

Calling Busia Queen Contestants for 2026 Dozynki Festival!

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Tad Broda

Recording Secretary
Susan Ulanowicz

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Rosemary Maciejewski
Angela Walejewski
Sarah Sharpe
Marzanna Butryn
Anthony Zasuwa

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

**Polish Heritage Society of
Grand Rapids**
PO Box 1844
Grand Rapids MI
49501-1844

www.polishheritagesociety.com

The Polish Heritage Society is now accepting applications from candidates for the sought-after position of Busia Queen, an honor bestowed on one lucky Polish Grandmother at the annual Polish Dozynki Harvest festival in August. The PHS instituted the Busia Queen competition loosely based on an early tradition at the Dozynki festivals in rural Poland where the best woman harvester was named queen of the harvest. Traditionally, the lord of the manor would present ceremonial gifts such as a wreath of grain to the queen, and the community would celebrate the harvest with feasts, music and dancing.

The lucky lady to be elected the PHS Busia Queen will be crowned at the festival and presented with a ceremonial sash, which she will wear to represent the PHS at the Pulaski Days parade, the Wigilia dinner, Polish Heritage Night at the Griffins, Matka Boska Zielna service and one non-PHS sanctioned event of the winner's choosing. Two benefits of being named Busia Queen include a \$250 donation made on the winner's behalf to the charity of her choice and a free annual membership to the society.

Current Queen Laurie Lesiewicz says her experience as queen has been "Amazing, you get to meet so many great people."

Those seeking to become Busia Queen must meet two basic requirements by having at least one grandchild by the second Sunday of August and that she must be present at the festival election on August 30th to be eligible for the honor.

Festival goers cast ballots to name the new Busia Queen on the last day of the three-day Dozynki Polish Harvest Festival that is being held this year at the Calder Plaza in downtown Grand Rapids. Contestants are encouraged to invite family and friends to vote on their behalf. In past Busia contests, candidates and

their supporters have even worked the festival crowd to generate votes among those in attendance.

To become a candidate in the election, complete and return the application that is found on page 2 of this newsletter. The completed application can be mailed to the Polish Heritage Society of Grand Rapids, P.O. Box 1844, Grand Rapids MI 49501-1844 or scanned and emailed to phsgrandrapids@gmail.com. All entries must be received before midnight Aug. 18.



Past Busia Queens Judi Serba and Lucy Maciejewski Preston with current Queen Laurie Lesiewicz (L to R)

Polish Heritage Society May Event Schedule

PHS Pierogis & Pottery Class, May 9th, 12:00 pm, Pottery Lane GR, See page 7 of this newsletter for info.

