

Polish Community Association in Geelong Inc.



*“Establishing our Roots in a
New Land”*

“Poles in the Geelong Community”



This project is supported by the City of Greater Geelong
'Healthy and Connected Communities Grants Program'

A Brief History of the Polish Community Association in Geelong Inc. *“Poles in the Geelong Community”*

The first influx of Polish migrants to Australia began between 1949 and 1951. Most came from war-torn Europe after spending more than five years in Germany as Displaced Persons, today's Refugees. Many of these people returned to Poland, which borders with Germany, while many thousands refused to return to their homeland as it was now in the USSR Communist Block of countries and Poles never trusted the Russians. Their decision was not an easy one. For many it meant cutting off ties with family and friends who still may have been alive in Poland.

For many the decision to migrate to Australia from Germany turned out to be the right decision. They all saw Australia to be the safest place in the world – so far away from the conflicts and the suffering they endured in Poland and later in Germany for more than six years.

When arriving in Australia, families were dispersed all over Victoria wherever a workforce was required. Even though all lived in migrant camps in places like Bonegilla and Mildura, they considered themselves so lucky that they received free accommodation and meals and, most important, their children were at last attending school.



White Eagle House in the late 1980s



Krakowiak Dance Ensemble performing in the early 1990s

Soon the two-year employment contracts with the Commonwealth Government ended and the “New Australians” were able to settle anywhere they chose in Australia.

Several thousand of these Polish migrants settled in Geelong in the early 1950s, as did many other people from various other European nationalities. The Bell Park area was a very popular settlement for many of these migrants. In fact, after several years it was nick-named “Little Europe”.

Very quickly, after settling in Geelong, the Polish community began to set up different organisations according to the needs of the new community. The Polish Community Association was set up in 1953. With memories of Poland and of their families they left behind still fresh in their minds, the main priority of the Association was to ensure that the children were formally taught the Polish language and were exposed to Polish culture, songs and folk dances. The first Saturday Polish School was set up at St Mary's Parish Hall in Myers St in Geelong, followed by a Folk Dancing group, which evolved into today's “Krakowiak” Dance Ensemble.



Children from PCA's Saturday Polish School paint a mural on their classroom wall. Late 1980s

Resigned to the fact that they would never be able to even visit homeland and many cases unable to even correspond with their immediate families because of the restrictions imposed by

Official Opening of the Adventure Playground by Mayor of Geelong



* GEELONG mayor, Cr Brian Fowler, cast off grown-up cares and tried the slide at the official opening of a Polish community adventure playground yesterday. He is pictured being watched by Polish community association president, Mr Stan Jakubowski, and secretary, Mr Zigmunt Krywek. The playground at White Eagle House, was built by voluntary labour and cost about \$40,000 in materials. It was "a terrific achievement," Cr Fowler said. "They have set an example to the rest of the community. They are good people."

governments of countries “Behind the Iron Curtain” , they began to build their own “little Poland” in Geelong. The Geelong Polish community celebrated Polish National Days, Religious Feast Days with concerts performed by the Dancing Ensemble and by children from the Saturday Polish School. To raise funds for projects they planned to achieve, monthly social dances were held at the Geelong West Town Hall in Pakington Street.



Celebrating Seniors Month at White Eagle House

During WW2, after the invasion and occupation of Poland by the German Armies, young Polish men formed regiments under the leadership of the Polish General Władysław Anders, and they fought in places like Tobruk in the Middle East and in Western Europe. Many Polish pilots joined up with the British Air Force and played an important role in the war under the British Flag.



SPK Members at the ANZAC Day Parade

Many of these young men migrated to Australia and settled in Geelong. In the early 1960s they established a Geelong Branch of the Polish Ex-servicemen’s Association. Under the Ex-serviceman’s Association’s patronage, another Saturday Polish Language School was set up at the Holy Family Parish in Bell Park – the centre of “Little Europe”. With funds raised collectively by the Geelong community, the Ex-Servicemen’s Association purchased the disused Temperance Hall in Ryrie St and very

quickly established a close relationship with Geelong Branches of the Returned Soldier Leagues and for over 50 years proudly marched with all the Geelong RSL Groups in the ANZAC Day parades.

