

## **Interview with Paul Burik**

By Emily Selius  
Head of Czech Garden  
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**PB:** Tomorrow October 28<sup>th</sup> is comparable to the 4<sup>th</sup> of July. It is kind of Independence Day for Czech Republic. So we try to honor that in different ways. This year we thought we would try to do it here at the gardens, to try to promote the gardens and let people know that they are here. I don't know how many people will show up.

**PB:** Talking about the weather.

**PB:** The person we are honoring is Nosreic, who was the founder and the first president of the Czech Republic. And that is one of the statues that we have restored recently. Hopefully in time we will do the rest of the statues. The next one I would like to do is Comenski, who was the father of education, known as, kind of promoted the education of outside of just studying scriptures, which was till his day the norm, so there is a lot we can learn from nature around us, from studying trees and animals. Women should study, till then it was solely men just studying scriptures. So he was a pretty radical guy for age. So those are some of the statues that are, that I tell to groups as I take people around, especially kids, the father of education, ahh, throw eggs at him (laughter).

**PB:** I had, what I thought was kind of interesting story that happened to me once. I was just working doing things here and two gentlemen were walking around, obviously looking at things, taking pictures, reading the inscriptions. And as they came, we struck up a conversation and the one fellow was from Czech republic, from Prog. His company sent him to tour a number of facilities here in the United States to see how they do their business what ever it was steel making, or whatever. He had a limited amount of time in each city, literally, he got out of the factory at four o'clock and his flight was at seven. He had two or three hours to go and see something. So he made a list of things he wanted to see in each city in that very narrow amount of time, and in Cleveland he found out about and wanted to see the Cultural Gardens. So that made my day and all those time when I come up here and try to do some work and weather it is after work or on the weekend, and maybe the weather is kind of cold. So it just made it worth it because somebody in Prog heard about it. Now I feel kind of obligated because after somebody comes here and it is not kept up they will say oh my god it is such a nice place, but needs upkeep. So I kind of feel like I got to keep it in decent shape.

**PB:** We have been pretty fortunate; most of our statues are here. I think because they are large and they are pretty high. There was a period, as you know, where things were not in the greatest of shape. But it has changed, the city has done a lot, installed lights for security, most gardens have water, so now we can plant, improved the sidewalks and things like that. It is really turning around.

**PB:** I am really glad that Mark is doing that because there are so many people that don't know about this area. I didn't know about it till about six years ago. Somehow I came here and said

gee this is nice. I like gardening, I like art and sculpture, and I am doing my share of preserving the culture I guess, it's not a whole lot, but it's a little bit.

**ES:** Every bit helps though. Which culture do you most identify yourself with?

**PB:** Czech. This is a good story. I was born in the city of Budweiser. That's my claim to fame.

**ES:** When did you come to Cleveland?

**PB:** In 1968. When Russians invaded Czech.

**ES:** How did you not here about the gardens until five years ago?

**PB:** What happens is I went to school, I went to Kent State.

**ES & VA:** We did too!

**PB:** I was studying Architecture up in Taylor Hall. It was after I was in Cleveland for a while, and I said ya know there's got to be more to it than just all that mainstream life style. There's got to be some kind of a heritage or feel some need to identify. I attended some of the meetings of local organizations, and some one said something about the cultural gardens. I said I would take a drive and look and as it turned out there was nobody really actively participating with the gardens and what happens is a lot of the people in the ethnic organizations are unfortunately aging and when we first started coming out here, I would call them up to have a sort of work party or so. The people are 65 or 70, and now they are 75 –80, so it is kind of hard to ask them to come out and help. So, it is kind of on my shoulders. I am hoping today to draw some new people. I called a number of people and said hey, come on down. I am trying to recruit some younger folks. I am not sure what it is that keeps them from participating. I know that if there is food, people will show up.....

**ES:** If you could add any statue to the Czech Garden, which one would you add?

**PB:** I would go into contemporary times and add President Hovel, who is still alive. He was a philosopher and then became a statesmen. He was a poet. He had the vision of liberating The Czech Republic from the influence of communism, spent years in jail for stuff. He undoubtedly is someone in history that would belong because he was the one person that everybody associated with and looked up to and he made the transformation from the communist state to the free republic. He is still president, this is his last term in fact this term expires this year. He just visited the states in September for the dedication of the statue of Musuric in Washington D.C.