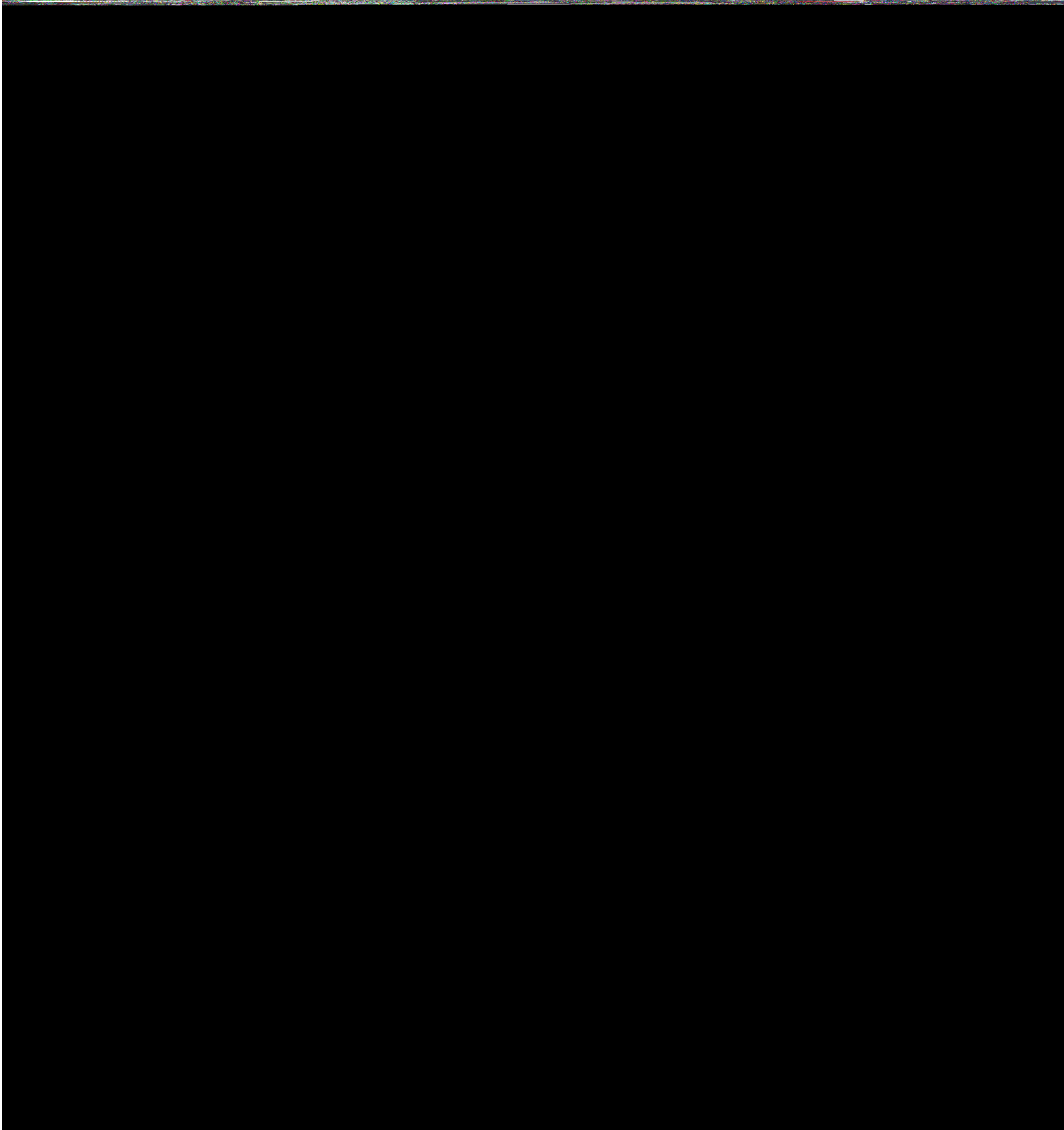
PHS Board Meeting and Election, Monday, May 18th, 6:00 pm at Polish Falcons - 957 Fulton St SW, Bar will be open. *PHS members are encouraged to attend.* See story on page 3.

Rozmowa Polish Language Club, May 26th 7:00 pm, Kosciuszko Hall - 935 Park St SW, Grand Rapids.

See PHS website and Facebook page for more details and other events.

**Polish Heritage Society of Grand Rapids Announces our:
2026 Busia/Babcia Queen Contest**

(Application may be made on this form and emailed or printed and mailed USPS)



Serba Running in Upcoming Board Election

The Polish Heritage Society will be holding the annual board election at its May meeting. All active members of the society are eligible to cast votes at the May 18 election to be held at the Polish Falcons Hall, 957 Fulton St SW. To be considered active, an individual needs to be a life member or have annual dues current. Those who wish to vote should bring their membership cards that they received in the April newsletter to document active status. The board will convene its regular public meeting on that day at 6 p.m. and then the doors will be locked promptly at 6:30 p.m. to conduct the election. No one will be admitted after 6:30 p.m. while the election is conducted.

Four board seats are up for election due to expiration of terms. The following individuals are running unopposed: Eric Tetsworth for 2nd Vice President and Tad Broda for Recording Secretary. The remaining seats running are two incumbent directors, Angela Walejewski and Anthony Zasuwa. The Nominating Committee received and approved the Nomination of Judi Serba as a candidate to run for director.

