

Families Carry On the Tradition of Swienconka in Grand Rapids



(From left) Maya, mother Monika Shank, and Julianna will be preparing a food basket this Saturday for Swienconka at the Basilica of St. Adalbert.

By Matthew Gryczan

For Darrell and Monika Shank, bringing a basket of food to the Basilica of St. Adalbert this Holy Saturday for a special blessing by a priest marks the beginning of the Easter celebration after the sacrifices of Lent.

But more importantly, the blessing of food – practiced

for centuries by Poles as Swienconka – reminds their twin 5-year-old daughters of the religious meaning of Easter and giving thanks for the abundance that God provides, the Shanks said.

“Having the food blessed keeps religion in the holiday so that it doesn’t become commercialized with things

like the Easter Bunny,” Darrell said. Easter to many Poles is more significant than Christmas, and some Poles only recently began to give children gifts instead of small sweets.

Participating in Swienconka “keeps the tradition alive,” Monika added. “My parents always had their food blessed, I’ve done it my whole life, and I want to pass this along to our daughters.” Even when the Shank family lived in Traverse City and Cadillac, they were able to find parishes that

blessed food on Holy Saturday.

This year, daughters Julianna and Maya undoubtedly will take a more active role in packing the basket that will be brimming with bread, meats, butter, colored eggs, a pussywillow, a candle and even some chocolates.

The Shanks are far from being alone in seeing the value of passing the Polish-American tradition of Swienconka along to new generations. Seven Catholic churches are holding services in

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PHS Board Election Update

Nominations for director and officer positions on the 11-member board of the Polish Heritage Society will close on April 30, and individuals interested in serving on the board can submit their names to the three-member Nominating Committee by writing an email to pshgrandrapids@gmail.com before the deadline.

The Nominating Committee reported that the following individuals have submitted their names for the election: Teresa Bonham for president, filling the seat vacated by current President Adam Porczynski; Matthew Gryczan for recording secretary, filling the seat vacated by Dennis Ziomkowski; and Thaddeus Broda for director, filling the seat

vacated by Bonham if she is elected president.

Bonham, 62, was elected as director to the PHS board in 2020,



Teresa Bonham

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<https://polishheritagesociety.com>

Email us at phsgrandrapids@gmail.com.

The Polish Heritage Society of Grand Rapids promotes Polish/Lithuanian culture in the metro Grand Rapids. The Society meets on the 3rd Monday of every month except for December and general meetings in June and October. The society publishes this newsletter monthly. We invite story ideas and content contributions. For more information, please contact Matthew Gryczan, Richard Panek or Marilyn Lignell by writing to phsgrandrapids@gmail.com.

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Adam Porczynski

1st VP
John Theisen

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Director
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Director
Michael Kozal

Director
Thaddeus Szyzlowski

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Swienconka

Grand Rapids at various times on Saturday. (See the end of the article for a list of churches and times of food blessings.)

Gary and Mary Ann Mancewicz will be assembling a food basket and their grandchildren Moira, 8, Kate, 5, and possibly Jack, 2, to participate in Swienconka at St. Adalbert's as well.

"It's a blessing to pass the faith along with Polish traditions to our family," Mary Ann said.

For both the Shanks and Mancewiczs, it is a time-honored tradition that has strong roots reaching directly back to Poland.

Monika's parents, Edward and Grazyna Kowalewski, emigrated from Poland to the United States and settled in Chicago. It was there that they taught Monika the symbolism of the different components in the basket, as well as the art of coloring eggs using naturally produced dyes from sources such as sweet and purple onions and beets. Darrell's marriage to Monika paved the way for his introduction to Polish customs.

In the case of Gary Mancewicz, it was his mother Josephine who instilled the tradition into her children. One of six children born and raised by Polish immigrants Peter and Magdeline (Herenza) Halas, Josephine instructed Gary on how to prepare the basket for Swienconka. In addition to lining the basket with an em-

broidered linen cloth, Josephine would fill it with traditional foodstuffs and bread from American Bakery on Bridge Street for the blessing at Holy Spirit Parish.

According to The Catholic Weekly, it appears eggs were blessed at Eastertime as early as the 12th century in Western Europe, "as a symbol of the sealed tomb from which Christ emerged after his resurrection." Since eggs were included in foods to refrain from eating during Lenten fasts, they became part of the celebration on Holy Saturday after Lent ended.

The most common item in all baskets is salt, or sol in Polish. "Gary's mom was meticulous about keeping the blessed food separate, so that we might consume that first," Mary Ann said. "Josephine would put the blessed salt in a tiny bowl. The salt shaker was not on the table so that we might first use the blessed salt. And the small piece of kielbasa that had been blessed was placed on a small dish and cut into ½" pieces so everyone could have a piece of 'blessed' meat."

