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Macedonian Schools Project Newsletter - June 2023

Welcome to the first issue of the Macedonia Schools Project's Newsletter. Our Newsletter has two major objectives: to assist members of the Macedonia Schools Project (MSP) to know about the volunteers, teachers, and schools associated with MSP and to motivate potential donors by showing the impact of MSP funds. The Newsletter will be electronically distributed quarterly to MSP volunteers, MSP members, Macedonian teachers and directors, and potential donors. We plan to include progress reports from schools (from students, teachers, and directors), family stories from MSP volunteers, and reports of past experiences (such as those of volunteer teachers).

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MESSAGE FROM THE MSP PRESIDENT BLAZO MITASEV

Education prepares children to pursue their calling. The mission of the Macedonia Schools Project (MSP) is to assist the children and teachers in Macedonian schools.

I was blessed to grow up in a family that valued education as a game changer and enabler. Both of my parents had to work from an early age and contribute to their families' subsistence. My father was pulled out of school at age of 11, my mother at 14. They did everything possible for me and my sister not to be burdened with labor at an early age, but instead to pursue higher education.

A number of educators that continuously challenged me to learn and do better also enabled me. They were skilled, experienced professionals, and also cared about the students' futures.

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Narodna Tehnika (The People's Technology). It provided after school activities for students interested in areas not part of the school curriculum. I fell in love with everything that was offered such as model airplanes and rockets, film making, photography, astronomy, MORSE code communication, and others. It became my "home" and my father used to joke about bringing my bed to the facility. I knew that funding of Narodna Tehnika was based on mandatory donations by all workers, and I am eternally grateful for their sacrifices.

As a result of my strong family support, excellent education, and the opportunities to experience many areas after school, I became an electronics engineer. I chose this career path after discovering electronics at age 17, while I was an exchange student in the USA. It was a life-long learning profession that provided well for me and my family. The early years were filled with more learning, and then innovation. The last phase was mentoring younger engineers.

Unfortunately, in the years since I partook of these programs in Macedonia, the political and economic landscapes have changed greatly. Schools are no longer well-funded and after school program offerings have been decimated. That's why I feel so strongly that it's important for private donors to step up.

Today, we have an opportunity to help future generations. The Macedonia Schools Project (MSP) does just that. We partner with select teachers in Macedonia as liaisons for MSP. They are individuals who are passionate about their profession and their students. As unpaid helpers, they contribute to the successful mission of MSP by identifying the most important areas of impact each year, and making sure the funds are spent according to the approved grants.

My vision is to expand the outreach of MSP by enabling more youngsters to learn and find the area of interest that becomes their profession. We live in a technology driven world. MSP has provided the extra funding that has made a difference in a limited number of schools. We are an organization of unpaid volunteers, striving to make sure donations are put to good use. Please help us, the children, and educators in Macedonia with your support by [becoming a general member of MSP or making a targeted contribution](#).

GRANTS FUNDED IN 2023

After an Executive Board review, MSP is pleased to provide \$17,134 in 2023 grants! The grants will be helping seven schools in six communities, with funding for an interactive whiteboard, a copier, projectors, TVs, laptops, desktops, musical instruments and equipment, ductless heating and classroom structural improvements. We hope and wish you will join us in generating an increase in funding for the 2024 proposals.

2023 Participating Schools

Alexandar Makedonski - Skopje

Braka Miladinovci - Struga

Bratstvo Edinstvo - Ohrid

Josip Broz Tito - Struga

Vanco Prke - Stip

Check out just a few of our successful funded grant projects from last year!



HISTORY OF THE MACEDONIA SCHOOLS PROJECT

By Tom Lineham, MSP Board Member and Founding President

I first visited Macedonia in 1981, one year after Tito's death. At the time Macedonia was still part of Yugoslavia. My first visit occurred on our honeymoon. My wife was an artist and avid folk dancer. She loved Balkan music the best. So, I asked her what was her favorite Balkan dance music, and she said: "Macedonian".

We had a swell time. The people in the area welcomed us whole heartedly. Over time I continued to communicate with several Macedonian friends and returned to visit several times. Soon, I fell in love with the people and country.

With some life insurance funds I received in 2004 on my wife's passing, I contacted various Macedonian groups focusing on youth. In 2005, with the help of Dimche Kanveche of the Ohrid Youth Council, I funded several activities.

During my visit in 2007 Dimche introduced me to school directors Osman Osmani of Bratstvo Edinstvo School in Ohrid and Marina Krelska of Zivko Cingo School in Velgoshti. Accompanying me on this visit was Tim Nogler, a future MSP board member. Though not yet officially organized, the MSP made its first donation to Zivko Cingo School. Since we were from Washington State, I think our hosts thought we were from the Gates Foundation! Though our first grant was modest, it was well received. At our meeting, Director Krelska introduced me to Vesna Terzioska, the

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I retired from my job with the state of Washington in 2008 and visited Macedonia every year until 2018. As a result, I made numerous contacts with local educators, students and administrators. Director Osmani introduced me to Emilija Paunkoska, the English Teacher for Bratstvo School, who later became another MSP board member. Meanwhile, word of the MSP reached Dr. Leon Speroff, a prominent Macedonian-American who lives in Portland, Oregon near me. In fact, Dr. Speroff and I played senior softball in the Vancouver-Portland area. When he learned of my work, he suggested I contact the Macedonia Patriotic Organization and apply for a grant (which was successful) from the organization's Goce Delchev fund. Over the years, Dr. Speroff and I held many informal discussions about the MSP during our senior softball games and practices!



Kuratica village school: kids with MSP donated sporting equipment

In 2010, the MSP officially incorporated as a 501(c)(3) nonprofit charitable organization that allows donors a potential tax deduction during tax time.

