

Family Keeps Polish Traditions Alive Making Pierogi

By Sharon Hanks

Donna Jachim doesn't believe in having a messy house – except for the one day a year when she turns her kitchen into an assembly line for making more than 1,200 pierogi with family and friends.

“People are everywhere,” said Donna, who launched the epic day-long pierogi fest nearly 40 years ago with her late younger sister, Linda Barle. “Flour is everywhere. It's crazy and a lot of work, but we just enjoy it so much.”

Like many Polish-Americans in the Grand Rapids area, Donna and her husband Dick are keeping the tradition of making the popular Polish dumplings alive and are passing it along to future generations. Some families dust off their secret recipes and dough cutters just before Christmas, while others like the Jachims treat it as a rite of spring before Easter.

The Jachims pumped out an astounding 1,233 pierogis in

late April this year in preparation of Easter feasts that she and her helpers were holding for their families.

The annual tradition was launched after Donna and her sister talked about their love of homemade cooking -- and especially pierogi, dumplings commonly filled with cheese and potatoes and usually prepared for special occasions.

“We liked them so much and we wanted to make them,” Donna recalls. The two tight-knit sisters embarked on plans to make the little dumplings on the upcoming Good Friday and serve them at the family's approaching Easter dinner. They never realized it would be the start of a cherished Good Friday family tradition spanning four generations.

“When we first started, it was just a few hundred at a time,” Donna recalls, but as the family grew, so did the pierogi-making gathering.

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(from left) Donna Jachim and her sister Carol Hammond

PHS Board Seeks to Fill Opening for Position of Corresponding Secretary

By Matthew Gryczan

PHS Corresponding Secretary Elena Chaidez announced at the society's Oct. 16 meeting that she will not be running for reelection when her term ends in May, and the PHS board is encouraging potential candidates to throw their hats in the ring for the post.

On a separate matter, the board will be reevaluating at its Nov. 20 meeting the criteria as to how it decides who is eligible to receive scholarships for post high school education. The PHS awarded \$5,000 this year to students to further their education, and the society has awarded up to \$7,000 in scholarships annually.

Regarding the Corresponding Secretary opening, PHS President Teresa Bonham said the society is “encouraging any member in good standing to consider running for the post. It's actually a fun position because it keeps you in touch with what society members are doing.”

The new Corresponding Secre-

tary will share duties and the workload with Marilyn Lignell, the Echo newsletter columnist who highlights happenings in the community, and the Recording Secretary. According to the PHS bylaws, the Corresponding Secretary is “to assist the Recording Secretary with his/her duties. The Cor-

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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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Pierogi

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Her youngest sister, Carol Hammond, soon joined them along with two sisters-in-law: Paula Hanks, wife of their eldest brother, Dan, and Angie Hanks, wife of their other brother, John. Their children and grandchildren came later when production of pierogi began resembling an assembly line, supplying bags of dumplings for each family to freeze and enjoy throughout the year.

Finding space in Donna's home on Seymour Avenue NW to accommodate the group wasn't too hard. "I have an old kitchen table we bring upstairs and set in the kitchen," Donna says. A second table in the adjacent dining room allowed for "workstations" to be assigned to each person throughout both rooms and the basement has a second stove to boil the dumplings.

"We're trying to keep our Polish heritage alive because a lot of people don't," explains Carol, as she rolled out dough on a flour-

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responding Secretary also will keep track of the Society's membership. The person will be responsible for keeping current all of the contact information for the membership including addresses, phone numbers and emails."

In practice, Lignell manages the contact information for members in her role with the newsletter. Lignell said that she would welcome help from the Corresponding Secretary in writing cards of encouragement to individuals and families as a reminder that

covered table. "Once the older generation passes, the next generation doesn't continue because they don't know how to make them."

Store-bought frozen pierogi don't compare to homemade, Carol said, as "they don't have the flavor and they are not as fresh."

Years ago, a family favorite was the pierogi served at the now-closed Wisla Restaurant at 646 Stocking Ave. NW where the Monarch Club Corner Bar stands today. Established by a Polish immigrant, Mitch Szczepanek, the small eatery primarily served traditional Polish dishes and was a popular spot among Polish Americans in the neighborhood. The meat-filled pierogi was the family's favorite and, after much persuasion, they convinced Mitch to share the recipe.

