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The Polish Heritage Society meets at the Polish Falcons at 6:00 pm on the 3rd Monday of every month except for December and general meetings in June and October.

The Polish Heritage Society publishes this newsletter monthly. Submit story ideas and content contributions to Richard Panek or Marilyn Lignell by writing to: phsgrandrapids@gmail.com

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Award Winning Regional Artist to Teach Pysanky Egg Decorating Class

Join Jozefa Rogocki as she teaches the intricate art of pysanky eggs, a traditional folk art practiced in various regions of Poland, Ukraine, and other Slavic countries. The class, organized by the Polish Heritage Society, will take place March 21st at Sixth St Hall in Grand Rapids, Michigan. The class is offered at 2 different times; 11:30 am and 1:30 pm.

During the class, Rogocki will share her process for decorating these colorful eggs by applying a wax-and-dye batik process. She will demonstrate tools and techniques; discuss the history, myths, and traditional symbols engaged by this unique art form; and share a variety of designs that include contemporary interpretations of archetypal symbols.

Jozefa Rogocki is recognized as one of the masters of this artform. She was named an Arts Midwest 2025 Midwest Culture Bearers Award winner. Arts Midwest is one of six nonprofit United States Regional Arts Organizations, that join to strengthen local arts and culture efforts in partnership with the National Endowment for the Arts, state agencies, private funders, and many others. This award recognized her, among a group of Midwestern folk artists and cultural practitioners who keep traditions alive through craft, poetry, dance, vis-



Rogocki often uses naturally derived dyes for her Pysanky Eggs

ual arts, and more. Jozefa was recognized as one of nine extraordinary practitioners who are preserving traditions and passing them on to the next generation.

Jozefa was born in the U.K. of Polish descent and now lives in Michigan. She has been creating Pysanky Eggs for 20 years. A love of nature inspires many of her designs which are influenced by ancient patterns. Fascination with the traditional designs of marbled paper and pysanky eggs is reflect-

ed in her contemporary interpretations.

"I was born in the UK to a Polish father and an English mother" Rogocki said. "As a child I loved the beautiful, decorated eggs on the Easter cards we received from Poland. When I came to the US in 1999, I found a strong Polish community in Hamtramck, Detroit and began to participate in a traditional Polish art that

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Polish Heritage Society Event Schedule

PHS Board Meeting, February 16th, 6:00 pm at Polish Falcons - 957 Fulton St SW, followed by Festival Planning Meeting at 6:30. All PHS members are encouraged to attend. (See article on page 4)

Rozmowa Polish Language Club, February 24th 7:00 pm, Kosciuszko Hall - 935 Park St SW, Grand Rapids

PHS Grant Application Deadline, March 1st. (See article on page 3)

PHS Scholarship Application Deadline, April 15th, (See article on page 4)

(Pysanky Continued from page 1)

represented community and belonging for me: Pysanky, or decorated eggs, a Slavic folk tradition that is thousands of years old."

Wondering how Jozefa sources the eggs? According to her website, she maintains a "produktion team" of three endangered duck breeds. "Vera is a beautiful Welsh Harlequin, Kaczka a stroppy Swedish Blue who protects her friends and Lagertha, is a majestic Cayuga, that shimmers dark green and purple in the sunlight. They produce eggs of varying shades throughout the year and enjoy their creative life in Michigan."

Rogocki says "I have practiced this art for 25 years and am honored to be recognized as an expert by my local Polish community. I learned the more advanced techniques from the Master Pysankarka, Helen Badulak, and have acquired extensive knowledge about the designs



Jozefa Rogocki relaxing in the garden with her ducks.

specific to various regions in Poland and Ukraine.

Rogocki has participated in the Polish Dozynki Festival in Grand Rapids with the Polish Heritage Society, provided education workshops for the Polish Federated Home in Lansing, and conducted workshops at libraries in the Greater Lansing Area. She has also been invited to present her

work at the International Festival of Holland, Michigan. She says "I am passionate about the art of Pysanky and excited to continue reflecting contemporary relevance within this Eastern European folk art."

