POLISH AMERICAN COUNCIL OF TEXAS

2026 PACT Annual Meeting / Program

November 14, 2026

Our Lady of Częstochowa Polish Catholic Church

2026 Polish Texan Lifetime Achievement Awards

Honoree Tributes

Choosing this year's recipients of the Polish Texan Lifetime Achievement Awards was no easy task. So many individuals in Houston and the surrounding communities have dedicated years of their lives to preserving our Polish heritage and passing it on to future generations.

Some of those we honor are familiar faces at nearly every gathering. Others work quietly behind the scenes, preparing halls, making phone calls, teaching children traditional songs and dances, and contributing in countless other ways. Today, the Polish American Council of Texas is proud to recognize the individuals, families, and organizations whose dedication has helped keep our community vibrant.

We also remember those who are no longer with us. Their contributions continue to shape the gatherings we cherish and the traditions we share with our children and grandchildren. To their families, thank you for sharing your loved ones with our community. We remember their contributions with gratitude and appreciation.

236 Combined Years of Service to Houston's Polish Community

Kościuszko Lodge 165 and Polish Progressive Lodge 2336

In 2026, Kościuszko Lodge 165 celebrates 135 years of service, while Polish Progressive Lodge 2336 marks its 101st anniversary. Both Polish National Alliance lodges helped establish a thriving community centered around Dom Polski, the Polish Home, and have continued that legacy across generations.

From a Shoe Shop to the Polish Home

In June 1891, eight Polish immigrants gathered in a small shoe shop on Houston's Milam Street and laid the groundwork for Kościuszko Lodge 165. Chartered that June with eleven members, the lodge was named in honor of Tadeusz Kościuszko, a Polish patriot and hero of the American Revolution. Members initially met in private homes, where they could speak Polish, share their Catholic traditions, and find companionship and financial protection through the Polish National Alliance.

As the community grew, Dr. Stefan Wagner Mieczkowski and local builders Herman and John Kazmierowski helped lead the effort to construct the first Dom Polski, which opened in 1918. The original building featured an open ground floor to accommodate horse-drawn carriages and early automobiles. That space was later enclosed for meetings and entertainment. Over the years, the hall hosted weddings, charitable events, May festivals, Easter celebrations, and the traditional blessing of Easter food.

Twelve Women Organize a Second Lodge

On March 4, 1925, twelve women gathered at Dom Polski to establish the organization that would become Polish Progressive Lodge 2336. Its first president, Apolonia Krus, and her fellow members sought to strengthen the Polish Home financially, promote Polish culture, and assist those in need. They collected dues door to door, hosted coffee socials and quilting gatherings to raise funds, and helped organize Polish-language classes, a choir, and a dance group. In 1940, they held a benefit supporting the Polish Relief Fund. In 1947, the lodge opened its membership to men, women, and children.

At one time, three lodges shared the Polish Home. Polonia Society 2308 was established in 1924. During the Great Depression, lodge members raised funds through covered-dish meals and dances. Joseph and Pauline Gorski helped rebuild Kościuszko Lodge's membership as Polish American families relocated to Houston from Bremond, Chappell Hill, New Waverly, and other Texas communities.

A New Home on Cooper Road

The Polish Home was incorporated as Polish Home, Inc. in 1950 for charitable and educational purposes. Families continued to gather for Christmas celebrations, Polish-language lessons, choir practices, and folk performances. In 1966, the community celebrated the millennium of Christianity in Poland.

By 1974, the growing community had constructed a larger Polish Home at 103 Cooper Road, made possible through donations and personal loans from its members. The opening celebration brought families together for Mass celebrated by Bishop John L. Morkovsky, Polish food, Texas barbecue, and folk dancing. Volunteers subsequently organized weekly Friday night dances, with proceeds helping repay the building loans. In 1993, the community celebrated the Polish Home's 75th anniversary.

During a later wave of immigration from Poland, the Polish Home became a welcoming haven for newcomers. It offered immigrants a place to speak their native language, connect with others who understood the challenges of starting over, and find support as they settled into life in Houston.