Helping the family to dramatically speed up pierogi production was the discovery about five years ago of a plastic pierogi maker available online that allowed them to make 18 dumplings in one procedure. To

use, one simply would place a large sheet of dough over 18 half-circle cut-outs in the plastic frame, add 18 portions of filling, and cover them with another layer of dough. Roll over the dough with a rolling pin and 18 pierogi readily fall out, already sealed, and ready to boil.

Pierogis are known for their traditional stuffing of mashed potatoes and cheese (cottage, ricotta or farmer's). Cooked minced beef or pork, sauerkraut, and mushrooms are also popular fillings. After they are boiled, fried or both, they are served warm and commonly topped with yogurt, sour cream, dill or chives.

This year, the family prepared two types of filling. One consisted primarily of mashed potatoes, sweet onion and cheese (homemade farmer's, store-bought ricotta and queso). The other was the recipe from the Wisla Restaurant of a pureed-like blend of cooked roast beef, eggs, bread and seasonings.

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they remain part of a caring community. The PHS launched its Words of Encouragement card project in January 2021 with great success. This project sends cards to persons or families who are experiencing milestones in their lives that need to be recognized, such as a shut-in at a retirement home who feels alone, a new birth in the family, a recent marriage, a sudden illness or loss of loved one.

The society has had two types of cards printed, one that highlights a colorfully decorated plate with "Congratulations" in

Polish and another that shows a field of poppies with the words "Thinking of You." Active members of the Society can request to have cards sent at no cost to any individual or family who is to be congratulated or in need of encouragement. Card recipients do not have to be PHS members.

Regarding the Corresponding Secretary post, nominations for officer and director positions on the 11-member board will close on April 30, and individuals interested in serving on

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Pierogi

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Carol's youngest daughter, Abbie Hammond, thoroughly enjoys the festivities. "I've been doing this my whole life," Abbie says, as she helped her mother with the dough. "It's fun and I would say we'll continue this once the older generation is gone. It's worth the time; it really is."

Carol's oldest daughter, Katie (Hammond) Davis, adds: "It's really important for us to share the food you make. It's a different feeling than when you buy everything. And everyone knows how much work goes into it, too. Making time to spend with your family is important."

Her cousin Carrie Leatherman, Donna's daughter, agrees. "It's fun to see everybody and everybody loves to eat them."

The event this year was bumped to a Saturday for the first time because of vacation plans. But once again, the

Jachim home on Seymour Avenue NW was filled with flour-covered kitchen tables, rolling pins, bowls filled with dough and filling, a whirring electric dough mixer, boiling water and of course, laughter and chatter among the cooks.

Donna's daughter-in-law, Danielle Jachim, managed the pierogi-boiling step at an extra stove in the basement while her three young children tried to help everyone in the kitchen. Donna's future daughter-in-law, Savannah Swanson, and the future maid of honor, Kate Batcheler, joined the party.

According to the online version of the Britannica: "While the origins of pierogi are disputed, it is known that the word pierogi first appeared in Polish cookbooks and literature in the late 17th century. They were introduced in Poland by the Dominican missionary St. Hyacinth, who died in Krakow in 1257. The Polish-born saint is said to have brought the dish with him from a missionary posting to Kyiv,

which has afforded Ukrainians and Russians grounds to claim pierogi as their own. "

Traditionally considered

peasant food in Poland, pierogi eventually gained popularity and spread throughout all social classes including nobles.



(from left) Savannah Harper, Carrie Leatherman (adult standing), Kate Batcheler, and Henry Harper make Pierogi

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the board can submit their names by writing an email to pshgrandrapids@gmail.com before the deadline.

Candidates submitting their names 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 June election.

Regarding scholarships, the society is encouraging members in good standing to join the Scholarship Committee that annually reviews applications and decides which students are worthy of being awarded scholarships.

At the November meeting the board will consider expansion of student eligibility requirements to include any post high school education and institutions other than what are currently allowed.

Wigilia Crafting Session and Brunch

You are invited to join the Wigilia Committee for a crafting session to create the 2023 Wigilia ornaments. Each year, a unique handmade ornament is given to guests as a favor.

The crafting session will be held Saturday, November 18th 10 am – 2 pm at the home of Rich and Mary Panek (6620 Knockadoon Dr., Rockford, MI 49341). Brunch will be served.