This hands-on workshop offers a rare chance to learn the art of Pysanky from a master who

brings extraordinary skill, patience, and heart to her teaching.

What to Expect:

-Guided, step-by-step Pysanky lesson using traditional tools and methods (All materials provided)

-Welcoming, intimate environment—each session is limited to 12 participants

-Completed, hand-painted decorated Pysanka to take home

Workshop Sessions: Choose the session that best fits your day.

-Morning Session: 11:00 AM – 2:00 PM

-Afternoon Session: 3:30 PM – 6:30 PM

Cost: \$20 per person, per session

Ages 15 and above only

Scan the QR code below to register for one of the classes:



Former PHS Board Member Recognized by Polish Army Veterans of America in Chicago Meeting



PAVA representative Darek Olszewski congratulates Matt Gryczan on receiving the Paderewski Medal.

A Chicago Polish war veterans' organization in Chicago presented the prestigious Ignacy Paderewski medal of honor to a local man for the research and restoration of the Soldiers' Monument at Holy Cross Cemetery in Grand Rapids.

Post 90 of the Polish Army Veterans' Assn. of America (PAVA) honored Matthew Gryczan with the medal at Holy Trinity Church in Chicago on Jan. 11 during a celebration of the post's Centenary Jubilee. The celebration featured a Mass dedicated to Post 90, a parade of participants dressed in authentic Polish garb from various eras, and a luncheon for more than 200 people.

Gryczan, 72, a native of Grand Rapids, said he was accepting the medal on behalf of the 70 local men who fought in the Blue Army during World War I for the

independence of Poland, the local Polonia who sacrificed to erect the monument dedicated in 1929, and all those who worked to restore the 14-foot-long granite monument.

Pawel Zyzak, the past Consul General of the Republic of Poland in Chicago, laid a wreath of fresh flowers and gave a speech at the Soldiers' Monument during a two-day visit to Grand Rapids to learn more about the city's Polish heritage in 2023. Gryczan spearheaded the efforts of the Polish Heritage Society to discover all the names of the men who served, and the history of the monument.

In addition to maintenance, the PHS annually raises Polish flags at the two flagpoles that flank the monument and plants red and white gladiolus in urns that replicate the original design of 1929.

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The monument is prominently located at the northern boundary of the cemetery in Section D-New.

The Soldiers' Monument was originally dedicated to the more than 70 local men who fought and died for the independence of Poland during WWI. They weren't U.S. soldiers: they fought under the Polish flag with the blessing of the U.S. government. The federal government allowed all Poles who were not U.S. citizens and not subject to the draft to enlist in the new Polish army in France, nicknamed The Blue Army.

Hundreds of Polish Americans in Grand Rapids sacrificed to build the monument during the Great Depression. Schoolchildren gave their candy money, societies held fundraisers, and priests at the city's three predominantly Polish parishes encouraged parishioners



The Blue Army Monument at Holy Cross Cemetery in Grand Rapids, Michigan restored by the Polish Heritage Society

to give during special collections.

The committee began the collections in 1927 at a time when communities around the country were building monuments to U.S. soldiers who fought and died in what was then known as The Great War. What we now call

WWI ended in 1918, and citizens wanted to recognize the soldiers' sacrifices before their names faded from memory.

Many who fought in the Blue Army returned destitute and often disabled, and the United States, France and Poland did

not grant veteran status for their service. In response, the veterans and their families in America formed posts of the Stowarzyszenie Veteranów Armii Polskiej w Ameryce (known today under its English name PAVA) to be a mutual aid society for the veterans.

Veterans in Grand Rapids formed PAVA Post 97 which was formally accepted into the national organization in 1927. After years of declining membership, Post 97 sold the property and discontinued as an organization in 1981.

