

2023 Dozynki Festival Planning in Full Gear

By Matthew Gryczan

Since it is the biggest undertaking of the year for the PHS, planning starts early for the annual Dozynki Festival.

So festival organizers are reminding people to mark 7 p.m. March 20 at Polish Falcons Hall on their calendars for the first official meeting of the 2023 Dozynki Festival Committee and be sure to get involved. Dozynki is the major fundraiser for the PHS that pays for its scholarships, donations to organizations such as the Malbork Dance Group and events such as Wigilia dinner.

“There’s work involved in putting on the Dozynki Festival, but it’s a lot of fun as well,” said Festival Co-Chair John Theisen. “If you talk with veteran volunteers of

Dozynki, they say they enjoy the camaraderie of working with others and the socializing that goes on at the festival itself.

“We have a wonderful core group of people who can show you the ropes if you’ve never been involved before.”

As the longest running ethnic festival in Grand Rapids, the Dozynki has about 100 volunteers who work during its three-day run in many different capacities – set up, tear down, selling tokens, tending bar, helping with children’s tent activities or the heritage tent, and contacts with past and potential new sponsors.

This year’s Dozynki Festival will be held at the Calder Plaza in downtown Grand Rapids from Aug. 25-27, the

(Continued on page 2)

Student Scholarship Applicants Sought

By Matthew Gryczan

The PHS board approved in January the distribution of \$7,000 in scholarships for students of Polish/Lithuanian descent who are looking to attend or are currently attending Michigan colleges and universities.

Scholarships are for to students attending Aquinas College, Grand Valley State University, Grand Rapids

Community College, Davenport University as well as other colleges.

The deadline is March 15 for students to apply for scholarships through their high school or college counselors, and the counselors will forward the applications to the Polish Heritage Society. The society will select the recipients and notify the financial aid officers in April of the

(Continued on page 2)



(From left) Andy Budnick wields a paint brush at the children’s tent of the 2021 Dozynki Festival with the help of his daughter Alysia and 2021 Pulaski Queen Katie Egan.

PHS Seeks Candidate for Board

By Matthew Gryczan

A board seat on the Polish Heritage Society will become vacant following the announcement by PHS Recording Secretary Dennis Ziomkowski that he will not seek re-election for his 2-year term ending in May.



Dennis Ziomkowski

Ziomkowski, 65, who has served on the PHS board for 8 years and is a lifetime member, said he feels it is time to give someone else an opportunity to help direct and work for the society as it sponsors activities throughout the year. “I’ve really enjoyed my time on the board, but it’s time for some new blood,” he said. “I’ll still be active in helping at the Dozynki Festival, just not as a board member.”

PHS President Adam Porczynski said the board expressed gratitude for Ziomkowski’s years of service when he announced his decision at the board’s Jan. 16 meeting. “We’re sorry to see Denny leave as he’s been a great addition to the board,” Porczynski said. “He’s been a hands-on board member, which is essential since the PHS is an all-

(Continued on page 2)

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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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Festival Planning

(Continued from page 1)

same location as the 2022 Dozynki Festival that drew an estimated 15,000 visitors.

“We’re committed to remaining free admission,” Theisen said. “Other Polish festivals in the area charge admission, but we want ours to be open to everyone as a fun and family friendly event.” The Dozynki Festival has established a reputation as a showcase of Polish/Lithuanian culture, featuring a tent that explains the contributions of famous Polish/Americans, live music and a large dance area, a children’s tent, and vendors offering Polish cuisine.

Other fun activities during the festival include the paczki eating contest, crowning of the busia queen and a performance by 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.

Last year’s Dozynki reached the same attendance record levels in 2019, before the Covid pandemic caused cancellation of the festival in 2020 and a weakened attendance in 2021.

Last year, more than 1,100 people passed through an extensive exhibit of Polish history curated by former PHS Director Richard Panek that is erected annually by the PHS.

Theisen said the financial success of last year’s festival was largely due to large and small donors alike. Last

year’s festival enjoyed the support of Pridgeon & Clay, Serra Honda; Micron Manufacturing; Center for Oral Surgery & Dental Implants, the City of Grand Rapids; GR Sister Cities, and a number of smaller contributors.

The festival is the major fundraiser for the non-profit Polish Heritage Society of Grand Rapids, which was founded in 1963 to advance Polish culture.

