

## **Lodge 1993's Blaskovich Says Croatia's Medical Technology 'More Than Ready' For New Millennium**

### **Hrvatska medicinska tehnologija je više no spremna za novi milenij**

LOS ANGELES, CA - The Sept. 22, 1998 opening of Croatia's newest medical school in Osijek was an event all Croatians should be justifiably proud of - regardless what part of the political spectrum or temperament they may lie. Although the school's opening was extensively covered by Croatia's media, few Croatian-Americans are aware of the school's existence or significance. I was honored and fortunate to have been invited to the opening ceremonies to the Josip Juraj Strossmayer University of Osijek School of Medicine and saw that the academic seeds planted then had blossomed into a healthy bumper crop of students, when I visited one year later and was named lecturer in Dermatology.

As a physician, who "has been there-done that," seeing bleary eyed students frantically pacing the hallways with opened books for a last minute cramming session prior to being quizzed by their professors, laboratories buzzing with activity and the familiar smells of the anatomy department was like a time warp. The beauty of these sights, sounds and the savored senses was - everything seemed to be functioning as a medical school should. This newest jewel of the academic world could not have a better setting.

Osijek is a city with a long tradition of intellectual curiosity. It produced two Nobel Prize winners, which is equal to Switzerland's output. What makes the coincidence even more remarkable, the Croatian laureates, Leopold Ruzicka and Vladimir Prelog, not only had worked in Switzerland; they were also products of the same high school in Osijek.

The fact that Osijek was able to have a medical school borders on the miraculous, since not so long ago its very status of remaining a city was in doubt. During the Serbian led Yugoslav army aggression against Croatia's independence effort, Osijek was only second to Vukovar in taking the brunt of the Serb artillery, rocket fire, and air attacks. One international news agency reported that Yugoslav shells rained on the city's center

at rate of one per minute. Its pre-war population of 120,000 shrunk to 10,000-17,000. Most of those who remained lived in mole-life existence in underground shelters. It was also a time when many in the Zagreb government had pessimistically written Osijek off. But the brave fighting spirit of its citizens could not be denied and the city's defence prevailed.

Although one of the Serbs' first targets was the hospital, the doctors and the staff carried out their tasks with a bravado that defied logic. Patient care was never compromised, despite the horrendous conditions. Medical and surgical care was conducted in a maze of tunnels under the hospital, because 80% of the superstructure was destroyed by Serbian weaponry. Not only was the hospital rebuilt, a new medical school rose like the proverbial phoenix from the ashes.

The school's inaugural was of such importance that the President of the Republic of Croatia, Zlatko Matesa; Prof. Dr. Ivica Kostovic, Minister of Sciences and Technology; Prof. Dr. Zeljko Reiner, Minister of Health, Prof. Dr. Branimir Jaksic, Advisor to President Franjo Tudjman, as well as the deans of the medical schools of Zagreb, Rijeka, Split and Mostar attended with other dignitaries.

It is fitting that the first dean named was Prof. Dr. Antun Tucak, for he was driving force that led to establishing the school. Against all odds, including political and economic, Tucak's personality, behind the scenes pressure and grass roots efforts - and probably a lot of wining and dining - brought his dream to realization.

The opening of Osijek Medical School unquestionably has readied Croatia for the next millennium, especially if Professor Tucak remains at the helm.

Jerry Blaskovich, M.D., M.A.  
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