



**Polish
American
Association**

The Link

Serving Polonia Since 1922

Volume XXI, Number 2, August 2004

Citizenship The Final Step to Calling the U.S. Home

The search for a better life, with economic and educational opportunities, safety, freedom and a chance for something better for their family and children takes many immigrants on the most difficult and courageous journey of their lifetime. Making a new country feel like home takes years and is filled with challenges and obstacles. But in the end, the majority of immigrants and their families find it was a journey worth taking. Immigrants have a deep appreciation for the opportunities life in the United States affords them. They also place a high value on acquiring their U.S. citizenship to show their commitment to and fully participate in the civic life of their new homeland.

According to the 2000 Census approximately 40 percent of all Polish immigrants are U.S. citizens, which is a rate similar to the rest of Illinois' immigrant population. Although this number may seem low, there are many obstacles that contribute to these numbers. Some of these include learning English, learning U.S. history and civics for the citizenship test, and the time consuming, complicated and for some costly process of applying for citizenship.

Polish American Association (PAA) has helped many thousands of people become US citizens through the many services it offers. PAA has been providing citizenship preparation classes since 1995, assistance with citizenship application filing since 1985, and English classes since 1989.

The intensive citizenship classes for beginners offered by PAA help legal residents become citizens by preparing them for the naturalization exam and by teaching them the rights and responsibilities of citizenship. Our classes are especially



designed for limited-English speaking Poles, and combine intensive English-as-a-Second Language instruction with teaching civics. Because of extended waiting times for naturalization exams from the time of application, PAA also offers review classes for our former students.

To accommodate as many people as possible, these classes are offered in the mornings, evenings on weekdays and weekends, and locations on the northwest and southwest sides of Chicago and the suburbs.

PAA, which is the only Polish community-based agencies accredited by the Board of Immigration Appeals, also offers individual immigration counseling and assistance with citizenship applications

through its Immigrant Services Department. More recently, PAA has been offering low-cost workshops during which staff assists people with filing their own applications.

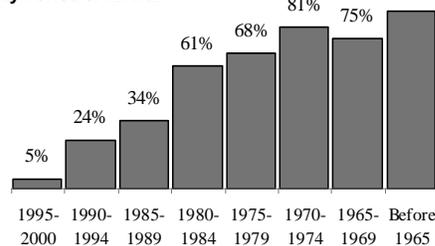
In an effort to encourage more Poles to become U.S. citizens, PAA has aggressively been doing outreach in the community to promote the benefits of citizenship through Polish-language media. Especially in this anti-immigrant climate in the U.S., it is now more important than ever for people to begin the citizenship process as soon as they are eligible. The percentage of Polish immigrants who have become U.S. citizens steadily increases the longer these persons have lived in the U.S. and have had the chance to learn English and prepare for the citizenship exam.

For example, nearly 90 percent of metro Chicago Polish immigrants who have lived in the U.S. since 1965 have become citizens; less than 25 percent of immigrants who came in the early 1990s, however, had naturalized by the year 2000.

(See Table)

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Pct. of Polish Immigrants Naturalized, by Period of Arrival



From The Chairman...

Non-profit organizations often rely on the talents and time of volunteers for many facets of their operations. At Polish American Association, we rely on volunteers in several of our programs. Additionally PAA is governed by a volunteer Board of Directors, which is actively involved in establishing governing policies and a programmatic direction for the agency that best responds to the needs of our clients, as well as maintaining fiduciary responsibilities for our nonprofit organization.

These dedicated professionals, business people, and community representatives who serve on the board come from different backgrounds and experiences, and volunteer their time because of their desire to give back to the Polish community.

They are selected for their abilities and willingness to lend their professional and technical experience to further PAA's goals and mission, their commitment to contribute significant financial or other resources to our organization, and their desire to act as advocates on behalf of those we serve.

I am pleased to welcome several new members, who were recently elected to the Board of Directors of the Polish American Association.

Rev. Wacław Lech, OCD serves as administrator of St Camillus Parish in Chicago's Garfield Ridge community, hosts a Polish-language radio program, and is involved with several other Polish organizations. Because of the large immigrant community located on the Southwest side, we hope he will be PAA's voice there to help us reach those in need that may not know about PAA.

Eugene Mroz, who is the son of Polish immigrants, is the former president and a current board member of Associated Bank in the Jefferson Park community. He volunteers his time by serving on the boards of several charitable organizations such as Easter Seals, Gordon Tech High School and others.

Michael Namovitz, a Polish immigrant, is a successful entrepreneur in real estate development and sales. He has business interests both in the United States and Poland.

Stanley Wielgos is retired from his company, an electrical contracting business, and is very active at Ridgemoor Country Club, which has a large number of Polish American members.

We are thrilled to have these successful and talented individuals as members of the Board. At the same time, we bid farewell to two others who have served on the Board of the PAA. On behalf of the entire Board and staff, I would like to thank Olga Kaszewicz and Kasha Cianciara-Puharich for their effective service on the Board and commitment to the Polish American Association and the immigrant community it serves.

Thank you to everyone who helps us to serve others.

