

Czech family honors heritage with the Stodola – a unique gathering place on the family’s 115-year-old Virginia farm

The Vtipil family is reviving their Czech traditions on their Virginia farm, building a gathering place and naming it The Stodola, which means “barn” in Czech.

PRINCE GEORGE COUNTY, VA - VIRGINIA, USA, February 8, 2022 /EINPresswire.com/ --- The Vtipil family is bringing back to life their 115-year-old farm in Prince George, Virginia. Reviving their Czech traditions, they have built a gathering place and named it [The Stodola](#), which means “barn” in Czech. Czech cultural values of self-sufficiency, frugality, family and stewardship are all visible in this labor of love.



Don and Debby Vtipil stand in front of their Stodola

AMENITIES OFFERED AT VTIPILS’ STODOLA

Husband and wife team, Don and Debby Vtipil, have done all the interior work salvaging materials from the old barn on the property and other recycled goods to create the new barn, the Stodola. The Vtipils’ main building is 5,200 square feet with a 200 guest capacity and will host its first wedding in March 2022.

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Carol Marks Bowman

The Stodola is already fully booked for weddings this year. The Stodola offers indoor and outdoor ceremony locations, indoor restrooms, dressing rooms, a bar and beverage station, a caterer warming room and ample onsite parking. Two grain storage bins on the grounds have been converted to gazebos, one with a fire pit.

After Don retired from the Army and Debby retired from operating a local salon, they were looking for a project to keep them busy and connected to their community. With the dream of preserving their Czech heritage, they purchased the farm back from a developer, who was planning a multi-unit housing subdivision.

Don states "Growing up going to church picnics and gathering for Brunswick stews on the farm, the sense of community and the power of place is important to me. We hope the Stodola can become that place for many others in our community. Whether folks are celebrating a marriage, the arrival of a baby, or just getting together to reminisce and make new memories, we have created a space for that and we look forward to hosting these meaningful moments."

THE VTIPIIL FAMILY HISTORY

In 1905, Don's great grandfather Joseph Vtipil, Sr., came from Czechoslovakia (now the Czech Republic) to scout out farming opportunities in Prince George County, Virginia. Two years later, Joseph and his brothers Jerry and Milton acquired a total of 292 1/2 acres here. The brothers cultivated the fields planting crops including Concord grapes to produce a dessert wine that has been a family tradition for over 75 years.

The Vtipil family worked the original farmland for years, but slowly acres were parceled off. Ultimately a 65-acre lot with the original and aging buildings were all that were left. After the farm had been out of the family's hands for seven years, Don and Debby purchased this undisturbed parcel with the original outbuildings in 2018. After building a new house and renovating many of the smaller outbuildings they now call the old farm home again.



Strings of lights adorn the rafters of the Stodola.



Don and Debby Vtipil point out a photo of the original farm.

WHY THE CZECHS AND SLOVAKS CAME HERE

The Czechs and Slovaks came from agricultural economies in Europe, looking for economic opportunity in America. With the end of the Civil War and the abolition of slavery in the U.S., the South's agricultural economy had collapsed. After years of heavy farming, the land was in poor condition. Many of the immigrants had first settled on farmlands in the Northern and Midwestern states. But they were enticed by ads in Czech-and-Slovak-language newspapers placed by land agents and railroad companies that advertised a warm climate and land for as little as \$5 an acre in Virginia.

"Czech and Slovak immigrants were very important to the overall lifestyle here. They were independent farmers, who restored the land to cultivation. And they brought with them a rich culture," said Carol Marks Bowman, executive director of the [Prince George County Regional Heritage Center](#). "When they first came, they established their own community with churches, businesses, banks, schools and even their own baseball teams. Then they began to assimilate. Now, 134 years after the arrival of the first Czech immigrant, they celebrate their history and culture." The annual Czech-Slovak Festival is scheduled for October 15, 2022.

A display of the Czech and Slovak history in Prince George County is featured at the Prince George Regional Heritage Center. For more information, contact the Heritage Center: www.princegeorgevahistoricalociety.org, (804) 863-0212 or PGHistory@aol.com.

Also, travel advisors at the [Hopewell and Prince George, VA, tourism office](#) (804-541-2461) will be happy to share details on historic attractions, accommodations, food, musical and theatrical performances and entertainment in and near Hopewell and Prince George, Virginia.

Hopewell/Prince George, Virginia, is located 20 miles south of Richmond, Virginia, situated on 35 miles of historic riverfront on the Appomattox and James Rivers. The Visitor Center is just off Interstate 295 between Richmond and Williamsburg, near Fort Lee, VA and has major transportation arteries running through it – Route 10, Route 460, and I-295.

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