

Guest Family Carries on the Polish Tradition of Świąconka

By Matthew Gryczan

For Gregory and Lisa Guest, bringing a basket of food to the Sacred Heart of Jesus church this past Holy Saturday for a special blessing by Pastor Ron Floyd marked the beginning of the Easter celebration after the sacrifices of Lent.

But more importantly, the blessing of food – practiced for centuries by Poles as Świąconka – reinforced for their three children the religious meaning of Easter and need to thank God for the abundance that the family enjoys, Gregory said.

“It’s important to take the time to reflect on the meaning of Easter and the Risen Lord,”

said Guest, who brought a large wicker basket adorned with cardboard cutouts of cedar and brimming with kielbasa, ham, pierogi, bread, bacon, salt, eggs, and other items. “And the first time that we eat food at the Easter meal will all be blessed food.”

The Guests’ children Cecilia, Gianna and Joseph were clearly impressed with the Świąconka ceremony performed by Father Floyd, who was named pastor at Sacred Heart last year after being assigned to the parish four years ago. He offered several blessings of food groups such as eggs, baked products having white flour, sausage and

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Gregory Guest brought children (from left) Cecilia, Gianna and Joseph and a basket of food to Sacred Heart of Jesus Church in Grand Rapids to participate in Świąconka, the blessing of the Easter baskets. Guest and his wife Lisa believe that the Catholic and Polish tradition should be passed on to the next generation.

Zelasko inducted into the International Polka Association Hall of Fame

By Matthew Gryczan

For the second year in a row, a member of Gerry Kaminski’s Polka Network has been inducted into the International Polka Association Hall of Fame in Chicago.

Last month, accordionist and concertina player John Zelasko was notified that he was inducted into the polka music organization’s hall of fame and will be honored at its music awards banquet on Aug. 31 in Mars, Penn.

Last year bassist Dave “Nigel” Kurdziel was inducted into the organization’s hall of fame.



John Zelasko

“I am truly humbled and honored to be in the hall of fame, particularly when you look at all the inductees before me,” said

Zelasko, 57. “They are my real polka heroes who have been at the top of their games.” When he isn’t entertaining crowds with his musical abilities, Zelasko is employed by Northpointe Bank as a systems administrator of network operations.

A native of Colorado Springs, he began learning the ropes of playing polkas from his father John, who also plays accordion and served as band leader of the Polka Cavaliers until the band retired in 2006. Zelasko started formal accordion lessons at 8 and became a full-time member of his father’s band at age 10.

He began playing trumpet in junior high and played that instrument with The Cavaliers when he started high school. In John’s senior year of high school, he joined and traveled with The Brass Connection (accordion) and later joined The Dynasticks, which led to the formation of Prime Drive.

Throughout his music career, Zelasko has played with 17 bands and continues as band leader and musician with The Project and is a member of Gerry Kaminski’s Polka Network. In 1993 and 1994, he fulfilled his childhood dream to travel, perform, and become a member of Eddie Blazonczyk’s

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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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kielbasa, dairy goods, and sweets and pastries.

Perhaps their favorite part was at the conclusion of the blessings, when Father Floyd invited all the children to help themselves to a plastic Easter egg -- with the gentle admonition that the candy wasn't to be eaten until Easter Sunday.

A native of the Boston area, Father Floyd said he was quite familiar with Świąconka as his mother Teresa was born in Warsaw. After a season of strict fasting and abstinence, the tradition reminds Catholics of the significance of the Resurrection, and "the first thing that goes into our mouths after the Eucharist is regular food that is blessed," he said.

The Guests were far from being alone in passing the tradition of Świąconka along to new generations. Seven Catholic churches in the Grand Rapids area held the blessings at various times on Saturday.

Its roots reach directly back to Poland and other European countries. According to The Catholic Weekly, it appears eggs were blessed at



The Rev. Ron Floyd sprinkles food baskets with holy water during Swieconka at Sacred Heart of Jesus Church.

Easter time 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.

Some families are quite meticulous about keeping the blessed food separate, so that they would be consumed first during the Easter meal. For instance, the most common item in all baskets is salt, or sol in Polish. In some families, the salt shaker was not placed on the table so that the tiny bowl of blessed salt would be used first. Sometimes a piece of kielbasa that had been blessed is placed on a small dish and cut into 1/2 inch pieces so everyone could have a piece of blessed meat.

Zelasko Inducted Into Polka Hall of Fame

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Versatones. In addition to playing accordion and concertina, he has played drums, trumpet and bass.

He is also a member of the St. Adalbert's Aid Society, and donates his time to increase polka awareness in the West-

ern Michigan Area.