Two Lodges Still Serving Houston

Today, the two lodges remain active as separate organizations, even without the Polish Home as their gathering place. Both belong to the Polish National Alliance; a national fraternal organization headquartered in Chicago. They sponsor Polish events, present cultural displays, support Polish schools, and bring people together through annual Christmas celebrations and meetings. Together, they support eight scholarship programs that help students pursue their education.

The lodges are proud to count a Polish fiddler among their members and to have seen many members assume leadership roles throughout the community. Both lodges have received awards recognizing their contributions to Polish communities in Houston and across Texas.

To the past and present members of both lodges, thank you for your generations of service, dedication, and commitment to Houston's Polish community.

Historical sources include John L. Kaminski's history of Kościuszko Lodge 165, the history of Polish Progressive Lodge 2336, and the Brief Overview of the History of the Polish Home transcription. The 1891 charter date follows the Kościuszko Lodge history.

Krysia and Stan Aponiuk

Krysia and Stan Aponiuk brought their love of Polish culture and traditions with them when they came to Texas. For years, they have generously shared that love through their parish, Our Lady of Częstochowa Catholic Church, and the many Polish organizations and events they support throughout the state.

If you have ever tasted Krysia's Polish bread, you know why people look forward to it at every gathering. She baked the traditional harvest bread for the 2023 Dożynki celebration at St. Stanislaus Catholic Church, and her wonderful desserts have made countless community gatherings feel like family celebrations. She gives just as generously behind the scenes, whether helping organize an event or preparing the church for Easter.

Stan is the person you are likely to spot with a camera in hand. From the Houston Slavic Festival and the Houston Polish Festival to PACT's Annual Meeting in Panna Maria, he has captured the people and moments that tell the story of our community. Thanks to Stan, we have photographs to share

with our children and grandchildren, preserving memories of how we have celebrated our Polish heritage together.

Krysia and Stan are often among the first to lend a hand, spread the word, or show up to support another organization's event. They have supported the Nicolaus Copernicus Polish School in Houston, and Dance Group Wawel recognized them with its Star of the Year Honored Sponsor Award.

Krysia and Stan, thank you for the warmth you bring to our gatherings, the memories you help preserve, and the countless ways you support our Polish community. It is our pleasure to recognize you with the Polish Texan Lifetime Achievement Award.

Cleo and Wanda Bench

Posthumous Recognition

Cleo and Wanda Bench played an important role in sustaining the Polish Home and Houston's Polish church during their early years. Cleo was born in Bremond, and Wanda came from Chappell Hill. They brought their love of Polish heritage to Houston, where they dedicated many years to volunteering at the Polish Home.

Whenever work needed to be done at the Polish Home, chances were that Wanda and Cleo would be there. Cleo could often be found in the kitchen preparing Polish food, while Wanda made bigos or pierogi. Together, they cleaned and prepared the hall, operated the country store, worked behind the bar, led meetings, and organized Christmas programs and gift packages for children. Long before the internet, Wanda knew how to bring people together. She would pick up the telephone, spread the word, and encourage others to lend a hand.

Cleo served as president of Polish Home, Inc. and was a lifelong member of Polish National Alliance Progressive Lodge 2336. Together, he and Wanda proudly celebrated their heritage and preserved their traditions in everyday life, including speaking the Polish language they had grown up hearing in Texas. That distinctive Texas Polish dialect is an important part of our history, and their children and grandchildren have every reason to be proud of the role they played in preserving it.

Wanda fondly remembered the crowded Christmas celebrations held during World War II at the original Polish Home in the Houston Heights, when volunteers prepared turkeys and traditional holiday dishes downstairs before carrying them upstairs for the gathering.

We are deeply grateful for the many ways Cleo and Wanda helped make the Polish Home truly feel like home. Their dedication, generosity, and love for their community remain an enduring part of Houston's Polish heritage.

Maryann Ciaston

Maryann Ciaston has been a member of the Polish National Alliance for more than 60 years. She began folk dancing at the age of four and spent the next 20 years performing with her Pittsburgh dance group, eventually becoming its director. She attended summer courses in Polish folk dance, language, and culture at Alliance College, where she met her future husband, Jan Ciaston, who supported her throughout her years of service to the Polish community.

After moving to Houston with her family, Maryann reconnected with her Polish roots at Our Lady of Częstochowa Catholic Church. She joined Dance Group Wawel and has participated in 30 Polish festivals and numerous performances with the group over the past 15 years. She has also served on Wawel's board and helped support the group's trip to Rzeszów, Poland.