*Mitchell J. Wiet
Chairman
PAA Board of Directors*

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Project - Stop Violence

PAA's Youth Development program created a project called Stop Violence. The main idea behind the project was to help youth understand beliefs related to violence and teach them valuable skills to prevent violent behavior. The culminating product of the project was an artistic performance that took place on August 9th, 2004 in the Free Street Theatre. The performance



Justyna Kielar during the rehearsal for "When You Stop Drinking..."

begun with a short documentary illustrating youths hard work and transformation. The youth then performed several Hip-Hop songs, poetry, and a set of drama skits, which depicted various situations where violence was present. The skits were created by the youth and developed as unscripted improvisations throughout the weeks of work. More than fifty viewers enjoyed the final performance sponsored by **Mayor Daley's Region I KidStart YouthNet**. The performance was such a success that it will be repeated for a larger audience by the end of the month of August.



Ewa Boryczko - theater instructor - with the young actors during the last rehearsal.

"We need to be somehow involved in the lives of our Youth. I showed 20 young people how to create a performance based on a very difficult subject - VIOLENCE. They learned how to use the tools (emotions, concentration, voice...) and gave an insightful, moving and at times humorous performance. It was incredible! Those young people reminded me about the POWER OF HUMAN SPIRIT." *Ewa Boryczko*

Dance the Night Away...

Please save the date **Saturday, November 13, 2004** for PAA's **Annual Gala & Benefit Auction** at the **Chicago Marriott O'Hare**. The recipients of PAA's Presidential Award, being honored at this year's event, are **Dr. Mark Sobor, SOMA Medical Clinic**, and **Anna Zolkowski Sobor**.

For early reservations, please call 773/282-8206 ext.307.

We look forward to enjoying the evening with you!

Reclaiming Hope

The subject of mental health counseling was and still often is taboo in the Polish community. Many people silently suffer for years, with problems that could be addressed with professional help. The stigma and shame associated with seeing a therapist, often leads people to simply ignore psychological traumas or early signs of depression from which they suffer. These unresolved issues have an unintended and detrimental effect on those close to these individuals.

Halina, a mother of three, who immigrated to the US four years ago, was finding it more and more difficult to cope with everyday life and to be a good mother to her children, while trying to battle feelings of worthlessness, hopelessness and isolation. After hearing about Polish American Association's (PAA) Women's Counseling Program on a Polish-language radio talk show, she got up the courage to call and make an appointment. After several sessions with PAA's therapist, she began to understand the root of her depression and resolved to make significant changes in her life.

PAA is the only organization that offers a counseling program for Polish-speaking women with limited income. PAA's staff has been active in outreach efforts through Polish media to dispel myths and fears that mental health

counseling is only for those with serious mental illness. Through this education many women finally feel comfortable in seeking help to resolve issues that have had a devastating impact on their lives and relationships.

At PAA they have found a place they can feel safe, and learn how to cope with issues such as grief and loss, severe depression, eating disorders, past sexual abuse, and marital and family problems. "I learned that I am a person who has a lot to offer, to respect myself and to build healthy relationships with others," said Elizabeth, a counseling client who battled severe depression and anxiety as a result of an abusive relationship. By restoring the emotional and mental strength buried within these women, PAA helps them restore their capacity to care for themselves and their families and lead more productive and fulfilling lives.

PAA thanks Sara Lee Foundation, a Major Corporate Sponsor of PAA's Women's Services program. In addition to its ongoing support, the Sara Lee Foundation recently spotlighted PAA, along with two other respected Chicago non-profit organizations during a special evening at Steppenwolf Theatre. We are grateful for Sara Lee Foundation's generosity to our organization.

Hats Off To . . .

PAA Board Member Ernest R Wish, who was presented with the highest honor the State can bestow to persons for outstanding achievement who were born or have resided in Illinois. Wish was recognized by the Lincoln Academy for his achievements in the areas of Business, Government and Social Service. We congratulate him and are honored to benefit from his time and talent.

PAA Board Member Bishop Thomas Paprocki, an attorney and founder of the Chicago Legal Clinic, received the Catholic Lawyer of the Year Award this past October from the Catholic Lawyers Guild.

Dariusz Barwacz, a graduate of PAA's English literacy program, and part of the All-State Academic Team was honored along with other teammates from Illinois for his academic achievement and volunteer work for their college and community. Phi Theta Kappa, the international honor society for two-year colleges, sponsors the All-USA Academic Team along with USA Today and the American Association of Community Colleges.

Former Board Chairman and Honorary PAA Director Lawrence Leck has developed and will be teaching a course in modern Polish history at the College of Lake County.

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PAA staff knows first-hand the obstacles many immigrants face in obtaining their citizenship, as nearly all of them are immigrants themselves. Therefore, through outreach and advocacy efforts in coordination with other immigrant groups, PAA has supported many programs and initiatives throughout the years to aid recent immigrants in becoming citizens.

Recently, the Polish American Association, along with the United Neighborhood Organization (UNO) and the Hebrew Immigrant Aid Society (HIAS) was recognized for being instrumental in assisting well over 100,000 immigrants in Illinois to become U.S. citizens in the past decade. In fact, the combined number of immigrants these three organizations have helped to become naturalized is second only to the former U.S. Immigration and Naturalization Services.