Serba aims to become a PHS director to learn more about the workings of the board and organization. Her vision for the PHS is to increase educational program-

ming that focuses on Polish heritage especially genealogy. Judi previously served the PHS as Busia queen in 2019-2020 but her reign was extended to 2 years due to the COVID epidemic. Recently, she organized the hospitality reception at the 2025 PHS Piano Recital and is currently involved with the Busia Queen contest for the upcoming Polish Dozynki Harvest Festival.

Outside of the PHS, Serba's board and committee experience includes President of the Saint Thomas Education Foundation, Committee member for multiple Catholic Central High School All Night Parties for graduating students and participation in the Catholic Central High School Student Parent group

Judi was born in Grand Rapids, and her grandparents were Polish immigrants. Her Grandfather immigrated from Warsaw and her grandmother was from Augustow, Poland. She has traveled to Poland twice and would love to go again. One of her passions is being with her grandchildren. She especially loves attending all their sporting events. Judi is passing on to them her Polish culinary heritage in the form of homemade Kapusta and Pierogi. Her newest project is mastering the baking of obozonki (Polish bagels) along with crafting for home decorating and gifts.



Judi Serba (3rd from left) with other Busia and Pulaski Day Queens in Malbork, Poland

Call for Polish Festival 2026 Volunteers and Sponsors

Work is now underway planning the Polish Dozynki Harvest Festival taking place on the weekend of August 28th thru the 30th, 2026 at Calder Plaza. The festival is our main fundraising activity and our volunteers and sponsors make it happen.

The PHS is always looking for volunteers and here are some of the many ways to get involved to make this one of Grand Rapids most successful Ethnic festivals:

-help with set-up and take down. If you like the immediate gratification of using your energy and ingenuity to make a festival venue change before your eyes, this is for you. Many hands will make for light work. (Set up starts on Thursday evening, August 27th and take down is at 4:00 pm on August 30th.)

-if you have a unique talent, skill or expertise that exemplifies Polish Culture, you could give a presentation in the Demonstra-

On the day of the election, ballots will be distributed at the meeting with the offices and candidates listed. Voters will be asked to cast no more than one vote for each board seat up for election. If a person casts two votes for any position, his or her ballot will be disqualified. The Nominating

Committee will tabulate the votes, and winners will be declared by simple majority. The ballots will then be destroyed.

The installation of officers and directors will take place at the Summer general membership meeting to be held in June.

Popular topics include Polish cooking as well as folk art and crafts. Email phsgrandrapids@gmail.com if you wish to be a presenter for more information.

