

The basis of this article is an abridged and updated version of one written by long-standing member, Laurie Barnes, which appeared in the Bridge magazine ten years ago, at the time of the tenth anniversary celebrations.

Over the next few months I hope to give you an idea of how the Association has evolved over the years, an overview of some of the activities we have participated in and a brief history of the Bridge magazine.

For those of you who have been a member of IWAP for much longer than I have, please put your thinking caps on and send me anything that you feel definitely should not be missed out.

Please send your ideas to me, Sally Stelfox, c/vicepresident@iwa-prague.com

If nothing else, these articles can form part of our archives and be a start for whoever writes an article for the 30th anniversary!

The history of IWAP

This year we celebrate the 20th anniversary

of the gathering together of a group of like-minded women to form what has become the International Women's Association of Prague – IWAP.

HOW IT ALL BEGAN

Before 1989, expatriate women, mostly from the diplomatic community, gathered informally for coffee mornings and lunches in private homes. After the Velvet Revolution there was a sudden influx of international female executives and corporate wives and, on Monday, 12th November, 1990, a group of six ladies gathered together to discuss the possibility of forming an international women's group in Prague.

Two months later, on 11th January, 1991, a Steering Committee met to initiate the formation of the International Women's Club of Prague (IWCP). Ladies of all nationalities would be invited to join. The members of that Steering Committee represented ten different countries.

On 22nd January, 1991 the first general meeting was held in the Canadian Ambassador's Residence in Prague 6. 88 ladies from 22 different countries attended that very first meeting.

By the end of the first year, the club had 310 members from 53 countries, including 32 ladies from the then Czechoslovakia. Membership, according to notes recording the 12th November 1990 meeting, was open to "active and interested women living in Prague who [are] willing to contribute their time and effort to the activities of the club."

The guiding principles upon which the organisation was founded included the desire to promote friendship, enhance cultural understanding and assist local charities in an effort to build bridges between members, and within the local community. It isn't surprising that a stylised version of a bridge over the Vltava River was chosen to represent these principles and is still used as the logo for our Association.

Within weeks of that first general meeting interest groups began to be formed. It was quickly recognized that members were eager to share their knowledge, skills and



Celebrating 20 years



interests. Small groups were formed to this end and the number of different activities open to members still remains at around 30. Interests ranged from physical activities and game-playing clubs, to literary and language endeavours, through to artistic interests and appreciation – something for everyone. Some groups, including Czech and French conversation and the bridge, golf and sewing groups continue to thrive twenty years on.

Within ten months, the Evening Group was established, allowing members who worked during the day to relax in the company of other working women and to network.

Moving away from home has always been difficult, but getting used to a new environment is a further challenge. Right from the very start of IWCP, focus was placed on newcomers to Prague, assisting them in acclimatising to their new home, providing information and welcoming activities. The first newcomers' meeting was held on 16th April 1991 at the Diplomatic Club on Karlova and Meet and Greet Luncheons are still held on a monthly basis.

Due to changes in legal requirements, the IWCP ceased to function as a legal entity in November 1997 and, in an effort to meet the requirements of our host country, a new organisation called the International Women's Association of Prague was established, with new bylaws and operating guidelines. IWAP was officially registered in early 1998.

We should salute those original six ladies who had the initial vision and determination to form a group of international women. Over the years, IWCP and IWAP have done so much to support, help and entertain their members and have brought so many women of different nations together to meet the challenges and adventures encountered daily here in Prague. •

by Sally Stelfox



19TH JANUARY 1998

The Day the International Women's Association officially came into being.

Smaller photos, from the top: Věra Benešová, Libuše Lastovková and Grace de Lorenzo-Výborná signing the IWAP Statues

Large photo: Libuše Lastovková, Věra Benešová Ozrenka Šundrica, IWAP's lawyer Elsa Derham, IWAP's President and Grace de Lorenzo-Výborná after the documents had been signed.

Photos from the IWAP archives.



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If you have any special memories or photos of IWAP events, activities or friendships you have made over the years, please send them to bridge.iwap@gmail.com

The history of IWAP Part 2

This year we celebrate the 20th anniversary of the gathering together of a group of like-minded women to form what has become the International Women's Association of Prague – IWAP.



Jane Dewey

From that first gathering in 1990 of six ladies who had the idea of forming an international women's group in Prague, IWAP came into existence and grew in strength and membership numbers.

