

## Polish Heritage Society 2024 College Scholarship Recipients

By Matthew Gryczan.

The Polish Heritage Society of Grand Rapids awarded scholarships totaling \$6,000 to accomplished students of Polish descent who are furthering their education in everything from the culinary arts to forensic science.

PHS President Teresa Bonham, Corresponding Secretary Elena Chaidez, and Director Mike Kozal selected the recipients on the basis of their academic achievements, interests in extracurricular activities, community involvement and connections with Polish heritage.

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

Bonham said the PHS received more applications this year than in prior years due to the society's outreach to school

districts in Allegan, Barry, Ionia, Kent, Montcalm, Muskegon and Ottawa counties.

"We were very pleased with the caliber of the applicants," she said. "Polish culture reveres learning and education, and we are furthering that tradition through our scholarship program. We wish our applicants the best of luck as they pursue their educational goals."

In addition to scholarships, the students were named honorary student members of the Polish Heritage Society for 2024, and they will receive special recognition at the Dozynki Festival.

Regina Mondro, a senior at Aquinas College, was awarded a \$1,000 scholarship to continue her studies in graphic arts with the goal of becoming a professional artist and graphic designer. She has an interest in pursuing a masters degree in fine arts and possibly teach-



*Regina Mondro*

ing art at the college level. Mondro has used her art talent to capture her Polish heritage. She created and displayed drawings at an art show of her grandmother who was born in a German refugee camp and her great-grandmother who was taken from Poland to Latvia and Russia to work camps. Mondro serves as Assistant Editor-in-Chief of The Saint student newspaper at Aquinas.

Maeson Strzyzewski, who graduated Summa Cum Laude from Caledonia High School, was awarded a \$1,000 scholarship to continue her studies in biolo-

gy at Ferris State University, with a career goal of becoming a forensic scientist. Strzyzewski was involved in the high school student council and volunteered under the A More Beautiful You mentor program. She said she became aware of her Polish heritage through family gatherings at a Polish Hall, celebrating the traditional Wigilia dinner and hearing stories from her great grandfather about how St. Adalbert's Basilica was built.



*Maeson Strzyzewski*

*(Continued on page 2)*

## Mike Kozal Elected as PHS Board Second Vice President

At the society's May 20 meeting at Polish Falcons Hall, PHS Director Mike Kozal was elected to the position of 2nd Vice President, which was formerly held by incumbent Anthony Zasuwa. Candidates for the other board positions ran unopposed.

The election marked the second year in a row that a board member was challenged for

an officer's spot.

The officers elected at the May 20 meeting will be installed at the PHS General Meeting to be held at 1 p.m. June 9 at St. Isidore the Laborer Church, 628 Diamond Ave NE, where the society will hold its meeting and tour the venerable church. Light refreshments will be served at the general meeting.

Along with Kozal, the following

incumbents and new candidates who will be installed include Michael Jasperse, Treasurer; Susan Ulanowicz, Corresponding Secretary; Angela Walejewski-Zasuwa, Director; and Eric Tetsworth, Director. Ulanowicz and Tetsworth will be new members of the board.

The PHS encourages members in good standing to consider joining the board, as it is the

only organization in the metro Grand Rapids area that promotes an appreciation of Polish and Lithuanian culture.

Grand Rapids has a relatively high percentage per capita of individuals who are descendants of Polish and Lithuanian immigrants: the city ranked 18th in the country as having people of Polish ancestry, according to the 2000 U.S. Census.

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<https://polishheritagesociety.com>

Email us at [pshgrandrapids@gmail.com](mailto:pshgrandrapids@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 Matthew Gryczan, Richard Panek or Marilyn Lignell by writing to [pshgrandrapids@gmail.com](mailto:pshgrandrapids@gmail.com).

**President  
Teresa Bonham**

**1st VP  
John Theisen**

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**Director  
Angela Walejewski-Zasuwa**

**Director  
Michael Kozal**

**Director  
Thaddeus Broda**

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*Genevieve Nickels*

Genevieve Nickels, a graduate of Byron Center High School this year, was awarded a \$1,000 scholarship to pursue a career in public relations at Loyola University Chicago, University of Dayton or Grand Valley State University. She has been actively involved with youth programs at St. Sebastian Parish and St. Mary's Visitation School and enjoys attending cultural events and festivals. Nickels hopes to study abroad as part of her college experience.



*Brianna Agon*

Brianna Agon, a graduate of Catholic Central High School, was awarded a \$1,000 scholarship to continue her studies in how education can impact the lives of children and help them form a positive foundation for future success. She has earned six varsity letters and served as captain on the school's track

and cross-country teams. Agon also has sung for four years in the school's Capella choir, served on the school's student congress and was recipient of the Catholic Central Leadership Award. She also was president of the Holy Trinity Greek Orthodox Youth Association.



