

MACEDONIAN COMMUNITY OF ADELAIDE & SA INC.
ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING – Sunday 03 November 2019,
1.00 pm
Macedonian Community Centre : 148 Crittenden Road, Findon SA 5023

PRESIDENT’S REPORT – A.Michael Radin

(nb. Delivered in a combination of the Macedonian and English languages)
(Agenda - ITEM 1)

Following on from my introductory and “house-keeping” remarks, I confirm that my own report will also incorporate the Secretary’s report, as Mary Perla is unable to be present here today.

The Executive Committee (EC) has met 23 times since the last AGM in December 2018. We have unfortunately had three resignations during the course of this year. One of those positions was filled by a co-optee, but given the fact that the two other resignations took place relatively late in the year, the EC elected to proceed with its routine business as an 8-person body, as permitted under the constitution, with a reduced quorum.

May I commend my fellow EC members on their efforts throughout this year, and although reluctant to single out individuals, let me nonetheless mention both **Jennie Trampeva-Radin**, our hard-working treasurer, minute-taker and producer of the weekly language programs on Radio 5EBI-FM, and **Fay Murat**, who in addition to her hard effort on the EC as a new member, has also taken over the responsibilities of property manager.

I note that insufficient nominations have been received for the EC half-election to be conducted this afternoon by the IEP, and as you all no doubt understand, we will be required constitutionally to call for nominations from the floor in order to fill all vacancies if possible. Can I simply say that although I encourage you all to consider, where eligible, joining the ranks of this Community’s peak body of governance, please understand what our organization most needs now is a passionate commitment to voluntary work, time and hard effort from a capable group of persons, whose skills and experiences do match the standards

2.

required in the year 2020. As our society has changed dramatically from the early days of post-war Macedonian settlement in Adelaide some 50 to 70 years ago, so too has the nature of voluntary, community-based organizations also changed, and particularly in a world where volunteers of this type are rapidly diminishing in nature, to be replaced by new values and experiences, largely built upon the back of the application of new, modern technologies in an information age where old forms of communication are rapidly becoming unfamiliar. For anyone who does not yet understand what is involved in being a productive and contributing member of the EC, please come forward and see me, or refer carefully to the leaflet which you will find amongst the package of materials sent to you in both languages with the notice of meeting.

Dear members, before I report on both our past and future activities, let me reflect further, in a philosophical way, about the existential challenges facing this organization, and the wider Macedonian community, in the year 2020. I have spoken often about the imperative of engendering a transition amongst the generations in terms of future participation in our Community. We must learn to understand and respect the values of our younger generations, and the ways in which they inform themselves and communicate, if we are to successfully persuade them to accept that our Community is relevant to their modern lives. I know from personal experience, and I have little doubt that most of you also appreciate this fact personally, that so many of our youth find it innately difficult to relate to our Community organization as being relevant to them

today. In particular, when they hear of the intrigues and debates and often poor behaviours amongst our older generations. “*Why would I want to get involved in that*” they ask themselves? And they are not wrong!

If we cannot realize our important objective of bringing younger people into our organization, and soon, then I fear that with the passing of the current patriarchal generations, these Community premises may simply become a “white elephant” in the middle of the western suburbs, the traditional home of Macedonians in Adelaide. Coupled with the serious financial challenges which we are facing, and both our treasurer and I will have much more to say on that later on, there is indeed a sad prospect that nothing much will remain, within a relatively short space of time. Knowing the trials and tribulations of our

3.

forebears, who faced an uncertain future in a nominally-hostile and ignorant socio-cultural environment when they arrived here all those years ago, often penniless and without language and literacy skills, this is a legacy which I am personally not prepared to leave behind if I can help it!

On a more positive note, aside from the generational changes which I speak of, I am pleased to confirm the broadening of our management and decision-making base, not before time, over the past few years, and I am happy to see that occur, with my personal support and encouragement, under my recent tenure as President.

Dear members, since our establishment in 1947, when the association was known as the “Macedonian Society ‘Alexander the Great’”, only fourteen (14) Presidents have served this Community in that capacity. All have been male, although Fay Petre did serve as acting president for a few months in 2015-16. Eleven of these fourteen Presidents were born in Macedonia, two in Australia and one in Czechoslovakia. Twelve of the fourteen have origins from the Aegean region of Macedonia, with only two being from the Republic of Macedonia, and none from the other regions (Pirin and Mala Prespa). In relation to the Aegeans, five come from the village of Dolno Kotori (Lerin), four from Visheni (Kostur) and two from Peshoshnica (Lerin). Occupationally, two were lawyers, one a real estate agent, four market gardeners, six business persons and/or property developers, and one a senior public servant. Seven of the Presidents have been subsequently acknowledged as Life members of MCASA, while only two of them have produced “next-generation” Presidents. An eclectic mix, you will agree!