At the parish, Maryann has chaired the festival's silent auction committee for 28 festivals, using the auction as an opportunity to showcase Polish culture. She served two terms as president of the parish finance committee and also served on the parish council. She continues to serve as a lector at English-language Mass and helps decorate the church for holidays.

Maryann's lifelong commitment to Polish folk dance, cultural traditions, and parish service has enriched Houston's Polish community. We are proud to recognize her dedication and contributions with the Polish Texan Lifetime Achievement Award.

Stanley "Michael" Kurtin

Stanley "Michael" Kurtin was born in Houston, Texas, in 1954 to Stanley and Barbara Kurtin, who were of Polish and Czech descent. Known as Michael, he was the second of ten children. Many of his relatives still reside in Gdańsk and Kraków, Poland.

Michael attended Catholic elementary and high schools in Houston before continuing his education at the University of St. Thomas. He also studied at the School of Polish Language and Culture at the Catholic University of Lublin in Poland. He is fluent in both Polish and Spanish.

Michael worked for Bechtel Engineering Corporation for 18 years. In 1999, he joined Delta Air Lines, where he traveled the world as a flight attendant before retiring. During his visits to Poland, he conducted genealogical research for clients and for the first volume of Silesian Profiles. Priests in small Silesian villages welcomed him to examine sacramental records on-site. In 2004, he shared these experiences in Polish at a symposium at the University of Opole, presenting a talk titled "Wspomnienia z pracy na Śląsku" ("Memories of Researching in Silesia"). That same year, he co-authored Silesian Profiles II: Polish Immigration to Texas 1850s–1870s.

As a lifetime member of the Polish Genealogical Society of Texas (PGST), Michael has authored articles published in its periodical, Polish Footprints. He served as president of PGST from 1992 to 1996.

Michael is a board member of the Polish American Council of Texas and serves as recording secretary of Polish National Alliance Council 182 and Kościuszko Lodge 165. He is also an active member of the Wawel Polish Folk Dance Group in Houston.

Beyond the Polish community, Michael serves on the board of the Whitehall Community Center in Whitehall, Texas, and is an associate member of the Whitehall Volunteer Fire Department. In 1975, he volunteered in Nicaragua as a medical volunteer with Amigos de las Américas.

Michael received the Heritage Award from the Houston Chapter of the Polish American Congress in 1994. In 2004, he was honored with the Father Leopold Moczygemba Foundation Outstanding Service Award. He has also had the privilege of meeting two Polish presidents: Lech Wałęsa in 1998 and Andrzej Duda in 2019.

Through his genealogical research, cultural involvement, and decades of community service, Michael has helped preserve and share the history of Polish Texans. We are pleased to recognize his contributions with the Polish Texan Lifetime Achievement Award.

Bruno J. Maciejeski

Posthumously Recognitionn

When Houston's Polish community needed a larger gathering place, Bruno J. Maciejeski prepared the plans for the new 16,200-square-foot Polish Home at 103 Cooper Road. The building featured two dance floors, meeting rooms, a full kitchen, and a room for children. When it opened on July 28, 1974, the community celebrated with a Polish-language Mass and a banquet featuring Polish food and Texas barbecue.

Bruno's service continued long after the building opened. In 2016, the Polish National Alliance's publication, Zgoda, identified him as president of Polonia Lodge 2308, a past president of Polish Home, Inc., and a member of Houston's PNA Council 182. The council brought together Polonia Lodge 2308, Kościuszko Lodge 165, and Polish Progressive Lodge 2336.

His wife, Patricia Maciejeski, served as secretary of Polonia Lodge. Bruno, Patricia, and their family had been members since 1958.

We remember Bruno for helping provide Houston's Polish community with a place where generations could gather, dance, celebrate, and pass on their traditions. His dedication continued through his service to Polonia Lodge and the Polish National Alliance, including the subsequent merger with Kościuszko Lodge 165 in Houston.

His contributions to the Polish Home and the broader Polish community remain an important part of Houston's Polish heritage.

