term will be filled during the March 27, 2026, SNPJ National Board meeting.

- Mileage reimbursement will only be paid up to a 100-mile radius of the SNPJ Recreation Center
- Compensation also includes a \$50 per diem

Resumes for these positions should be forwarded by March 20, 2026, to:

Slovene National Benefit Society

Joseph C. Evanish, National President/CEO
247 West Allegheny Road
Imperial, PA 15126
e-mail: cvalencic@snpj.com

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NATIONAL SECRETARY/COO
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NATIONAL TREASURER/CFO
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Toll-free: 1-877-767-5732
website: www.snpjrec.com
e-mail: snpj@snpjrec.com

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:
PROSVETA
247 W. Allegheny Road
Imperial, PA 15126-9774
e-mail: prosveta@snpj.com



Members, families and friends of Detroit SNPJ Lodges 564 and 677 enjoyed attending the 2025 Christmas party.

Holiday spirit shines at the Detroit Lodges combined Christmas party

by SHELLY VOLPE
Lodge 564 Secretary

DETROIT — The holiday season was made even brighter this past year as friends, families and neighbors gathered for an SNPJ Christmas party filled with laughter, warmth, and community spirit.

Guests enjoyed an evening of great food, cheerful decorations and heartfelt conversations. The venue was beautifully decorated in seasonal colors, creating a welcoming atmosphere that brought everyone together to celebrate the joy of the season.

The children delighted in holiday treats and activities, while adults reconnected with familiar faces and made new friend-

ships. The spirit of giving and gratitude was present throughout the evening, reminding everyone of what truly makes this time of year special – community, kindness and togetherness.

Events like this Christmas celebration highlight the importance of staying connected and supporting one another. As each year comes to a close, gatherings like these strengthen the bonds that make our community such a wonderful place to live.

We are grateful to everyone who helped organize, contribute to, and attend this special celebration. It was truly a night to remember, and we look forward to many more joyful gatherings in the future.

SNPJ members participate in the 14th Cleveland Kurentovanje Festival

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truck carrying an inflatable dragon, the symbol of Ljubljana, followed by Dean Eppley (5) in his ferociously decorated Subaru. We were joined by many friends from Ohio and Pennsylvania representing a total of five different SNPJ Lodges.

Those not riding in the vehicles walked the parade route handing out candy, honey

sticks and SNPJ koozies to spectators who were lined several people deep along the parade route.

Familiar faces could be found throughout the event, whether it was volunteering behind the bar, waiting in line for delicious Slovenian food, or dancing to polka music.

Next year, the 15th annual Kurentovanje Festival will be held Feb. 6, 2027. We hope you'll be able to join us!



MARK MARUSZAK (142) [left] and Lake County, Ohio, Commissioner **JOHN PLECNIK** (142) carried the SNPJ Lodge 142 banner in the annual Cleveland Kurentovanje parade.

Slovenian sausages a tasty addition to the Lodge 87 Jan. meeting

by PAMELA GRADISEK-IANNITTO
Lodge 87 President

HERMINIE, Pa. — The members of Lodge 87 gathered for their January meeting with an extra sense of anticipation, as the air was soon filled with the rich, smoky aroma of homemade Slovenian sausage and sauerkraut.

Member Alan Lazar had spent days carefully preparing the sausage – seasoned with traditional spices and garlic –

before smoking it low and slow over apple wood, imparting a subtle, sweet fruitiness that perfectly complemented the tangy, fermented cabbage. The tasty sausage paired beautifully with the tender, smoky sauerkraut, and several members declared it the best they'd ever tasted.

By the end of the meeting, everyone agreed that Lodge 87 should make this Slovenian specialty a regular tradition.



Delicious Slovenian sausages prepared by Alan Lazar were served during the Herminie, Pa., Lodge 87 January meeting.

SNPJ LODGE BONUS PROGRAM 2025 Results

Gold Level Lodges for Activity (\$300 award)

Lodge 1, Chicago	Lodge 559, Chicago
Lodge 2, La Salle, Ill.	Lodge 576, Cleveland
Lodge 6, Sygan, Pa.	Lodge 581, St. Marys, Pa.
Lodge 8, Chicago	Lodge 603, Samsula, Fla.
Lodge 34, Indianapolis	Lodge 643, Girard, Ohio
Lodge 106, Imperial, Pa.	Lodge 677, Detroit
Lodge 138, Strabane, Pa.	Lodge 723, Fontana, Calif.
Lodge 142, Cleveland	Lodge 729, Yukon, Pa.
Lodge 158, Euclid, Ohio	Lodge 745, Grass Valley, Calif.
Lodge 218, Denver	Lodge 771, Hillsville, Pa.
Lodge 223, Greensburg, Pa.	Lodge 776, Borough of SNPJ, Pa.
Lodge 225, Girard, Kan.	Lodge 782, Glenshaw, Pa.
Lodge 358, West Point, Ohio	Lodge 786, Orange County, Calif.
Lodge 518, Melvindale, Mich.	

Silver Level Lodges for Activity (\$200 award)

Lodge 304, San Francisco
Lodge 689, Helper, Utah
Lodge 721, Aliquippa, Pa.

New Member Enrollment Award (10 New Members = \$100)

Lodge 6, Sygan, Pa. • 28 new members = \$200
Lodge 31, Sharon, Pa. • 13 new members = \$100
Lodge 106, Imperial, Pa. • 25 new members = \$200
Lodge 138, Strabane, Pa. • 15 new members = \$100
Lodge 277, Struthers, Ohio • 10 new members = \$100
Lodge 559, Chicago, Ill. • 17 new members = \$100
Lodge 782, Glenshaw, Pa. • 14 new members = \$100

Election of National Athletic Board members slated in March

SNPJ ATHLETIC BOARD
FROM PAGE 1

DISTRICT 4: Cuyahoga, Ash-tabula, Lake, Portage and Summit counties in Ohio

DISTRICT 5: The state of Michigan

DISTRICT 6: The states of Indiana, Illinois and Wisconsin

SNPJ National Athletic Board members receive \$325 per year for their services.

Candidates to the National Athletic Board can be nominated by any Lodge or Federation. The candidate need not be a member of the nominating Lodge, but they must be a member of a Lodge in the district

they will be representing. Each Lodge or Federation may nominate only one candidate.

To nominate a candidate for the SNPJ National Athletic Board, the Lodge or Federation must submit the candidate's name, address and Lodge number to SNPJ Fraternal Director Courtney Valencic either via letter

or e-mail to cvalencic@snpj.com by March 15.

The athletic directors will be elected by the National Board during the March 27 meeting.

If you have any questions, please phone the SNPJ Home Office at 1-800-843-7675 or send an e-mail to cvalencic@snpj.com.

