

Rick Szczepanski Makes Musical Donation to the Malbork Dance Group

By Richard Panek

The gift of music can brighten one's life and PHS member Rick Szczepanski saw an opportunity to do just that. The life-long West Side resident contacted the PHS in July asking for assistance in donating a potentially valuable musical item relevant to Polish culture.

Szczepanski, a retired engineer, is no stranger to supporting the community through donations and philanthropy. In fact, he started the Mary J. Szczepanski MS Scholarship foundation in 1980. The foundation, named in honor of his late mother who suffered from Multiple Sclerosis, gives out scholarship awards to students for creatively raising funds for Multiple Sclerosis. The website www.msscholarship.org has information about the program and is open to students in all United States high schools, colleges and universities.

Szczepanski's email inquiry to the society requested assistance in finding a place to donate an accordion. He still had the Monterey piano accordion that he used when taking lessons as a kid in the 1960's and thought it was time for it to find a new home. "It hasn't been played since shortly after I did a recital in the Sacred Heart Church basement. It was a stressful experience especially since my brother played better than me" said Szczepanski. He wanted to pass on the instrument to be used again to play Polka music. Proud of his Polish heritage, he has fond memories of the polka music scene growing up in Grand Rapids

He related the story of how he and his brother Ron took accordion lessons from Ray Kaminski as kids. Polka music, which often includes the accordion for rhythm and melody, was very popular locally in the 1960's. A well-known Grand Rapids band



PHS member and philanthropist Rick Szczepanski

at that time was the Merry Makers, featuring Jerry Kaminski, Don Rosloniec and Don

Uzarski among others. Szczepanski recalled that some of his

(Continued on page 2)

Laurie Lesiewicz is Named 2025 Polish Heritage Society Busia Queen



Laurie Lisiewicz

By Teresa Bonham

The last day of the PHS Dozynki Polish Festival is steeped in all things Polish, from the floral headdresses girls and ladies make in the activity area, to the performance of the Malbork Polish folk dancers and numerous adults attending in Polish costumes and garb. Topping it all off however is the crowning of the Polish Heritage Society Busia Queen. This year's winner is Laurie Lesiewicz.

Laurie is an active member and volunteer for the PHS. For years, she has worked in the token, paczki and pop booth at festival and contributes to festival planning meetings. She celebrates her Polish Heritage by supporting the Polish Halls, attending Pulaski days activities including the parade and enjoys live polka music as well as listening to the Polka Pops radio show.

Laurie is a Busia to 4 grandchildren, Cassadee age 8, Cole age 7 who live out of state and Levi

age 7 and Harper age 5 who live in West Michigan. In addition to promoting Polish heritage with her grandkids, she enjoys cooking for them.

Laurie is excited about being named Busia Queen and looks forward to meeting amazing people during the coming year. She hopes during her reign to promote the Polish Heritage Society, have fun and learn more about her Polish Heritage.

Polish Heritage Society of Grand Rapids

PO Box 1844

Grand Rapids MI

49501-1844

<https://polishheritagesociety.com>

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 Richard Panek or Marilyn Lignell by writing to: phsgrandrapids@gmail.com

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grade school classmates, Tom Uzarski, Greg Rosloniec and Stan Dubis formed their own "teen band" under the direction of Kaminski. The Merry Makers had a network of halls where they performed, and it was only natural that people would enjoy the "younger generation" playing Polkas and the young Triple-Aires were an immediate hit.

These young musicians would eventually grow into a popular Michigan polka band and they had, like the Merry Makers, recordings made of their music. Some of these tunes may even be part of the Polka Pops musical library that can be heard on 94.9 Jethro FM on Saturday and Sunday afternoons. Szczepanski recalled that Tom Uzarski played the saxophone, Stan Dubis played accordion, and Greg Rosloniec was the drummer.

Local Polka bands played at the Grand Rapids Polish halls on a regular basis for various events and many are still going strong. Some of the notable past and present ensembles included the Grand Rapids Old Time Concertina Band, Stan Mroz Polka Band, Pan Franek, Bruce Packard Band, Virgil Baker as well as Gery Kaminski's Polka Network and others.

In the spirit of preserving the West Michigan Polka tradition, Szczepanski ideally wanted the accordion to be passed on and used by a local student. PHS Director Marzanna Butrynn, who has granddaughters in the Malbork Dance group, advised that

the instrument be donated to Malbork. Butrynn suggested accordionist Wade Hillen, whose children are also involved with Malbork, evaluate the instrument.



Wade Hillen

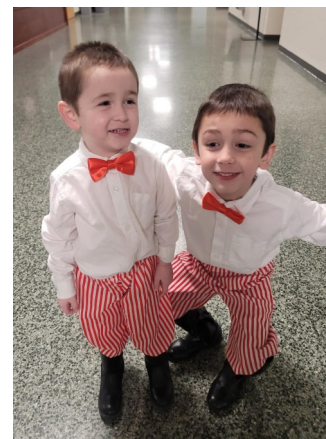
Hillen has over four years of experience studying and playing accordion and has 11 in his collection. When contacted, Hillen agreed to look at the instrument for Malbork. He said, "I just agreed to play for a fundraiser for Malbork on November 15th. I played earlier this year for Marzanna Butrynn's Polish cooking class." He has two sons in the Malbork dance group, Ignacio Stonehouse Hillen and Neal Raymond Hillen, and he also teaches accordion to two other Malbork dancers.

Hillen took possession of the instrument and has started the process of finding it a new home. He said, "Old accordions can breakdown with time if not used on a regular basis. They are com-

plex instruments that require professional evaluation."

