

Festival Celebrates Taste of Slavic Nations

Downtown festival adds more food vendors and variety

YOUNGSTOWN – Simply Slavic, the downtown festival created specifically to celebrate Greater Youngstown’s colorful Slavic community, will take place on **Friday night, June 16, 5 - 11 PM, and Saturday, June 17, noon - midnight in historic Downtown Youngstown!** The annual event began in 2011 to educate both the region’s large number of Slavic descendants and the community at large about Slavic heritage. This year, the Planning Committee focused heavily on providing Slavic food – and plenty of it.

The festival has added food vendors from Pittsburgh and Cleveland, duplicated the most popular menu items, and brought in additional commercial operators with experience meeting the great demand encountered in 2022 as more than 5,000 festival goers attended after a two-year pandemic hiatus.

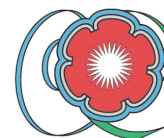
“I’m extremely excited about the variety and number of food vendors we will have for festival attendees to enjoy this year,” said Dave Slanina, festival food vendor coordinator. In addition to the Slavic staples of *pierogi*, *halušky*, stuffed cabbage, and *kolache*; guests will also find a wide variety of new or returning items from festival years’ past, such as potato pancakes, *ćevapi* (Balkan sausages), *smažený sýr* (Czech fried cheese), *trdelník* (Slovak chimney cakes), and *burek* (a savory Bosnian pastry). “While we wish everyone could travel to the Slavic nations to sample their cuisines in person, we hope to transport you there for a weekend via your taste buds while on the streets of Downtown Youngstown.”

Simply Slavic has become more than a must-attend festival no matter your ethnic heritage - it’s more like a movement amongst the Slavic community. By getting to know each other while working on the festival, Slavic community leaders have discovered various ways to collaborate to educate about Slavic cultures. This has led to an ability to support special projects together throughout the rest of the year.

In addition, the organization has provided thousands of dollars in scholarships to deserving Youngstown State University students - even when there was no event to add funds to do so! In 2018, a collaboration between Simply Slavic and local brewer Modern Methods Brewing Co. launched Rodina, a traditional Czech Amber Lager (*polotmavé pivo*) showcasing spicy Czech Saaz noble hops, lager yeast, and caramel Bohemian malt. It was aptly named after the word “family” in many Slavic languages. Annually brewed to be tapped as part of the festival’s Friday night opening ceremonies, a portion of beer sales go directly to the scholarship fund.

NEW THIS YEAR

- **Ecumenical Blessing of the Festival Food** - Slavic tradition holds that on the Saturday before Easter and other festive occasions, the food to be consumed receives a special grace. The three-part blessing specifically will address the various items being served at the Festival, with special prayers and holy water sprinkles for the meats, eggs, cakes, and bread. **To expand on this tradition, all of the festival’s food vendors will submit an item for blessing so that Father Joseph can bless it for taste, the health of the patrons, and those preparing it so that it will be plentiful.**
- **Tribute to Honorary Grand Marshall Rev Joseph Rudjak** - A son of the former St. Casimir Church in Brier Hill, Father Rudjak has long been a champion of the Mahoning Valley’s ethnic parishes. He has repeatedly stressed to all that would listen that the churches founded by the immigrants created community and fellowship through extended families. Generations grow in faith valuing their ethnic heritage and traditions within a religious context. This gospel outreach carries the ethnic identity into the future.



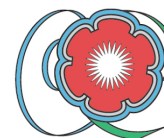
Keeping with its mission, the event will showcase the rich traditions of the Mahoning Valley's Slavic culture by celebrating the food, music, dance, and customs of the various Slavic ethnicities represented here. It will do this by featuring live music, folk dance performances, delicious food, educational exhibits, and ethnic vendors. Highlights include the following:

- A **Slavic Kitchen** featuring booths of foods from area churches, local businesses, and ethnic clubs;
- A **Marketplace** of vendors selling imported dolls, eggs, linens, and apparel reflecting the varied nations of the festival;
- An **Ethnic Heritage Tent** where Slavic groups from around the region exhibit materials to educate visitors about their culture through maps, folk art, language lessons, and a display of famous immigrants.
- The **National Flags** of the 13 countries and one region will open the event each day and then create a colorful and educational display throughout the whole event;
- The **Entertainment Stage** features the region's most colorful folk dance troupes and a variety of live bands, including the popular Del Sinchak Orchestra, Chardon Polka Band, and the renowned **Harmonia Folk Band** showcasing the concert and dance music of Eastern Europe, and;
- **The Vatra**, a traditional Slavic bonfire, will be ceremonially lit after dark with live music playing fireside for the singing and dancing pleasure of the young and the "young-at-heart" until midnight.

