



Visitor Experience #57
A Year of Thanksgiving



Boże Narodzenie!

*The "Pasterka" or Shepherds' Mass at Midnight of Christmas
Image by Wood, Ronsanville, & Harlin, Annapolis, MD*

Thank you!! Dziękuję!

By Betty Kowalik

2021 is almost over! The year flew by and the PHC capital campaign is closing as of December 31, 2021! Thanks to all donors, our beautiful, world class, state-of-the art Polish Heritage Center is complete, and we are open to the public. Now is the time to take advantage of the opportunity to enter a founding society or to move up to a different society to memorialize those who came before us. They worked so hard and sacrificed to give their descendants a better life. We owe them much. What an honor for them to have their names displayed in the founding societies!

Donating to honor your ancestors, has a dual benefit. You can honor them and reduce your IRS taxes because the Polish Heritage Center at Panna Maria Foundation is a fully tax-exempt public charity under sections 501 (c)(3) of the Internal Revenue Code. Gifts to Polish Heritage Center at Panna Maria Foundation are tax deductible to *the extent allowed by law*. What an opportunity!

Donors to the heritage circle societies are displayed in the center's lobby with the donors and those memorialized etched in glass. The remaining founding societies are displayed in the donor gallery. The available societies are listed below.

Saint John Paul II Society *

\$1,000,000 and above

Father Leopold Moczygemba Society *

\$750,000 to \$999,999

Families of Original Settlers Society *

\$500,000 to \$749,999

Saint Faustina Kowalska Society *

\$250,000 to \$499,999

King Jan III Sobieski Society *

\$100,000 to \$249,999

Saint Hedwig Society

\$75,000 to \$99,999

Marie Skłodowska Curie Society

\$50,000 to \$74,999

Nicolaus Copernicus Society

\$25,000 to \$49,999

Tadeusz Kościuszko Society

\$10,000 to \$24,999

Frédéric Chopin Society

\$5,000 to \$9,999

* *Indicates Heritage Circle*

Donor support has kept us going over these many years. For that we are forever grateful and thank the Good Lord every day for your kindness and generosity!

For information concerning recognitions in the Heritage Circle or in the societies, please do not hesitate to contact Betty Kowalik at kowalikbetty@gmail.com or by calling 830-583-6236.

Grand Opening of the Center



Immaculate Conception of the Blessed Virgin Mary Church, Panna Maria, Texas
Photograph courtesy of: John Wojtasczyk

On a sunny, windy day on October 23, 2021, a major event unfolded in a “sleepy hamlet” named Panna Maria, in a typically rural county of South Texas named Karnes. This major event was the official grand opening of the long awaited Polish Heritage Center at Panna Maria. Over ten years ago, **Bishop Emeritus John W. Yanta** had a vision of how to remember and tell the story of the first immigrants from the region of Upper Silesia, in present-day Poland. One hundred sixty-seven

years ago, a group of intrepid Polish immigrants sold all that they possessed, traveled from the land of their ancestors by rail to the Prussian seaport of Bremerhaven, where they boarded the *Weser* and the *Antonette*. They began a nine-week voyage and arrived at the Gulf port of Galveston in early December of 1854. The next segment of their trip via ship to the then thriving port



Gathered crowds awaiting the ribbon cutting
Photograph courtesy of: Miguel Ramos



of Indianola. At that point, what lay ahead of them was a two-week journey by foot to San Antonio in the hopes of meeting up with a son from their Homeland, **Fr. Leopold Moczygemba**. No sooner had they arrived in San Antonio, **Fr. Leopold**

Attentive audience awaiting the ribbon cutting
Photograph courtesy of: Miguel Ramos

Moczygamba broke the news that these exhausted travelers would have to double back, three days by foot, to what would eventually become their new home — a home that would be called Panna Maria.

