

A Knight to Remember

European Knighting Ceremony Lights up the Duke Mansion in Charlotte

Saturday, January 12, 2013 (Charlotte, North Carolina, USA) – The idea came about in the fall of 2010, when Charlotte resident Karl de la Guerra was invested into a 982 year old chivalric organization named the Sovereign Order of Cyprus, during a knighting ceremony at a royal palace outside of Budapest, Hungary. At that time, he was tasked by the Order’s senior leadership to create a re-birth of their Order in the United States. On that day, with less than 900 knights receiving this honour in the history of the Order, Karl became the 32nd living Knight of Cyprus.

Now two years and three months later, de la Guerra has selected, organized and prepared a unique group of men and women from North Carolina as the first members of their Order in forty years to be knighted in the United States. Past members of the Order of Cyprus in the U. S. include such notable figures as author Lowell Thomas, the man who made Lawrence of Arabia famous, The Hon. Edward Thompson, Justice of the Supreme Court of New York and Air Force Lt. General James “Jimmy” Doolittle, who’s medallion from the Order of Cyprus is on permanent display at the Smithsonian Institute, the national museum of the United States.

Once the prospective members were selected by de la Guerra, their entire personal and professional backgrounds were reviewed by the Order’s European based Board of Admissions of the Magisterial House, and permission was given to grant these three women and two men the title of Postulant for Knighthood, the position bestowed upon those who are in preparation for knighthood. This process took close to a year to complete.

Founded in the year 1192 by King Guy de Lusignan as an elite group of bodyguards known as The Royal House Guard, recorded history tells us the Knights of the Order of Cyprus came from the best, bravest and most loyal nobles of the Kingdom of Cyprus. The present day Order of Cyprus joined the Federation of Autonomous Pories in 1962 during a meeting in New York.

Having not grown up in a society of Kings and Queens here in the U. S., de la Guerra understands the general public’s curiosity about such an Order. When asked if this is some secret society, de la Guerra smiles and reminds those asking that this is an international humanitarian association that has been registered as a non-profit organization in the State of New York since the 1960’s and has their own website at orderofcyprus.org. “There is nothing secret about what we do,” says de la Guerra, “we were founded over 900 years ago from a group of hospitaliers, those who rendered aid at hospitals, and we continue our humanitarian focus. The honour of Knighthood should be considered the same as receiving a lifetime achievement award.”

The events here in Charlotte were attended by Sir George Popper, the Lieutenant General of the Federation, Prime Minister of the State of the Federation and Executive Grand Chancellor and Grand Collar of the Sovereign Order of Cyprus. He was accompanied by his wife Lady Anna, President of the Board of Admissions of the Magisterial House and Superintendent of State Protocol and Ceremony.



Group Photo at Duke Mansion



Guests gather at St. Mary's Chapel



Sir George Popper of Budapest, Hungary, and Reverend Rebecca Nagy of Charlotte



Charlotte resident Andrea Lee signing documents bringing her into the Order



A new team of Knights



The Knight's Ball at Duke Mansion

The Story is In the People...

Since the Order of Cyprus was founded as a elite team of bodyguards by the King of Cyprus in 1192, de la Guerra decided to continue that tradition by investing individuals who have dedicated their lives to the safety and security of others. Not necessarily in de la Guerra's industry of international protection, but in other areas with just as significant an impact on our community, our country and the world.

During the noontime ceremony at St. Mary's Chapel, the following residents of North Carolina were recognized and invested into the Order of Cyprus; Mr. Dan Starks, Ms. Connie Smigiel, Ms. Alice Torres, Ms. Andrea Lee and Mr. Christopher Poe. Each have significant accomplishments in their lives that warranted their entry into the Order of Cyprus.

Mr. Dan Starks – Dan is the owner of Starks Training Institute and hosted a long Running television program in Charlotte titled, "Don't Be a Victim!" which was also his memorable closing line on the show. This very popular weekly program won Dan an Emmy Award and has launched his career in some amazing directions. Keeping a very busy schedule of instructing North Carolina Concealed Weapons classes and courses in personal protection, Dan has made an indelible impact on the safety and security of thousands of citizens. He is President of the North Carolina Crime Stoppers program and is the Past President of the FBI Citizens Academy Alumni Association.

Ms. Connie Smigiel – As Dan Stark's partner, those that know them cannot picture a Dan, without a Connie. Side by side they have taken on the challenge of bringing personal protection and safety and security related training to thousands of citizens. The commitment and dedication that Connie has put forth toward her community truly distinguished her in the eyes of the Magisterial Council during her selection process.

