

Symposium from 1

Greetings addressed to conference participants can be viewed on the PAC website www.pac1944.org.

General Session 2 – Today’s Polish American Community

The moderator for this session was Dr. Lucja Mirowska—Kopeć, General Secretary of Polish Clubs and Principal of Arthur Canty School in Chicago. The three panelists, like most speakers throughout the conference, used Power Point presentations to highlight their points. The first panelist to speak was Kasia Rivera, Partner Specialist of the U.S. Census Bureau, who urged all to respond to the 2010 Census so that their communities will not be under-represented in Congress and under-funded by federal programs. She noted that the 2010 Census will contain only 10 questions, since questions asked previously in the long form are now asked in the American Community Survey which is done once every month in every community across the country.

Dr. Thaddeus Radziłowski, President of the Piast Institute, spoke of their Census Information Center and findings from their survey of Polonia. With him was Dominik Stecula, Census Coordinator of the Piast Institute, who noted that migration from Poland to the United States is declining. Whereas in 2003, 12% of Poles migrating from Poland came to the United States, only 9% did so in 2006, with the UK and Germany as the leading destinations. Emigration from Poland overall appears to be declining; outmigration reached a low of 37,000 in 2007. Five percent, or 525,590, of Polish ethnics in the United States are foreign-born.

The picture of Polonia that emerges from Census data is highly positive. Polish Americans, who numbered 9,887,799 in 2008, are slightly older, better educated, wealthier, more likely to hold professional and management positions and own homes than the general American population. Median age of Polish Americans is 38.7 years as compared to 36.9 years of the general American population. Bachelor and higher degrees are held by 36.1% of PolAms as compared to 27.7% of the general population. 41.3% of PolAms hold professional and managerial positions as compared to 34.9%. Median family income of PolAms is \$79,494 versus \$63,360. Only 7.1% of PolAms fall under the poverty line, compared to 13.2% of Americans. 74.4% of Polish Americans own their own homes versus 66.4% of the general population.

Dr. Radziłowski briefed the gathering about the “Modern Polonia Survey” which the Piast Institute is currently conducting and is being distributed by Polish-American media. Respondents are not a representative sample, but, as those with contacts with the media, are more likely to be 21st century leaders of Polonia. So far there have been 636 respondents from 32 states. Their profile: Age: 50% are 45-64 years of age; 20% over age 65. Place of birth: 75% born in U.S., 20% in Poland, 5% elsewhere. Political party affiliation: Independent 34%, Democrat 33%, Republican 29%. Political orientation: Conservative 46.7%, Moderate 21%, Liberal 31.5%. Of the respondents, 56% have visited Poland, of which 74.6% visited Poland in 2000 or later. For respondents, the single most important issue in U.S.-Polish relations was: Economic cooperation 28.3%, Visa Waiver for Polish citizens 27.6%, cultural and educational exchanges 18.4%. None of the respondents attributed importance to settling old issues or scores. A majority of respondents believe Poles are not accorded the same respect as other nationalities and report discriminatory treatment and offensive or stereotypical remarks. Piast Institute is still soliciting participants in the survey, which can be accessed at: piaststudy.blogspot.com.

A Q and A session followed. There was great indignation that this year’s census form does not include an opportunity to specify Polish ancestry. Instead, Poles will register in the “white category” along with other Europeans, Arabs, Israelis and others. However, Hispanics and those of Asian Pacific ancestry are separate categories with opportunity to indicate countries of origin. There is concern that this change in the census will lessen our opportunities to get various types of special benefits doled out to specific ethnic group categories.

General Session 3—Leadership in the Polish American Community

After lunch in the cafeteria, guests returned to their seats to be informed about Leadership in the Polish American Community. The moderator was Dr. Casimir (Cash) Kowalski, Professor of Educational Leadership, South Carolina State University. First he spoke about “passing the torch.” Too many leaders hold on to their positions too long and prevent new leaders from having an opportunity. New leaders need to be developed. Any action is better than none. People tend to wear too many hats and should take a break and give others a chance. They should not be critical of these new leaders and should welcome the change. The old leaders could still be a Director on the Board. It was decided that leaders are made – not born.

