



**German American National Congress
National Convention
Hosted by the Pittsburgh Chapter
Crown Plaza Hotel
Sunday, October 30, 2011**

Newly elected National President Beverly Pochatko reconvened the assembly.

Pledge of Allegiance was said and the meeting was called to order at 9:05 a.m. by Parliamentarian Robert Miske.

ROLL CALL

Chicago South (6), Chicago IL (9), Chicago West (2), Benton Harbor MI (4), Milwaukee WI (5), Cleveland OH (3), Uniontown PA (3), Pittsburgh PA (4), and Erie PA (3). **Not Represented were Chapters:** Lake County IL, Fox Valley IL, Springfield IL, Decatur IL, Indianapolis IN, Lafayette IN, Chicago Northern Suburbs IL, Quad Cities IA, Columbus OH, South Bend IN, Washington DC, Philadelphia PA, Pascack Valley NJ, Phoenix AZ. Because 46 delegates were registered to attend the convention, the Quorum was met with 39 delegates present.

SOLICITATION OF IDEAS

Welcome by National President Beverly Pochatko. President Pochatko opened the meeting by asking the assembly to share ideas for the new board's goals for the coming two-year term.

Erik Wittmann suggested that national connect more with the chapters' leadership. For example, the chapter Secretary and Treasurer have little interaction with the National Board.

Beverly asked if the chapters want representatives of the National Board to make informal visits to discuss the current status of the chapters. It was noted that National Board meetings with the chapters would be open to all members.

Fred Leinweber suggested that the National Board develop more marketing tools, specifically the Internet, to solicit new members and for general recruitment.

Beverly stated that we have a lot of information on the national website. She recognized Steven Fuchs and his work in placing vital and commonly used DANK organizational information on the National website for ease of access and the convenience of DANK's chapter, regional and national leadership. The administration section has much of the information that we refer to frequently, but that is not accessible to the public.

Beverly confirmed with Bill Fuchs that his son Steven will continue to work with the website and his wife Darlene will stay on to work on the German-American Journal newspaper. She recognized that the newspaper has become more engaging to readers and that Darlene has put a new vitality into the newspaper.

Beverly noted that we need new and "young" ideas. We may try to do new things at national meetings such as icebreakers. We should try to do this during chapter meetings during the opening of the meeting – something fun. Beverly asked for additional ideas and goals from the delegates.

DISCUSSION OF FINANCES AND DUES INCREASE

There were no responses. Linda Voit, Recording Secretary asked the question "Is anyone concerned about the financial condition?" Linda asked a follow up question "What can we do to fund our deficit or to turn the picture around, so that we are not operating at a deficit." It was noted from the assembly that the topic of raising the annual dues was discussed during Saturday's meeting, but that we had not reached a final decision. It was noted

from the assembly that dues had not been raised in 5 or 10 years. Beverly stated that the Board discussed this topic during the recess on Saturday afternoon and the Board fully agrees that dues need to be increased.

Anita Walthier, delegate, stated her disapproval of a dues increase and suggested holding national fundraising events. President Pochatko expressed concern that would be hard to do given that some chapters are scattered across a large geography.

Dagmar Freiburger stated that each chapter is struggling and that it is hard to conduct fundraising for another part of the organization when each chapter has its own financial obligations to meet. She stated her chapter sometimes competes with National for fundraising events and used the example of selling chapter raffle tickets in addition to the National raffle tickets. She noted this is close to being a conflict of interest.

Beverly agreed with Dagmar. Beverly added that she does not agree with holding a National raffle and noted that the chapters do not support the annual raffle for the National organization. Beverly also noted that most of the tickets go unused and that perhaps only 4 chapters supported the raffle by purchasing tickets. She also noted that because each member of DANK at the chapter level receives Raffle tickets it is hard to justify asking for more tickets to sell.

Mark Bohn, delegate, noted that dues should be addressed separately from fundraisers. He stated that we need to have an increase in the dues for the steady stream of money that it brings. Fundraisers are hit or miss, not consistent, and we cannot predict how much money a fundraiser will bring. Mark stated that, by raising the annual dues, we will lose some members, but that if we hold membership drives, we will get new members.

New Speaker from DANK North... We should stress the benefits (Dank North Delegate) of membership, such as discounts on concert tickets.

Beverly agreed that her chapter offers discounts to events for DANK members so that there is a DANK price and Non-DANK price. She also noted that genealogy is going to be a big new push for her chapter and by offering a DANK membership combined with a genealogy service or subscription, it is likely her chapter can attract new members. Beverly encouraged chapters to start promoting the German heritage. Look for new ideas. She mentioned decorating an egg tree for Easter which she found in German Life magazine. People have asked her and she's explained that it is a German thing.

Bill Fuchs agreed that dues are not related to fundraising and expressed that fundraising is a band aid to the financial picture. Bill stated that our biggest issue is the decline in membership. He stated DANK used to have over 30,000 members – now we have only 2,000. Our budget to operate the organization hasn't shrunk even though our dues collection has fallen. The answer to fix our financial shortfall is, in part to increase the dues, but more crucially it is to grow the membership.

