

Robert Doubek's Monumental Career Ranges from Establishing the Historic National Memorial for Vietnam Veterans to Founding Legacy Organizations and Memorials for Heroes of the Czech Republic

By Bill Outlaw

WASHINGTON – What do the Vietnam Veterans Memorial, the American Friends of the Czech Republic, the memorial to Czechoslovak hero Tomáš Masaryk in Washington, D.C., and the rebuilding of a monument in Prague in honor of U.S. President Woodrow Wilson all have in common?

They all are historic, legacy-building projects led or substantially supported by Robert W. Doubek, an American originally from the Chicago area whose grandparents came to the U.S. from the kingdom of Bohemia (now part of the Czech Republic).

His leading role in developing these projects is the reason the Czech Republic and the Embassy Series are honoring Doubek at their June 9 concert at the Czech Embassy.

"We are pleased to dedicate this Embassy Series' concert performance to the leadership role Bob Doubek has played, both in the United States for his role in the Vietnam Veterans Memorial and on behalf of the Czech Republic," said Jerome Barry, Embassy Series founder.

The Embassy Series' concert at the Czech Embassy will feature the performance of international prize-winning pianist and Czech native, Veronika Böhmová.

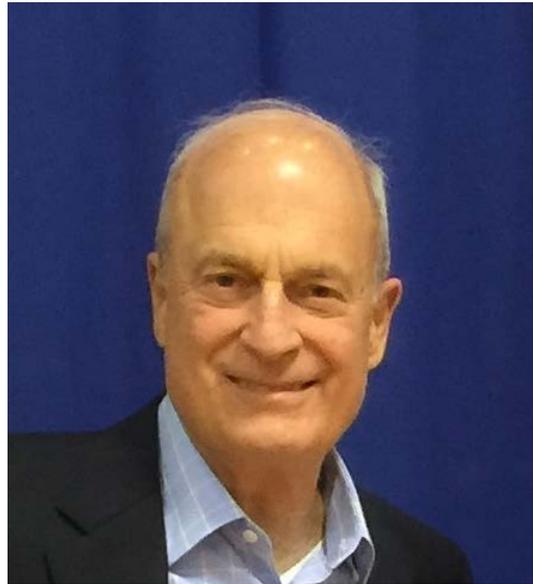
"I am delighted that our Embassy is once again hosting a concert from the Embassy Series and that we are able to welcome Veronika Böhmová, one of the Czech Republic's most talented pianists," said Petr Gandalovič, Ambassador of the Czech Republic to the U.S.

"I am especially pleased that this concert is dedicated to Robert Doubek, a founder and past president of the American Friends of the Czech Republic (AFoCR). During his presidency of AFoCR, he was instrumental in mobilizing public support for the accession of the Czech Republic to NATO. Moreover, he launched and directed a project to rebuild the Woodrow Wilson Monument in Prague. We are further grateful for his support and role in the establishment and creation of the Thomas G. Masaryk Memorial and the Václav Havel Place tribute at Georgetown University in Washington, DC."



Doubek – whose name is pronounced “dough-beck” in Czech, but is usually called “dew beck” by Americans - proudly answers to both versions. “Either is fine with me because I am proud to be an American and a Vietnam veteran and I am proud of my Czech roots.”

Doubek’s dedication and determination led him to play leading roles in building historic tributes in both countries. He co-founded the Vietnam Veterans Memorial Fund in 1979 and served as its executive director and project director until the completion of the Memorial (often called the “Wall”) in 1983. It pays tribute to those who served and those who gave their lives fighting in the Vietnam War.



After graduating from the University of Illinois in 1966, Doubek served in Vietnam in 1969 as a U.S. Air Force intelligence officer. After his service, he earned a law degree and was working for a law firm in Washington, D.C, in the late 1970s when he met Vietnam veteran Jan Scruggs, who conceived the idea of building the Vietnam Veterans Memorial as a way to recognized the service and sacrifice of all who served in Vietnam, especially to those who gave their lives. This was at a time when Vietnam veterans had not received recognition and often had been disparaged for their service in the politically controversial war.

Doubek last year published his memoir about the project, called “*Creating the Vietnam Veterans Memorial: The Inside Story*,” which describes the challenges faced in getting the Memorial built. Despite strong opposition from some political circles and from some veterans, the Wall is now the most visited memorial in Washington and its design is considered brilliant.

“We perceived its purpose as recognizing the service and sacrifice of those who served in Vietnam, instead of continuing to use them as tools in arguments for and against the war. A hoped-for byproduct would be that the memorial could help reconcile the country’s divisions over the war. Ideally, both the war’s supporters and its opponents could agree that the veterans deserved recognition,” said Doubek.

Doubek’s next monumental project came about in tribute to his Czech origins. He grew up in the Chicago suburbs of Berwyn and Riverside, where many people had Czech roots. His four Czech grandparents had immigrated in the ten years before World War I.

His experience in organizing and obtaining support for the Vietnam Memorial helped guide him in creating an organization called the American Friends of the Czech Republic (AFoCR), to support efforts of the Czech Republic to join the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO). This came about a few years after the newly formed Czech Republic and other Central and Eastern European nations had broken free from the East Bloc, ruled by the Communist government in Russia.

"I was approached by the Czech Ambassador, and the need was to have an organization here to support the



Czechs in their bid for NATO," said Doubek.

AFoCR has worked to strengthen ties between the U.S. and the Czech Republic in business, trade, culture, education, diplomacy, and security. A main goal was to enhance understanding and friendship between the peoples of the two countries, while informing U.S. government leaders, media, and other opinion makers about the Czechs.

"It took a lot of foresight and grit in order to lead the lobbying effort to get the Czech Republic to become part of NATO," said Tom Dine current AFoC president, who served as head of Radio Liberty and Free Europe from 1997-2005.

Among the key supporters and officers of AFoCR are Fred Malek, the former President of Marriott Hotels and Northwest Airlines who also served in the administrations of Presidents Richard Nixon and George H.W. Bush, and Dine, who headed Radio Free Europe in Prague.

After its efforts on NATO, AFoCR's next major project, in 2002, was to establish a monument to Tomáš G. Masaryk, the founding President of Czechoslovakia, on Embassy Row near DuPont circle in Washington, D.C. The statue of Masaryk, the centerpiece of the memorial, was offered to the United States by the Czech Republic. Speakers at the dedication included Czech President Václav Havel, former Slovak President Michal Kováč, and Czech-born former U.S. Secretary of State Madeleine Albright.

Inspired by the gratitude and pride expressed by Czech visitors to the Masaryk Memorial, Doubek proposed that AFoCR rebuild the monument to Woodrow Wilson in Prague that had been destroyed by the Nazis in 1941. The proposal was embraced AFoCR's leadership, the Czech Ambassador, and the Lord Mayor of Prague, and Doubek directed it to completion in 2011.

Noting that many Americans wonder about the connection between Wilson and the Czechs, Doubek explains: "Woodrow Wilson was the godfather of the independent Czechoslovak state in 1918, which fulfilled a centuries-old dream."

Doubek is now with the U.S. State Department, where he buys and sells real property worldwide for diplomatic use.

"With these projects I sought to provide lasting recognition to individuals who made significant sacrifices and contributions to their societies and the world. I am gratified that for many Vietnam veterans the creation of their Memorial has imparted genuine healing," concluded Doubek.

