

## Polish Heritage Society 2025 Academic Scholarship Winners

The Polish Heritage Society of Grand Rapids awarded scholarships totaling \$4,000 to accomplished students of Polish descent who are furthering their education in everything from teaching to pharmacy.

The society has awarded more than \$60,000 in scholarships during the past 20 years from money raised at its Dozynki Festival in late August.

PHS Scholarship Committee members Tad Broda and Rosemary Maciewski selected the recipients on the basis of their academic achievements, interests in extracurricular activities, community involvement and connections with Polish heritage.

In addition to scholarships, the students were named honorary student members of the Polish Heritage Society for 2025, and they will receive special recognition at the Dozynki Festival.



*Sydney Law*

Sydney Law is a graduate of Byron Center High School. She is a four-year letter winner in track and field as well as cross

country, earning All-Conference awards, Academic All State and a State qualifier. Sydney is also a very talented jazz guitarist winning several awards at festivals & competitions. She is very involved in her community as well, volunteering at summer jazz camps, sports camps for elementary students, Worship Music Leader at her church, and local events at the Byron Center Community Center. Sydney is planning to attend the University of Michigan to study Pharmacy.



*Katie Weiss*

Katie Weiss is from Grandville High School. She has proven herself to be a dedicated student earning an academic letter each semester through high school as well as the Bulldog Pride award. Katie is actively involved in the National Honor Society, serves on the Student Council, and leads the Youth Group at her church. She has also worked on several school & community theatre productions. Katie plans to major in Art Education at either Western Michigan or Michigan State

University with a career goal of being an elementary art teacher



*Ella Wolters*

Ella Wolters graduated from Byron Center High School. She has maintained a 4.0 GPA all four years of high school and is a member of the National Honor Society. Ella has earned Academic all-state honors while in competitive cheer and President of the Be Nice Club. Additionally, she volunteers for Meals on Wheels and as a Salvation Army Bell Ringer, has coached youth cheerleading, and works part-time where the business owner has noted that Ella is a natural leader and consistently helps where needed.

She is going to attend Western Michigan University and major in Child Development.

Camryn Kolzow 2025 graduate from East Kentwood. As Captain of the soccer & golf team she has earned All Conference and Academic All State honors. Camryn has also been an active member of Athletic Leadership Council, National Honor Society, Student Council, Women's Choir as well as volunteering at the local food bank. She will be attending University of Michigan to pursue a Pre-Med - Nursing degree with the goal of becoming an Anesthesiologist.



*Camryn Kozlow*

## Origins of the Polka Pops Radio Show

By Matt Gryczan

Polka radio broadcasting was hot in Grand Rapids in the late '40's with regularly scheduled programming on 3 different radio stations. The Polka Time program on WGRD hosted by the godfather of local polka, Bob "Jasiu" Whitcomb had the biggest following. When the competition heated up, Whit-

comb fought back by rebranding his show as the Original Polka Time, and he redoubled his efforts at promotion.

Whitcomb would act as master of ceremonies at events, host store openings and engage in stunts that steam-

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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](mailto:phsgrandrapids@gmail.com).

**President**  
**Teresa Bonham**

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**Director**  
**Angela Walejewski-Zasuwa**

**Director**  
**Sarah Sharpe**

**Director**  
**Marzanna Butryn**

*(Polka Pops Continued from page 1)*

rolled the other shows. He once promised on his program that he would personally cut the lawns of listeners who purchased lawn mowers from sponsor Ball Park Hardware.

One listener took him up on the offer, and about 3,000 people showed up to watch Whitcomb mow the lawn. In his typical showbiz fashion, Whitcomb arranged for two policemen and a guy in a Model T to escort him to the house. Then he had his "second" Wes Ramey massage his legs and fan him after each pass with the mower of only 20 feet. "After it was over, we all went to a hall and everybody got bombed," Whitcomb is quoted in a news story on the stunt.

"I remember my grandma would never leave the house when Jasiu Whitcomb was on the air," said Mary Puhalski, a long-time Polka Pops listener herself and a life-long companion of legendary local polka DJ Ernie Pickem.