Up-and-Coming...

A look at events planned by the Slovene National Benefit Society

- MARCH 1.... SNPJ Region 1 Appreciation Dance at the Yukon Slovenian Hall, Yukon, Pa.; 2-6 p.m. Music by Polka Classics. All SNPJ members and students under 17 admitted free of charge. Proceeds benefit the Westmoreland County Federation of SNPJ Lodges Pretty in Pink fundraiser for cancer. For more information contact Maury Sinan by e-mail to maury@zoominternet.net.
- MARCH 15..... Westmoreland Federation of SNPJ Lodges dance at the Yukon Slovenian Hall, Yukon, Pa.; 2-6 p.m. Music by the Mikey Dee Band. For more information contact Mary Ann Bebar at (724) 244-4986.
- APRIL 11..... California SNPJ Day at the Phoenix Club, Brea, Calif. For event details contact Lodge 786 Secretary Teresa Koci by e-mail to teresamkoci@gmail.com or by phone at (949) 246-1983.
- JUNE 5-7 SNPJ Heritage Center 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.
- JUNE 12-14.... SNPJ Young Adult Conference at the SNPJ Recreation Center, Borough of SNPJ, Pa. For registration and event details contact Fraternal Director Courtney Koenig at 1-800-843-7675 ext. 144, or e-mail cvalencic@snpj.com.
- JULY 10-12The 43rd Slovenefest and the 68th Miss SNPJ Pageant at the SNPJ Recreation Center. For additional information phone the Recreation Center toll-free at 1-877-767-5732 or e-mail snpj@snpjrec.com.
- JULY 26-AUG. 1.... Family Week at the SNPJ Recreation Center, Borough of SNPJ, Pa. For more information phone the 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

Luck is not a retirement strategy

March often brings symbols of good fortune: four-leaf clovers, pots of gold, and the idea that luck can change everything overnight. While optimism has its place, retirement security is not built on chance. It is built on structure, discipline and informed decision-making.

In 2026, retirement planning is more technical than ever. Legislative changes, tax rules, Required Minimum Distribution (RMD) adjustments, and evolving market conditions all require thoughtful attention. Hoping that markets cooperate or taxes remain favorable is not a strategy. Planning is.

Understanding Today's RMD Landscape: Under current law, individuals must begin taking Required Minimum Distributions at age 73 from qualified retirement accounts. For those born in 1960 or later, that starting age will increase to 75 beginning in 2033. These changes, part of recent federal retirement legislation, were designed to provide flexibility, but they have also added complexity.

The penalty for failing to take an RMD has been reduced from 50 percent to 25 percent, and potentially to 10 percent if corrected promptly. While that is a significant improvement, it's still a costly mistake. It's also important to understand that while Roth IRAs have never required lifetime RMDs, Roth 401(k) accounts no longer require lifetime RMDs either; a change that many retirees are still unaware of. These updates create new opportunities for tax-efficient income planning, but only for those who review their accounts proactively. Luck does not ensure compliance. Oversight does.

The Tax Conversation Is Not Over: Current federal tax brackets are scheduled to sunset after 2025 unless extended by Congress. While no one can predict future legislation, it is reasonable to acknowledge that tax rates may not remain at historically low levels for long. This makes tax diversification increasingly important. A well-structured retirement income plan may include:

- Tax-deferred assets (Traditional IRAs)
 - Tax-free assets (Roth IRAs)
 - Taxable brokerage accounts
 - Guaranteed income sources, such as fixed annuities
- Strategic Roth conversions during lower-income years may reduce long-term tax exposure. Coordinating distributions with Social Security timing and RMD obligations can help minimize unintended tax consequences. Tax planning is not about reacting in April. It is about structuring income years in advance.

Market Performance Is Not a Guarantee: Over long periods, markets have historically rewarded investors. However, retirement is not measured in decades of accumulation, it's measured in annual withdrawals. Sequence-of-return risk, or the impact of market losses early in retirement, can significantly reduce the longevity of a portfolio. This is where structured income planning becomes critical. SNPJ fixed annuities, for example, can provide principal protection, predictable growth, guaranteed income options, and reduced exposure to market volatility. For many retirees, layering protected income alongside Social Security benefits creates a more stable foundation. Stability is not achieved through luck. It is achieved through design and proper planning.

Beneficiaries and Inherited IRAs: Another area that requires attention is beneficiary planning. Under current law, most non-spouse beneficiaries must fully distribute inherited IRA assets within 10 years. Failure to plan for this rule can create unexpected tax burdens for heirs. Spouses retain more flexibility, including the ability to roll inherited assets into their own IRA. However, outdated beneficiary designations remain one of the most common planning oversights. A simple review can prevent unnecessary complications.

Longevity and Inflation: Americans are living longer than previous generations. A healthy 65-year-old couple has a significant probability that one spouse will live into their 90s. Retirement income must be structured to potentially last 25 to 30 years, or more. At the same time, inflation continues to erode purchasing power. Even modest annual inflation compounds over decades. Without proper planning, income that appears sufficient today may fall short tomorrow. Hope is not a hedge against longevity. Planning is.

A Measured Approach: Retirement success is not about predicting markets or relying on favorable legislation. It is about building a coordinated strategy that addresses:

- Distribution timing
- Tax efficiency
- Income stability
- Legacy planning
- Risk management

Reviewing accounts annually, confirming RMD schedules, evaluating beneficiary designations, and reassessing income needs are all part of responsible stewardship. As we move through March and reflect on themes of good fortune, it's worth remembering that financial security is rarely accidental. It is the result of informed decisions made consistently over time. Luck may bring opportunity, but planning preserves it. Schedule a review with an SNPJ agent or the Home Office today: phone 1-800-843-7675 or e-mail SNPJmarketing@snpj.com.

SNPJ does not provide tax, legal or accounting advice. Consult with a tax, legal or accounting professional regarding your specific situation.



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AI competence center opens in Ljubljana

LJUBLJANA (STA) — A competence center for artificial intelligence (AI) opened in Ljubljana in mid-January to serve as the main entry point for access to AI expertise, training and information. Digital Transformation Minister Ksenija Klampfer defined the center's main goal as facilitating "safe and competitive AI implementation."

"We're establishing an operational hub of knowledge, technologies, services and people that will connect companies, universities and institutes, public administration and support organizations with a single goal of accelerating the safe, responsible and competitive introduction of AI in Slovenia," Klampfer said. She added that a total of EUR 10 million (\$11.75 million) has been secured for the establishment of the center and for funding related applied projects.