Bill mentioned German World magazine and his discussion with its publisher. German World's publisher is willing to give DANK subscriptions for \$3.00 if all DANK members were to participate. Bill stated we could raise the dues by \$10.00 and retain the \$7.00 after giving \$3.00 to German World. He said that German World's subscription price is \$25.00. He noted that an increase in membership must be a grass root movement and he agreed that an increase in dues may mean the loss of some members.

A comment from the assembly was made that members who join in July pay \$40 then must pay \$40 again at the beginning of the following year. They must pay again in January and, as a result, we lose those members at renewal. The question was raised "Why can't we have the dues billed from July to July?"

Beverly mentioned that the Board discussed the pro rating of dues based on the start date of the new member. She suggested that members who join in the first half of the year would pay \$40, but if they joined in the second half of the year, they would only pay \$20. She mentioned that many new members join right before the start of the school year (in September) as parents enroll their children in DANK language schools.

Dagmar suggested billing based on anniversary date. Bill said that we cannot do that because of our system. There is simply a bookkeeping nightmare associated with tracking pro-rated memberships. Billing for dues based on anniversary date is probably the best solution. We have difficulties with the dues billing and collection as things are now.

Erik Wittmann agreed with Bill and said that prorating is too difficult. Erik stated we are missing the real target and that we need to ask ourselves “What are we giving people who want to join this organization? What are we giving them to retain them in the organization?” People are willing to pay for something they perceive has value. The issue is both at the local and national level. We don’t really push German pride as much as we should on the national level. What do we really do at either the local or national level to make people say this is really worth it to me -- increasing dues avoids the real issue of declining membership.

Bill Fuchs agreed with Erik. As an example, Bill mentioned that new people come to a membership meeting or board meeting and typically hear negative things concerning finances or other members. Bill stressed that positive energy, friendliness, and fun are the things that make people want to come back. Every chapter has to come up with something that makes people want to come. Bill used a chapter with a Stammtisch as an example – many people show up because of the Stammtisch. He suggested showing a movie that really interests people. Every chapter is different and there is no one solution that works for every chapter.

Beverly took an informal poll by asking: “Who is in favor of raising dues?” and “Who is not in favor?” By a show of hands, those in favor of raising dues were the majority. She asked what does everyone feel is fair? She asked “How about a \$5.00 new member processing fee?” Erik Wittmann suggested that would never work – instead, he countered the first year’s dues should be lower to entice people into the organization. Then once they are in the organization, increase the dues. Many prospective members would not pay \$35.00 if they know very little about the organization.

Maria Thompson noted if the organization does not give back to its members, the members will not stay. If you don’t connect with people when they join with activities, they are not going to stay and they are not going to join. Dr Jean Braun mentioned that the German World magazine is fantastic. A brief discussion of working with German Life magazine followed, but Erick Wittmann noted that a discussion with German Life led to its publisher saying that they could not offer the subscription for \$3.00.

Edwin Gunther stated that to give out our members’ names and addresses to entities such as German World would not be permitted without the consent of each DANK member. Therefore we could not share the information with German World magazine. Bill Fuchs stated that we could take care of that with a statement on the dues billing.

Edwin noted that the discussion of dues has been hashed over and over. Beverly stated that raising of dues had to be done at a national convention with all of the chapter delegates present so that their input and approval could be received. She stated that the concern about the address information sharing is mitigated if we stipulate that they cannot use, sell, etc. our members’ information without our consent. If they do so, we could take them to court.

Bill Fuchs stated that Edwin is referring to a legal disclosure that we can place on our DANK membership renewal statements. The wording would be something like: “Membership in DANK includes a membership to German World magazine”. German World would sign a statement or release that authorizes them to use our mailing list to send German World magazine to our members.

Erik asked if the meeting could proceed with the issues that need to be discussed. He suggested that the new board will need to focus on some of the items regarding dues and make a decision.

Bob Miske suggested we move to the two proposed bylaw amendments and place the dues vote under "Miscellaneous". Item number 4 on the agenda is the bylaw regarding teleconferencing. The bylaws proposals were sent out 60 days in advance as required by DANK's bylaws.

VOTE ON ARTICLE VIII, PARAGRAPH 6

Bob read proposed additional text to Article VIII Paragraph 6: "Any meeting of the National Board may be held by teleconference and/or video conference provided that all participants are able to fully participate in the teleconference and/or video conference. All decisions rendered shall be legal and binding."

Bob explained that we have used teleconference in the past and that participants are notified by email of the meeting. They are provided a telephone number and pass/participant code. As the participants join in the call, they must identify themselves by name. There is a moderator on every call – primarily the moderator is the president. Before people speak they typically identify themselves. Many voices can be recognized. Bob mentioned that roll call votes have been used on teleconferences. Beverly mentioned that the meeting sessions are taped even though the Secretary is taking written notes.

