

Distinguished recipients of Czechia 30 medals (June 20, 2023, Ottawa)

“Czechia 30” celebration featured a presentation of medals for special contributions to the development of Czech-Canadian relations. The medals prepared by Česká mincovna / Czech Mint feature portraits of Her Majesty Queen Victoria and Her Majesty Queen Elisabeth II as well as motifs of the Czech Lion, symbol of the Czech statehood, and the Czech tolar. (Tolar was an important European currency created more than 500 years ago in Bohemia, which spread to North America and gave the name to the currencies in Canada and the US – dollar.)

Mr. GEORGE HELLER - recognized for his remarkable personal contribution to the strengthening of the Czech-Canadian cooperation. Mr. Heller was born in Mariánské Lázně in 1948. His father fought in World War II as a member of the Czechoslovak division of the British Army. After the communist coup in 1948, the Hellers left Czechoslovakia and arrived in Canada. George Heller marked an impressive career in business. He served as the President and CEO of the Hudson’s Bay Company, Zellers, Bata North America and Europe, Kmart Canada as well as the Committee, which oversaw the 15th Commonwealth Games in Victoria. Throughout his life as a proud Czech Canadian, he has been a tireless supporter of the strengthening of (not only) economic cooperation between the Czech Republic and Canada.

Hon. JOHN BRASSARD - recognized for his remarkable personal contribution to the strengthening of the Czech-Canadian cooperation. Mr. Brassard showed impressive, dedicated leadership in establishing the Canada – Czech Republic Parliamentary Friendship Group in the Canadian Parliament. During the pandemic, Mr. Brassard was tirelessly calling meetings of the emerging Group online and in person with masks when it was possible. Thanks to all these efforts, a record might have been broken when the Friendship Group was officially established only 3 days after the last elections. The group now includes more than 20 members and can be proud of its impressive record in strengthening Czech-Canadian relations. The Czech Republic has a truly remarkable friend in Mr. Brassard. It does not matter for him if it is day or night – he is always there for our country when an important Czech-Canadian initiative emerges.

JIM & KAREN PETERIK - recognized for their remarkable personal support of the Czech Republic abroad and advancing Czech-Canadian relations. Mr. and Mrs. Peterik, both proud Czech-Americans, have been most kind supporters of Czech Republic’s as well as Czech-American community’s presentations for a long time, including celebrations of the centennial of the creation of Czechoslovakia in Chicago where one of the key chapters in the history of the creation of the modern Czech statehood was written. In Canada, Jim performed not only the Czechia 30 celebration, but also in September of last year via a videorecording at the Czech European Union Presidency Gala. In addition to that, Jim most kindly agreed to be part of the Traxler 110 project celebrating 110th anniversary of the birth of the Czech-Canadian songwriter Jiří Traxler and honouring more than 100 years of Czech-Canadian friendship. For that project he recorded, for the very first time, Jiří Traxler’s hit Měsíc to zavínil in English as Let’s Blame It on the Moon (All the songs of the album are available – together with Czechs & Canada publication at www.Traxler110.cz) None of those projects would have been possible without the strong support from Ms. Karen Peterik, who has stood by her husband in music, promotion of Czech culture and heritage, and everything else for more than 50 years.

The medals were also presented to three distinguished representatives of three historic Czech communities in Canada, one from each of the prairie provinces. Czech settlements and villages were created in this part of Canada at the end of the 19th and beginning of the 20th centuries by Czechs arriving not only from our homeland, but also from the US as well as from Volhynia/today's Ukraine. Members of all three communities helped create Czechoslovakia during the 1st World War and save the modern Czech statehood during World War II.

Ms. LOUISE JOSEPHINE RŮŽIČKA CHILD, a distinguished representative of PRAGUE, ALBERTA, founded in 1904 by Czechs from Prague, Oklahoma. Ms. Růžička Child is a direct descendent of Jan Růžička, the man who was sent from Oklahoma to find the right place for the "new Prague" in Canada. Ms. Růžička Child has played a key role in preserving Prague's Czech history and heritage as Treasurer of the Board that takes a remarkable care of the Prague Hall, St. John Nepomucene Church, old school building and cemetery.

Mr. JERRY VÍTĚZSLAV MAREK, a distinguished representative of MINITONAS, Manitoba. Ancestors of the Minitonas community went into exile as members of the Czech protestant church Unity of Brethren at the beginning of 1700s. They helped create Czechoslovakia during World War I from Volhynia. After the war, they returned to their homeland after 200 years in exile upon invitation of the Czechoslovak President Tomáš Garrigue Masaryk, however, only for a few years. Unfortunately, they had to leave again because of the Nazi invasion. They helped save Czechoslovakia from Canada where they found their new home. As long-term leader of the Minitonas community, Mr. Marek has played a key role in preserving the local Czech history and heritage. After almost 300 years that his family spent in exile, he speaks perfect Czech as if he was born in our country. After the fall of communism in 1989, he and his wife went to the Czech Republic to help our country get back on its feet by teaching English at universities.

Mr. LARRY MIKULCIK, a distinguished representative of GLENSIDE, founded at the beginning of the 20th century in central Saskatchewan close to a significant number of other Czech settlements. Several of the 18 branches of the Bohemian National Alliance that were founded in Canada during World War I, were established in the area, including one in Glenside. Mr. Mikulcik has played a key role in preserving the local Czech history and heritage. As President of the Glenside Jan Hus society, he has led the efforts to transform the community protestant Jan Hus Church into a museum. He has also led the efforts to reunite Czech communities in central Saskatchewan.

One more award was presented during the Czechia 30 evening. It was the Masaryk Award of the Czech and Slovak Association of Canada. The list of past recipients of this award is very impressive, it includes for example President Václav Havel, Josef and Zdena Škvorecký, and Otto Jelínek. This Czech and Slovak Canadian community award was presented by the President of the Association Mr. David Beneš and the President of the Montreal branch of the Association Ms. Andrea Larocque.

Mr. JOSEF MAXANT - the Masaryk award recipient. Mr. Maxant left Czechoslovakia after the Soviet invasion of the country in 1968 having received a stipend in Canada for post-doctoral studies in geophysics. As a long-term leader of the Czech community in Quebec ever since, Mr. Maxant has played a key role in preserving and even growing Camp Hostýn, a unique Czech center in Canada of 40 acres founded in 1954. Mr. Maxant has served as the Director of Hostýn's summer camps for Czech and Slovak children from Canada, the US as well as the Czech Republic for 21 years.