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26<sup>th</sup> ANNIVERSARY OF UKRAINE'S INDEPENDENCE and CANADA 150  
\*\*\* UCC-TORONTO CELEBRATIONS \*\*\*

By Nadia Prokopiw, UCC-Toronto

The Ukrainian Canadian Congress - Toronto Branch (UCC-Toronto) welcomed over 12,000 people to the 26<sup>th</sup> annual Ukrainian Independence Day celebration on Saturday, August 19<sup>th</sup> at Centennial Park in Toronto, the largest in North America and the Diaspora. It was a huge success: Record attendance and a full day of festivities and entertainment was enjoyed by all.

This Independence Day celebration marked not only over **a quarter century of Ukraine's independent statehood**, but also celebrated **CANADA's 150<sup>th</sup>** Anniversary.

The stage program commenced with opening prayers conducted by Very Rev. Volodymyr Yanishevsky, Chancellor of the Ukrainian Catholic Eparchy of Toronto and Eastern Canada, Rector of Saint Josaphat's Cathedral and Fr. Vasyl Fediv from the Ukrainian Orthodox Church of St. Andrew the Apostle. This was followed by a warm welcome from the UCC-Toronto President, Taras Bahriy, and special greetings from the Ukrainian Ambassador to Canada, His Excellency Andriy Shevchenko and Andrii Veselovskyi, Consul General of Ukraine.

Mr. Bahriy reiterated that "Ukraine is still in a real war, regardless of who is calling it what ... but we will overcome and defeat our enemy because truth and God are on our side... Slava Ukrayini!" He also proudly recollected the words of Ukraine's president, who said that "Toronto is the largest Ukrainian City outside of the boundaries of Ukraine", and here reside true Ukrainian patriots who continue to fight for Ukraine's sustained independence.

This event was attended not only by thousands of returning visitors, but also by many government representatives who joined the celebration. Amongst the Federal representatives offering greetings and showing support for the Independence of Ukraine were the Hon. Kirsty Duncan, Minister of Science, MP Borys Wrzesnewskyj, , MP Arif Virani, MP James Maloney, MP Peter Fonseca, MP Andrew Scheer, Leader of the Conservative Party of Canada, and MP Hon. Peter Kent.

The Hon. Kirsty Duncan, announcing that she is yet another proud Ukrainian Canadian, proclaimed that "the Canadian government stands shoulder to shoulder with the people of Ukraine". She also read greetings from Prime Minister Justin Trudeau who affirmed that "since its pivotal independence in 1991, Ukraine and Canada have forged a strong relationship based on common values and shared ambitions" and gave thanks "for the enormous contributions Ukrainian Canadians have made to Canada's success".

MP Andrew Scheer, wearing a vyshyvanka, restated that “the now almost four year old conflict... the unceasing attack on the Independence and sovereignty of Ukraine by the Putin regime - will not be forgotten... and the illegal annexation of Crimea - will not be accepted”. He also reminded us that “our previous Conservative government adopted the widest list of sanctions on Russia of any country in the world... and continues to stand with Ukraine against Putin’s aggression.”

From the Ontario Provincial government we had MPP Hon. Dave Levac, Speaker of the Ontario Legislative Assembly, MPP Yvan Baker, as well as MPP Ted Arnott, representing Conservative Party leader Patrick Brown.

The Hon. Dave Levac expressed his heartfelt thanks to Ukraine for standing up against evil and recognized that “for 600 years Ukraine has had someone else’s boot on its neck but has still survived, still gone forward and still represents good on the planet”. Mr. Levac then presented UCC Toronto’s President, Taras Bahriy, with a scroll from the Ontario Legislature commemorating this event and thanking its organizers and supporters.

Toronto Mayor John Tory, also in a vyshyvanka, acknowledged how valuable it was for UCC to honour the young students with awards for the Holodomor Essay competition (presented earlier) and how important it was to “teach these lessons of history... that so many people don’t even know about... that this genocide was one of many struggles of the Ukrainian people... and to make sure that these lessons are never forgotten”. He also mentioned that he was very proud to have finalized the location for the Holodomor Memorial in the heart of our city. Mayor Tory continued with inspiring congratulations to the Ukrainian community for its “contributions in public office, in business, and in the professions... to the well being and building of the biggest city in Canada, which also has the largest Ukrainian Diaspora in the world” and stated that he will continue to stand with the Ukrainian community, shoulder to shoulder, whether here celebrating Independence, at the Holodomor Memorial or in front of the Russian Consulate. The Mayor was joined on stage by Councillors John Campbell and Stephen Holyday, as well as Oakville Councillor Natalia Lishchyna.

Markian Shwec provided greetings from Paul Grod, President of the National Ukrainian Canadian Congress, and emphasized that “we won’t give in, we won’t surrender. ”.