Josephine also included butter in the shape of a lamb, a practice that carries the special Polish name of Baranek Wielkonocony. The butter lambs can be purchased at local meat markets, molded using wooden or metal forms available online or even sculpted using ordinary kitchen utensils. Sometimes a red ribbon is affixed to the neck of the butter lamb to recall the blood of the Crucifixion and a white banner placed between its shoulder blades to signify Christ's victory through the Resurrection. Lambs of chocolate have been introduced in

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and she also serves as vice president of the board of directors of Pulaski Days Committee, recording secretary for the Ladies Auxiliary of the Polish Falcons Aid Society, a volunteer for years at the Dozynki festival and Busia Queen in 2021. Bonham works part-time as relationship manager at Serra Honda auto dealership in Grandville.



Matthew Gryczan

Gryczan, 69, who served on the PHS board as director from 2019 to 2021, was responsible for recreating the PHS website and

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Festival Sponsorships

The annual Dozynki Festival is scheduled for the weekend of August 25th thru the 27th, 2023 at Calder Plaza. The festival is our main fundraising activity and could not happen without our sponsors.

Sponsorship opportunities available for members and friends of the Polish Heritages Society range from Keg, Band or Tent Sponsorships all the way to Presenting Sponsorship. See pages 3 and 4 for all the details.



2023 SPONSORSHIP OPPORTUNITIES & BENEFITS

PRESENTING SPONSOR	\$5,000
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Highly visible branding with banners at key traffic locations. • Sponsor recognition in radio advertisements during the Polka Radio Hours on 94.9 FM, 99.5 FM, and 1530 AM • Fifty (50) Polish Festival Tokens to be used for authentic Polish cuisine or beverages. • Four (4) Parking Passes. • Sponsor name in social media, and PHS's website for one year (with direct link). 	
CULTURAL TENT or BEER TENT SPONSOR	\$2,500
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Highly visible branding at either the Polish Heritage Society Cultural Exhibition or the BeerTent. • Fifty (50) Polish Festival Tokens to be used for authentic Polish cuisine or beverages. • Two (2) Parking Passes. • Company/Organization name on PHS's website for one year (with direct link). 	
POLISH ROYALTY VIP TENT SPONSOR	\$2,500
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Private tent positioned in a prime location within Calder Plaza. Banner can be displayed on the tent. • Seating for 20 – room for your corporate clients, loving family, or close friends! • Fifty (50) Polish Festival Tokens to be used for authentic Polish cuisine or beverages. • Company/Organization name on PHS's website for one year (with direct link). 	
ENTRANCE SPONSOR (Three Available)	\$1,000
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A highly visible signage recognition is available at one of the three entrances to the Polish Festival. • Twenty-five (25) Polish Festival Tokens to be used for authentic Polish cuisine or beverages. • Company/Organization name on PHS's website for one year (with direct link). 	
POLKA BAND SPONSOR (Three Available)	\$1,000 Fri or Sat, \$500 Sun
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Available on a first come, first serve basis; sponsor the Polka Band on Friday, Saturday or Sunday. • Twenty-five (25) Polish Festival Tokens to be used for authentic Polish cuisine or beverages. • Company/Organization name on PHS's website for one year (with direct link). 	
CULTURAL ACTIVITY SPONSOR (Four Available)	\$500
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sponsor either the Children's Tent, Busia Pageant, Paczki Eating Contest, or Demonstration Tent. • Ten (10) Polish Festival Tokens to be used for authentic Polish cuisine or beverages. • Company/Organization name on PHS's website for one year (with direct link). 	
KEG SPONSOR	\$100
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Promote your organization by sponsoring a keg! Includes a printed sponsorship board listing at the beer tent – one of the most popular stops for visitors of the Polish Festival! • Company/Organization name on PHS's website for one year (with direct link). 	
BANNER SPONSOR	\$100
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Promote your organization by placing a banner on the Festival fencing – visible to all festival participants during the 3-day festival. • Company/Organization name on PHS's website for one year (with direct link). 	



YES, We/I would like to be a 2023 Polish Festival Sponsor!

