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LASALLE POST

Polish Diaspora celebrates community in Canada

100th anniversary of Windsor Polonia, Nov. 8-15

By Bob Stewart

When the Polish-Canadian Congress sent a delegation to Ottawa to meet with the Prime Minister and celebrate three important milestones of the Polish community in Canada, the Town of LaSalle's development engineer, Jerry Barycki, was there.

Barycki, who immigrated to Canada from his native Poland in 1982, even had the honour of presenting Prime Minister Stephen Harper with the Centennial Gold Medal of the Polonia of Windsor—the commemoration of 100 years of the Polish community in Windsor being just one of the three cultural milestones.

Altogether, 24 people from Windsor and nearly 600 from across Canada were in Ottawa to mark the 150th anniversary of the first organized Polish settlement by the Kaszubs in Barry's Bay, Ont., and the 75th anniversary of the Canadian Polish Congress.

Barycki, who serves as vice-president of Polish affairs for the Canadian-Polish Congress and president of the Polish Canadian Business and Professional Association of Windsor, had the honour of presenting Harper with the Centennial Gold Medal.

"They told me I was not allowed to put the medal on the Prime Minister," Barycki said, recounting the protocol

instructions given to him by Prime Minister's Office staffers.

"Then, when I presented the medal to him, he said 'Can I put it on?' and I said 'Of course!'" Barycki laughed.

Ottawa gala

The presentation was made before a gala in a West Block ballroom on Parliament Hill, June 10. The evening was attended by other dignitaries aside from the Prime Minister, including MP Blaine Calkins, chair of the Canada-Poland Parliamentary Friendship Group; H.E. Piotr Ogrodzinski, Ambassador of Poland; and Wladyslaw Lizon, president of the Canadian Polish Congress.

"These anniversaries remind us how much Polish Canadians—more than 800,000 strong today—have done to build out great country, Harper said in a statement. "Polish Canadians have made their mark in every walk of Canadian life."

The Prime Minister noted that the government and the Canadian Polish Congress have worked together on numerous initiatives to strengthen ties between Canada and Poland, including the removal of visa requirements for Polish visitors to Canada, a Social Security agreement allowing the portability of pensions from either country, and a Youth Mobility agreement which allows youth to work and study up to one year in the two countries.



Photos courtesy of Jerry Barycki

MEDAL: Prime Minister Stephen Harper dons the Centennial Gold Medal of the Polonia of Windsor, presented to him by Jerry Barycki (left), vice-president of the Canadian-Polish Congress and president of the Polish Canadian Business and Professional Association of Windsor, Piotr Ogrodzinski, Ambassador of Poland (second from right) and Wladyslaw Lizon, president of the Canadian Polish Congress (far right).