So it is with delight that I confirm once again, that women now significantly outnumber men on our EC, and also in relation to other organs of management within the Community! That is our main mission, while carrying out the essential objects and purposes of an organization which is now 72 years old – to ensure continuity and consistency in our social and cultural practices as Australians of Macedonian origin, but all the while ensuring that we can replenish our ranks, to guarantee our future in a meaningful way, with the broadest possible participation of volunteers in respect of age, gender, social and occupational

4.

status. That is the right formula in my humble view for the 21st century in terms of being a Macedonian-origin person in South Australia!

2019 Activities

I am pleased to acknowledge the terrific work done by many of our volunteers in holding what was a very successful Macedonian womens’ event in May 2019, including a culinary exhibition and fashion parade. Funds were raised for the Community, the attendance was fantastic, and a great time (from all accounts) was had by all!

Our traditional national-day function (“*Ilinden*”) was held in August, and more recently, on 12 September 2019, while acknowledging “*Independence Day*” (11 September), we also held a successful “denska slava” commemorating the 50th anniversary (1969-2019) of the establishment of our Community’s

“**Macedonian Orthodox Church**”, named after the patron saint “*St. Naum of Ohrid*”. The luncheon was well attended, following on from the church service, conducted by Father Eftim Betinski, from Melbourne. A nice souvenir of “St Naum”, in the form of a “mini-icon”, was prepared. We used the occasion to also award the first recipients of the “Goce Delchev” medal, and let me today publicly acknowledge those deserving recipients, Risto Yankoff, Sime Kolachkov and Milica Kostoff, who between them have collectively amassed no less than 260 years, with over 150 of those selflessly dedicated to our Community! It was very pleasing to see so many of their own families attend the function to witness these three recipients be awarded their medals.

We are still negotiating with Bishop Timotej, the head of our Australian Diocese (MODAS) about when our new parish priest, Oliver Noveski, may be able to travel to and settle in Adelaide, with his wife. This will be an important event, after not having a regular priest for almost three years, and the EC is hopeful that his presence will not only impact favourably upon once again bringing parishioners into the Church for regular services, but will also provide an immediate religious and spiritual resource for families who require access to a Macedonian orthodox priest. We are also hopeful that this will mean re-establishing religious instruction classes, and even perhaps our old Macedonian-

5.

language school for youngsters, and others, who have a keen desire to improve their Macedonian language competency.

I must publicly acknowledge the following priests who, with the blessing of Bishop Timotej, and their own church committees, travelled regularly to Adelaide from Melbourne and the Gold Coast, to hold special services in our religious calendar, as well as conducting various funeral and christening services during the year. These priests are Fathers Eftim Betinski, and Kliment Stankovski from Melbourne, Archimandrite Gavril Galev from Melbourne, and Father Gjorgji Laposki, from Gold Coast. In this regard, special services were held at Orthodox Christmas in January, the “Blessing of the Waters” also in January, Orthodox Easter in April, two other special services and liturgies later in the year, and of course, the 50th anniversary service in September.

Other important projects include the work towards re-establishing the MCASA web site and a social media presence, which is well under way, and will go “live” soon, renovation of our radio recording studio in the Cultural Centre, and acquisition of new sound equipment for use in the Community Hall and elsewhere. I acknowledge the generosity of the SA government in this regard, through the Multicultural SA grants scheme, for assisting both projects. Of course, as we all know, we have also received a \$20,000.00 grant from the SA government under the same scheme, on condition that MCASA provide matching funds, with respect to our most significant current project, the renovation and extension of the Community Hall. In this regard, I will shortly invite Jim Petre, our long-standing member, and consultant architect, and of course member of the IEP, to update you all about the project, which will be tackled in various phases over the next two years, from both a financial and a building point of view. Our first task is to attend to various compliance priorities imposed by the Charles Sturt Council, which has formally approved the project, but which also requires some urgent matters to first be attended to. We are grateful for Council’s support, and trust to be able to persuade it to assist us variously in financial terms in relation to bringing this important building project to fruition.

6.

During the year, general meetings were held in respect to the various internal sections of the Community. Very much our pride and joy, the **Macedonian Folkloric Ensemble “Sloboda”**, which provides a key pathway for young people to come into the Community through traditional Macedonian music and dance, performed at both Community functions but also at other external events, both in Adelaide and interstate. Indeed, one of the reasons why the Ensemble

