

Polka Pops Carries on 75 Year Tradition of Polka on the Airwaves



Rocky Rothenthaler tunes into Polka Pops at 94.9 FM every Saturday

By Matthew Gryczan

It's just before noon on Saturday, and Rocky Rothenthaler pushes the power button on his stereo in the basement and cranks up the sound level high enough to be heard throughout his condo.

For the next four hours, his home will be filled with the bouncing melodies of polkas and three-quarter beat ober-eks broadcast during the Polka Pops and Polka Overtime radio shows on Jethro WYGR (94.9 FM and 1530 AM) on Saturday and Sunday, noon to 4 p.m.

"What can I say," said Rothenthaler, who has been listening to polka music on local radio stations for decades. "It's happy music, and you can't help but to tap your toes. I'm a polka dancer from way back, and sometimes I even dance in

place at home."

Rothenthaler's weekend ritual is practiced by many throughout the West side of Grand Rapids and West Michigan. For more than 75 years, radio listeners here have been able to pick up at least one local radio station that regularly plays the music so closely associated with Polish Americans. Polka Pops also has expanded to the Kalamazoo-Plainwell-Otsego area through station WAKV.

Tune into the station during Polka Pops and you'll be treated to renditions of everything from the familiar Blue Skirt Waltz and Clarinet Polka to the hilarious Stella at the Wheel. The program also streams on-line at www.polkapops.com — Rothenthaler used to listen on his laptop while vacationing in Florida.

"From a business standpoint, we've targeted listeners and businesses on the Northwest side, such as Standale and Walker, because that's where the bulk of the Polish population originally lived or where they migrated to," said Scott Pastoor, majority partner in WYGR who occasionally hosts Polka Pops under the radio name of Scott Richards. The station now reaches Kalamazoo and Lowell.

"While the typical listener tends to be older, you'd be surprised at how many listeners are younger because it

tends to be a family or generational thing," Pastoor said. "There is a fair amount of people of Polish descent who were brought up to love this kind of music by their parents or grandparents. We get a number of call-in requests from people in their 20s and 30s."

As even the most die-hard listener will attest, it would be too much of a good thing to listen to polkas every day for hours. But everyone agrees that there should always be a place on the radio dial for at least one polka show on a weekly basis.

The some 220 polka shows broadcast in the United States are concentrated throughout the Great Lakes and Mid-Atlantic regions and oddly enough, Texas, according to the Polka Jammer Network, a non-profit organization based in South Deerfield, Mass.

The shows generally broadcast by independent or community radio stations have been declining steadily over the years. A survey conducted in 1989 counted 354 stations that played polka music in 32 states, author Victor Greene

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Board Elections Coming Up May 19

The Polish Heritage Society will conduct its annual election on Monday, May 19 at the Polish Falcons hall to fill three officer seats and three director seats.

Doors to the hall at 957 Fulton St W open to PHS members at 5:30 p.m., the board meeting will take place from 6 to 6:30 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.

Lifetime members and members who have paid their annual dues are eligible to vote.

The election will be held for the offices of President, 1st Vice President, Recording Secretary, and three director

seats. All of the offices are for two-year terms expiring in May 2027.

President Teresa Bonham and 1st Vice President John Theisen are running unopposed, and there are no candidates running for the Recording Secretary seat that is being vacated by Matthew Gryczan. The Recording Secretary position will be filled by appointment at a later date.

Directors Sarah Sharpe, Director Rosemary Maciejewski, Marzanna Butryn, Thaddeus Szyzslowski, and Anthony Zasuwa are running for the three open seats.

The PHS board also has an open Director seat expiring 2026 that will be filled by appointment at a later date.

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

<https://polishheritagesociety.com>

Email us at phsgrandrapids@gmail.com.

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 Richard Panek or Marilyn Lignell by writing to phsgrandrapids@gmail.com.