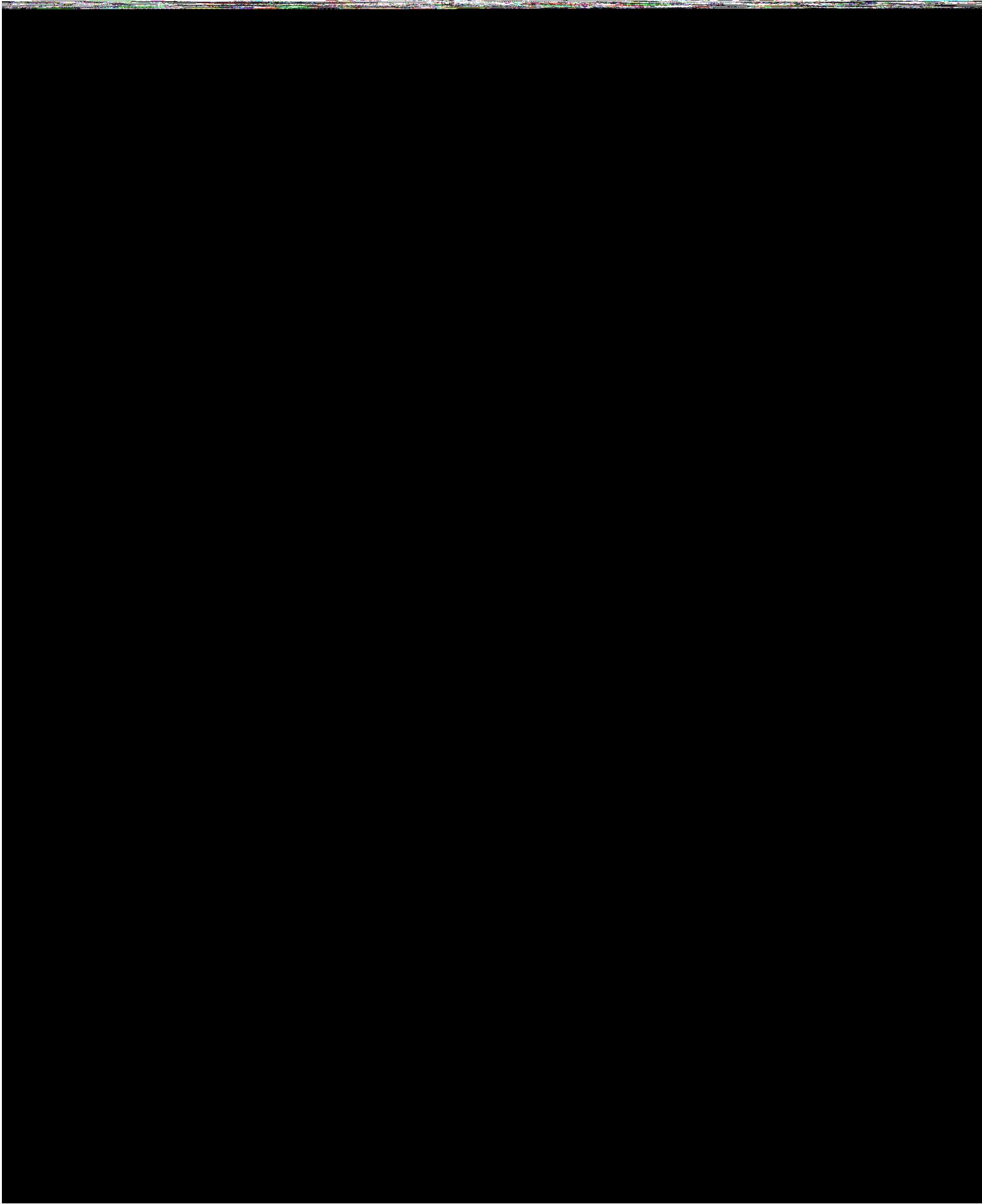
-work the token booth cheerfully greeting people and selling tokens and Tee-shirts. This is a fun job, and you get to meet lots of happy people. (People come to festivals to have Fun!) Like making people even happier than when they buy their tokens? Work at the bar! (Must be 21)

Committee will tabulate the votes, and winners will be declared by simple majority. The ballots will then be destroyed.

The installation of officers and directors will take place at the Summer general membership meeting to be held in June.

Finally, you could be a Festival Sponsor or ask a business owner you know to consider sponsorship of the event. All volunteer workers as well as sponsors get some tokens for festival food or drink.

Sponsorship opportunities available for members and friends of the Polish Heritage Society range from Keg, Band or Tent Sponsorships all the way to Presenting Sponsorship. See pages 4 and 5 of this newsletter for all the details.



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POLISH FESTIVAL SPONSORSHIP OPPORTUNITIES & BENEFITS
PRESENTING SPONSOR \$5,000

1530 AM

- Highly visible branding with banners at key traffic locations.
- Sponsor recognition in radio advertisements during the Polka Radio Hours on 94.9 FM, 99.5 FM, and
- Fifty (50) Polish Festival Tokens to be used for authentic Polish cuisine or beverages.
- Four (4) Parking Passes.
- Sponsor name in social media, and PHS's website for one year (with direct link).

CULTURAL TENT or BEER TENT SPONSOR \$2,500

- Highly visible branding at either the Polish Heritage Society Cultural Exhibition or the BeerTent.
- Fifty (50) Polish Festival Tokens to be used for authentic Polish cuisine or beverages.
- Two (2) Parking Passes.
- Company/Organization name on PHS's website for one year (with direct link).