As it celebrates its 100-year anniversary, Post 90 remains as the last PAVA post in Chicago. Like others throughout the country, Post 90 has had to deal with declining membership. But the post said it continues to serve as a bridge between the Polish government and veterans of the largest Polish community outside of that country.

PHS Invites Applications for Grants to Further the Mission of the Polish Heritage Society

By Matt Gryczan

Organizations or causes that further the mission of the PHS and need financial assistance should submit applications to the society's Grant Committee for consideration by March 1.

For more information on the PHS grant criteria and the form to submit a request, please refer to the society's website at <https://polishheritagesociety.com> and click on the Community tab in the main menu.

The society supports organizations and causes that carry on the traditions introduced by Polish immigrants to Grand Rapids, preserve the history of contributions made by local Polish-Americans, promote Polish culture and cultivate ties between Grand Rapids and Poland.

Grants are awarded annually to organizations and causes based

on need and how the donations will be used to further the aims of the society.

Grantees are required to fill out the PHS Grant Request Form to outline their requests for funding. The form is available on the PHS website, or a hard copy of the form can be obtained by sending a request to the Society's email address: phsgrandrapids@gmail.com.

After they fill out the form, applicants can send it to the society's email address or mail it to the society's address at PO Box 1844, Grand Rapids MI 49501-1844.

To be eligible, all grant requests must be submitted in writing by March 1 to be considered for 2025.

The PHS Grant Committee will consider all eligible requests in the month of March and render its recommendations to the PHS board by its April meeting. The

PHS Grant Committee consists of the PHS Treasurer, a PHS board member and three PHS members taken from the general membership rolls who have agreed to serve on the committee.

The PHS board will consider the recommendations at its April meeting and vote to:

- fund the request in its entirety;
- modify the amount funded or scope of work;
- or decline to support the request.

All organizations or individuals who make eligible grant requests will be notified of the outcome by April 30 either by phone or in writing.

Organizations and projects that have received PHS grants are as varied as the Polish National Aid Society in particular, Pulaski

Days Halls in general, restoration of the Soldiers Monument as well as the Stanley Ketchel monument at Holy Cross Cemetery, Polish cooking classes at the Sons & Daughters Hall, St. Michael's Ukrainian Church for its war effort, and a local chapter of the YWCA.

Polish Hall Corner

The editor of the Echo Newsletter would like to raise awareness of the Polish-Lithuanian halls among the PHS Membership. We are hoping to include a regular feature highlighting a hall including a focus on history, origins as aid societies or social clubs as well as current activities.

If you have any good stories about your favorite hall, memorable events or historical background that you would like to share with our readers, please contact us at the following email address:

phsgrandrapids@gmail.com

PHS College/Trade School Academic Scholarship Applications Due By April 15

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 heritage.

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

Over the past 20 years, the society has awarded more than \$60,000 in scholarships from money raised at its Annual Polish Dozynki Festival held in late August.

Commenting on previous scholarship winners, PHS President Teresa Bonham said, "We are always impressed with the cali-

ber of the applicants. Polish culture reveres learning and education, and we are furthering that tradition through our scholarship program. We want more Polish American students to apply for these awards."

In addition to scholarships, the students selected are named honorary student members of the Polish Heritage Society for one year, and they receive special recognition at the Dozynki Festival.

Students of Polish descent who plan to attend or are enrolled in just about any post high school education are eligible to apply.

Last year, the PHS published 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; deserving of a scholarship.

- reside in Allegan, Barry, Ionia, Kent, Montcalm, Muskegon or Ottawa county; and,

- 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

Applicants can provide additional 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 in August for special recognition.

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

Calling All Members: Help Shape Our 2026 Dozynki Harvest Festival

The long, snowy freezing spell we had may be testing your patience but don't forget that summer will eventually be here. Why not warm yourself up by thinking Summer and looking forward to one of the most cherished celebrations in West Michigan Polish culture: The PHS Dozynki Festival?