President
Teresa Bonham

1st VP
John Theisen

2nd VP
Eric Tetsworth

Treasurer
Michael Jasperse

Corresponding Secretary
OPEN

Recording Secretary
Matthew Gryczan

Director
Rosemary Maciejewski

Director
Angela Walejewski-Zasuwa

Director
Thaddeus Broda

Director
OPEN

Director
OPEN

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stated in his book on polka music.

Grand Rapids tracks similar Midwest cities through the rise of polka radio shows after World War II, the heyday of the genre in the 1950s and 60s, then its decline after the wide acceptance of other music. A late comer to the game, the National Academy of Recording Arts & Sciences gave out Grammy awards for Best Polka Album from 1985 to 2008, when the academy retired the polka category because en-

tries were few and consistently won by Jimmy Sturr.

The earliest newspaper listings of a polka radio show in Grand Rapids appeared in 1948 – the Polka Time program on WGRD hosted by the godfather of local polka, Bob “Jasiu” Whitcomb. Whitcomb’s daughter Robin Choals said in an interview that after Whitcomb played the first polka song “his phone started ringing off the hook with people wanting more.” The show started as one 15-minute show daily, then reached a point in the 1950s

when it ran twice daily.

Due largely to Whitcomb’s gregarious personality, Polka Time was a huge success that spurred imitators: Let’s Polka on WFRS and Polka Echoes on WFUR, both launched in 1949.

Next Month’s Echo Newsletter will recount how the new media of local television broadcasting in Grand Rapids embraced Polka Music and how the Polka Pops program came about. As they say in broadcasting, stay tuned!

Polish Cooking Classes Gaining Popularity

Saturday, April 12, 24 hungry cooking students converged on the Son’s and Daughter’s Polish/Lithuanian Hall to attend Marzanna Butryn’s Cooking Class. The menu consisted of pulpety (meatballs) with mushroom sauce, beet salad, kluski (noodles), and a cabbage salad with peas and cucumbers.

The 2 hour hands-on demonstration class had participants shredding cabbage, slicing beets, mixing ground meats, hand cutting egg noodles as well as cooking down a luscious mushroom sauce.



Marzanna Butryn adding a little love (olive oil) to the meatballs



Wade Hillen entertains



Hands-on teaching

To compliment the international flavor of the cooking, Wade Hillen, whose sons dance in the Malbork Polish dance group, played some accordion favorites as entertainment. After 2 hours of teaching, prepping and cooking, all got to enjoy the delicious results of their efforts. Rounding out the class was a Polish trivia contest as well as a Pysanki Demonstration.

To stay up to date and get more information on upcoming cooking classes watch the PHS Facebook page or email marzannabutryn@gmail.com



Sauce maker Rich Panek.

Polish Heritage Society March 17th Board Meeting Report

The meeting of the Board of the Polish Heritage Society of Grand Rapids was called to order at 6 p.m. at the Polish Falcons Hall by President Teresa Bonham

Present: Bonham, 1st Vice President John Theisen, Treasurer Michael Jasperse, Recording Secretary Matthew Gryczan, Director Rosemary Maciejewski, Director Eric Tetsworth, Director Sarah Sharpe, Director Thaddeus Broda and Director Angela Walejewski-Zasuwa. Absent: Corresponding Secretary Susan Ulanowicz. Guests: Cultural Ambassador Richard Panek.

The minutes were distributed via email prior to the meeting. Motions made by Gryczan to accept minutes as corrected by email and reading of the minutes waived. Second by Theisen, passed unanimously.

Bonham said she sent a card to Christine Halvorson on behalf of the PHS on the passing of her father and long-time member Raymond Tush.

Jasperse said the Finance Report showed a positive Workbook Final Balance which matched the Bank Final statement at the end of Feb. 28, 2025. He reported account income for the period due to monies received primarily for the Ketchel monument restoration, the Piano/Arts program, the April bus trip and annual dues. Motion by Theisen, seconded by Maciejewski to accept the report, passed unanimously.

Bonham said she would like to appoint Tetsworth to the post of 2nd Vice President, thereby vacating his Director seat for someone to be appointed later. Motion by Gryczan to name

Tetsworth to the position, seconded by Walejewski-Zasuwa, passed unanimously.

