



Chairman's Column

By: Aloys Notzon, PHC Chairman and President

What a blessing for the Polish Heritage Center to be playing a role in this Jubilee Year of Hope. We were so pleased to assist in Bishop Mike Boulette's Pilgrimage Mass at the Immaculate Conception of the Blessed Virgin Mary in Panna Maria and to host the brunch for the attendees after the Mass. This marks the 5th official event in this Jubilee Year in Panna Maria and follows Bishop Yanta's vision of the Polish Heritage Center's spirituality by linking the churches and the pilgrims with the Center.

Kudos to Dr. Jim Mazurkiewicz who was Grand Marshal of the largest Polish parade in the U.S. – the 134th Polish Constitution Day Parade, which was May 3 in Chicago. Dr. Jim in his cowboy hat was a hit not only in the parade, but also in twelve events during three days of festivities. He was a featured guest on many TV and radio broadcasts and featured in newspaper articles. Dr. Jim brought the reality of Texas Polonia to our Polish friends in Chicago.



Thanks again, Dr. Jim, for all you do for Texas Polonia. We are grateful that you continue in your roles as a board member of the PHC, the President of PACT, the head of TALL, president of the Polish Chamber of Commerce in Texas and the counselor of the Polish student associations at Texas A&M and UT Austin, among many others.

Our thanks to Krzysztof Gajda, President of the Polish Association (DFW Region) who is hosting a delegation of about eight professors led by Professor Jacek Jan Golebiowski, a Polish historian and associate professor at the Catholic University of Lublin. They will be in Panna Maria on Thursday, July 3, and at 10 am will present: "Position of Poland in the Contemporary World" and "The History and Role of American Polonia." The talks will be followed by lunch. Seating is limited and RSVPs are required. This will be a great opportunity for an exchange of information and for future educational presentations by this university at the Heritage Center.

Thanks again to all our Donors who continue to support the Polish Heritage Center and our activities. Alice Poore will be giving more details of these activities in her article. Have a blessed summer!



It Was A Very Good Year

By: Alice Poore, PHC Executive Director

Last April, I shared with you wonderful readers all the exciting events that happened at the PHC during my first eight months as Executive Director. I set some very ambitious goals for the remainder of 2024 and 2025, and I am thrilled to announce that since my last formal report we have exceeded all expectations. Instilling Polish culture and traditions in our youth was so important to Bishop Yanta, so when the idea of a Polish Art contest came about in a team meeting, we were excited to incorporate this each spring. Students from Falls City, Karnes City, and Runge participated in the first art contest which began April 5, 2024, with art on display for two weeks. With 100 entries, the judges, along with visitors to the Center, were amazed at the exceptional talent. During an April 20 reception, the PHC awarded 52 winners with rosette ribbons and gift cards. Parishioners from Trinity Baptist Church in San Antonio chartered a bus to visit the PHC, Immaculate Conception Church and St. Joseph's School. These twenty-five guests fell in love with Panna Maria and its history and hope to return with even more church members. Throughout April, we hosted a tour and lunch for 55 members of St. James Catholic Church, Panna Maria Confirmation Breakfast, Ivan Snoga Funeral reception, Region 20 Social Studies Directors' annual meeting, and tours for Falls City 9th,10th,11th, and 12th grades and Karnes City 3rd grade for a total of 164 students.

May brought the Polish Heritage Center the opportunity to participate in the dedication of the stunning Statue of the Blessed Virgin Mary, donated to the Panna Maria parish by the Ronnie Urbanczyk family. Community members attended Mass, the dedication and blessing beneath the statue, and later enjoyed a reception in the Bishop John W. Yanta Room. June was definitely the month of family reunions. We hosted gatherings for the Carter, Kyle Crews, Jonietz, Housley, Henke, Hurta, Crieghton-Crews, and Siste families for a total of 214 guests. The First Lutheran Church of Floresville along with Los Patios Senior Living of San Antonio scheduled a tour and lunch for 35. Also, 140 ACE summer program students from Kenedy Elementary and Middle School, Three Rivers Elementary and High School, along with Stockdale Elementary and Junior High enjoyed a day in Panna Maria with a tour of the PHC, a Polish craft, tours of the church and St. Joseph's School Museum and a picnic lunch.

The Polish Heritage Center was honored to host one of our most important events to date with Bishop Yanta's Celebration of Life on Saturday, August 3. The beautiful tribute began with Mass officiated by Father Wieslaw Iwaniec. Parishioners and guests then gathered around the Bishop's headstone with the stunning Yanta family coat-of-arms etched on the back and were welcomed by Aloys Notzon, President and Chairman of the PHC Board. Prayers and singing were shared by all as we remembered a special friend, brother, cousin, uncle and Bishop.



