

Polish Heritage Society 2021 News Round-up

By Matthew Gryczan

Like the resilience of Poland itself, the Polish Heritage Society remained steady during what has been a difficult 2021 for volunteer organizations in metro Grand Rapids. Throughout the challenges of Covid, the organization delivered on its hallmark activities and even made some progress in terms of membership and sponsors during the year.

The annual Dozynki Polish Harvest Festival held in downtown Grand Rapids returned after a hiatus in 2020 when the PHS board cancelled the event due to concerns about spreading Covid among attendees, volunteers and vendors. Last year was only the second time in the festival's 42-year history that it was cancelled,

and it remains the longest running ethnic festival in the city.

Likewise, the annual Wigilia dinner made its return this year after cancellation last year due to Covid concerns.

The PHS rounded out this year by authorizing \$7,000 in scholarships to area college students of Polish/Lithuanian descent and sponsoring its annual Matka Boska Zielna Feast at St. Isidore Catholic Church and exhibit at the Ethnic Heritage Festival at the Grand Rapids Public Museum.

PHS First Vice President John Theisen said the board was particularly pleased with the response from the community to the Dozynki Festival. "I'd say it was the best attended festival of all the ethnic festivals held in Grand Rapids this

year," he said. "Financially, we showed a minimal loss on the festival that serves as our largest fundraiser – and that is a success because people were still concerned about Covid this summer. And from every other viewpoint, it was a tremendous success."

Theisen said this was the first collaboration between the PHS and the Pulaski Days Committee on holding the election and crowning of the Pulaski Days Queen during Dozynki, with hopes it will become an annual tradition. New corporations came forward to sponsor Dozynki and attendees flocked to attractions such as the heritage tent and youth activities tent organized by Charlene Czarnecki.

Pridgeon & Clay, the Grand Rapids-based manufacturer of components for the class 8 truck, agriculture, medical, and other industries with 1,000 employees worldwide, and Serra Honda Grandville, 4260 Kenowa Ave SW, the state's largest retailer of Hondas for the past four years, joined long-time sponsors such as Micron Manufacturing Co., 1722 Kloet Street NW, a manufacturer of precision machined components founded in 1952 by Ed Preston. Ed's son Michael Preston, who

leads the company as president, said he supports Dozynki as a way to keep Polish heritage alive in metro Grand Rapids.

During the festival, the PHS signed up 32 people as new or life-time members – an increase of about 18 percent of its total membership. The demographics of the new members is a further bright spot for the PHS. New members were almost evenly split between women and men, and they represented ages ranging from college-age students to grandparents.

The annual Wigilia dinner held at The Guest House drew a crowd of about 30 people this year – about one-third its normal size – after a cancellation of the event last year due to Covid. Event organizer Marilyn Lignell said she was pleased with the response, considering that the board didn't give final approval to hold the event until its November meeting. Held at the Guest House, the Wigilia dinner featured a seven-course meal of traditional Polish foods, followed by Polish Caroling led by Jarek Kozal and Nick Palmer. (see pg 2)



The Polka Towners Playing at Festival

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Grand Rapids**
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<https://polishheritagesociety.com>

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

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Wigilia Musicians Jarek Kozal and Nick Palmer

PHS Scholarship Deadline Approaching

The Polish Heritage Society is encouraging college-bound students of Polish/Lithuanian descent to apply for financial aid offered by the PHS, working through their high school or college counselors.

The deadline for applications is March 15, so students should contact their counselors to obtain forms and compile the necessary documents for the application process.

Scholarships are awarded to students who attend Grand Valley State University, Aquinas College, Davenport University, and Grand Rapids Community College. In addition, the PHS awards universal scholarships for those attending

any college or university in Michigan.

To view the scholarship guidelines and application form, visit the PHS website at <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 phsgrandrapids@gmail.com.



Membership News by Marilyn Lignell

The Polish Heritage Society would like to recognize the life saving efforts of PHS life member **Gary Szotko**. Gary and his wife Mary are the current owners of Lewandoski's Market, taking over ownership in late 2018 and have since focused on maintaining the sense of community, both neighborhood and Polish, that's existed in the shop for almost a century. On November 12, 2021 Fred Bivens walked into Lewandoski's to pick up some kielbasa and catch up on life. When Fred went to leave he turned back and collapsed to the floor. Gary jumped into action, recognizing the signs of a heart attack and immediately started CPR. Gary's quick response and knowledge of CPR are what saved Fred's life. Both Gary and Fred are taking this experience a step further.

Gary is planning to have all his employees trained in CPR. Fred is committed to raise money for an Automatic External Defibrillator for Lewandoski's Market. You can send a check to Fred at Fred/AED, 808 Carpenter Avenue NW, Grand Rapids, MI, 49504, PayPal Fred at fred@vinecroft.com, or drop off cash.



The Polish Heritage Society welcomes new life member **Ronald Sakowski**. Marybeth Rardin contacted PHS in August that she wanted to give him a membership as a gift at Christmas. She said he was surprised and very appreciative! Witamy Ronald!

Membership dues are due on February 28. Please use the form in this newsletter to update your membership in a timely manner. We will be sending out new membership cards to both yearly and life members in March sometime.

PHS Night at the Griffins Game!



Date: Fri, Feb-4- 2022 Event Time: 7:00 pm

FIND TICKETS by going to the link on the PHS Facebook Page

A portion of each ticket purchased directly benefits the Polish Heritage Society. Questions? Contact Michael Kiel by calling (616) 774- 4585 ext. 3023 or email mkiel@griffinshockey.com.

