

Dozynki Festival Takes Grand Rapids by Storm



(From right) Consul General Pawel Zyzak congratulates Richard and Mary Panek on their Polish Citizens of the Year Award.

By Matthew Gryczan

Nothing could stop people from jamming Calder Plaza to enjoy this year's Dozynki Polish Harvest Festival – even roads blocked by downed trees and interrupted electric service caused by a tornado that touched down the night before the festival's start.

Many who visited the festival that ran from Aug. 25-27 felt some effects from the EF1 tornado that carved a path for nearly 9 miles from Peach Ridge Avenue to just west of Rockford High School, but everyone was in a partying mood judging by the turnout for the city's longest running ethnic festival.

Preliminary results still subject to change by the festival committee showed a nearly 25 percent increase in both overall revenue and profit from the event, a surprising turnout given that some people didn't have power and cleanup efforts were still underway when the festival ended Sunday at 5 p.m.

"We had some remarkable luck," said festival co-chair and society 1st Vice President John Theisen said. "We set up Thursday afternoon in some sweat-drenching humidity, and then the terrible weather came through Thursday evening. But by 11 a.m. Friday when the festival opened, the weather really improved – the humidity

dropped and we had lots of sun throughout the week-end.

"Thank God that our Heritage exhibit didn't blow away Thursday night."

This year's festival featured a special distinguished guest, cooking demos by a Polish cookbook author, two crownings of new royalty and a world class robotics team.

Paweł Zyzak, Consul General of the Republic of Poland in Chicago, made a two-day visit to Grand Rapids to lay a wreath of fresh flowers at the Blue Army Monument recently restored by the Polish Heritage Society, present the Polish Citizens of the Year Award at the Dozynki Festival and tour areas of the city that main-

tain Polish heritage.

Zyzak presented the Polish Citizens of the Year Award to this year's recipients Richard and Mary Panek on Friday night after Kent County Commissioner Carol Hennessy (14th Dist.) read a proclamation that outlined why the Paneks were so deserving of the award.

The Paneks "have given generously of their time, expertise and financial resources to strengthen the Polish Heritage Society of Grand Rapids in its mission to preserve and promote Polish culture in West Michigan," she said. Hennessy said Richard has lectured on topics such as Soviet deportations of Poles during WWII and the life of Casimir Pulaski and continues as curator of the festi-

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Cookbook Author Anna Hurning demonstrates the finer points of making chilled beet soup.

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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 pshgrandrapids@gmail.com.

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(From left) 2022-2023 Busia Queen Nancy Borek transfers the responsibilities of the office to the 2023-2024 Busia Queen Lucy Maciejewski Preston.

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val's heritage tent. Mary has been highly active in organizing the Society's annual Wigilia dinner and other special events and has spearheaded the festival's sponsorship program.

The Paneks said they were greatly honored to be named recipients of the award. "Being one hundred percent Polish and the son of Polish immigrants, I am proud to serve the PHS in any way I can," Richard said. "The Society is key to keeping our rich Polish cultural heritage alive in Grand Rapids for succeeding generations."

Mary said she is of 25 percent Polish ancestry through her paternal grandmother

Lottie Masiakowski, but "growing up, we didn't continue any Polish traditions. I'm honored to learn more about Polish culture and assist in the cultural tent at the festival."

Another highlight of the fes-

tival was cooking demonstrations by Polish cookbook author Anna Hurning, who served up a delicious batch of chilled beetroot soup topped with hardboiled eggs. Hurning, author of Polish Your Kitchen and other titles, said she enjoyed meeting festival goers and was planning to attend again next year.

Twice was the charm for Lucy Maciejewski Preston, who lost to 2022-2023 Busia Queen Nancy Borek last year, but came back to snag the crown this year as Busia Queen 2023-24. "Being Busia Queen means being everyone's Busia," she said. "I'm one hundred percent Polish, and Polish people are very welcoming and traditional people that love to share a drink or meal together."

While there wasn't a crown involved, Max Goldwasser was given the informal title of "The Paczki Prince" for winning the paczki eating contest two years in a row. Goldwasser, a reporter/

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(From left) Bar buddies Bob "Wojo" Wojcik, Kenny Kloostr, Greg Herda and Thaddeus Broda take a break from slinging drinks.

Pulaski Days Upon Us



By Marilyn Lignell

If you pulled out your polka shoes for Dozynki, don't put them away quite yet!

Coming up in October is Pulaski Days, our annual celebration the Revolutionary War hero Gen. Casimir Pulaski that ties together the 14 Polish and Lithuanian halls and fraternal organizations in Grand Rapids for a week of Polish food, music and fun. The weeklong event kicks off with a flag

raising ceremony at 2 p.m. Oct. 1 at the Pulaski Monument located at Diamond Hall, followed by the annual kielbasa eating contest at 7 p.m. Oct. 4 at Fifth Street Hall. Come out to celebrate your Polish pride by watching the parade of floats and marching bands on the East Side starting at 11 a.m. Oct. 7. All of the Polish Halls will be serving food, and most have live music!! More info at www.pulaskidays.org.

As you celebrate Pulaski Days next month, you may bump into our newest member of the PHS: West Sider Benjamin Boerkoel. Although Benjamin isn't of Polish descent, he is an honorary Pole by association as he has many Polish friends and enjoys going to Polish halls, Pulaski Days and celebrating other celebrations of Polish heritage.



Members of the West Catholic High School Enigma 2075 robotics team showed off their technical prowess at the Dozynki.

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anchor for FOX17 in West Michigan, donned a boxing robe and was awarded a championship boxing belt for his accomplishment.

In another type of competition, the West Catholic High School Enigma 2075 robotics team did a demonstration at the festival. The team placed fourth out of 600 teams from around the world in an April competition sponsored by the organization named For Inspiration and Recognition of Science and Technology (FIRST).

At its meeting in July, the PHS board voted to name the Polish National Aid Society, more commonly known as Jackson Street Hall, as the recipient of this year's award from the festival to aid a local organization. The dollar amount of the award is slated to be discussed at the September meeting.

"This type of event wouldn't be possible without the help of all the volunteers, and the support of all the people who came down to the Calder Plaza to enjoy the

Dozynki Festival," PHS President Teresa Bonham said. She added that the festival established by the PHS in 1979 has established a reputation for being a fun, family friendly event that showcases Polish culture, featuring a tent that explains the contributions of famous Polish/Americans, live music and a large dance area, a children's tent, vendors offering Polish food and goods, and the P.R.C.U.A. Malbork Dance Ensemble, a dance group for youth ages 3-18 that teaches traditional Polish folk dances with authentic garb.

Theisen said the success of this year's Dozynki was largely due to the nearly 40 large and small donors. This year's festival enjoyed the support of Pridgeon & Clay, Alliance Beverage Distributing, Bielsko Biala Sister Cities, Tito's Handmade Vodka, the city of Grand Rapids, and others.

Dozynki is the major fundraiser for the PHS, a non-profit organization founded in 1963 to perpetuate Polish culture, including Christmas Wigilia Dinner and Matka Boska Zielna.



(From left) Steve Arsulowicz, daughter Emma and son Lucas show off their trophies after winning the Kielbasa Eating Contest at Diamond Hall last year, the fifth consecutive win for Team Arsulowicz.

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