Bonham said she was impressed with the first meeting of the Rozmowa Polish-language club. Sharpe said she would be bringing name tags to the next meeting. Maciejewski asked for \$25 for snacks for the upcoming March meeting, and Tetsworth said the board already has approved a total of \$100 for snacks for Rozmowa, which hasn't been fully spent. Gryczan said there were more than 26 people who attended Rozmowa, which is more than the PHS normally draws for a general membership meeting.

Panek reported that he created a flier to publicize the June 7 concert of pianist Cezary Karwowski for distribution to local businesses. Panek said he has started negotiations with radio stations on in-kind donations to publicize the event. Theisen said he had a conversation with Char Czernicki, who wanted to donate \$200 towards the recital. Sharpe said she bought the first two tickets using the Zeffy system that she inaugurated to test the ease of use. Zeffy is the only completely free fundraising platform for nonprofit organizations. Panek said the system is well designed and user friendly compared with other systems on the market, and it may be useful for selling tickets to Wigilia.

Panek said signups to the Detroit bus trip are going well, and Walejewski-Zasuwa said she was able to negotiate a price of \$16.50 for the lunches, down from the original cost of \$19. She said she was also able to get the room for free, waiving the normal \$150 reservation fee. Panek said Associate

Director for Polonia Affairs Ania Bieciuk waived the admission fee, so the only major costs for the trip would be for Holiday Motorcoach and the luncheon at the Polish Village Cafe. He estimated that the based on the costs, this will be a money-maker for the PHS.

Gryczan reported that the PHS received a \$1,500 check from the World Boxing Council, and he anticipates that the PHS will receive thousands of dollars worth of public relations from the project. Gryczan said any surplus monies should be sequestered into a monument fund for maintenance of the Ketchel monument, and flowers and flags for the Soldiers' Monument.

Bonham reported that she received 2 scholarship applications, and the news is being distributed to local school districts. Maciejewski asked whether the PHS scholarship program could be publicized on Polka Pops.

Bonham reported that the Marzanna Butryn's cooking classes are doing well, with class sizes of about 25 people. She said Sons & Daughters are being quite helpful with providing materials for the classes, and it appears to be helping both organizations.

Theisen reported that the PHS received a check for about \$400 as a contribution from the Van Andel Arena Polish-American night at the Griffins.

Gryczan said the board needs to put into place election procedures since seats are being contested regularly now, and he recommended that the PHS adopt some of the procedures used by the Polish Falcons hall. After some discussion, Theisen

made the motion that the board vote to lock the doors at 6:30 p.m. on election night; that the Nominating Committee collect and tally the votes; and that the doors open at 5:30 p.m. for a 6 p.m. board meeting. Gryczan seconded the motion, passed unanimously. Tad made a motion that the board adopt a more transparent voting process so that all can see how each vote is tabulated on a board. Gryczan seconded the motion, passed unanimously. Gryczan made a motion that all of the election procedures be added to the bylaws if approved at the June general meeting. Theisen seconded, passed unanimously.

Theisen made a motion that the board approve a \$100 donation to buy a sign of support for the Polish Falcons golf outing, since the board uses its facilities for its meetings. Maciejewski seconded, passed unanimously.

Gryczan shared that the Corresponding Secretary stated that they would be stepping down from the position. Gryczan said part of the Corresponding Secretary's duties is to monitor emails and shuttle them to the appropriate individuals – not answer every question. He also said that the membership list, the Sign Up Genius list and the list that can send targeted email from the website all need to match and be kept current. Broda said he is familiar with compiling lists and fixing data, so he was interested in being appointed to the Corresponding Secretary seat.

Bonham made a motion to name the children's tent after Char Czarnecki, seconded by Theisen, passed unanimously.

Meeting adjourned.

Detroit Polonia Bus Tour a Big Success

Cool drizzly weather did not deter 41 PHS members and their friends from participating in the April 5th Detroit Polonia Bus Trip. The first stop was the Polish Institute of Culture and Research in Orchard Lake. Institute Executive Director Dr. John Radzylowski personally conducted a short tour of the grounds as well as their current art exhibition in their Galeria building.