On this occasion, following the welcome by Executive Director **Angelica Docog**, **Bishop John W. Yanta** was introduced. **Bishop Yanta** shared some opening thoughts and remarks

before offering an opening prayer. A large crowd, from far and wide, had gathered to celebrate with **Bishop John Yanta**, the members of the Board of Directors, **Executive Director Angelica Docog**, the Counsel General of the Republic of



Musicians entertaining at the Grand Opening
 Photograph courtesy of: Miguel Ramos

Poland, **Robert Rusiecki**, and Karnes County Judge **Wade Hedtke**, to cut the ribbon and signal the official opening of the Center. The event was honored with the **Wigilia Ensemble**, many who also belong to the County Line Community Band. As the crowd gathered, the **Wigilia Ensemble** entertained those present on this sunny day.

The **Wigilia Ensemble** filled the air with their tributes as they played both the US and Polish national anthems while the program began. Inspiring words and thoughts were offered by Counsel General **Robert Rusiecki**, County Judge **Wade Hedtke**, and the Executive

Director of the Karnes City Community Chamber of Commerce, **Amelia "Mely" Martinez**. Following these remarks and thoughts, **Bishop John W. Yanta** shared his concluding remarks before the cutting of the ribbon.



Bishop John W. Yanta at the entrance of the Polish Heritage Center during the Grand Opening Ceremony
 Photograph courtesy of: Miguel Ramos



Gathered crowds awaiting the ribbon cutting
 Photograph courtesy of: Miguel Ramos



Bishop Yanta, Counsel General Robert Rusiecki, and Karnes County Judge Wade Hedtke readying to cut the ribbon! Photograph courtesy of: Miguel Ramos

Alongside **Bishop Yanta** with their hands on the scissors, were Counsel General **Robert Rusiecki** and Karnes County Judge **Wade Hedtke**. The memorable ribbon-cutting ceremony officially marked the opening of the Polish Heritage Center at Panna Maria!

All those present were invited to experience a marvel of the *sleepy hamlet*.



Counsel General of the Republic of Poland **Robert Rusiecki** Photograph courtesy of: Miguel Ramos

Bishop Yanta's long held hope and expectations were finally realized! From the very beginning, **Bishop Yanta** unconditionally demanded that the Polish Heritage Center be a *FIRST CLASS CENTER*. Ask anyone who has experienced the Center, and they will tell you that **Bishop Yanta's** demand was heeded! In addition to being wowed by the Center, the large number of visitors were delightfully entertained by the Wigilia Ensemble who had moved to the Temporary/Rotating Exhibit room. A little later, the Polish dance troop, **Jagoda Polish Folk Dance Ensemble**, shared their talents in the Theater. With their colorful attire, the Jagoda dancers displayed their skills with the precision that you

find only with those who have dedicated many years to preserving and teaching this custom from the Homeland of Poland. In keeping with the custom, the dancers' ages ranged from young adult to middle age.



Gathered crowds awaiting the ribbon cutting Photograph courtesy of: Miguel Ramos

Adding to the offerings on this Grand Opening day were items and keepsakes to purchase and to remember the day by. **Jolanta**



Bishop Yanta posing with family and friends
Photograph courtesy of: Miguel Ramos

Mazewski-Dryden, of the Polish National Alliance, brought with her a splendid array of authentic costumes, jewelry, keepsakes, books, and pamphlets. By the time the Grand Opening event wound down on Sunday, it was evident that her stock was seriously depleted!

The Polish Heritage Center also had its own merchandise to mark the occasion. Among the offerings were two different mugs, two distinctive cloth bags, a beautiful commemorative Christmas ornament, a PHC face mask, lapel pin, and a commemorative “coin.”



Bishop Yanta next to the image of the icon of Our Lady of Czestochowa
Photograph courtesy of: Miguel Ramos

To satisfy the “munchies,” two school groups, one for Saturday and one for Sunday, were present with a selection of snacks and drinks which ranged from chips, sausage wraps, cupcakes, whole cakes, water, and sodas. The refreshments were served by students with friendly young

faces which was a wonderful addition.

