Polish Studies Center and Director Receive Polish Foreign Ministry Award

This fall, Indiana University’s Polish Studies Center (PSC) in Bloomington and its current director, Bill Johnston, received a special tribute from the Foreign Ministry of Poland. The Polish Foreign Ministry Award, which has been made each year since 1970, honors people and institutions that significantly enhance the promotion of Poland abroad. On October 6, Johnson accepted the award from the Polish Foreign Minister, Włodzimierz Cimoszewicz, in a ceremony that took place at the Presidential Palace in Warsaw.

IU has been promoting Polish studies for almost 30 years. The year 1976 saw the establishment of an exchange program, largely funded by the U.S. Department of State, to develop an American Studies Center (ASC) at Warsaw University and a Polish Studies Center (PSC) at IU Bloomington. During the cold war period, the ASC was the only place where Polish scholars had access to uncensored material about the United States and to U.S. publications. Over the years, numerous scholars in the social sciences and humanities from both institutions have participated in the exchange, allowing for more than 60 IU faculty and graduate students to study in Poland and an equal number of Polish scholars to come to the Bloomington campus.

Each year, the PSC sponsors an active program of academic, cultural, and social events, including conferences, concerts, film series, theatrical performances, and receptions as well as publications. The center has participated in hosting some of the most important figures in Polish politics and culture. These include the 1998 visit of Lech Wałęsa, former president of Poland and Nobel Peace Prize winner for his leadership in the solidarity movement that paved the way for democracy in Poland. Among literary figures was the late Czesław Milosz, a 1980 Nobel Laureate in Literature who came to IU in 1981–1982 as a Patten Lecturer. His life and work were celebrated this September by an evening of prose and poetry readings, sponsored by the PSC and the Office of the Bloomington Chancellor.

Johnston, who has been the center’s director since 2001, is an associate professor of applied linguistics, an adjunct associate professor of comparative literature, and an award-winning translator of contemporary Polish literature. He has lived, worked, and traveled throughout Poland for many years and spent several years directing the British Council’s English Language Centre at the University of Wrocław. While working later at University of Hawai’i on his dissertation, he became involved in translating several stories for a Polish cultural festival there. Since then, he has continued working as a literary translator, particularly of the works of contemporary Polish authors.

Johnston’s most recent works of translation are those of renowned writer Witold Gombrowicz (1904–1969). They were published just in time to celebrate the “Year of Gombrowicz” that has been declared in Poland to honor the writer’s birth in 1904. These two books are Bacacay (Archipelago Books, 2004), a collection of his short stories, and Polish Memories (Yale University Press, 2004), autobiographical sketches of his youth written for Radio Free Europe during the 1950s. In April 2002, Johnston was continued on page 16.
Economic Development Workshop continued from page 10

Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD).

In a U.S. State Department Internet training laboratory in the Sumy State University (SSU) Scientific Library building, we held a chat session on the Internet Access and Training Program (IATP) (www.iatp.org.ua) Web site. For two hours, the three of us discussed economic development with government officials and NGO managers at 30 other IATP sites located throughout Ukraine.

After returning to Kiev, we held discussions with U.S. embassy officials about our trip. They expressed a wish to send a group of Ukrainian mayors to the Louisville area next spring to discuss economic development.

Since our return to the U.S., we have started several different programs with our Ukrainian friends. LICC’s Global Education Network has paired students from local high schools with high school students in Ukraine as e-mail “pen pals.” James St. Clair (Journalism, IUS) and his students are assisting students at SSU in starting a student newspaper in Sumy. We are working with a Peace Corps Volunteer teaching photography in an orphanage in Sumy to arrange a showing of their photographs on our campus. Additionally, we sent them information about the March 2005 meeting of the Soyuz Symposium hosted by IU to SSU faculty in hopes that one or more might submit papers for presentation.

The State Department calls the programs we work with “citizen diplomacy,” and we like to think of ourselves as two of IU’s ambassadors to the world. We have learned much in our travels and interactions with people of other cultures; the experiences have added another dimension to our lives. We try to create similar opportunities for students, faculty, and community members to experience other cultures.

—REEification Newsletter (October 2004)

Polish Foreign Ministry Award continued from page 6

responsible for bringing a dramatic adaptation of Gombrowicz’s satirical novel, Ferdydurke, to Bloomington. In April 2003, he was awarded an Amicus Poloniae award from the Polish government, together with Patrick O’Meara, IU’s dean for International Programs. This academic year, Johnston is on sabbatical leave.

“This award to the Polish Studies Center and to Bill Johnston for promoting knowledge of Poland and things Polish is richly deserved,” says Owen V. Johnson, the center’s acting director. “But the award only tells part of the story. For more than a quarter of a century, the center, like the other area studies centers at IU, has been opening up the rest of the world to IU students and faculty as well as the people of the state of Indiana.”

In addition to Warsaw University, IUB has more recently established an academic exchange program with Jagiellonian University in Kraków. IUPUI has also been exploring formal agreements with a number of universities in Poland.

—RMN