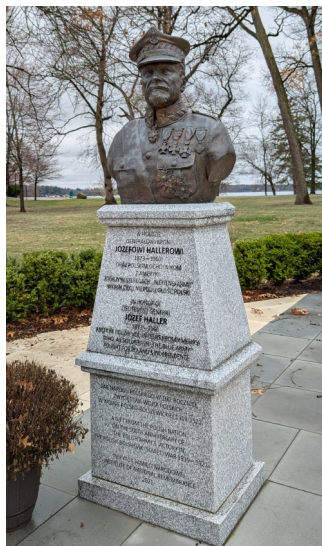


Dr. Radzylowski with group

The Institute, located on the grounds of the Orchard Lake School/Saint Mary's Prep, serves the Detroit area as well as the greater Michigan Polish community as a center for Polish studies. Their collections include archives as well as a collection of historical artifacts and works of art that chronicle the growth of Polonia in Michigan.

Originally the site of the Michigan Military Academy, the cam-

pus was acquired in 1909 by the Saint Cyril and Methodius Polish Seminary in Detroit. The seminary at Orchard Lake trained over 2000 Polish speaking priests to serve the growing Polish immigrant population until it closed in 2022.



Orchard Lake memorial to Haller's Blue Army

The beautiful campus on the shore of Orchard Lake, is now the home of Saint Mary's Preparatory High School, The Shrine of Saint John Paul II and the Saint John Paul II Liturgical Center. If you ever attended any Catholic Masses conducted in Polish here in the US, you may have used the bilingual Polish/English Missal "Pan z Wami" (The Lord be with you)



Detroit Polonia Bus Tour participants at the Galeria Tour.



PHS Members Tour the Polish Institute of Culture and Research

which is published by the Liturgical Center and distributed in the US and Canada.

An interesting historical artifact on display in the narthex of the Saint John Paul II Shrine is a red and white kayak. It is the kayak that the saint used on a visit to Orchard Lake in the early 1970's.

The tour of the Galeria building, the Institute's exhibition space, focused on the exhibition "Biography Art, History: Polish American Memories of Great Men and Women". In addition to serving as an art gallery for rotating exhibitions, the venue also serves as a site for intimate musical recitals, performing arts events as well as receptions.

After the Orchard Lake visit, the group boarded the bus for the trip to historic Hamtramck and the Polish Village Café for a hearty family style Polish lunch arranged by Board member Angela Walejewski-Zasuwa. Delicious dill pickle soup, followed by pierogi, cucumber salad, city chicken, meat balls and potatoes were served

After lunch, the group had time for shopping at the Polish Art Center as well as local Polish bakeries and food markets.

Tour participant Suzanne Kloet was pleased to find Polish greeting cards at the Polish Art Center. "You can't find these in

Grand Rapids. I wanted to get an Easter card for my Polish cousin. This is perfect" she said. The final optional stop was the Hamtramck Historical Museum next door to the Polish Art Center.



Angela and friends at lunch

Some members of the tour group brought coolers and extra shopping bags in anticipation of visiting the Polish meat markets and grocery stores all within walking distance of the Polish Village Café restaurant.

Happy shoppers were able to get some special items to take home to Grand Rapids for their Easter baskets.



New Palace Bakery case



August 22-24, 2025 POLISH FESTIVAL SPONSORSHIP OPPORTUNITIES & BENEFITS

PRESENTING SPONSOR	\$5,000
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 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 1530 AM • 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
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 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
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 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
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 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). 	
POLKA BAND SPONSOR (Three Available)	\$1,000 Fri or Sat, \$500 Sun
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 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
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sponsor either the 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
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Promote your organization by sponsoring a keg! Includes a printed sponsorship board listing at the beer tent –one of 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
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Promote your organization with a display banner on the Festival fencing all 3 days • Company/Organization name on PHS's website for one year (with direct link). 	



YES, We/I would like to be a 2025 Polish Dozynki Festival Sponsor!