- Presenting Sponsor \$5,000
 - Beer Tent Sponsor \$2,500
 - Entrance Sponsor \$1,000
 - Cultural Activity Sponsor \$500
 - Cultural Tent Sponsor \$2,500
 - Polish Royalty VIP Tent \$2,500
 - Polka Band Sponsor \$1,000 Fri or Sat, \$500 Sun
 - Keg Sponsor \$100
 - Banner Sponsor \$100
- (Select one below)
- Children's Tent
 - Busia Pageant
 - Paczki Eating Contest
 - Demonstration Tent

Sponsor (organization or individual name), exactly as it should appear in print:

Address: _____

Contact Person: _____

Phone: _____ E-Mail: _____

Direct Web Link: _____

- Send an invoice for this sponsorship: mail e-mail

Please mail your completed form with check payable to *Polish Heritage Society*.

Questions: Mary Panek
616.550.4113 marypanek@charter.net
John Theisen PHSgrandrapids@gmail.com or
John.Theisen@comcast.net

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Board Election Update

relaunching the PHS newsletter. He serves as managing editor of The Echo and attends PHS meetings as outside counsel on public relations and marketing. Named Polish Citizen of the Year in 2023, Gryczan was an editor and reporter on four daily newspapers and three business publications and held executive positions at three public relations firms

Broda, 35, is a trustee on the board of the Polish Falcons Aid Society, a musician who performs in Grand Rapids and a West Side resident. He

and his spouse, wife Hanna, have two children, Natalie and Eugene.



Thaddeus Broda

"I am interested in serving

on the PHS board because I enjoy being a part of the Polish community and am excited to help everyone celebrate the rich and beautiful history that we have here in Grand Rapids," Broda said.

Those who are interested in submitting their names for consideration for the vacant seat on the 11-member board must be active members who are current with annual dues or who have lifetime memberships. The names of individuals running for office will be published in the May issue of the newsletter before the election.

The election is scheduled to take place during the PHS general membership meeting and picnic to be held noon June 25 at Oriole Park, 1380 42nd St. SW in Wyo-

oming. If the candidates run unopposed, no election will be held.

The Polish Heritage Society always encourages members in good standing to consider joining the board, as it is the only organization in the metro Grand Rapids area that promotes an appreciation of Polish and Lithuanian culture.

Grand Rapids has a relatively high percentage per capita of individuals who are descendants of Polish and Lithuanian immigrants: the city ranked 18th in the country as having people of Polish ancestry, according to the 2000 U.S. Census.

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Swienconka

modern times.

White cloths either line the basket or cover the top of the precious cargo. In the 18th and 19th centuries, Poles adorned these cloths with elaborate embroidery, but as a transplanted tradition in the Midwestern United States, more Polish-Americans crocheted elaborate Swienconka covers.

Even the baskets reflect the preferences of their owners, with some families bringing only a few foodstuffs in small baskets, while others lugging nearly the whole meal to church.

Kate Koperski, guest curator at the Buscaglia-Castellani Art Gallery of Niagara University, observed in her 1988 article on Swienconka

that the tradition "functions as a yearly affirmation of Polish-American ethnic identity." She noted in her article that business at the Broadway Market in Buffalo, N.Y. peaks annually just before Easter as Polish-Americans "make their yearly pilgrimage back to 'the old neighborhood' (many never lived there) to buy foods which, when eaten, somehow make one Polish."

A similar phenomenon happens in Grand Rapids. Fritz Stanitzek, owner of Frank's Market, 1021 Fulton St W, said that he expects his meat market to sell up to 10 times the normal amount of fresh, smoked and double smoked kielbasa to families preparing for their Easter feasts.

The market also stocks special items in anticipation of Easter, such as the butter lambs and several different variations of sauerkrauts that Polish-Americans doctor

up to make kapusta, he said. "And we sell a ton of regular and extra hot horseradish," Stanizek added. Now in its fourth generation in the Stanitzek family, Frank's Market has been serving the West side for 90 years.

Natalia Szczygiel, director of the P.R.C.U.A. Malbork Dance Group in Grand Rapids and long-time participant in the food blessings, said "When the elders in our family were asked why this tradition of "Swienconka" must continue, they replied that we need to celebrate the meaning of Easter and preserve our Polish culture.

"For us children, the toughest part was not eating the blessed food until Easter Sunday!"

The following churches will be blessing baskets (Swienconka) on Holy Saturday:

Holy Spirit Parish, 2230 Lake Michigan Drive NW, Grand Rapids, (616) 453-6369, 1 p.m.

St. Anthony of Padua, 2510 Rich-

mond Street NW, Grand Rapids, MI 49504, (616) 453-8229, 1 p.m.

Sacred Heart of Jesus, 151 Garfield Ave SW, Grand Rapids, 49504, (616) 459-8362, 10 a.m.