40 years of freedom

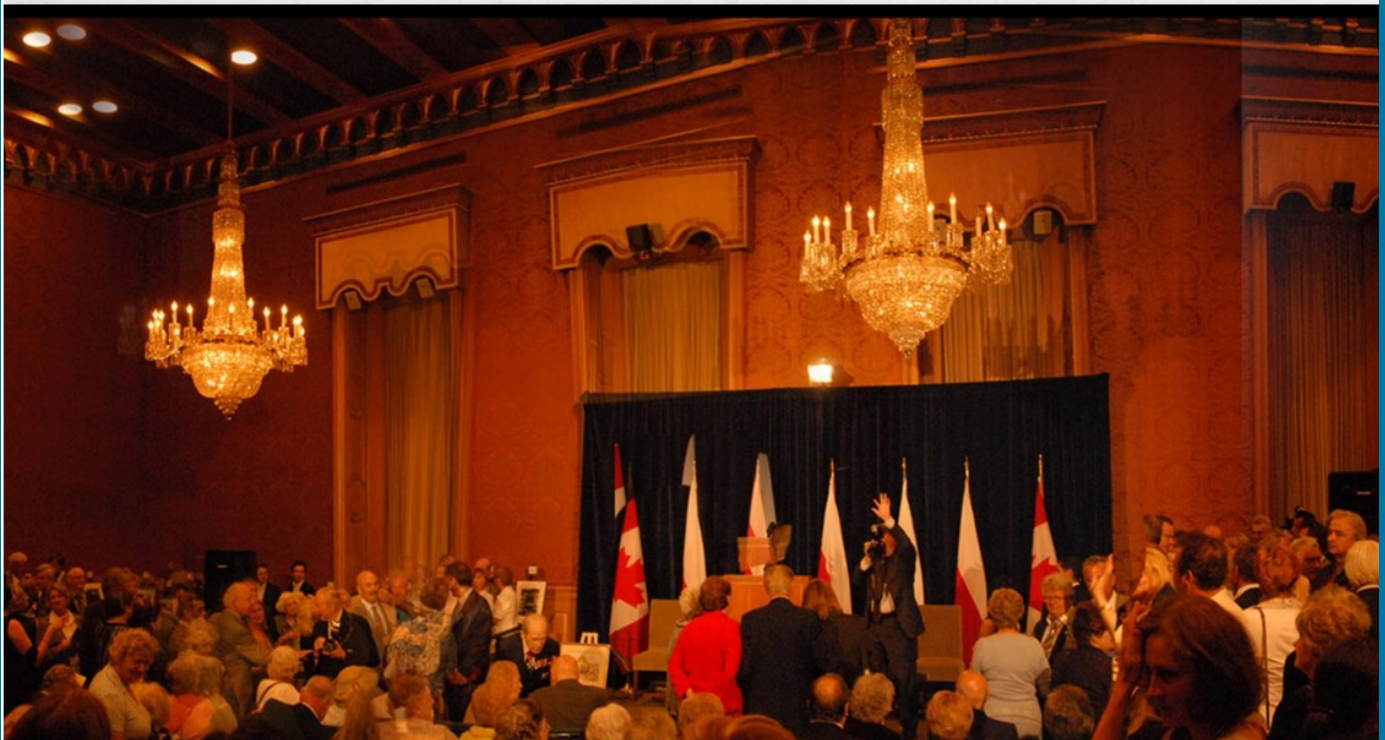
Throughout the past millennium, Poland was repeatedly been the centre of sweeping political change which shaped Europe.

As a result, Poland has only enjoyed 40 years of freedom out of the last 213 years.

In 1795, the Austria-Hungary, Russian and German empires took control of the country. Poland

remained under their control until the end of the First World War in 1918 and enjoyed 21 years of freedom until Hitler's invasion in 1939—a central event in the beginnings of the Second World War. It wasn't until the Solidarity movement in the late 1980s that Poland finally gained autonomy. The country has been free from 1989 through the present day.

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In November, Windsor's Polish community—some 11,500 descendants strong—will celebrate its 100th anniversary with a week-long festival which will include an exhibit at Windsor's Community Museum on Pitt St., a banquet at the Dom Polski Hall, an anniversary mass at Holy Trinity church on Ellis St., Remembrance Day observances and a special Polish army veterans ceremony, plus Polish film, dancing and food. The festivities will run from Nov. 8-15.

A \$45,000 Trillium Foundation grant will see a book by Agata Rajski entitled 100 lat Polonii w Windsor 1908-2008 (or, One Century of the Polish Community in Windsor, 1908-2008) published by Walkerville Publishing.

Polish Week in Windsor will also see a replica of a famous drinking fountain in Windsor's sister city, Lublin, Poland, installed on the riverfront. The fountain features a rearing goat—one of Poland's national symbols.

The exhibit at the Windsor Community Museum, 254 Pitt St. W., is currently on display and runs through the 100th anniversary week.



SISTER CITY: The famous goat drinking fountain in Lublin, Poland—Windsor's twin city. A replica will be installed on the Windsor riverfront.



ON THE HILL: The delegation from the Polish Community poses in front of the Parliament Buildings in Ottawa during their visit in June. They were joined for the photo by Windsor-West MP Brian Masse (fifth from right).