



IPA Newsletter

2025 IPA Hall of Fame® Inductees



Congratulations





A Note From Our President



It is with great pride and heartfelt joy that I extend warm congratulations to the newest inductees into the International Polka Association Hall of Fame. Please join me in celebrating five extraordinary individuals whose dedication, passion, and lifetime contributions have left a lasting impact on the world of polka music: Johnny Krawisz, Mark Janson, Bob Earl, Sr., Chester Pala, and Rich Sendra. These honorees represent the very best of our beloved genre, and we are honored to welcome them into the IPA Hall of Fame. Their legacy continues to inspire musicians, dancers, and fans alike across generations and throughout the country.

In addition to our Hall of Fame inductions, we are excited to announce this year's exceptional recipients of the IPA Polka Music Awards. Congratulations to Kimberly Uelmen for being named Female Vocalist of the Year and to Lenny Gomulka for earning the title of Male Vocalist of the Year—two artists who continue to elevate the quality and tradition of polka music with every performance. We are also proud to recognize Frankie Liszka and Blue Magic for a well-deserved sweep in three major categories: Polish Style Band of the Year, Album of the Year for *Thanks Alot*, and Song of the Year for their stirring rendition of *Bella Ciao*.

On the international stage, we celebrate the incredible talent of Ted Lange, who has been named International Male Vocalist of the Year, and the beloved Mollie B, recognized as International Female Vocalist of the Year. And a very special congratulations goes out to Alex Meixner and his band, who earned top honors as International Band of the Year, as well as International Album of the Year for *Fest* and International Song of the Year for the high-energy hit *Beer Medley*. Their vibrant, crowd-pleasing performances continue to expand polka's reach and bring joy to audiences across the globe.

We are also honored to present two very special awards that speak to the heart of our organization. Congratulations to Harold Otto, this year's recipient of the Joe Jozwiak Award, given in recognition of extraordinary service to the IPA and the polka community. Additionally, we salute Whitey Ryniec, recipient of the prestigious Leon Kozicki Trustee Award, for his unwavering commitment, leadership, and dedication to our mission.

All of these incredible individuals and their achievements will be formally celebrated at the 57th Annual International Polka Festival and Convention, taking place over Labor Day weekend in Cranberry Township, Pennsylvania. It promises to be a memorable weekend filled with music, camaraderie, dancing, and the deep sense of community that defines the IPA spirit. Full details about the festival schedule, hotel information, and ticketing can be found on the IPA website.

As we kick off the celebration, we invite you to join us for a very special event on Thursday, August 28th, at the Cranberry Elks Lodge. Our Annual Kick-off Party will feature none other than IPA Hall of Famer Alex Meixner in what is sure to be an unforgettable evening of music and fun. Best of all, proceeds from this dance will go directly to support the Elks Veterans Commission—helping those who served our nation and need our continued support.

We thank all of you—our members, supporters, and fans—for helping keep polka music thriving for generations to come. We can't wait to celebrate with you this Labor Day weekend as we honor our award winners, dance to the music we love, and continue building the future of polka together.

The Board and
Directors wish you all safe
travels to Pennsylvania for the
57th Annual
International Polka
Association Festival
and Convention.

**The International Polka Association Proudly Presents
The Parade of Polka Bands Picnic
Sunday, August 3rd, 2025**



**Hammond Mohawks Picnic Grove
4040 Calumet Ave., Hammond, IN**

**Gate opens at 12:30pm – Polka Music from 1pm until 6pm
Admission: \$20 Payable at the grove**

Polka Bands Scheduled to Appear



Freshly grilled Polish Food Favorites!

Rain or Shine!

www.ipapolkas.com

Refreshing Beverages!

Indoor Restrooms!

It's Always Sunny in Florida...

Witamy członków!

It's a beautiful Florida summer, allowing everyone to get out and enjoy LIVE polka music.

Keep your feet dancing to the polka beat while our Florida Clubs are preparing for our upcoming Oktoberfest season and Fall dances! Remember, our IPA's 57th Annual Festival & Convention is only a few weeks away. We hope to see all of our Florida IPA members at our convention.

FL Musician Spotlight:

Joe Oberaitis, also known as "Pan Josef," began his musical career at a very young age, growing up in Cleveland, Ohio. At the age of five, Joe heard the "Haystack Polka," which motivated him to start playing the accordion. He began taking lessons at DePaul Music each week.

At age seven, he had already appeared on the local television talent show. Throughout grade school, he played at school functions and then graduated to social gatherings. In fifth grade, Joe put together his first band. His father made a cardboard stand that said "Polka-Aires," and they played the Ampol Aires "Hi-Fi Polka" at a PTA party. From elementary school through high school, the band excelled and became very popular in the surrounding Cleveland area and neighboring towns, playing at various social events.

In 1967, Joe joined Ray Budzilek's band, playing with them for three years. The Joe Oberaitis Band made its debut and released its first recording, "A Little Bit of Polish Soul," in 1971. The album was a huge success, and the band was gaining popularity.

Joe hosted "The Polish International Program" and made regular appearances on WEWS's "Polka Varieties" shows. The Joe Oberaitis Band was voted the Favorite Polish Polka Band by the viewing audience. In 1975, he received numerous awards for his exceptional polka performances. He was dubbed "Cleveland's Polka Prince." He was then credited with "revitalizing polka music in the industrial Northeast."

In 1983, Joe moved to Orlando and joined the Walt Disney Entertainment Company family. He entertained the Epcot Oktoberfest crowds for many years and became a solo entertainer in Central Florida. He performed at numerous events, which included

prominent polka celebrities as well as Pope John Paul's papal visit to Miami in 1987.