But the handwriting was on the wall for polka music, with rock, Motown and new country music taking off. WGRD switched its broadcast format in the early 1960s to Top 40, and Whitcomb tried his hand at real estate sales and the party store business. Then in 1972, Whitcomb accepted an offer from WJPW in Rockford to deejay a polka program.

"We used to visit the WJPW studio in Rockford," Puhalski said with a laugh. "We called it 'termite hill' because the station itself was like a garage built into

the side of a hill." Whitcomb himself would jokingly talk on-air about station owner Jack "Payne's Palace," replete with a revolving rooftop dining room – until a Middleville couple showed up to celebrate their anniversary there.

It was during his stint at WJPW that Whitcomb would rely on helpers Ernie "Pierogi" Pickem and Jerry "Golumki" Baczewski to find polka albums and deejay the show. While they were still working at WJPW, Pickem and Baczewski launched Polka Pops in 1979 on Tuesdays and Thursdays on station WEHB, a community radio station that was looking for ethnic programming. Whitcomb played his last polka on air in 1980 when he retired from WJPW.

Polka Pops was an immediate hit with listeners, and it expanded from an original one-hour format to 11 hours a week. An electrical engineer, Pickem also served double duty as station engineer. "We'd ask listeners for their old TV sets and radios and take the tubes from them to keep our transmitter on the air," he said in a newspaper interview in 1983. Polka Pops was christened in the 1980s as "the premier polka show of the nation" by a New York writer who admired the variety of music it played.

After a format change in 1991 at WEHB scrapped polka music, Pickem and Baczewski approached Scott Pastoor to broadcast Polka Pops on Jethro WYGR.

"We told them: Yeah, you bet," Pastoor said. "We are one of the few locally owned, Mom-and-



*Scott Pastoor runs 94.9 FM*

Pop radio stations in this market, so we've always thought we can do the unique Grand Rapids-type stuff that a big corporation would never do."

A number of personalities have kept the show running since the passing of Pickem in 1998 and Baczewski in 1999. Scott Pastoor's father Rich worked closely with the original Polka Pops duo to keep the tradition going, along with George Rosinski. Laura Szczepanek, who remains on the Polka Pops team to this day, learned the ropes of reporting on Polish doings in the city from Puhalski and Baczewski's wife, Diana.

Regular deejays now include Mike Boruta, Chris Kamysek, Eric Mills, George Murphy, Scott Pastoor, Don Rosloniec, and Denny Ziomkowski. Polka Pops plays "happy, festive, party music," Pastoor said. "I may not listen to it every day, but it just brings a smile to your face."

***Plan to Attend the Annual Polish Heritage Society Summer Picnic***

***Noon, Sunday, June 22, 2025 at Oriole Park, Wyoming, MI***

***Pavilion, Splashpad, Playground and Food sponsored by PHS***

***All Society Members and Families are Welcome***

## Polish Heritage Society April 21st Board Meeting Report

The meeting of the Board of the Polish Heritage Society of Grand Rapids was called to order at 6 p.m. at the Polish Falcons Hall by President Teresa Bonham.

OFFICERS: Present: Bonham, 1st Vice President John Theisen, Treasurer Michael Jasperse, Recording Secretary Matthew Gryczan, Director Rosemary Maciejewski, Director Eric Tetsworth, Director Sarah Sharpe, and Director Angela Walejewski-Zasuwa. Late: Director Thaddeus Broda. Guests: Cultural Ambassador Richard Panek, Marilyn Lignell.

The minutes were distributed via email prior to the meeting. Motions made by Theisen, seconded by Walejewski-Zasuwa to accept minutes and reading of the minutes waived, passed unanimously.

Jasperse said the Finance Report showed the Workbook Final Balance is higher than normal because there weren't any checks written in March and minimal card transactions. Motion by Gryczan, seconded by Maciejewski to accept the report, passed unanimously.

Jasperse distributed a preliminary annual budget that details revenues and expenses. Panek

said it is important to have an annual budget because some philanthropic organizations ask for such a document to consider grant requests.