This August, the Polish Heritage Society will once again bring our community together to honor tradition, share food and music, and celebrate the spirit of gratitude that defines this Annual Polish event. But to make this year's festival worthy of our heritage—and reflective of the vibrant Polish American community here in Grand Rapids—we need your leadership, creativity, and hands-on support.

The February festival committee

meeting will be held at 6:30 pm on Monday February 16th at the Polish Falcons Hall, 957 West Fulton Street SW, Grand Rapids.

Every Polish Heritage Society member is encouraged to attend. This gathering (which starts immediately after the PHS Board Meeting), is more than a logistical check-in; it is the moment when ideas take shape, partnerships form, and the foundation for a successful festival is built.

Whether you have years of experience or are looking for a meaningful way to get involved, your presence matters.

We are especially seeking volunteers with skills or interest in the following key areas:

- Sponsorship development and partner relations including VIP activities

- Marketing and publicity management, as well as media appearances (TV, Radio, Social Media)

- Volunteer recruitment

- Coordination and management of activity tents

These roles are essential to ensuring that Dozynki remains both financially sustainable and

culturally rich. If you've ever wanted to help elevate our Society's visibility, strengthen community ties, or support local artisans and performers, this is your moment.

Join us on February 16 and help shape a festival that honors our past while building our future. Your voice—and your talent—will make all the difference.



Polish Heritage Society Membership News and Events

By Marilyn Lignell

Hello members and welcome to February. On behalf of the Polish Heritage Society, I want to thank everyone that has already renewed their memberships for 2026. Memberships are due February 28 and can be renewed through our website www.polishheritagesociety.com or by using the form on the back of this newsletter. New membership cards will be mailed out in your newsletter so be sure to look for it. Also, we occasionally send out emails to PHS members. If you are not receiving these and would like to, please email us at phsgrandrapids@gmail.com so we can get you set up.

We welcome a new lifetime member Rob Kirkbride. "I joined the PHS during the Polish Festival downtown, which I attended with my wife, son, daughter-in-law and granddaughter. My grandmother, Lorraine Novakoski, was active in the society in the late 1970s and early 1980s. My grandfather, Eugene Novakoski, was a longtime member of Diamond Ave. Hall." Rob remembers going to early Pulaski Day celebrations at Diamond Hall.

"I've always been interested in my Polish heritage. I grew up on the Northeast side, but went to West Catholic (I live on the West Side now). I attended Michigan State



Rob Kirkbride shows his West Side allegiance surrounded by friends and family at a Diamond Hall event.

University and I am a magazine editor and former reporter at the Grand Rapids Press."

Rob really got interested in his Polish heritage after his youngest daughter wrote a paper about the history of the Polish on the West Side and the part his family played in it (his great grandfather was one of the founding families at Sacred Heart). "I have visited Warsaw twice, including once with my daughter. And I don't want to brag, but I make the best pierogi in town."

Investing in a lifetime membership is Rob's way of supporting a group that has been part of his family for quite a long time.

Also joining as a lifetime member is 2022 PHS Busia Queen Nancy Borek. When I asked Nancy why she decided to change her member-

ship to lifetime she plain and simply responded, "Because I always forget to pay." She also added that she wants to support PHS any way she can.

The PHS also offers our condolences to Nancy Borek and her family on the death of Nancy's sister Jamie Ann Zimmerman who died on December 22, 2025. Family was most important to Jamie and she loved her parents, siblings, children, niec-

es, nephews, cousins, and she adored her grandchildren. Our thoughts and prayers are with Nancy and her family.



Nancy Borek at the 2022 Pulaski Days Parade

Congratulations to past president Adam Porcynski and his wife Stacy on the birth of their baby boy Bodie Griffin Porcynski, weighing 8 lbs. 1 oz. Bodie is also the little brother to Evelyn, Noah and Tucker.



Bodie Griffin Porcynski



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

Scan the QR code with your phone camera to become a member:



OR BY 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 _____