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[HOME](#)[SOCCER](#)[GOLF](#)[TENNIS](#)[MAPS](#)[CONTACT](#)

QUICK LINKS

- [Administration](#)
- [Events](#)
- [News and Reviews](#)
- [2008 Yearbook](#)
- [Soccer](#)
- [Tournament](#)
- [Golf](#)
- [Tennis](#)
- [Olympiad 2008](#)
- [Comments](#)
- [Links](#)
- [Maps](#)
- [Contact Us](#)

Ukrainian Fest Marks Independence

By: Evelyn Short. photos by Mark C. Psoras
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HORSHAM - The audience clapped to the music and cheered as the men dressed in Ukrainian clothing spun around and leapt into the air in unison while the female dancers formed a circle.

"There's nothing else like it," said Nick Kobryn, who's been dancing with the **Syzokryli Dance Group** for five years. "Some moments in the dance you just get chills. You're happy about what you're doing and being Ukrainian."



He said the audience clapping and cheering boosts the dancers' energy levels.

The New York-based group was dancing at the **Ukrainian American Sport Center - Tryzub** on Sunday afternoon as part of the **17th annual Independence Day celebration**.

Ukraine gained its independence from the Soviet Union on Aug. 24, 1991.

"Ukraine was part of the Soviet Union for so long that having our independence means a lot to us," said Syzokryli dancer Deanna Rakowsky. "It's a very significant event in our history." Rakowsky and Kobryn's parents are both Ukrainian. "Since the time we were born we've grown up in the Ukrainian culture," Rakowsky said. "We're very proud of what we do and our culture."



Andra Vasko of Wyncote and Larissa Zaika of Cheltenham were among those in the **crowd of about 2,000 people** seated under the trees to watch the dancers on the outdoor stage.

"People that love folk dancing of any sort would love this because of the passion," said Vasko, whose dad was Ukrainian and mom was from Latvia. "You have to be a gymnast almost, especially for the men."

Taras Lewyckyj, who is the **artistic director** of the Jenkintown-based **Voloshky Ukrainian Dance Ensemble**, said he's always loved the Ukrainian dance for the beautiful women. Lewyckyj was born in the U.S. to Ukrainian parents, who came to this country after spending time in concentration camps in World War II.



"Women are allowed to be truly women and have complicated steps and men are allowed to be acrobatic showoffs," Lewyckyj said. "There's real distinct differences between how a man carries himself and how a lady carries herself. The dance celebrates life and these differences we all find attractive with each other."

About 30 dancers practice twice a week for the group, which usually performs for larger venues, such as Lincoln Center in New York, he said.



"They were very good," Vasko said. "This is very first class folk dancing. I came here because there's a part of me that beats to this music."



She also was moved by an impassioned plea that some people from the country of Georgia made between the performances.

"They got up on stage to talk about the plight in their homeland and to ask for Ukrainians to support them," Vasko said. "There's a real concern that if Russia moves into Georgia that they would move into Ukraine. There's real concern that they want to create an empire again."

On April 9, 1991, the Supreme Council of the Republic of Georgia declared independence from the Soviet Union.

Eka Vardanashvili, who's lived in Philadelphia for 10 years, is from the Republic of Georgia.

"I wanted to reach out to the people here and voice the truth of what is going on in our country," she said.

Russia claims it is going in to Georgia to defend nations in the territory of Georgia, but Vardanashvili said the Russians are really creating the problems so they can come in as peacemaker with the mission to seize the country.

They want to re-establish their dominance by taking over the countries they have lost," Vardanashvili said. "They are not helping the people." **She thanked the Ukrainian people for giving Georgia the support that it has so far.**

Lewyckyj agreed that Ukrainians are concerned about Russia's latest actions in Georgia. "I really feel Ukraine might be next," Lewyckyj said.

The Ukrainian American Sport Center - Tryzub is at the corner of County Line and Lower State roads in Horsham, Pa..

For more information visit www.tryzub.org.

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