PHS 2021 Sponsor Recognition

Here is a partial list of all the organizations and people who have supported the main events of the PHS during 2021:

Contributors to Dozynki Festival

Pridgeon & Clay	\$1,500
Micron Manufacturing	\$1,000
Serra Honda Grandville	\$1,000
Pulaski Days Committee	\$500
PRCUA	\$500
Richard and Mary Panek	\$500
Grand Rapids Sister Cities	\$500
Meadowview Farms, Lowell,	\$500
Office of Catholic Schools	\$100
Randy and Natalie Sluja	\$100
Bob's Sports Bar in Grand Rapids	\$100
Polish Falcons Ladies Auxiliary	\$100

Contributors to Matka Boska Zielna Feast

Msgr. Edward Hankiewicz
Polish Heritage Society

Contributors to Wigilia

Msgr. Edward Hankiewicz
Richard and Mary Panek
Krystyna Sweeney and Pieces of Pottery
Marc Mileski and Sparky's Candy
Frank's Market in Grand Rapids
Sobie Meats in Grand Rapids
Lewandoski's Market in Grand Rapids

Dziekuje!

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 _____

ADDRESS _____

PHONE _____

EMAIL _____



Kulig, a party that moves from home to home on sleighs sounds like a wild vodka-fuelled bash,

but actually it's how Polish noblemen used to celebrate the Carnival, a month-long celebration before the beginning of Lent. Historically, New Year's Eve wasn't celebrated by Polish noblemen. During the First Republic, which lasted until the turn of the 18th and 19th centuries, the nobility spent 31st December at home or in church. Party time began in January, after Three Kings' Day. And once it started, it didn't last just one day or evening. It lasted for a whole season called the Carnival, which ended on what was known as Devil's Tuesday, a day occurring just before Ash Wednesday. Mardi Gras would be the equivalent today.

During Kulig time the nobility would participate in fetes, masked balls and other merrymaking events. The sleigh parties were usually the crowning attractions of the Carnival season. An old Polish sleigh party was a truly spectacular event. It commonly started with a couple of gently born neighbors deciding to go on a sled trip. Together with the grown-up members of their families and numerous servants they would form a joyful sleigh procession and go, uninvited and unannounced, to the nearby homes of their noble neighbors. There they would demand food and drink.

The procession typically included musicians that would play along the way for those wishing to dance. The 'lucky' host usually didn't protest because of two reasons. Firstly, the old Polish tradition of hospitality required a nobleman to accommodate even unannounced guests. Secondly, most sleigh party participants simply wouldn't take no for an answer. The host usually tried to make the most of the situation and eventually joined in on the fun.

Once there was no food or alcohol left the party moved on. The host, his family and retinue would join the procession, which would head to another nobleman's home. There the whole routine recurred. A sleigh party could go on for days, growing steadily, moving between homesteads. Especially determined merrymakers could travel through an entire county during such celebrations.

Kulig

All in all, Kulig celebrations, even if slightly problematic to the hosts (to say the least), were genuinely picturesque. They commonly ended when the sleds arrived at the homes of the initiators, who were usually the poorest of the noble lot and didn't have any victuals to share.

In the 19th century, such sleigh rides were occasions to discuss sabotaging the administration of Poland by its invaders, especially the AustroHungarian Empire which had taken over the south and east of the country. No one could eavesdrop a conversation on a sleigh ride and groups could discuss subversive actions on garrisons and offices. National costumes were compulsory on rides, stressing patriotism.

A famous description of a 17th-century sleigh party involving a visit to the Polish king Jan III Sobieski himself was published in a Polish newspaper in 1827. According to this story, the procession in question consisted of 24 horsemen, 10 sleds with musicians, and 107 sleds with merrymakers. It went to several aristocratic homes before going to the king's palace in Wilanów, where the monarch and his wife gladly accommodated the visitors. The party at the royal palace lasted until late and not only the guests but also the palace servants were invited to help themselves to the king's personal pantry. Sleigh parties unfortunately no longer take place nowadays, but they are considered a lasting symbol of the legendary Polish hospitality.

You may not be able to take a country sleigh ride nowadays but, with winter flurries headed our way, it doesn't mean you have to stay huddled indoors all season. West Michigan has an abundance of winter wonderland activities that are perfect for families or anyone looking to get out of the house. Here are five things to do in West Michigan on a snowy day (or any winter day).

Get some friends and family together and go sledding! Richmond Park in Grand Rapids is a favorite venue. Other sites include Belknap and Mulick Parks as well as Manhattan Park in East Grand Rapids.

Enjoy Outdoor Activities at the Muskegon Winter Sports Complex. Home to over nine miles of cross-country skiing trails, one of only four luge tracks that exist in the U.S., and two acres of outdoor ice skating, this sports complex is perfect for anyone looking to indulge in some winter activities.

Ice Skate at Rosa Parks Circle. Ice skate with friends or family in downtown Grand Rapids as Christmas lights glow all around you. This ice rink is one of Grand Rapids' main gathering spots and is actually part of an art installation.

Experience Frederik Meijer Gardens. This gorgeous garden full of art and sculptures is open all year long. Venture in the 158-acre winter wonderland, and if you get cold, head inside and visit the many tropical, indoor gardens – perfect for thawing from the winter air.

Try Snowshoeing or Cross-Country Skiing. Pidgeon Creek, part of the Ottawa County Parks System, is the perfect place to try either sport, especially for beginners. Affordable rentals, groomed trails (lit at night!), and how-to classes, make it a great spot to take your activity outdoors.