Among other activities such as the Christmas Wigilia dinner and the Matka Boska Zielna and manning a booth at the Grand Rapids Public Museum during its ethnic festival, the society awards scholarships annually to students of Polish descent who attend Aquinas College, Grand Valley State University, Grand Rapids Community College, Davenport University and other Michigan colleges and universities.

Last year the society awarded \$7,000 in college scholarships.

Polish Heritage Society Scholarships

(Continued from page 1)

dollar amount that each recipient has been awarded.

To view the scholarship guidelines and application form, interested individuals should visit the PHS website at <https://polishheritagesociety.com/scholarships>.

In general, scholarships will be awarded based on the following criteria:

- Must be a full-time student

Elections

(Continued from page 1)

volunteer organization.”

Those individuals who are interested in submitting their names for consideration for the vacant seat on the 11-member board must be active members who are current with annual dues or are lifetime members. Individuals can submit their names to the three-member Nominating Committee by writing an email to phsgrandrapids@gmail.com before the close of nominations on April 31.

At its last meeting, the board named directors Michael Jasperse, Michael Kozal and Teresa Bonham as members of the Nominating Committee. The names of individuals running for office will be published in the May issue of the newsletter before the election.

Installation of officers takes place at the June board meeting.

with a minimum 2.75 GPA.

- All recipients must be of Polish/Lithuanian descent and provide a brief statement delineating their heritage.
- Financial need will be taken into consideration.

In addition to their scholarships, the award winners will be named honorary student members of the Polish Heritage Society.

Community News — New Member Welcome



By Marilyn Lignell

Since we often talk about getting more and younger members involved in the Polish/Lithuanian heritage in Grand Rapids, let's give a big Witam to the members of the Grand Valley State University Polish Club!

We've just given the club a complimentary PHS membership so that it can keep up with our doings, and we hope to learn more about their activities.

Club president Laura Kapanowski said they have a fun semester planned, including a paczki sale for Fat Tuesday, pisanki, "another polka night, movie night, bowling and more." They have about 15 regular members but hope to grow that number as the year goes on. Laura said she is excited to see what activities they can become involved in with the Grand Rapids Polish community.

Speaking of involvement, PHS also welcomes new member Bruce Packard.

Bruce's sons Brian and Kevin joined PHS at our Dozynki

Festival, and they are committed to supporting Polish Heritage and keeping the traditions going. When he was 15 years old, Bruce started a polka band with PHS director Dennis Ziomkowski (see page 1 story) and "our parents had to drive us to the hall because we were too young to drive."

They were helped along the way playing at Diamond Hall by local polka great Ray Kaminski and Walt Ulanich, co-founder of Pulaski Days. Bruce, who loves to play the accordion with sons Brian and Kevin, said "we are currently working on bringing the grandkids in to keep the traditions and music going."

Here's a Wielkie Powitanie to new member Nicole Johnson!

"I am very interested in learning more about every-

thing Polish, including the



Nicole Johnson

history of Polish immigrants to Grand Rapids, as well as history of Poland," Nicole said. "I recently discovered that I am a great granddaughter to Polish immigrants who settled in Grand Rapids." Nicole's grandmother's maiden name was Zyzek.

As part of our ongoing outreach, the PHS sent out

three cards of caring this month.

The first went to Mark and Lori Weyers, owners of Quick Printing Co. that prints our newsletter each month. Mark suffered a stroke and is currently recovering at Mary Free Bed. He is scheduled to return home soon to continue therapy and asks for your prayers.

A second card went to the Sotko family to congratulate them on the 100th anniversary of the establishment of Lewandoski's Market, 1107 Walker Ave. NW. The Sotko family said that they are excited to celebrate Polish heritage and family traditions, each and every day.

The third card went to Kayleigh Kramer-Frederick, special events coordinator for the city of Grand Rapids, on the expansion of her family. She and her husband David are expecting their first baby in April. Kayleigh and David both come from Polish families, and she said a onesie with a Polish Falcon on it has already been purchased. Kayleigh is our liaison with Grand Rapids, making sure our Dozynki Polish Festival runs smoothly.



(From left) Brian, Kevin and Bruce Packard

This year's Polish Heritage Night at the Grand Rapids Griffins is Feb. 10, starting at 7 p.m. For more information and link to purchase tickets, go to the PHS Facebook page.

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

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