After retiring from Epcot in 2018, Joe continues his polka band career playing at local events, German restaurants, Oktoberfests, Polish clubs, and other venues. He has recorded with Alex Meixner, Fred Ziwich, Tom Mrocza, and Keith Stras.

In his retirement, Joe enjoys spending hours in his home recording studio, composing, recording, researching polka music, and hosting live shows on the Polka Jammer Network. Joe has his own record company, Kerebo Records, and his own publishing company, Kerebo Music Publishing. He has recorded over 20 albums and CDs throughout his musical career.

Joe is known as a walking encyclopedia of polkas. Many artists in the polka field call on Joe for his expertise in polka music, language, research, credits, and musical ability, as well as Polish traditions.

Just a few of his many famous polka hits over the years are: "*I'm Lovin' You Now*" Polka, "*Take My Hand Forever*" Polka, "*Squeeze Me*" Polka, "*Good Wishes*" Polka, and "*Sparkling Eyes*" Oberek. Numerous polka bands have recorded these notorious tunes.

Currently, Joe hosts "Polkas 101," heard Saturdays at 4:00 p.m., and "Slovenian Polka Blast" on Thursdays at noon over the Polka Jammer Network. He has been an IJ since 2007.

Joe has thousands of polka fans over the years, but his **#1 FAN** was his mother, Valerie. He always enjoyed playing her special request of "*Siwy Kon*" (Old Gray Mare).

One of Joe's most significant accomplishments was being inducted into the IPA Hall of Fame® in 2009. I would like to personally thank "Pan Jozef" for **ALL** he has done throughout the years, keeping polka music alive and well. I hope Joe continues his polka



By Brad Turk



journey, allowing me to ride his coattails for many more years to come.

If you have not listened to one of his polka shows, please do so, for you will be entertained by one of the best promoters in the polka field. Anyone who listens to Joe's music is guaranteed to get **Polkaitis**, because everyone knows it's contagious!

Please continue to support our Clubs & Bands:

Polish American Pulaski Club of Daytona Beach are having their Dinner/Dances at the **SNPJ Lodge #603 421 North Samsula Drive, New Smyrna Beach**. June 8th Jim Wicks; June 22nd KeyTones; July 27th Brewski Bros.; Aug. 24th TrentTunes & the Polka Sound; Sept. 7th Jim Wicks; Sept. 21st Northern Sounds. For dinner reservations, call Irene/Club (386)-258-7059. For additional info visit their Facebook page.

General K. Pulaski Citizens Club of Belleview.

The club is closed over the summer months, next Dinner/Dances will be Oktoberfest on Sept. 14th Northern Sounds; General K. Pulaski Day Oct. 19th Northern Sounds; Thanksgiving Nov. 16th Northern Sounds; Christmas Kolendy on Dec. 14th Northern Sounds. Please contact Brad for more info.

Polish American Society of St. Petersburg.

The Club is open over the summer/fall months for special events and social gatherings. The Club's "OPENING DAY" Celebration will be on Nov. 2nd with Northern Sounds, Nov. 16th Gone Coastal, Dec. 7th Jam-N-Jive, Dec. 14th Polka All Stars. Please visit their Facebook page, website: www.polishsociety.org, Dinner reservations call Rita (727)-347-7944, club (727)-894-9908 for more info.

Polish American Social Club of Vero Beach.

For all of their monthly events, please join their Facebook page, visit their website www.pacvbusa.org, or email: pascverobeach@gmail.com. Call the club at (772)-778-0039.

SNPJ Lodge #603 in Samsula.

For info. call the

club (386)-428-3983, visit their website: www.samsulasnpjlodge603.com. Join their Facebook page SNPJ Lodge 603 Official site for all their events, snpj lodge603@gmail.com.

Oktoberfest Season:

Sept. 5th: Oktoberfest Northern Sounds @ Ocala C/ C 6-9pm

Sept 20th: Oktoberfest with Northern Sounds @ New Smyrna Beach 6-10pm.

Sept. 26th: Oktoberfest with Northern Sounds @ Tampa 6-10pm.

Oct. 16th: Oktoberfest with Northern Sounds @ New Smyrna Beach 5-8pm

Oct. 24th: Oktoberfest with Gone Coastal @ Upper Tampa Bay Downs 5-10pm

Oct. 24th: Oktoberfest with Northern Sounds @ Gainesville 5-9pm

Oct. 25th: Oktoberfest with Gone Coastal @ Upper Tampa Bay Downs 11-4pm

Oct. 25th: Oktoberfest with Oktoberfest Express @ Upper Tampa Bay Downs 5-10pm

Oct. 26th: Oktoberfest with Oktoberfest Express @ Upper Tampa Bay Downs 12-6pm

Please support Florida's Polka IJ's. Featured on the Polka Jammer Network, 2009 IPA Hall of Famer Joe Oberaitis with Polkas 101 (Sat.), and Slovenian Polka Blast (Thur.) IPA member Ray Skorka, can be heard on Crankin' Polkas (Fri.). High on Polka's every (Sat.) on PolkaRadio.org featuring IPA members Tara, Diane, Jimmy and Billy.

If you would like any additional information about our clubs, polka dances or special events, email me at bradturk@cox.net or call the **Polka Hot Line:** (352) 875-3961. Please continue to support LIVE polka music and our clubs!

See you soon!



