

LOU (ILIJA) VLASHO - FAMOUS AMERICAN, BUSINESSMAN, HUMANIST AND HONORARY CONSUL OF THE REPUBLIC OF MACEDONIA



Lou Vlasho was born American, but is Macedonian by origin from the village of Breznica, Lerin region, in the Aegean part of Macedonia. He is an intellectual, businessman, humanist, known and recognized in American society, as well as an honorary consul of the Republic of Macedonia for Florida. He is a famous American who has made a significant contribution to the Macedonian cause and dedicated his life to the service of human society.

Lou Vlasho was born an American, however, his love for his ancestral country – Macedonia is great and is rooted in the upbringing he received from his Macedonian parents who left his native village of Breznica, Lerin region and migrated to the United States, the big country, for better opportunities for their family.

The village of Breznica is located about forty kilometers west of Florina towards the Albanian border. It is a purely Macedonian village and is northwest of the villages of Smrdesh and B'mbel, not far from the town of Bilishta in Albania. There were about 120 houses in it but, unfortunately, today nearly all are empty, reflecting the great sorrow of the Macedonians from Breznica who for many reasons, some for a better life and some forced upon them, have moved forever to different countries around the world.

Lou Vlasho, Ilija as his parents and close relatives called him, was born on May 26, 1937 in Canton, Ohio. He is the son of Ziso E. and Athena (Tina) (Malta). Lou Vlasho and his wife Jan had

two children: Vincent Todd Vlasho and Steven Louis Vlasho. Canton, where Lou Vlasho spent his childhood, is located about 100 miles south of Cleveland and some 30 miles south of Akron in northeastern Ohio. According to the 2010 census, the population was 73,007, making Canton the eighth most populous city in Ohio.

Canton is best known for the famous 25th US President William McKinley, who was elected in 1896. The city is also known for the McKinley National Memorial Center and the William McKinley Presidential Library and Museum, which mark his life and presidency. Canton was also elected First Lady National Historic Site, mainly in honor of his wife, Ida Saxton McKinley.

Lou Vlasho completed his education in his hometown and graduated in 1959 with a Bachelor's Degree with a major in Accounting from Ohio University, interestingly located in Athens, Ohio. During his career he held various executive positions in financial management and systems management. He was a twenty-five year employee of Hobart Corporation, Troy, Ohio, 1959-1982, and was vice president and controller from 1982-1984. He was Senior Vice President of Gold Bond, Inc., Green Bay, Wisconsin from 1984-1986. He was then the editor of the 1983 Accounting Management Guide. In politics, he is a member of the Republican Party, and by religion belongs to the Methodist Christian Church and is a dedicated Christian.



The family of Malta, Lou's mother, in the village of Breznica.

For a period of fifty years Lou Vlasho held senior positions in numerous companies and various organizations in several US states. At the same time, Vlasho was a strong supporter of Macedonia's independence. Among other things, he helped facilitate scholarship programs at Ohio University, which enabled numerous Macedonian students to receive scholarships to the United States. His vision for mentoring these students helped them integrate into American society, have successful careers, and be kind of ambassadors for Macedonia.

Although he devoted most of his life to his career and service in the American community, he never forgot his parents' homeland - Macedonia. Therefore, Lou Vlasho was a strong supporter of Macedonia's independence, a recognition of the country that declared independence and the path to NATO membership.

Lou Vlasho, as a Methodist by religion, was a close friend of the late Macedonian President Boris Trajkovski, also a Methodist. As religious like-minded people, they helped spread the President's vision for the World Conference on Building Dialogue between Religions in Macedonia and in the World, which lasts to this day. For more than a decade, Lou Vlasho was actively involved in the Annual National Prayer Breakfast (NPB) in Washington, D.C. and was an instrument in establishing a Breakfast for guests from the Balkans. Together with his personal friend and former Ohio senator George Voinovich, he co-chaired this now-annual lunch, which is attended by over 100 people a year from the Balkans.



Lou Vlasho with his friend Boris Trajkovski.

As a sign of gratitude to Lou Vlasho for his commitment to the work and progress of the Macedonian cause, the Government of the Republic of Macedonia appointed him Honorary Consul of the Republic of Macedonia in the United States of America in 2007. The Honorary Consulate opened in Naples, Florida, in February 2008. This is also the year in which Lou Vlasho was awarded the special cross of "St. Stanislav" (Kiev Ukraine) for his charitable services.