Led by the Chamber of Commerce and Industry (GZS), the Artificial Intelligence Competence Centre operates as a consortium of partners with complementary expertise in AI, digital technologies and innovation. The consortium also includes the Jožef Stefan Institute, Slovenia's foremost research institution; the Chamber of Craft and Small Business; and the ASEF Institute for Education and Research.

The academic sector is also heavily represented by the computer science, electrical engineering, and law faculties at the University of Ljubljana; as well as several technical and natural science faculties from the Maribor, Primorska and Nova Gorica universities.

GZS Director General Vesna Nahtigal is convinced the competence center "will give companies guidance on where to start, what makes sense, how to reduce risks, and how to introduce AI in a way that brings measurable results." Marko Štefančič, the director of the consortium, said the center "will ensure the best possible transfer of knowledge into practice, and provide training... for both the corporate and public sectors."

AI research has a long tradition in Slovenia, dating back to the 1970s. Since then, a strong and stable research community has developed in Slovenia, achieving top-level results in the international arena. A few years ago, Slovenia was selected to host the UNESCO International Research Centre on Artificial Intelligence (IRCAI) which was formally launched in Ljubljana in March 2021.

Digital textbook, online course aiding immigrants

LJUBLJANA (STA) — "Slonline," an online Slovenian language course, is now available as an interactive textbook, "Naslon," developed by the Centre for Slovenian as a Second and Foreign Language. Provided in seven languages, the textbook is designed for adult immigrants already in Slovenia and those planning to move [to Slovenia].

The online textbook offers flexible learning: as a self-study guide, as part of guided learning with a teacher, or as a combination of both. Its content is rooted in the "real communicative needs of adult immigrants during the initial stages of life in the Slovenian environment," according to the Centre for Slovenian as a Second and Foreign Language.

Naslon covers vocabulary, communication patterns, and texts that individuals most often encounter in official settings.

Centre representative Matej Klemen explained that as part of the project, the basic Slonline course was also updated. The course is now available not only in the most widely spoken European languages (English, French and Spanish), but also in Albanian. "Albanian was chosen because it is the language of the largest non-Slavic immigrant community in Slovenia," Klemen said.

One of the project's aims was "to develop a new, interactive textbook for learning Slovenian that brings together material that may be missing from other teaching material." The additions include linguistically demanding situations that immigrants encounter often, such as when dealing with administrative paperwork, seeking medical help, or communicating with their children's teachers. "The main goal of the course remains the linguistic empowerment of immigrants," Klemen said.

According to Klemen, the online course is very popular, with a total of more than 60,000 users registered from practically every country around the world. Between 4,000 and 5,000 people



actively use the online course each month, and the numbers are expected to increase following the latest upgrade.

New major cave system discovered in Slovenia

KOSTANJEVICANA KRKI (STA) — The Kostanjevica na Krki Caving Club recently made a major discovery. After 60 years of searching, club members have discovered an underground cave system that is probably larger than the Kostanjevica Cave in the east, the largest cave in the Dolenjska region.

The newly discovered caves boast chambers that are a few dozen meters high and some 50 meters (164 feet) long, while the largest speleothem [natural mineral deposit] found there matches the largest in the Kostanjevica Cave, according to club secretary Brane Čuk.

The cave system is most probably connected to the Kostanjevica Cave since the Studena River runs two kilometers (1.25 miles) from the entry to the cave. "When we realized what we had found, it took us quite some time to comprehend its significance. It was the dream of several generations of cavers," Čuk said.

The Caving Club, founded in 1964, was created mainly because of the proximity of the Kostanjevica Cave. The cavers have been actively exploring the 2.5-kilometer (1.6-mile) cave, discovering new passages and new galleries, but had been stopped repeatedly by deep lakes and siphons that they couldn't cross. "That's why they decided to try to enter the system from the top, through the pits from the Gorjanci mountains," Čuk explained.

Club members had been investigating the pits for quite a few years until they discovered a hole in the snow leaking warm air four years ago. They started exploring the hole and a pit, which they called "Gorjanc," and gradually descended ever further. After 70 such expeditions, the exploration came to a stop two years ago when they were unable to find a path forward.

They were lucky again in January when they discovered big halls with magnificent speleothems. They decided to explore thoroughly, and a week later, in late January, they stumbled upon an even larger discovery.

"We've reached the Studena River canyon 305 meters (1,000 feet) below the surface, discovering waterfalls, chambers, speleothems and side shafts. The cavers who were inside say the system is probably longer than the Kostanjevica Cave system," Čuk told the press.

The Gorjanc pit has thus revealed what is probably the largest and deepest cave system in the Dolenjska – and perhaps wider – region.

Four tourist destinations form a regional group

AJDOVŠČINA (STA) — Earlier this year, four tourist destinations in western and southwestern Slovenia formed a joint regional tourist organization, the goal of which is to create joint tourist products, gain recognition, and attract more visitors.

The Brda, Kras and Brkini, Nova Gorica and the Vipava Valley, and the Green Karst tourist destinations adopted an agreement on the founding of the Primorska-Notranjska tourist destination group in January. "[The group] wants to develop new tourist products together and appear jointly on foreign markets," said Erika Lojk, director of the Nova Gorica and Vipava Valley Tourism Board. Their aim is to retain tourists at the destinations for longer periods, she said, adding that "the individual destinations are not too far apart. This gives visitors more options during their stay in the region."

The individual destinations will retain their own trademarks, but will now work together to develop new tourism products.

The four destinations span 17 municipalities, along with several tourism boards and organizations. In 2024 they recorded almost 745,000 tourist stays; preliminary data suggest figures for 2025 could be even higher. The destinations have worked together previously on several projects, including a joint presentation of Nova Gorica, the Vipava Valley, Kras and the Julian Alps on the

U.S. market.

The formation of regional destination organizations is identified in the 2022-2028 strategy for Slovenian tourism. The Primorska-Notranjska group is one of 10 such proposed organizations.

Ljubljana Zoo readies for a major renovation

LJUBLJANA (STA) — The Ljubljana Zoo will soon start a major and much-needed renovation that is expected to last 10 years and cost at least EUR 40 million (\$47 million). This project marks the first time the zoo has launched an extensive renovation in the past four decades.

Most of the Ljubljana Zoo facilities are in such a poor condition that they will not be renovated, but rather replaced. Due to the complicated and lengthy process of securing relevant permits and completing the required paperwork, it is difficult to set a precise renovation timeline, but Ljubljana Zoo management finds it likely the project will be completed in 10 years.

The plan is to start building a large modern wolf enclosure as early as this year. The new addition, which will aim to replicate the wolves' natural habitat, is expected to open in 2027, Ljubljana Zoo representatives told the press. In the future, the zoo intends to focus on designing additional new facilities to accommodate services, such as a veterinary clinic, and a bear enclosure.

