Novosti iz LA-a

Where Bagpiping and Cevapcici Meet

Croatian Cultural Center Hosts Multicultural Series

by Megan Barnes

If you've seen the posters around town, you may have made a double take: A Scottish festival in San Pedro? At the Croatian Cultural Center, no less?

It is true. Sunday, July 31 at 2 p.m., bagpipes and haggis will be in the air (don't worry, the former leads to the latter) at 7th and Pacific that has been the Croatian Cultural Center of Greater Los Angeles for the past 40 years. The Scottish festival is the latest in a new series of multicultural events put on by the center, a series conceived by Director Maya Bristow.

"Our neighbor here is from Kenya, the guy across the street is Georgian, the guy over there is Mexican, I'm Croatian ... It's such a rich, diverse neighborhood," says Bristow, who commutes to San Pedro from La Crescenta. "Here I don't have to grab my passport and leave the country to experience different cultures; I can just go down the street."

In the past year, the Croatian Cultural Center has put on a Brazilian bossa nova event, Hungarian festival, Afghan fashion show and Mexican art exhibit in addition to its Croatian programming. The events not only bridge local communities, but draw hundreds from the greater L.A. area to downtown San Pedro.

Every town knows there is no shortage of cultural pride in San Pedro. From hometown pride to homeland patriotism. But Bristow thought maybe instead of focusing exclusively inward, why not learn about cultures by sharing and exchanging?

"We are trying to open the window into our culture in juxtaposition with other cultures, create a synergy of events and basically realize how much we are alike than we are not," she says. "Because the culture of Croatia is so diverse, we have so much common ground with so many different people, that you would be surprised."

The Scottish festival offers at least one example. "Croatia has a bagpipe," she says. "It's not as euphonic and as the Scottish bagpipe, but we do have a bagpipe."

The international events have been a hit so far, with instrumental help from downtown businesses like Mobi's Strudel, Mixed Designs and the Maritime Research Center & Nautical Shop.

They're just one of the many ideas Bristow, who set out to revive the center when she became director in 2009. The creative force brings a diverse background: herself. Serving worked in industries from fashion, to animal rescue, to education.

In the past two years, Bristow has brought together a new board of directors (ladies from all parts of L.A. [and with 20-forest regional roots in Croatia] to put together diverse programming at the center from music, films and lectures, to kids events, art, Croatian singing, language and dance classes, all at inexpensive rates or for free. There are even Croatian soccer and tennis tournaments.

"People see this big huge building here and they have no idea what's going on, they don't know it's open to the whole community to come and enjoy," says Vice President Fiona Jerkovic.

Sponsored by the Los Angeles Department of Cultural Affairs, the nonprofit center was founded in 2001 by then City Councilman Rudy Svorinich, Jr. The city's tight budget means many expenses are out-of-pocket for the volunteer-based board of directors.

While the center might struggle with funds, it certainly doesn't lack vision.

Bristow has her eyes set on bringing an award-winning Croatian musical group (yes, you read right) to the center. With San Pedro's Croatian and Mexican populations, could there be a better fit in the world?

The center also has relationships with Mary Star of the Sea Parish and former Councilwoman Janice Hahn's office. "I have to thank her for her support," says Bristow. "She was the first person to give me a hand of support to the community and I really thank her for that. I even got her over to her congressional endeavor."

It also works with representatives from the Croatian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Croatian Consulate and international exchange programs. This summer, PBS-featured music educator Scott Stevenson will bring his Rhythm Village Music Camp for kids. A San Pedro Youth Choir with Lisa Crawford as well as a jazz festival are also in the works. The center serves as a gallery, where artists and crafters can display their work, and when the San Pedro Art Association puts on its First Thursday events.

Jerkovic says the center's multicultural programming is all about community building and has benefited chamber like Harbor Interfaith Services, the Khalid Hosseini Foundation and Soroptimist International of the L.A. Harbor.

He jokes that Bristow is constantly brewing with new ideas. Adding, "Maya doesn't lack in that department. And she's succeeded a lot to be down here."

They also welcome input from the community. "We want people to experience the culture that's all around San Pedro they don't know about. Hungarians, Afghans — there's all kinds of culture and it's a great atmosphere we're creating here."

Find more information on the Croatian Cultural Center by visiting www.croatianculture.org.

Promocija Hrvatske bogate baštine konačno je na radaru umjetničkog miljea Los Angelesa. Naime, glavni urednik *San Pedro Today* tražio je detalje rada Hrvatskog kulturnog centra u Los Angelesu. Tražimo sve spone između naše kulture i svijeta. Možda zvuči preambiciozno, ali kvalitetnom vizijom sve je moguće. Trenutno radimo na Hrvatsko-meksičkoj kulturnoj razmjeni. Meksiko slavi našeg misionara Konščaka, te će upravo po njemu u pograničnom gradiću Ensenadi biti imenovana ulica. Ponosni smo na taj gest.
Na jesen počinje Internacionalni kulturni triptih, likovna izlozba, ples i koncert.
Sada pokusavamo postići novu razinu dijaloga o našoj kulturi i umjetnicima.

Pozdrav iz Los Angelesa

Maya Bristow