

NEWS ALERT



SPOONER Advocate

Vol. 111, No. 23 Spooner, WI

www.spooneradvocate.com

Thursday, May 12, 2011

\$1.00

Spooner and Beli Manastir could become sister cities

BY FRANK ZUFALL

What do Spooner, Wisconsin, North America, and Beli Manastir, Croatia, Europe, have in common?

The answer is each city has a Cortec plant owned by Boris Miksic: EcoCortec in Beli Manastir and Cortex Spay Technologies in Spooner.

And soon the two cities separated by the bulk of two continents, the Atlantic Ocean and Mediterranean and Adriatic seas could be sister cities.

On Tuesday, May 3, the city council voted to "go forward" with a sister city relationship with Beli Manastir.

In 2006, Miksic, who has made two unsuccessful bids for president of Croatia, proposed the sister city idea.

During then-Spooner Mayor Louie Villella's term in office, the city sent a letter to officials of Beli Manastir, concerning establishing a sister city relationship.

After several years of very little communication between the two cities, Spooner recently received a "letter of intent" from Ivan Dobos, the mayor of Beli Manastir, on becoming a sister city.

"We are very grateful to Mr. Boris Miksic, owner of EcoCortec Ltd., very successful



Seal from the mayor of Beli Manastir, Croatia, Spooner's possible sister city. Photo by Frank Zufall

company operating in our industrial area, for the initiative to become sister city of city of Spooner, Wisconsin, USA," wrote Dobos.

He added, "We accept the proposal that our city representative visit Spooner and present our city and region, as well as business opportunities in our industrial area.

"We sincerely hope that the contacts could lead to successful and entrepreneurial investments and they will contribute to good friendly relations between the city of Spooner and Beli Manastir," wrote Dobos.

"It would be an opportunity for economic, cultural, as well as maybe educational

exchanges with the country and the community." Spooner Mayor Gary Cuskey said at the May 3 council meeting. "We have corresponded somewhat, and what I would like to do is officially adopt the concept to go forward. There's a lot of stuff to do as far as paperwork, a proclamation, and different things."

Cuskey said the organization Sister City International assists with creating sister city relationships.

"For our younger people, for cultural exchanges, it could be a really nice thing," said Alderperson Esa Everroad.

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Sister City

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"It could be something really interesting for us" said Cuskey.

The mayor of Beli Manastir may go to Spooner in September, said Cuskey, and if the city does become a sister city, he would like to have a reception for the Croatian mayor.

"This is really kind of the first step," said Cuskey. "I'm really looking forward for us saying we are going forward, and that is what I am looking for tonight, and as this develops we will just have to keep reporting back to the council where we are at with this thing, and maybe we would then have myself or someone go to Croatia at some future date in reciprocity."

Cuskey said the city needs to visit Miksic and Cortec officials.

In a press release from Cortec, Dobos invited Spooner officials to Beli Manastir on November 11 for the city's celebration Day of the City.

In the same Cortec press release, economic opportunities between the two cities are also cited as a benefit of being connected.

The Spooner city council voted unanimously to pursue the sister city relationship.

Beli Manastir

Croatia borders the Adriatic Sea to the west, Slovenia to the north, Hungary to the northeast, Serbia to the east, Bosnia and Herzegovina to the southeast and Montenegro to the very south. Beli Manastir is in eastern Croatia.

From 1992 to 1996, Beli Manastir, a city of under 9,000, was the battleground of the Balkan wars between Serbians and Croatians.

Miksic said in 1992 all the residents of the city were ordered by the Serbians to evacuate the city, and the area subsequently was destroyed.

In 1996, the people



returned, and the city has since been given special economic status to encourage development.

"Why I think it is a good connection for Spooner because it will give the opportunity to become friendly with a city that has its problems but also opportunities and challenges," said Miksic back in 2006. "Not only will we see economic benefits but also cultural benefits. I think we will also see some networking opportunities in the heart of Europe for our businesses here in Spooner."

Beli Manastir is known as a hunting and fishing area, and family tourism destination.

Miksic

Miksic grew up in Zagreb, Croatia, living in a one-room apartment with his parents. In college, he became active against the then-communist Yugoslavia, which had absorbed Croatia. In 1974, Miksic immigrated to the United States with his wife. They had \$37.

Miksic's first job in America was washing the floor in a New York McDonald's.

His American sponsor found Miksic, who had a

mechanical engineering degree, a job in Minnesota at Northern Instruments, which makes corrosion inhibitors and electronic sensors.

Miksic took classes to improve his English and also studied chemical engineering.

Because of his knowledge of Russian, Miksic read Russian research journals for Northern Instruments on corrosion control. In the research library, Miksic discovered ideas that he thought would be excellent for Northern Instruments to adopt. After the company did not respond to Miksic's suggestion, using the knowledge from the Russian journals, Miksic created Cortec in 1977.

In 1983, Cortec was called the "fastest growing small company in Minnesota."

In the same year, Miksic sold his company to Sealed Air, a medium-sized public company. Five years later, in 1988, Sealed Air sold the company back to Miksic.

In 1998, Miksic bought the Rawn Corporation in Spooner which became Cortec Spray Technologies.

Cortec has sales offices in Asia, Europe, South America and the Middle East.