Around the same time in the mid-sixties, the Polish Community Association in Geelong purchased a building in Malop St Geelong. They named it “The Polish Millennium House”. It was in 1966 that Poland was celebrating its 1000th Anniversary of its conversion to Christianity. At that time Mr Baumgart was the PCA President, in fact, one of the longest serving presidents of the PCA in Geelong.



Celebration of Holy Mass before the start of the PCA Sports Picnic in 1989



Krakowiak Group performing recently at Poland Independence Day celebrations at our venue

The late 1970s, early eighties saw a revolt by the workers in Poland under the Banner of “Solidarność” and led by Lech Wałęsa, The living standards in Poland were deteriorating for nearly a decade; not to mention the curtailment of basic freedoms the Polish people had to endure. This forced thousands of young people to escape from Poland to countries outside the Warsaw Block.

Consequently, this resulted in the second large influx of Polish migrants to Australia. Once more many

settled in Geelong and soon became an integral part not only of the Geelong Polish community but also the broader Geelong community

The Polish community flourished at that time. As the children of these migrants grew older, the young people also began to contribute to the life of the Geelong Polish community. They established the Polonia Soccer Club, the Syrena Volleyball Club, the "Krakowiak" Dance Ensemble, and Polish Women's Association in Geelong. These groups were all supported by Polish Community Association in Geelong and Polish Ex-servicemen's Association.

In 1980, the Polish Community Association (PCA) decided to purchase a disused Japanese ball bearing factory in Breakwater. Now known as the White Eagle House. The PCA's vision was to embrace all the different Polish sporting and cultural groups in Geelong and welcome them to use its new venue. This vision did materialise and was extended even further by welcoming members of the broader Geelong community to its venue.

The White Eagle House became a popular place to socialise. Unfortunately, the money the PCA was making from sales at the bar and meals prepared by volunteers on Sundays and monthly Saturday dances wasn't enough to pay for the upkeep of the venue or the support it had committed to give to groups affiliated with the Association. Hence, in the late 1990s, when poker machines were introduced in Victoria, the PCA threw its hat into the ring, applied for and was successful in obtaining six Gaming Licences. It envisaged that these extra funds coming into the PCA would be used to improve the PCA's facilities for its members and affiliated groups to enjoy.



Our first FIVE gaming machines



White Eagle House today

was elected, the PCA decided that the only way to increase its profitability was to engage the expertise of the Mercury Group to give the Association invaluable financial advice and support to become a truly viable organisation. As a result, the management structure and the Association's operations were overhauled, and proper financial practices were instituted. In 2017, the PCA was able to repay its very large bank loan and a large overdraft. More importantly, it was able to repay all debts to its creditors. For the first time in many years, the PCA was able to report to its members at the October 2017 AGM that it had a substantial profit.

Even before the PCA purchased the Breakwater property in 1980, when the Association was then

The PCA started with only five electronic gaming machines but as the number of Gaming Entitlements were increased for the Geelong area, the PCA Committee applied for and received an extra 29, giving it a total of 35 poker machines.

Over the past 10 years, the financial position of the PCA varied from year to year. During the last 10 years, there were large losses and sometimes only small profits.

In 2015, when the new and current Committee



Poles at the Annual Pako Festa Parade



Breakwater Eagles SC match on White Eagle House soccer pitch

located in Millennium House in Malop St, it was very much involved in and financially sponsored the Polonia Soccer Club. Unfortunately, the Polonia SC disbanded in 1967. Fortunately, the Syrena Sports Club, which was already heavily involved in Volleyball, set up its own soccer team and at the beginning played under the name of Belmont Syrena. When names of ethnic origins were not permitted to be used, the soccer team's name was changed to Bell Post Hill United. In the late 1970's, The Pyramid P.B.S. offered to sponsor the Polish soccer team and the name was again changed to Pyramid PBS. When the property in Malop St

was sold and the Breakwater property was purchased in 1980, the Soccer team changed its name to the Breakwater Eagles Soccer Club. This name remains to this very day. Over the years, we saw a dramatic increase in the membership of the Soccer Club. Although the Soccer Club may have one or two members of Polish background, to this very day, the PCA continues to heavily sponsor the Breakwater Eagles Soccer Club.

The Club is free to use all the facilities of the PCA. This included the use of the soccer fields at the White Eagle House, the change rooms, function facilities for their social events and, naturally, our Bar facilities. The maintenance of the soccer field, cleaning of the change room facilities and utility costs continue to be all covered as part of the informal sponsorship agreement the PCA had with the Clubs.