To be eligible for citizenship, a person must:

- be at least 18 years old
- have resided continuously as a lawful permanent resident in the U.S. for at least five years
- be able to read, write, speak, and understand basic English
- demonstrate a knowledge and understanding of the fundamentals of U.S. civics
- show that he or she has been a person of good moral character

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Polish American Association

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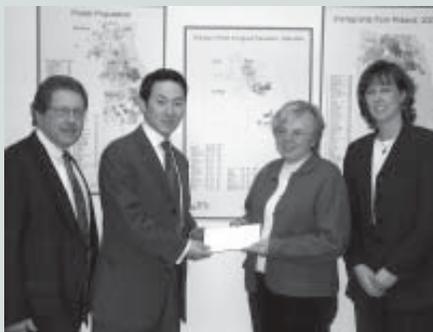
Thank You

...to all those who made PAA's 2004 Chairman's Brunch and those who made generous donations to the Miracle Fund, especially: A.D. Medical, LTD., Archer Gold Jewelry, Bank One, Kazimiera Bober, Chicago Society, P.N.A., Consulate General of Poland, Camille Einoder, Michael Faron, General Press Colors, Ltd, Gordon & Pikarski, Victoria Granacki, Dolores Grantz, Christopher Hill, Integra Communications Inc., Harriet Irsay, Bogna Iwanowska-Solak, Susan & Stanley Jozefiak, Dr. Krystyna Kiel, Paul Kolpak, Krzysztof Koziol, Jeffrey Kroll, Linda Kuczma, Dr. Henry & Michelle Kurzydowski, Labe Bank, LaSalle Bank, Legion of Young Polish Women, Harold & Geraldine Lichterman, Helen Magnuski, Thaddeus Makarewicz, Art & Theresa Malinowski, Edward & Anna Mazur, MBB Enterprises of Chicago, MidAmerica Bank, Leo Niemiec, Most Rev. Thomas Paprocki, Peoples Energy, Polish Roman Catholic Union of America, Polish Women's Civic Club, Inc, Karen Popowski, Quantum Foods, Inc., John Raitt, Dr. Izabela Roman, SBC Illinois, Edmund Siedlecki, Henry & Isabel Smogolski, Jerry Smulik, Dr. Mark & Anna Sobor, Jeanne Sowa, St. Constance Church, Karolina Suszynska-Wolak, Laurence Szumski, Ted Szywala, Dr. Barbara Truszkowski, UPS, Donald Versen, Sr., Stanley Wielgos, Mitchell & Frances Wiet, Bryanna Wilczynski, Ernest Wish, Kathleen Wytmar, Arie & Bozena Zweig . . . to Oak Mill Bakery for generously donating its delightful pastries for the Chairman's Brunch . . . to those who made this year's Paczki Days for the Poor such a success, especially WNVR 1030AM, Grazyna Maneykowski and Archer Gold Jewelry, Bogna Solak and Oak Mill Bakery, Jurek Arsenowicz, Ideal Pastry and all those who supported us with their paczki purchases . . . to the foundations and corporations that provide support for our programs: **The Chicago Community Trust, Chicago Tribune Charities, Emil J. & Marie D. Kochton Foundation, Kraft Employee Fund, Prince Charitable Trusts, Sara Lee Foundation, United Way of Metropolitan Chicago** . . . to Nancy Kaszak for hosting an event at her home to acquaint people with PAA . . . special birthday wishes and thanks to **Dr. Mark Sobor** for suggesting to his birthday guests that they make a donation to PAA in lieu of a gift . . . to **Cukierski & Kowal, L.L.C.** for pro bono services . . . to **Universal Casualty Company** for their generous donation of a phone system to PAA . . . to **Frank Zabielski** for his donation of a mint condition KIA...and to all those not mentioned here, but who have given to PAA in time, money or prayers, *Dziękujemy bardzo!*



PAA was pleased to honor **Henry and Isabel Smogolski** at its 2004 Chairman's Brunch with the Solidarity Award for their lifetime giving to the organization. The Smogolskis are the first private individuals to contribute to PAA at the Solidarity Circle level, which includes those who have made gifts in excess of \$50,000 during their lifetime. (Pictured left to right) Isabel Smogolski, PAA Board Chairman Mitchell Wiet, and Henry Smogolski.

PAA is grateful and proud to be the recipient of **SBC Communications'** Exceleator grant, which will enable the organization to enhance its data technology. (Pictured left to right) SBC External Affairs Directors Jerome F. Mytych and Steve Kim present PAA Executive Director Karen J. Popowski with the SBC Exceleator Grant as PAA Board member and SBC employee Bryanna Wilczynski looks on.



The Polish American Association expresses its deep gratitude to **Edward and Jane Bleka** and **Quantum Foods**. Thanks to their incredible generosity, PAA once again has a vehicle to transport tons of food each week to our food pantry and homeless day shelter. Our homeless clients have a means to travel the more than 20 miles daily to and from their night shelter, which is especially appreciated during the cold winter months. Additionally, this van is used for our youth and senior programs.