

VIA HERITAGE NEWS

The Newsletter of The Via Foundation Czech Heritage Society

September 2004

THE VIA HERITAGE FUND DISTRIBUTES ITS FIRST GRANTS

Thousands of small monuments in the Czech landscape – chapels, crosses and statues – still await preservation. Many of them are literally falling apart and there is usually little hope that they will be restored in the near future.

In the more promising cases, municipalities or owners try to heal the heritage of neglect left by the former Communist regime by raising funds to restore these monuments. Unfortunately resources to restore this type of small monument are very limited.

“We receive some funding from the municipality, sponsors and the Ministry of Culture, but these resources are a minute fraction of what is actually needed.

We need at least 100 million CZK to restore damaged churches, and we receive around 1 million CZK from the state,” says Ivo Fiedler of the construction department of the Litoměřice Diocese. Smaller monuments have a smaller chance of receiving subsidies.

Volunteers or local citizens’ groups are often the caretakers of these smaller monuments. They try to raise money for restoration work wherever they can: amongst themselves, through public collections, from sponsors or from foundations.

New source of funding met with great interest

The Via Foundation is trying to help those working to preserve small monuments through its Via Heritage Fund, which brings together resources from donors primarily from the USA.

“We are pleased to be able to distribute the first grants for cultural monument restoration only 10 months after the founding of the Via Heritage Fund,” says Jiří Bárta, Executive Director of the Via Foundation. “We have been aware of the need for monument restoration funding for a long time, but even so, I have to admit that the number of applications we received surpassed all of our expectations.”

During the two-month period between the announcement of the grant competition and the deadline for applications, 173 proposals were submitted from across the entire Czech Republic. “It turned out that the Fund hit the bull’s eye, responding precisely to a need in the Czech Republic. There is little money for small monuments, but there are many people who know how to use such funding efficiently,” said Michal Valenčík, member of the selection committee.

Interest shown by both volunteer community groups and municipalities

The vast majority of applications asked for funding to restore chapels. Statues and crosses situated in the landscape were also common subjects of applications. The most applications came from the South Moravian region. In most cases, the applicant was a city or town, but volunteer community groups also submitted applications.

Many projects anticipated broad volunteer involvement by local residents in the restoration work. “Projects initiated through the independent effort of citizens and community groups and founded on volunteer, non-profit work are very close to the Via Foundation’s philosophy,” says Jiří Bárta. “During the evaluation of applications to the Via Heritage Fund, however, we also paid great attention to the condition of the monuments and to whether a grant could save a given monument from total devastation.”

Please, help us increase membership in The Via Foundation Czech Heritage Society!

As of August 2004, The Via Foundation Czech Heritage Society has 81 members. Our goal is to at least double membership by the end of 2004. With your help, we would like to address those of your friends who may be interested in becoming members of The Via Foundation Czech Heritage Society and helping endangered Czech monuments in this way. We have enclosed 2 giving brochures and we hope that we can enlist new members with your help.

The “Athena” statue in Lnáře, damaged in the 2002 flooding, was restored thanks to contributions from American donors. A group of them further contributed to the repair of other monuments in the Czech Republic, becoming members of The Via Foundation Czech Heritage Society.



Dear member and friend of The Via Foundation Czech Heritage Society,

You have just opened the first newsletter of The Via Foundation Czech Heritage Society. This first issue brings you news about the distribution of the initial USD 80,000 raised for monument restoration, information about how Via's selection committees operate as well as an interview with Mr. and Mrs. Vasicek, significant



Letter from the Director

donors to the Czech Heritage Society. You will hear about our first monument restoration grant competition, which drew great interest from volunteer community groups and municipalities from across the Czech Republic. Over 170 applications made the work of our selection committee quite a challenge.

Once again, I would like to thank you for joining The Via Foundation Czech Heritage Society and for helping us provide help. Without your donations, we would be unable to contribute to the preservation and restoration of Czech cultural heritage. Without your donations, we would be unable to support the volunteer initiatives of individuals who understand that responsibility goes hand in hand with freedom, and who take action rather than waiting idly for someone else to care for them.

Finally, if any item in this newsletter attracts your attention, please feel free to contact us. We would be pleased to hear your thoughts and to get your feedback.