The IPA recognized the Cleveland Polka Association on their 50th Anniversary of promoting polkas in the Cleveland area. Chris Bogdon presented them with the certificate on June 7

2025 IPA Polka Hall of Fame®

Inductee

Mark Janson

Living Category



Mark Janson was born on December 17, 1959, to late Erna (Bender) Janson and Albert Janson. Mark is the youngest of four children, twin sisters Karen and Sharon, and a brother, Robert. Mark has been a lifelong member of Immanuel Lutheran Church in Frankentrost, where he attended grades 1 through 8. Mark is a 1978 graduate of Frankenmuth High School. He married Valerie Maurer on May 29, 1994. Val was one of the original members of the band and performed with the band until 1995. Mark and Val have two sons, Tyler and Zachary.

Mark's affiliation with polka music began in the mid 70's when Mark, along with grade school friends Scott DuRussel, Valerie Maurer, and Nathan Reinbold, started their first band called the "Partytime Polkateers." The band's first public dance appearance was at a dance in May 1977. Because all of the members were still in high school, they attracted an exceptional young following. The Partytime Polkateers recorded an album in 1978 entitled "*Through the Years*."

In 1982, the band's name was changed to The Brass Express when two trumpet players were added to the group. Due to the Brass Express's similar style to the Harold Mitas Orchestra, and with Harold's help, they quickly secured jobs throughout Michigan, northern Ohio, and Indiana. The Brass Express was different from most other polka bands in the area because they not only played polka, waltzes, and oberek's but also added rock & roll, country, and slow music to their repertoire. Thus, they played at many of their friends' weddings and other functions, in addition to polka events. The Brass Express recorded several albums including: "Introducing Mark Janson and The Brass Express, 1983," "Polka Time" 1984," "Brass Expressions," 1989, "When We're 64," 1991, "Dance to the Music" 1993," "15th Anniversary" 1993, "WRS Presents a

Very Merry Christmas" 1993, "Turning Point," 1995, and "Hey Diddle Diddle," 1997. Some of the most requested and remembered songs from the recordings were "Larry's Polka," "When I'm 64," "A Beer-Drinking Medley," "Dupa Polka," "Latest Babes of Polka Music," and "Hey Diddle Diddle." Mark led the band and served as the drummer for 25 years before passing the leadership to long-time band member and friend, Darrell Weltin. The band is now known as "The New Brass Express."

The promotion of polka music was always an ambition and goal of Mark's. He volunteered for Marv Herzog and Harold Mitas, the originators of the Summer Polka Fest, which began in 1977. Mark began hosting dances at the Golden Glow Ballroom in Saginaw, Michigan, in the early 1980s, as well as New Year's Eve parties. In 1987, it was announced that the Summer Polka Fest in Frankenmuth would no longer be held. Consequently, Mark and Tim Elbers formed the "Frankenmuth Festival of Polkas" and coordinated a 10-day festival in August 1987 in Frankenmuth. In 1988, Mark Janson and Marv Herzog formed the parent corporation RAM Productions, Inc., and thus began the Summer Music Fest. Frankenmuth is Michigan's #1 tourist destination, and the Summer Music-Fest soon became known as one of the premier polka events throughout the United States. On average, music fans from over 25 states and several countries travel to Frankenmuth the second full weekend of August to attend the Summer Music-Fest and enjoy the nation's top polka entertainers, as well as other styles of music and concerts. The Fabulous Hubcaps were one of the mainstays of the event, as many listeners reminisced and enjoyed their performances to the music of the 1950s and 1960s. Christian performers such as MercyMe, Third Day, Jeremy Camp, and many others performed at the Summer Music Fest. One of the largest crowds ever to attend the event was

when Bobby Vinton, along with Jimmy Sturr, shared the stage. Over the years, other mainstream artists who have performed include Marie Osmond, Tony Orlando, Brenda Lee, The Lettermen, and Little Jimmy Dickens, among others. Mark purchased Marv and Teresa Herzog's shares in RAM Productions in 2002 soon after Marv was diagnosed with cancer. Marv died December 12, 2002. Along with Val, Tyler, Zachary, and festival coordinator Pam Mossner, they continued to host this grand event. Mark Janson and RAM Productions also sponsor the Frankenmuth Oktoberfest, which takes place in September and celebrates Frankenmuth's German heritage. The Frankenmuth Oktoberfest has been recognized as one of the most popular Oktoberfest's in the United States and in 1996 Lord Mayor Christian Ude and the German Parliament from Munich, Germany gave an official proclamation that the Frankenmuth's Oktoberfest was declared the first and only Oktoberfest to operate with the blessing of the original Oktoberfest in Munich.

In addition to the Summer Music Fest and Oktoberfest, Mark also hosted many dances at the ever-popular "Pulaski Hall" in Bay City, Michigan, where many of the nation's top bands performed. Mark and Val also hosted a popular weekend event, "Polka Ka-Ching," for many years in Michigan's Upper Peninsula city of Sault Saint Marie at the Kewadin Casino, featuring Slovenian music. That event hosted Slovenian artists, including America's Polka King Frankie Yankovic, Canada's Polka King Walter Ostenak, Vern & Steve Meisner, Gaylord Klancnik, and many more.

Mark has been a DJ since 1978, when he co-hosted the WKCQ Saturday Morning Polka Show and Bavarian Hour, as well as the WKCQ evening polka shows. Currently, Mark rotates with other DJs on WKCQ's sister stations, WSAM 1400 and WSAG 92.3 FM, keeping polka music heard loud and clear throughout the mid-Michigan area on Sundays from 10 a.m. to noon. For a time, Mark was an IJ on the Polka Jammer Network, where he produced the "Nine-Hour Drive" show. Mark also served as a board member of Polka Jammer Network.

