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Your Independent Ukrainian Internet Newsletter

Незалежний Український Інтернетний Інформаційний Бюлетень

May the Spirit of Christmas remain with you to share throughout the year

*Merry Christmas * Веселих Свят*

December 20 грудня
2008 Vol.9 No.47

People&Culture&Politics&Business

UCAMA holds Christmas decorations workshop

UCAMA, the Ukrainian Canadian Archives and Museum of Alberta held its third folk arts and crafts workshop. In keeping with the holiday season, the theme of the workshop was decoration making. Participants made miniature dolls and angels to use as ornaments on their Christmas trees.



Genia Boivin, a graduate student at the University of Alberta, shows off her angel.

Khrystyna Kohut opened the workshop by welcoming participants and introducing Natalie Kononenko from the University of Alberta Kule Centre for Ukrainian and Canadian Folklore and students Genia Boivin, Svitlana Kukharenko, and Yanina Vihovska.

Kononenko then spoke briefly about Ukrainian Christmas traditions. These celebrated the nativity of Christ and also helped people articulate their sense of the cycle of nature, the end of one year and hope for year to come. Many old traditions involved crops and crop fertility, often combined with a religious meaning. After talking about traditional celebrations, participants viewed a short film showing Ukrainian Christmas on the Prairies as it was celebrated over fifty years ago.

In all of the old traditions, Kononenko pointed out, the Christmas tree is missing. Yet it is very much a part of Christmas today, both in Canada and Ukraine. The Christmas tree, or ialynka, is a relatively new tradition, but one that has been thoroughly integrated into Ukrainian life. An interesting folktale is called Spiders at Christmas. It illustrates the fact that Ukrainians did not really have a traditional way of decorating their trees. Kononenko told this story, addressing it particularly to the children in the audience, and said that, as the tree has been adopted and adapted, so workshop participants were going to adapt traditional dolls to give a Ukrainian feel to their trees.

The highpoint of the workshop was the construction of three dolls, an angel made out of a square of fabric, a cotton ball and embroidery thread, a doll built around a birch bark core (substituted with a paper core for this workshop), and a doll made of rolled-up strips of fabric. Both the paper core doll and the one built on fabric strips could be dressed up in a variety of ways to reflect Ukrainian traditional clothing. The fabric doll could be made up as either a boy dressed in Hutsul trousers and a keptar or a girl dressed in a scarf or khustka and a skirt. As Kononenko pointed out, once the basics of doll construction are learned, almost endless variation is possible. Sure enough, several participants made their own interpretations of the various dolls, creating little hand-made treasures.