The Grand Opening event, of course, was a two-day celebration! Sunday featured, as mentioned earlier, the **Jagoda Dance Troop** who continued to dazzle and delight visitors in the spacious Theater with their exposition of the dancing styles celebrated in Poland. Their brightly colored outfits and happy smiles conveyed the joy that the dance troop shared with those present for their perfor-

Polish banner of *Sto Lat, Good Luck, Good Cheer!*
Photograph courtesy of: Miguel Ramos



mances. The **Jagoda** dancers preserve the joyful spirit of Polish culture that often weathered the long periods of pain, strife, and struggles that was part of their daily lives. And just as the Polish spirit survived and thrived, so has its colorful dancing customs. Thank you **Jagoda Dance Troop!**

From the photographs shared here, it is easy to tell that young and old came from far and wide to be part of this remarkable weekend. **Bishop Yanta** made himself

Bishop Yanta with some of those present for the Grand Opening
Photograph courtesy of: Miguel Ramos



Bishop Yanta, flanked by two of his caregivers, **Fomba Nabieu** and **Vanessa Cantu**, speaking with **Piotr Orłowski**, Program Director at Polskie Radio 1030 Chicago
Photograph courtesy of: John Wojtasczyk



Bishop Yanta with the **Jagoda Dance Troop** of Dallas, Texas
Photograph courtesy of: Miguel Ramos

available for many to have the opportunity to remember this special day by having their photographs taken with him throughout the Center.

Below, **Piotr Orłowski**, Program Director at Polskie Radio 1030 Chicago, is in conversation with **Bishop Yanta** about the Polish Heritage Center, what it means to him, what its impact is with others, and what the goal is for



Dorothy Gawlik Moy and Bishop Yanta
with others at the Grand Opening
Photograph courtesy of: Miguel Ramos

visitors who arrive not knowing what to expect. **Piotr Orłowski** represented only one of several media outlets, including those from Poland, that were present for the Grand Opening. The completion and opening of the Polish Heritage Center was anticipated by many in Polonia, not only here in Texas, or the United States, but also in Poland! Poles all around the world look at this *sleepy*

hamlet with great pride because this is the site of the first permanent Polish settlement here in the United States of America! If you want to see *Plymouth Rock*, you go to Plymouth, Massachusetts, because that is where that site is located. If you wish to visit the first permanent Polish settlement here in America, you travel to *Panna Maria, Texas!*



Ross Moczygemba, standing next to the statue for which he was the model of his third great granduncle, **Father Leopold Moczygemba**
Photograph courtesy of: Miguel Ramos

To the right is a proud photograph. Within the “Chapel” is a statue of **Fr. Leopold Moczygemba**. Since there were only a few photographs available of **Fr. Leopold** over the many years of his life, a suitable model was needed. A number of Moczygemba family members had a “contest” within their ranks to locate whom they thought had the best resemblance to our founding father. The winner was **Ross Moczygemba**, son of **Lucian** and †**Josephine Lyssy Moczygemba**. After comparing several photographic poses with those on hand of **Fr. Leopold**, there is a very striking resemblance!



Bishop Yanta, joining others in the Theater, enjoying a program
Photograph courtesy of: Miguel Ramos

The Polish Heritage Center’s flexibility is



A video being shown in the Theater
Photograph courtesy of: Miguel Ramos

already on display. In addition to the showing of an introductory video that sets the atmosphere before you experience the Main Exhibit area, this space also allows for the possibility of viewing other video programs and exceptional presentations. A good example is the photograph below. **Paweł Piekarczyk** was a special last minute guest. He is traveling Polonia here in America,

sponsored by the Polish Government. **Paweł Piekarczyk's** musical program tells the story of pain and repression that Poland was subjected to under both the German Nazis and the Russian Communists. Many of us have heard of the war stories from World War II, but most of us had not experienced what the Polish people endured. This Center is not only about telling the story of our immigrant ancestors but also about relating the history of their Homeland. **Sto Lat!**

John S. Wojtasczyk

Polish performer, **Paweł Piekarczyk**, shown in the yellow circle, performing ballads of the cruelty that Poland suffered under both the German Nazis and the Russian Communists Photograph courtesy of: John Wojtasczyk



Heartfelt thanks to our supporters from October 22 to November 21!