Also, Lou Vlasho is an honorary member of the Council of the United Macedonian Diaspora (UMD) for his contribution, especially helping in the development of the first member of the Congressional Caucus on Macedonia and the expansion of Macedonian-American relations, as well as obtaining the necessary support from the Congress for Macedonia's membership in NATO.

Lou Vlasho has a great love for Macedonia, so his positive attitude and readiness is to help his parents' country. He does this in many ways, one of which is through the humanitarian organization Habitat, which has a very successful operation in Macedonia.

He is an honorary member of the board of "Habitat for Humanity in Macedonia", which provides simple, decent and affordable housing solutions for those living in poverty. Thanks to the efforts of Lou Vlasho, in 2008 Collier County (Florida) "Habitat for Humanity" signed a partnership with "Habitat for Humanity" from Macedonia.

Habitat-Macedonia is a non-governmental and non-profit organization dedicated to providing simple, decent and affordable housing solutions to those living in poverty, regardless of their ethnic, gender and religious affiliation. In this way they allow them to leave the conditions of a poor environment and improve their quality of life.



Lou Vlasho became Honorary Consul of the Republic of Macedonia.



Order of "St. Stanislav" for Lou Vlasho.

Habitat-Macedonia provides this group of poor people with construction expertise as well as construction materials that will enable them to own their own home after repaying the interest free loan.

In the effort to enrich and improve the lives of the poor, they partner families and their communities; all united in this mission are guided by four core values – Commitment, Respect, Integrity and Oversight (care).

The records in the history of Lou Vlasho show that his first wife Janet (Jan) passed away after thirty-eight years of marriage at the very young age of 58. Lou met his second wife Patricia, a well-known American humanitarian and social activist. Patty and Lou are people of

respect and example. They are hospitable, talkative and very interested in the situation in Macedonia, especially in Aegean Macedonia.

Lou Vlasho has been a resident of Naples since 1989. He and Patty lived at Pelican Bay for many years and recently downsized to the downtown Naples area. Lou and Patricia are members of the United Methodist Church of the North Naples. Lou has two sons, Vince and Steve. Vince is a graduate of the United States Naval Academy who currently lives in the Washington area with his wife, Jerri. They have two daughters, Megan and Alexis. Steve is a graduate of Ohio State University and lives in the Los Angeles area. He has two sons, Jackson and Ryker. Patricia's daughter, Erica, lives in New York City with her daughter Brittany.

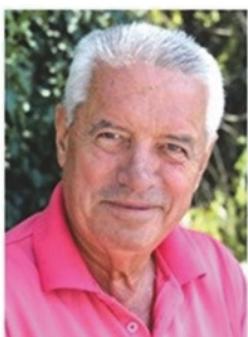
The author of this text, Slave Katin, remembers the meeting with Louis Vlasho in the restaurant "Vergina" (Kutles, Palatica) in Naples. Louis Vlasho was the manager many years ago, when we first met. The restaurant is one of the interesting facilities and is located in the center of the city on the main street, and the restaurant "Vergina" is part of the luxury building of the Macedonian businessman Risto Gushterov. In the restaurant on one of the walls was the painting of the battle of Issus, where Alexander the Great won a great victory against the Persian emperor Darius. The restaurant was named in honor of the Radiating Star of Macedonia – Vergina.

A meeting with George Atanasovski in "Vergina" ten years ago in a Macedonian setting under the Macedonian sun was when I agreed with the businessman Atanasoski to write a monograph on his life and work in the United States and Macedonia.

According to the agreement, I prepared two editions of professional monographs that are a character and an opportunity for the most important works that this businessman has achieved in all fields. At the same time, the monographs are a mirror for him and a pride for Macedonia, filled with materials from ancient times to the present day. I had a similar or identical conversation in the same restaurant with Louis Vlasho.

The second meeting with Lou Vlasho was two years ago again in the restaurant "Vergina". In fact, we agreed to meet with Lou Vlasho, George Atanasoski and his Marija, as well as the former director of the magazine "Macedonian Sun", Elizabeta Andonovska. The meeting was very cordial, friendly, Macedonian. We talked about many things that refer to the events, the progress and the future of the Macedonian emigrants, the Macedonian truth and Macedonia.

After parting with George Atanasoski, Lou and I went to his home, which is located near the Hilton Hotel, where I stayed for a few days. At Lou's luxury villa, I met his wife, Patricia, a well-known American humanitarian and social activist. Patty and Lou are rightly said to be respectable and exemplary figures from whom other Americans of Macedonian descent can and should be seen.



Writes: SLAVE KATIN