Mark was inducted into the "Michigan State Music Hall of Fame" on May 16, 2010. On May 27, 2017, Mark received the "Lifetime Achievement Award 2016" from the United States Polka Association.

Mark attributes his accomplishments to his parents for their Christian values and work ethic, his wife, Val, sons Tyler and Zachary, as well his family for their continued love and support and his polka mentors, Harold Mitas, Marv Herzog, Eddie Blazonczyk

and Lenny Gomulka for their endless conversations, advice, and respect for polka music. He also attributes his accomplishments to the past band members, as well as the many bands that have played at the various events he has been involved in. Above and beyond all, Mark wants to thank the many people that followed and promoted the Brass Express, all the people that have volunteered through the many years for all his events, the most gracious sponsors and MOST of all the people that attend the events in which he is and has been affiliated with. All of you are the reason he most graciously and humbly accepts his induction into the International Polka Association's Hall of Fame.



The IPA recognized Richie Dombrowski on the 10th Anniversary of Ocean Beach Park Polka Days during the festival on June 20. Congratulations Richie and the entire OBPPD staff!



CERTIFICATE OF APPRECIATION

is hereby presented to:

Larry Walk

In recognition of your 60th anniversary of being a Polka DJ as well as promoting polkas, the International Polka Association hereby presents this Certificate of Appreciation.

Thank you, and Congratulations.

Granted: June 27, 2025

Chris Bogdon, President



2025 IPA Polka Hall of Fame®

Inductee

Johnny Krawisz

Living Category



John Krawisz was born on September 5, 1964. His grandmother, Anna Kamien, bought him his first accordion when he was 5 years old. She owned a tavern in the old Polish neighborhood by St. Peter and Paul on the Southwest side of Chicago. So many polka musicians grew up in this area. At the age of 9, Johnny started taking lessons from Chester Kordelewski, the accordion player from the Johnny Bomba orchestra, who heavily inspired Johnny to play polka music. He quickly developed a love for polka music, which his mom and dad would listen to on the radio every day and night. At the age of 11, Johnny formed a friendship with Ray "Melvin" Rzeszutko at St. Peter and Paul. Ray happened to be a drummer and loved polka music. Ray is the youngest of the Rzeszutko brothers, with Robert "Ode" and Rick, of the Music Company band at the time. Johnny and Ray formed a two-piece band called the Little Tones, performing at local churches and taverns in the Chicago area. They performed for a few years, and his parents then moved to a suburb called Oak Lawn. There, Johnny joined the high school band as a trumpet player. During this time, Johnny would also visit a local lounge called the Omen, owned by Ted and Gennie Okrzesik, and had the opportunity to meet many great Chicago musicians. Two in particular, Jimmy Mieszala and Ted "Tadziu" Kiewicz. Jimmy had a band called the Music Explosion, and they were looking for an accordion player, so they took Johnny under their wing. Johnny was lucky enough to record his first album with them, "Polkas with a Blast". Johnny became a member of the band and performed with them for many years. This is where Johnny met Ray Czmieł. Together, Johnny and Ray decided to form a new band and called it "Chicago's Milwaukee Avenue". Ray was the manager, and Johnny was a band member, along with Ray's son, Joe, Jerry Jendreas, Timmy Okrzesik, and Greg Helton. Johnny's good friend, Brian Kapka, also joined the band at one point, and so did his longtime friend Ted Kiewicz. Johnny started working at Ray's Trucking company, and a few years later, in 1984, Johnny would marry Ray's daughter Vickie. They would then have two children together: Holly, born in 1986, and Tiffany, born in 1988. Chicago's Milwaukee Avenue was around for several years and recorded one album called "The Best Part of Polka Town" and performed at all the major festivals, in and out of town, as well as all the polka hot spots. They ran a few bus trips to Seven Springs. Johnny would learn to play bass with his left hand by watching John "Foo" Furmaniak. After the band broke up, Johnny was reunited with his childhood friend, Ray Rzeszutko, who performed with the Downtown Sound under the leadership of Dan Mateja, also a longtime friend. He played with them for a few years on the Accordion and Keyboards, at many weddings, private events, and festivals. Johnny also started to fill in with many bands that needed help on accordion, such as Marion Lush and the White Eagles and Eddie Blazonczyk's Versatones. During this time, he would also win the United Polka Association's Piano Player of the Year Award. After his divorce and departure from Ray's Delivery Service in 1995, Johnny started a pallet business, and is currently celebrating its 30th year in business. In 1998, Johnny and Christy married, and they had a daughter named Katie in 2000, followed by another daughter, Hayley, in 2004. Johnny left the Downtown Sound and joined a band called Freeze Dried in 1998, as he wanted to play in a polka band that was a little more progressive. Members of the band at the time were Joey Derus, Kevin Altenburg, Mike Maduzia, Teddy Okrzesik Jr., Tony Blazonczyk, and Wally Maduzia. Johnny became the leader of the band not too long after joining it. In 2003, FreezeDried won the IPA Song of

the Year for *"Angelina"*. Johnny also wrote two songs for the CD Artistically Challenged: *"Ooh Baby"* and *"Dreams of You Tonight,"* both polkas.

In 2006, Johnny decided that Freeze Dried could use some backup singers, so he hired three ladies, Angie, Mitzi and Storm, the Icicles; they performed on the FreezeDried recording and live at the Summer Music Festival in Frankenmuth, Michigan, the crowd went wild and to this day is one of the many highlights of Johnny's musical career. They also performed at the Roncesvalles Polish Festival in Canada, the USPA Convention in Ohio, Chicago's Millennium Park, and some others. The Icicles played specific jobs with Freeze Dried until 2010.

