

Love of family and passion for their work is what Hal and Maxi Okanovic bring to Wesley Homes' Des Moines campus every day. Hal and Maxi go out of their way each day to provide exceptional customer service to all residents and staff members. Hal is Head of Security and Maintenance for the property and manages 12 employees. Maxi as Laundry/Housekeeping Coordinator oversees 17 staff members. Both Hal and Maxi work within the Environmental Services department.

Hal and Maxi's path to Wesley Homes has had its fair amount of tragedies, victories, and blessings and best of all Hal and Maxi have persevered through it all. Both Hal and Maxi Okanovic are native to Bosnia. Before the break-up of the Soviet states, Bosnia made up what was northern Yugoslavia. Hal lived in Germany from 1970 to 1977. He then moved back to Yugoslavia to finish high school. After Hal graduated he performed his required military service of 15 months by serving in the Yugoslavian Navy. All this time Maxi was also living in Yugoslavia (Bosnia). You see these two have known each other for 50 years. As a matter of fact, they have been happily married for over 30 years.

At one point Hal had to temporarily move to Germany to find work because there were no jobs in war-torn Bosnia. Luckily, he had an uncle living in Germany that could assist Hal in finding employment. During this time Maxi was back in Bosnia with their two boys. Food and water were extremely hard to come by. A wake-up-call of sorts came along in the form of their home being struck by two rocket-propelled grenades. The grenades did a tremendous amount of damage. The attack was a sign that it was time to go.

Hal and Maxi left the war and destruction and moved to the United States on September 21<sup>st</sup>, 1997. Hal and Maxi's first touch of American soil was in San Francisco. Two items Hal purchased almost immediately were an American flag and a cowboy hat. Hal recalls always being intrigued by the United States and loving the look of the American flag. Things were not all rosy. Maxi was diagnosed with breast cancer. Within a month of their arrival to the US, Maxi had surgery.

Now that the Okanovic's were in the US, Hal had to find work. As fate would have it Hal and Maxi were blessed to have a neighbor, Mrs. Lee, who helped Hal find a machine shop job. Mrs. Lee happened to know the owner of a machine shop, Frank Valenzuela. Mr. Valenzuela hired Hal on the spot. Hal worked for Mr. Valenzuela for 4½ years.

After leaving the employ of Frank Valenzuela, there was a 9-month period where Hal was working two full-time jobs. Hal then transitioned into a part-time job doing security for Wesley Homes. From there Hal worked his way up through the Security and

Maintenance department to his present position as Head of Security and Maintenance. Maxi came to work for Wesley Homes over 10 years ago as a housekeeper. She then moved to working in the laundry. Because of Maxi's meticulous work and loving nature she moved up the ladder and eventually was promoted to her current position as Laundry/Housekeeping Coordinator.

In 2000 the Okanovic's made becoming American citizens a mission. Yet over a 7-year period each time the couple was ready to apply and go through the citizenship process much more urgent matters would surface. The most recent tragedy was the death of their youngest of two sons in 2007. In the son's passing he left his wife and daughter, 5 year-old Jasmina. Hal and Maxi assist in taking care and raising Jasmina.

Hal and Maxi remark how touched they were by the outflowing of sympathy that they received from the residents and staff. The Okanovic's received large amount of cards and words of condolence concerning the tragic death of their son. Maxi still has those cards.

Undaunted through it all, Hal and Maxi have completed the citizenship mission. Both Hal and Maxi received US citizenship almost a month ago. They both freely express the fact that they were not going to relinquish the dream of acquiring US citizenship. The Okanovic's path to where they are now is a true example of determination.

Hal has taken his love and passion for soccer to assist with coaching at the Starfire Soccer Center in Tukwila. Hal and his sons always played soccer and loved it. Therefore, Hal is giving back by coaching at the soccer center, and Maxi and he have established the Okanovic Scholarship in memorial to their son. The scholarship is able to cover the cost for 3 under-privileged kids at Starfire Soccer Center.

Residents come first in Hal and Maxi's minds. They have strong relationships with the residents and staff. As Hal put it so well, "*We smile together and cry together.*" The Okanovic's love the residents and treat residents like family. Maxi pointed out, "*Even after residents pass, families will come back and visit.*"

Maxi and Hal Okanovic are an inspiration on many levels. I feel very fortunate to have had the opportunity to interview this dynamic and caring couple. The residents of Wesley Homes are in great hands. Maxi and Hal have lived in Burien for the past 15 years. It seems Maxi and Hal are in for the long-haul. Maxi has been with Wesley Homes for over 13 years. Hal has worked for Wesley Homes since 2002.