



## Orange County News

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Here we are, at the beginning of the New Year 2009, embracing each day with new hopes, dreams and positive expectations. As January marches on, sun is getting brighter, days are already getting longer, we reminisce about some events of the past year, especially those, which have touched our hearts, which have brought us joy – those, we want to remember. For the Community of the Pope John Paul II Polish Center the special event which will be long remembered, was the Celebration of the 25th Anniversary of the Center in April 2008. With grateful hearts we continue to thank God for our Center and ask Him for an abundance of blessings in the future.

For the community of the Pope John Paul II Polish Center in Yorba Linda there is a lot to reminisce about, because the Christmas Season, which has just passed was so full of special activities and festivities of religious, social and charitable nature. To mention only few, there were at the Center special Liturgies, devotions, Christmas Brunches, dinners and parties. There was the annual, beautiful „Jaselka” performed by the children of the Helena Modrzejewska School, as well as the traditional “Wigilia Dinner” organized and hosted by the teachers and parents.

Another special event, organized and performed by the “Polanie” Dance Ensemble, was an evening of “Koledowanie”. Beautiful Christmas Carols and Folk Dances were enjoyed by everyone, and filled the hearts of all present with true Christmas spirit and joy.

Year 2009 was ushered in at the Polish Center at the gala “Sylvester Ball” on December 31<sup>st</sup>. Happy partygoers wined, dined and danced to their hearts delight till the wee hours, enjoying good music, friendship and the endless flow of gourmet food prepared by our own Super Chefs Teresa and Czeslaw Turek. The Ball was under the auspices of the “Polanie”, with Viola Turek and her committee in charge of the festivity.

Center’s forthcoming attractions will be the “Valentine Dance” on Saturday, February 14th, sponsored by the “Polanie” (Info: 714 996-8161), followed by the “Paczki Dance” on Sunday February 22nd<sup>d</sup> (1pm - 5pm) This is also an annual event which attracts many dance lovers from near and far, who come to the Polish Center to dance their hearts away to the tunes of the well known band “Roger and the Villagers”. “Paczki Dance” is sponsored by the Ladies Guild, and this year is under the capable chairmanship of Josie Kudlo. Many fine prizes and good Polish food will await everyone attending. Admission is - \$ 8. children 12 & under – free. All are welcome! HAPPY NEW YEAR!

### “Who is Who”...

#### KASIA BITNER

By: **Lila Ciecek**

Pope John Paul II Polish Center in Yorba Linda, California is proud to present Kasia Bitner, a young lady, who has been a lifelong member of the Center, and for many years has been sharing her time and singing talent with the Community. She has been a solo vocalist at many special events at the Center, including the Celebration of the 25<sup>th</sup> Anniversary, Polish National Alliance 100-year Anniversary and many others.

Kasia was born in Mission Viejo, California, daughter of Christopher and Mariola Bitner, and granddaughter of Janusz and Anna Bitner - longstanding, funding members of the Polish Center. Kasia attended Saturday Polish School at the Center and received Sacrament of Confirmation at the church there. She speaks fluent Polish and English, loves to sing and is a very accomplished young lady.

After graduating as a valedictorian from Aliso Niguel High School, Kasia was accepted in many prestigious Universities including UC Berkley, UC San Diego, and UC Irvine. She chose UC Irvine, and presently, as a freshman is pursuing her two passions in life: Biological Sciences and Vocal Performance / Opera. She is currently majoring in both, carrying 20 units and doing very well. She was selected to the Honors program at UC Irvine as well as being recognized as a UC Irvine Regents Scholar. Kasia is taking vocal and piano lessons. She participated in many singing competitions: was the finalist in Classical Singer Magazine’s competition in New York, and in the finals of the Opera Pacific’s Laila Conlin Competition. Her Music Spotlight Awards Audition resulted in a very positive feedback: “rich, vibrant, world class voice.”

During her recent vacations in Poland, Kasia let her talents shine there and was involved in many activities. Among these, she sung during Mass in many churches and was guest soloist at the summer festival’s “Czwartki Artystyczne in Brennej” (“Artistic Thursdays”). It was a very special event for Kasia when she was invited to conduct a military orchestra (50 men) during the evening concert of the 17<sup>th</sup> International Music Festival “Viva il Canto.” While in Poland she devoted much of her time to study music with a professor from the University of Silesia. Traveling through Austria, Kasia had an opportunity to sing in the audition room of the Vienna National Opera House.

While at home, Kasia is always very generous with sharing her time and talent with people in various, local retirement homes and at the Saddleback Hospital, where she works as a volunteer and gives concerts, bringing joy and happiness to others. We congratulate Kasia and wish her many more accomplishments, continuous successes and a bright future. □



### Polish News Bytes from 7

◆ Poland’s first 2009 frost fatalities accompanied the first cold snap of the new year. The first victim was a 58-year-old homeless man from the eastern city of Hrubieszów (Lublin voivodship), whose frozen body was found in a meadow by hunters. The second was a 76-year-old woman who froze to death in her unheated flat in the southern mountain town of Zakopane (Małopolskie voivodship). In recent years the first cold-snap fatalities had occurred as early as October. A 20-year-old homeless man found in a Kraków side street was the third victim.

