

Looking through the Window...

by Resident Vice President Anna Sokolowski



Dear Readers,

"There's a country dear to my heart, that's my mother's native land"

Song words from: "My Mother's Homeland" by Tadeusz Mikucki

In July 2009 the International Children's Festival of Polish Folk Dance Ensembles was held in "My Mother's native land". Nestled in the Southeastern part of Poland is the small and picturesque resort town of Iwonicz Zdroj. Iwonicz Zdroj is one of Poland's oldest health resorts and spas, dating back to 1578, which was famous outside Poland already in the 18th century. Three of the PRCUA dance ensembles attended that Festival: "Wesoly Ludek" and "Wesole Ludki" from Chicago with the dance group Director Krystyna Lech, dance instructors Anna Kraszewski, Danielle Lech-Kroplewski and choreographers Misia and Richard Jaminski and "Polanie" from Lemont, Illinois, under the choreographic and artistic direction of Misia Jaminski and group coordinator Krysia Rozwadowski.

The Festival was one-of-a-kind experience for our youth. Not only are they fun, the attendees quickly melted into a group of friends enthusiastically sharing the common experience. Many of the dancers have established long lasting friendships extending beyond the Festival. They learned how to embrace their strengths as well as weaknesses and applauded the strengths and achievements of others. This experience inspired and encouraged them to work as a team, challenging them to do their own personal best. To our dancers this trip was a hugely enriching experience and all of the dancers hope to have an opportunity to participate in the Festival again. Many of them had never been to Poland before. Over 500 dancers traveled halfway around the world to share their song and dances and experience the Polish culture and traditions with others. All the dancers had the same mission - to preserve and promote the Polish heritage through singing and dancing.

After our arrival in Iwonicz Zdroj, there was no time to get adjusted to the time change or to this year's unusually hot Polish summer. We had no air-conditioning, but cold showers did help. There were plenty of cool refreshing juices or local spa water to drink and mouth-watering, cooling and exciting locally made ice cream. Oh, my gosh, that ice cream was the best ever! The dancer's time was consumed with activities, many hours of busy practice and concert schedules. Many of the performances were in the nearby towns, but the most important concerts were held in Iwonicz Zdroj. The Festival started on July 16th with a Mass at St. Iwona Church with Rev. Andrzej Chmura officiating. Later that day, the official opening ceremony started with a parade through the people-lined streets of Iwonicz Zdroj. Imagine the excitement of this moving spectacle as over 500 smiling dancers dressed in the colorful Polish costumes walked, sang and danced their way through the streets toward the main stage in the center of the town. After welcoming speeches and presentation of the *Keys to the City* the opening concert started, where each dance ensemble presented their favorite dance of Poland. All of the dancers were very well prepared, energetic, and light on their feet as they presented dances from different regions of Poland. It was a joy to see distinctive styles and pattern of dance movements, not to mention the beautiful singing on the stage. They were just wonderful!

The two main concerts were: "Performance of Nations" (Tance Krajow Zamieszkania) and the Gala Concert. At the "Performance of Nations" Concert each dance group performed dances highlighting a bit of culture that the dancers experience in their own country. "Wesole Ludki" danced and kicked their heels to the beat of western style music as they performed the "Square Dance". "Wesoly Ludek" danced the "Charleston Polka" from the Roaring Twenties with a fast-paced dance to a Polka melody, which was characterized by outward heel kicks combined with an up-down movement and bending and straightening of the knees with elaborate arm movements, not to mention the colorful costumes. That dance made all of us feel that we are 10 again, where you can just let your limbs go crazy! "Polanie" on the other hand put us in a relaxing mood. They danced in colorful Hawaiian costumes "Dances from Hawaii" and sang the Don Ho classic song "Tiny Bubbles" and gracefully with their various hand motions and basic patterns leg steps and rhythms took us to the beautiful Hawaiian Islands. I may add that many people remarked about how much fun and refreshing it was to see something new and different.

The Festival ended with a Gala Concert and introduction of many special guests: RP Speaker of the Senate Bohdan Borusewicz and President of "Wspolnota Polska" Maciej Plazynski; also present were Senators from different regions of Poland, officials and VIPs including the Mayor of Iwonicz Zdroj Pawel Pernal and Festival Director (our "Guardian Angel") Mariusz Grudzien. The concert was very beautiful. Each dance group performed one of the dances from their repertoire.



Anna Sokolowski with Speaker of the Senate B. Borusewicz and dignitaries at the Gala Concert in Iwonicz Zdroj

"Wesole Ludki" performed the suite and songs from the Eastern Krakow region, which is a rich and vibrant center of rich folklore, historic traditions and arts. The dance has many steps and figures. "Wesoly Ludek" presented dances and songs from the southeastern part of Poland - Rzeszow and Krosno region. The dances are dynamic and rich in form and some dance steps are unknown in other regions of Poland. "Polanie" presented *Scenery of Warsaw* with an array of early 20th century working class Warsaw dances - waltz, szajerek, tango and polka all with humor, romance, song and music.