- | | |
|--|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Presenting Sponsor \$5,000 | <input type="checkbox"/> Cultural Tent Sponsor \$2,500 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Beer Tent Sponsor \$2,500 | <input type="checkbox"/> Polish Royalty VIP Tent \$2,500 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Entrance Sponsor \$1,000 | <input type="checkbox"/> Polka Band Sponsor \$1,000 Fri or Sat, \$500 Sun |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Cultural Activity Sponsor \$500 | <input type="checkbox"/> Keg Sponsor \$100 |
| (Select Activity below) | <input type="checkbox"/> Banner Sponsor \$100 |
| Children's Tent | |
| Busia Pageant | |
| Paczki Eating Contest | |
| Demonstration Tent | |

Sponsor (organization or individual name), exactly as it should appear in print:

Address: _____

Contact Person: _____

Phone: _____ E-Mail: _____

Direct Web Link: _____

☐ Send an invoice for this sponsorship: ☐ mail ☐ e-mail

Please mail your completed form with check payable to *Polish Heritage Society*.

Questions:

John Theisen PHSgrandrapids@gmail.com or
John.Theisen@comcast.net

Polish Heritage Society Membership News

By Marilyn Lignell

We would like to thank everyone for your continued support and membership updates. You should have received your new membership cards in the April newsletter.

We would like to welcome the following new members:

Annual Membership:

Kay Macaraeg

Sheryl Rettig

Suzan Schumacher

Diane Krasinski

Jagienka Timek

Adam Gaver

Janese Grzybowski Passenger

Family Membership:

Mark and Cindy Lackowski

Lifetime Membership:

Kathy Harris

Paulette Longwell



Davenport grad Tad Broda

A big congratulations goes out to PHS Corresponding Secretary Tad Broda on his graduation from Davenport University!

Tad earned a degree in organizational leadership and performance with emphasis in supply

chain. He also has other professional business and industry certifications. Besides serving the PHS, he is active in leadership with the Polish Falcons.



Restored Ketchel Monument

Congratulations to Outgoing PHS Board member Matt Gryczan for completing the renovation project of the Stanley Ketchel Memorial. This was truly a labor of love that united PHS members, as well as local supporters and relatives of the former World Champion Boxer.

A rededication took place on Sunday April 27 at Holy Cross Cemetery with eighteen Ketchel family members coming from as far away as Raleigh, North Carolina and Spokane, Washington.

Wood TV8 was there to record the event for their local news broadcast. A celebration with family and friends took place afterwards at 5th Street Hall.

Speaking of events that generate local news coverage, Dozynki planning is under way. Be sure to follow the PHS Facebook page and upcoming newsletters for updates and to sign up to volunteer. Many

hands make for light work and the Festival is our major community activity to bring Polish culture to Grand Rapids.

Check out the sponsorship opportunities listed on the previous pages of this newsletter. You or your business may benefit from exposure by being a festival sponsor. Be sure to share sponsorship opportunities with your friends and professional colleagues.

This year the PHS is also promoting Polish culture by presenting classical Polish arts and

music with **Polish Piano Legacy: Music of My Home** with Cezary Karwowski. (See below)

Learn about the great Polish composers Frederik Chopin and Ignacy Paderewski as well as notable Polish-American composers. Witness history being made with the local premiere of Chopin's newly discovered Waltz in A minor!

In order to inspire young musicians, the PHS is offering **free tickets to students**. Spread the word and get your tickets today!

Polish Piano Legacy; Music of My Home ***with Cezary Karwowski***

Date: Saturday, June 7, 2025 Time: 7:00-8:30 PM

St. Cecilia Music Center,

24 Ransom Avenue NE, Grand Rapids, MI

Cost: Adults \$25, STUDENT TICKETS FREE

Get your tickets today by scanning this QR Code:



For Recital Sponsorship Opportunities or if you need to order paper tickets contact Richard Panek at (616) 490-3231 or rwpanek@gmail.com





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



JOIN ONLINE

You can join the Polish Heritage Society online by scanning this QR Code:

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 _____