Until July 2015, the wages of the part-time Secretary of the Eagles Club were funded by the PCA for 4 years. Unfortunately, with the financial pressures the PCA was experiencing in 2015/16. The PCA decided to discontinue that part of the funding. All funding areas other areas of the Soccer Club continued.

With improved management of the PCA's finances by the new Committee in mid 2015, the PCA was confident enough to apply for Commonwealth Government 1:1 funding to install soccer field lights on two of our junior soccer pitches. The cost of this project was just over \$33,000, of which the PCA had to contribute \$17,000. The application was successful. This demonstrated the PCA's long-term commitment to the Breakwater Eagles Soccer Club and to the young kids, of various backgrounds, in our local area.



Syrena Team finals winners 1965

The Syrena Volleyball Club has enjoyed a long and very successful history in Geelong, State and National competitions. The Club was set up in Geelong in 1961. The founding members were Peter Wołosewicz, Eugene Pedzinski, Leszek Kuźma. This group set up the Syrena Volleyball Club Committee of which Zbigniew Niewinski was President and Zbigniew Zembrzuski was Secretary. Soon after, the membership began to expand when Mr Josef Stopinski, who later became the Club's mentor, Frank Filipowicz, Adam Zychla and Joe Parks joined the Club. Within a couple of

months this small group established the first official Polish volleyball team and began playing in the Division 2 of the Geelong Volleyball competitions in 1962. Training sessions were run on vacant blocks in Bell Park, owned by the Geelong Polish community. The membership quickly grew from the initial 15 members in the first year, to over 100 playing and non-playing members. The Club initially funded itself by running regular dances at the Railway Institute Hall in LaTrobe Terrace.

Due mainly to the drop in the popularity of Volleyball in the Geelong region and because the original players were reaching their “retiring age”, the Club discontinued its involvement in volleyball in 2015 but continues to operate, on a smaller scale, as the Syrena Golf Club.

Credit must go to Frank Filipowicz, who, due to his efforts and dedication to the Syrena Sports Club, was able to ensure the Club continued to exist for four and a half decades.

With the introduction of Gaming Machines in early 2000, the PCA was able to improve and expand the facilities for its members. What was then an informal Darts Group, which played darts regularly in the evenings at the White House, soon expanded into a large Darts Club with men’s and ladies’ teams taking part in competitions with other clubs at various venues around Geelong.



Senior's Deb Ball

Each year, the PCA has sponsored the National Darts competition at the White Eagle House over a weekend in October. Dart teams from all over Australia, some even from NZ and the UK, participate in this competition each year. Not only did the PCA cover most of the costs in staging this event, it also provides its the facilities free of charge.

For over a decade, the PCA has also been sponsoring our 8-Ball Club, which meets at the WEH formally twice a week as well as informally on a regular basis. Having the 8-Ball Club using our facilities, the PCA was the main sponsor of the Victorian Eight-Ball Tournament for a number of years. This major event was held at the White Eagle House annually, with hundreds of competitors from around Australia competing for various prizes.

Each year, since the PCA moved to its new facilities in Breakwater in the early eighties, it had been organising its Annual Sports Picnic for around two decades. This event encouraged family participation in various sports. Naturally, exhibition soccer matches were played between our Breakwater Eagles SC teams and invited teams from other Clubs in the Geelong area. Unfortunately, this event is no longer held mainly due to the ageing membership and a lack of interest shown by our third and four generation of Poles in Geelong.

Late in 2017, the PCA supported the Soccer Club to convert a large rotunda structure, which the general membership of the PCA once used for BBQs. It is now used specifically by the Soccer Club,



Main Hall ready for “Wigilia” – Christmas Eve Dinner

for raising funds by selling of soft drinks, coffee and tea and BBQ foods to spectators at soccer matches on Sundays. The Secretary of the PCA has worked closely with the Soccer Committee to organise the required Council permits. Once again, the PCA has agreed to cover the costs of utilities to assist the Soccer Club to use the all the money it raises some to fund their soccer activities.

The PCA has its own Website, www.whiteeaglehouse.com.au, in which we promote all the activities of the PCA as well as the activities of the Clubs which we sponsor. We encourage affiliated sporting clubs as well as other groups affiliated with the PCA to add to our website.