In 2010, Johnny, still performing with Freeze Dried, started to perform with the Music Company, with the Rzeszutko brothers, Rick and Bob (Ode), and once again performing with his childhood friend, Ray "Melvin", and lifelong friends, Dan and Laura Mateja, in 2013 with the IPA Tribute band. Johnny continued to manage playing with all three bands simultaneously. During his time playing polka music, Johnny has had the privilege and honor to fill in and perform with the greatest polka bands and musicians, such as Marion Lush and the White Eagles, Eddie Blazonczyk and the Versatones, John Gora and Gorale, Polka Family, Lil Wally, Crusade, Toledo's Polka Motion, Tony Blazonczyk's South Side Sounds, Polka Country Musicians, Dynabass, Lenny Gomulka and the Chicago Push, Scrubby and the Dynatones, Buffalo Touch, Tone Aires, Craig Ebel's Dyversco, The Beat, The Boys, One More Tyme, Jimmy Kilian and Honky Chicago, Lil Wally, Stas Bulanda and The Average Polka Band and Dyno Chicago, Eddie Forman Orchestra, Tony Blazonczyk's New Phaze, The D Street Band, Keith Stras and Polka Confetti, Stephanie, The Knewz, Daryl Welton and the New Brass Express and Phocus.

Unfortunately, Freeze Dried stopped performing in February of 2020.

Johnny was on the IPA board from 1994 to 1998 and returned to the board in 2010, serving as a Director from Illinois until September 2024. Johnny, Christy, and Jerry Wantroba were DJs on WPNA radio from 1995 to 1998. Johnny and Christy returned to the Radio in 2010 on WPNA and were part of the IPA board members' rotation for the IPA show on the Polka Jammer Network.

Johnny appeared on the ETC (Ethnic Television Channel based in Chicago) with Chicago's Milwaukee Avenue, on the Mollie B Polka Party on RFD-TV with Freeze Dried and the IPA Tribute Band. He has also been featured on several news clips on lo-

cal channels in the Chicago Area, including WGN TV and CBS 58 in Milwaukee, with John Gora and Gorale. When John Gora was nominated for a Grammy in 1998, Johnny was featured on Accordion with John Gora as a Canadian news crew followed them around their Florida tour. He was also quoted in a Chicago Tribune article written on August 2, 1999, for being a part of a band that is trying to modernize polka music by turning songs by the Grateful Dead and the Beatles, into polkas, as well as trying to show young kids that playing the accordion can be cool.

For several years Johnny has donated his warehouse in Plainfield Illinois for numerous Polka Jammers and was extremely proud to have been able to donate his warehouse during Covid, to the IPA for their weekend extravaganza in 2020 for the IPA Virtual Festival, with an amazing pallet background for three full days, in addition to recording game shows and the accordion races.

Johnny has volunteered to help with fundraisers such as the All for AI benefit to raise money for his good friend Indiana Al Zawislak, The Center for Independence for Children with disabilities, such as Cerebral Palsy and The Stas Bulanda Family Fundraiser and Benefit dance, as well as donating his time performing with the bands at the event's.

Johnny has always wanted to do whatever he can to keep polka music going, so for over 15 years, he has performed at Northwestern University in Chicago, on Chicago's Milwaukee Avenue, and then FreezeDried, trying to get college kids interested in Polka Music. He would encourage them to come to other polka events in the area. There were a few years when a couple of kids attended the Chicago Festival of Polka Bands to check out all the bands and conduct some research on the music.

Johnny has been a member of the Chicago Polish Carolers, which performs at Christmas time at Misericordia and visits families and friends in the polka industry. He was also a member of Eddie Blazonczyk's Christmas Brass Show Band for many years. He is a member of the International Polka Association, United States Polka Association, Midwest Polka Club, Toledo Area Polka Society, and Cleveland Polka Association.

The Accordion is his primary instrument, but he has also played Trumpet, Sax, Clarinet, Concertina, and Piano on jobs as well as on Polka recordings. He is also a vocalist.

He appears on the following albums:

Jimmy Mieszala's Music Explosions - Polkas with a Blast; Chicago's Milwaukee Avenue - The best part of Polka Town; The Pea Pod Polka on Eddie Blazonczyk's Versatones album - Smokin' Polkas; Lil Teddy and Bernie Gorak - Proud and Polish; Lil Teddy - I'm Proud to be a Polish American; Freeze Dried - Artistically Challenged, Deliberate Confusion, Degeneration Gap and Bodacious Ditties; Divas - Girl's Night out; The Downtown Sound - All Wound Up; Keith Stras' - Hooray for Honky; Jimmy Kilian's - Bandstand Favorites; Polka Generations - It's a Family Affair; Honky Holiday featuring Stas Bulanda, Stas Golonka, Chet Kowalkowski, Richie Gomulka, Stephanie Pietrzak and Keith Stras; Tony Blazonczyk's New Phaze, Phase One Complete, Have a Shot with New Phaze, 2K10 The Next Phaze and At Phaze Value; Stas Bulanda and Dyno Chicago One More Tyme - After All These Years; I.P.A. Tribute Band - Yesterday's Songs and "Here's a Gift" Single with IPA Hall of Fame Inductees; Live Wire - Up and Coming CD; Keith Stras and Polka Confetti - Under the Polka Big Top; and Stephen Kaminski and the Dream Team Volume 3 - Legends and Fables.