Zoo renovations used to take place in stages over time, but nowadays they are more organic and ongoing. In recent years the Ljubljana Zoo has carried out small-scale upgrades, including a renovation of the pools for sea lions and several new facilities for the animals.

Once the extensive project has been completed, the animals will have larger enclosures, and visitors will be able to enjoy a more modern approach to animal sightings. The renovations will be planned to create as little disruption as possible for both animals and visitors.

Hoping two dog breeds are recognized as native

CELJE (STA) — Slovenian cynologists [specialists in the study, care and training of dogs] are striving for two dog breeds to be recognized as native to Slovenia. Launching the process for recognition of the Koroški Žigec, an old hunting breed, in mid-January, they are hopeful the Silken Windhound, which Slovenian breeders helped spread, could one day be recognized as a Slovenian breed as well.

The Koroški Žigec Mountain Hound is a small to medium-size hound, intended primarily for hunting rabbits, foxes and other small game in difficult terrain. The hound has a short to medium-length coat, mostly black with some brown markings. Hari Arčon, the president of the Cynological Association, told the press that there are currently around a thousand bred in Slovenia.

For the breed to be recognized, information on bloodlines, photographs of several specimens, and DNA analyses must be submitted, along with photographs of hips and elbows to show the average health of the dogs and the breed as a whole. The International Canine Federation (FCI) will then evaluate the breed standard and health.

"It can take two to three years before the breed can gain the status of a Slovenian native breed," Arčon explained, adding that "the process is complex because it includes the whole protocol for the recognition of a breed."

The Silken Windhound, an elegant sighthound [a hound that hunts primarily by sight and speed], is known for its graceful build and soft, silky coat. Though the breed originated in the U.S., the windhound did not see further development there. Windhound enthusiasts brought the breed to Slovenia, where breeders started to develop and expand it.

While the breed did not originate in Slovenia, it was Slovenian breeders and owners who played a key role in its preservation and expansion. That's why Slovenian cynologists are working to have the Silken Windhound recognized as a Slovenian native breed and are preparing the necessary documentation.

"The aim for both breeds is to show that the breeds are stable, healthy and useful, and that Slovenia deserves the native status of the breeds," Arčon said. Currently, the Karst Shepherd is the only dog breed native to Slovenia.

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

SNPJ fraternal sympathies

Sis. Lois Ann Denning • LODGE 41 • WESTMORELAND COUNTY FEDERATION OF SNPJ LODGES TREASURER

IRWIN, Pa. — The members of Lodge 41 sadly report the Dec. 15, 2025, passing of Sis. Lois (Susa) Denning, 71, of Greensburg, Pa., surrounded by her loved ones.

Sis. Denning was born Nov. 22, 1954, in Pittsburgh, a daughter of the late Joseph and Mary (Oblak) Susa. She was a graduate of Penn Joint High School and went on to wear many hats throughout her extensive career. Most recently, she spent more than 10 years as head bank teller at First National Bank in Greensburg. She was beloved by her colleagues and customers, always willing to go the extra mile to help someone in need.

As treasurer of the Westmoreland County Federation of SNPJ Lodges, she cared deeply about sharing and celebrating her Slovenian culture.

Lois was known and loved by many for her tremendous strength, fun-loving spirit, joyful presence and caring nature. An ovarian and breast cancer survivor, she was passionate about helping other patients. She annually dedicated her time and energy to raising funds directly supporting local cancer patients by organizing and hosting the Pretty in Pink polka dance for the last 14 years. She profoundly touched countless lives, leaving a lasting mark on everyone fortunate enough to know her.

When she wasn't spending time helping others, she enjoyed traveling to visit friends, bringing loved ones together in times of celebration, hosting and attending too many polka dances to count, and never passing up a trip to the casino.

Lois took immense pride in raising her two girls. Her bright light will shine on through each of them. She is survived by her daughters, Jacqueline Denning (Brandon Swain) and Rose Denning (Sean Thompson); her brother, Denny Susa; chosen sister Mary Ann Bebar; her fiancé, Gary Meyers; several nieces and nephews; and numerous family members and friends.

In addition to her parents, she was preceded in death by her longtime partner, Joseph Andorjio; and her sister, Janet (Susa) Wilkinson. Lois felt blessed to have found love and companionship in both Joe and Gary across different seasons of life.

Although she may be on a different dance floor, we know in our hearts that she is continuing to polka the night away.

A funeral service for Sis. Denning was held Dec. 22 at Kepple-Graft Funeral Home, Greensburg. Private burial followed.

The family wishes to honor Lois' legacy with donations to the Karla J. Nease Foundation, 50 Old Main St., Blairsville, PA 15717.

On behalf of the members of Lodge 41 and the Slovene National Benefit Society, we extend our sympathies to Sis. Denning's family, relatives and friends on their loss.

BRO. ALBERT SUHAJDA • LODGE 786 •

ORANGE COUNTY, Calif. — The members of Orange Coast Lodge 786 mourn the Dec. 24, 2025, passing of Bro. Albert G. Suhajda, born Jan. 27, 1947, in Chicago, after a battle with leukemia and bladder cancer. He faced his illness without complaint and remained living independently until his passing, having never been confined to hospice or a care facility. Al lived a full and self-sufficient life despite his diagnosis.

Al was a quiet, humble man who embraced a simple life. He was drafted into the U.S. Army during the Vietnam era and was stationed in Germany, where he served as a cook and traveled throughout Europe. He later joined the U.S. Air Force Reserves, serving honorably for more than 20 years. Al was a proud veteran.

He earned a bachelor's degree from Southern Illinois University and spent most of his professional career working as a clerk for the Federal Government.

Deeply religious, Al practiced his Catholic faith throughout his life. He attended daily Mass, received Communion regularly, and was a Fourth Degree member of the Knights of Columbus. He volunteered whenever possible, especially at the food pantry at St. Timothy's Church.

From an early age, Al developed a love for cars and motorcycles, often working on vehicle overhauls. He especially enjoyed extended motorcycle trips along the West Coast with his brother Tom and attending car shows throughout California.

He was also a longtime member of SNPJ, where he enjoyed supporting and attending Slovenian events. In addition, Al was an HO train enthusiast, an avid bicyclist in his younger years, and had an interest in photography.

Al was blessed with a wonderful community of friends who supported him throughout



Bro. ALBERT SUHAJDA (786)

his illness.

The family requests donations to the American Cancer Society.

On behalf of the members of Lodge 786 and the Slovene National Benefit Society, we extend our condolences to Bro. Suhajda's family, relatives and friends on their loss.