Special guests were the Wawel Polish dancers who traveled from Houston to entertain our guests. It was a beautiful event celebrating a true visionary. September brought the addition of five new school districts to our Educational Outreach Program. We welcomed Poth ISD, Yorktown ISD, Runge ISD, Stockdale ISD and Nixon-Smilely ISD. With the tremendous success of our educational outreach and the growing numbers of student tours, it was obvious that we would need additional helpers. The Docent program launched September 18, with six fabulous ladies who are now a crucial part of our program. They assist with student tours, Polish crafts, refreshments and working in the gift shop. Very special thanks to Becky Bexar, Sandra Yanta, Shirley Palitza, Linda Griffith, Joni Huwe, and Judy Scheffler who volunteer their time to ensure that all our visitors have wonderful experiences. A very special thank you to board member Susie Kotara who serves as the PHC's education specialist. Susie plans each of the activities and Polish crafts for our student visitors. Another very special thank you to board member Susan Moczygemba-McKinsey for her role as a major tour guide for our student tours.

In late September, the PHC was honored to be invited by the City of San Antonio to participate in the First Annual Eastern European Culture Festival. Polish, German, and Czech cultures were showcased for three days at La Villita. Board members, staff and docents managed a booth introducing tourists to the Polish Heritage Center, Polish culture, food, music, and costumes. Thank you to Asia Gonzar for her delicious pierogis, Tim Bordovsky and family for their fabulous Polish sausage wraps, Elaine Mazurek and Genny Kraus for modeling their gorgeous Polish costumes, and to Dr. Jim Mazurkiewicz and Rebecca Jane for the foot-stomping Polish music we all enjoyed. We hope to be invited to the festival again this Fall. We celebrated several new beginnings in the Bishop John W. Yanta Ballroom, hosting a rehearsal dinner for Garrison Moczygemba and Erynn Hosek with 86 family and friends in attendance, and a couple's shower for Tanner Bostick and Kayla Kotara for 80 family and friends.





Both were beautiful celebrations, and I'm sure Bishop was very pleased to see the Center filled with families celebrating important milestones. In October, the PHC hosted principals and superintendents from Poth, Stockdale and Yorktown to introduce them to the experiences that we offer their students. Let's just say they were completely blown away!!! We were honored to be asked to host the annual meeting of the San Antonio River Authority, October 16. Sixty members enjoyed a catered lunch in the Yanta Room and then enjoyed the documentary of our Polish immigration and a tour of the Gallery Exhibit.

Travel guru Chet Garner, from the show, "Day Tripper, visited the PHC to highlight our national treasure in the episode," Karnes County," which was dedicated to important places and events within the area. If you did not have a chance to see the show when it aired, you can view the episode on the Day Tripper website. Christmas came early in November as the entire Center was transformed with beautiful decorations at the request of several parishes and groups planning visits. Special thanks to Randy and Gary Pawelek for putting together the twenty-foot Christmas tree and my brave staff for climbing the ladders to decorate with gorgeous Polish ornaments. Guests from Los Patios Senior Living in San Antonio enjoyed the lovely decorations along with a tour of the center and a delicious luncheon. The Weber cousin's reunion was held on October 30 with 35 family members traveling many miles to visit the PHC. Thirty-five Yorktown 11th graders and 78 Poth 7th graders spent the day with us learning about the Polish immigration, as well as Polish history, art and traditions.

Bishop Yanta wanted to reserve a section of the PHC for temporary exhibits to showcase important events and contributions of the Polish people. Our third exhibit, "Honor Our Polish Texan Veterans," opened November 30, with a presentation of the flags by the Karnes County Honor Guard and a ribbon cutting performed by Bobby and Dixie Mutz and Doris Obsta. It was a solemn event. One could feel pride, emotion and a tremendous sense of loss by family and guests as they toured the exhibit. Kudos and credit go to Lauren Robinson, PHC archivist and librarian, for her countless hours of research, hundreds of phone calls finding exhibit items, many hours of cataloging, and of course her vision for this important tribute. In the month of December, the Polish Heritage Center celebrated our donors with a special evening of fellowship with a traditional, family style Polish dinner. It was a wonderful event that expressed our gratitude for their support. "Dziękuję"!!! In addition, school tours continued with visits from the Yorktown senior class, Runge 3rd and 4th grade, and Karnes City 5th grade class. These 158 students loved Christmas at the PHC! Our last huge event for the year 2024 was the opening celebration for the Jubilee Year of Hope on December 29.