*Jacob Woycehoski*

Jacob Woycehoski, a graduate of Rockford High School, was awarded a \$1,000 scholarship to continue his studies in the Grand Rapids Community College Culinary Arts program, with career goal of becoming a personal chef. He said he grew up in a household influenced by Polish heritage and mastered traditional Polish recipes passed down through generations. Woycehoski said he is committed to contributing to the culinary landscape through that Polish influence.

Grace Kohane, who graduated as valedictorian at West Catholic High School, was awarded a \$1,000 scholarship to continue her studies at the Franciscan University of Steubenville in the fields of business and marketing. She has been active in

school choir, West Catholic Theatre, soccer team, and swim and dive team, and she tutored students in math. In addition, Kohane is a black belt in Tae Kwon Do.

The PHS board loosened requirements in December to make even more high school and college students eligible for financial assistance. Now students who plan to attend or are enrolled in an accredited 2-year trade/vocational program, 2-year community college program or 4-year college or university are eligible for scholarships.

To be eligible, applicants must:

- be of Polish American descent; and 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.

The scholarship application requires:

- 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 deserving of a scholarship.

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 [pshgrandrapids@gmail.com](mailto:pshgrandrapids@gmail.com) or mailed to PHS, PO Box 1844, Grand Rapids MI 49501.



# PHS Membership News



By Marilyn Lignell

The PHS Polska Bus Trip to Chicago on April 27th gave those participating a flavor of Chicago's Polonia including an authentic Polish Lunch at the Staropolska Restaurant and a tour of historic Polish Churches. The first stop was at the Polish Museum of America. The museum has permanent exhibits including a military collection, a history of Poles in the City of Chicago, a Folk-Art collection, the Kusmierczak Art Gallery, as well as the Paderewski Collection.

The highlight of the museum is the collection documenting the life of Polish Pianist and Statesman Jan Paderewski. Viewing the display, member Mary Jo

Kaminski, said; "I can't believe I didn't know about this museum and its collection. It is just amazing."

After the museum we had lunch at Staropolska Restaurant. The luncheon included flavorful stuffed cabbage, fresh vegetable salads, Pierogi, Kapusta, Kielbasa, and potato pancakes followed by sweet cheese Blintzes for dessert.



*Polish Lunch at Staropolska*

The last leg of the Polska Bus Trip was a visit of some of the historic Polish Churches in the neighborhood. One of the museum guides, Barbara Kozuchowska, is also an expert on the Polish churches near the Museum and led the tour.

The first church stop after lunch was to Holy Trinity Church which dates to 1906. Today the Polish Mission of Holy Trinity is one of the few historically Polish parishes still serving a Polish immigrant congregation. After pointing out the highlights in the main church, the group toured the catacomb area of the basement which houses over 250 relics of saints and blessed.

We then boarded the bus for the final stop to St. Mary of the

Angels, another architecturally significant church which has a dome that bears a remarkable resemblance to St. Peter's Basilica in Rome.



*The Catacomb of Holy Trinity Church*

At the end of the tour, many were sorry it was over. Mary Karcis said, "If we do it again, it would be great to have some more time at the museum and maybe a visit to one more church. The food was smaczny!" Others lamented the fact that there wasn't a stop at a Polish market to shop and bring some imported Polish food back to Grand Rapids.

Joining the PHS as a business membership is Amanda Grant. "I am a fulltime travel agent with Vacation Life, celebrating my 13th year in the industry. I sell and plan a lot of packages/tours to Poland. Have a group leaving next month!" Amanda would like her travel agency to start supporting the local community more and she wanted to start with the Polish Heritage Society. Amanda is a new mom of twin boys who just turned one last month! "I am all about helping people live their best vacation life & we are free to work with." She graduated from GVSU and has an extensive travel background with companies such as Amway & Kellogg. Amanda is looking forward to hearing more about the organization and any in person events.

Who wants to learn how to make sausage? Joining the Dozynki Polish Festival again this year from Poland will be Anna Hurning and her husband Mark. Anna is an accomplished Cookbook Author, Food Blogger, Youtuber, and the face behind **Polish Your Kitchen**. Wednesday, August 21 at 4pm at 5th Street Hall, 701 5th ST, will be your opportunity to meet Anna and Mark, hear their story, and watch as she demonstrates how to make Fresh Sausage "Biała Kielbasa". It will also be an opportunity to purchase and have signed one or all of her cookbooks! Space is limited, to reserve your spot email Teresa at [teresabonham@gmail.com](mailto:teresabonham@gmail.com).

Save the Date! July 19th will be Polish/American night at the Whitecaps. More information to follow or check out Polish Heritage Society or Pulaski Days Facebook page.



*Amanda Grant*



*Rich Panek and Diana Budd admiring the art*



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

NAME \_\_\_\_\_

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