

Polish Language Instruction Available in Grand Rapids

By Matthew Gryczan

Metro Grand Rapids has a large enough population to support a Saturday school for Polish language and culture where children and adults can practice speaking the language on a regular basis and learn about Polish heritage.

That's the assessment of Marzanna Butryn, a recent Grand Rapids transplant who founded a Saturday school for Polish language and culture in Bridgeport, Conn. that now boasts more than 150 students.

"It's possible to do something here," said Butryn, 60, who co-founded the Szkoła Kultury i Języka Polskiego im. św. Jana Pawła II in 1997. "There is a growing interest in learning the Polish language and culture because people want to visit Poland as tourists and share their heritage with their children."

She speaks from experience. Butryn enrolled her two daughters, Jenna and Gabriela, in a

Polish Saturday school as children, and now both can communicate fluently with relatives in Poland. Better yet, Butryn said she is now teaching her granddaughters Polish in a fun way "that they don't even know they are learning the language."

A Saturday school can serve students of all ages in a variety of ways, said Butryn, a Polish immigrant who moved to Grand Rapids in the summer of 2021. Such a school could hold crash courses in Polish for adults who are looking to visit Poland on vacation and act as a focal point for instruction on dance, history, geography and cuisine.

"There wouldn't be any discrimination because of age," she said with a laugh. "I now am tutoring four students ranging in age from 9 to 68." One typical session teaches language skills alongside lessons on Polish history and a sampling of foods such as ba-

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Polish Language Educator Marzanna Butryn with student Joe Figurski enjoying Bajaderka Cookies during a lesson

PHS Opens Applications for Vocational Students to College Scholarship Program

By Matthew Gryczan

To those who don't know about the PHS, it comes as a surprise that the society annually gives out scholarships totaling several thousands of dollars to students attending institutions of higher learning as a way of supporting Polish herit-

age.

Even those who are aware of the scholarships may not know that the PHS board loosened requirements at its last meeting to make even more high school and college students eligible for financial assistance.

The board opened eligibility to

students who plan to attend or are enrolled in just about any post high school education.

Effective last month, the PHS board shared the new guidelines for eligibility on its website and conducted outreach to area schools to encourage as many applicants as possible before the April 15 deadline.

To be eligible, applicants must:

- be of Polish American descent;
- reside in Allegan, Barry, Ionia, Kent, Montcalm, Muskegon or Ottawa county; and,

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of Grand Rapids**
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Grand Rapids MI
49501-1844
<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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jaderka cookies and red borsch soup. One of her students, Joe Figurski, is appreciative of Butryn's immersion classes in Polish language and culture.

"Living in America is a blessing and a curse when it comes to culture," said Figurski, 27, who drives from Kalamazoo regularly on Fridays to attend 2-hour classes with Butryn. "We are living in this big melting pot where we can experience all types of culture, but at the same time we can lose the sense of where we come from over the course of generations."

Figurski credits his maternal grandfather with being "a cultural beacon" for his family by preparing Polish dishes at Thanksgiving, but he added that he wanted to expand the cultural ties beyond food. "I've always wanted to

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- plan to attend or currently attend an accredited 2-year trade/vocational program, 2-year community college program or 4-year college or university.

Applicants need to provide:

- the scholarship application form;
- a copy of academic transcripts that show a minimum 2.75 GPA;
- two letters of recommendation from a teacher, mentor, coach, or advisor;
- a brief statement signed by the applicant that delineates his or her Polish heritage; and,
- a 200-word essay that shares career goals and why they are deserving of a scholarship.

Applicants can provide additional

know a second language, and I thought 'Why not Polish?'"

With growing confidence in his language skills, Figurski is thinking of spending time in Poland as part of a honeymoon when he gets married.

Since starting the classes in September, he said he has worked on reading and pronunciation where -- unlike English -- sounding out words is consistent with how the words are spelled. "But Polish is difficult too," Figurski added. "You have to learn that you can't split up certain letters, you have to move your mouth differently when it comes to pronunciation and the cases of nouns can change depending on the context of the sentence."