The celebration began with a Mass, officiated by Father Scott Janysek and Father Wieslaw Iwaniec, where parishioners were amazed with the beautiful music and singing from the group Majeranki from Rabka, Poland. Guests, carrying lighted candles, then met under the beautiful oak tree in remembrance of the first Mass led by Father Leopold Moczygemba. Dr. Jim Mazurkewicz spoke to the audience, both young and the seniors, reminding each of the journey of the first immigrants and the importance of their story, the traditions, and culture of the Polish people.

The year 2025 began like a whirlwind. In preparation for the White and Red Gala to be held March 1, VIP table sales were announced, invitations were designed and sent out, and all the small details that go along with a major event were finalized. The PHC hosted George Kowalik's 80th birthday in the Bishop Yanta Room. Over sixty family members and friends enjoyed a vintage car theme, delicious food and a sweet rendition about their "Pappa" sung by his numerous grandchildren to the tune of "Old MacDonald Had a Farm."



The PHC was also excited to welcome aboard Christina Griffin as a new staff member in the position of assistant to the Executive Director. As a designated site for the Jubilee Year, the Immaculate Conception Church welcomed its first Pilgrimage visitors to Panna Maria in January. Fifty-six parishioners from St. Matthews Catholic Church in San Antonio traveled here to attend Mass and visit the Polish Heritage Center. The guests enjoyed a delicious lunch catered by Polaks Sausage Farm and then enjoyed the afternoon touring the PHC, the Museum and shopping for beautiful items by Polish artisans in our gift shop and at the Historical Society's Visitor Center. Ron and Debbie Janysek celebrated their 40th wedding anniversary with a luncheon and reception on Saturday, January 25. Eighty-five guests enjoyed the afternoon of fellowship, great food and lots of laughter. We also hosted an afternoon for the members of the Museum of Hand-made Furniture Organization from New Braunfels. Guests enjoyed lunch and tours.

January and February were also extremely busy months for the Educational Outreach program. The PHC hosted students from Poth 4th and 5th grades, Stockdale 6th and 7th grades, Runge 7th and 11th grades, and 3rd grade from Karnes City for a total of 515 students and teachers. A second pilgrimage welcomed members of Saints Peter and Paul Church in New Braunfels on Friday, February 21. Guests enjoyed the documentary, the Veteran's Exhibit, the Gallery, tours of the church and museum and a delicious lunch in Bishop's room. The end of the month brought a great deal of excitement to Panna Maria and the Polish Heritage Center with the arrival of AllDete, the brass band from Poland, who provided entertainment for the White and Red Gala. We had a fabulous week with these guys: a tour of the PHC, a Banduch family reunion, a Texas ranch day hosted by Debbie and Randy Pawelek, a concert for the students at Falls City ISD and of course their outstanding performance at the White and Red Gala. George Kowalik hosted the nine band members in his home for the week and strong friendships were created between all of them. PHC cannot thank George enough for his wonderful hospitality. (cont.)



**THE
POLISH HERITAGE CENTER
AT PANNA MARIA**

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PHC Hours: Tues. – Sat. 10 a.m. – 4 p.m.
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The Polish Heritage Center at Panna Maria Foundation is a 501(c)(3) tax deductible organization.

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It Was A Very Good Year cont.

The goals set for the Polish Heritage Center have been accomplished and include increased promotion. We have sixteen avenues of advertising for the Center, including four major magazines, our own newsletter, three newspapers reaching thousands of readers, a television show featuring the PHC, a radio interview, a beautiful commercial created by Catholic Television of San Antonio, brochures in major hotels from San Antonio to Corpus Christi, a billboard advertisement, highway signs, and church bulletins. Our Veterans' exhibit is in place until October, when we open our newest exhibit honoring Bishop Yanta. To date, PHC has hosted five pilgrimages for Jubilee Year 2025. Finally, our rentals for the PHC and the Bishop John W. Yanta Room have kept us extremely busy.



Most important is the welcoming experience we provide for our visitors. As they enter the Center, there is nothing more rewarding than seeing the expression on the faces of each one and hearing the statement, "I never expected anything like this!" IT'S A GREAT FEELING!!! To say that the Board of Directors and staff are incredible is a definite understatement. They are innovative, supportive and completely committed to the mission of the Polish Heritage Center and Bishop John W. Yanta's vision. Our achievements have instilled a feeling of celebration, accomplishment and pride within the PHC Board of Directors, the staff and me. As always, a very special thank you to our donors for their incredible support and generosity in making a significant difference in our success. Thank you all for supporting me as your Executive Director!