

Dozynki Sets New Attendance Records, Ups Fun Quotient



FOX 17 Reporter/Anchor Max Goldwasser strikes a victory pose after besting some of the city's most experienced paczki-eaters.

By Matthew Gryczan

The festival gods smiled on the Polish Heritage Society this year, serving up three days of gorgeous weather to make the society's Dozynki Festival a smashing success – a stark contrast to the past two years that were weighed down by the Covid epidemic.

An estimated 15,000 flocked to the Calder Plaza in downtown Grand Rapids during the festival's 3-day run ending Aug. 28 to enjoy polka music, Polish food and beverages, a children's activities tent, traditional Polish dances and the crowning of the Busia Queen for 2022. It reached the same attend-

ance record levels in 2019, before Covid caused cancellation of the festival in 2020 and a weakened attendance last year.

"It's pretty clear that having our festival on Calder Plaza is the way to go," festival co-chair John Theisen said. "We couldn't have handled this turnout at Rosa Parks Circle, where we've had Dozynki in past years.

"Also, we're committed to remaining a free admission event. Other Polish festivals in the area charge admission, but we want ours to be open to everyone as a fun and family friendly event."

While much of Dozynki ran without a hitch, festival organizers had to pivot quickly the day before opening when the planned live music

for Sunday was cancelled due to health issues. The Watkowski Family Band, a well-known group that has been entertaining locally for decades, had to bow out from Sunday's performance due to health issues of the band's founder Ray Watkowski and band member Dan Bizon. Family members said Watkowski and Bizon recuperating well at home.

Festival entertainment chairman Greg Rosloniec and Theisen swung into action, looking for a last-minute replacement for the Watkowski Family Band. They discovered that New Phaze, a Chicago-based polka band headed by Tony Blazonczyk – son of Grammy award-winning polka king

(Continued on page 2)

PHS to Hold General Meeting

The Polish Heritage Society will be holding a general meeting of its membership at noon Oct. 16 at Eastern Avenue Hall, 506 Eastern Ave NE.

PHS Board President Adam Porczynski said the agenda

is still being finalized, but there will be an update on the 2022 Dozynki Festival and upcoming Wigilia dinner in December.

The public is invited to attend, and attendees are encouraged to RSVP to phsgrandrapids@gmail.com.

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

[https://
polishheritagesociety.com](https://polishheritagesociety.com)

Email us at phsgrandrapids@gmail.com.

The Polish Heritage Society promotes Polish and Lithuanian culture in the metro Grand Rapids. The society board meets on the 3rd Monday of every month except for December and general meetings in June and October. The monthly newsletter invites story ideas and content contributions. For more information, please contact Matthew Gryczan, Richard Panek or Marilyn Lignell by writing to phsgrandrapids@gmail.com.

President
Adam Porczynski

1st VP
John Theisen

2nd VP
Anthony Zasuwa

Treasurer
Michael Jasperse

Corresponding Secretary
Elena Chaidez

Recording Secretary
Dennis Ziolkowski

Director
Teresa Bonham

Director
Angela Walejewski-Zasuwa

Director
Michael Kozal

Director
Thaddeus Szyszlowski

Director
Martin Rogalski

Dozynki: A Festival of Things Polish-Lithuanian



Outgoing PHS Busia Queen Teresa Bonham (at right) crowns the 2022 Busia Queen Nancy Borek at the coronation ceremony.

Eddy Blazonczyk Sr. – was playing a gig Saturday in Wyandotte.

“We called them to explain our predicament and asked if they could do us a special favor by filling the spot on Sunday – knowing full well that we had limited funds due to last year’s attendance,” Theisen said. “After Tony consulted with all the band members, they agreed to support our festival.” New Phaze will be playing Oct. 7-9 during Pulaski Days at the Polish Falcons hall at 957 West Fulton.

One of the highlights of Dozynki was the election

and crowning of Busia Queen 2022, a hotly contested competition this year with five entrants: Lucy

Maciejewski Preston, Rosemary Prusinski Maciejewski, Laurie Lesiewicz, Karen Sawinski (CHECK), and Nancy Borek. Some family and friends of Borek and Sawinski were sporting T-shirts at the festival that promoted the women.

