

## President's Visit

## President Der Petrossian Dedicates New Embassy Building

WASHINGTON, DC — "If until now you had the opportunity to visit the homeland once or twice a year, now you can do it every day," proclaimed Armenian President Levon Der Petrossian as he dedicated Armenia's new Embassy building at 2225 R Street NW in the nation's capital on October 25.

In a historic ceremony — cohosted by the Embassy of Armenia and the Armenian Assembly of America — Der Petrossian expressed the Armenian government's gratitude to noted philanthropist and industrialist Hirair Hovnanian for his efforts on behalf of the Republic of Armenia and the Embassy of Armenia in Washington, DC.

Armenia's Ambassador to the United States Rouben Shugarian unveiled a plaque signifying the dedication of the building to the memory of Hovnanian's parents, Stephan K. Hovnanian and Yester Hovnanian.

As the presidential delegation arrived, the excitement was palpable among the Armenian-American guests and friends who traveled from all over the country to see Der Petrossian dedicate the Embassy. Their enthusiasm was reciprocated by



Ambassador Rouben Shugarian unveils the plaque dedicating the Armenian Assembly building to Stephan K. and Yester Hovnanian.

the president, who began his remarks by commenting, "I feel like I'm surrounded by citizens of my own country." He thanked Hirair and Anna Hovnanian for their efforts in Armenia since the 1988 earthquake. He also expressed appreciation for the support given to the new Republic by the Armenian-American community.

"Given that the Embassy is part of the territory of the homeland," Der Petrossian commented through an interpreter, "the territory of Armenia [has been expanded] by 1,400 square meters."

In his remarks, Hirair Hovnanian expressed gratitude, "not only for me, for my wife, Anna, for my children and grandchildren, and also my brothers, sisters, and extended family," many of whom were standing beside him. "For me there is no greater honor," he stated, as he invoked "the memory of my father and mother, who gave us the inspiration [to] stay Armenian and support our country and homeland." Hovnanian is the CEO of Hovsons, Inc, a real estate construction and development company in New Jersey. He also chairs the Assembly's Board of Trustees.

The Embassy building was designed by the prominent Washington architect George Oakley Totten and constructed



President and Mrs. Levon Der Petrossian.

in 1909 as a residence for then-senator Gilbert M. Hitchcock. It is being renovated by a volunteer committee of Armenian Americans headed by Assembly Trustee Vartkess Balian. Shugarian acknowledged them by saying, "I want to thank the



Armenian President Levon Der Petrossian (second from right) and his wife Ludmila (far left), celebrate the dedication of Armenia's new Embassy building with Hirair and Anna Hovnanian on October 25. They are pictured with the plaque signifying the dedication of the building in memory of Hovnanian's parents, Stephan and Yester Hovnanian.

committee that worked for a long time on the renovation of this building and all the people who made it possible for us to obtain the building."

From the late 1960s through early 1990, the building was used by the International Institute of Interior Design, which merged with Marymount University in 1990. The university sold the building to Armenia earlier this year. The closing of

Board of Directors — in honor of Der Petrossian. Opening the program was community activist Rita Balian, who noted, "History was made today, not only for the Embassy and the Armenian Assembly, but also for all Armenians in America." Archbishop Datev Sarkissian of the Western Prelacy gave the closing prayer.

Serving informally as emcee was Assembly Board of



Levon Der Petrossian with Hagop Kassardjian of Beirut, left, at the Embassy dedication.



From left, Edmond Y. Azadian, Vartkess Balian, and Levon Der Petrossian, at the Embassy dedication.

this transaction took place on May 1, 1995, in the Washington offices of the law firm of Drinker Biddle & Reath. Harry S. Cherken, Jr., chair of the Real Estate Department of the Philadelphia-headquartered firm and a member of the Armenian Assembly's Board of Directors, worked on a pro bono basis for the Armenian Embassy for the nearly three years it took to complete this transaction.

Also providing assistance throughout this phase was Assembly Trustee Elsa Keshishian, who originally found the "Embassy Row" property after looking at countless other sites. Her husband James, of Mark Keshishian and Sons in Chevy Chase, Maryland, contacted a dozen rug dealers and friends who promptly and overwhelmingly responded with approximately \$100,000 worth of donated rugs, carpeting, and padding which adorned the still unfurnished building for the ceremony. Cherken, Keshishian, and others were interviewed by NBC, who covered the event along with Radio Free Liberty/Radio Europe and the Armenian American press.

Immediately following the dedication, Armenian First Lady Ludmila Der Petrossian and Assembly Trustee Anna Hovnanian signed an agreement on the establishment of an Academy of Arts on the premises of Armenia's National Gallery of Art in Yerevan. These two women — both committed to charitable and philanthropic action — warmly embraced after they penned their signatures. This became the first official document to come out of the new Embassy.

The stately Cosmos Club was the setting for a luncheon that followed for the major donors who helped to make the Embassy building a reality and sponsors of an Assembly banquet — chaired by Annie Totah, vice chair of the Assembly's

Directors chairman Carl Bazarian, who welcomed Shugarian and Foreign Minister Vahan Papazian to the podium. Shugarian again expressed the Embassy's appreciation to the guests. Papazian called the new Embassy a tangible example of the cooperation that exists between Armenians in Armenia and Armenians in the diaspora.

Carolyn Mugar, president of the Assembly's Board of Trustees, took a moment to reflect on the Assembly's varied activities, emphasizing its projects in Armenia. "The Armenian Assembly is lucky that we are able to do what we do," she noted. Also making remarks was Assembly Trustee Counsel Robert A. Kaloosdian, who praised Research Director Rouben Adalian for publication of the Guide to the Genocide in the US Archives. Kaloosdian also thanked the project's main benefactor, Assembly Trustee Mike Erkiletian.

That afternoon, Der Petrossian met privately with US officials.

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