The PCA does have a very complex Membership structure, which it will be looking to change in the very near future. As it stands currently, the PCA's Constitution lists six membership categories:

- **Ordinary Members** who are of Polish heritage or spouses/partners of members of members of Polish background;
- **Associate Members**, these members are not of Polish heritage.
- **Honorary Life Membership**. These members are nominated by the Committee at an AGM and can come from any of the above membership categories. Members in the above categories can attend and vote at all general meetings. However, only Ordinary Members and Life Honorary Members can serve on the Committee of Management.
- **Sporting Members**. They have the same rights and access to all PCA facilities as the above three groups but are not able to vote.
- **Social Members**. They have the same rights and access to all PCA facilities as the above three groups but are not able to vote or attend the PCA's general meetings.
- **Eagle Members**. They have access to all PCA facilities but are not able to vote or attend the PCA's general meetings and they do not pay annual membership subscriptions



Members catering for a special PCA Function

Members of the various sporting clubs affiliated with the PCA, have the choice of joining the PCA as Social Members or to nominate themselves as Associate members. If the Committee believes that any member has substantially contributed in any way to the betterment of the PCA or its affiliates, those members can be nominated for Honorary Life Membership.

Because the age of the majority of members of Polish background is well into the 70s and 80s, the PCA will be looking at simplifying our membership structure by making membership of the PCA more inclusive of the wider Geelong community.

Relationship of PCA with affiliated Groups

Each entity, which includes the Soccer Club, the Men's & Women's Darts Club, the 8-Ball Club and non-sporting groups, the three senior citizens' groups and the Jukebox Rockers, all have their own management committees. These Committees manage their own day-to-day affairs with minimal interference from the PCA Committee. The PCA Committee has appointed a representative on the Committee to oversee and report on groups/clubs which the PCA sponsors. This representative, together with the Secretary, attends committee meetings of these groups whenever the PCA Committee wishes to have an input into any discussions. Representative from these groups/clubs can also attend PCA Committee meetings. This relationship and these consultative arrangements have served all parties well over the last two to three decades.

The PCA has informal agreement with all the sporting groups we are supporting. The support PCA has been offering sporting and non-sporting groups either sponsorship funding or free access to all the PCA's facilities or both. Some of these groups include:

1. **Breakwater Eagle Soccer Club**

- The Soccer Club has access to the main soccer field which is set up with floodlights
- Access to two junior soccer fields with floodlighting on both, thanks to a Grant from the Commonwealth Government's "Stronger Communities" Funding Program.
- The Soccer Club manages their own funds, paying the registration fees to the FFV and Referee fees. The same agreement applies to any extra funds they raise via their own fundraising. Sponsorships include:



- The Soccer Club's full access to the change rooms and well as a special change room for visiting Soccer Referees. The cleaning and maintenance cost are totally funded by the PCA.
- The mowing, watering and maintenance of the soccer fields is also totally funded by the PCA
- The PCA also funds all utility costs associated with the use of all the facilities used by the Soccer Club.
- Each year, the PCA gives the Soccer Club a grant of up to \$4,000 to cover the costs of trophies and other items associated with the end of season Soccer Presentations.
- The PCA has estimated all these support costs to be over \$55,000 per annum.

It is not a requirement of PCA Committee members to be formally involved in the promotions of Soccer or any other sporting activity. However, a member of the PCA Committee has been delegated to work with the sporting clubs, especially the Soccer Club.

2. **8-Ball Club**

- The PCA was happy to welcome the 8-Ball Club to our venue for them to run their weekly 8-Ball competition at our venue. There are not many facilities in the Geelong area that can provide the necessary equipment and the large area for such activities. They have been using the WEH venue for just on 10 years
- Neither the 8-Ball Club itself nor the players are charged for using our facilities. Everything is provided free of charge.

3. **Jukebox Rockers**

- For over three decades, we have hosted the Jukebox Rockers group at our venue. Members of this group range from late teenage years to well past the retirement ages.
- The Jukebox Rockers use the venue twice a week for practising dance routines and assisting beginners and each month, they hold their Rock 'n Roll Dance.
- In January of each year, the group organises a Rock 'n Roll Festival on the grounds of the White Eagle House. This weekend event culminates with a Rock 'n Roll Dance, which is held in the main function area of our venue. The use of our entire facility during that weekend is provided by the PCA free of charge

4. **Cribbage Club**

Although the WEH does not directly sponsor the Cribbage Club, it does welcome members of the Club to use our facilities, free of charge, for their competitions each Wednesday and informally at any time during the week.

