

## The Via Foundation Provides Grants for Grassroots

By John White

Via Foundation celebrated ten years of active involvement with communities around the Czech Republic by having Dr. Madeleine Albright speak at a ceremony held in Pittsburg, Pennsylvania, in 2006. For her, the Via Foundation “is based precisely on the right concepts: Help for those who are helping themselves; partnerships between the public and private sectors; support for democracy at the grassroots level.”

The Via Foundation (Nadace Via) combines grant making and technical assistance to serve communities, support NGOs, and promote a culture of philanthropy. Since 1997 they’ve raised \$12 million in support of NGOs and community development, and they’ve distributed grants for more than 1,750 projects in 1,000 towns in Czech Republic. They were originally supported entirely by foreign funds, but now, Czech donors are contributing more and more every year.

There will be at least fourteen grant rounds this year. When a grant round begins, announcements will go out in newspapers nationwide. Brad Hoar, Via’s Development Manager explains, “the merits of the project themselves determine what’s successful” in determining who receives the grants. Afterwards, Via follows up to make sure the money is going to the work the donors intended.

An example of a grant from the Academy of Social Entrepreneurship Fund is Portus Praha’s Slapy Sheltered Workshop. In the town of Slapy, the workshop houses nine mentally disabled people and employs them to produce marinated Hermelin cheese. Thanks to the 200,000 Kc grant, the workshop was able to increase production and distribution capacities,

enabling them to sell their cheese to various pubs and cafes in Prague. The profits raised from this business are reinvested in Portus Praha, which decreases their dependency on donations.

For the staff at Via Foundation, a highlight of their job is attending town meetings and observing citizens in planning committees. In one case, citizens of Česka Čermá (just below the Czech-Polish mountain Sněžka) were building a park. The planning committees expected twenty people at the first meeting, but forty to fifty showed up. Mr. Hoar smiled wide when explaining, “They had to keep getting chairs, even from the mayor’s office.” The town hall’s rooms were covered with children’s drawings from the town’s elementary school of what they wanted, and the adults in the meeting studied the drawings to determine what was feasible or not. It was decided that the park would feature a pond and life-sized wooden statues featuring characters from Czech fairy tales. A grant totaling 210,000Kc came from the fund Helping People to Improve their Communities.

Although the foundation doesn’t offer many volunteer opportunities, they offer several internships a year. “But if people want to give,” they enable them to give, “in an effective way.” Individuals can choose what fund they prefer, and Via makes sure it goes to where the donor wants it to go. And if Via doesn’t offer a program to suit the donor’s wishes, Via will redirect the donor to a non-profit that does. “It’s easy to give money, but to give money effectively? That’s where we come in” Via’s Development Manager Mr. Hoar says.

Every year, Via presents the Via Bona Award to recognize individuals and businesses that are dedicated to social philanthropy. For the award, anyone is eligible, not just Via donors. The key is active community participation and social innovations, not just who gives the most. Last year in a ceremony at the U.S. Ambassador’s residence, the corporate award went to Vodafone Czech Republic because they contributed money and technology to develop a GPS

system for cell phones for the blind. The individual award went to Countess Nositzova for fifteen years work with Czech Blind United (SONS).

Via's website says it best, "Via does not offer charity, we offer possibility. Those with both the potential and drive must be given an opportunity to succeed."

For Additional information about the Via Foundation, visit [www.en.nadacevia.cz/](http://www.en.nadacevia.cz/)

or contact them at (420) 233 113 370.

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Word count--646