Adam and Antonina Mazewski

Posthumously Recognition

At Polish events throughout Houston, Adam and Antonina Mazewski could often be found spreading the word, preparing the hall, or welcoming

someone new. Adam was born in Konojady, Poland, while Antonina was born in Wilno, then part of Poland and now known as Vilnius, Lithuania. They married in Poznań in 1958. Adam arrived in Houston in 1959, and Antonina and their young daughter, Jolanta, joined him in 1962.

Over the years, Adam and Antonina helped bring together Old Polonia and New Polonia. Through their efforts, longtime Polish Texans and newly arrived families from Poland could gather at the Polish Home, at church, or on the dance floor and discover the traditions they shared.

Antonina could often be found cooking in the Polish Home kitchen, working with the choir at Houston's Polish Catholic Mission, or ensuring that the young princesses and queens were ready for the Slavic Heritage Festival. She served as secretary of Polish Progressive Lodge 2336, helped bring Polish music to Houston listeners through a local radio program, and taught Polish cooking, history, and language classes.

She also helped newcomers settle in Texas, translated documents, and interpreted for Polish-speaking patients in Houston's medical community. Long before the internet, Antonina was frequently on the telephone helping members of the Polish community. Whenever someone needed assistance finding their way in a new country, she made time to help.

In 1970, Antonina founded the Polish Eagle Dance Group, known as Polskie Orły, with just a few children and Adam's support. Over more than 25 years, more than 200 children participated in the group, traveling throughout Texas to share Polish folk dance. A talented seamstress, Antonina created costumes for the dancers and for productions at the Polish Home.

Adam was always there to support her efforts, helping with the dance group and its performances. He also organized Friday night dances at the Polish Home, booked Texas bands, served on the boards of Polish Home, Inc. and Progressive Lodge 2336, and chaired the Slavic Heritage Festival for several years. Both Adam and Antonina were active members of the Polish National Alliance.

Throughout their lives, Adam and Antonina received numerous honors recognizing their service, including recognition from Poland's Ministry of Culture and National Heritage. Yet Antonina rarely spoke about her awards. What mattered most to both of them was bringing people together, helping newcomers feel welcome, and giving children the opportunity to learn the dances, songs, and customs their families treasured.

As we honor Adam and Antonina, we remember how generously they gave their time, talents, and hearts to Houston's Polish community. They never forgot their Polish heritage, and through their dedication, they made it easier for countless others to preserve theirs.

They are deeply missed, and their legacy continues to inspire future generations.

Barbara and Thomas Ostrowski

Barbara and Thomas Ostrowski have played an important role in building Houston's Polish church, supporting numerous Polish community events, and participating in activities at the Polish Home. Affectionately known as Basia and Tom, they have been active in the Polish American community since arriving in Texas in 1987.

Basia has devoted countless hours to supporting Our Lady of Częstochowa Catholic Church. She served on the parish council for nearly 20 years and organized numerous parish events during that time. For more than two decades, she has also been responsible for the church's beautiful weekly floral decorations, particularly during the Easter and Christmas seasons.

Basia and Tom were instrumental in completing the construction of the church. As a member of the Church Building Committee, Basia contributed creatively to its interior décor. Tom managed the electrical work and dedicated countless hours to the many tasks involved in completing the building. In recognition of their contributions and continued support of the parish, Basia and Tom received a Medal of Recognition from the Society of Christ.

Tom served as president of the Polish American Congress, Texas Division and Houston Chapter, for a combined period of eight years. During his leadership, he participated in efforts to encourage the United States Congress to support Poland's admission to NATO.

With Basia's assistance, Tom also organized numerous events throughout Texas, bringing together Polish Americans from across the state and promoting Polish culture.

In recognition of his efforts on behalf of Poland, Tom received the Krzyż Kawalerski Orderu Zasługi Rzeczypospolitej Polskiej (Knight's Cross of the Order of Merit of the Republic of Poland). Basia and Tom also received the Polish American Congress Heritage Award in 2004.

For many years, Basia and Tom served as Polish representatives on the board of the Sts. Cyril and Methodius Slavic Festival, working alongside other Polish and Slavic organizations in Houston to organize this annual celebration.

Basia and Tom married in 1979 and have three children: Kasia, Hania, and Michael. Continuing the family tradition, all three children became involved in the Polish community. They established Polish clubs at their respective universities, including the University of Texas at Austin and Texas A&M University. They also participated in Polish dance groups, attended Polish school, and contributed to Polish community activities in numerous ways.

