

Domáci folk dancers celebrate 15 years

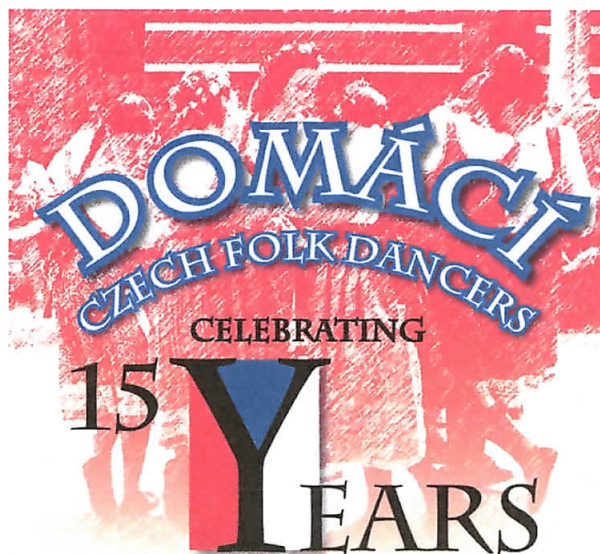
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For the past 15 years, the Domáci Czech Folk Dancers have been promoting and sharing their talents of traditional Czech folk dances. They have performed at ethnic events, nursing homes and celebrations in general. You may have seen them locally in Montgomery at Kolacky Days or in New Prague at the Dožínky Fall festival. But they have traveled southern Minnesota performing at Sokol MN in St. Paul, Sokol Camp in Pine City, as well as the communities of Bechyn, Mrytle, Albert Lea and Watertown, to name a few. Performance opportunities have also brought them to Protovin, Iowa, for their annual Masopust Celebration and the National Czech and Slovak Museum and Library in Cedar Rapids, Iowa, for their Hoby (Mushroom) Days festival and the grand opening of the new museum.

Beginning in 1999 with six enthusiastic adult couples, they first introduced themselves to the public by participating in the Dožínky parade. They had not acquired matching folk dress, nor did they have a float, so they proudly carried a banner displaying their name, which translates into "Hometown Czech Folk Dancers." During the next eight months, the group selected a Czech region whose folk costumes, or kroj, would be replicated. Assisted by fellow folk dancer Don Pafko, they practiced to be proficient with enough dances to entertain a half-hour performance. Pafko, who is the current Slovak honorary consul, trained through an apprentice program held in the Czech and Slovak Republics.

The group's first offer to perform was for a benefit dinner at the American Legion Hall in Montgomery. From there, they helped support the MN Czech Country bike trail fund-raiser, performed at Hilltop Hall in the play "Destination Montgomery," and at many other events, annual festivals and nursing homes.

Adult members who performed for about five years were: Mary Lou and Charlie Jirik of Watertown, Sue and Dick Miller of Buffalo, Heather and John Novak of New Prague, Karen and Bob Pexa of New Prague, Mary and Arnie Smisek of Elko-New Market, and Deb and Arnie Ziskovsky of Webster.



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The children's group as you see them today started in 2003 through a community education class teaching Czech folklore — dancing, singing, costumes and food. The class started with two students. By the end of the summer there were nine, and the children's group was formed and already performing at Kolacky Days that July.

But this group does more than perform for the community. The original directors, Arnie and Deb Ziskovsky, teach their dancers the language and practice singing in Czech. They teach the young dancers, as well as their parents, about holiday traditions and the history of the folk costumes.

The Ziskovskys' credentials for leading a folk-dance group are their involvement and experience of being dancers themselves. They both were members of the St. Paul Czech and Slovak Folk Dancers — Deb for 20 years and Arnie for 14. They have traveled to the Czech Republic seven times, attending multiple dance camps to learn the traditional choreography and the importance of the different folk regions of the country.

The Ziskovskys, as well as other members, pride themselves in presenting authentic choreography in authentic replicated folk costumes, performed to music using traditional regional instruments. This combination accurately promotes the traditions of their Czech ancestors.

The group created three junior directors positions that are filled by its own dancers, looking to them for assistance in teaching and ideas. These are Michaela Goettl and Olivia Lemke, nine-year members, and Tatum Kubes, a seven-year member. Another adult director, Leah Baker, has also been added for assistance with promotion, including overseeing their Facebook updates.

The directors of the group would like to say thank you to everyone who has supported them in the past, whether it be financially, promoting or giving the opportunity to perform. A huge thank you is given to the parents of the dancers, for taking their time to get their dancer to practices and performances as needed.

The Domáci Czech Folk Dancers offer a community ed class each spring and are open to new members any time.

Upcoming performances this year are: Rice County Fair, July 18; Millner Heritage Vineyard and Winery, July 20; Kolacky Days, July 26; Sokol MN Czech & Slovak Festival, Sept 14; Dožínky Fall Festival, Sept 20; and the fifth annual European Christmas event, Dec. 7.

Current members are: Michaela Goettl, Izak and Joey Jirik, Tatum Kubes, Olivia and Sylvia Lemke, Kaley and Korey Mach, Anna Novak, Lauren Reiland, Cynthia and Connor Raduenz, Lea and Owen Sirek, Sarah Stresnak, Grace Tumasmith, as well as the 2014 Czech Heritage Junior Ambassadors Christina Raduenz, Victoria Soukup and Lizzie Trnka.