SIS. MARY ANN PLANTAN • LODGE 2 •

LA SALLE, Ill. — The members of Lodge 2 sadly report the Dec. 27, 2025, passing of Sis. Mary (Zickar) Plantan, 100, in the comfort of her son's home in Palm Coast, Fla., where she enjoyed taking in North Florida's sun, warmth and ocean breeze. She was an 82-year SNPJ Lodge 2 member.

Sis. Plantan was born June 14, 1925, and spent most of her life in DePue, Ill., where her family — and later she and her husband, Al — ran a neighborhood grocery store and butcher shop. There, she would often sell her homemade pies and Slovenian delicacies, walnut potica and strudels. Her baking belied her diminutive frame, as Mary was also a longtime Weight Watchers coach in the Illinois Valley.

A fitness fanatic before it was in vogue, Mary walked four to five miles a day, and she was quite sure neighbors set their clocks by her morning treks past their homes. She never knew a stranger, striking up conversations wherever she went. Her favorite pastime was visiting and talking with others — a true social butterfly to the end.

Those left to carry on Mary's legacy include her son, Mark (Monica) Plantan; her grandchildren, Sarah Jaleel and Mark Jacob (Elizabeth) Plantan; and her great-granddaughter, Linnea Plantan.

She was preceded in death by her husband, Al; her daughter, Mary Kay; two brothers, Frank and Louis Zickar; and her sister, Leona Rivasi.

A memorial Mass of Christian Burial will be celebrated for Sis. Plantan in St. Patrick's

Catholic Church, La Salle, at a future date.

On behalf of the members of Lodge 2 and the Slovene National Benefit Society, we extend our condolences to Sis. Plantan's family, relatives and friends on their loss.

SIS. ROSEMARY J. MLAKAR • LODGE 786 •

ORANGE COUNTY, Calif. — The members of Orange Coast Lodge 786 mourn the Dec. 30, 2025, passing of longtime member Sis. Rosemary Joan Novak of Laguna Niguel, Calif.

Rosemary was born Sept. 22, 1929, in Chisholm, Minn., to Slovenian immigrants Alojsius and Theresia Rose Novak. After graduating from Chisholm High School in 1947, she attended Hibbing Community College and was employed at the Hibbing office of the Oliver Mining Company. On Sept. 17, 1949, she married Joseph J. Mlakar, with whom she had four sons.

Facing deteriorating economic conditions on Minnesota's Mesabi Iron Range, the Mlakar family relocated to Fontana, Calif., in 1960, where they purchased, owned and operated a popular nightclub for more than 30 years. Meanwhile, the family grew when they were blessed with a daughter.

As a young woman, Rosemary had dreamed of becoming a nurse, but her loving, old-world parents discouraged her from pursuing higher education. However, she knew that acquiring skills and continuing to learn were necessary to achieve financial independence, and she instilled that value in her children.

After her sons were grown and on their own, Rosemary furthered her own education at the local community college to become a certified teacher's aide. For the next 10 years she earned the respect of her colleagues and boosted the confidence and self-sufficiency of teenage mothers — some of whom were only 13 years old — by teaching homemaking skills, infant care, baking, cooking, and other practical skills at the Pregnant Minor Program of the Rialto School District Continuation School.

Rosemary was a longtime SNPJ member and a leader in the Slovenian Women's Union of America, now known as the Slovenian Union of America. She revived Fontana Branch #100 and served on the National Board as a regional vice president. She was instrumental in securing funding for the Slovenian



Sis. ROSEMARY J. MLAKAR (786)

Women's Union Scholarship Foundation, thereby ensuring that it would continue to help advance educational goals for young men and women for decades to come.

Devoted to family and gifted in the art of nurturing children, Rosemary maintained close relationships with all of her grandchildren. Every summer, she gathered them in the warmth of her home for activities that created cherished memories and lasting bonds among cousins. After her Alzheimer's diagnosis, the grandchildren — many now with families of their own — visited her regularly, reflecting the deep love, connection and values she instilled in them.

Rosemary enjoyed traveling with her girlfriends. Among their adventures were tours of Greece and Yugoslavia, road trips to Minnesota, and visits to the casinos in Las Vegas and Laughlin, Nev. They dubbed themselves the "real-life Golden Girls," a

name that perfectly captured their marital status, happiness, sense of fun and adventurous spirit. Her last overseas trip was with her beloved brother, Louis, to renew ties with relatives in Slovenia.

She was preceded in death by her husband, Joseph J. Mlakar (2017); father, Alojsius Novak (1967); mother, Theresia Rose Novak (1988); brother, Louis A. Novak of Chisholm, Minn., (2014); and first cousin, Ronnie (Novak) Boucher of Hibbing, Minn. (2025).

She is survived by sons Joseph L. (Teresa) of Roseville, Calif., Fredrick of Irvine, Calif., John (Lucille) of Auburn, Calif., and Martin (Patti) of Moreno Valley, Calif.; daughter Teresa (Ken) Koci of Laguna Niguel; 11 grandchildren and 14 great-grandchildren, with two more on the way.

Rosemary specifically requested that donations be sent or given in the form of a personal check made payable to Slovenian Women Union Scholarship Foundation (SWUSF), 6019 Lausche Ave., Cleveland, OH 44103, att'n: President Stane Kuhar. Please indicate on the check "in memory of Rosemary Mlakar." For more information or questions about this scholarship foundation, contact Mr. Kuhar at skuhar@hotmail.com or (216) 314-9403.

On behalf of the members of Lodge 786 and the Slovene National Benefit Society, we offer our sympathies to Sis. Mlakar's family, relatives and friends on their loss.

DEATHS REPORTED

For the month of January 2026

LODGE	NAME	DATE OF DEATH	CITY, STATE
A02	Earl H. Furrer	12-19-2025	Gibsonia, Pa.
5	Edward A. Kus	07-20-2025	Cleveland, Ohio
6	Mark M. Miller	04-03-2024	Bridgeville, Pa.
31	Victoria A. Maykowski	12-02-2025	Colorado Springs, Colo.
34	Robert L. Miklavcic	11-06-2025	Bartonville, Ill.
87	Frank V. Kolesha	11-28-2025	Hermine, Pa.
87	Leonard Marovich	12-13-2025	Uniontown, Pa.
106	Helenann Gearhart	12-21-2025	Imperial, Pa.
120	Nancy A. Stockdale	11-29-2025	Carlsbad, N.M.
138	Thomas A. Terpin	06-16-2025	Girard, Ohio
138	Barbara B. Brockman	12-10-2025	Washington, Pa.
142	Gladys H. Tomsic	07-29-2019	Kirtland, Ohio
142	Rudolph Kastelic	08-30-2025	Aurora, Ohio
153	Richard R. Makovec	06-20-2025	Struthers, Ohio
174	Connie J. Loughry	01-25-2025	Hermitage, Pa.
174	Maria J. Ford-Witthoff	04-21-2025	Lincoln, Neb.
174	Robert D. Lehman	07-21-2025	Windber, Pa.
218	Wayne H. Preskar	10-25-2025	Santa Maria, Calif.
225	Frank J. Sotosek	12-14-2025	Bartlesville, Okla.
225	James L. Giordano	12-27-2025	Arma, Kan.
257	Suzanne M. Krutsch	10-15-2025	Cleveland, Ohio
257	Martin J. Peters	11-29-2025	Cleveland, Ohio
277	Lou Ann Baker	03-13-2024	Cantfield, Ohio
576	Beatrice F. Pestotnik	01-07-2026	Jefferson, Ohio
604	Joseph A. Zabukovec	06-21-2024	Hobe Sound, Fla.
677	Violet T. Spicko	04-29-2017	Spruce, Mich.
677	Mary Ann Bassett	07-28-2023	Dearborn, Mich.
715	Michael B. Gentile	11-14-2025	Jeannette, Pa.
749	Mary C. Prince	06-28-2025	South Fork, Pa.
770	Stephen P. Razo	11-16-2025	New Middletown, Ohio