Through their dedication to the church, cultural organizations, and community events, Basia and Tom have made lasting contributions to Polish life in Houston and throughout Texas. We are proud to recognize their years of service with the Polish Texan Lifetime Achievement Award.

James Smock

A native Houstonian, James Smock is descended from early Polish immigrants who farmed cotton in Bremond and New Waverly. He began researching his Polish ancestry in the mid-1980s, spending much of his free time examining records in county courthouses, church rectories, and genealogy libraries.

James joined the Polish Genealogical Society of Texas, where he managed the society's surname index for several years, helped develop its website in 1997, and served as president in 1998.

In early 2007, James brought his extensive research together through the Polish Texans website. For nearly 20 years, he photographed Polish community events and published the images online, creating a valuable historical record of Polish life in Texas.

Today, the website contains more than 220 articles, thousands of photographs and videos, and a searchable database documenting the genealogy of early Polish Texans.

Although James has retired from event photography, his website remains available as a valuable resource for anyone interested in researching their Polish heritage.

Visit www.Polish-Texans.com to explore the history and genealogy of Polish Texans.

Through his dedication to genealogical research and historical preservation, James has helped ensure that the stories of Polish Texans remain accessible to future generations. We are pleased to recognize his contributions with the Polish Texan Lifetime Achievement Award.

Al J. Snider

Al J. Snider was born in Reagan, Texas, on June 22, 1940. He moved to Bremond in 1950, attended St. Mary's School, and graduated from Bremond High School in 1958. That same year, he joined the Polish National Alliance's Kościuszko Lodge 165. He is also a member of Christ the Redeemer Catholic Church.

Al was elected president of Polish Home, Inc. in 2009 and vice president in 2020. He chaired the committee responsible for the bylaws adopted in 2020.

At Kościuszko Lodge 165, Al was elected vice president in 2011 and later served as president. In 2016, he was elected president of PNA Council 182, where he helped the lodge reinstate its tax-exempt status and restore its standing with the Texas franchise tax authorities.

Al also served for many years as a scholarship committee chair, supporting educational opportunities for future generations.

Through his leadership, organizational service, and commitment to education, Al has made meaningful contributions to Houston's Polish community. We are pleased to honor his dedication with the Polish Texan Lifetime Achievement Award.

Elżbieta Winiarska and Edward Winiarski

Elżbieta Winiarska dedicated 15 years to teaching at the Polish school, including 10 years as its director. Through her commitment to education, she helped children learn the Polish language, history, and traditions while developing a deeper connection to their cultural heritage.

Edward Winiarski is a singer and artist known for his warm, distinctive voice. Through concerts and other performances, he has brought audiences together with songs celebrating love, relationships, the immigrant experience, and the beauty of Poland. His repertoire includes traditional Polish music and works by Polish composers.

Together, Elżbieta and Edward have enriched the Polish community through education, music, and cultural preservation. Their contributions have helped strengthen connections to Polish heritage across generations.

We are proud to recognize their dedication with the Polish Texan Lifetime Achievement Award.

Elżbieta "Ella" Wojchejowaska

When Ella came from Poland to Texas, she brought with her a deep love for Polish culture, heritage, and traditions. Over the years, she has shared that love through countless acts of quiet service, becoming a cherished pillar of the Polish community.

You might find Ella working on the church grounds or lending a hand wherever help is needed. Whatever the task, she is always ready to contribute. Because she serves so quietly and without seeking recognition, it can be easy to overlook just how much she does for others.

Today, we have the opportunity to recognize Ella and express our gratitude for the countless ways she has supported our community.

Ella, thank you for giving so generously of your time, serving with such humility, and being someone our community can always count on. It is our privilege to honor you with the Polish Texan Lifetime Achievement Award.

A Few Words from Ella's Daughter

My mom is truly one of the most amazing people I know. She loves God with all her heart, and her Catholic faith guides the way she lives. I see it in how she treats people, in the love she gives so freely, and in the kindness she shows to everyone around her.

Family means everything to my mom. She has always been a source of unconditional love, strength, and support for us. Whenever someone needs a hand, she gives her time and does whatever she can. Helping others comes naturally to her, and she gives without expecting anything in return.