His children Jacob and Jenna have followed in his footsteps playing music, and "they are talented," Zelasko said, "but I don't seem to have passed on the polka music gene. They aren't too interested in that."

While interest in polka music waxes and wanes, part of its declining

Another tradition is to have blessed butter in the shape of a lamb, a practice that carries the special Polish name of Baranek Wielkanocny. 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 modern times.

White cloths line the basket or cover the top of the precious cargo. In the centuries past, Poles adorned these cloths with elaborate embroidery.

Kate Koperski, guest curator at the Buscaglia-Castellani Art Gallery of Niagara University, observed in her 1988 article on Świąconka 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 Polish neighborhood' to buy food for Easter".

popularity may be due to the ways weddings are conducted today, he added. "When we were growing up, all of the kids were always invited to weddings where they played polkas, so we all considered it a Polish tradition -- it becomes part of your expectations of what a wedding should be. Some of that is lost now."



2024 SPONSORSHIP OPPORTUNITIES & BENEFITS

- PRESENTING SPONSOR** **\$5,000**
- 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**
- Highly visible branding at either the Polish Heritage Society Cultural Exhibition or the Beer Tent.
 - 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**
- 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**
- 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**
- 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**
- 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**
- 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**
- 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 2024 Polish Festival Sponsor!

- Presenting Sponsor \$5,000
 - Beer Tent Sponsor \$2,500
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 - Cultural Activity Sponsor \$500
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 - Polish Royalty VIP Tent \$2,500
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Sponsor (organization or individual name), exactly as it should appear in print:

Address: _____

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- 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 marylpanek@gmail.com
John Theisen PHSgrandrapids@gmail.com or
John.Theisen@comcast.net

PHS Membership News



Lifetime member Millie Mileski-Combs will have a busy two years of weddings as her three children (all members of PHS) were recently engaged! Had-



Eric Tetsworth

ley, William and Emma Bowman will be planning their big days to occur over the next 18 months. The proud mother will need the next eighteen months to recuperate.

On behalf of the PHS, I'd like to extend our condolences to the family of past PHS president Gerald R. Hardebeck of Grand Rapids who passed away March 23 at the age of 93. Gerald and his wife Lorraine were both former presidents of the Polish Heritage Society, which was originally founded as the Polish Arts Club by his uncle.

He was preceded in death by his parents Ralph and Isabelle, and his siblings Roger, Marvin and Diane. Surviving are Lorraine; his daughters Michele and Elyse (Frank); his grandchildren Anthony, Nicholas and Julianna; several nieces and nephews.

Gerald graduated from Davenport University with a degree in executive management and

accounting and became assistant treasurer and controller of Michigan Title Company, which later became First American Title Company where he served as senior escrow officer.

He became active in the Grand Rapids Community Concert Association, serving on the board and later becoming president. Gerald was the secretary/treasurer of Downtown Kiwanis Club for more than 30 years, receiving the Hixson Honorary Award for outstanding community service.

More recently, Gerald became a charter member and was elected treasurer of the St. Stephen Knights of Columbus Council #15691. He was deeply devoted to his Catholic faith and was dedicated to serving his parish communities over the years. Gerald will always be remembered for his selfless love for his family, as well as his kindness, thoughtfulness and extreme generosity to others.



Gerald Hardebeck

In lieu of flowers, memorial donations can be made to the St. Stephen Knights of Columbus Coun-

cil #15691 for their charitable works or Dominican Sisters-Grand Rapids, 111 Lakeside Dr NE Grand Rapids MI 49503.

Dozynki Festival Sponsorship opportunities are outlined in the insert in this newsletter. If you have a business or know of one that could benefit from sponsorship, please review the form.

All sponsorship levels include one year of Polish Heritage Society Website exposure with a direct link to your organization's website. Organization banner/sponsorship board listings or mainstage recognition of sponsorship is also available.

Your membership cards are included in this newsletter. If by chance your card is missing, that means we have not received your renewal. If you have any questions, please email us at phsgrandrapids@gmail.com.

PHS Membership Card

By Marilyn Lignell

I'd like to take this opportunity to express Dan's and my heartfelt thanks to the Polish community in Grand Rapids for all the support and love we received over the last month while we grieved the loss of our daughter Carly and mom Gerry Lignell. Your kind words, cards and prayers helped us through this most difficult time.

As always, life continues on with the addition of a new member, the growing family of a current member, and the passing of a member who has been with the Polish Heritage Society of Grand Rapids since its inception.

We welcome Eric Tetsworth as our newest lifetime member. Eric was the president of the Grand Valley State University Polish Club from 2012-2014, and he looks forward to meeting others who he can converse with in Polish and share recipes with. He became a member of the Polish Falcons Club about three years ago and looks forward to helping out on the Dozynki Polish Festival this year.



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:

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