

SPECIAL EDITION

FAITH FAMILY
COMMUNITY



POLISH
HERITAGE
CENTER
PANNA MARIA, TEXAS

Visitor Experience #34



Honor awarded by President Andrzej Duda of the Republic of Poland to Bishop Emeritus John W. Yanta who receives the highest civilian award for his life-long work on the behalf of American Polonia

Photo courtesy of Jakub Szymczuk/KPRP

Commander's Cross of the Order of Merit



Bishop Yanta's *Commander's Cross of the Order of Merit*

Photo courtesy of John Wojtasczyk

On June 13, 2019, at Our Lady of Częstochowa Church, Houston, Texas, during his first state visit, President Andrzej Duda of the Republic of Poland presented to Bishop Emeritus John W. Yanta the *Commander's Cross of the Order of Merit*. This award is the **HIGHEST** award that can be awarded to a person who is not a citizen of the Republic of Poland. This is awarded to foreigners and Poles resident abroad for distinguished contributions to international cooperation or cooperation between Poland and other countries. It is awarded by the *President of Poland* (www.revolvy.com/page/Order-of-Merit-of-the-Republic-of-Poland).

It may be difficult at first to grasp the meaning and depth of this award. Awards like this are not a standard fare in American life. The closest example of an award like this here in America is the *Presidential Medal of Freedom* which is presented by the President of the United States to acknowledge *an especially meritorious contribution to the security or national interests of the United States, world peace, cultural or other significant public or private endeavors* (Executive Order 9586, signed July 6, 1945; Federal Register 10 FR 8523, July 10, 1945). In Poland and much of Europe, these kinds of recognition are still highly important, cherished, and respected. At this event, there were six awards presented by President Duda, but only Bishop Yanta received this highly prized and coveted award!

This process began behind the scenes many months ago, and a handful of select people worked diligently when it was asked whom should be recognized. Background on Bishop Yanta was gathered and presented to the Polish government with no specific award in mind. It was first thought that perhaps General Consul Rusiecki might come to San Antonio and present “something” at most, not knowing what it might be. Then Bishop Yanta received a personal invitation from President Duda to attend the event in Houston. Lastly, days before the event, Bishop Yanta received an email from General Consul Rusiecki. Bishop John W Yanta was to receive this award!

John Wojtasczyk



Bishop Yanta after receiving his *Commander's Cross of the Order of Merit* and holding an official Polish flag presented by President Andrzej Duda for the Polish Heritage Center



The Seraphic Sisters above
Religious from across Texas
Various Polish Texas Priests below



Photos courtesy of John Wojtasczyk



Randy & Debbie Pawelek, Michael & Velma Janysek

Representatives of the Panna Maria Community

Betty & George Kowalik and Susie & Sam Kotara



Photos courtesy of John Wojtasczyk



Al Notzon, Joe Yanta, Elenora Dugosh Goodley, Maureen Brown, Sue McCarthy & Susan Moczygemba McKinsey

Representatives of the Polish Heritage Center (above)
and various members of the
Polish American Council of Texas (above & below)

Elaine Mazurek Stephens & Jolanta Dryden



Photos courtesy of John Wojtasczyk



President Andrzej Duda seated in front with his wife, Agata Kornhauser Duda (above) *Photo courtesy of John Wojtasczyk*

First Lady Agata Kornhauser Duda & President Andrzej Duda

photo courtesy of Jakub Szymczuk/KPRP



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President Andrzej Duda during his address to the assembly



photos courtesy of Jakub Szymczuk/KPRP



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Crowd gathered at the hall at Our Lady of Częstochowa Church, Houston, Texas
Bishop Yanta, President Andrzej Duda, and the award recipients (below)



