

# Obituary: Louis Novak, champion of the Croatian culture

ST. PAUL, MN - Louis Novak, of St. Anthony, went to great lengths to keep alive his Croatian heritage, including driving a truck to Chicago with his wife, Mary Ann, to pick up paintings due in the Twin Cities for an exhibit of Croatian art. Novak, cultural attache for St. Paul's honorary consulate of the Republic of Croatia, died Monday after complications related to heart surgery. He was 77. As an honorary consulate, "mostly what we do is public relations," said his wife, Mary Ann. In addition to fielding requests from immigrants who need help, Louis Novak, as cultural attache, was responsible for arranging poetry readings, art exhibits and receptions for visiting dignitaries.

Novak's parents immigrated in 1925 to join a substantial community of Croatians in South Bend, Ind. After high school, he joined the Navy and then graduated from Purdue University in 1950 with a degree in electrical engineering. He moved to the Twin Cities to work for Honeywell in the military avionics division and retired after 32 years. Novak's link with his parents' native region stayed deep through the years. When what is now Croatia became involved in the civil war that convulsed Yugoslavia in the early 1990s, he was instrumental in sending food, medical supplies and clothing through the Croatian Cultural Society of Minnesota, of which he was president in recent years. After Croatia was declared an independent republic in the mid-1990s, he was active in setting up the honorary consulate, which assists citizens and businesses.

He also was instrumental in creating the Croatian presence at the Festival of Nations in St. Paul, said former Lt. Gov. Mae Schunk, who is of Croatian extraction and who often attended events arranged by Novak. In 1999, Novak and his wife led the first exchange of 27 people to Croatia through a Friendship Force Club he created in the country, an outgrowth of Friendship Force, started by President Jimmy Carter in 1977. Novak also represented Croatians on the board of the Immigration History Research Center at the University of Minnesota. An avid public speaker, he was a member of Toastmasters for 40 years, serving as district governor for the Minnesota region in 1981-82 and as an international director from 1985 to 1987. In addition to his wife, Mary Ann, survivors include daughters Andrea Novak Neumann of Columbia Heights and Monica Novak of Minnetonka; three grandchildren, and a sister, Joan Novak, of South Bend, Ind.

*Trudi Hahn, Star Tribune  
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