◆ The 2008 Oscar nominee „Katyń” is not available on a DVD with English subtitles, despite considerable interest in the movie world-wide. Many Poles wanted to send copies to friends in America but couldn’t find any. The film’s world-famous director Andrzej Wajda blamed the inept distribution operations of TVP (Polish public television). „Sixty-six years after the crime, Stalin’s defenders are trying to undermine the historical facts about Katyń, but copies of the film are still unavailable in Russia, other European countries of the United States,” Wajda complained.

◆ The Central Intelligence Agency has released 82 documents relating to one of NATO’s greatest cold-war spies, Polish Army Col. Ryszard Kuklinski. A senior Polish General Staff officer and aide to General Jaruzelski, for over nine years Kuklinski provided the CIA with more than 40,000 pages of documents regarding the innermost secrets of the Soviet-led Warsaw Pact. During the 1980-81 Solidarity period, he continued to provide information on martial-law planning and Soviet pressure. Kukliński and his family were whisked Poland to safety in the US in 1981 but there both his sons died mysterious deaths, leading money to suspect “the long arm of the Kremlin”.

◆ Foreign Minister Radosław Sikorski is widely seen in some Euro-Atlantic circles as the next chief of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO). The British-educated Sikorski, who speaks fluent English and has an American wife, is extremely well connected in the West and his appointment would greatly boost Poland’s international prestige and significance. For some time now NATO officials have expressed an interest in focusing on the military bloc’s “eastern dimension”. The name of Czech Deputy Prime Minister Saša Vondra has also surfaced in that context.

◆ Poland’s minimum monthly wage rose from January 1st, 2009 by 150 zlotys (about \$50) to 1,276 zł (\$433). The increase resulted from a compromise achieved by the Trilateral Commission comprising government, industry and labor representatives. Originally the government wanted the minimum wage to increase only to 1,204 zł a month, and the unions also compromised by agreeing that the minimum wage would amount to only 40% of the average wage, not 45% as they had originally demanded. Most Polish employees get paid once a month.

◆ Poland’s blown-glass tree ornaments were one of the country’s first victims of the global economic crisis during the 2008 Christmas season. The fragile, hand-blown, hand-painted ball-type ornaments have won a world-wide clientele and are especially popular in the US, but economic uncertainties have seriously cut into the market. One producer, the Szkló-Dekor Co. of Piotrków Trybunalski received only a fraction of the orders it normally does. In hard times, people are turning to cheap “Made in China” junk, a company spokesman remarked.

◆ The last batch of draftees are now serving in the Polish Army which plans to go professional by 2010. When the current rotation completes its stint, only career soldiers will be serving in the

country’s Armed Forces. Defense Minister Bogdan Klich says the Polish Armed Forces will undergo major modernization and will not drop below a total troop strength of 150,000.

◆ Police have clashed with cross-border traders who have repeatedly blocked the border crossing in the eastern town of Medyka. The traders were protesting against customs regulations limiting them to only two packages of cigarettes a day. Many Poles in this economically depressed area could feed their families for a day on the 10 to 15 zlotys (\$3.30-\$5) they earned when reselling a carton of the cigarettes they brought over from Ukraine.

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◆ More than 7,200 Polish doctors have left Poland since 2004 to practice medicine abroad, or 6.3 percent of all the country’s professionally active physicians. During the same period, only 34 foreign doctors, mainly from Third World countries, have come to Poland to work. A chronic lack of funds, inadequate and obsolete equipment, pay protests by health employees, hospital bankruptcies and closures have combined with the doctors’ exodus to make a patient’s life a nightmare. Patients may have to wait a year or more to get undergo medical tests and necessary operations.

◆ The Prussian Trust, which had demanded restitution from Poland for Germans who lost their property in Poland when they were expelled after World War II, did not have a leg to stand on, the Strasbourg-based European Court of Human Rights ruled recently. The trust, a claims group, acknowledged that Nazi Germany had inflicted massive suffering on Poland, but argued that it was unfair to punish individual Germans for Hitler’s crimes. The ruling was welcomed by German Chancellor Angela Merkel whose government has long regarded the Prussian Trust’s claims as unjustified.

◆ PKN Orlen, Poland’s largest petroleum company, plans to expand its gas-station chain in northern Germany by some two hundred stations over the next three years. The company’s Germany subsidiary, Orlen Deutschland, already operates some 500 filling stations. It has scored annual profits of more than \$11 million.

◆ Polish plastic surgeon Maria Siemionow has performed America’s first face transplant. Siemionow, a graduate of the Poznań Medical Academy, led a surgical team whose members took turns at the operating during the complicated 23-hour procedure at Cleveland Clinic with which she has been associated since 1996. The patient had experienced such severe facial damage that she could not eat or breathe unassisted. The transplant taken from a deceased donor replaced all but her forehead, lower teeth and jaw. □

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