

NARÓD



POLSKI

Official Publication of the Polish Roman Catholic Union of America, Celebrating 135 Years of Fraternal Service
No. 1 - Vol. CXXII January 7, 2008 - 7 Stycznia, 2008

This year, 2008, marks the 135th anniversary of the founding of the Polish Roman Catholic Union of America. To celebrate this event, *Narod Polski* the official publication of the PRCUA - is being re-designed, beginning with this new masthead, to give it a more modern look. Throughout the year, other regular columns and features in the newspaper will also be updated. The Executive Officers and Editors believe that our members should have some say in the content of the "new and improved" newspaper. Therefore, all members are encouraged to send their comments and suggestions regarding the newspaper to the editors. See page 4 for details.

Our beloved fraternal enjoys the distinction of being the "mother" of all Polish American fraternal societies. Established in 1873 by Rev. Teodor Gieryk and Rev. Wincenty Barzynski, C.R., in Detroit, MI, the PRCUA has grown into the largest Polish Roman Catholic fraternal benefit society in the U.S. with approximately 60,000 members.

From the onset, the PRCUA pioneered social programs to financially assist its members by collecting donations for widows, orphans and the needy and raising funds to build an orphanage and a hospital.

Headquartered in Chicago since around 1875, membership grew in urban areas, especially in Detroit, Chicago, Buffalo, Ohio and Pennsylvania. In 1886, after a life insurance program was adopted, membership escalated.

The PRCUA donated

large sums of money to build Roman Catholic churches and schools in Polish American neighborhoods for the increasing numbers of Poles who were immigrating to the U.S. at the turn of the 20th century.

In order to effectively communicate with members, the PRCUA established a publication that was known by various titles until 1897, when the official publication was named *Narod Polski*, which means "Polish Nation."

The PRCUA urged its members to remain steadfast in their Catholic faith and blend the best of their Polish culture with lofty American ideals to create a community dedicated: "To God and Country" - which became the PRCUA's motto.

Originally, only men were allowed to join the PRCUA, as was the trend in all fraternal societies in the late 1800s. Eventually married women could join if their husband was a member. However, in 1897, the PRCUA was on the cutting edge of liberal reform when it was the first fraternal to grant equal rights to women. Thus, many "ladies' societies" were organized. By 1902, the organization had reached 19,000 members and was growing rapidly.



In response to this expansion, in 1913 the PRCUA built its national headquarters at the corner of Augusta Boulevard and Milwaukee Avenue on Chicago's Northwest side - the same building that it occupies today. At that same time, the PRCUA also opened a library in the same building to serve its Polish-speaking members. In 1935, the PRCUA - under the leadership of President Joseph Kania - founded the first ethnic museum and archives in America. Over the decades it has become a priceless treasury of unique artifacts from Poland and Polonia. Originally known as the Archives and Museum of the PRCUA, the Museum and Library became a separate not-for-profit entity in the 1970s henceforth known as the Polish Museum of America.

The PRCUA promotes camaraderie among its members by sponsoring national sports tournaments, such as bowling, basketball, golf and softball.

It also holds social events and sponsors 20 Polish dance and language schools in four states (Illinois, Indiana, Michigan, and Ohio). Approximately 1,454 children attend these schools where they learn Polish language, songs, culture, history and traditions, as well as Polish folk dancing. The PRCUA also sponsors teen programs, such as annual formal presentation Balls in Illinois and in Michigan.

The PRCUA has a 135-year legacy of supporting worthwhile charitable endeavors. During World War II, members sent food, medical supplies and ambulances to Polish refugees. During martial law in the 1980s, members generously contributed toward ambulances, food, medicines and medical equipment that were sent to Poland through the Polish American Congress Charitable Foundation. The PRCUA continues to support charitable causes through its matching-fund drives to raise money for SS. Cyril & Methodius Seminary at the Orchard Lake Schools in Michigan, Pope John Paul II Cultural Center in Washington, D.C., the Polish Museum of America in Chicago, IL and the new matching funds drive for Madonna University (see page 3 for details.)

The PRCUA is currently

licensed to sell life insurance and annuities in 24 states. In addition to life insurance and annuities, it also offers members low-interest home mortgages, membership in the A. of P. Credit Union and college loans. Each year, the PRCUA offers scholarships and grants to its members for their higher education.

Today, our fraternal organization is headed by National President Wallace M. Ozog, FICF; Resident Vice President Anna Sokolowski, FICF; Vice President Robert Bielenda; and Secretary-Treasurer Joyce Szarowicz. The PRCUA enjoys financial stability and looks forward to a bright future, created by 135 years of effectively serving the needs of its members and the Polish American community at large. - Kathryn Rosypal

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