Butryn and Figurski agreed that informal conversations in Polish with others is crucial to improv-

information that they wish the scholarship committee to consider.

After the April 15 deadline, the PHS scholarship committee will review applications and notify recipients of the scholarships and financial aid offices of the institutions by May 15. Winners will be asked to provide a photo of themselves for a story in the Echo newsletter and will be invited to the Dozynki Polish Harvest Festival on Aug. 24 for special recognition.

Applications are available online at <https://polishheritagesociety.com> or from the counseling offices at high schools or post high school institutions. Email completed applications to phsgrandrapids@gmail.com or mail to Polish Heritage Society of Grand Rapids, PO Box 1844, Grand Rapids MI 49501.

ing on language skills -- something that a regular Saturday school would accomplish.

Grand Rapids may have the critical mass necessary to establish a Saturday school, but it would take some foresight and determination to accomplish the task.

During his visit in August to the annual Dozynki Festival in Grand Rapids, the Consul General for the Republic of Poland in Chicago said a number of Saturday schools in the Midwest are associated with Catholic parishes. Pawel Zyzak said he was impressed with the facilities of St. Isidore's after touring the church, opining that it may be an ideal location for such a Saturday school.

He added that it may be possi

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Volunteer Appreciation Night

The PHS is throwing a party for members who volunteered their time in 2023 at the Dozynki Festival, Wigilia Dinner, Matka Boska Zielna or other society functions! We'll be having a Taco bar and drinks at Diamond Hall - St. Isidore's Benevolent Aid Society from 4-8 p.m. on Feb. 24 as a way of saying thanks for your contributions. Please sign up if you plan to attend so that we know how much food to buy.

To sign up for the event, go to the PHS Facebook page, the Calendar section of our website, or use this link: <https://www.signupgenius.com/go/60B0C4EACAA2DA1F85-47073225-phsvolunteer>

PHS Membership News



By Marilyn Lignell

Looking back, December 2023 turned out to be an exciting month to engage and learn about Polish customs.

Our Wigilia Dinner held on Dec. 14 was a smashing success in terms of attendance, food, décor and comradery -- thanks in part to the cooperation of Mother Nature who gave us favorable weather. We had just under 100 people attend this year at the West Leonard Banquet Facility, almost double the number from last year!

Rich and Mary Panek, Stephanie Kovitz, my husband Dan and I formed the decorations committee that was able to

transform the hall into an elegant venue with Polish- and Christmas-themed artistry. The tables were decked out beautifully in red and white, adding a splash of Christmas for centerpieces. Stephanie put up a Christmas tree with past Wigilia handmade ornaments, and Rich and Mary brought their stunning szopka. Each guest received a handmade ornament crafted by volunteers at the Panek's home.

A fabulous dinner was catered by Krystal Maynard of Krystal Palace Catering, who added her own touch to some classic Polish recipes. Jarek Kozal and Nick Palmer led us in singing traditional Polish carols both in English and Polish.

My nieces Hadley and Emma Bowman and their beaux Harrison Palmer and Hayden Latham volunteered to help serve the meal. (I may be slightly biased, but I think they did an amazing job!)

The evening ended with the awarding of door prizes that included gift cards from Frank's Market, Sobie Meats and Levandoski Meats, Polish pottery from Janice Smith of Piękny Polish



Sally Stephenson and Gretchen Detloff Drawing Straws at the Wigilia Dinner

Pottery, jewelry sets crafted by Barbara Rylko-Bauer, assorted Polish decorated wooden plates donated by Donna and Dick Jachim. I'd be amiss not to also give a big thank you to Mon-

the good news is we are going to do it again with a tentative date set of Dec. 7, 2024!

Speaking of repeats, PHS President Teresa Bonham for a second time has shared the histo-



Volunteer Wigilia Servers



Jarek and Nick Lead Koledy

signor Hankiewicz for his monetary donation to help fund Wigilia.

ry and tradition of szopkas at a special event sponsored by the Frederick Meijer Gardens and

The event with so many new faces felt magical last year, and

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Sculpture Park. On Dec. 17 she gave a presentation to an appreciative audience of about 70 people on how craftsmen in Krakow during the 19th century began constructing szopkas -- detailed miniature models of buildings in the city that served as backdrops for the Nativity of Jesus.

