



# POLISH HERITAGE SOCIETY OF GRAND RAPIDS

October 2020

## Wigilia 2020 Canceled due to COVID-19 Concerns

By Matthew Gryczan

For the first time in its 50-year history, the annual Wigilia dinner sponsored by Polish Heritage Society to celebrate the traditional meal enjoyed by Poles on Christmas Eve will be canceled, due to concerns that the event may promote the spread of COVID-19 virus among the attendees and volunteers.

Marilyn Lignell, former president of PHS who has organized the event for about 15 years, said it is unfortunate that the board had to cancel the event this year due to health risks, but it was the right action to take. About 80 people attended last year's event.

"The Wigilia dinner is all about expressing the love and joy of the Christmas season," she said. "It's all about socially engaging with people, where everyone likes to hug each other. If they couldn't do that, it would be like torture."

Recent past dinners that consist of a 7-course meal centered around the main dish of baked fish have been held at the Guest House, 634 Stocking Ave NW and catered by Laura Szczepanek, who owns That Polish Girl. The dinner starts with the sharing of Christmas wafer, or opiatek, then a vegetarian meal with fish, rounded off

with Polish Christmas carols, or koledy, and a visit by St. Nicholas.

Stephanie Kovitz, who organized Wigilia dinners in the 1980s, said dinners at that time drew as many as 200 people at venues such as the Wege Center of Aquinas College and English Hills Country Club. In those years, the event started with a candle-lighting ceremony at each table, which was set for an even number of people with one place left empty for a potential visitor and guest.

"When I started, the older women and I would get together to prepare the food ourselves, then give

the recipes to the catering company," Kovitz said. "Some of the most active members at that time were Stella Swierbut and Thaddea 'Teddy' Wagner. Teddy was a woman's woman, and we would go to her house to cook the recipes. It made the whole dinner pretty authentic."

Kovitz said the event is "a lot of fun, but it's also a lot work to put on. Even so, it's one tradition that I think is so important to keep going in Grand Rapids." The PHS board voted to cancel the event at its last meeting, with the stated objective that Wigilia should be resumed in December 2021.

## Levandoskis Contribute to PHS History Exhibition

By Richard Panek

Thanks to the generosity of a local family, the Polish Heritage Society is now the custodian of a number of exhibition quality posters that depict 19th century folk costumes in several regions of Poland and other valuable items.

"I really feel good about the fact that the posters are in such capable hands," said Mark Nevin Levando-

ski, retired educator and a long-time PHS member who decided to donate the set of colorful offset prints from artist and academic Witold Dynowski made in the 1960s. Dynowski (1903-1986) was a professor at the University of Warsaw who distinguished himself in the study of ethnography of Poland and Mongolia and documented the folk art of the Vilnius and Nowogródek regions in Eastern Europe.



(From left) son Luke, Barbara and Mark Levandoski

Levandoski and his wife Barbara have contributed

the trove of items they collected during their trips

## Polish Heritage Society of Grand Rapids

PO Box 1844  
Grand Rapids MI  
49501-1844

[https://  
polishheritagesociety.com](https://polishheritagesociety.com)

Email us at [phsgrandrap-  
ids@gmail.com](mailto:phsgrandrapids@gmail.com).

The Polish Heritage Society of Grand Rapids promotes an appreciation of the Polish and Lithuanian culture in the metro Grand Rapids. The Society publishes this newsletter monthly. We invite story ideas and content contributions. For more information, please contact Matthew Gryczan or Marilyn Lignell by writing to [phsgrandrap-  
ids@gmail.com](mailto:phsgrandrapids@gmail.com).

President  
Adam Porczynski

1st VP  
John Theisen

2nd VP  
Anthony Zasuwa

Treasurer  
Mary Ann Bergevin

Corresponding Secretary  
Elena Chaidez

Recording Secretary  
Dennis Ziolkowski

Director  
Teresa Bonham

Director  
Matthew Gryczan

Director  
Michael Jasperse

Director  
Richard Panek

Director  
Greg Rosloniec

## Levandoskis: Donation

to Poland when they downsized from their home in East Grand Rapids to a condo in Evanston, Ill. The couple made to the move to be closer to their children.

“Barbara and I traveled to Poland many times with our children, and each trip we brought back some souvenirs,” Levandoski said. He contacted past President Marilyn Lignell about donating materials to the PHS, and she referred him to Richard Panek and Mike Swidwinski, who are working on changes to the History, Culture and Heritage Tent that is featured annually at the Dozynki Polish Harvest Festival held in downtown Grand Rapids.

Panek and Swidwinski expect to incorporate a number of the new items into the displays of the tent to be held next year at the Polish Festival. Panek said he has been working with Swidwinski to make the displays “more colorful and



attractive to festival goers. And this is just what we

were looking for.”

Levandoski said the 22” by 28” Stoje posters show couples wearing typical 19th century folk costumes of the Slaski, Pomorski, Krakowski, Podhalanski, Lowicki and Wielkopolski regions of Poland.

The posters “need good protection, but we want them used and displayed as much as possible,” he said. “They’re not doing any good sitting in storage,” As a longtime member of PHS who joined after returning to Grand Rapids from college, Levandoski said he “always wanted to elevate the Polish image and will continue doing so

## Polish Dance Group Sells Pierogies to Recoup Donations

The Grand Rapids chapter of the Malbork Dance Group, who regularly perform Polish folk dances wearing authentic costumes at venues throughout metro Grand Rapids, is selling pierogies in November to cover a shortfall in donations caused by COVID-19.