We thank you so much for your generous help. Moc děkujeme.

Jiří Bárta
Executive Director
The Via Foundation,
Prague

SELECTION COMMITTEE CHOSE 38 PROJECTS

After five hours of intense discussion and negotiations, the selection committee selected 38 projects as grant recipients.

Putting together a selection committee that is able to evaluate proposals from various perspectives and also reach a consensus is undeniably one of the Via Foundation's most difficult grant administration tasks. It is also difficult to coordinate the schedules of the experts sitting on the committee.

For this program, the Via Foundation selected experts from the monument preservation field as well as individuals capable of evaluating the degree of local community involvement in restoration work as volunteers.

The committee, which met on June 16, 2004, was composed of Dagmar Sedláková (National Monument Institute), Jarmila Štogrová (Archbishop Seminary), Irena Bartošová (Civic Forum Foundation), Michal Valenčík (operator of the website "Damaged Churches and Chapels in the CR") and Pavel Hájek (National Monument Institute).

The most important criteria for proposal evaluation included the monument's importance and extent of its endangerment, the adequacy of the requested funding for the required work, the ability of the applicant organization to implement the project, the professionalism of the implementation plan, as well as the level of involvement of the local community. Each project was evaluated independently, however.

"With some proposals, we appreciated that the proposed restoration wasn't dependent solely on funding from the Via Foundation: for example, a small amount of resources was gathered from other sources, whether they be sponsors or funds received through a public collection," says Pavel Hájek. The committee was also frequently



Members of the Via Heritage Fund evaluation committee, Irena Bartošová (above), Pavel Hájek, Dagmar Sedláková and Michal Valenčík (bottom from the left), in a discussion concerning the distribution of grants.

impressed with proposals in which the municipality or citizens contributed to the restoration work, either financially or through clean-up work. Nonetheless, selection committee member Michal Valenčík says: "Community involvement isn't the top priority in this program. In many cases, the decision was based on a simple fact: whether the monument can survive another year," says Michal Valenčík.

A total of 38 applications received grants in the total amount of 2,198,084 CZK. Unfortunately, not every high-quality proposal deserving support could be funded in the first grant competition. The committee unanimously agreed that there were many more applications that deserve support in a future grant round. "We are pleased that we were able to support 38 important projects but we also recognize that there are more than one hundred good projects still awaiting our help," says Jiří Bárta, Executive Director of the Via Foundation. If the Via Foundation is able to raise further funding for Czech monuments, the committee will gladly meet again to decide upon its distribution to additional projects.



Oldrich and Silva Vasicek gave a generous donation in response to the disaster wrought by the floods of 2002. During one of their trips to the Czech Republic, they met with representatives of the Via Foundation and decided to continue in their giving, this time with a gift of USD 5,000 to the Via Heritage Fund.

Why did you select the Via Foundation as your partner?

We believe that the Via Foundation promotes goals that we want to support - encouraging, directing and financing independent self-help initiatives to restore and maintain our cultural heritage. It takes our own work, each of us, to get things done. We cannot rely on the state or public sector to take care of everything that needs to be done. It is marvelous that so many people in local communities want to join something they believe in, contributing work, know-how, and money to save endangered monuments from our past. The Via Foundation helps them, and we want to be a part of that effort. We have met foundation staff members on several occasions and were impressed by their dedication and professionalism.

Why does the Via Heritage Fund appeal to you? Why did you decide to contribute?

There are many ways in which the Via Foundation gets involved, such as community development or helping to establish community foundations. One thing, however, that cannot wait long and that we want to be involved in is the preservation of cultural monuments, because once they are gone, they are gone forever. That is where we wish to put our efforts first. We are Czechs by birth and with pride, we spent our childhood there and studied there, and we view our participation as one way of giving back to the country we love.

Do you have any other philanthropic activities?

We contribute to the Via Foundation through the Vasicek Foundation, which we founded and financed, and which we and our children direct. The foundation makes grants to many charitable purposes. The goals of the Vasicek Foundation are to support music and the arts, education, the environment, medical research and world peace. We are fortunate to be able to do something for the world around us.