elected a new management committee in June this year, was to perhaps enable the scope for youth activity in MCASA to be further broadened to involve activities beyond the folkloric dance aspect. However, the said committee unfortunately failed in terms of presenting coherent governance, and for reasons which I will mention “off the record”, it was relieved of its function under our constitution, with the EC holding all members of that committee collectively responsible for that unfortunate turn of events. That notwithstanding, the situation has been retrieved, and I am pleased to announce to the members today that, following advertisements placed on the internet and on our radio program for the new position of “Principal Choreographer” of the MFE “Sloboda”, Ms Lisa Georgiou has been appointed to this position. She is an excellent choice in my view, and given her relevant experience and undoubted skills, I am certain that she will lead the Ensemble into a bright future. I am also pleased to announce that the Ensemble will resume full practises next week, with a view to performances which are coming up shortly, including our Xmas function on 21 December next, and at the Bulgarian Festival in February 2020. Lisa is presently working with me, as temporary administrator of the Ensemble, to devise and put in place new administrative and funding arrangements for the group, within a new and perhaps more appropriate cultural environment. Lisa will shortly conclude the process of appointing her associate instructors, for both the intermediate and junior groups, and indeed I am pleased to announce that Jasmina Georgievski will assist Lisa in this regard with the intermediate age group.

The Macedonian Radio Program also elected a new management committee, with myself as President and Jennie Radin as both Secretary and program producer. I personally remain a board member of Radio Station 5EBI-FM for another year.

Georgina Vasilevski has also voluntarily committed to seek to re-establish a network of active Macedonian women, and she has some excellent project-

7.

oriented ideas in mind in this regard ; while the Life members have been urged to become more active, and to generally incorporate amongst them for social activities Macedonian senior citizens. I have already mentioned the prospect of rehabilitating the Macedonian language school, while a heritage project, hopefully funded by government, will focus on both the preservation of our important heritage materials, and the publishing of oral histories.

In terms of the international situation concerning our homeland Macedonia, it has indeed been an “annus horribilis”, so perhaps the less said the better! Suffice it to say that we have sought to distance ourselves from the morally bankrupt political regime in the Republic of Macedonia. The Macedonian “movement” on the other hand, which encapsulates all of our aspirations, lies in our hearts and in our collective conscience, and continues to draw our undying support.

Members, it is vitally important that we understand that MCASA is, and must continue to be, more than just a social club, where people can meet regularly, eat and drink, dance and listen to music. Though that aspect remains vitally important, what is even more important is that the Community, now 72 years old, stands for something inherently very valuable. That is the preservation, protection, and advancement of our entire cultural heritage in all of its important facets – historical, political, cultural/artistic, religious, folkloric and social – but importantly carried out in a way which embraces organically the changing face of the wonderful, multicultural Australian environment which has embraced us with better living conditions, rights and freedoms (but also with responsibilities and obligations) which we simply could not have achieved in the old country.

So if our perspective is to simply maintain an organization which enables a regular get-together for an ageing and therefore a dwindling population, then I say to you that with the inevitable passing of that magnificent generation, so too will MCASA pass from the scene in any meaningful way. I for one, as your elected President, am not prepared to allow that to happen!

8.

The 2020 Program

In closing, let me briefly address our proposed program over the next 12 months or so. Once the new Executive Committee has settled, we have two important functions on the immediate horizon. The first is the **Macedonian Fete and Garage Sale**, on Sunday 01 December 2019, which Georgina Vasilevski and her team of volunteers are passionately working towards organizing as we speak.

Hopefully, as an important organizational feature in this region for a long time, we can persuade the Charles Sturt Council to support us in this exciting initiative. Profits will essentially be allocated to the Hall renovation project. I appeal to you all, with your families and friends, to support this event.

As mentioned, our Xmas function this year, for the first time, will not be held on Xmas eve, given that the next day sees families wholly engaged in those traditional activities, which are invariably burdensome. So let us try this year something different – we will hold our function on the closest Saturday to Xmas day, and with our “Sloboda” ensemble performing, we will hopefully attract a good crowd, and have a lot of fun!

Our church services at Orthodox Xmas (07 January) and the “Blessing of the Waters” (19 January) will follow in quick succession, and we will again make arrangements for a parish priest to attend in this regard.

However, by far the major project for 2020 will be the Hall renovation program. We must complete this as soon as possible, with a view to commercially leasing those premises to a suitable business in the catering and hospitality industry. That will enable us to fully realize the potential of our most valuable asset, the Macedonian Community Hall. Although we have a collective asset-base of around \$2m in value, the commercial rent potential of the Church and the Cultural Centre are obviously limited. We must put ourselves in a situation where we can draw and rely upon a good commercial rent from a management lease arrangement in respect of the Hall, in order to improve our revenue base. In that scenario, there is still scope for our regular, small-scale renters to continue to use the Hall, as well as the three or four MCASA functions which we regularly schedule annually in this regard.

9.

Jennie will shortly distribute our audited financials for the 2018-19 year, and as you will note, the position on a cashflow basis is far from an impressive one. While the Balance Sheet is very sound, with asset values having increased, this helps us little in terms of the P & L situation, where again MCASA has accrued a substantial cash loss.

For our own sakes, and those of our descendants, this is a situation which we must quickly turn around.

Thank you for your attention, and I will now briefly take questions before we proceed with the agenda.