KAREN A. PINTAR
National Secretary/COO

PROSVETA Crossword
VALENTINE'S DAY (#0226) solution

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PROSVETA 2026 Publication Dates

JANUARY 2026

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ANNOUNCE IT

Lodge 218 member a new U.S. Navy Ensign

DENVER — Cara K. Fabian, a member of SNPJ Lodge 218 in Denver, was commissioned as a new Ensign in the U.S. Navy on Sept. 5, 2025. Cara won the title of SNPJ Miss Fraternalism in both the 2022 and 2023 Miss SNPJ pageants.

Cara commissioned as a Nuclear Surface Warfare Officer and is currently completing Surface Warfare Officer (SWO) training in San Diego. Following SWO, Cara is assigned to the USS Barry (DDG52) in Everett, Wash.

Cara graduated from Colorado State University in May 2025 with two engineering degrees, one in mechanical engineering and another in biomedical engineering. She is the daughter of Paul (218) and Lisa Fabian, and the granddaughter of Fred and Agnes Fabian (218). She is the great-granddaughter of Anton and Frieda Fabian, and Frank and Mary Faidiga, all of Leadville, Colo., and all members of the former SNPJ Lodge 278 in Leadville.

submitted by Paul Fabian (218)



Denver Lodge 218 member **CARA FABIAN**, a former SNPJ Miss Fraternalism in both 2023 and 2024, was commissioned as a U.S. Navy Ensign in September 2025.



CARA FABIAN (218) [right], who won the title of Miss Fraternalism 2024 during the 2023 pageant, pictured with Miss Talent 2024 **ANNA MACK** (138) and Miss SNPJ 2024 **MORGAN SINAN** (782). Cara also won the title of Miss Fraternalism 2023 during the 2022 pageant.

Lodge 34 electing Convention delegates in March

by JERRY WATSON
Lodge 34 Secretary/Treasurer

INDIANAPOLIS — *Srečno novo leto!* SNPJ Lodge 34 held their fourth quarterly meeting on Dec. 12 at the Slovenian National Home (SNH). Our current officers were elected to serve another year.

After the meeting, every-

one, including SNH members, enjoyed a Christmas party. Over 200 people participated in the festivities. Our Lodge provided the krofi, and many members helped make the party a great time for all.

The Lodge 34 first quarterly meeting for 2026 will take place Friday, March 27, at the

SNH starting at 7 p.m. This is an important meeting as election of our delegates to the National Convention will take place. Our Lodge is permitted to send three delegates.

Our Lodge has committed to providing the Friday night dinner at the SNH in March. Jozef has agreed to prepare his

famous, made-to-order, gourmet grilled cheese sandwiches. Those ordering will have their choice of bread, several types of cheese, and peppers. Tomato soup and dessert will complete the meal. Please try to attend; all proceeds are donated to the SNH.

Na svidenje!

Slavija Lodge 1 opens 2026 with a March meeting

by MICHELLE HRIBAR-HERNANDEZ
Lodge 1 President

CHICAGO — Slavija Lodge 1 held its annual elections meeting on Sunday, Dec. 14, at the home of President Michelle Hribar-Hernandez. During the meeting, members confirmed final social activities for the year, including attending the Grotto Christmas Lights display at the Slovenian Cultural Center.

Meeting dates for 2026 were approved as follows: Sunday, March 8; Sunday, June 7; Sunday, Sept. 13; and Sunday, Dec. 13. The March and June meetings will be held at McCook Bohemian Restaurant, 8300 Joliet Road in McCook, Ill. The December meeting is scheduled at President Hribar-Hernandez's home.

The following officers were elected: President Michelle Hribar-Hernandez, Secretary/Treasurer Janina Hribar, Recording Secretary Marianne Murray, Sergeant-at-Arms Kaitlyn Conroy, Auditing Committee President Edward Hribar Jr., and auditor David Hernandez.

Following the meeting, members celebrated the Christmas season with a traditional Slovenian meal featuring čevapčiči, Slovenian-style coleslaw, potato salad and potica. This marked the second consecutive year of enjoying Slovenian cooking at President Hribar-Hernandez's home, a tradition the Lodge looks forward to continuing.

For questions or additional information regarding upcoming meetings or activities, contact Lodge Secretary Janina Hribar at (708) 598-2570.

Slavija Lodge 1 wishes everyone a happy and healthy New Year!



[Left] SNPJ Slavija Lodge 1 members celebrated the holidays by attending the Grotto Christmas Lights display at the Slovenian Cultural Center in Lemont, Ill., and holding their annual meeting which included a traditional Slovenian meal [below].



Photo submitted by Kandace Kocjan Franklin

Happy Holidays for Golden Eagles Lodge 643

SNPJ Golden Eagles Lodge 643 members enjoyed attending their annual Christmas party in December. Pictured are [seated, from left] Recording Secretary **KATHLEEN NAIL**, President **KANDACE KOCJAN FRANKLIN**, Past Presidents **RAY KOVAC** and **ANDREW KOCJAN III**, [standing] Sergeant-at-Arms **KATHLEEN KOCJAN**, **ANDREW KOCJAN IV**; **BRIDGET KOCJAN** (holding **EMMALINE KOCJAN**), **BRETT FRANKLIN**, **KURT SEIFERT Sr.**, and Secretary/Treasurer **TINA NAIL SEIFERT**.

Reservations suggested for the Calif. SNPJ Day Revival

CALIFORNIA SNPJ DAY
FROM PAGE 1

wonderful opportunity to gather with family and friends – and to make new ones.