With more than 200 votes cast in the election, Borek came out victorious. Borek said she will serve as Busia Queen as a tribute to her grandfather, who arrived in the United States at age 30 on the same day the Titanic sunk.

As the new queen, she will be making the rounds in the Grand Rapids metro area at events that celebrate Polish-Lithuanian heritage. PHS Director and 2021 Busia

(Continued on page 5)



(From left) PHS President Adam Porczynski, Kent County Board of Commissioners Chair Stan Stek and District 14 Commissioner Carol Hennessy congratulate Matthew Gryczan as the 2022 Polish Citizen of the Year.

Community News — New Members from Dozynki



By Marilyn Lignell —
Community News Editor

Hello members! The Polish Heritage Society is thrilled to announce that during our Dozynki Polish Festival we increased our membership by nearly 25 percent. Members are the lifeblood of our organization and we are excited to share our ethnic, cultural and social activities with you.

As an incentive, members that signed up at festival received a membership card and a pin, but the desire to belong to an organization that helps to cultivate our Polish heritage was the theme amongst the new members. Here is what a few had to say.



Virginia Beard

Tom Dlugos signed himself up and two of his kids, Thomas and Megan, that attended festival with him. Tom said it is important for his children to understand why their ancestors fled Poland.

“My grandparents left a country that at the time was run by fascism and communism,” Tom said. “They came to the United States to experience the unique principles of democracy.”

Tom feels that it is important for his kids to appreciate the sacrifices his grandparents made for a better life and also keep Polish traditions alive. Tom concluded that he should buy membership for two of his remaining kids as well. (Hopefully I didn’t just ruin a surprise).

Matt Szukalowski is a new member, but he isn’t a stranger to the Polish Heritage Society. Matt knew the late Mike Swidwinski and lent him some of his Polish stamp collection to use in the cultural display that the Mike lovingly put together for the PHS at Dozynki every year. This year more than 1,100 people cycled through the exhibit to learn about Poland and famous Poles.

Matt’s dad was born in Hamtramck, but he was never really exposed directly to Polish culture, moving



(From left) Thomas J. III, Megan and Tom Dlugos

when he was in the 5th grade.

“I feel that it is important to learn about Polish culture and heritage, and I have a deep desire to give back and help out where it is possible.” At the PHS, we love the words “help out!” Besides his stamp collection, Matt has a Polish beer collection he would like to display in the cultural tent in the future.

Marzanna Butryn moved from Poland to the United States after she graduated from college in 1984. She moved to Michigan from Boston last year to be -- no surprise -- closer to her two granddaughters!

She is a Polish language teacher by trade, having served as a principal in Connecticut at one time.

“I feel it is important to cultivate culture and language to keep the heritage alive,

to remind us of our roots,” she said. Marzanna is teaching both of her grandchildren to speak Polish -- what a gift from grandma! Marzanna has a bubbly and enthusiastic attitude when talking about her Polish roots. “We are Polish, I want my grandchildren to know all about that!”

In addition to Marzanna, Matt, Tom and his children, here’s a list of new members.

If you have the opportunity, give them a hearty welcome when you see them!



Kevin Packard

Community News — Cont.



(From left) Joe and Eleanor Welniak, David Milanowski

- Lee Metheney
- James Mikula
- Terry Szczepanski
- Terese Chandler
- Joe Welniak
- Eleanor Welniak
- David W. Milanowski
- William Palczewski
- Mieczyslaw Polak
- Kimberly LoBretto
- James Jasper
- Megan Dlugos
- Nicole Beaudette
- Evan Kain
- Matthew Meyer

- Philip Kosecki
- Jeff Gdowski
- Stanley R. Lein
- Larry Goresch
- Piotr Buniwicz
- Lisa Bis



Linda Cunningham

- Bryan and Magdalena Heyboer
- Kevin Packard
- Linda Cunningham
- Nancy Borek
- Ann Alexander
- Virginia Beard
- Earl Hogle
- Joanne Lubbers