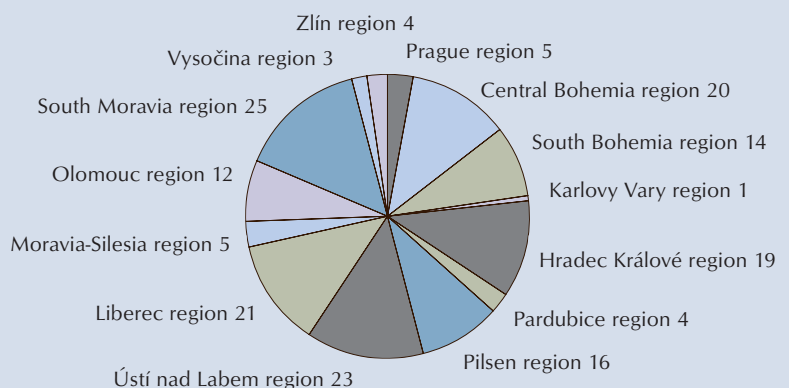
Drs. Silva and Oldrich Vasicek



Program statistic

Number of applications	172
Number of disqualified applications	33
Number of consultations	60
Average requested grant	CZK 53,086
Total amount requested	CZK 9,130,851
Total to be distributed	CZK 2,200,000
Number of grants bestowed	38
Success rate of applicants	22%

Number of applications by regions



EXAMPLES OF SUPPORTED PROJECTS

Most of the applications received by the Via Heritage Fund were for the restoration of chapels, followed in turn by crosses, columns, memorials and statues. The evaluation committee succeeded in selecting projects for support from each category. Here are several examples of cultural monuments, whose restoration has been made possible by support from the Via Heritage Fund.



Vlastenecký poutník Civic Association – Baroque Column Ecce Homo, 40,000 CZK

The Baroque Plague column in Dvorce was originally erected at the town's entrance during the time of the plague in order to warn travelers not to enter, helping Dvorce avoid contamination in the 18th century epidemic. After 1945, the column, however, fell into disrepair. In 2002, the Vlastenecký poutník Civic Association succeeded in raising enough money for its restoration. Unfortunately, a series of storms this past winter eroded the repairs to the column, which was then further damaged by vandalism. The Association plans to repair the damaged parts of the column as well as the area around it.



Municipality of Kozojedy – Restoration of a chapel in Brána, 65,000 CZK

The small chapel stands on the edge of the village right on the side of the road. It was most likely first erected in the 19th century by the owner of the neighboring land. While for many years, the descendants of the property and the villagers cared for the monument, today, it is abandoned. The support from the Via Heritage Fund will go towards repairing the plastering and surface repairs of the facade and replacing the roofing and doors. The project also plans to engage the help of the local inhabitants in the repair.

Club for Old Bruntál – Wooden cross commemorating victims of the plague, 13,500 CZK

The cross was erected in the 19th century in the memory of the victims of the plague. The cross formerly stood in the town center, but is now located in the middle of a group of family homes, on a frequented footpath. The Association would like to repair the cross and the area around it and install a plaque with information about smaller monuments in the town of Bruntál.



Municipality of Holany – Renovation of small cultural monuments, 70,000 CZK

Several smaller monuments located in the district of Holany are considered important as prime examples of the local folk-art craftsmanship and traditions. The project supported by the Via Heritage Fund intends to repair seven small monuments from the 18th and 19th century – including a small chapel and cross, located in the Zahrádecko local monument zone.

Would you like to contact us?

Did something in our newsletter catch your attention? Do you have a question, or an idea you would like to share with us? If so, please contact us in the Czech Republic or USA:

The Via Foundation, Jelení 200/3, 118 00 Prague 1, Czech Republic, Phone: +(420) 233 113 370, Fax: +(420) 233 113 380
 Jiří Bárta, Executive Director, email: jiri.barta@nadacevia.cz **Táňa Hlavatá**, Philanthropy Manager, e-mail: tana.hlavata@nadacevia.cz
 Carol Hochman, Friends of Via, 1541 Pinehurst Drive, Pittsburgh, PA 15241, Phone: (412) 221-4057, email: CarolH1541@aol.com