For advance paid reservations for the California SNPJ Day Revival on Saturday, April 11, from 2 to 7 p.m., please send a check payable to SNPJ Lodge 786, along with an e-mail address for updates, to SNPJ Lodge 786, att'n: Teresa Koci, 14 Dion, Laguna Niguel, CA 92677. Or an electronic payment can be submitted through Zelle to only this e-mail address please: teresamkoci@gmail.com.

We look forward to celebrating with you!

Slovene National Benefit Society: Privacy Policy

We value you as a member of the Slovene National Benefit Society and we take your personal privacy seriously. We will inform you of our policies for collecting, using, securing and sharing non-public personal information the first time we do business and every year that you are an SNPJ member.

You have provided SNPJ with certain non-public personal information, such as your name, age, residence, marital status and social security number. When you applied for life insurance you may have also provided us with employment and medical information and authorized us to obtain further information concerning your health history, mode of living, avocations and other personal characteristics. Based on this authorization,

only the minimum amount of information necessary to underwrite your application has been collected. We may obtain other information from your transactions with us, such as your payment history and claim documentation.

We maintain the highest level of confidentiality concerning your non-public personal information. The employees at the SNPJ Home Office have been trained in the careful handling and protection of such information. Oversight of these matters is rigorous, and our employees understand that improper disclosure of non-public personal information is a serious matter with severe consequences.

We are a fraternal benefit society which has always been committed to

protecting the privacy of our members. There are no affiliated financial institutions or third-party non-affiliates which have access to your non-public personal information, except pursuant to your written authorization. We never sell lists of our members' names and addresses to any goods or services vendor.

Access to your records is limited to those Home Office employees who are working with your file. Should we be required to disclose information in connection with civil or criminal litigation we must comply; however, such instances are very rare. Our policy of protecting the security of non-public personal information also extends to potential insureds and former insureds who no longer maintain coverage with us.

SNPJ Scholarship Fund Donations for the months of Oct. 2025-Jan. 2026

Randall Casciola (138), Pittsburgh	\$300	SNPJ Lodge 776, Borough of SNPJ, Pa.	\$100	SNPJ Lodge 31, Sharon, Pa.	\$50
SNPJ Lodge 559, Chicago	\$125	In memory of Russell Cracraft, Mary Jo Nahod and Robert Solomon		Irene & Donald Kranitz, Winston-Salem, N.C. ...	\$40
In memory of James Plahuta, Robert Gosti, Zdenka Blum, William O'Crotty and Charles Zordani		George & Jaci Trosky (776), Enon Valley, Pa.	\$100	In memory of Lawrence Moler	
Fontana Button Box Accordion Club	\$100	Anonymous donation	\$55.38	SNPJ Lodge 225, Girard, Kan.	\$30
				In memory of Shirley Gerwert	
				Edward & Henrietta Snyder (776), Medina, Ohio	\$25



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Bole Balina Bash rolls into the Rec Center May 2

by JANICE ROCKWELL
Lodge 138

BOROUGH OF SNPJ, Pa. — Oh, the thrill of victory and the agony of defeat! The Olympics are in full swing as I write. Of course, the athletes and stories are amazing. We marvel at their dedication, perseverance. We are inspired by their unswerving quest to reach the pinnacle of excellence, not of a machine, but of the human body.

Something else, less obvious, occurs during the Olympics. We are all on the same page. “Did you see that gold medal run?” “Can you believe the difficulty of half-pipe tricks today compared to its debut as an Olympic sport?” “How devastating for the Quad God to have fallen on the biggest stage.”

We are all part of the same conversation, like a big family, gathered around the television watching the same show at the same time. How many remember the Saturday night lineup? “All in the Family,” “M*A*S*H,” “The Mary Tyler Moore Show,” “The Bob Newhart Show,” and “The Carol

Burnett Show.” Many will recognize my opening sentence as the ABC Wide World of Sports tagline for years. (This audience will also know that the ski jumper crashing in the depiction of the “agony of defeat” is Slovenian.)

Those growing up in the ’70s know the above because we experienced it as a family. Modern life, with a dozen screens in every house and unlimited viewing options, can rob us of family connections. Not so for the Bole Balina Bash! One day, one place, one big family with a shared experience.

I think our parents/grandparents, Tony and Josie Bole, would be pleased to see this tournament, in their names, bring families together. Each year, someone shares something new or that I had forgotten about our parents. Last year, someone reminisced how our dad loved running the Family Week balina tournament. He would come to the Campsite just to do that.

For her part, our mom was at her happiest when her family was all together. No

store-bought gift could ever measure up.

It’s fitting that our tournament seems to have found a niche in being one where families play together. The Trailer Court blind draw tournament is great fun. The National SNPJ Days women’s and men’s tournaments dish up superb competition. The Family Week tournament is still around, but you need to take part in Family Week (which I highly recommend).

The Bole Balina Bash doesn’t require a weeklong commitment and allows family members of all ages to play together. People who never play balina participate in this day in the spirit of family. I mean, when else does Chris Petukauskas get a chance to play a sport with her testosterone-laden family?

Tony and Josie’s “blood” family was small, but their extended, chosen family was enormous. Whether blood or chosen, in the family spirit we welcome everyone to the SNPJ Recreation Center Balinarena on May 2 to kick off the summer season with some

Olympic-grade connection and camaraderie.

Here are the details: In honor of Tony and Josie Bole, our family will host the Bole Balina Bash, double elimination (subject to change, pending number of entrants) tournament at the SNPJ Recreation Center, 270 Martin Rd., Enon Valley, PA 16120, on Saturday, May 2, starting at 9 a.m. and concluding around 4 p.m. Continue the fun afterward in the Gostilna for the Kentucky Derby party. Contributions to the snack smorgasbord are welcome.

The entry fee is \$15 per person; cash prizes will be awarded immediately. One half of the entry fee will go to the Recreation Center Cabin Renovation Fund, the other half will be the prize fund.

To participate, visit the SNPJ Recreation Center Facebook page for entry form. Alternatively, e-mail your team participants’ names, team name, and captain’s phone number and e-mail address to jan@rockwelllaw.com. The entry deadline is April 25. See you on the courts!



Photo submitted by James Baker (603).

Slovenia Men Notch Top-10 Finish at ITF World Masters Team Championship

The Slovenia men’s team registered a best-ever, top-10 finish at the 2025 International Tennis Federation World Masters Team Championship played in Bol, Croatia. The team was led by quarterfinalist James Baker, a member of SNPJ Lodge 603 in Samsula, Fla. The Slovenia team defeated Germany, South Africa, Switzerland and Turkey. Members of the Slovenia team: (from left) **Pavle Zerjav, Franc Bradan, JAMES BAKER** and **Rikardo Grizilo**.

