



# POLISH HERITAGE SOCIETY OF GRAND RAPIDS

December 2020

## Lapel Pins Available at Local Businesses

By Matthew Gryczan

Active members of the Polish Heritage Society will be able to pick up snazzy lapel pins emblazoned with the Polish eagle and PHS logo at six different locations throughout metro Grand Rapids in the month of December.

In addition, another business is offering a discount on selected purchases to active members who show their cards! The Grist Mill in Cannonsburg will be giving a 5 percent discount on products in its meat counter to those PHS members who show their cards.

To obtain your lapel pin,

simply stop in at a participating pin pickup location and show your 2020 PHS membership card to a store associate in the checkout lane. No purchase is necessary. **Please take only 1 pin**, as we have a limited number of pins available.

Existing active members are entitled to one pin each, and new members will be issued a pin when they join. The pins are not issued every year when memberships are renewed.

The participating locations are:

- **Sobie Meats**, 3450 Remembrance Rd NW;
- **Lewandoski Meats**, 1107 Walker Ave NW;
- **Frank's Market**, 1021



- **Fulton St. W;**
- **Rylee's Ace Hardware** – West Side, 1205 Fulton St W;
- **The Grist Mill**, 8000 Cannonsburg Rd NE, Cannonsburg; and
- **Farmers Insurance – Adam Porczynski**, 8980 N Rodgers Ct SE, Suite L, Caledonia.

In addition to acting as a

pin pickup locations, the retail businesses offer a discount on selected products. The discounts are given at the discretion of each business, can be ended at any time and are meant for non-commercial use only.

PHS member Don Kurylowicz, owner of The Grist Mill, the Honey Creek

## Sharing Oplatek: A Time-Honored Tradition

By Matthew Gryczan

One of the most beloved customs practiced locally by families of Polish/Lithuanian heritage is the sharing of the oplatek, or Christmas wafer, at the Christmas Eve supper.

The breaking of oplatek (pronounced O-pwah-tek) between family members and guests at the dinner is among the most vividly remembered traditions of the holidays – and the one

that is most often passed from generation to generation.

There's no time like the present to start this custom if you don't celebrate it already, and there are 5 locations in Grand Rapids where you can obtain the wafers at a nominal price.

The sharing of the Christmas wafer originated more than 300 years ago in Poland, and it is also celebrated in parts of Lithuania,

Latvia and Slovakia. During the 19th century when Poland was partitioned, the sharing of oplatek took on a patriotic meaning that the nation would someday regain its independence.

The unleavened Christmas wafer itself is baked from wheat flour and water, the same ingredients as the altar bread distributed during a Roman Catholic Mass as the Eucharist. The oplatek is often a rectangular, almost paper thin wa-

fer embossed with religious images that can be easily broken when grasped by two people.

While traditions vary somewhat, they all start with the oldest or especially respected member of the family breaking pieces of the oplatek and distributing it to the rest of the people gathered. Each person then offers a piece to everyone else at the dinner, stating in some way how they care about that individual. In

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ids@gmail.com](mailto:phsgrandrapids@gmail.com).

The Polish Heritage Society of Grand Rapids promotes an appreciation of the Polish and Lithuanian culture in the metro Grand Rapids. The Society publishes this newsletter monthly. We invite story ideas and content contributions. For more information, please contact Matthew Gryczan or Marilyn Lignell by writing to [phsgrandrap-  
ids@gmail.com](mailto:phsgrandrapids@gmail.com).

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## Oplatek: Sharing Good Wishes and Apologies

our family, we say this Polish phrase: "Daj, Boże, za rok doczekali." Loosely translated, its meaning is "God, let us live long enough to see each other next year." (see related Membership News story)

Here is a list of locations that offer oplatki (plural of oplatek):

**Angelus Religious Goods**, 641 Diamond Ave. NE, phone 776-0450, oplatki available during store hours Tues. to Sat., 10 a.m. to 1 p.m., \$2.95 per envelope.

**Holy Spirit Church**, 2230 Lake Michigan Drive NW, phone 453-6369; oplatki

### Time to Apply for PHS Scholarships

The PHS is encouraging college-bound students of Polish/Lithuanian descent to apply for financial aid offered by the society.

The deadline for applications is March 15, so students should contact their high school or college counselors to start the application process.

To view the scholarship guidelines and application form, visit the PHS website at [https://  
polishheritagesociety.com/  
scholarships](https://polishheritagesociety.com/scholarships). To obtain more information on the program, contact Scholarship Committee Chairperson Mary Ann Bergevin by writing to the PHS email address [phsgrandrap-  
ids@gmail.com](mailto:phsgrandrapids@gmail.com).

available at the parish office open on weekdays, call ahead due to varying hours at the office, \$2 per envelope.

**Sacred Heart of Jesus Church**, 151 Garfield Ave SW, phone 459-8362, oplatki available at the parish office at 156 Valley, office hours are M-F., 8:30 a.m. to 4 p.m., \$3 per envelope.

**St. Adalbert Basilica and St. James**, 654 Davis Ave NW, phone 458-3065,

oplatki available after Masses during the week-end and at the back of church during weekdays from 9 a.m. to 6 p.m., access to the church is through the handicapped entrance, \$3 per package.

**St. Isidore Church**, 628 Diamond Ave. NE, phone 459-4731, oplatki available after Masses on the week-end or at the parish office at 625 Spring during the weekdays, M-F, 9 a.m. to 3 p.m., \$2 per envelope.

## Lapel Pins: Pickup Locations

Inn and The Bottle Shop in the village of Cannonsburg, said he was pleased to offer a discount on meat products at the Grist Mill. Kurylowicz, who created the retail center at the intersection of Cannonsburg Road and Honey Creek Avenue NE, said The Grist Mill specializes in kielbasa made from an old family recipe.