POLISH ROYALTY VIP TENT SPONSOR \$2,500

- Private tent positioned in a prime location within Calder Plaza. Banner can be displayed on the tent.
- Seating for 20 – room for your corporate clients, loving family, or close friends!
- Fifty (50) Polish Festival Tokens to be used for authentic Polish cuisine or beverages.
- Company/Organization name on PHS's website for one year (with direct link).

ENTRANCE SPONSOR (Three Available) \$1,000

- A highly visible signage recognition is available at one of the three entrances to the Polish Festival.
- Twenty-five (25) Polish Festival Tokens to be used for authentic Polish cuisine or beverages.
- Company/Organization name on PHS's website for one year (with direct link).

Sun

POLKA BAND SPONSOR (Three Available) \$1,000 Fri or Sat, \$500

- Available on a first come, first serve basis; sponsor the Polka Band on Friday, Saturday or Sunday.
- Twenty-five (25) Polish Festival Tokens to be used for authentic Polish cuisine or beverages.
- Company/Organization name on PHS's website for one year (with direct link).

CULTURAL ACTIVITY SPONSOR (Four Available) \$500

- Sponsor either the Char Czarnecki Children's Tent, Busia Pageant, Paczki Eating Contest, or Demonstration Tent.
- Ten (10) Polish Festival Tokens to be used for authentic Polish cuisine or beverages.
- Company/Organization name on PHS's website for one year (with direct link).

KEG SPONSOR \$100

beer tent –one of

- Promote your organization by sponsoring a keg! Includes a printed sponsorship board listing at the most popular stops for visitors of the Polish Festival!
- Company/Organization name on PHS's website for one year (with direct link).

BANNER SPONSOR \$100

ants during the

- Promote your organization by placing a banner on the Festival fencing – visible to all festival participants during the 3-day festival.
- Company/Organization name on PHS's website for one year (with direct link).

Geneological Research Shows Importance of Saint Adalbert Church to Grand Rapids' Early Polish Immigrants

By Paulette Longwell

St. Adalbert Church was significant in the life of my grandfather, Anthony Racziewicz, as well as that of many other Poles who immigrated to Grand Rapids, Michigan. When he arrived in the 1910s, St. Adalbert Parish had finished their current church which also happened to be immortalized by a famous artist. My grandfather began his immigrant life in Grand Rapids and celebrated a marriage and a birth, followed by two tragic deaths in the span of six years short years.

Many Grand Rapids Polish Americans can trace their roots to immigrants like my grandfather. Primary sources for genealogical research into ancestry are civil, church and community records. Church records contain baptismal, marriage as well as burial registers which, over the centuries, have often predate civil registration and are highly reliable. They also may include Parish membership lists, confirmations, and communicant rolls, which are excellent for tracking families over time. Many large old established Parishes also publish history books for special events.

Good sources for St. Adalbert's history are two Jubilee books. (Michigan Polonia website Jubilee Books | Michigan Polonia) The first one was written in Polish and covered the time period from 1881 to 1931, and I read it using the Google Translate app. The second one was written by Phillip Jung in English and covered the time period from 1881 to 1981.

The history of St. Adalbert Church sheds light on what it was like when my grandfather arrived in Grand Rapids. Initially, there were limited Catholic church options. Those who immigrated from the Prussian partition of Poland attended St. Mary's, a German Catholic church, because

of their ability to speak German. The Society of St. Adalbert was established in 1872 to raise funds for a Polish church. Construction began in 1881 and the church was consecrated by 1883.

Finding a Polish priest proved to be a challenge and after a few false starts, Father Ponganis led the parish for 18 years. Many Polish societies within the Church were established during this period. Father Kazimierz Skory replaced him in 1904, before the parish's 25th anniversary in 1906. Together, the Polish parishes purchased 80 acres on Walker Avenue for the Polish Catholic Cemetery in 1909 (later named Holy Cross Cemetery.)

In 1912, my grandfather arrived from the Russian partition of Poland. He was drawn to Grand Rapids for the job opportunities and the strong network of spiritual and physical support developed by the previous Polish immigrants. As a thriving church community, St. Adalbert had 331 baptisms, 78 marriages, and 72 interments that year.

