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## Spooner, Beli Manastil - sister cities?

BY FRANK ZUFALL

Spooner City Mayor Louie Villella said during the Tuesday, Sept. 5, city council meeting that the city would send a "letter of intent" to officials of Beli Manastil, Croatia, in Europe concerning establishing a sister city relationship.

Beli Manastil is the city where Boris Miksic, the president of Cortec, which has a plant in Spooner, recently built a biodegradable film factory.

Miksic, who has both American and Croatian citizenship, has political aspirations in Croatia. In 2003 he ran unsuc-

cessfully for Parliament, and in 2005, he came in third for a bid for president. Later in 2005, he was elected to the city council of the capital city, Zagreb. Miksic returns monthly to Croatia to attend city council meetings.

Miksic has told the *Spooner Advocate* he plans to run again for Parliament in 2007 and then make another bid for president in 2009.

If elected president, Miksic probably would be the first person with a business/interest contact in Washburn County who has gone on to become

head of state.

However, Miksic would not be the first person with Wisconsin connections to become the leader of another country. In 1921, Golda Meir left Milwaukee with her husband to return to Palestine. She later became prime minister of Israel from 1969 to 1974. In Israel, the president is the head of state but occupies a ceremonial position. The real power lies with the prime minister.

Keith Trembath of Spooner has led the effort to explore a sister city relationship in Croatia. He said he thought of the

idea after meeting Miksic during an April business seminar in which Miksic spoke.

From 1992 to 1996, Beli Manastil, a city of 10,000, was the battleground of the Balkan wars between Serbians and Croatsians.

Trembath and Miksic said the city is now in a period of economic development.

"Every small city needs to reinvent itself, and every small community needs to take charge to dream and to have ideas and so on," Trembath said concerning the Croatian city as well as Spooner.

Trembath explained the logic of Spooner pursuing a sister city relationship.

"The connection in my mind is he [Miksic] is invested in this city [Spooner] and he is invested in Croatia, in a city there perhaps that would be a starting place," he said.

Trembath said he thought both Shell Lake and Rice Lake have sister city relationships. (However, Shell Lake City Manager Brad Pederson said Shell Lake does not have a sister city.)

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## Sister City

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Trembath said there is an organization that helps cities develop sister city relationships and the organization also may be able to secure a foundation grant to assist with the establishment of the relationship.

When Miksic spoke to the city council, he said he was proud to be part of the Spooner community and he enjoyed the area and enjoyed visiting his cabin here.

He told the story of Beli Manastil. Miksic said in 1992 the Serbians ordered all of the residents to evacuate the city and the area was subsequently destroyed. In 1996, the people returned, and the city since has been given special economic status to encourage development.

"Why I think it is a good connection for Spooner is

because it will give the opportunity to become friendly with a city that has its problems but also opportunities and challenges," said Miksic. "Not only will we see economic benefits but also cultural benefits. I think we will also see some networking opportunities in the heart of Europe for our businesses here in Spooner."

Miksic said a good start for a sister city relationship might be for a delegation from Croatia to attend next year's Spooner Rodeo.

Miksic said Beli Manastil, which sits on the River Danube, like Spooner, is known as a hunting and fishing area, with a heavy emphasis on family tourism.

Villella said he asked Trembath to "spearhead" the effort to explore a sister city relationship. He said the city council and Spooner Area Chamber of

Commerce also would be involved in the exploratory process.

"I think it is a very good idea," said Villella, "something we should look into."

Villella asked whether officials in the Croatian city also have been presented with the sister city proposal.

"Yes, I have talked to the mayor," said Miksic, "and to the council and they are very much for that, too."

Miksic said he was going to Croatia at the end of September and would return to Spooner with a letter of intent from the Croatian mayor and more information about the city.

"If there is no objection from the council, we will send

a letter of intent that you can hand to those people when you return [to Croatia]," said Villella.

Villella thanked Miksic for his investment in Spooner and his interest in creating the sister city relationship.