

Thomas Jefferson MONTICELLO

SPRING 2012

www.monticello.org

VOLUME 23, NUMBER 1

★★★★★ Olympic Champion **Nadia Comăneci** ★★★★★ to Be Featured July 4th Speaker at Monticello

Gold-medal-winning gymnast Nadia Comăneci will be the featured speaker at Monticello's 50th annual Independence Day Celebration and Naturalization Ceremony.

Considered one of the best-known gymnasts in the world, Comăneci was the first Olympic gymnast to score a perfect 10 and leave her indelible mark on the history of the Games.

Born in Onești, Romania, Comăneci became a naturalized citizen of the United States in 2001. She has also retained her Romanian passport, making her a dual citizen.

Her illustrious career as a gymnast reached worldwide fame during the 1976 Olympics in Montreal, Canada, when Comăneci, who was just 14 years old at the time, earned seven perfect 10s, three gold medals, one silver, and one bronze. In one week, she appeared on the covers of *TIME*, *Newsweek* and *Sports Illustrated*. Comăneci went on to earn two more gold medals and two silver medals in the 1980 Moscow Olympics. In 1996, she was inducted into the International Gymnastics Hall of Fame. Comăneci received the Olympic Order, the highest award given by the International Olympic Committee, in 1984 and 2004. She is the only person to receive this



honor twice and was also the youngest recipient. In 1999, she became the first athlete to be invited to speak at the United Nations to launch the Year 2000 International Year of Volunteers.

In April 1996, Comăneci married American Olympic Champion Bart Conner in a Romanian state ceremony broadcasted live in her native country. In 1999, she was honored by *ABC News* and *Ladies' Home Journal* as one of the 100 Most Important Women of the 20th Century. In December 2003, Comăneci wrote a book titled *Letters to a Young Gymnast*, detailing her inspirational story.

Comăneci now divides her time among appearances, commercial

endorsements for major companies, speaking engagements and charity events. Currently, Nadia and Bart are business partners with their manager, Paul Ziert, in the Bart Conner Gymnastics Academy, *International Gymnast* magazine, Perfect 10 Productions, Inc. (a TV production company), and Grips, Etc. (a gymnastics supply company).

Comăneci, who is also fluent in French and English, continues to travel the world with her various interests. Her charity work is extensive. She is a member of the Board of Directors of Special Olympics International and a Vice President of the Muscular Dystrophy Association. Comăneci also serves as a member of the Board of the Laureus Sports for Good Foundation. She travels to Romania often to support dozens of charities in her homeland.

Conner and Comăneci have a son, Dylan Paul Conner.

"For me, one of the greatest aspects of being a citizen of the United States is that I am allowed and in fact encouraged to cherish and celebrate my Romanian heritage as well," said Comăneci.

"Every July 4th, we celebrate the birth of American independence and the legacy of Thomas Jefferson with the naturalization ceremony on the

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West Lawn of Monticello,” said Leslie Greene Bowman, President and CEO of the Thomas Jefferson Foundation. “Nadia Comăneci is not only one of the most honored Olympians, she is also a naturalized citizen. We are delighted that Ms. Comăneci will share her thoughts with our newest American citizens, who embody the global spirit of Independence Day. Jefferson envisioned that the ideals expressed in the Declaration of Independence would spread beyond

our shores when he wrote in 1795: “This ball of liberty ... is now so well in motion that it will roll round the world.”

Last year’s featured speaker at Monticello on July 4th was Muhtar Kent, Chairman of the Board and Chief Executive Officer of The Coca-Cola Company.

This July 4th will mark the 236th anniversary of American independence. Jefferson, the principal author of the Declaration of Independence,

died at Monticello on the 50th anniversary, July 4, 1826.

Since 1963, more than 3,000 individuals have been sworn in as American citizens on Independence Day at Monticello in proceedings presided over by the U.S. District Court, Western District of Virginia.

The event at the home of Thomas Jefferson begins at 9 AM and is open to the public free of charge.