Please reply to Mary Panek marylpanek@gmail.com or

616.550.4113.

Space is limited to 20 guests. Participants should bring a pair of scissors and dress casually; in case we get messy!



POLISH HERITAGE SOCIETY'S ANNUAL

Wigilia Dinner and Program

Saturday, December 9, 2023

West Leonard Banquet Facility- 1140 Muskegon NW

Oplatek

Marbled and Traditional Rye Bread with Whipped Butters

Cream Herring with Lemon and Pickled Turnips

Barley and Wild Mushroom Vegetable Soup

Potato Dumplings with Sour Cream and Fried Cabbage

Haddock Filet Baked with Cucumber Aioli and Panko Crumbs

Roasted Golden Beet Salad

Authentic Polish Desserts

Wine served with fish course

Social Hour 5:00-6:00PM / Dinner and Program at 6:00PM

Polish Koledy: Featuring Jarek Kozal and Nick Palmer

\$40.00 per person-prepaid: Checks payable to Polish Heritage Society

******Reservation deadline November 18, 2023******

Send to PHS-c/o Marilyn Lignell Phone: 616-443-3773

2858 W Sandrel CT NE

Grand Rapids, MI 49505

Name _____

Phone # _____

of tickets @\$40.00 _____

Amount enclosed _____

I would like to be seated with _____

Email: _____



PHS Membership News



By Marilyn Lignell

The PHS General Membership Meeting and a tour of the Basilica of St. Adalbert was held on October 22, 2023. The informative, behind the scenes tour of the Basilica was conducted by Rev. Tom Simons. The tour included some back history of the Basilica as well as some noticeable changes that have been made to update it and keep it in the amazing shape that it is in. He also explained

many of the symbols and paintings that are unique to the Basilica.

A light lunch and meeting were held right after the tour with 40 people in attendance. The meeting reviewed some festival highlights and acknowledgement of the Blue Army Monument, a visit from Consul General Pawel Zyzak, Anna and Mark Hurning from Wronia, Szczecin, Poland promoting their Polish Your Kitchen cookbook and the West Catholic Robotic Team.

Busia Queen Lucy Preston chose to donate her \$250.00 organization donation for winning the Busia contest to Polish National Aid Society (Jackson Hall).



Father Tom Simons leading Basilica tour

One awesome thing about General Membership Meetings is that I get to see some old friends and hopefully meet or reconnect with new



Susan Ulanowicz

friends. I was delighted to be seated with new member Susan Ulanowicz. Susan's grandfather Bert (Bronislaw) immigrated from Suwalki to Grand Rapids to join his 3 brothers living here where he worked primarily as a furniture finisher.

Susan believes there are still some Ulanowicz/Ulanach cousins in the area, one was involved in starting Pulaski Days. Her grandmother Veronica Pawlowska came with her family from Posnan. She and her sisters worked in a cigar factory. Her grandparents met, married, moved near John Ball Park and had Susan's father. On the Pawlowska side, Susan is cousins with Echo columnist Sharon Hanks. Susan said their family didn't practice a lot of Polish traditions and is excited to gain

some more knowledge about them through the society. We are excited to share them with her!!

Congratulations to life member Matt Gryczan and wife Ann on the marriage of their daughter Katie to Eric Kipfmiller. The couple was married on October 21st and the celebration took place at the John Ball Park Bissell Tree House. We wish you and your family all the best!

Our deepest sympathy goes out to life member Laura Szczepanek and her family on the passing of her brother Tim who died October 13, 2023 in Riverview, Florida. Tim was a valued diesel mechanic who could diagnose and fix anything from minor repairs to major issues on cars, motorcycles and golf carts. Tim had a devastating motorcycle accident in November 2022 that left him unable to walk and do the things he loved. He will be greatly missed by many of his family and friends that absolutely loved him.

Who wants to learn to speak Polish? Member Marzanna Butryn is a Polish Language and History teacher and has credentials to teach Polish to children and adults at all different levels. Here is an opportunity to learn Polish at your own comfort level. Please reach out to Marzanna directly to discuss a plan and costs to best fit you. Her email is butryanmarzanna@gmail.com or phone # (203)415-0005. Dziękuję



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 _____