

Slovak festival features speakers, food, crafts

AMANDA SAMMONS

Staff Writer

The line snaking around the tables and booths in the Cathedral of Learning Commons Room may have been for the food, but the crowds at Sunday's Slovak Heritage Fest were there for more than pierogies.

The Slovak Heritage festival, now in its 12th year, was sponsored by Pitt's Slovak Studies Program, a division of the Slavic Department and the only permanent Slovak Studies program in the country. The festival included numerous tables of crafts, historical displays, food and information on travel and study opportunities at Pitt and throughout the Pittsburgh area. The festival opened with a performance by the Pittsburgh Slovaks, a song and dance group lead by Sue and Rudy Ondrejco, who co-host the Slovak Radio Hour on WPIT. The Slovaks lead the audience in a sing-along of traditional Slovak music.

The festival also featured two performances by the Lucina Slovak Folk Ensemble, a nonprofit group which hails from Cleveland and performs traditional Slovak folk song and dance in cities from Orlando, Fla., to Toronto, as well as in Slovakia itself; the Pittsburgh Area Slovak Ensemble, directed by John and Angela Lipchick; and Jerry Jumba, a folk musician who has served as choreographer for both the PAS and the Pittsburgh Slovaks.

While the Commons Room teemed with singers, dancers and attendants hungry for Slovak food and culture, those seeking a quieter, more reflective look into Slovakia could attend the three lectures offered in Room 139 throughout the afternoon.

Lisa A. Alzo, a graduate of Pitt's graduate program in nonfiction writing, spoke on her book "Three Slovak Women." The book, published by Gateway Press, depicts the lives of three generations of women in Alzo's Slovak family in Duquesne,

Pennsylvania, beginning with Alzo's grandmother, Verona, and her journey to the United States, and ending with Alzo's own story.

Dr. Robert Carl Metil, a professor of ethnomusicology and cultural studies at Pitt and Chatham College, gave a lecture titled "Pride Breeds Passion: Romas, Racism and Music in Eastern Slovakia." Metil, whose



Cover of Lisa Alzo's book "Three Slovak Women." Alzo spoke at the Slovak festival.

work has been funded by the International Research and Exchanges Board in Washington, D.C., spent nearly two years in Slovakia studying the country's music, culture and society. A photo exhibit based on his most recent research in northeastern Slovakia was on display at the festival.

Helene Cincebeaux, co-founder of the Slovak Heritage and Folklore Society International, gave a speech entitled "More Treasures of Slovakia." Along with her

mother, Helen Zemek Baine, Cincebeaux has visited more than 2,000 Slovak villages researching the country's history, folklore and customs. The team's work has been exhibited in 12 major museum exhibits and the Slovak Heritage and Folklore Society International has more than 1,500 members, according to information at the festival.

Between the song, dance and speaking, visitors had plenty to see. The festival's booths, which filled the entire commons, included tables by Habitat for Humanity detailing the group's work throughout Slovakia and its neighbors, a display of Slovak folk dress sponsored by the Nationality Rooms Program and tables by the Western Pennsylvania Slovak Cultural Association, the Western Pennsylvania Slovak radio Program and the Youngstown Sister Cities Program, headed by Steve Bacon.

Among the most popular exhibits were the numerous tables of Slovak and Eastern European crafts. Artists featured included Joseph Armata, a textile artist who has researched and trained in the embroidery and weaving techniques of Poland, Slovakia and the Ukraine and Master Weaver Sigrid Piroch, a professional hand weaver and designer who studied in Slovakia.

The Slovak Studies program is part of the Department for Slavic Languages and Literature and the Center for Russian and Eastern European Studies.

Chaired by Professor David Birbaum, the program offers courses devoted specifically to Slovakia, as well as courses in archaeology, ethnography and culture that include Slovakian content.

In addition, the program offers a six-week intensive language program for all levels of Slovak language instruction in the summer and an exchange program with Comenius University in Bratislava. Information on the Slovak Studies program can be obtained from REES, or by e-mailing slavic+@pitt.edu.