

# Spooner businessman and rodeo fan is subject of movie, prospective head of state

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*Photo by Frank Zufall*

Mr. President! Boris Miksic is the owner and president of Cortec, and he is making serious moves to be the next president – as in head of state – of Croatia.

Outside of Washington, D.C., and New York City, Spooner is probably the only city in the United States where a prospective head of state of a foreign country regularly shops in the local stores, sips coffee in one of the coffee shops, and watches cowboys struggle aboard ticked-off bulls and broncs at the rodeo.

The prospective head of state is Boris Miksic, president of Cortec, which manufactures corrosion control products and biodegradable film. He owns seven plants employing a total of 250 people. Two plants are under construction overseas in China and Croatia, and five are in America, including one at 1300 S. River St. in Spooner.

Miksic ran for president of Croatia in 2005 and plans to run again in 2009.

Miksic has dual citizenship with Croatia (the country he immigrated from) and the United States, but he said in his heart he has always been red, white and blue.

“I was an American probably before I ever came here,” he said. “I always read American books, enjoyed American movies, and I like the sky’s-the-limit type of approach.”

Part of the American mystique is the Marlboro Man, the cowboy, and his rodeo.

Miksic commissioned a wooden sculpture of a cowboy at the Spooner plant to honor the annual Spooner Rodeo.

Rodeo officials recently discovered Miksic is a big fan and asked

him to take part in the Rodeo Parade Saturday.

### **Hollywood calling**

A spot in the parade seems fitting to a man whose life story is the definition of the American Dream – an immigrant with \$37 in his pocket and a pregnant wife, sweeping the floors in McDonald's, attending night school to learn chemical engineering, discovering a Russian formula that stops corrosion, starting a company that is a leader in corrosion control and also starts to make biodegradable film, and a 2005, third-place bid for the president of Croatia.

Now Miksic's life is set to go Hollywood. Barry Marrow, the scriptwriter for the 1988 hit Rain Man starring Dustin Hoffman and Tom Cruise, has written a script based on Miksic's life called Quest For Freedom, said Miksic.

[Marrow's representative, Gersh Agency, at 232 N. Canon Dr., Beverly Hills, Calif., did not return a call to confirm the screenwriter's participation on the project.]

Marrow has connections to Miksic's homeland. He produced a 1995 movie called Gospa, starring Martin Sheen, Morgan Fairchild and Michael York. The movie was based on the alleged real-life accounts of six Croatian children in former Yugoslavia in 1981 who claimed to have seen the Madonna on a hillside in Medjugorje and the attempts by the communist government to suppress interest and discourage pilgrimages to the site.

Miksic said Quest for Freedom has a fairly small budget by Hollywood standards, \$6 million, and shooting is set to begin around Sept. 1.

### **Another chance**

Just about the time the movie is released, Miksic said, he will begin one of several steps in a serious run for the top job in Croatia.

Miksic first entered Croatian politics in 2003 for a seat in Parliament at the urging of former Minnesota Gov. Ruddy Perpich, an American with Croatian ancestry.

He failed in 2003 but threw his hat in the ring again in 2005, that time running for president and winning almost 18 percent of the total votes.

Miksic and his supporters alleged government tampering with vote numbers from nearby expatriate voting in Bosnia-Herzegovina.

In response to alleged vote rigging, an orange-type democratic demonstration, like the type held in the Ukraine after a suspected tainted 2004 presidential count, began to form in Zagreb, the capital city.

Miksic said he feared the government's retaliation and asked demonstrators to disperse.

However, that was not the end of Miksic's political career. Almost immediately, he entered the race for mayor of Zagreb. He earned enough votes for three seats on the city council and monthly returns to the capital city to participate in the city's meetings.

He also has followed through on his presidential commitments to develop the Croatian economy and invest in education by building a biodegradable film factory in the country and making large donations to Croatian universities.

## **TV exposure**

Miksic said he was seriously hampered in his 2005 presidential campaign because he was not allowed time on government-owned TV stations.

In response, he is starting his own satellite TV station on the order of CNN, with a focus on news and business.

“I am timing it with upcoming parliamentary elections because obviously the media is the main contributor to one’s success and failure,” he said.

Not only will Miksic use the station to get his message out, he will bring a little American culture with him in the form of the Croatian version of NBC’s *The Apprentice*, with several young professionals vying to work in Miksic’s new factory located in the rural city of Beli Manastil.

Miksic said he likes *The Apprentice* because it promotes the American value of rewarding performance over pedigree or connections.

And, yes, each week, someone will get fired, but Miksic said he will not say, “You’re fired!” because there is no equivalent Croatian expression, but he will say in his own dramatic fashion, “You have lost your job.”

Phase two in Miksic’s presidential strategy is another run for a parliamentary seat in 2007. He has identified one of the 11 districts in the country, with a population of 350,000, as the area where he will focus his campaign.

He believes that once in national office he will have the opportunity to make the leap to president in the 2009 election.

Miksic claims a popular Croatian magazine recently polled voters about 2009 contenders and his was one of three names.

“I beat the other two in 2005,” said Miksic.

He said Croations are looking for change

“The country is being taken down the wrong road in the wrong direction, and people know that,” he said. “Now with the two opposing parties, like the Republicans and Democrats, we have the Rightests Party that we have now, and the Leftest Party that will probably take over, like has happened in Italy.

“Europe is shifting to the left. The Rightest have really just disappointed about everyone. They are not listening to people. Once they have taken over, they don’t listen to voters, and they have become arrogant; they are doing the same thing the Republicans are doing here.”

Miksic said he has been a life-long Republican but finds working in his Zagreb assembly seat he has an easier time working with the Leftest because they are better educated and care about social problems, even though he is more focused on a fiscal platform of reforms.

“These politicians who have been in power have totally lost control of our banking system, energy, and tourism in the hands of foreigners, so what are we going to be, second-grade citizens living in our own country and working for foreigners?” he asked.

It is not as though Miksic does not have his hands full with running Cortec, which grew by 37 percent last year and is set to expand by 20

percent this year, he said.

“Why am I doing this?” said Miksic. “Right now, Croatia really needs help from people who are not interested in taking the money. Who are willing to contribute whatever knowledge and experience, and I think I have a lot of support in Croatia, and it is growing too.” He will spend more and more time in Croatia, approaching 50 percent of his time, around the presidential elections.

Being president of a growing medium-sized business is one thing, but how does one prepare for being president of a whole country with 4 million citizens?

“It is nothing different than being the head of a corporation,” he said.

“You have a board of directors and you surround yourself with honorable people who are capable and confident and then you run the country.

“Do you know who is the head of Switzerland? Who the hell cares?

Well-run countries are like well-run corporations. Everything functions – incomes are there, quality of life is there, cleanliness, education – everything functions.

“I always say, ‘Why do we need all these politicians there? What have they accomplished?’ They know how to spend but they don’t know how to earn money.”

If he becomes president, he said, he will model Croatia on Ireland and Finland, two small countries that have made economic leaps by emphasizing high-tech industries and encouraging the best and brightest young people to stay and build a better future.

### **Sister city**

Keith Trembath of Spooner said if Miksic does become president of Croatia, it would be neat for Spooner to have a sister-city relationship with a city in Croatia. Trembath has passed the idea around to Miksic and Spooner officials.

Miksic said city officials in Beli Manastil, the site of his new biodegradable film factory, were very receptive to the idea when he presented it to them recently.

He said the sister city relationship could be good for Spooner’s economy by bringing Europeans to the area.