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SOME OF THE POLISH HERITAGE INITIATIVES OF BISHOP JOHN W. YANTA

- Founder and charter member of group of priests which launched the Polish American Priests Association of Texas (P.A.P.A.), 1970, which grew into a national entity
 - Elected first national president of P.A.P.A., 1991 in Chicago. P.A.P.A. flourishes to this day
 - General Chairman of the first Polish American Priests Association Convention, 1990 in San Antonio
- Founder of the Texas Division of the Polish American Congress, 1971
 - Served (5) terms as the Division's president
- Attended a Kosciuszko Foundation Summer Session in Poland at the Jagiellonian University, 1971
- Attended a University of Kansas Summer Program at Adam Mickiewicz University in Poznan, 1972
- Leader of the first tour of Polish Texans back to Poland in 1973
- Coordinator of Pope John Paul II's visit with Panna Maria parishioners and Texas Polonia, 1987
- General Chairman of Father Leopold Moczygemba Centennial, 1991
- Main celebrant at the 700th anniversary of St. Stanislaus Church, Płużnica, Poland, 1999, the parish of his ancestors
- Founder and Chairman of the Board of Directors of the Polish Heritage Center at Panna Maria Foundation, 2011

The Polish Heritage Center celebrates the first and oldest permanent Polish settlement in the United States, dating from 1854

The Mission of the Polish Heritage Center is to "Keep vibrant and alive the history, values, customs and traditions of the Polish settlers and their descendants...and to inspire, engage, and educate our visitors. We must honor our ancestors, and build pride of our Polish heritage in current and future generations."

This center, a \$14 million project well underway, is a one-of-a-kind tribute intended for the benefit of all of American Polonia, the 8th largest ethnic group in the United States, and all of our brethren in Poland. It is expected to be open in early 2020

- Visits with Pope John Paul II in Mexico City, St. Louis, and Toronto World Youth Day, and present in Rome at his Beatification



First Lady Agata Kornhauser Duda & President Andrzej Duda congratulating Bishop Yanta (above) *photo courtesy of Jakub Szymczuk/KPRP*

Bishop John W Yanta surrounded by friends and well-wishers (below)



Photo courtesy of Elaine Mazurek Stephens



Randy & Debbie Labus Pawelek, Photo courtesy of John Wojtasczyk

Well-wishers in Houston and loyal benefactors of the Polish Heritage Center too!

We were not born in Panna Maria; however, our ancestors were early settlers to the area. They went through many difficult years so that our lives would be better than the one they endured. We have memorialized our ancestors for the gifts they left for us and our family.

They left us many gifts, including our Catholic faith, respect for family and life, and respect for community. One of the many material gifts we received was the oil and gas royalty income from the Eagle Ford Shale. This is a “first fruit” from God and our ancestors, and we wanted to return a portion of these bountiful gifts to honor God and our ancestors. We felt the honor we wanted to show our ancestors and God could best be accomplished by a donation to the Polish Heritage Center.

We have always liked to keep our donations “local” so that we can see the fruits of our gifts grow before our eyes and so we also can claim ownership of the cause. The Polish Heritage Center will memorialize our ancestors for many years to come and help our family, and other families, appreciate the many hardships our Polish ancestors endured.

Why send our tax dollars some place and never see it come back to our community? Oil and gas royalty income has been a great way for us to make a sizable donation to the PHC and reduce our taxes at the same time. When given the choice of sending our money to the government or keep it here in our community, the choice was pretty simple.

As recipients of oil and gas royalties, we receive tax deductions not given to other taxpayers, namely the 15% Depletion Allowance. Also, the Investment Tax reduction of 3.8% saves more. In addition, a donation to the PHC also reduces our total income taxes. When we add all our tax savings together, the cost of the donation to the PHC saves us on income taxes and reduces the real cost of a donation to a fraction of the amount donated. Before making a donation we always check with our tax professional to get maximum tax savings from a maximum donation amount at minimal actual dollar cost.

We will continue donating to the PHC (Polish Heritage Center). We want to “tell the story of those who can no longer speak.”

Randy & Debbie Labus Pawelek