The following year in 1913, the original wooden church of St. Adalbert was replaced by a new stone building in the Romanesque style. In 1916, Anthony married his first wife Klementyna Gołębiewska, at Sacred Heart Church.

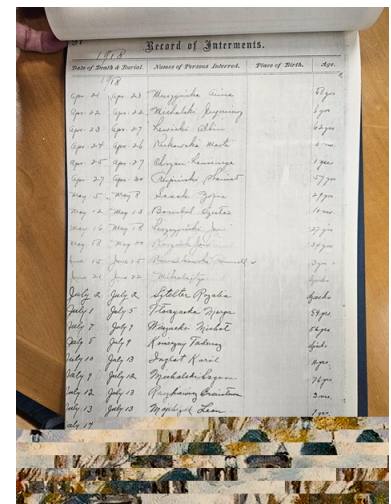
In 1918, Anthony's wife Klementyna and their child Bronisława died. The family was visiting in Bay City when Bronisława was born on April 1. They returned to Grand Rapids and Klementyna died a few days later of complications of childbirth on April 4, 1918.

I have found that another good source for information related to the Polish American community, is the Eduard Adam Skenzel Collection, found in the History Center of the Grand Rapids Public Library. Skenzel was a linguist

and a historian with a doctoral degree from Wayne State University. He collected items and wrote extensively about the Catholic church and the history of Poles in Grand Rapids, Michigan. He also published a history of Saint Isidore Parish which is in their Parish library.

In the Grand Rapids Public Library History Center collection, I found a funeral register (1883 - 1919) for St. Adalbert Church. This record contained information about Anthony's wife and daughter. Nothing was found for Klementyna, but it is possible her funeral was at Sacred Heart, where they married. Bronisława's funeral was recorded in the St. Adalbert register and indicated that she died on July 12 and that her funeral was on July 13. Bronisława's funeral was one of 102 funerals at St. Adalbert that year with eleven of the funerals in the same month as hers. Seven of the eleven deaths were of stillborns or children. She was also buried in the Polish Catholic Cemetery but Bronisława's gravestone has disappeared.

In 1919, the German born painter Mathias Alten created a 10 x 18 oil painting of the six year old building of the 38-year-old parish. While Alten was an immigrant who traveled and painted extensively, Grand Rapids was



Saint Adalbert Internment Record from the year 1918

his home base and he owned a home on East Fulton Street. During World War I, he spent more time painting locally, including the painting of the church. It was first owned privately, then donated by Elizabeth Grant to the Women's City Club and finally the Sweet House Foundation. Her sister Susan is one of the children pictured in the painting.

My grandfather arrived in the U.S. during the 1910s with hopes and dreams related to the opportunities with the growth in industry. He found work, married and had a child, but dealing with two funerals after only six years in a new country must have been difficult for him. Hopefully, the support of the Polish Polonia with its Polish speaking priest, newly built church and cemetery provided comfort during a challenging time in his life.

If you are interested, the Western Michigan Genealogical Society has started a Polish Interest Group (free to everyone). They will be having monthly meetings at the downtown Grand Rapids Public Library. They will be held on the 3rd Saturday of every month in the VanderVeen Room on the 4th floor from noon – 2PM.

More information about the society is available at www.wmgs.org.

St. Adalbert Church by Alten

Polish Heritage Society Membership News and Events

By Marilyn Lignell

The Polish Heritage Society is happy to welcome Mark Lackowski and Cynthia Lackowski, both joining as life members.

We would also like to welcome Barbara Uradzionek Cumings. The main thing Barbara wants everyone to know about her is that she is proud to be Polish! Her parents were both born in Poland and she is 100% Polish heritage. Her father was born in Wilno, which is now in Lithuania as a result of the Russian's dissection of Poland. Her mom was born in Galicia, Poland. Barbara's parents both came to the USA through Ellis Island at different times. They met here and settled in Detroit. Barbara moved to Grand Rapids after she was married and had three children who have now added 4 grandchildren to their family.



