Architecture Around Us
By Lu Donnelly

Saint Nicholas Chapel
5400 Tuscarawas Road, Brighton Township,
Beaver County

Saint Nicholas Chapel, crafted of cedar logs and shingles, could pass for a traditional village chapel in the Carpathian Mountains of Eastern Europe, but its three onion domes cloak a thoroughly modern church. The chapel was built for the Greek Catholic Union in 1992 with a steel frame, computer-controlled lighting, and air conditioning to celebrate the fraternal benefit society's 100th anniversary.

Architect Tom Terpack, a 1966 graduate of Carnegie Institute of Technology (now Carnegie Mellon University) has designed a number of Byzantine Rite church buildings in Pennsylvania and Ohio. This one is a composite of village chapels in Saris County, Slovakia, the native region of many Greek Catholic Union members. Terpack studied photographs of 120 chapels in an eight-county area of Slovakia and Ukraine.

Onion domes are not unusual in Western Pennsylvania, reflecting the large number of Eastern Europeans recruited to work here, but nowhere else in our region has this ecclesiastical style of the 1600s and 1700s been adapted so diligently and cleverly. Terpack, a descendant of Carpathian immigrants, calls the chapel "my private homage to my parents and grandparents who labored hard and long in the mines and mills to give me the opportunity to become a professional."

Lu Donnelly has authored numerous books and National Register nominations in Western Pennsylvania. She is currently project director for Pittsburgh and the Buildings of Western Pennsylvania, one of 58 volumes sponsored by the Society of Architectural Historians on architecture in the United States 1996 to present.