**PB:** Talks more about President.

**ES:** How about the Mission statement of peace and brotherhood, do you think that is still relevant today?

**PB:** Oh yeah. Perhaps more today than it was a year ago. With all these gardens together representing the population of greater Cleveland. I think that is the neat part in Cleveland there is such a spectrum of different ethnic nationalities from the traditional Europeans years ago, to now it is a lot of Middle East or India. It's still immigration, people coming in slowly starting to share the ideas and ideals and bring their knowledge and skills to make Cleveland better and that is what will carry Cleveland on into the future.

**PB:** Talking about teachers in India, and other things.

**PB:** These gardens are very important, not only to individual gardens, but to American history. Most of these bridges and gardens and retaining walls, and the channels, they all built during the WPA program. Tried to bring the county out of recession, that was the turning moment for the United States for America in modern history.

**ES:** Have you ever attended One World Day?

**PB:** Oh yeah. I missed this past one. I was on a boat helping a friend. We had One World Day here in the Czech garden about five years ago. That is one of the big events we try to maintain and continue because it is the theme of the gardens. One World Day, its one world.

**ES:** Over the years you have been working has the number of people grown that attend that?

**PB:** Yes, I would say a turning point was the bicentennial celebration. During that year, Cleveland made it one of the bicentennial events, and so they put their mick behind it, and we had a large turnout. There was a parade that started at one end of the gardens and went down East Boulevard all the way across. Good promotions, Cleveland Public Power sponsored the event. They made some funds available promoting it. It was the largest event that I can remember. It has sort of become smaller since that year, but still larger than they used to be. We still try to have two or three organizations sponsor the event, so there is more publicity. We try to make it as diverse as can. We want to make it bigger.

**ES:** How do you think you could draw more people to be interested in the gardens?

**PB:** Good question? There is the perception that this is not a safe area. We are trying to bring in groups of people...invite a group that has nothing to do with history or anything, just people that live in Cleveland. You expose them to this area, and maybe they will bring their friends next time. That is one way. We try to put out information. I am sure you have the flier. We have tried to put it in different places like hotels and bus stops. We try to let people know this place exists.

**PB:** Talks more about pamphlet and friends of the gardens membership.

**Back round sounds:** Parts of speech from Burik. (Talks about tour of gardens, thanks everyone for coming, clapping).

## **Joe Klucho**

**ES:** How are you involved with the garden?

**JK:** The gardens are part of my history because both of my parents are born in Slovakia in the village. My father had come to the US in 1907 he worked for several years and he went back in 1911 met my mother there. Married her and came back. And so they lived here. I had no interest at all in my heritage, nothing until I got a letter in my late forties; I got a letter from a cousin in Slovakia in English....

**JK:** We had the One World Day in our garden back in August. They had a lot of different ethnic performances. There was eight different groups from eight different countries, they performed, dancers and singers. They were really great.

**ES:** Why do think a lot of people don't know about the Cultural Gardens?

**JK:** One of the reasons is I think this area was a bad area. I think there was a lot of crime in here. In fact there was one rape that was famous twenty some years ago, and a girl that was walking through here was raped. They made such a big splash in the papers day after day. I think a lot of people remember that. Especially the older people, the younger people have no idea. This area isn't that white. There isn't that many white people around here, and black people sure enjoy it. There is a lot of other people in the suburbs that moved out of this area and never came back. It's really not a black white thing, its people are afraid of violence.

## **Amelia Hivnar**

**VA:** Do you identify more with your Czech back round or as an American?

**AH:** One of the reasons I feel I identify with my ethnic back round is that I am first generation. I was born and raised in Cleveland in the Slavic village area. My mother and father were very active in the Czech community in greater Cleveland.

**AH:** Talking about the American Nationalities movement, her father was a founder of this movement.

**AH:** These Czech gardens and the rest of the cultural gardens represent an ethnic mosaic, and all the groups are part of the ethnic mosaic of greater Cleveland. I do believe that being first generation I have a greater appreciation of my ethnic heritage.

**AH:** Talks more about family.