

Remembering Polish Day '11

By Marianne Poprik, Community Outreach Coordinator

Sunday, August 28th was a wonderful day! Not only was the sun shining, but a slight breeze caressed the team members of PolishYoungstown and the many volunteers who arrived at St. Anne's Ukrainian Catholic Church on Kirk Road in Austintown between 7:00 and 8:00 AM. It looked like it would be a perfect day. POLISH HERITAGE DAY 2011 was finally here! Although there were a lot of last minute details that needed to be done, we knew we could handle it. After all, this was the 4th year that Polish Heritage Day was taking place. We all had big grins on our faces as we greeted each other that morning. The months of planning, worrying, phone calls and tense moments were over. Today was our day! We were doing many tasks at once. Everything needed to be done by 10:30. The clock was ticking. . .

As I entered the new tented outdoor seating area, I greeted Jerry Lyda, PolishYoungstown treasurer and logistics guru for this event. The space was his brainchild. It would add extra seating, create elbow room inside and be the performance space for the fun-loving Chardon Polka Band as well as Tessie Bielski's Pierogi Eating Contest. He was betting on the space being filled.

Further along was the Marketplace Tents where the vendors would be selling their items. Thanks to the graciousness of Fr. Mike Swierz we were able to have all of that space covered, too. Jerry was adding some extra electrical lines for the vendors. No problems loomed that couldn't be handled, he assured me. His family members were already there. His daughter, Paula Wonner had coordinated the Children's area with face painters, games and a large "bounce-around" for added fun! In They were busy moving tables for last minute changes that were taking place. Concessionaire booths were already in place, and vendors were unloading their wares. Everything from Gourmet Garlic Bulbs to Bronze Replicas of the Peterson Park Polish Generals were being sold. I greeted the vendors, showed them to their tables and scurried into the hall.

All the signage that we had hung during the week greeted me as I stood there in awe. Agata Lyda Khoury, our art director, had outdone herself again! Her fingers were really flying on that computer keyboard during the past two weeks. She designed many of the ads and put together the program book, designed the mass program, designed all the signs and even choreographed and taught the Krakowiaki Folk Circle dance routines to our littlest dancers. The massive hand-painted map of Poland that her Dad had provided, (17 feet square) was hanging from the ceiling on the stage. This is what it was all about: the country of our ancestors; the start of our customs; the Polish Heritage we were passing on to others; and the basis of who we were. Not too much time to reflect though. Ken Shirilla, our Polish Happy Hour chair and Master of the Polish Day Bar was heading towards me with cases of our signature PolishYoungstown beer mugs and shot glasses. (I hope you purchased these great souvenirs! But, not to worry, we will be selling them at our monthly Polish Happy Hour also.)

Mary Ann Mlynarski, President of Polish Arts Club and bakery chair, was getting the coffee ready and setting up the display of kolachi, cookies, cakes and the ever-popular pączki. (fluffy, filled donuts) I stopped and bought a few of them, as I knew they would be gone in a matter of hours. Carol Papalas, our volunteer coordinator, approached me with a handful of papers. All the volunteers she had so diligently cultivated during the past many months were listed according to times and duties. Everything was set. Our volunteers were trained and raring to go!

Tony Khoury, food coordinator for the event, was wheeling the trays of homemade foods into the huge kitchen. His dad, John Khoury, (renowned head chef from Las Vegas) was like a general giving directions and staging the food lines. He had worked diligently preparing hundreds of stuffed cabbage, huge pots of halushki and roasters of sauerkraut and kielbasa. Ivan Vincenzini and Ted Szmaj appeared to attend to the last minute details for the Polka Mass that would be celebrated by Fr. John Keehner. They had coordinated the music

performed by the choir from St. Casimir's Church and the Jimmy K and the Ethnic Jazz Polka Band. They set up the altar, procured readers and Eucharistic ministers, and served at the mass themselves.

Lisa Skomora Lotze, our chairperson for the Cultural Garden and Classroom Activities, was checking to make sure that all of the educational signs were in place and the classrooms ready. Lisa was also the chairperson for the relocation of the Polish War Monument from Krakusy Hall to Peterson Park in Poland. While talking to Lisa, I saw our favorite "Babcia" heading into the hall. Jackie Johnson, our Polish Youngstown Secretary had a visor with 50 / 50 written on it. She carried a large jar and rolls of tickets. She was ready to sell, sell sell! Angela Barwick Messenger, was already at her spot in the front entrance hall laying out programs, getting wristbands separated according to the ages of the attendees and in general, getting ready to greet the hundreds of people who would walk through the doors today. As always, Angela had a lot of support and help from her family and from her college sorority sisters and friends.

But where was our leader, our inspiration, our "crack the whip" gal? Ah, there was Aundréa Cika Heschmeyer, coming through the door, coffee in hand. As she smiled brightly, she said: "Today will be a wonderful day." At this point, I joined with her in reciting what has become the PYTown Team mantra repeated hundreds of times before each event: "We have planned a wonderful event and everyone is going to love it."

And so they did! I hope you did too.