

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

***“The Poles in the  
Geelong Community”***



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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.

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.

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 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.



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.

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 1000<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of its conversion to Christianity.



The late 1970s, early eighties saw a revolt by the workers in Poland under the Banner of "Solidarność" and lead 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 some Saturdays 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 also threw its hat into the ring, applied for, and was successful in obtaining a Gaming Licence. It envisaged that these extra funds coming into the PCA would be used to improve the PCA's facilities for its members to enjoy and enable the PCA to support the various groups affiliated with the Association.



The PCA started with only six electronic gaming machines but as the number of Entitlement were increased for the Geelong LGA, the PCA applied for and received an extra 29, giving it a total of 35 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 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 processes 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. The PCA was able to report to its members at the October 2017 AGM that it had a substantial profit for the first time for well over a decade.

Even before the PCA purchased the Breakwater property in 1980, the Association was very much involved in and financially sponsored the Polonia Soccer Club. Later, when it purchased the Breakwater property, it also sponsored the "Syrena" Volleyball Club, which at that time had several teams, including two women's teams. Members of both the Polonia Soccer Club and the Syrena Volleyball Club served as members on the PCA Committee of Management at that time.

Both Clubs used all the facilities of the PCA, free of charge. 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.

In the late 1990's, it was decided to change the name of the Soccer Club to the Breakwater Eagles Soccer Club to encourage a broader membership base. This was a wise decision. Over the next few years, we saw a dramatic increase in the membership of the Soccer Club.



Until July 2015, the wages of the part-time Secretary of the Breakwater 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 funding this. However, all other funding areas of the Soccer Club continued.

With improved management of the PCA's finances by the new Committee, the PCA was confident enough to apply for Commonwealth Government 1:1 funding to install soccer field lights on two of our junior soccer fields. The cost of this project will be 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 in our local area.

Unfortunately, the outcome with the Syrena Volleyball Club was not as positive. This was mainly due to the drop in the popularity of Volleyball in the Geelong region and the original players were reaching their "retiring age". The Club folded in the early 2000s.



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.

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 does the PCA cover most of the costs in staging this event, it also provides all the facilities of the PCA, 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 has also become the main sponsor of the Victorian Eight-Ball Tournament. This major event is 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 has been organising its Annual Sports Picnic. This event encourages family participation in various sports. Naturally, exhibition soccer matches are played between our Breakwater Eagles SC teams and invited teams from other Clubs in the Geelong area. Other sporting events on the day include:

- Junior soccer matches
- Track events for kids and their parents
- Volleyball
- Chess (for those agile with their mind but not their bodies)
- 8-Ball competitions
- Variety of games for younger children
- Table Tennis
- Indoor Bowls

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, 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 encourage the Soccer Club to take some responsibility in raising some of their own funds to run their affairs.

The PCA has its own Website, [www.whiteeaglehouse.com.au](http://www.whiteeaglehouse.com.au), in which we promote all the activities of the PCA and the activities of the Clubs 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 of the various sporting clubs affiliated with the PCA, have the choice of joining the PCA as Social Members or nominating themselves as Associate members and, depending on their contribution to their sporting club or the PCA, they can be nominated for Honorary Life Membership.

Because of the age of members from Polish background is increasing and the number of Polish background members is consequently decreasing, the PCA will be looking at simplifying our membership structure and making membership of the PCA more inclusive of the wider Geelong community.

The breakdown of our membership in 2020 stands as follows:

Ordinary Members	164
Life Honorary Members	50
Associate Members	29
Sporting Members	120 (This number will increase as we are encouraging parents of younger players to join).
Social Members	188
Eagle Members	1709

## 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 offers to all the sporting and non-sporting groups includes sponsorship funds and free access to all the PCA's facilities:

- **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. Currently floodlights are being installed, as 1:1 grant from the Commonwealth Government "Strong Communities" Funding Program.
- The Soccer Club collects registration fees from players during the registration week in February each year. They manage these funds themselves, paying the registration



fees to the FFV through their own account as well as the Referee fees. The same agreement applies to any extra funds they raise via their own fundraising; these funds are managed entirely by the Soccer Club. The PCA funds areas that the Soccer Club would not be in a financial position to fund themselves. These 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.
- The Soccer Club has agreed to fund referee costs and registration of player from the funds which participants are required to pay when they register to play for the Breakwater Eagles Soccer Club.
- Each year, the PCA gives the Soccer Club a cash 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 \$65,000 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 (Jack Karpinski) of the Committee has been delegated to work with the sporting clubs, especially the Soccer Club. The Secretary (Henry Szkuta) of the PCA also works with the Soccer Club to ensure both the Soccer Club and the PCA get maximum exposure in the local community.

The Committee members do, whenever the occasion arises, promotes Soccer in the area when young people visit the White Eagle House (WEH) for reasons not associated with Sport. One

example was when the Bellarine Regional Scout Group visited the WEH for a “Cultural and Community Diversity Week Event” this year. After our presentation of Polish history, culture and food, we highlighted the fact that soccer was the main sport played in Poland and we informed them that we have a Soccer Club at the WEH and that it is looking for enthusiastic boys and girls to play in their teams. It was an evening session, so at the end of the information session, we turned on the lights on the soccer field, gave them some soccer balls and let them run around the field until their parents came to pick them up. Hopefully, we will get some recruits from that activity.

We usually leave Soccer promotions for the Soccer Club Committee to organise. However, in all promos the White Eagle House Logo is included. During Player Registration Week, we have banners hung up at the road entrance to the WEH Venue, making anyone driving or walking past, aware that Soccer is an integral part of the WEH. We also have permanent signs up at the entrance and around the WEH Venue advertising the fact that this venue is the home of the Breakwater Eagles Soccer Club.

- **Men’s and Women’s Darts Club**

- For over a decade, the PCA sponsored the Darts Teams in several ways to promote their activities in the local and broader area. This was done by:

- Assisting the Darts Club set up their Headquarter in the White Eagle House Venue. This including setting up permanent dartboards and lights in a special area.
- The PCA provided snacks and the traditional jug of beer at the end of each match to teams competing in weekly competitions. All this at no cost to the Darts Club.
- The PCA provided \$7,000 each year towards the organisation of the Annual National Men’s and Women’s Darts Championships over three days, hosted by the PCA at the White Eagle House. This sponsorship has discontinued.



- **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.

- **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.

- **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



- **Bridge Club**
  - Although, 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.
  
- **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 community is looking at options it will put to members regarding our vision for 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.

**Henry Szkuta**  
 Secretary  
 Polish Community Association Inc. in Geelong

