

## **President's Report on Association's activities during the year 2018-19**

The year just ended was a remarkable one for the Association and packed with activity as we celebrated the centenary of Poland's regained independence. The commemorations of that important anniversary commenced in April last year with a piano recital by Raphael Lustchevsky "The Heart of Europe". In October we participated in the Christchurch City Council Heritage Week with an event which was a self-guided walk of Linwood Cemetery, remembering the first Polish settlers in Canterbury who were driven out of their homeland as a result of Poland's loss of independence. To accompany that event, we also held a well received public talk by Auckland-based researcher Barbara Scrivens and Taranaki-based descendant of Canterbury's early settlers Ray Watembach. In November, together with the Ambassador of Poland, the Polish Consul and the Honorary Consul of Poland in the South Island, we hosted a reception for members of the Association and invited guests marking the centenary. Last but not least, on the 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary day itself, 11<sup>th</sup> November, we enjoyed a recital by an artist from Poland, Artur Gotz, who entertained us with a mix of patriotic songs and some lighter material. Through the efforts of our Association, the centenary of Poland's regained independence was also marked with special illuminations of significant objects in Christchurch – the New Brighton Pier, Memorial Avenue Gateway Bridge and the Christchurch Airport control tower. The Akaroa historical lighthouse was also decorated in red and white for the occasion. We were pleased to be able to participate in this initiative from Poland's Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and to have our illuminations reported by the media in Poland.

In addition to these important one-off events, the Association also continued to organise regular social events and special celebrations for our members and for the Polish community more generally. Please refer to the printed copy of the report for the list of the events. Detailed reports from most of them are also included in our Newsletters, available on our website [www.polonia.org.nz](http://www.polonia.org.nz).

- Annual Seniors' lunch in October (combined with a meeting with Jo Bailey, a Canterbury author who recently published "Never Forget", a collection of WWII stories, including the story of the Węgrzyn siblings, Pahiatua Children) and afternoon tea in March (combined with a minibus tour of Christchurch Rebuild expertly guided by Mariusz Talaśka to whom we give our thanks).
- Targeted at the younger and middle generations, we held two informal Friday after work get-togethers during the year, and one movie evening at which we screened Harry Potter in Polish.
- In August, a large group attended the screening of Paweł Pawlikowski's "Cold War" as part of the NZ International Film Festival for which we were able to offer a discounted entry.
- In September, we joined Poland's National Reading initiative for the third time, this time to read together Stefan Żeromski's „The Coming Spring”.
- In December we met for a traditional Christmas meal and carol singing. We also had an informal pre-Christmas get together at a family picnic at our Honorary Consul's residence in Loburn. Thank you to Winsome Dormer for the invitation, for opening your house to us, and for making us feel so welcome.
- One of our best attended events this year was a family picnic in March, combined with the run/walk to commemorate the Cursed Soldiers. The success of the event was largely due to the organising efforts of Krys Pawlikowski and Piotr Sawicki.
- In April we participated in the ANZAC Day parade and dawn ceremony, where the Association lay a wreath commemorating the brotherhood of arms of Polish and New Zealand soldiers, as well as accompanying the Honorary Consul in laying a wreath on behalf of the Polish government and the people of Poland.
- We also had three out of town trips during the year - skiing at Mt Cheeseman in August, fishing in Akaroa in February and Hanmer Springs in early May. All trips were very popular. Thank you to Jacek Pawłowski, our trips coordinator, for organising these trips and additional activities for those who took part.
- Thanks to Sylwia Śmiarowska's commitment to provide Polish-language pastoral care for our community, Polish priests visited Christchurch on three occasions in October, December and April. For the first time in many years we were able to attend Pasterka, the Christmas Eve midnight mass, in Polish. At Easter, once again the traditional blessing of foods took place, organised by Ela Sawicka.
- As part of our relationship with the Polish Embassy in Wellington, a consular outreach was held in Christchurch in December and in March.

- We have also continued to collaborate with the Christchurch City Libraries to continually develop and improve the Polish language book collection, maintained our website and Facebook page and published 7 Newsletters.

Perhaps the most important thing achieved this year was the recognition by the Polish government of the suffering of a group of Pahiatua Children deported from Poland during WWII by granting them veterans' status and veterans' compensation. This would not have been possible without enormous commitment from Krys Pawlikowski and his wife Barbara who devoted many hours to completing application forms, collecting documents required by the Polish authorities, and fulfilling requests for additional information. The presentation of Veteran IDs by the Polish Ambassador during the November centenary celebrations was a very moving occasion. It was followed by a more intimate celebration in January when the recipients were hosted by Krys and Barbara for a special lunch. Once again, a very big thank you for taking on this very challenging undertaking and seeing it through to a successful conclusion despite many obstacles and set backs along the way.

A large part of what we do is a collaboration with special interest groups within our Association – folk dance group Polonus coordinated by Ela Sawicka, and Polish language playgroup coordinated by Magda Pawłowska. During the year two of these collaborations came to an end - Polish School led by Sylwia Śmiarowska ceased its operations at the end of November 2018, and POLKA Radio led by Agata Bulska finished broadcasting in March 2019 when a decision was made by the Executive Committee to end the sponsorship of the programme. I would like to thank both Sylwia and Agata for their work and contribution over the many years Polish School and POLKA Radio operated under the umbrella of the Polish Association.

As required by the Rules of the Association, each of these special interest groups separately presents a brief report on their activities during the year, but on behalf of the Executive, I would like to record our thanks to all involved in them.

#### Vote of thanks

Writing this report gave me an opportunity to look back at how busy this year has been and therefore how busy the Executive Committee members have been. Most of the events the Association hosts require a lot of involvement from every person on the Committee - before, during and after. The same people are responsible for all our fundraising efforts – from filling out grant applications to making pierogis and bigos for multicultural festivals and serving them with a smile.

In addition, the representatives of the Executive Committee represented the Association at a number of events hosted by others during the year, including Polish-Jewish commemoration of the Warsaw Uprising in June held at the Holocaust Centre in Wellington, the visit of Poland's President and First Lady to Auckland in August, and Constitution Day celebrations hosted by the Polish Embassy in Wellington in May, as well as many local events in Christchurch hosted by the Christchurch City Council, Christchurch Multicultural Council of which we became members during the year, and other organisations. I would like to thank my colleagues on the Executive Committee for putting in huge amounts of their personal time, not to mention their personal funds, to ensure that the Polish Association is able to represent the Polish community at such high profile events and that it is making its mark as an active member of Canterbury's multicultural community.

Many of the activities I mentioned would not have happened without the financial support of our members who continue to pay their annual subscriptions, everyone who supports our fundraising initiatives, the Trustees of the Polish Charitable and Educational Trust who have been supporting our work for many years, and other funders. This year, I especially acknowledge the funding received from the Ethnic Communities Development Fund which has enabled us to celebrate the centenary of Poland's regained independence!

As I conclude my term as the Association's President, I would like to give my heartfelt thanks to all members of the retiring Executive and to each of them individually for their dedication and tireless work for the Association. We may have different ideas how to go about it, but we all aspire to build something good and lasting for our Polish community, brick by brick. Thank you for all the bricks you have put in this year.

*Anna Gruczyńska*

*11 May 2019*