Apparently, caring for an old accordion is like tending to a vintage car—it's part art, part science, and all about preserving its soul. The reeds, bellows, and valves are delicate and easily damaged. Accordions generally hold their tuning well, but over time, reeds may drift. Tuning involves adjusting reed pitch and should be done by a skilled technician with a well-used instrument requiring professional servicing every 2–3 years.

Hillen will be looking for another young student who would be willing to take on the instrument versus having it appraised and selling it to raise funds for the Malbork Dance group. Who knows, maybe a group of young accordion players may wind up forming a Polka band much like the Triple-Aires did in the 1960's.



Malbork Dancers Ignacio and Neal Hillen

Copernicus Center for Polish Studies in Ann Arbor Hosting Polish Film Events

The Copernicus Center at the University of Michigan along with the Polish Cultural Fund and Ann Arbor, Michigan Theater are presenting the 32nd Ann Arbor Polish Film Festival Fri, Nov 14-Sun, Nov 16. For a listing of the

films and screening times go to annarborpolishfilmfestival.com.

On Mon, Dec 1, 5—6:30 pm there will also be a Copernicus Center roundtable: *Polish Cinema in the 20th and 21st Centuries: From the*

Centers to the Margins by Elzbieta Durys and Magdalena Zdrodowska, Copernicus visiting fellows. Room 555 Weiser Hall. Visit umich.edu/polish/events for details.



47th Annual Genealogy Seminar

presented by the
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Webinar or In Person

Saturday, October 18, 2025

In-Person Registration 9:00 a.m. to 9:30 a.m.

Seminar 9:30 a.m. to 3:00 p.m.

Optional In-Person Walking Tour 3:15 p.m. to 4:00 p.m. (all times U.S. Eastern Time)

The in-person session is at a new location this year:

Polish Institute of Culture & Research, 3535 Commerce Rd., Orchard Lake Village, Michigan.

The in-person session includes continental breakfast and lunch with Polish food.

In-person seating is limited – please register soon.

Speakers and Presentations:

Dr. Anna Muller

"The People of Hamtramck: Reflections on Belonging, Agency, and Being Polish American"

Nancy Loe, M.A., MLS

"Researching Ancestral Locations in Prussian Genealogy Records"
and "Finding Prussian Ancestors in Online Archives"

Dr. John Radzilowski

"Fr. Leopold Moczygemba and Fr. Jozef Dabrowski: Pioneers in Polish American Education"

Visit pgsm.org to register and pay by credit or debit card (online registration closes October 8).

To register and pay by check, fill out the form below and mail it with your payment to:

PGSM, P.O. Box 85987, Westland, MI 48185-6087

Registrations paid by check must be postmarked by October 5.

For more information about PGSM or the seminar, visit pgsm.org

Polish Genealogical Society of Michigan 2025 Seminar

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Polish Heritage Society Membership News

By Marilyn Lignell

I would like to extend a big thank you to all our volunteers who helped make the Polish Dozynki Festival a success! We are so grateful for the support of our members, and from the community at large. Check out some pictures from festival!



Citizen of the Year Bob Wojcik with Pulaski Days Royalty



Mary and Rich Panek with Dr. Stephanie Sakowicz



Millie Combs, Marilyn Lignell and Sally Stephenson



Malbork Dancers preparing to perform for the crowd

The weather was perfect for the festivities at Calder Plaza this year. The Polish hall sign up booth was active this year and we also had 20 new PHS members sign up at Dozynki!

Annual memberships:

Laurie Knott
 Angie Jarnagin
 Rob Kirkbride
 Jana Broushon
 Alyse Solomon
 Cathy Heynen
 Heather Piotrowski-Tillman
 Georgiana Kowalski
 Jenna Skar
 Angela Stallard
 Adam Windes
 Bruce Behrens Jr
 Halina Windes
 Alex Wilson
 Barb Rudnik-Wilson
 Debbie Hougaboom
 Mike Hougaboom
 Thomas Sadar
 Stacy Sadar

Family Membership:

Adrian, Anna, Wiktoria and Jan Piatek

The Polish Genealogical Society of Michigan (PGSM) also had a table at Dozynki and registered a bunch of new members. Check out their upcoming program announcement on the insert of this newsletter.

St. Stanislaus Parish in Hilliards, Michigan is publishing a book: Faith, Family and Tradition, The Story of St. Stanislaus Parish. It is a 300-page hardcover book that explores the fascinating history of the Polish immigrants who settled in the Hamlet of Hilliards and formed the Parish of St. Stanislaus. Please see the order form on the insert for more information.

Congratulations to Lifetime Member Laura Szczepanek on being "In the Spotlight" in the Forest Hills Community Enrichment classes. Laura will be teaching three courses: Polish Pierogi, Polish Golabki, and Polish Chrusciki. "In my classes, the recipes I will be sharing are

many years old, but simple."

Laura is a third-generation authentic Polish caterer, learning the art through her grandmother and aunties. If you are interested in participating, call the Forest Hills Public Schools for more information. 616-493-8950. Laura also will be featured in the Home Cooking publication with a book signing at Barnes and Noble so stay tuned!



Kara and Wil Bowman

Also making membership news is lifetime member Wil Bowman and his wife Kara. Wil and Kara were married on July 26 in beautiful Northport, MI at the Verterra Winery. Wil's mom is Millie Combs, also a lifetime member. We wish you all the best!

Please mark your calendars to save the date for our annual Wigilia Dinner. It will take place on Saturday, December 13th at the West Leonard Banquet Facility. More information and an order form will be available in the October newsletter, as well as information on making this year's ornaments for the Wigilia table settings.



Laura Szczepanek



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



JOIN ONLINE

You can join the Polish Heritage Society online by scanning this QR Code:

BY MAIL

Fill out this form and send a personal check made out to the Polish Heritage Society to this address:

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