By enhancing the community's knowledge of these lively peoples through a joyful, family-friendly experience, we hope to honor the shared past of our beloved ancestors by educating and enriching the lives of future generations.

For further information, refer to the event's website www.simplyslavic.org, or info@simplyslavic.org. Direct press related calls to Aundrea Cika Heschmeyer 330-646-4082 or aundrea@marqueecreatives.org





Simply Slavic 2023 - Event Schedule

Admission is \$5 (Children 12 + younger are free)

All times and acts are subject to change or adjustment

FRIDAY, JUNE 16, 2023

5:00 PM - Od Srca Tamburitzans

6:00 PM - OPENING CEREMONY

Parade of Nations, tapping the inaugural keg of Modern Methods Brewing Co.'s Rodina Lager and Community Maypole Dance.

6:30 PM - Tatra Mountain Cultural Foundation Dancers

7:00 PM - Orkestar Zabava

8:00 PM - Chardon Polka Band

9:00 PM - Orkestar Zabava

10:00 PM - Chardon Polka Band

11:00 PM - THANK YOU & GOODNIGHT

SATURDAY, JUNE 17, 2023

11:45 AM - FESTIVAL GATES OPEN

NOON - CITY SIREN SOUNDS

12:15 PM - OPENING CEREMONY

Ecumenical Blessing of the Festival Food and Honorary Grand Marshall Rev Joseph Rudjak Tribute

1:00 PM - Happy Hearts Junior Tamburitzans

1:30 PM - Sokÿra

2:15 PM - Living Traditions Folk Ensemble

3:00 PM - T. O. Nocne Sove

3:45 PM - Selo Croatian Ensemble

4:15 PM - The ZAPS

5:00 PM - Kashtan

5:30 PM - Tatra Mountain Cultural Foundation Dancers

6:00 PM - Harmonia

7:00 PM - Del Sinchak Orchestra

8:00 PM - Harmonia

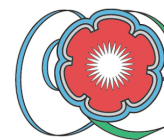
9:00 PM - Del Sinchak Orchestra

10:00 PM - Vatra Lighting Ceremony

10:15 PM - Harmonia & Friends @ the Vatra

MIDNIGHT - THANK YOU & GOODNIGHT





Honorary Grand Marshall - Fr. Joseph Rudjak MA, M. Div.

Fr. Joseph is the pastor of Holy Apostles Parish, a parish established to serve ethnic communities in the Mahoning Valley. Father loves God, the Church, extended family, ethnic heritage, Polish history, philosophy, sociology, and motorcycling.

Father Joseph's background takes in years of study and scholarship. His studies were at The Athenium of Ohio- Mt St Mary's Seminary, Xavier University, Catholic University in Lublin, Poland, Kent State University, and Youngstown State. He has been noted in the top 4 percent in the United States for historical studies. He has traveled in Mexico, El Salvador, Guatemala, Ephesus, and Istanbul in Turkey, the Holy Land, and 15 European countries, returning to Poland 14 times to study, teach, and guide tours.

He has worked with immigrants and ethnic communities through the International Institute of Youngstown. He has taught at Kent State and Youngstown State Universities. Courses offered included Ethnic Politics, General Catholic Church History and American Catholic Church History, Communications, Philosophy, Comparative Religions, and Individual and Society.

Ordained a deacon in 1970, he worked as a deacon at Mother of Sorrows Parish in Ashtabula, St. Bernard and Mother of Christ Mission in Cincinnati, St. James Warren, St. Luke Boardman, Youngstown State Newman Center, Kent State Newman Center, St. Rose in Girard, and Sacred Heart (now Angela Merici) in Youngstown. Ordained a priest in 2000, Fr. Joseph was Associate Pastor at St. Paul North Canton and has been Pastor of SS Peter and Paul since 2003, Pastor of Our Lady of Hungary in 2005, and Pastor of St Stephen of Hungary and the merged parish of Holy Apostles since 2011.

His retirement will be celebrated on **Sunday, June 18**, with a special **10 AM mass** featuring the Polish Tatra Mountain Cultural Foundation Dancers of Chicago and a **2:30 PM mass** featuring the Croatian Happy Hearts Junior Tamburitzans and Hungarian Kis Csillagok Children at Sts Peter & Paul Church, 421 Covington Street, Youngstown.