Milwaukee balina league seeking new participants

submitted by MARY DONOVAN
SNPJ District 6 Athletic Director

MILWAUKEE — The Milwaukee Slovenian Balina League is looking for new players. We’re asking current league members to recruit your adult (18 and over) family and friends to play this year. League members don’t have to be Slovenian or have any experience.

Balina is an easy game and a bit like bowling, but it’s played outside on a sand court. Each

team consists of two men and two women. If you have family or friends to play with, that’s great! If not, we’ll do our best to put together a team for you. The league is also in need of substitutes, which is a great way to ease into the game.

Games are a kept to maximum of 50 minutes. League play ends with a playoff game and banquet. Prizes are awarded to the first, second and third place teams. The total cost to participate is \$35

for the entire season, which includes a banquet in the fall at a local restaurant.

League play is postponed in the event of extreme heat or heavy rain, and no games are scheduled during the weeks of Memorial Day, Independence Day and Labor Day.

Our first league meeting (team captains encouraged to attend) will be held Monday, April 27, starting at 6 p.m. at the courts. Teams will begin league play the following

Monday, May 4, at either 6 or 7 p.m. The courts are located at Veteran’s Memorial Park, 6900 W. National Ave., West Allis, WI 53214; near the corner of 70th and National Ave.

For more information, contact Linda Abstetar by e-mail to dlabstetar@twc.com or by phone, (414) 303-0569 (call or text); or Denise Bartlett by phone, (414) 333-2289 (call or text). We’re looking forward to seeing everyone at the April meeting!

Play for your roots. Play for Slovenia.

The Football Association of Slovenia (FAS) is reaching out to girls and young women, from U15 all the way to the senior level, who were born or live abroad but carry Slovenian blood, heart and spirit.

We’re looking for talented, ambitious and proud players who want to represent their heritage on the international stage – who dream of wearing the Slovenian jersey, standing tall during the national anthem, and writing history with our national teams.

If you have family roots that lead back to Slovenia,

your story matters! Your connection to Slovenia can become something bigger... *something unforgettable*.

Join our growing community of Slovenian players around the world who are united by pride, passion and purpose. You’ll not only find a pathway to top-level soccer, you’ll find your home team.

If you believe you have what it takes, reach out to us! By mail: Nogometna zveza Slovenije, Predoslje 40a, p.p. 130, 4000 Kranj, Slovenia; or e-mail wnt@nzs.si.



PROSVETA Crossword Vacation Destinations (#0326) by StatePoint Media

ACROSS

- Aladdin’s find
- “Lights out” signal
- Not good
- Flock’s echo
- ___ diet, a.k.a. caveman diet
- Kind of jerk
- *Southern and Southwestern U.S. region: Sun ___
- Financial backer
- *Switzerland’s skiing destination (2 words)
- Ivan the Terrible, e.g.
- Clint Eastwood’s “Play ___ for Me”
- One in a pod
- Wear out
- Masculine
- *Princess’ turf
- Makes a sum (2 words)
- “He’s Just Not That ___ You”
- Dionysus’ pipe-playing companion
- Choose
- Provide food
- Answer from a tunnel
- Virtual you
- ___ Scare
- Prickly plant
- *Second “National Lampoon’s Vacation” destination

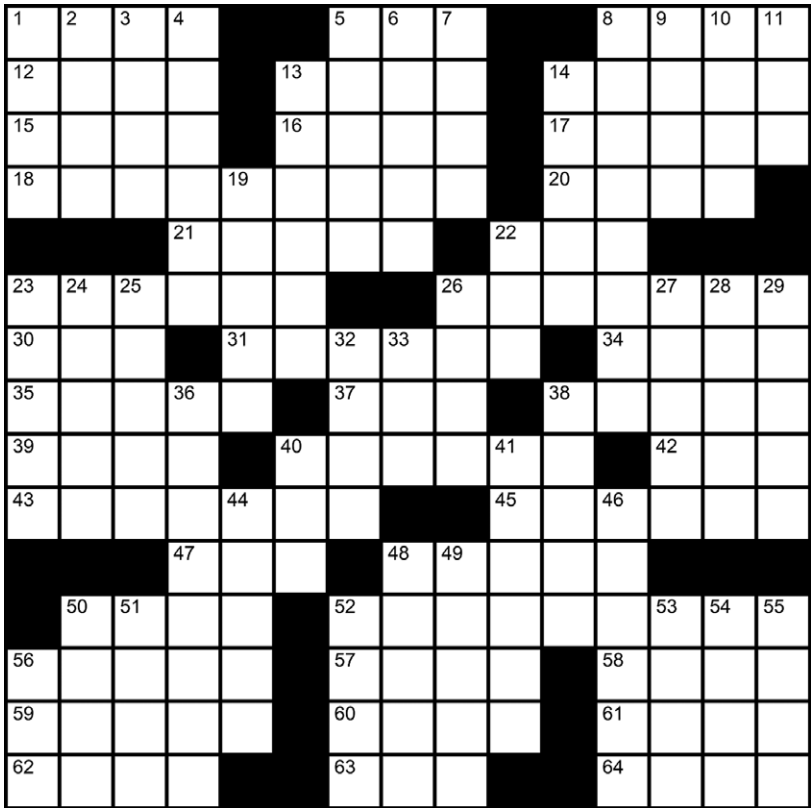
- Biblical Adam’s partner
- Cause and effect cycle?
- Goals
- *Jamaica and Cayman Islands location
- Bert’s sidekick
- Poet Pound
- Hay bundle
- “The Great Gatsby” author
- Billiards relative
- Theories
- ___-deaf
- Boar’s mate
- Reason to cram

DOWN

- Not more
- Swear, not curse
- Between mini and maxi
- Bodily fluid
- Small silvery fish
- ___ G. of “SpongeBob SquarePants”
- Aardvark’s repast
- *Serengeti National Park location
- Aquatic plant
- Pressure inducer
- *Costa del ___, Spain

- Humiliated
- Eucharistic plate
- Fretted instrument
- OB-GYN test
- Balance sheet item
- *Coastal destination
- Policeman’s club in India
- Cockapoo or Puggle, e.g.
- Foreword
- Make tea
- Vast multitude
- Peace symbol
- *Rest and relaxation destination
- *El Capitan and Half Dome location
- Pigeon food?
- Brewery order
- Acrobatic move
- Living room centerpiece?
- Velveteen creature
- Type of membranophone
- Cupid’s ammo
- Gas station brand
- Aware of a secret (2 words)
- Porcinos
- “At ___, soldier”
- Charitable contribution
- Hawk’s aerie, e.g.
- Time in NYC

The solution to puzzle #0326 will run in the April 1 issue.



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