John Theisen, Bob Wojcik and Rob Smith at Festival

smoothly. Rob was with Alliance Beverage for 40 years as of November 2025. He plans on helping his wife Janice who owns Piekny Polish Pottery at summer festivals and markets this summer, catching up on neglected projects around the house and fishing with his grandson and granddaughters.

After over 45 years our Citizen of the Year Bob Wojcik is hanging up his whistle from officiating high school football and high school and college basketball. Throughout his career, Bob had been considered one of the most respected officials in the state among coaches, athletic directors, and his peers. He will still continue to be involved in the mentoring of new officials, just not wearing the stripes.

Thank you Bob for your years of commitment to all the athletes across the state. Your dedication and leadership has definitely inspired incoming young men and women whose love of sports will become role models just like you. Enjoy the sidelines Wojjo !!

The 89th Kosciuszko Foundation Annual Dinner and Ball held on April 25, in New York City, celebrated 250 years of Polish-American friendship and honored Polish American community leaders. Among those recognized were PHS members Jamie and

Stephen Kusmierczak, who were the recipients of the 2026 Kosciuszko Foundation Medal of Recognition.

Stephen serves as a Trustee for the Kosciuszko foundation, which is dedicated to promoting educational and cultural exchanges between the United States and Poland and to increasing American understanding of Polish culture and history.

The Kosciuszko Foundation is a membership organization, which is supported by contributions from foundations, corporations, and individuals who share the Foundation's mission of fostering the relations and understanding between the United States and Poland.

The Foundation Medal award recognized the Kusmierczak's distinguished philanthropic leadership, devoted service, and generous contributions to the Kosciuszko Foundation, as well as their enduring support of Polish culture, heritage, and Polish-American friendship.



The Kusmierczak Family receiving the Kosciuszko Medal

The Kusmierczak's involvement with the Kosciuszko Foundation in New York as well as the Polish Museum of America in Chicago has been instrumental in the vi-

ality of those organizations.

Locally, Stephen and Jamie have also been generous sponsors of the Dozynki Polish Harvest Festival as well as our PHS cultural fine arts programming. Congratulations Stephen and Jamie.

Finally, don't miss your opportunity to register for the May 9 PHS **Pierogis & Pottery** event for a creative afternoon at Pottery Lane GR, painting your own Polish-inspired serving platter. Each ticket includes one round or oval platter of your choice, ready to be transformed by your imagination and then professionally fired by the studio.

Step into a warm afternoon of art, heritage, and togetherness; where Polish tradition meets personal expression. Folk art stencils, professional firing, and plenty of pierogis will make this a joyful way to gather just in time for Mother's Day.

Each ticket includes:

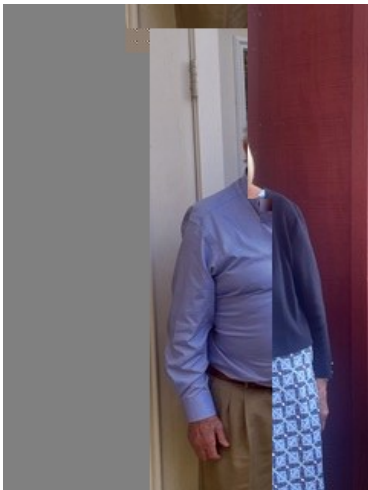
- Painting your own Polish-inspired serving platter
- Folk art stencils available for traditional patterns or modern flair
- Pierogi and refreshments provided
- A relaxed, creative atmosphere
- Professional firing by Pottery Lane (pick-up 1-2 weeks after event)

Date: Saturday, May 9, 2026 at 12:00 PM

Location: Pottery Lane GR, 2663 Elmridge Dr NW, Grand Rapids, MI 49534

Cost: \$60 per person | Ages 12+

Scan this QR code to reserve your spot and purchase tickets:



Barbara and Gary Cumings

Barbara said she has made sure to bring her Polish heritage into her children and grandchildren's lives. Mmmm...maybe a future Busia Queen contestant.

Joining the wonderful world of retirement is life member Rob Smith. Many of you probably know him as the Alliance Beverage Company bar master during Dozynki Festival. He is there all weekend making sure things run



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 _____