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Bosnian community honored in new WKU exhibit

By AARON MUDD amudd@bgdailynews.com Sep 29, 2017



Anna Strunjas (left) and her mother, Jean Neils-Strunjas, of Bowling Green, read about the Sarajevo Rose in the “A Culture Carried: Bosnians in Bowling Green” exhibit Friday at the Kentucky Museum.

Photos by Austin Anthony/photo@bgdailynews.com

Through displays showcasing traditional Bosnian footwear, a coffee set, living room and others, Bowling Green's Bosnian community saw its stories commemorated Friday with the opening of an exhibit at the Kentucky Museum at Western Kentucky University.

Among them was Edina Turkovic, a Bosnian immigrant who reacted to the exhibit with mixed feelings. Turkovic quietly considered the displayed personal effects of a Bosnian man killed in the Bosnian War and buried in a mass grave.

"When I see something like this, it's hard," she said.

Turkovic left Bosnia before the war broke out in 1992 so much of her memories are of happier times. Along with the sadness she felt, Turkovic was also heartened by the familiar heirlooms that reminded her of the good times.

"That gives me warm feelings, like I'm there again," she said.

The exhibit, called "A Culture Carried: Bosnians in Bowling Green," is the result of a project by folklorists in WKU's Kentucky Folklife Program and the Department of Folk Studies and Anthropology. In 2015, the folklorists began putting together oral histories of the members of Bosnians in Bowling Green.

The ongoing project is featured in WKU's International Year of Bosnia and Herzegovina program. It will remain open until June 30 next year.

"I just think this exhibit is a wonderful example of the university involving itself in communities in Bowling Green, Warren County and southcentral Kentucky," WKU Provost David Lee said, adding it's a great example of the applied research championed by WKU President Timothy Caboni.

The exhibit features a variety of donated belongings that showcase the textures of Bosnian lives. One display made possible by Dijana Muminovic shows her Backstreet Boys scrapbook, trading cards and stickers of popular '90s bands and a backpack and school supplies given to her by the United Nations.

“In an effort to avoid the stigma attached to possessing a UN handout like these notebooks, Dijana and many other students created and personalized book covers for their notebooks,” the display’s description reads.



“We are so lucky to have this community of Bosnians here,” said Mary Margaret Villines after considering a display about Bosnian coffee customs.

“I remember when the Bosnians were being slaughtered,” she said. “.. It’s hard to imagine that kind of inhumanity.”

Ena Demir, a Bosnian immigrant who left in 1992, posed for a picture next to a photograph of herself hanging on a display wall. She appreciated the exhibit’s effort to affirm her dual-identities.

“I think this exhibit is important for people like me who are American and Bosnian at the same time,” she said.

During a brief speech celebrating the exhibit, WKU President Timothy Caboni encouraged faculty to integrate it into their course work and the community to cherish it.

“I do hope you take time to continue to support the exhibit this evening,” he said. “It’s going to take time to come to understand it.”

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