Ann Alexander

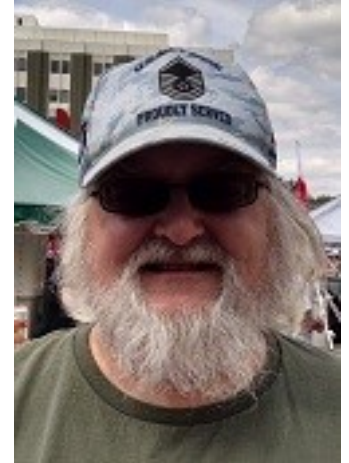
- Brian Packard
- Cindy Takus
- Alex Wilson
- Ryan Brechting
- Thomas Young
- Brandon Foley
- Marzena Roskienicz



Earle Hogle

PHS member and newsletter correspondent Sue Popma filed the following report on an annual event that the PHS has co-sponsored with St. Isidore Catholic Church since 1971: [Matka Boska Zielna](#), the Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary into heaven. An old Polish custom that is known as the Feast of Our Lady of Greens, the feast is held on Aug. 15

“On a beautiful 75 degree day, Monsignor Edward Hankiewicz conducted the Matka Boska Zielna Mass -- with a blessing of flowers and herbs and songs sung in



Larry Goresch

Polish -- followed by a procession to and crowning of a statue of the Blessed Virgin Mary in the church courtyard. More than 200 people were in attendance.

Many people brought garden herbs and beautiful arrays of flowers to be blessed at the altar during the Mass.

Following in the footsteps of her mother Donna Jean Mileski, Marilyn Lignell brought flowers from her garden to be used in the procession and coordinated the event and reception in the church basement afterwards.

Marilyn even made a quick run to Gordon Foods to get more cookies due to our fantastic turnout!

Others who worked on Matka Boska Zielna included Stephanie Kovitz and PHS Second Vice President Anthony Zasuwa.”

Dozynki: A Festival of Things Polish-Lithuanian



Ukrainian soldiers fighting the Russian invasion hand-signed this Ukrainian flag on display at the Dozynki Festival – their way of thanking members of St. Michael’s Ukrainian Catholic Church on Gold Street for purchasing 4 ambulances used to transport the wounded. (From left) Diana Kuziuk, church administrator Roman Fegchyk, Iryna Wells, Margrita Atrepyeva and other church members raised more than \$4,000 at the festival, which included a \$1,000 donation from the PHS.

Queen Teresa Bonham-Kozal was on hand to crown Borek as the new queen.

Former PHS Board Member and newsletter managing editor Matthew Gryczan was named 2022 Polish Citizen of the Year, an award of special recognition given out annually since 1977 to an individual in the metro

Grand Rapids area who embodies the spirit of community service in the Polish tradition.

In presenting the award, Kent County Board of Commissioners Chairman Stan Stek and Kent County Commissioner Carol Hennessy (14th Dist.) said Gryczan was awarded the honor “as

being instrumental to the Society as a past board member, as a volunteer extraordinaire always willing to help, and as a vital force” for the newsletter. PHS President Adam Porczynski said Gryczan was instrumental in rebooting the society’s website, newsletter and marketing efforts.

“I am deeply honored that the PHS board named me to receive this prestigious award, and I hope to live up to the standards it represents,” Gryczan said.

Polish-Lithuanian heritage was on grand display at the festival. More than 1,100 people passed through an extensive exhibit of Polish history curated by former PHS Director Richard Panek that is erected annually by the Polish Heritage Society.

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, 154 Gold Ave NW, so that the organization could educate the public on the Russian invasion of Ukraine and raise money for ambulances used to transport casualties. Including the PHS contribution, more than \$4,000 was raised by St. Michael’s for

the effort.

Ukrainian soldiers fighting the Russian invasion hand-signed a Ukrainian flag draped over one of the tables at the festival – their way of thanking members of St. Michael’s for purchasing 4 ambulances used to transport the wounded. Church administrator Roman Fegchyk, who delivered one of the ambulances himself in Ukraine, said the church leverages contributions by buying used vehicles in Germany that are then refurbished in Poland before being commissioned.

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 Pidgeon & Clay, Serra Honda, Micron Manufacturing, Center for Oral Surgery & Dental Implants, the city of Grand Rapids, GR Sister Cities, and a number of smaller contributors.

As the longest running ethnic festival in Grand Rapids, the Dozynki Festival is the major fundraiser for the Polish Heritage Society of Grand Rapids, a non-profit organization founded in 1963 to perpetuate and advance the Polish-Lithuanian culture that has been so integral to metro Grand Rapids.

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 _____