Ms. Alice Torres – Alice has dedicated her life to protecting the borders of the United States, literally. As a 28 year veteran Immigration Officer for two U. S. Congressional members, Alice has kept her eye on protecting the borders of the United States and ensuring that the safety and security of Americans' was not compromised with the illegal or questionable entry of individuals that would compromise the safety of our nation. She is Past Chairman of the Immigration Task Force of the Carolinas.

Ms. Andrea Lee –Andrea's life has revolved around networking, connecting people, and helping others. Through career changes that upped the ante at each turn, she has been an editor, columnist, Executive Director, and been in key Public Relations and Corporate Communications positions. As a charter member of the Carolinas Asian-American Chamber of Commerce, she was "key" in bringing Asian ethnicities to prominence within the Charlotte community, and continues to serve on numerous Boards and Committees. She has earned the reputation of someone who always has the best interest of the community in mind, and "is a sound voice for those who will not, or cannot, speak for themselves."

Mr. Christopher Poe – As an international bodyguard, Christopher has dedicated his life to the protection of others. He has travelled around the globe providing protective services for a variety of persons to include senior members of clergy, business executives and celebrities. Christopher graduated from a variety of specialized protection courses and regularly volunteers for numerous community service institutions. He had the honour of receiving knighthood into the Order of St. George in The Netherlands in 2012.



Sir Daniel Starks



Lady Constance Smigiel



Lady Alice Torres



Lady Andrea Lee



Sir Christopher Poe

Two Days of Events in North Carolina

The Watch of Arms

Centuries ago, a Watch of Arms was held the evening prior to an individual being knighted. This was a night the postulant stayed in a church, polished their armour and meditated about the journey they were about to embark upon. Today, this tradition continues, but in a modern way. The five new postulants met at the Duke Mansion, spending a few hours in fellowship, with an educational session about the Order headed by Sir George and a time for reflection and prayer held by Reverend Nagy. During this ceremony, the postulants were awarded their formal notification of intent to enter the Order. The evening ended with a traditional knights meal of meats, breads, fruits, cheeses and wine, served by the culinary staff of the Duke Mansion in an elegant “King’s Table” style.

The Investiture Ceremony

At noon on Saturday, January 12th, the doors opened at the historic Saint Mary’s Chapel to family, friends and guests to witness a “European Knighting Ceremony with an American Style” as de la Guerra phrased it in his opening comments. Steeped in traditions that date back a thousand years, this ceremony began with the traditional posting of the colours (the U. S. flag in this case and the flags of the Order), presentation of the ceremonial sword, and introduction of VIP’s. Decorations and commendations were presented, to include Reverend Nagy receiving appointment to the Ecumenical Council of the Order, de la Guerra receiving promotion to Knight Commander and Christopher Poe receiving appointment to the Magisterial Guard (a protective service assignment for the international VIP’s of the Order). The ceremony also included the traditional “dubbing” of the knights and a public introduction of each new knight.

The Knight’s Ball

Saturday evening found the new knights and their guests in the main ball room of the Duke Mansion where the traditional “Knight’s Ball” was held. This was translated into a formal dinner setting for the group. The evening began with the presentation of Diplomas, the document that formally declares each knight as a full member of the Order. Reverend Nagy blessed the meal and we received a presentation from Father Theodore Kyritsis of the Greek Orthodox Church in Charlotte. An excellent meal was served by the Duke Mansion for our new knights and their guests. The evening was referred to by Dan Starks as an amazing end to an amazing day!

The Future of the Order of Cyprus in North Carolina

As a humanitarian and service organization, the Order of Cyprus is connected with two other significant organizations; FEMERAID International, the medical rescue arm of their Federation and the International Bodyguard & Security Services Association (IBSSA) which conducts international protective services. It is through these organizations that the new knights will begin their service to community. And to focus their efforts, the new knights will establish a traditional Club of Knights, as their monthly meeting, to begin at the Duke Mansion in February.

With the personalities involved in this group, the community is sure to hear more from them very soon! For more information, please visit www.orderofcyprus.org, www.femeraid.org and www.ibssa.org.



Lady Anna, Sir George, Christopher Poe and Reverend Nagy



Dan Starks receiving official document



A Knight’s Feast



Posting of Colors



Reverend Nagy



Sir Karl and Sir George