

Hello, Hello! Newsletter Gets a Name

By The Editorial Board

As the PHS newsletter improves coverage of local stories related to Polish heritage, the Editorial Board has decided to sharpen its identity by giving the publication a name.

This edition is the first to bear that name: *The Echo*.

We hope to live up to the standards set by the original *Echo Tygodniowe*, a weekly newspaper first published in 1900 by Walter Buskiewicz and edited by Louis Skory.

The Echo sought to satisfy the hunger of thousands of new Polish immigrants in Grand Rapids for news reported in their own language on topics that mattered most to them.

While it ceased publication in 1957, issues of *The Echo* from 1908 to 1928 are preserved on microfilm in the Grand Rapids Public Library.

While we don't claim to be a newspaper or have the same editorial caliber as the original *Echo*, we aspire to highlight the activities of individuals and organizations who keep Polish and Lithuanian heritage alive in West Michigan. In doing so, we keep faithful to the mission of the original *Echo*.



(From left) Genevieve, Lilianka and their father Stephen Kusmierczak participate in the koledy sung at this year's Wigilia.

PHS Finishes 2022 on a Strong Note

By Matthew Gryczan

As the books closed on 2022, the Polish Heritage Society of Grand Rapids found itself larger in membership and stronger financially, largely due to the many PHS members who actively engage in their Polish, Lithuanian and Eastern European heritage.

The year passed by on a high note with another successful Wigilia, a PHS event held annually since 1966 to

keep the tradition of the special Christmas Eve feast alive – a tradition that was once a common occurrence in local households a century ago.

Throughout the year, the society sponsored and supported activities that provided ways for those of Polish, Lithuanian and Eastern European descent to socialize and share their heritage.

Activities and support included Polish American

night at the Griffins, scholarships for college students, Matka Boska Zielna, Dozynki Harvest Festival, a summer picnic and October general meeting with refreshments, exhibit at the Ethnic Herit-

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This year's Polish Heritage Night at the Grand Rapids Griffins is Feb. 10, starting at 7 p.m. For more information and link to purchase tickets, go to the PHS Facebook page.

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

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age Festival at the Grand Rapids Public Museum, crowning of the Busia Queen, naming of the Polish Citizen of the Year, the P.R.C.U.A. Malbork Dance Ensemble, support for Ukrainian brethren and Wigilia.

More than 50 people attended this year's Wigilia, a rebound from the muted attendance at the 2021 dinner and the cancellation of Wigilia in the prior year due to the Covid pandemic.

As the premier cultural event of the society, this year's Wigilia was the result of hard work, dedication and generosity by PHS volunteers and sponsors. (See Marilyn Lignell's column on page 3)

The society's major social event and fundraiser of the year – the Dozynki Polish Harvest Festival -- was a smashing success. An estimated 15,000 flocked to the Calder Plaza during the festival's 3-day run ending Aug. 28. It reached the same attendance record levels in 2019, before Covid caused cancellation of the festival in 2020 and a weakened attendance last year.

As the longest running ethnic festival held within the city of Grand Rapids, the Dozynki has prospered with its four-F formula for success: Free, Fun and Family Friendly.

Nancy Borek was named Busia Queen 2022, and PHS Director and 2021 Busia Queen Teresa Bonham-Kozal was on hand to crown her as the new queen.

Matthew Gryczan was named 2022 Polish Citizen of the Year, an award given annually since 1977 to an individual who provided community service in the Polish tradition.

Polish, Lithuanian and Ukrainian heritage was on grand display at the festival. More than 1,100 people passed through an extensive exhibit of Polish-Lithuanian history curated by former PHS Director Richard Panek. The society also paid a special tribute to Mike Swidwinski, who passed away March 10, for his dedication in curating and expanding the exhibit.

The Polish-Lithuanian community also opened its arms to their Ukrainian brethren at the festival. The PHS gave several tables of space and a \$1,000 contribution to St. Michael's Ukrainian Catholic Church for ambulances used to transport casualties of the Russian invasion. Including the PHS contribution, more than \$4,000 was raised at the festival by St. Michael's.

PHS Vice President John Theisen said the financial success of this year's was largely due to large and small donors alike. This year's festival enjoyed the support of Pridgeon & Clay, Serra Honda, Micron Manufacturing, Center for Oral Surgery & Dental Implants, the city of Grand Rapids, GR Sister Cities, and smaller contributors.