A large group of diverse guests voiced their continued support and congratulations to the Ukrainian Canadian community. The afternoon was emceed by Larysa Bajus and Myron Konyk, and UCC Toronto Board member, Bohdan Wynyckyj, provided the opening ceremony introductions.

This year the very vibrant and colourful concert program was directed by Anna Kisil and Lesia Movtchan. The stage show included a variety of local Ukrainian dance and musical performers as well as special guest artists from Ukraine. The enthusiastic audience was entertained by Toronto’s renowned Dance Ensembles – BARVINOK, KALYNA and UKRAINA, the BATURYN Marching and Concert Band and the Prometheus Choir. Among the celebrated guest entertainers from Ukraine were: the musical Ensemble Ottawa from Ternopil, soloists Myroslava Solovyanenko, Pavlo Fondera, Ihor and Adrianna Artemiak, and many others. And this year, Mad Heads front man Vadym Krasnooky from Kyiv delighted the audience with his performance. The concert was capped off by the ZIRKA finalists’ performance from the competition, “Ukrainian Star”, sponsored by Buduchnist Credit Union.

A large classroom bus displaying and teaching the history of the Holodomor, was a moving attraction for those desiring to learn about the 1932-33 Ukrainian famine and genocide. The UCC Toronto Euromaidan Committee and the Canada Helps Ukraine booths showcased a poignant photo display of life in Ukraine today – soldiers,

families, children, and the ongoing war in Eastern Ukraine. Attendees were moved to make donations to assist those in need in Ukraine.

The shopping bazaar seems to get better every year. Food and market vendors offered their many wares to an eager crowd. As always, through the generous support of the Zaraska Family, the Ukrainian Canadian School Board provided a robust Children's Amusement Centre which included inflatables, games and crafts.

The day was concluded with a lively outdoor Zabava at the Carpathian Lounge, sponsored by Ukrainian Credit Union, where a capacity crowd of revelers danced to the music and antics of "DJ Unlisted" well into the night. Many thanks to Eugene Iwasiuk for seamlessly running the stage, the zabava infrastructure, and sound systems.

"This annual celebration could not have happened without the help and support of many valued volunteers and our generous sponsors," said Bahriy. Our Platinum Plus sponsor for 2017 was Northland Power. Platinum sponsors were Buduchnist Credit Union, Horodynsky Farms, Ukrainian Credit Union, and the Zaraska Family. Gold sponsors were "Bitter Harvest", Caravan Group, Halenda's Meats, Meest Corp., and Mitec-EFX Show Systems. Silver sponsors were New Canadian Drain and Plumbing, Rodan Energy Solutions, and the Shevchenko Foundation. CTV, Forum, Kontakt, Razom, Meest Radio and Song of Ukraine acted as Media sponsors

Six months of untiring work by the UCC Independence Day organizing committee and an amazing team of hard-working volunteers who began work on Friday to set up the event, ran it all day Saturday, and then completed the take-down and clean-up on Sunday, were invaluable to the smooth functioning, viability and great success of this event – all managed by Committee Co-chairs, Taras Antoniuk and Lesia Bonk. A heartfelt thank you to our Fundraising chief Roman Bonk without whose efforts this event could not have happened. Special thanks go to the Ukrainian Canadian Women's Council, Toronto Branch, together with the Ukrainian Women's Organization of Canada, League of Ukrainian Women in Canada, Ukrainian Catholic Women's League of Canada and Ukrainian Women's Association of Canada for their tireless work at the entrance and information gate. Kudos go to Nadia Prokopiuk and Irene Solomon who handled the media, marketing and advertising. Thanks to Orest Omeliukh for running logistics, to Bohdan Myndiuk who ran the popular chess tournament, to Lydia Falcomer for the program book, to Tatiana Schturyn for the dignitary reception, and to the entire UCC-Toronto Independence Day organization committee and office staff for their diligent work over the past 6 months. Appreciation goes to UCC office administrator Nadia Sydorenko, to summer student Nadija Polanski, and to the UCC Toronto Branch Executive members Taras Bahriy, Markian Shwec, Peter Schturyn, Lesya Winnicki, and Marijka Stadnyk who filled the rest of the key positions on the organizing committee.

After the culmination of a successful, jam-packed event of stage shows, food fairs, beverage gardens, market places, children's activities, sports tourneys, and Zabava, President Taras Bahriy now invites all to join the Toronto Ukrainian Canadian Congress in the planning of and participation in next year's Ukrainian Independence Day 2018!

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UCC-Toronto is a not-for-profit umbrella association with 57 member organizations that coordinates and represents the Ukrainian Canadian community to ensure its continued and cohesive development within Canada's socio-cultural fabric.

For more information about the event and UCC-Toronto, please visit [www.ucctoronto.ca](http://www.ucctoronto.ca).