

A Visit to Cleveland

By Barbara Ruben

With the Slovak flag flying over the Cleveland City Hall, the mayor of Turianske Teplice and three of her city administrators toured Cleveland's seat of government during their 10-day visit in January. In addition to declaring Cleveland's offices far more elaborate than their own, the Slovak delegation found many other differences between governments, community life and health care systems. At the same time, they discovered much they hope to adapt for Slovakia as they shape their healthy community program.

Turianske Teplice is a town without an ambulance or adequate health screening equipment, and the group toured their partner MetroHealth System's facilities, from the emergency room to the nursery, to better understand their own community's needs. They learned about the spirit of volunteerism at the non-profit Federation for Community Planning in which they met with its director, former US Congressman Eric Fingerhut. And they visited numerous community-based health care centers, from a private center for the aging to a church-sponsored clinic.

"We want them to see and appreciate Cleveland as well as come away with a range of ideas for programs and interventions in their community," said George Weiner, PhD, director of planning and institutional learning for MetroHealth. He cited reducing stress-related problems, from alcoholism to cardiovascular disease, as main areas in which he hopes the partnership can cooperate.

Turianske Teplice Mayor Alena Chlapkov, MD, said that she also hopes to use information learned on the trip to develop the role of non-governmental groups and better coordinate services for the elderly and children. Traveling with Chlapkov were Josef Turcany, town manager; Jaroslav Malis, chair of the town health council; and Alexander Chvojka, chief of environment for Turianske Teplice.

On January 10, Chlapkov, Terry R. White, president and chief executive officer of MetroHealth System, and AIHA's Bernice Bennett signed the memorandum of understanding formalizing the partnership. AIHA presented the Turianske Teplice partners with a computer, printer and software to help facilitate their collection of community health data.

The partnership also spurred a bonus for residents of Cleveland, which has 89,000 residents of Slovak descent, the highest concentration of Slovak-Americans in the country. Mary Jo Keshock, RN, who is a trustee with the Cleveland-Bratislava Sister Cities Organization, is coordinating dozens of Slovak-speaking volunteers to translate American patient education materials for Turianske Teplice, where the few brochures now available for patients are produced by drug companies. Covering numerous topics, from diabetes to asthma, the materials will also be used for Slovak patients in Cleveland hospitals.