The first panelist was Laura Felusiak, Secretary of the PAC Texas Division. Miss Felusiak attended the School of Polish leaders – in Poland, where she learned about Poland’s political and educational situation. Kamil Mróz, Co-organizer of Polish—Canadian Youth, spoke about Quo Vadis II, where 200 young students learned about their heritage, country, and leadership. The next conference will be held beginning May 7, 2010 in Windsor, Ontario. The location will enable more American students to attend. With the advent of email and texting, communication and rapidity have improved greatly. Students can communicate quickly and often. Organizations were urged to send a student, to be ready to confront challenges, and to bridge the gap between young and old. Education is a lifelong journey. The audience was told to “share the vision, trust, and keep it.” Jennifer Crissey of the Polish Roman Catholic Union is another example of a positive youthful leader. She urged all to be positive, sensitive, and recognize others. They also need emotional intelligence and charisma. In the Q and A session, the President of the Northeastern Illinois University Polish Club lamented the fact that she has over 100 members and only five who attended this conference. Miss Crissey encouraged her by saying that she should be thankful for those five, and not to be discouraged over the others.

Issue Session A1**Education Partnerships: Teaching and Learning**

Dr. Lidia Filus, Professor of Mathematics at Northeastern University, moderated this session, with professors from Poland and the Chicago area as panelists. (*I did not attend this session.*)

Issue Session A2**Role and Importance of Ethnic Organizations**

Virginia Sikora, President of the Polish Women’s Alliance of America, moderated this panel.

Teresa Abick, Vice President of the Polish National Alliance (for 16 years) was the first speaker, and stated that she is ready to “hand over her torch.” The PNA is active in 37 states. For the Youth (and others), they sponsor dance groups, classes, choreography seminars, Debutante Balls, sports, Spelling Bees, and trips to Poland. It is important to support fraternal organizations.

Ana Sokolowski, VP of the Polish Roman Catholic Union of America, informed the audience that the PRCU was founded in 1873 and is the oldest Polish fraternal. They support religious and educational activities, dance groups, as well as the Polish Museum. They have been a presence at Six Flags, White Sox and Chicago Wolves games, and other events. They believe in keeping Polish customs and traditions alive. The audience was urged to lobby textbook publishers and encourage them to include Polish history.

Wallace Zieliński, PAC Secretary, represented the Polish Falcons, of which he was the President for many years. Mr. Zieliński explained that The Falcons, PWAA, PNA and PRCU are 501(c)8 Fraternal Benefit Associations. Fraternal must be not-for-profit, have subordinate lodges in the country, offer a benefit (e.g., life or health insurance), and have a common bond among members that separates them from others. Mr. Zieliński spoke about how changes in our society are challenging the fraternal to find new missions. The original mission of the fraternal to provide mutual assistance has over time been supplanted by government,

employer, and union programs, such as Social Security, Medicare, Medicaid, unemployment, life and health insurance, and pensions. Instead, fraternal have turned to volunteerism and community service, as well as scholarships. Will fraternal remain relevant; will the resources be there to support our community, he asked. The resources will be there, he suggested, if ethnics buy insurance, IRAs, annuities. Fraternal offer excellent, competitive insurance, annuity, IRA and other products at lower cost and higher return than commercial firms. Because they are non-profits, they return their earnings to their members, communities, and Polish American organizations such as the PAC. They also are highly regulated and safe. As examples of new directions for fraternal, he mentioned the Falcon’s sponsored “Make a Difference Day” and “Join Hands Day”, as well as getting together with other organizations. They work with and visit the veterans, senior citizens, and churches.

A discussion followed in which many participants spoke about activities of some of the oldest organizations (Polish Singers Alliance of America founded 1889), as well as the newest, such as League of Young Polish Women (Ms. Lucy Lucki), Polish Youngstown (Aundrea Cika-Heschmeyer), Children of Christian Holocaust Survivors Illinois Chapter (Dr. Cathy Dipla), and service organizations such as Organization Health Plus, serving 15,000 Polish immigrants yearly (Małgorzata Cieślak). Rob Kamiński, President of the Polish Heritage Society of Northeastern Wisconsin, emphasized that you can make a difference: their organization of 200 members publishes a newsletter six times a year and distributes 5,000 copies of each free of charge through stores, veterans organizations, and other locations.

General Session 4

The final session of the day (5:30 – 6:45 PM)

U.S. and Poland Business Ties

The moderator was Bogdan Puksza, Executive Director of the Polish American Chamber of Commerce. Panelists were Andrzej Arendarski, President of the Poland Chamber of Commerce; Iwona Bocheńska, Illinois Department of Commerce; Maciej Cybulski, Managing Director, state of Illinois Central European Office; and Richard Walawander, Principal of Miller Canfield School.

Positive assets of Poland were brought out: 1.) Poland is a country of young people. 2.) 87 percent of the students speak a second language. 3.) There are 500 institutions of higher learning. 4.) Poland is the only European country with a positive GDP of 1.1%. China’s is seven %. 5.) Poland is Number One of the 12 East European countries.