St. Adalbert Basilica and St. James, 654 Davis Ave NW, Grand Rapids, 49504, (616) 458-3065, noon in the Basilica Center gym

St. Isidore, 628 Diamond Ave NE, Grand Rapids, 49503, (616) 459-4731, two of them, one at 11 a.m. and one at 1 p.m.

Our Lady of Consolation, 4865 11 Mile Rd NE, Rockford, 49341, (616) 866-0931, noon

St. Paul the Apostle, 2750 Burton St. NE, Grand Rapids, 49546, (616) 949-4170, noon

3rd Annual Tom Uzarski DAY

In memory of our brothers of the note.



5th St. Hall

701 5th St. NW 1:00-4:30

**MAY
21**

Music from:

Gerry Kaminski's Polka Network

The Noteables

DONATION AT THE DOOR

PHS Membership News



By Marilyn Lignell

Hello everyone!

This month's column is all about music, meats and membership -- what can be better than that!

You've certainly noticed the display ad that appears in The Echo this month for the "3rd Annual Tom Uzarski Day," but you may not know what's behind it, so let me fill you in.

The Kaminiski and the Uzarski families have teamed up to throw a party each year that celebrates all of the gusto that Tom Uzarski put into keeping Polish music and traditions alive in Grand Rapids.

"We all raise a glass to toast him on Tom Uzarski Day, but what we're really celebrating is Tom's tremendous passion for Polka music," said Mona Kaminiski, wife of musician Gerry Kaminiski. "That's why we also call it 'In Memory of Our Brothers -- and Sisters -- of the Note.'

"It's a day when we remember all the local musicians who aren't with us anymore for all the joy that they gave us by sharing their musical talents."

Since Tom was a tireless promoter of the PHS, the Kamin-

ski and Uzarski families will be donating profits from the party to the society.

The celebration of our local Polka musicians takes place from 1 to 4:30 p.m. May 21 at 5th Street Hall, so put on your dancing shoes and stop over for some Hupaj Siupaj!

And here's a Trifecta where you can be a sure winner -- but you have to move before April 8!

Three of our city's finest meat markets -- Frank's Market, Sobie Meats and Lewandoski's Market -- have joined forces to help the PHS with a special "Meat Market Trifecta" promotion, so yours truly ventured out on the West Side to see what was happening.

It turns out that Tim Sobie and Fr. Mark Przybysz, who recently retired from St. Anthony Parish, came up with the idea to promote all three of the markets by putting them on a tee-shirt with their logos and a map on the back.



Marilyn with Tim and Teresa Sobie

To support the Polish community, they decided that part of the proceeds should go to a local Polish organization -- and



Dancers from the P.R.C.U.A. Malbork Dance Group performed at Polish American night at the Griffins at Van Andel Arena

the Polish Heritage Society was the lucky one chosen!

If you shop at all three markets, save your receipts, staple them together and put your name and phone number on the back. Drop off the packs at any of the three markets to be entered into a drawing for one of three \$50 gift certificates or one of twelve \$10 gift certificates!! You can enter as often as you wish.

Get out there and support your Polish meat markets and maybe earn some money doing so!

We sent out two cards of caring this month: one to member Don Kurylowicz on the death of his brother David, and one to Mike Preston on the death of his mom, Jacqueline Marie Preston. Our thoughts and prayers are with you.

On a final note, the Polish/American Night at the Griffins was a big success according to event organizer Anthony Zasuwa. Anthony reported that the PHS sold out the entire section of the Van Andel Arena that was allotted for the event, nearly 150 tickets! There were also 50 Polish Heritage/Griffin t-shirts sold. Some of the highlights of the game were the PRCUA Malbork Dance Ensemble performing be-

fore the game and the 2019 Busia Queen Judi Serba and Pulaski Queen Haley Kozal riding the Zamboni!

I've been hearing a lot of questions about when you'll be receiving a new membership card, so here it is.

If you receive a blank card that means that we do not have record of you paying your dues for 2023. Please pay your dues to continue receiving the newsletter each month and be a part of our thriving organization!

(card)

Join the Polish Heritage Society to receive our monthly newsletter and other benefits!

Annual Student Membership for full-time students through college \$5

Annual Adult Membership \$20

Annual Family or Business Membership \$35

Lifetime Membership \$150

ONLINE

You can join the Polish Heritage Society online by going to our website at <https://polishheritagesociety.com/>, filling out the Membership form and paying by using the PayPal Button.

MAIL

Fill out this form and send a personal check made out to the Polish Heritage Society to this address:

Polish Heritage Society of Grand Rapids

P.O. Box 1844

Grand Rapids MI 49501-1844

NAME _____

ADDRESS _____

PHONE _____

EMAIL _____