

PolandNow: Learning about contemporary Polish culture

By Michael Kull with photos by Edward Foley Photography



When you think of European culture, as compared to American culture, what images immediately come to mind? For some it's pictures of cobblestone streets lined with 18th century (and older!) buildings, men and women in colorful folk costumes, and traditional foods prepared simply and heaped on platters. Even today, images like these are hard to shake.

This is exactly the conception that was wonderfully challenged on May 3, when Knoxville allergist and Honorary Consul for the Republic of Poland Dr. Marek Pienkowski and Knoxville Parent's own Eva Nations, President of the PolandNow organization, presented PolandNow 2013: A Celebration of Contemporary Polish Culture. The event, sponsored by the Marek Maria Pienkowski Foundation and Knoxville Parent Magazine, with support from the City of Knoxville, Preservation Pub and Oodles Uncorked, The Arts & Culture Alliance, the University of Tennessee, and Instytut Adama Mickiewicza was spread over three locations in downtown Knoxville (The Emporium Gallery, Market Square and the UT Conference Center), and featured contemporary cuisine, graphic arts, cinema and jazz.

Unlike the more traditional festival with folk dancing, kielbasa and pierogies (Polish dumplings with fillings like potato, cheese and meat), this event focused on the Poland of today, a culturally rich, economically powerful, world presence. Poland has long since emerged from the repressive Communist rule that ended in 1989. It has been a member of the European Union since 2004 and served as President of the EU Council in 2012. Its economy has weathered recession better than its European counterparts, and its descendants have made important contributions to modern fields like science (Nobel Prize winning physicist Georges Charpak), technology (Apple Cofounder Steve Wozniak), religion (Pope John Paul II), arts (composer Henryk Górecki), entertainment (MGM's Samuel Goldwyn),



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and sports (hockey great Wayne Gretzky). This is the Poland that PolandNow 2013 celebrated on May 3, Poland's Constitution Day (and similar in nature to the July 4th U.S. Independence Day). The event featured a dinner prepared using the advanced techniques of molecular gastronomy by Poland's only Michelin star rated chef, Wojciech Modest Amaro, from Warsaw; an exhibition of contemporary Polish print making from the Eugeniusz Geppert Academy of Art and Design in Wrocław; appetizers made from classic Polish ingredients prepared in a modern way by visiting master chef Edward Nowakowski of Memphis, TN; Academy Award winning Polish films; and contemporary jazz performed by undercurrents Quartet and Baseball the Band.

Kicking off the event was a formal ceremony led by PolandNow President Eva Nations with remarks by Honorary Consul Marek Pienkowski, Deputy to the Mayor of Knoxville Eddie Mannis, and Deputy Chief of Mission at the Embassy of the Republic of Poland Maciej Pisarski.

Those who attended were treated to great entertainment, one-of-a-kind culinary experiences, a unique display of visual art, and all the color and excitement that a public festival deserves, all updated to the present day.

Plans are already being made for PolandNow 2014, once again scheduled on Poland's Constitution Day, Saturday, May 3, 2014. Next year's event promises to build on the success of this year's with even more entertainment, activities, and great food, so mark your calendar now! For more information about PolandNow and upcoming events, visit PolandNow.org.



Poland's first (and only) Michelin star rated chef Wojciech Amaro (left) and visiting master chef Edward Nowakowski prepare their culinary presentations for PolandNow 2013.



Deputy Chief of Missions Maciej Pisarski, PolandNow President Eva Nations, and Honorary Consul and PolandNow Founder Dr. Marek Pienkowski.

