

2013 Medals - Natl Czech

Speakers: Gail Naughton, Bob Schaffer

Transcription provided by:

Caption First, Inc

P.O. Box 3066

Monument, Colorado 80132

877-825-5234

www.captionfirst.com

>> FEMALE SPEAKER: The National Medal for Museum and Library Services is the nation's highest honor for libraries and museums that are serving their communities in exceptional ways.

National Czech and Slovak Museum and Library President and CEO Gail Naughton and community member Bob Schaffer traveled to Washington from Cedar Rapids, Iowa to receive the National Medal and spoke to IMLS about how the library impacts the community.

>> GAIL NAUGHTON: The National Czech and Slovak Museum and Library was founded in about 1978. We serve a broad based community. Of course we have the Cedar Rapids community. We have the founders, the people of Czech and Slovak heritage. But in a city of Cedar Rapids' size which is about 125,000, maybe a larger metro area of about 250,000, we're a very important part of the cultural community. We are an anchor cultural institution.

But then we are a national museum and so we have a national audience across the country.

Czech Village is an ethnic commercial district where all of the people who come into town to do their business. They would come in to bring in their things to sell and they would come in to buy things they needed for the next week. They would probably stop in and have a little drink. They'd meet their friends.

So it was a commercial area and it was also I think a social magnet.

>> BOB SCHAFFER: That little commercial district in Cedar Rapids, the Czech Village, it had kind of fallen on decline as the heavy industry of Cedar Rapids declined, jobs went away. That first generation of immigrants aged, their kids went off to school, and oftentimes didn't come back.

And that is when we bought a little building that used to be a pharmacy from 1901. So we bought that in 1975, opened up the store, pretty quickly got drafted into the effort to revitalize this Czech Village.

>> GAIL NAUGHTON: Well Czech Village was really part of why the museum exists. This is the area, this is the base, this is why they built a museum. So it is a very close relationship. You know, we work together on things and try to you know, improve, both frustrated improve each other.

The flood of June 2008 came about from a terrible winter. We knew there would be flooding but there had been flooding. You know, when you have a river running through town.

>> BOB SCHAFFER: That flood was one of those amazing events. You know, they had talked about the chance of flooding but you know, we were quite sure how bad it would be. Sure enough it inundated the whole neighborhood, a multi-block area, and you can imagine that jumble after we came back into the building.

It was a very surreal image with shelving kind of tilted at odd angles. But strangely some things through you know, the surface tension of the water were just stuck to the shelves at an angle like this.

>> GAIL NAUGHTON: There were very difficult times in the very beginning and getting back into the building, checking on artifacts that we had not removed to see what was safe, what was damaged. The building needed to get cleaned out so that mold didn't get into the building. That was our big concern.

It was obvious quickly that we had, you know, massive damage that was going to cost millions of dollars to fix and I say that on one side but on the other side, we never hesitated. We never hesitated. We were always going to come back. There were lots of decisions to make to get there but we were always going to come back.

We found out very early that it couldn't be a museum again where it stood. We could not insure our artifacts. We couldn't insure anyone else's artifacts that would come from another museum. And in the end we actually moved it. We lifted it up and we moved it about four hundred and eighty feet and lifted it up eleven feet higher than it sat when it was flooded.

>> BOB SCHAFFER: The relationship I think between the Czech Village and the museum has always been a great one and one that I think has been not only - well, self-supporting and we always felt that. That was one of the main reasons why it was pushed to open up a museum was not only to preserve that culture but also to give visitors to the area something more to do than just to shop.

People want it all. You know, they want the full experience. They would like to see a museum but they also want to shop. They want to eat. They want to taste every facet of the culture.

>> GAIL NAUGHTON: The flood of 2008 changed the museum in dramatic ways. Our mission had been more about being the premier museum and library you know, about the history and culture of the Czechs and Slovaks in the United States. But we dug down deeper into coming up with a mission that was to inspire people of all backgrounds. It is about Czech and Slovak history and culture but it is about Americans too. It is about being an American.

So we want people to take the stories, to get the lessons in the values out of the struggles for freedom and identity and family, community, human dignity that these people have had and learn from it.