Spartanky PLAST sorority meets for Anniversary Conference at Soyuzivka

By Olesia Matijcio

KERHONKSON, N.Y. – Members of the Spartanky sorority of the Plast Ukrainian Scouting Organization gathered for the sorority’s annual conference and retreat on the weekend of November 1-3, 2019, at the UNA Soyuzivka Heritage Center.

A record number of sixty-five members of the sorority, both from the senior and younger branches, traveled from the Eastern and mid-western states to attend this year’s conference, which had special significance this year because 2019 marked three anniversaries in the history of the sorority. 60 years ago in 1959 the younger branch was founded in Chicago, and 25 years ago the senior branch was formally established in the Plast Scout organization. In addition, the sorority has been operating a camp for 7-year-old cub scouts, called “Beginning Camp”, that the organization initiated 25 years ago at the Plast scout camp at East Chatham, N.Y. The conference was the culmination of a series of celebrations that took place during the year that marked these anniversaries, the most notable one which was held during Parents’ Day (Den Plastuna) and the East Chatham camp.

The Spartanky sorority was founded based on PLAST Scouting principles, taking additional inspiration from the role Spartan women played in ancient Greece, where they were known for exhibiting strength of body, mind and soul. The mission of the organization is grounded in the Plast Scouts ideology, commitment to helping others and character development of Ukrainian youth, in the United States and Ukraine. Spartanky have active branches in New York, New Jersey, Connecticut and Pennsylvania as well as a very active contingent the city of Lviv, Ukraine

 This year’s conference began with an informal social evening on Friday night, when arriving members gathered to enjoy each other’s company after a year’s worth of active scouting leadership~~.~~ After checking into their rooms and enjoying a delicious dinner at the Main House, the scouts gathered for the main event of the evening, a “vatra”, or bonfire program, that took place by the warmth of the fireplace in the main lobby. The evening was highlighted by a beloved Plast tradition of acting out humorous skits and singing songs. The theme of this “vatra” was to reprise memorable skits from previous Spartanky conferences. MCs Roma Maksymowych and Darka Patti ably led a program of humorous skits performed by both senior and younger members, followed by rousing renditions of sing-along favorites.

The formal phase of the conference took place on Saturday in the main hall of Veselka. During the opening ceremonies Senior Sorority President Irena Sawchyn greeted all the attendees, and commended and thanked everyone for their extraordinary dedication to the sorority and the Plast scout organization. And to the year’s highly successful anniversary celebrations.

Several members were honored for their contributions.

1. Petrusia Kotlar Paslawsky -  Орден Святого Юрія в Золоті - awarded the Order of St. George in Gold, the highest commendation given in Plast USO.  for establishing the popular one-week Beginners' Camp 25 years ago, and guiding its continuation for 25 years, as well as many years in leadership scouting roles

Award was presented by Daria Temnycky, a long-time leader in Plast Scouting in America.

2. Anna Ortynsky and Alexandra Magun - received a promotion in rank to Scout Trustee,

*A*ward was presented by Irene Pelech Zwarych, the Chair of Nominations for the Spartanky Sorority

3. Laryssa Nahnybida and Zenia Olesnycky were give a Certificate of Recognition for their year-long dedication in organizing the anniversary celebrations for the sorority, as well as multiple reunions in the past.

4. Alexandra Zawadiwsky received a Certificate of Recognition for her excellent work in developing the Spartanky website and acquiring archival data for the site.

The Certificates were awarded by Sorority President Irena Sawchyn.

The group then reviewed projects that were completed by the various branches throughout the year, including caroling during the Holidays, a ski day / winter outing at Holiday Mt. NY, conducting St. Andrew’s Eve customs ( Andriyivskiy Vechir), Beginner’s Camp at East Chatham, NY, testing of campers for the PLAST physical fitness badge (VFV), and helping to preserve the forest trails at the campsite.

New board members were elected for the key posts that follow: Theresa Kuritza as president, Chrystia Iwanik as vice-president, Zezya Zawadiwsky as secretary, Christya Stasiuk as treasurer. Additionally, local chapter leaders were named including Kiki Zinycz in NY/CT, Roma Maksymovych in NJ, and Marusia Kolodij in Philadelphia. Lastly, 3 women were welcomed into the kurin as new Spartanky candidates ( to be accepted as full members once all requirements are fulfilled ) : Zina Zinycz, Alexandra Odulak Petrenko and Roma Hamersky-Dale.

After Saturday’s formal deliberations, all Spartanky attendees joined in a unique fun-filled scavenger hunt (“terenova hra”) organized by Alexa “Googa” Watters, President of the younger branch, Nadia Olesnycky and Olenka Olesnycky, members of the younger branch. Teams of senior and younger Spartanky worked together eagerly to address a series of challenges and outdo the other teams. There were mock battles, impromptu singing, trick photography and poetry recitations. A good time was had by all with every Spartanka demonstrating good cheer and a healthy dose of competitive spirit. All activities were captured on digital cameras by each team and then edited and shown to all the enthusiastic participants as a late-night treat.

After the vigorous outdoor hunt, everyone gathered by the fireplace again for snacks and beverages, and were treated to an exhibition of mementos from wedding traditions that were practiced by the first Spartanky at shower-type celebrations called “Divych Vechir”. Four senior members, Itsia Bihun, Marta Torielli , Romana Pylyp and Margreta Nycz displayed the keepsakes that they had received for their weddings many years before and had stored as valued treasures. They displayed tablecloths (“obrusy”) that had been embroidered by the Spartanky friends of the bride-to-be, framed “fairy tale” posters that related with beautiful calligraphy the story how the groom and bride met, as well as head wreaths plaited by the friends to give to the new bride.

The senior members reminisced about the other wedding traditions, and were all deeply moved to hear that the younger members were continuing many of the traditions for their “Spartanky weddings.” It was a very sentimental hour!

The highlight of the day was the after-dinner “Spartanka Masquarade” team competition. Each team was tasked with dressing up one team member as a Spartan woman who had to embody one of the key Spartan ideals that reflect the sorority’s fundamental ethic. The results were both hilarious and thoughtful, resulting in a memorable evening that brought the younger and senior members even closer together.

The evening continued when the library was opened to show a display of Spartanky memorabilia through the ages, including photo collections that reflected 60 years of the group’s existence and contributions to the Plast organization.

The conclusion of the day came with a celebratory cake, as a fitting culmination of the year’s anniversary celebrations. All the attendees, younger and older, toasted their accomplishments and sang the traditional “Mnohaya Lita” to wish each other many more years of collaborative endeavors as Spartanky.

As a late-night treat the younger Spartanky screened the video montage of the scavenger hunt that took place earlier to a very receptive audience. The chatting and laughing continued late into the night.

Closing ceremonies took place early on Sunday morning, led by the new Senior President Theresa Kuritza, followed by Divine Holy Liturgy celebrated at the Holy Trinity Ukrainian Catholic Church on Foordmore Rd.

All in all the event was a major success, in light of the beautiful fall weather, the hospitality and wonderful accommodations of the Heritage Center at Soyuzivka, the planning and execution of the event by the NJ chapter, led by Rada organizers Laryssa Nahnybida and Zenia Olesnycky, and most of all by the commitment and dedication of these strong women to do their part in helping to support and reinforce the ideology of PLAST Organization with the Ukrainian youth in the US and abroad: strength of body and soul . All left for home energized and ready to accomplish another year of hard but rewarding work!

The next conference is being planned by the NY / CT chapter for the fall 2020. For further information about the Spartanky sorority readers my contact Chrystia Iwanik at ciwanik@yahoo.com

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