Dr. Speroff introduced me to Podkrepa, a Macedonian-Bulgarian organization centered in Portland Oregon. Podkrepa's President, Bob Bouneff, and Vice President, Blazo Mitasev, embraced the MSP's mission of helping Macedonian schools. Bob and his family visited the Ohrid schools and especially championed the Lasker Chess Club led by Bratstvo-Edinstvo instructor, Boris Luseski. Later, Blazo joined the MSP board and now is the MSP President. Podkrepa collected books and educational materials which I packed and sent directly to our Macedonian Schools.



MSP Board and friends, Portland Oregon, 2018. Top row: Tony Usibelli, Tom Lineham, Dr. Leon Speroff, Ljudmil Jordanovo, Margarita Niceska, Vasja Jordanova. Bottom Row: George Antansov, Blazo Mitasev and Sasha

conversation English. The Covid pandemic disrupted the program, but it was revived in 2023.

We added a third school, Josep Broz Tito School in Struga. Leading the effort was Margarita Nicheska, the school's IT teacher. Subsequently Margarita joined the original MSP board. By 2022, the MSP expanded to serve eleven schools and their satellite schools in 16 cities and villages in the Republic of North Macedonia!

What is your favorite memory? I had so many great memories of my time in Macedonia, it is difficult to reduce it to one. However, one stands out. This occurred during a visit to the remote village of Kuratica several miles off the Bitola Road deep in the hills. The small Goce Delce Primary School has about 50 students. The MSP purchased a few items for the schools over the years, and we sent them books for the school's small English Library. As I toured several classrooms, Vesna Terzioska, the school's counselor and MSP board member, summoned me to one room. To my surprise, the kids put on a special performance for me. On the blackboard, in large letters, read THANK YOU! in English. The kids danced both modern and traditional dances to entertain me. It was a very special day for me that I will not forget.



What is your vision for the future? The MSP is about kids in Macedonia. Anything which the MSP can do to foster interest by anyone in helping kids and their schools is a good thing. We need to reach and inspire next generations of Macedonian-Americans to champion the cause. My vision includes the encouragement of other ethnic groups to participate in the program. Ideally, the MSP could raise enough financial contributions that it could support a full-time paid staff rather than relying solely on volunteers. We should provide a transparent, trustworthy structure whereby donors can contribute directly to the schools or communities they feel a special connection with.

Why are you stepping down as president? I have always felt that a good organizer knows when to pass the torch. In recent years, the MSP has attracted some significant new leadership from the Macedonian-American community. With new leadership, come fresh ideas and approaches that will keep the organization current and relevant. I feel proud of what we have accomplished so far and the MSP will only get better over time.

Why was the effort worth it? The MSP has touched many Macedonian schools, teachers and students over the years. The organization has built a solid core to build upon. We have promoted a positive model and developed many friendships. MSP has made a difference for numerous young folks in Macedonia.

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Tom teaching in Vanco Nikoleski Primary School in Leskoec, 2015

Why is it important to expand and grow? Too much time in the Balkans is spent examining the past. The future of Macedonia lies in its youth! Helping kids get a quality education is the best investment a society can make. Many Macedonian-Americans and other supporters understand this and want to help. The MSP provides one more vehicle to make it happen.

Why did you never learn to dance? While I love Macedonian music and dance, I feel it is much safer for my friends when I sit and enjoy.

What is your favorite Macedonian dish? Macedonian moussaka.

Favorite Macedonian wine? Tga Za Jug! Inexpensive and full of body!

Did you pass your love of Macedonia to your daughter? Both my daughter, Lisa, and my granddaughter, Maya, joined me in Macedonia. As I promised them, they had experiences they will never forget. Both Lisa and Maya appreciated and enjoyed the people and the land.

What were the characteristics of Macedonia that made you fall in love with the country? This is a complex question! There are so many components to my love of Macedonia: how kindly the people have been to me; the fascinating history; the hidden beauty; the challenging political situation; how the moon floats over Lake Ohrid during a starry clear night; the relative obscurity of being off the normal tourist beaten track!

Are you going to remain in contact with the MSP and Macedonia? Absolutely, I intend to be active on the MSP board and help its leadership whenever I can. I plan to return to Macedonia in September, 2023, and renew my many extraordinary Macedonian friendships.

MEET MARGARITA, A MACEDONIAN TEACHER AND MSP BOARD MEMBER

By Margarita Nicheska

My name is Margarita Ruvinova Nicheska, a teacher at Josip Broz Tito School in Struga. My first contact with MSP happened in 2010 when I first met Tom Lineham, whose story about his connection with Macedonia and his desire to help Macedonian schools fascinated me so much. His commitment to help our schools, whose financial situation did not allow providing the necessary school supplies, was warmly welcomed by teachers, students and parents alike.

understand our problems as teachers, but also the needs of students to achieve quality knowledge.



Every year we decide which visual aids are priority, and we ask for them to be donated to us. Everything we have received so far is being used to the maximum extent today, with the modernization of teaching: smart boards, televisions, projectors, computers, equipment for the subjects of physics, chemistry, biology, history, geography, but also for physical and musical education.



Without the help we receive from MSP, our school would be lagging in achieving quality knowledge. It gives me great honor, pride and pleasure to be part of this family that contributes to the achievement of positive values.

Donations & Membership

Please become a member of the Macedonia Schools Project to help the youth of North Macedonia. Your tax-deductible contribution will enhance the growth and impact of our program. Visit www.msp.charity to learn more. We can answer any question you may have regarding membership or making a contribution at MacedoniaSchoolsProject@gmail.com



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