5. Bridge Club

Again, the WEH does not directly sponsor the Bridge Club, it does welcome members of the Club to use our facilities, free of charge, for their card games each Thursday.

6. Senior Citizens Groups

For over a decade the PCA has supported the three Senior Citizens Groups who use our venue, including our back kitchen free of charge. As part of this, we also support the promotion of the State Government's Senior Citizens Month. We have been holding a weekend of Multicultural activities, entertainment, ethnic crafts and cooking and welcome all the Geelong senior citizens to participate.



The Polish Community Association in Geelong Inc. is grateful to the Geelong community for supporting us throughout the last four decades. Now that we will likely be in a better financial position in the future, we would like to give something back to the community, not just the Polish members but also to anyone who would like to come and enjoy what the White Eagle House has to offer.

In conclusion, we cannot ignore the fact that our Polish background membership is aging. When the White Eagle House was officially opened in 1981, most of our members were between 40 and 50 years of age. Today, 40 years later, most are now between 70 and 90 years of age – if they are still with us. For various reasons we are not attracting our children and grandchildren to join the Association and take an active role in running the Club. This problem is not unique to the Polish community other ethnic groups in the Geelong region are having the same problems. For this reason, the PCA Committee is looking at options it will put to members regarding the future of the PCA and the White Eagle House. Members will be consulted extensively and will play an important part in deciding our future.



Live Nativity Play at the White Eagle House



Annual General Meeting of Members at the White Eagle House

Polish Community Association in Geelong Incorporated

Our Office Bearers from 1980 – 2020

YEAR	PRESIDENT	SECRETARY	TREASURER
1980 - 82	E. PEDZINSKI	W. GAŁĄSKA	K. PIEKUT
1982 - 83	Z. JORDAN	W. GAŁĄSKA	K. PIEKUT
1982 - 83	K. MNICH	W. GAŁĄSKA	T. FIC
1982 - 83	A. SZALINSKI	W. GAŁĄSKA	T. FIC
1983 - 84	A. SZALINSKI	W. GAŁĄSKA	S. GWIZDEK
1984 - 86	A. POSADOWSKI	A. SZALINSKI	S. GWIZDEK
1986 - 87	S. OKIS	A. SZALINSKI	Z. SZALINSKI
1987 - 88	A. POSADOWSKI	J. TAPEREK	K. KARDEL
1988 - 89	A. POSADOWSKI	A. SZALINSKI	K. KARDEL
1989 - 90	T. FIC	J. TAPEREK	K. KARDEL
1990 - 93	S. JAKUBOWSKI	Z. KRYWULT	K. KARDEL
1993 - 94	Z. KRYWULT	H. SZKUTA	K. KUBINA
1994 - 95	Z. KRYWULT	T. KOVAC	K. KUBINA
1995 - 97	S. JAKUBOWSKI	M. FILIPOWICZ	R. MATCZAK
1997 - 99	S. JAKUBOWSKI	H. SZKUTA	R. MATCZAK
1999 - 01	J. PAWLAK	H. SZKUTA	R. MATCZAK
2001 - 03	J. PAWLAK	H. SZKUTA	W. ŁATA
2003 - 05	J. JAKUBOWSKI	J. JABŁOŃSKA	R. MATCZAK
2005 - 09	J. JAKUBOWSKI	W. KWIATKOWSKI	W. ŁATA
2009 - 13	S. JAKUBOWSKI	P. KRYWULT	W. ŁATA
2013	M. NADOLSKI	B. PAWLAK	R. MATCZAK
2013 - 14	J. JAKUBOWSKI	A. KARPICZ	P. KRYWULT
2014 - 15	J. JAKUBOWSKI	J. SKUZA	H. TRUSIAK
2015 - 18	G. BRZOSTOWSKI	H. SZKUTA	R. MATCZAK
2018 - 20	G. BRZOSTOWSKI	H. SZKUTA	J. KARPINSKI
2020 -	K. MATCZAK	H. SZKUTA	J. KARPINSKI

Henry Szkuta

Secretary

Polish Community Association Inc. in Geelong

December, 2020