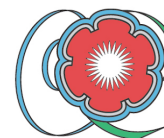
Celebrating Summer Solstice

The bonfire in the middle of Federal Street has become such a unique, popular feature at Simply Slavic that people plan their visit to be there for the ceremonial lighting. People danced to the live acoustic music of Harmonia around the fire, which is truly magical! This is part of sharing Slavic traditions with the community.

Rejoicing at the beginning of summer has long been a tradition in those countries where the winter is long and brutal. Our Slavic ancestors endured close quarters and dark months, so no doubt were giddy by the arrival of the summer solstice. The Ukrainian, Belarusian, and Russian name of this holiday combines Ivan (John) Kupala derived from a similar Slavic word for bathing, and reinterpreted as John's baptizing people through full immersion in water. So it's known as Ivan Kupala Day or just Kupala Night. The fire and water traditions predate Christianity. Due to its popularity, the pagan celebration was re-established as a part of the native Christian traditions intertwined with local folklore. The festival date falls in advance of the summer solstice. The Founders originally chose the third Saturday in June for the festival because we knew the significance of the summer solstice and St. John's Eve in Slavic cultures.

The modern-day European nations representing the origins of Slavic ancestry are Belarus, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Croatia, Czech Republic, Macedonia, Montenegro, Poland, Russia, Serbia, Slovakia, Slovenia, and Ukraine (see [map](#)). Many Slavic descendants of Carpatho-Rusyn heritage also reside in the Youngstown area.





Who is a Slav?

The **Slavic peoples** are an ethnic and linguistic branch of **Indo-European peoples**, living mainly in **Central** and **Eastern Europe**. The early Slavs came from various parts of Asia into Eastern Europe about 2,000 BC. Under the pressure of nomadic hordes, the Slavic tribes crossed the Carpathian Mountains and pushed their way down to the Balkans. Others moved westward toward the upper Danube, and still others eastward toward the River Dnieper and the Black Sea. This migration continued from the fourth through the eighth century, giving birth to the Slavic nations we know today. More than half of **Europe's** territory is inhabited by Slavic-speaking communities.

The worldwide population of people of Slavic descent is more than 350 million. Modern nations and ethnic groups described as *Slavs* are considerably diverse both in appearance and culturally, and relations between them – even within the individual ethnic groups – are varied, ranging from a sense of connection to feelings of mutual hostility.

For many centuries the Slavic tribes used the same common language. Starting with the migration into Eastern Europe, some dialectical differences developed among the various tribes. Generally, Slavic peoples are classified into three main groups:

- **East Slavic**, including **Russians**, **Ukrainians**, and **Belarusians**. This group subdivides into three separate branches: Russians (or Muscovites), White (or Bielo-Russians), and **Rusyns** (or **Carpatho-Rusyns**);
- **West Slavic**, including **Poles**, **Czechs**, and **Slovaks**, and;
- **South Slavic**, including **Bulgarians**, **Serbs**, **Croats**, **Macedonians**, **Slovenes**, **Bosniaks**, and **Montenegri**ns.

In the late 1800s and early 1900s, political and economic tension triggered a wave of emigration from the Slavic nations to America. These hard-working people came to form settlements in cities and neighborhoods where jobs and the American Dream welcomed their arrival.

Today, millions of Americans and at least 75,000 Valley residents can trace their family heritage to the Slavic nations (ref. **US Census**). Celebrations, like the Simply Slavic Heritage Festival, remind us of those roots and the sacrifices made by those who came before us seeking a better life.

Often Mistaken for Slavic Not all people from Eastern and Central Europe are Slavs. Hungarians and Romanians are neither linguistically nor ethnically Slavic people. Linguists identify the language of Hungary as a member of the Finno-Ugric group of languages. Romanian (closely related to Moldovan) is a Romance language related to French, Italian, Portuguese, and Spanish. So, although generally a friendly neighbor to all, these two ethnic groups and languages are never considered Slavic.

Could you be a Slav? Many people were identified as “Hungarian” by immigration officers due to their origin of travel from the territory called Austria-Hungary. However, living in the territory ruled by Austro-Hungary were large numbers of Poles, Slovaks, Czechs, Slovenes, Croatians, Ukrainians, Rusyns, and Serbians who were ethnically and linguistically Slavic. So if your ancestors arrived before 1918, you could actually be a Slav!