The United States, Germany, Luxemburg, and other countries are investing in Poland. Some of the industries are Intel, General Electric, and SAS. IBM is setting up in Wrocław. Poland is offering business incentives, such as tax exemptions. New roads and sports arenas are being built. In 2012 the European Soccer Championships will be held in Poland. Poland is indeed a very favorable investment destination!

Reception and Piano Recital

At 7:00 PM all of the attendees gathered in the lobby to enjoy a reception of wine and hors d’ouerves. Following the reception, there was a piano recital. An Evening with Chopin was very beautifully performed by Maralguia Darjaa, who was born in Mongolia and studied in Poland.

DAY TWO – October 16**General Session 5—Polonia and Poland : Ties Between the Two Countries**

PAC Vice President for Polish Affairs Bożena Kamińska was the moderator of this panel. Adjutant General of the Illinois National Guard William Enyart was the first speaker. Illinois has long had a Partnership for Peace with Poland. Some of the topics General Enyart touched on were, the “elephant in the room”—missile defense. President Reagan’s threat of a Star Wars defense in the 1980’s led to the collapse of the Soviet Union. NATO has the F165.

The Illinois National Guard is very committed to Poland. Positive programs mentioned were: 1.) There are 18 Illinois National Guardsmen serving with the Poles, under Polish command, in Afghanistan. 2.) Six Illinois State Police officers went to Poland to learn and share information. Youth intervention programs were initiated. 3.) The Illinois National Guard and Poland both believe in the importance of peacekeeping and are stationed in countries such as Kosovo and Lebanon – to keep the borders safe. 4.) There are 64 countries partnered with National Guard units. Illinois has only Poland, while other states have more than one country.

A “surprise” panelist was Mr. Sebastian Mikosz, CEO of LOT Polish Airlines in Warsaw. He stated that Polish Americans are one of their largest groups of passengers. LOT is one of the few central European airlines still flying over the Atlantic. Charters will soon begin flying to the U.S. LOT is always striving to improve their services. They hope to add another U.S. city to their schedule, as they add new large planes. All their Transatlantic flights are served by Boeing airplanes and they are first in line for the newest planes.

Mr. Andrzej Arendarski, President of the Polish Chamber of Commerce, spoke of Poland’s business strength. He said that there is no recession in Poland. They are receiving subsidies from the EU. There are 500,000 companies currently in Poland.

Dr. Susanne Lotarski, PAC V.P. for Public Relations, Retired Deputy Assistant Secretary for Europe and Director of the Office of Eastern Europe, Russia, and Eurasia for the U.S. Department of Commerce, was the next panelist at the podium. Dr. Lotarski began by saying that Polonia and Poland are very different today from what they were when the PNA or PAC were founded. For most of its history in America, Polonia’s top goal was regaining freedom and independence for Poland. Twenty years ago this goal was achieved. Both Polonia and Poland now have different expectations of each other. Polonia wants a Poland it can be proud of - one that conducts its own affairs in a democratic manner, that takes care of its citizens and provides them opportunities to realize their potential, that is principled and tolerant, and that contributes constructively to European, Transatlantic and global peace and prosperity. What Poland, in turn, needs today is a strong, united, organized Polonia that has influence in politics, the media, academia, the professions and business. Polish leaders repeatedly have told us: “We need you to be strong and influential in the U.S.” But there is a paradox, Dr. Lotarski said. Even as individual Polish Americans have prospered and reached the top of their professions, our organizational strength and influence as an ethnic group has dispersed and faltered. The truth of the matter, she suggested, is that Polonia has been most united and forceful when Poland is under threat, when there is a “big cause” on behalf of Poland. She suggested that to build unity and energy in a normal state of affairs, in the absence of crisis, we need to go back to our roots in this country. Our organizations always had dual missions. One was Poland’s freedom and independence. The other was the well-being and advancement of Polish Americans in the United States. It is this latter mission, advancement of Polish Americans and rejuvenation of Polish American organizations that is the crisis of our times. So much of our Polish heritage in this country has disappeared or is in danger of disappearing. Too few Polish Americans under age 50 know about or care to get involved in the Polish community. Too few of our successful efforts reach out beyond the Polish community to interest, inform and influence our fellow Americans. These are the challenges we face. Polonia needs new energy, new directions, modern communications, and strengthened unity of purpose. In working toward this, Polonia needs a new partnership with Poland. Dr. Lotarski said that she had proposals for this partnership but would conclude her remarks at this point because of Mayor Daley’s imminent arrival.

Maciej Płażyński, President of Wspólnota Polska, was the last speaker from this panel. He thanked Polonia for its help when Poland was not free. Now they no longer need the letters and packages from their American relatives. They want an exchange of potential – an academy, beginnings of partnerships. He said that Poles like to worry about things, and concluded, “Let’s worry about the potential that is there.”

Symposium to page 9