Johnny has a huge heart and is a very generous man. He donated a clarinet to a boy named Dominic for Christmas in 1999, as Dominic had really wanted one for Christmas, but his parents were unable to afford it. Dominic loved polka music and was excited to learn how to play it. Johnny helped a person in need of a hearing aid by obtaining one

from a friend who worked at a company that sells them. Johnny gave one of his truck drivers an extra accordion he had, as the driver was a younger gentleman who had seen Johnny practicing one day at work and taken an interest in the instrument. He hired a homeless veteran at his pallet shop and paid for a hotel for him for a month until he got on his feet, and also provided him with a cell phone to use. He paid the salary to one of his employees for 6 months as he was dealing with cancer treatments, even though he could not work, but still had to provide for his wife and small children. These are just a few of the many stories.

Johnny continues to perform with the Music Company, the IPA Tribute Band, The Bratwurst Brothers, some jobs with John Gora and Gorale, and now performs with the new band, PolkaMojo and Gone Coastal. He will also fill in with other bands if he is available.

He has also enjoyed performing non-polka music with his two youngest daughters, Katie and Hayley, with a band called Katie and the K Crew, at local bars and clubs.

When he is not playing, he enjoys shopping, playing ice hockey, traveling, spending time at his Florida home, dinner with family and friends, and gambling; that is why some people call him Johnny Casino.

Johnny believes God put him on this earth to play polkas and is blessed; if it weren't for polkas, he wouldn't have the wonderful family and life that he has today.

The IPA Recognizes Mr. "Peanuts" for his love for polka music

On April 26, in Middleton, Wisconsin, Rodney "Peanuts" Esser, was acknowledged by the IPA with a certificate, recognizing his contribution to the Polka industry. For multiple years now, Mr. Peanuts, who has served as a head custodian at Park Elementary School for 60 years has included Polka music in the schools lunch program and beyond. While the kids enjoy their lunch, polka music is played. Once a year, he brings in Mollie B and her team of dancers, as well as a band, to lead polka workshops for kindergarten through fourth grade students. The school also hosts a family dance in the evening, where the children are happy to get on the dance floor trying out everything they learned in the workshops with Mollie B. He has kept this traditional going, even in the year 2020, when Mollie created a virtual Polka workshop for the school.



The National Academy of IPA® Electors just concluded their annual voting cycle to select the 2024 Polka Music Award winners. The results are as follows:

2024 Polish Style Polka Music Award Winners



Male Vocalist of the Year:

Lenny Gomulka

Female Vocalist of the Year:

Kimberly Uelmen



Band of the Year:

Frankie Lyszka and Blue Magic

Album of the Year:

***Thanks A Lot* by Frankie Lyszka and Blue Magic**



Song of the Year:

***Bella Ciao* by Frankie Lyszka and Blue Magic**



2024 International Style Polka Music Award Winners



Male Vocalist of the Year:

Ted Lange

Female Vocalist of the Year:

Mollie Busta Lange



Band of the Year:

Alex Meixner Band

Album of the Year:

***Fest* by Alex Meixner Band**



Song of the Year:

***Beer Medley* by Alex Meixner Band**



2025 IPA Polka Hall of Fame®

Inductee

Rich Sendra

Pioneer Category



Rich Sendra was born June 4th, 1942, and grew up in a Polish-Catholic musical family on the South Side of Chicago. Influenced and surrounded by music at an early age, his mother, Helen, took him and his younger brother, Bob, to dances to hear their father, Frank Sendra, play with the Chuck Stevens Orchestra—dad on drums, Uncle Chuck on accordion, and Uncle Gus Chuckla on clarinet and sax. When Rich was 10, his dad passed away, and Rich was 15 when his mother married Joe Novak, an accomplished accordionist. Music was constant in the Sendra/Novak household.

Rich wanted to play the accordion, and he practiced while listening to the modern style of the Naturals, Hi Notes, and Li'l Wally's Polish songs. Rich desired to emulate his idols, the jazz accordionists Art Van Damme and Tommy Gumina. Another idol, Jerry Stanley of Musical Gems, rounded out Rich's sound, and Eddy Duchin and Peter Nero, on piano, influenced his overall playing style. The variety of influences to which Rich was exposed helped define the distinctive qualities that would make him stand out.

At the age of 7, Rich began his formal musical studies with weekly lessons from local instructors, where he listened, learned, and developed a good ear for music, adapting easily to reading and writing music.

In 1952, Rich and Bob's performing career began at ages 10 and 9, respectively, with their first two-piece band (Rich on accordion, Bob on drums), playing family parties, showers, and job referrals from Uncles Chuck and Gus. Joe Novak hearing Rich and Bob play encouraged them to get advanced music training, and throughout high school, Rich took progressive music lessons at the Andy Rizzo Music School, downtown Chicago. Early on, Andy Rizzo placed Rich in the Accordion Ensemble,

where students performed solo recitals in front of live audiences. Determination motivated Rich to practice extensively and was a key factor in his early success with the accordion.

The two-piece Sendra brothers soon added a clarinet and sax when Jerry Chocholek joined the band. While still in high school, the three-piece group, adding a temporary trumpet player from the High School Band, Pete Drungle, entered a local talent contest and won First Place. The contest promoter, aware of a band that had recently broken up and was no longer performing, suggested the name 'Versatones'. The three-piece Sendra band was now officially known as "The Versatones." In a DownBeat Magazine contest, the band played a Bill Haley rock 'n' roll tune, took third place, and was featured in DownBeat Magazine.