GENERAL MEETINGS AND CHARITY

Since 22nd January 1991, the date of the first general meeting, our monthly meetings have taken place in various places including the beautiful Kaiserstein Palace on Malostranské náměstí, where the 10th anniversary celebrations were held, the Convent of St. Agnes of Bohemia, the Wallenstein Palace and Obecní Dům. We are very grateful for the support of the Zátíší Group who currently hosts our general meetings in their various restaurants close to the famous bridges of Prague.

Many significant personalities from the Prague community have made dynamic and expert presentations at our general meetings, allowing members to broaden their cultural horizons and more fully understand and appreciate the economic, social, literary, historical and political background of the Czech Republic. We have also had speakers from varied backgrounds, including the film industry, charity organisations and those who have

spoken about women's issues. Recently we introduced "social" general meetings where, rather than hosting a guest speaker, members have been able to socialise, meet old friends and make new ones. These meetings have included demonstrations by IWAP interest groups and bring and buy and book tables, where monies raised have gone towards IWAP's chosen charities.

In November 1999, President Václav Havel gave official recognition to IWAP for the outstanding efforts of the organisation. IWAP's efforts were recognised as "truly admirable," not only to promote friendship amongst women in the international community, but also to seek out and assist those in need through helping charitable organisations in the Czech Republic.

The number of charities in the Czech Republic has grown exponentially in the last twenty years and one of IWAP's most important functions has always been the focus on charitable work with and for Czech non-profit organisations. The Charity Group identifies worthy causes, co-ordinates volunteer activities and helps to plan and organise some of the Association's fund-raising. The Charity Group regularly visits worthy causes to assess their suitability for our support.



Eva Vlasáková at the Charity Christmas Market, 2010

Opportunities for hands-on work to help the disadvantaged have become very popular with groups of our ladies helping with activities in hospitals and homes and sandwich making for the homeless. Lap blankets have been knitted by IWAP members to be presented to residents of homes for the elderly, and hotel toiletries have been collected to be made up into small gifts for women's refuges. The Crafts for Charity interest group was formed in 2009. Talented members help to stock the charity table with items for sale at our annual fundraising markets.

Honour cards, a good source of income for our charity account in the past, are still available in the IWAP office for members to mark a special occasion or event.

There have been many diverse projects, both small and large, over the years to raise money for the IWAP chosen charities. There was the publication of the successful Kids for Prague book a few years ago and the production and sale of annual calendars featuring photographs taken by our members. Balls and gala events with charity auctions have been important dates in the IWAP diary; concerts, tea parties, golf days, wrapping paper sales, car boot sales and even the collection of small change, all helped to raise money. We were at the forefront of bringing awareness of environmental issues to Prague with the sale of our shopping bags and we have been honoured to be invited to many embassies for afternoon teas, which has

also raised significant amounts for our charity account.

Our annual fairs and markets have gone from strength to strength and, with the generosity of sponsors, have raised substantial amounts for charity. Co-operative relationships with businesses are vital to our on-going success. We are extremely appreciative of the companies who have supported and sponsored IWAP over the years. Without their support we would not have been as successful in our fundraising for Czech charities. Recently, the fairs and markets have been particularly successful in raising both awareness of local needs, and large amounts of funding.

IWAP also works in association with other charities in the Czech Republic. In 2010 we were invited to enter the annual Rotary Club Dragon Boat race. The IWAP team and supporters raised the largest amount of money for the Rotary Club charities of all the competitors, despite our lack of expertise on the river. IWAP has helped with the Domov Sue Ryder Praha fashion shows by donating clothes and accessories and for the last five years IWAP ladies have taken part in the annual Avon Walk for Life, promoting breast cancer awareness.

Over the past twenty years, IWAP has contributed over 21 million Kč to Czech charities. •

by Sally Stelfox

IWAP Dragonboat Race, 2010



Charity Golf Days, 2006



Andrew and Liz Sutherland at the Charity Godfather Party at Bellevue, October 2007



Peter and Suzanne Formanek at the Charity Tea Dance at Pachtuv Palace to kick off the Charity Tea Parties, March 2008



Charity Group at DAR House, April 2010

Photos provided by Susie Collinson and IWAP archives

IWAP'S 20TH ANNIVERSARY LUNCHEON



Some of our long-standing members



Šarka de Jong and Dr. Lindsay Kaplan, wife of US Ambassador Norman Eisen



Eva Hudečková won a dinner at V Zátíší



Tatiana Černá



Jaroslava Kramulová