“We typically have two to three festivals a year -- plus Pulaski Days -- which were all cancelled this year,” the chapter’s director Amber Gillette said. “This fundraiser will really help us to make up for those lost donations, which we rely on to keep our kids in Polish dance and teach them about their heritage.

“We are currently the only school in West Michigan and hope to stay here in Grand Rapids for a long time but, are asking for support so we can continue our work in the community.”

Those interested in purchasing pierogies need to order and pay for the items by November 15, with a pickup date of December 15. The group is offering a single pack of pierogies for \$9, or 4 packs of pierogies for \$30.

There are three different varieties of pierogi packs: a package of 8 with potato/Farmer’s cheese filling; a package of 12 with potato,

bacon and American cheese; and a package of 12 with sweet Farmer’s cheese filling.

To order pierogies, please contact PHS 2nd Vice President Anthony Zasuwa at 616.856.2038 or write [anthony-zasuwa@prcu.org](mailto:anthony-zasuwa@prcu.org).

Founded in 2017, the P.R.C.U.A. Malbork Dance Group -- Grand Rapids has furthered the appreciation of Polish dance by performing at dozens of events throughout West Michigan. Members of group ranging in ages from 3 to 18 are taught traditional Polish folk dances, and they perform wearing authentic costumes made in Poland.

## PHS Member News

By Marilyn Lignell

Judi Serba, Busia Queen 2019-2020, renewed her membership and said that she enjoyed her short time as Busia Queen before COVID-19 hit. "The best highlight was being Busia Queen at the Dozynki Polish Festival" Judi said. "I attended the Wigilia Dinner with my husband (dzia dzia king wanna be). I also had an awesome time at the Griffins game with the Pulaski Days Queen and her court. The rest of my reign was cancelled." Judi also attended Matka Boska in August with Pulaski Days Queen Paige Rubleski and Court Ashley Vander-Meulen at her side.

Chris Szczygiel Joined the Polish Heritage Society as a life member. "I joined the Polish Heritage Society as a life member because, while I was born in New Jersey, I was brought up very Polish by my parents who were both born and raised in Poland," he said. "I have spent a lot of great times visiting Poland and spending long summers on the Baltic Sea coast."

Chris' wife was born in Poland and they are very dedicated to raising their two children with the Polish culture and traditions they very much treasure. "In fact, my 3-year-old daughter's first language is Polish and she is already a lover of Polish folk music." Chris looks forward to being a member of the Society.

Mike and Caitlin Kozal and their 5 children have joined

as a family membership. The Kozals feel a commitment to keeping their Polish heritage and traditions alive, with both Mike and Caitlin having roots in Poland. Mike's family (Kozal) has roots in the Krakow region of Poland. His great grandparents are the ones that immigrated to America and settled on the west side of Grand Rapids. Caitlin has great-great grandparents (Kubacki) that immigrated from Poland (no clue where from)

in the late 1800s and settled in Manistee.

Rosemary Maciejewski has joined as a life member. Rosemary (wo)manned the bar at the Polish Festival for many years! You can also find her setting up every year and seated on the Executive Board for the American Legion Post 459 and on the Pulaski Days Committee as just a few of her many talents.

It is with great sorrow to report that Sabina Kali-

nowski (Dabrowska), 85, passed away Oct. 12. Sabina, her husband Wencel and their three children immigrated to the United States from Poland in the 1960s.

Sabina and Wencel were both dedicated members of the PHS, with Sabina devoting time to Polish dance troupes that performed at Calder Plaza during the annual festivals. She was an early devotee of the Adoration Chapel at St. Isidore's for years.

### Meeting Minutes — August 17

By Dennis Ziomkowski

**(Abbreviated for space)** Attendance: Mary Ann Bergevin, Adam Porczynski, Dennis Ziomkowski, Anthony Zasuwa, John Theisen, Richard Panek, Michael Jasperse, Elena Chaidez, Greg Rosloniec, Matt Gryczan, Theresa Bonham

Minutes were sent via e-mail to the board. Motion was made by Michael and seconded by John to accept. Motion passed.

Treasurer Report: The financial report was given. Motion was made by Greg seconded by Michael to accept the report. Motion passed.

Correspondence: The checks from renewals were given to Mary Ann for deposit. Member information is going to Marilyn. A thank you note was sent to Martin Rogalski for all his work on the success of getting the 501(C) 3 paper work done.

Old Business: Hawkins & Company will be the accounting firm to handle our 501(C) 3 reports and other related accounting items. Cost will be \$50 a month, and the firm uses Quick Book software.

The PHS treasurer position will not be eliminated and will still control the check book to take deposits and pay bills. Motion made by John, seconded by Matt to approve. Motion passed. Michael brought up tax forms for

donors and whether membership software should be purchased. General agreement was to revisit in a few months to see how things are working out.

The general membership meeting is slated for September 20 at Eastern Avenue Hall, depending on COVID requirements. Lecture on the history of Casmir Pulaski, activities in Poland and America will be presented by Richard.

The society pins will be handed out to visitors of any board meetings and potential locations at businesses, with Matt in charge of distribution.

It is not cost effective to send pins to all members via mail. Marilyn is in charge of getting the cards out to our membership, with members eligible for discounts at five local businesses. It is hoped that other businesses will join the discount program.

New Business: Matka Boska was nice and well attended, featuring a guest organist who was very good. A motion by Greg, seconded by Elena to send a \$50 gift to the church. Motion passed.

A tentative date was set for Wigilia Dinner on December 5, but the board will reevaluate whether the dinner will be held based on COVID restrictions.

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 \_\_\_\_\_