By 1960, the band's focus had shifted to polka music, and they were looking to expand. With the addition of Chet (CK) Kowalkowski, the Versatones had a trumpet and a strong, charismatic vocal voice to the mix. The band's popularity and exposure increased steadily as more jobs, radio shows, and TV appearances followed. Stanley Jay, owner of "The Jay's Club" in Hegewisch, IL, booked the band, which led to jobs at Club 505, weddings, picnics, and dances. Wally Skibinski, a WJOB radio station disk jockey who did remote broadcasts at 505, upon hearing the versatility of "The Versatones", on air, dubbed them the "Versatile Versatones". It was a good fit. They were "The Versatile Versatones" going forward.

In 1963, Chet Kowalkowski approached Eddy Bell, a popular rock 'n' roll artist, with an invitation to listen and sit in with the Versatile Versatones. Eddy had expressed a desire to return to polka music, and Chet felt that the band, with Eddy's skills and musical background, would broaden and expand

the scope of the Versatones' potential. Eddy's business acumen and visionary goals, combined with the Versatile Versatones talent, were a sign of things to come. Eddy took over the responsibilities of the band under the name "Eddie Blazonczyk & The Versatones". Ed's exceptional singing ability, both individually and in duets with Chet, added a whole new dimension to the band, which had a significant impact on the diverse style of polka music in the 1960s through the '90s. Ed's talent for song composition and a keen insight into what the public liked added up to an exciting career for all members in the newly renamed band. Job volume and traveling increased steadily as the band performed throughout the U.S. and Canada. Ed formed Bel Aire Recording Co., and the band put out their first 45s, followed by the first of many albums, thus expanding the nationwide prominence of The Versatones. Rich recorded on the 45s and on 11 Versatones albums. Another notable 45 recording that Rich did with the Park Lane Singers was the 'Bride and Groom Waltz', released on the Limelight label by Mercury Records. Rich eventually added piano to the band's sound by playing keyboards. He also mentored and taught accordion at Bel-Aire Music Studio.

In July 1965, the U.S. Army drafted Rich to active duty in Korea. By April 1967, his tour of service was over, Rich rejoined the band and resumed his full-time job as a tradesman painter at National Decorating. Rich soon met his future wife, Sally, at a church picnic where the Versatones were performing, and they married in October 1969. In December 1969, Rich left the band. The busy band schedule and extensive out-of-town traveling conflicted with job and family obligations. Rich was a Versatone for 16 active and exciting years.

By 1970, a new band was in the Chicagoland - The Tones Orchestra. Reflecting a unique style and personality, original key members were Lenny Gomulka: trumpet, clarinet, sax and vocals; Wally Maduzia: concertina, clarinet, sax and vocals; Roger Malinowski: drums and vocals; Jerry Mytych: clarinet, sax, trombone and vocals; Rich Sendra: accordion, keyboards and vocals; and Zack Ziobro: trumpet and guitar.

Regrouped and partnered together with mutual respect and friendship, the band flourished. They had a tight-knit group with a strong foundation, and their musical style and sound differed significantly from those of other bands. Wally and Rich pioneered the dual sound of concertina and accordion, creating a driving, upbeat energy sound that many musicians and bands in the polka field have copied. As a

'Tone' player, Wally used his famous concertina 'bellow shake' to create that 'wow' factor that set The Tones apart.

The Tones Orchestra was one of the best bands around. They had a snappy, happy sound - The songs, the singing, the music - favorites of musicians and fans alike. Richie Gomulka, musician and radio personality, calls The Tones Orchestra "The Cadillac Sound" and Rich Sendra "The Foundation" for the innovative sound of his strong left-hand bass and bellows-shake combination. Rich hung his accordion low and steady, a unique distinction for an accordionist.

The Tones recorded three popular albums on Ampol Records, featuring songs that are part of many polka bands' playlists today and are often heard on radio and internet broadcasts. Around 1988, the group disbanded, but their music continues.

Shortly thereafter, Rich's musical history included his participation in a new band in town. Whitey Ryniec, a well-known polka musician in the polka field, desired to start his own group, and so, with three other talented musicians, he formed 'The Chicago Wave'. Frequent band rehearsals ensured the band's extensive library of songs was a perfect mix well-suited to the predominant wedding and anniversary niche the band focused on. Over the next four years, their numerous engagements and other functions were steady in local halls and ballrooms. The Chicago Wave made a name for itself in the polka industry.

Over the years, Rich has shared the stage and worked with many bands and notable musicians, participated in radio, internet, and TV show appearances, and enjoyed participating with Chet Kowalkowski's Polish Carolers. Rich's professional musical journey in the polka industry, marked by exciting changes, has blessed him with excellent opportunities to develop his craftsmanship while promoting Polish music. His musical contributions are well-respected and emulated by current and aspiring musicians alike.

Rich worked as a tradesman painter for 37 years and retired from the construction industry at the end of 2004 and eased back performing professionally as a musician a few years later. He and his wife, Sally, continue their involvement in the polka field by memberships in The International Polka Association, USPA, and Let's Polka USA Clubs. They support and promote polka music by attending dances, festivals, and events throughout the year, locally and out of state. Rich likes to polka dance, and he enjoys the friendship and time together with fellow

musicians and fans from all around. The importance of sharing memories is instrumental in continuing the legacy of Polish music to the next generation of young polka musicians, who play it forward and keep the connection alive.

Rich and his brother, Bob, as the original 'Versatones', were and are part of the history of polka music.