PHS members also can able to obtain their lapel pins at any board meeting held on the third Monday of each month, the general board meeting held twice a year, and at gatherings such as the Wigilia dinner and Dozynki Polish Harvest Festival.

Active members of the PHS receive benefits that include a mailed monthly newsletter, one-time lapel pin, and membership cards good for discounts on

purchases at participating businesses. Membership dues help support the PHS scholarship program and the annual Dozynki Polish Harvest Festival in downtown Grand Rapids.

PHS membership dues are due by Feb. 1. Members can pay online by using the PayPal account on the website or by filling out the attached newsletter form and sending it along with a check.

Businesses that are interested in acting as a pin pickup location or joining the discount program should send an email with contact information to [phsgrandrapids@gmail.com](mailto:phsgrandrapids@gmail.com).

Companies that also become business members of the society will have their logos and short descriptions included on the PHS website for a full year.

## PHS Member News

By Marilyn Lignell

Several PHS members vividly remember that when they were children, Polish customs were incorporated into Christmas celebrations in three ways: Food, Family and Faith.

Jarek Kozal, longtime PHS member who often sings in Polish at events such as the Dozynki Polish Harvest Festival and Wigilia, recalls that his extended family would visit his paternal grandparents modest home on the northeast side on Christmas Eve for a wonderful Wigilia supper that started with the sharing of opłatek (see page 1 story).

“We would arrive at our grandparents’ home in the early evening and celebrate the customary sharing of opłatek, wishing others good health and happiness and apologizing to those we may have hurt over the past year,” he said. “Wigilia dinner then ensued with about forty people gathered.

“My pra-babcia (great-grandma), babcia (grandmother), dziadek (grandfather), parents, aunts, uncles, and always some unexpected guests squeezed around a way-too-small dining room table. The kids, however, sat on the couch, chair, floor, and even the stairway leading upstairs. We filled every square inch of that tiny house and ate more food than one can imagine. The atmosphere was magical.”

When PHS President Adam Porczynski’s was a child, his family also celebrated Christmas Eve with a traditional Wigilia Dinner.

“The rest of our extended family was still in Poland, so it was usually just our immediate family,” he said. “We always started with the opłatek that we received from Poland, then went on to herring that my dad ate, soup, pierogi, fish, potatoes and dessert. After dinner we would go to church and then we would open presents when we returned.”

Adam went on to say that he, his wife Lisa and their

two children continue to go to his parents on Christmas Eve and participate in the Wigilia Dinner. His children Evelyn and Noah are now learning the traditions and customs of Poland.

Busia Queen 2019-2020 Judi Serba said that her family shares the opłatek on Christmas Eve, and on Christmas Day she makes everything Polish - kielbasa, kapusta, pierogi, golombki, chrusciki, and sometimes krupnik.

Jarek said midnight Mass at Sacred Heart Church made a lasting impression with him as a child about the real meaning of Christmas.

“Kolędy began promptly at 11:30 p.m., with the carillon bells ringing... The church was unusually dim, and we all received candles. Holding my candle in the dimly lit church, I sang my heart out with my brothers, parents, and grandparents.

“The highlight for us children was the appearance of Saint Nicholas coming down the aisle after Holy Communion. He quietly rang his bells while carrying a gift for the infant Jesus. He knelt before the infant, quietly whispered something to him, and then placed the gift in front of him.”

By Dennis Ziolkowski

**(Abbreviated for space)** President Adam Porczynski called the meeting to order at Polish Falcons Hall on Oct. 19 at 6 p.m.

Attendance: Mary Ann Bergevin, Adam Porczynski, Dennis Ziolkowski, Anthony Zasuwa, John Theisen, Richard Panek, Michael Jasperse, Elena Chaidez, Greg Rosloniec, Matt Gryczan. Absent: Theresa Bonham.

Minutes from the last meeting were approved as printed. Motion was made by John, seconded by Anthony to accept. Motion passed.

Treasurer Report: The financial report was given. Approximate balance in the checkbook is \$46,700. Motion was made by Elena, seconded by Richard to accept the report. Motion passed.

Correspondence: A thank you was sent to St. Isidore’s Parish and an old picture from one of the Polish halls, date unknown, was donated by Ted S.

Old Business: Motion by Anthony, seconded by Matt to donate \$1,000 to the Save the Halls campaign. Motion passed. 18 people attended the general membership meeting held at Pinery Park Pavilion. Otherwise a nice day and a

great presentation by Richard. The Szopka involvement with Meijer Gardens is still a go. Michael will lead with more to follow.

New Business: Motion by Elena, seconded by Michael, to cancel the Wigilia Dinner for this year due to Covid concerns. Motion passed. Motion by Elena, seconded by Greg, to set the PHS scholarship amounts for a total of \$7,000, with recipient schools as follow: GVSU 2@ \$1,000; Universal scholarship for any Michigan school, 1@ \$1,000; GRCC 2 @ \$500; Aquinas College 2@ \$1,000; Davenport 1 @ \$1,000.

John asked about a logo or branding ideas for the society. Richard will handle the art posters that were donated by Mark Levandoski.

Motion by Matt, seconded by John, that the president coordinates the discussion of issues that require board approval outside of regular meetings by sending e-mails to everyone, to consider, discuss, and vote on in a 2 to 3 day time span. Motion passed.

Motion by Elena to close meeting, second by Matt. Motion carried. Meeting ended at 6:45 p.m.

Next meeting is November 16, 2020, 6 p.m. at Polish Falcons Hall.

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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