More than 40 new members signed up at the festival, boosting membership by nearly 25 percent.

The society awarded schol-

arships to the following students: Rachel Warnke; Nicholas Klak; Alex Beaudette; Abigail Hunt; Olivia Gregorski; and Ella DeGraw.

PHS members Mary and Richard Panek, Marilyn Lignell and Gryczan manned a booth at the Grand Rapids Public Museum for its Ethnic Heritage Festival, where they informed visitors that Grand Rapids was ranked in the 2000 U.S. census as the 18th largest concentration of residents of Polish ancestry in the United States.

PHS has co-sponsored Matka Boska Zielna – known as the Feast of Our Lady of Greens -- with St. Isidore Catholic Church since 1971. This year's service and ceremony celebrating the Assumption of Mary took place Aug. 15 at the church, with Monsignor Edward Hankiewicz officiating. More than 200 people were in attendance.

The society hosted a general meeting and picnic June 26 at Oriole Park in Wyoming, where Ted Szyzlowski and Mike Kozal were installed as new board members to take the place of retiring directors Richard Panek and Mary Ann Bergevin.

At the October 16 general meeting held at Eastern Avenue Hall, Gryczan gave a presentation on the "Blue Army" and the names of local men who participated in that military action.

The PHS also supported the Malbork Dance Ensemble, a group that performs traditional Polish folk dances in costume regularly at festivals and events throughout West Michigan.

Community News — Wigilia Tops Off Great Year



By Marilyn Lignell

We are on the upswing, people!

Here's to 2022, and a hearty *Dziękuję* to all the many volunteers, contributors and sponsors who made everything happen this year – from the *Dozynki* Festival to *Wigilia*! It's a bit mind blowing to see all the activities the society sponsored this year, and it's looking even more promising in 2023 with our growing membership.

Wigilia is fresh in my memory, so let's start there. We had a wonderful event

at the West Leonard Banquet Facility where the hostess with the mostess -- Laurie Sipka – and her husband Bob made us all feel welcome. Bob manned the bar and contributed his time, and Laurie flitted about to make sure everything was up to her satisfaction. The hall was recently renovated and redecorated to host everything from wedding receptions to birthday parties, and it was a perfect venue for our *Wigilia*.

Many hands made light work and that was certainly the case with the pierogies served at the dinner. They were hand made by Terri Sierzant, Mary Hellenbrand, Jarek Kozal and Nick Palmer – and Jarek and Nick did double duty by leading the sing-along of Polish carols after the dinner. Mary Panek and I made the desserts for the end of the meal.

One highlight of the party was awarding door prizes



(From left) Sharon Hanks and her twin sister Kathy Benjamin compare blades of straws under their plates at *Wigilia*.

that were all donated. The gift cards from Frank's Market, Sobie Meats and Lewandoski Meats were appreciated by the winners, as were several custom crafted candy trays made by Marc Mileski at Sparky's Candy, a piece of Polish Pottery from David Sokolowski at Polish Pottery Castle, and beautiful earrings made by Barbara Rylko-Bauer that she sells at Meijer Gardens.

Barbara and Msgr. Ed Hankiewicz also made generous cash contributions to the dinner that put us in the black for next year!

Stephen Kusmierczak definitely was a showstopper when he arrived with his darling daughters Genevieve and Lilianka in authentic traditional garb from the Krakow region of Poland. Originally from the Chicago metro area, Stephen and his family moved to Grand Rapids about two years ago, but

he still serves as a trustee with the Polish Museum of America in Chicago. Many wanted to take selfies with Stephen and his girls at the conclusion of the event.

Looking forward to this year, the next fun event will be at 7 p.m. Feb. 10 at Van Andel Arena for Polish Heritage night at the Grand Rapids Griffins Game! For more details, go to our Facebook page and click on the link to buy tickets. \$3 from every purchase will benefit the Polish Heritage Society.

I hope you are all as enthused about the direction that the PHS took this year and where we are headed in 2023! We couldn't do it without your support, which we hope you will extend again this upcoming year. So please clip the form on this newsletter and send in your annual dues, or go to our website and renew via PayPal. *Szcześliwego Nowego Roku dla Ciebie!*



Nick Palmer mans the keyboard and Jarek Kozal adds vocals during the *koledy* at this year's *Wigilia* dinner held at the West Leonard Banquet Facility, 1140 Muskegon Ave. NW.

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

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