I feel truly blessed to call her my mom. Mom, I hope you know how deeply you are loved, how much we appreciate you, and how many lives you've touched simply by being yourself.

Julian M. Yezak

Posthumously

Julian Michael Yezak was born in Bremond, Texas, in 1917 to Joseph Yezak and Frances Bielamowicz. In 1941, he married Anna Martha Jaworski in her hometown of Chappell Hill. His life connected three Texas communities with deep Polish roots. In Houston, he served as a member of the Polish National Alliance and as president of Polish Home, Inc., which he helped build.

Julian was a strong, hands-on president who made sure there was always something going on at the Polish Home. He understood how much it meant for families to have a place to gather for a dance, a holiday celebration, or a lodge meeting. By keeping the hall active, he gave longtime friends a reason to come back and younger generations a chance to grow up with the same Polish traditions their parents and grandparents had shared.

We remember Julian for his hands-on leadership and for keeping the Polish Home open and active as a gathering place for Houston's Polish families.



Historical Recognition

Pauline Kazmierowski Gorski

Posthumously Recognition

Pauline Kazmierowski Gorski was born on November 1, 1903, in Marlin, Texas, to Max Kazmierowski and Nellie Hopcus Kazmierowski.

Pauline and her husband, Joseph F. Gorski, lived in Houston's Woodland Heights neighborhood in a home they built in 1929. They were charter members of Christ the King Catholic Church in the Houston Heights.

Pauline held leadership positions in the Polish National Alliance for more than 50 years. She served as president of the Polish Home and as president of PNA Council 182 from 1949 to 1951. She also served for many years as council secretary and later as council treasurer.

Together, Pauline and Joseph organized and supported Kościuszko Lodge 165 for more than 40 years. They served as the lodge's financial secretaries from 1936 to 1976.

Pauline served four consecutive four-year terms as a Polish National Alliance District XI commissioner, from 1963 to 1979. She was the first Texan to hold this position.

In 1974, Pauline and Joseph received a Heritage Award from the Houston Chapter of the Polish American Congress, along with a proclamation from the City of Houston.

Pauline subsequently received a Heritage Award from the Polish Arts and Culture Foundation of San Antonio in 1977, the Antonio Margil Award from the Texas Catholic Conferences on Ethnic Community Affairs in 1978, and the Polish National Alliance's Medal of Honor in 1981. She also attended ten national PNA conventions as a delegate.

Pauline served as a director of the Polish American Congress from its founding in 1971 and chaired its 1972 state convention in Houston.

She also helped organize Houston's annual multi-Slavic celebration of Saints Cyril and Methodius Day, which Bishop John L. Morkovsky began in 1963.

Pauline passed away on July 25, 1988, at the age of 84. Her decades of leadership, dedication, and service helped sustain Polish culture in Houston and throughout Texas.

We honor her memory and recognize the lasting contributions she made to generations of Polish Texans.

Anna Worhol Greensage

Posthumously Recognition

Anna Worhol Greensage was born in Houston on September 8, 1907, to Henry Worhol and Victoria Kronenberger Worhol. Her parents married on January 6, 1903, at St. Mary's Catholic Church in Bremond.

Anna served as financial secretary of Polish Progressive Lodge 2336 from 1951 to 1991. She also served as the lodge's official organizer and sales representative for the Polish National Alliance and represented the lodge on the board of Polish Home, Inc. for many years.

Anna represented Houston's PNA Council 182 as a delegate to ten national conventions. She was the council's longest-serving president, holding office from 1959 to 1977 and again from 1983 to 1991, for a combined total of 26 years.

On April 4, 1993, the Polish National Alliance presented Anna with a Distinguished Service Award in recognition of her dedication to the lodge and council.

Anna joined the Polish American Congress of Texas when it was founded in 1971 and attended conventions throughout the state. In 1976, she received a Heritage Award from the Houston Chapter of the Polish American Congress. The City of Houston also honored her with a proclamation recognizing her community service.

Anna's decades of leadership and dedication helped strengthen the Polish National Alliance and preserve Polish cultural traditions in Houston and throughout Texas. We proudly recognize her lasting legacy and the important role she played in the history of Texas Polonia.