Bill mentioned that these teleconferences are conducted exactly like in person meetings but have much less negativity, they are done faster, and the meetings still have the feeling of being in the room with the other participants. Bill explained some of the capabilities that teleconferences have to offer. Beverly stated that recording of the meetings has helped verify what participants have said even when they have disputed the minutes. Recorded sessions are now filed with the typed minutes. Bill confirmed that teleconferences are legitimate based on Roberts Rules of Order.

Bill Fuchs explained this article was proposed because some members of DANK felt that teleconferences were not permitted under Roberts Rules of Order.

Bob asked if we are ready to vote. He asked "Those in favor of accepting" and "Those opposed". There was no opposition. The proposed article was approved.

VOTE ON ARTICLE XI ADDITION

Bob moved to the second amendment proposal which is to be added to Article XI of the organization bylaws. "Voting by proxy or absentee ballot shall not be allowed on any level of the organization." Bob mentioned this issue has been floated around the organization for years and that we wanted to finally lay the issue to rest.

A question was raised by a delegate from Chicago North chapter as they wanted to know how to avoid conflict with the National policy because they use absentee ballots. Dagmar Freiburg defended her chapter's (Chicago North) position that it be allowed to use absentee voting and agreed proxy voting is not a good practice. A lengthy discussion concerning the Chicago North chapter's nomination and voting process followed.

It was decided that the words "or absentee ballot" be removed from the proposed article. Erik Wittmann then made the motion to vote on the proposed Article. The motion was seconded. Bob asked: "Those in favor of the amendment say Aye." The "Ayes" were the majority and the change in wording, as follows was approved: "Voting by proxy shall not be allowed on any level of the organization."

VOTE ON MEMBERSHIP DUES INCREASE

Bob Miske asked for a motion to increase the membership dues by \$10.00 per head of household. Donna made the motion to increase the head of household dues by \$10.00. Bob asked for a second; a second motion was received. Erik Wittmann suggested implementing the \$10.00 increase at some future time until we could figure out what additional benefit would be given to the membership with the increase. Bob reminded that the \$10.00 motion is still on the floor. A vote on the increase in membership dues followed, but required a show of hands as

there were attendees opposed to the increase. However, there was still discussion which followed. No count was taken. Instead, Dr. Jean Braun suggested an amendment to the motion to begin the increase as of January, 2013. Donna Lippert provided a second. The “Ayes” were unanimous. No opposition expressed.

Bob asked for a vote on an increase of the dues on heads of household beginning January, 2013. The “Ayes” were unanimous; no opposition was expressed.

After the vote, Erik Wittmann suggested we take time to look into the issue of what would be included in the dues increase. Bob asked for committee volunteers. Erik agreed to be on a committee which will be chaired by Alfred Mueller and on which Dr. Jean Braun, and Bill Russell will also serve.

Mrs. Leinweber noted that the issue of prorating membership dues was not decided. It was decided that the National Board will wait until the new computer database is in place as our current system cannot handle the prorating of annual dues. Beverly asked if we have a date for the new database – the question was directed to Bill Fuchs. Bill stated that DANK had collected enough money to start working on a new database, but that these funds were not enough for all of the programming and necessary changes including hardware and rewrites for programming. Membership cards are another issue that is a cost issue not only with the software, but the printer and supplies. He further stated that we need to solidify what DANK’s needs before we can move forward with programming. Until then, the issues related to the cost for the database changes are not clear. Bill then told the assembly that at the last board meeting it was determined that we had sufficient money to go forward. The big change in the system is that it is an online system and on a different server outside the office, and chapters will not have to call the office, but supply their username and password to get data available to them. It will be available 24/7. It is based to serve the needs of the chapters and the whole organization. Bill said he would prefer to know our needs in advance. Additional discussion followed concerning the database, prorating of the dues, anniversary dates, the difficulties of tracking membership, and costs followed.

Bob asked for additional points to be discussed under “Miscellaneous” of the agenda. There was no response from the assembly.

2013 CONVENTION LOCATION

Bob Miske asked for agreement on the tentative timeframe for the next convention. It was agreed that the convention would take place in late October or early November. Bob then asked the attendees “Is there an offer to host the 2013 convention?” Bob suggested that 2 chapters (Chicago South and West) could work together to host the convention. Bob then suggested that a group of chapters could host the convention, much like Chapter 3 cooperated to host the 2011 convention. Erik Wittmann advised that the financing of a convention is not a burden if the host sells ads in a program book and opening social activities to the public. A suggestion was made that the convention could be held over 2 days instead of 3 to make it more cost effective – Erik stated that the length of the convention is decided by the national board. Chicago West Chapter volunteered to host the 2013 convention. They have been given the responsibility of deciding the dates it will be held.

THANK YOU TO OUTGOING PRESIDENT

Beverly Pochatko presented outgoing President Bill Fuchs with a gift to express DANK’s gratitude for Bill’s four years of service from the outgoing Board. Beverly thanked everyone for attending.

Donna Lippert made a motion to adjourn the meeting. The motion was seconded and the meeting was adjourned at 12:08 p.m.

Linda M. Voit
National Recording Secretary