The Gala ended with the great dance and song finale featuring all the participants including the officials and

the audience. There was much applause and standing ovations as our dancers took their bows. The memories of this performance will last a lifetime as the lights dimmed, and as we all held hands, we could see sad tears on the faces of everyone.

This Festival could not happen without the hard work and effort of many people. A special BIG THANK YOU to the Polish Senate, Wspolnota Polska and to the Festival Director, Mariusz Grudzien, and his committee for bringing together so many dancers from all over the world. We thank you for your hard work and efforts for the success of the Festival and for making this festival enjoyable, unforgettable and fantastic! Thank you to the PRCUA organization for sponsoring our dance groups.

I should not forget our dance instructors and choreographers, especially Misia and Richard Jaminski. It was under Misia's and Richard's skillful direction that our dance groups performed so well. They inspired and motivated our dance instructors and the dancers with the ever-expanding diversity of choreographic invention. They encouraged them to aim for excellence and ignited the spark that made them work to achieve the expressive potential of Polish dancing. They also reinforced the enjoyment of dance, helping children grow into informed, open minded and appreciative students. They showed that Polish folk dancing indeed enriches the lives of our youth. We thank Misia and Richard for their invaluable contribution to Polish dancing and to the PRCUA. So many wonderful choreographers and dance instructors who have devoted much of their lives to the promotion and preservation of the beauty of our Polish folk dancing have blessed our organization.

On a personal note, it was such a pleasure to be at the Festival with our dancers, instructors, choreographers and parents and be one of the family members. It was pure pleasure traveling with such a well-behaved group of children. I took over 500 photos to share with readers on the PRCUA website: www.prcua.org - click on **News & Events - Looking Through the Window**.

CONGRATULATIONS - Congratulations are in order to the PRCUA new choreographers who graduated this summer from the Choreographers Course in Poland. Kalina Dziadkowiec, Renee Bober, Natalia Grabowski and Andrew Lech graduated in Rzeszow and Jaclyn Krysinski and Krzysztof Ptaszek graduated in Lublin after taking very demanding courses under the direction of very talented and world known choreographers and dance specialists for the past 4 summer months in Rzeszow and Lublin, Poland.

Congratulations on passing the very difficult exam and your perseverance and commitment - a job well done! There are not enough words to express how proud our organization and I am of you. You all have accomplished so much and we have no doubt that you will continue to do great work in our organization as certified choreographers of Polish traditional folk dancing! As you set on your journey as choreographers in the PRCUA dance schools (Kalina and Andrew at the "Southwest Center of Polish Dancing", Renee at "Polanie", Natalia at "Slask" and Jaclyn and Krzysztof at "Polonia Ensemble") keep your eyes focused on your goals, your values and your talent. Teach our children the interactive dance steps of traditional folk dances from various regions of Poland. Enhance in our children an appreciation of Polish culture, traditions and enjoyment of dancing. Best wishes to all of you!

HAPPY BIRTHDAY - Let's all sing loudly Happy Birthday and *Sto Lat* to everyone with birthdays in September and October.

September birthdays: PRCUA President Wallace Ozog; PRCUA National Chaplain Rev. Walter Ptak; my efficient secretary Mary Jane Robles; Philadelphia office employee Elaine Burkhardt; PMA guide Richard Kujawa; Jolanta Tatara, Director of John Paul II Polish Language School; Chicago Archdiocese Polish Youth Director Jacek Chaba; very hard working and talented artistic choreographer Misia Jaminski; Bernice Adamkiewicz, Ralph Raczynski. Happy Name Day to my Mother-in-Law Rena Sokolowska.

October: Mariola Wysocka who works in the accounting department; Judy Hoffman who works in the membership department; Helena Gliniczak who does maintenance work in our offices; Leonard Kurdek, PMA employee; Joan Sylak PRCUA National Director District #5; Jolanta Wisnicki, Treasurer, John Paul II Polish Language School; Richard Ciesla, husband of the PMA President Maria Ciesla; Martha Kwiatt, past PRCUA National Director District #8; Insurance Supervisor Ted Klamerus and also to Janusz Frankowicz, and Henryka Jablonska.

We wish you all many happy and healthy years to come.

HAPPY ANNIVERSARY - Happy Wedding Anniversary to Frieda & Kaz Zabek, Irene & Ralph Raczynski, Elaine & Ronald Burkhardt and all couples celebrating their wedding anniversaries in September and October - may your love last forever!

Dear Readers, due to the new *Narod Polski* format, a decision was made that my English articles can only appear every other month and I must shorten all the news that I would like to share with you. However, the entire text of my article and many more photos can be seen at www.prcua.org. My article in October will be in Polish. Until next time, keep in touch: fraternal.department@prcu.org