

**CZECHOSLOVAKIA 100TH ANNIVERSARY
TREE OF LIBERTY PLANTING
SPEECH BY
HER EXCELLENCY PROFESSOR THE HONOURABLE KATE WARNER AC
GOVERNOR OF TASMANIA, SATURDAY 13 OCTOBER 2018**

Thank you very much for inviting Dick and me to attend this significant tree-planting ceremony today.

I begin by paying my respects to the traditional and original owners of this land. I acknowledge the contemporary Tasmanian Aboriginal community, who have survived invasion and dispossession, and continue to maintain their identity, culture and Indigenous rights.

What I would like to do as my contribution to the ceremony is to refer to some of the notable Czech nationals who have settled in Tasmania since the 1950s. My list necessarily has to be selective because we could say that every single Tasmanian Czech is notable!

Most of you will be well aware of the significance of the community role of Tasmanian Governors. The role is significant because the Office of the Governor is representative of all Tasmanians; and because the community role comprises much of the Governor's annual program. So it is fitting that I am able to talk to you today, on behalf of all Tasmanians.

Early in my term as Governor, in May 2015, we hosted the Ambassador of the Czech Republic at Government House – His Excellency Mr Martin Pohl – during his two-day official visit to Tasmania. This included a Formal Dinner at Government House. Among the guests were Josef Chromy (accompanied by his grandson Dean Cocker), Tom and Tracey Samek, and Milena and John Mills. I will therefore start my name-calling with Joe, Tom and Milena.

To say that Joe needs no introduction is an understatement, but here goes anyway!

Joe Chromy migrated to Australia in 1950 in order to escape Soviet occupation of Czechoslovakia. I love Joe's story because it is such an amazing and inspiring rags to riches story. He arrived with little other than the clothes he was wearing. After an initial hiccup, he established Blue Ribbon Meat Products which he ran for over 40 years as a major Tasmanian brand, employing some 540 people with almost \$80 million in sales turnover.

After Blue Ribbon was successfully floated on the Australian Stock Exchange, Joe was able to buy into Tasmania's fledgling wine industry, through the JAC Group –

Joe and Alida Chromy – purchasing Heemskerk, Rochemcombe (now Bay of Fires) and Buchanan Vineyards. Jansz sparkling wine was also part of that deal.

Joe then established Tamar Ridge, which is one of the state's leading wineries.

And today Josef Chromy Wines' 61-hectare vineyard produces highest quality Pinot Noir, Chardonnay, Sauvignon Blanc, Riesling, Pinot Gris, Gewürztraminer, a vintage sparkling and a Botrytis Riesling.

However, Joe's story is not all meat and wine! As a property developer he has rescued at least two derelict properties. First the abandoned and vandalised Launceston General Hospital building which, rather than demolish – the option most observers recommended – he transformed into the very smart Charles Hotel and apartments in a \$33 million project at the height of the GFC. The second rescue is the Penny Royal complex, which had become dilapidated and was closed in 2006 and which JAC purchased, restored and revitalised. Not only did Joe give himself a new life in Tasmania, he has given new life to these two sites in Launceston and made a wonderful contribution to our state.

Milena Mills has been the Honorary Consul for the Czech Republic since 2009. She is therefore a longstanding friend of Government House Tasmania and she is always active in Czech-Tasmanian relations – not least through Prague Zoo being one of the international zoos which from next year will be housing an insurance population of Tasmanian devils, as part of the international effort to save the species.

This is why in January this year Milena accompanied Martin Pohl and the Deputy Director of Prague Zoo to the TMAG exhibition "The Remarkable Tasmanian Devil".¹

The exhibition covered many aspects of the devil and included work by some Tasmanian artists.

Which provides a neat segue for me to say something now about **Tom Samek**, whose international profile as a Tasmanian-based artist has been built up over many years. I must say, of all of the many more recognizable contemporary Australian artists, the work of Tom Samek is instantly recognisable, and that's no easy achievement. He works in sculpture, painting, print making, tapestry, mural, theatre set design and film animation. And of course is a legendary chef.

From art to music. The late Jan Sedivka was a leading violinist and string teacher. After holding influential violin teaching posts in London and then Brisbane, he became Lecturer in Violin and Chamber Music at the Tasmanian Conservatorium

and then its Director of Music. In the words of the Conservatorium:

“His influence on string playing in Australia has been profound. He has enriched ensemble playing in incalculable ways, and in the music world has become a legend in his own time...Many of his students hold positions in Australian and European Orchestras; many more teach in music establishments or universities throughout the country.”ⁱⁱ

Frank Stary designed many impressive buildings in and around Hobart and I’m advised that a Prague TV crew will be here soon to document the story of his life and work.

Vlastik Skvaril is a bit more than a retired cheesemaker from Burnie. Raising funds for charities, he has walked, run, cycled and scooted across Australia many times and in a recent venture, in 2016, he pulled a rickshaw with a 65-kilogram load on a 350-kilometre journey from Hobart to Burnie to raise money for the Make A Wish Foundation. Commenting on it he said, "I am very tired. Nothing is too sore, I have a few blisters but they will heal, they are a part of life. I was able to have a shower in Ross and at Launceston where I stayed at a friend's house, it was like a five-star hotel. I slept in a queen-size bed, had steak for dinner, and in the morning I had eggs and bacon, which is a lot better than a can of baked beans or spaghetti and sausages."ⁱⁱⁱ

Ladies and gentlemen, those are but a few names – there are many more – Charles Matysek, Tony Zvatora, Milan Vhynalek^{iv} – but they do represent a cross-section of Czech Tasmanians whose collective narrative is as diverse as it is rewarding.

Tasmania is enriched with immigrants from all over the world and the Czech contribution is significant. Today, at this ceremony marking the 100th anniversary of the founding of Czechoslovakia, we have a perfect opportunity to thank you to all of you for choosing to live in this wonderful island State of Australia.

ⁱ <https://www.easternshoresun.com.au/?p=1929>, accessed 10 October 2018.

ⁱⁱ <http://www.events.utas.edu.au/2017/october/jan-sedivka-celebrating-100-years>, accessed 10 October 2018.

ⁱⁱⁱ <https://www.theadvocate.com.au/story/3688822/hard-toil-pulls-in-the-cash-for-vlastik-skvaril/>, accessed 10 October 2018.

^{iv} Milena Mills email dated 5 October 2018 to David Owen.