Bold and in italics indicates a corrections

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Mark A & DeAnne Williams
John & Christie Schroeder Wojtasczyk
Bishop John W. Yanta
Lawrence Yanta
Dr. Shirley Ann Yanta, D. C.

Calendar of Events

Many of our communities are still examining moving forward with their celebrations;
many of the listed events ARE PLANNED BUT NOT FINALIZED!

December 11: *Polish Christmas Traditions* at the Polish Heritage Center, Panna Maria, Texas

December:
Chappell Hill, Polskie Kolędy, St. Stanislaus Catholic Church
St. Hedwig, Wigilia, Annunciation of the BVM Catholic Church
Bremond, Kolędy, Toy Drive, Festival of Lights
Houston, Christmas Party, PNA Council #182
Dallas, Christmas Celebration & Bazaar, Jan Karski Polish School
Panna Maria, Polish Christmas Mass,

singing, Immaculate Conception of the BVM
Austin, Christmas Party, Austin Polish Society
January 1, 2022: Kolędy St. Stanislaus Catholic Church, Chappell Hill at noon
January 15, *Welcoming the New Year: Meet Our Community Neighbors* at the Polish Heritage Center, Panna Maria, Texas
February 19th, *We're in Love with Our Polish Texas History* at the Polish Heritage Center, Panna Maria, Texas

The Polish Heritage Center will be Open to Visitors on the following dates:

Thursday-Sunday: Dec. 2nd - 5th, 2021, 10am-4pm.
Thursday-Sunday: Dec. 9th - 12th, 2021, 10am-4pm
Thursday-Sunday: Dec. 16th - 19th, 2021, 10am-4pm
Thursday, Dec. 23rd, 2021, 10am-4pm
Thursday, Dec. 30th, 2021, 10am-4pm
(Admission: \$10 Adults, \$5 Youth 5 -17, and Free for children under 5)

The Polish Heritage Center will be Closed for the Holidays on the following dates:

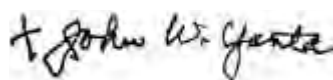
Friday, Dec. 24th, 2021: Christmas Eve -Closed
Saturday, Dec. 25th, 2021: Christmas Day - Closed
Sunday, Dec. 26th, 2021 - Closed
Friday, Dec. 31st, 2021: New Year's Eve -Closed
Saturday, Jan. 1st, 2022: New Year's Day -Closed
Sunday, Jan. 2nd, 2022 - Closed

Bishop's Corner

In-Kind Donations

To the great many of you that have contributed with your monetary support and have made the opening of the Polish Heritage Center a reality, I cannot say *Thank You* enough. Because without your many, many gifts over the years, the Grand Opening would never have been possible. Thank you again! As important as the all of this has been, there is another group of supporters that I wish to acknowledge here and say *Thank You* to as well. This intrinsically special group are those who have made and contributed *In-Kind* donations. This group of donors, through their *in-kind* donations, eased the demands and financial requirements of the Polish Heritage Center. In many cases, this comes in the form of volunteering expert services. Some of the early donations of this kind include: **Moy & Sons Water Well Services** for the drilling and providing much needed water to the Center; **Clarence Bordovsky** for the carpentry work that he performed on early temporary onsite office, or Bishop's Budka; and †**Norman Pollok and his Pollok Surveying** for the survey and site work that started the PHC project. Other *In-Kind* donations includes one who is perhaps the foremost historian of Karnes County, **Judge Robert Thonhoff**, and the entire collection of his work that he graciously donated to the Polish Heritage Center. An ongoing donation is from **Janet Dawson Ebram** and her tireless attention to detail in polishing this newsletter which many of you so enjoy! Others have made substantial *In-Kind* donations, along with their financial support. Especially in the early days of the project, before the project got off the ground, I assisted this fledgling project and helped guide as it was gathering its strength and took its form. These are examples of the many *In-Kind* donations that contributed to making the Polish Heritage Center a reality.

May God bless you and yours,



Bishop John W. Yanta