She explained that the custom has been handed down through generations, with some crafters starting to build their szopkas for the next year on the day after Christmas. There is a szopka presentation and tournament held every year on the first Thursday of December at the Main Market Square in Krakow. The best szopkas are then displayed in the city's Historical Museum. To give a sense of the work involved in building a szopka, Rich Panek brought his szopka so guests could appreciate its fragility, intricacy and beauty.

We welcome two new members this month, both citing that they really want to learn more about Polish traditions. Diana Budd, who is half Polish, said the szopka presentation at Meijer Gardens sparked in her a desire to learn more about her Polish roots. Diane Kowal, who is 100 percent Polish and has recently learned more about her Polish descendants, hopes to learn some of the language and travel to Poland in the future.

As we enter the new year, I feel like our society is accomplishing its mission to assist local people of Polish/Lithuanian descent to appreciate their heritage, history and culture. But we can't do it without your support. To renew your dues, please fill out the form on this newsletter and enclose your check or go to the www.polishheritagesociety.com website where you can pay using PayPal. New membership cards will be in your April newsletter.



Teresa Bonham at Meijer Gardens Szopka Program

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ble for the Chicago consulate to provide teaching materials and other support for a Grand Rapids school.

In addition, support can be found from other organizations such as The Polish Supplementary School Council of America, which provides "templates of documents necessary for the proper organization and efficient management of educational institutions, teachers - materials, articles and lesson plans inspiring their teaching and educational work."

The website for the Consulate for the Republic of Poland in Detroit lists Polish language schools in four Michigan cities: Orchard Lake, Hamtramck, Sterling Heights and Ypsilanti. All four schools appear to be associated with Catholic parish-

es. Nationwide, there are schools operating in Connecticut, Massachusetts, Illinois, New York, New Jersey, Pennsylvania, Rhode Island, Texas, Florida, California, Oregon, Nevada, Georgia, and North Carolina.



Polish Consul General Pawel Zzyk with Msgr. Hankiewicz

Polish Heritage Night at the Griffins

Time is running out to purchase tickets for the Polish Heritage Night at Van Andel Arena on Feb. 9, when the Grand Rapids Griffins take on the Manitoba Moose at 7 p.m. Game organizer Anthony Zasuwa said the entire block of 150 tickets was sold out last year to this very popular winter event.

Tickets can be purchased by following the link on the PHS Facebook page or by accessing the Griffins website and using the promo code POLISH.

The Griffins again have set aside a block of 150 seats

for the PHS at a price of \$25 a ticket for admission, and the arena will be having a special on \$2 beers and hot dogs. The PHS board will be deciding at its January meeting whether to hold a meet-and-greet party at the Polish Falcons Hall prior to the game.



TMC



PHS Polska Bus Trip to Chicago

Saturday, April 27, 2024

8 a.m. EST -- Depart Grand Rapids via Motorcoach to Chicago

10 a.m. CST -- Arrive at Polish Museum of America (PMA) for 2 hour docent-led tour of exhibits.

Noon to 1:30 CST-- Hearty family style lunch at Staropolska Polish Restaurant

1:30 to 4:00 CST-- After lunch, guide-led tour of local historic Polish Churches

8 p.m. EST -- return to Grand Rapids

MUSEUM ADMISSION, LUNCH, GUIDE AND TRANSPORTATION

INCLUDED IN COST OF TOUR



The Polish Museum of America on Milwaukee Avenue in Chicago



Local Guide Basia Kozuchowska



Interior of St. Stanislaus Kostka Church



A Taste of Poland in Chicago

*****Reservation Deadline Saturday, March 30, 2024*****

Send to PHS-c/o Richard Panek Phone (616) 490-3231

6620 Knockadoon Drive NE

Rockford, MI 49341

Name _____

Phone # _____

of Tickets @ \$60.00 each _____

Amount Enclosed _____

Email _____



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

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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.

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