Detroit Polonia bus trip report by Panek noted that there were 41 participants, and he thought that \$80 was a good price point for bus trips within a 2-hour drive from Grand Rapids. Walejewski-Zasuwa said any future trips should consider whether participants will need the use of wheelchairs. Gryczan suggested that a fun photo of the participants and story be posted on Facebook.

Panek reported that 20 tickets had been sold for the June 7 Polish Piano Recital concert. He provided a summary of the marketing efforts to promote the event and said he took the liberty of offering free admission to students with the intent that parents will also attend. Panek said the PHS has purchased 30 radio spots on Blue Lake Radio to be aired 3 weeks prior to the recital at a cost of \$350 and acknowledgement as a media sponsor. Interlochen Public Radio is willing to give 20 spots solely as a mention as a media sponsor.

Bonham said that the board needs to formalize the appointment

of Director Thaddeus Broda as Corresponding Secretary. Motion made by Gryczan to that effect, seconded by Maciejewski, passed unanimously.

Bonham reiterated that the doors to Polish Falcons hall will open at 5:30 p.m. May 19 in anticipation of the election, the board will hold its regular meeting from 6 to 6:30, and the doors to the hall will be locked promptly at 6:30 to hold the election. She said she has 3 people who said they were interested in running for director seats: Marzanna Butryn, Thaddeus Szyszłowski and Anthony Zasuwa. Gryczan said the open director seats are the seat formerly held by Thaddeus Broda (2025), and the seats held by Sharpe and Maciejewski (2025), both of whom are running again. The director seat formerly held by Tetsworth (2024) will be filled through appointment.

Gryczan reported that a PHS-sponsored event will be held at 1 p.m. Sunday, April 27 to celebrate the restoration of the Ketchel monument. He said the PHS will purchase a wreath of fresh flowers to place at the monument by a Ketchel family member and buy one round of drinks for participants at Fifth

Street Hall after the ceremony.

The board agreed to hold the June general meeting at noon June 22 at Oriole Park.

The group discussed that there are three main ways that the PHS communicates with its members and non-members: The Echo newsletter, PHS website and PHS Facebook. Panek is the editor of the newsletter, Sharpe manages the website, and Gryczan is temporary editor of the Facebook page. A committee of those individuals and Broda as Corresponding Secretary were scheduled to meet after the board meeting to discuss updating the SignUp Genius database in preparation for the Dozynki Festival.

Theisen said no meeting has been scheduled yet regarding Dozynki Festival planning. Sponsorships have been slow. Bonham said she has been struggling with how to make various contacts and asked for help.

Walejewski-Zasuwa offered to help with sponsorships, and she suggested that the PHS look at good merchandise to sell at the festival, such as koozies for beverages and new tee shirts in red sporting the PHS logo.

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## Friends of Polish Art and Polish Institute of Culture & Research Relaunch Arts Competition

Friends of Polish Art (FPA), and the Polish Institute of Culture & Research at Orchard Lake (PICR), announce the return of the 29th Friends of Polish Art Fine Arts Competition, formerly known as the Richard Kubiński Fine Arts Competition. Returning after more than a decade, this revitalized collaboration renews a tradition of celebrating artistic excellence while

honoring the richness and beauty of Polish cultural inspiration.

The juried exhibition will take place October 5–24, 2025, at the Galeria on the Orchard Lake Schools campus.

This open call invites all artists aged 18 and older—across all media and backgrounds—to submit their recent work. Artists are especially encour-

aged to explore subjects that interpret, reflect on, or are inspired by Poland and Polish culture in its many dimensions—past and present, personal or collective. Works need not be Polish-themed to be considered, but those that thoughtfully engage with Polish heritage will be eligible for a special prize category.

Cash awards include \$500 for

Best in Show, \$400 for Best Polish Theme, and additional recognition for artistic merit. Submissions are open now through September 2, 2025. Artists may submit up to five works. A \$30 entry fee covers all five submissions, which must be entered individually at: [friendsofpolishart.org/competitions/fine-arts-competition/](https://friendsofpolishart.org/competitions/fine-arts-competition/)



**YES, We/I would like to be a 2025 Polish Dozynki Festival Sponsor!**

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| <input type="checkbox"/> Beer Tent Sponsor \$2,500       | <input type="checkbox"/> Polish Royalty VIP Tent \$2,500                  |
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**Children's Tent**

**Busia Pageant**

**Paczki Eating Contest**

**Demonstration Tent**

Sponsor (organization or individual name), exactly as it should appear in print:

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Please mail your completed form with check payable to *Polish Heritage Society*.

Questions:

John Theisen [PHSgrandrapids@gmail.com](mailto:PHSgrandrapids@gmail.com) or  
John.Theisen@comcast.net



## Polish Heritage Society Membership News

By Marilyn Lignell

Dozynki preparations are well underway so be sure to follow the PHS Facebook page and upcoming newsletters for updates regarding the live entertainment schedule and to sign up to volunteer. Many hands make for light work and the Festival is our major community activity to bring Polish culture to Grand Rapids.

Also, check out the Festival sponsorship opportunities listed on page 4 of this newsletter. You or your business may benefit from exposure by being a festival sponsor. Be sure to share sponsorship opportunities with your friends and professional colleagues.

We would like to thank everyone for your continued support and membership updates. We love new members and getting to know you at some of our events is always such a treat. New member Jagienka Timek was kind enough to share a little about herself. Jagienka grew up in Grand Rapids and is very proud of her Polish heritage. She was fortunate to grow up in a Polish-speaking household with parents from Poland. Her extended family is still located in Krakow, Poland, and Jagienka grew up visiting her grandparents in the summer. After living in Europe for 2 years after college, Jagienka now resides in Grand Rapids as a medical student at Michigan State University and plans to pursue internal medicine or pediatrics!

Celebrating a milestone in her life is Donna Jean Mileski who will be turning 90 on June 8. Donna has been a longtime life member of the PHS volunteering in numerous ways on the PHS board, managing volun-

teers at Dozynki, keeping track of memberships, helping with Wigilia and organizing home-made baked goods and decorations after Matka Boska. Though Donna is not Polish, her husband Mitch was very committed to PHS while he was alive. Donna still loves attending any PHS functions because, "I just really like to see the people."



*Donna Jean Mileski*

A congratulations goes out to member Madeline Fazzio and husband Joe on the birth of their new baby boy. Frank Brian weighed in at 9lbs, 11oz! Frank is also the new grandson of members Mitch and Ginger Mileski.



*Frank Brian Fazzio*

May 3 is a Polish national and public holiday. It celebrates the declaration of the Constitution of 3 May 1791—the first modern constitution in Europe.



*Panek and Jasperse with Counsel General Jurkowska*

This year, PHS Treasurer Michael Jasperse and Cultural Ambassador Richard Panek were guests of the Counsel General of the Republic of Poland in Chicago for a May 3rd celebration. The party was held on Wednesday night, April 30.

Counsel General Regina Jurkowska hosted representatives of Chicago Polonia as well as local government leaders from Illinois and Indiana. A unit of the Polish National Guard as well as representatives of multiple Chicago Polish organizations were in attendance for the festive celebration.

Speaking of Polish organizations, the Pulaski Days Queen Pageant will be Saturday, June 21st at 6th Street Hall. Doors open at 3:00 pm (first come, first served seating) and the pageant begins at 6:00. There will be food and drinks available and bring cash for the People's Choice!

PHS Member Marzanna Butryn is helping to coordinate with Classic Travel a 14 day trip to Poland. Though this trip is not a PHS sponsored trip, it is an opportunity worth noting if you have an interest in touring Poland. Please contact Marzanna Butryn at 1-203-415-0005 or [butrynmarzanna@gmail.com](mailto:butrynmarzanna@gmail.com).

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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:

Polish Heritage Society of Grand Rapids  
P.O. Box 1844  
Grand Rapids MI 49501-1844

NAME \_\_\_\_\_

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