The Sendra brothers, Rich and Bob, earned their reputation and notoriety by hard work, dedication, responsibility, perseverance, and active ongoing support of polka activities and organizations. The timing of the events in their musical careers has enriched them, and their love of polka music remains as strong today as it was when they started with their first two-piece band in 1952. They are veteran musicians who have achieved and experienced satisfaction and enjoyment as an active part of polka music in its heyday.

As a performing and recording artist, the time has come for recognition of Rich's dedication, commitment, accomplishments, and contributions in the

support and promotion of polka music, making him a deserving candidate for induction into The International Polka Music Hall of Fame.

Discography - list of musical recordings

*** Eddie Blazonczyk & The Versatones**

- Polka Parade
- Polkas - Here Come the Versatile Versatones
- Something New Just for You
- Musically Yours
- Let's Hear a Polka
- Polka Tour
- Polish Party ADULTS ONLY
- Polkas A Plenty
- America's Most Wanted Polka Band
- Christmas Time With the Versatones
- Christmas in Chicago

*** Park Lane Singers**

- Bride and Groom Waltz

*** The Tones Orchestra**

- Polkas From the Heart of Chicago
- On Top of the World
- 200 Years of Polka Music

2025 IPA Newsletter Schedule

Issue

October - November 2025

Deadline for Submissions

August 15, 2025

December 2025 - January 2026

October 15, 2025

2025 Leon Kozicki Trustees Award

Whitey Ryniec



Whitey Ryniec began playing trumpet and clarinet at the young age of 11 years old. He would go on to become a member of the Dave Kolata and the Debonairs band. Later, he joined The Casinos band who changed their name to the Dynatones when it was time to make their first recording at Bel Aire studios. Whitey's polka career was interrupted when Uncle Sam called for him to serve in the U.S. Army from 1971 to 1974.

After his honorable discharge, he found himself on stage as part of Polka Hall of Famer Ed Guca's band. Then Whitey got the call from Marion Lush, the "Golden Voice of Polkas," to join his band in 1976. It was then his 15 years of standing beside Marion on stage began. Though no longer working the polka circuit full time, Whitey continues to grace the stage as needed with quality polka bands.

Board of Directors Election Eligibility

Nominees shall not occupy any appointed or elected office of any other polka organization. No nomination shall be valid unless agreed to by the nominee. A willingness to seek and accept office must be done in person at the annual meeting. If unable to attend the annual meeting, candidates may also submit a signed and dated letter. If emailing your submission letter, please put **Board Position** in the subject line. **Please include what skills you have to offer to enhance the board, as well as why you would like to join the board.** Such letters can be submitted for consideration in any of the following ways:

1. brought to the meeting by another member
2. given to an officer or director in advance of the meeting
3. mailed to the International Polka Association, PO Box 1484, Plainfield, IL 60585
4. emailed to info@ipapolkas.com
5. deadline for submissions is August 15th

Requirements for Elections:

Voters must be a member of the IPA for no less than 30 days before the Annual Meeting. Each nominee must be able to actively utilize e-mail, Webex, and dial-in conference calling. All members seeking a position on the board should expect to receive assigned duties and responsibilities. These will include activities which support the ongoing operation of the organization, working at our annual convention and all other IPA events, as well as special projects as needed throughout the course of their term of office.



Electable Positions in 2025

President: 1-year term

All Others: 2-year term

OFFICERS

President

- May be from any state
- Must have served at least 2 years on the Executive Board

2nd Vice President

- May be from any state
- Must have served at least 2 years on the Executive Board

Financial Secretary

- May be from any state
- Must be a member in good standing for at least one year

DIRECTORS

Any State or Provinces - 6 open positions

- Can be from ANY state
- must be a member in good standing for at least one year



- 1st** – Frank Stanger; Dave Glaza;
Maryann Cuglewski
- 2nd** – Chuck Stastny;
Patricia Daigle; Tony Blazonczyk
- 3rd** – Mike Stapinski; Maria Dipyatic;
Cindy Olszewski; Jim Wysocki
- 4th** – Susan Matysiewicz; Lynn Kaminski;
Sherri Ann Martin
- 5th** – Rose Marie Tynski; Barry Pfannenstiel;
Dianne Zawisza; Wally Czaska; Randy Polovick;
- 6th** – Mary Ann Jakubielski
- 7th** – Edward Guca; Camille Hjelm; Pete Jend
- 8th** – Alex Saltanovitz, Jr.; Mary Witulski;
Princess Bonczkiewicz; Sandra Maddie
- 9th** – Kelly Stec; Jeff Tomczak
- 10th** – Helen Curtin; Jim Kucharski
- 11th** – Dave Ulczycki; Keith Pietranczyk;
Chris Zawisza; Robert Page
- 12th** – Leonard Wolski
- 13th** – Carol Forman
- 15th** – Linda Ross; Karen Guca
- 17th** – Tim Wolter; Doris Benson; Gaylen Haas;
Bernie Koslosky
- 18th** – Carol Trzebiatowski
- 19th** – Michael Matousek; Michael Retka;
Debbie Kapuscinski
- 20th** – Patricia Huch
- 21st** – Carolyn Baras; Tammy Arnes
- 22nd** – Ramond Sadusky; Michelle Eron

- 23rd** – Randy Vokral
- 24th** – Cheryl Blankenship
- 25th** – Steve Wejrowski
- 26th** – Mary Ann Moon
- 27th** – David Joseph Flack
- 28th** – Judy Krason; Joyce Fornek;
Michelle Edwards
- 29th** – Keith Gennerman; Jim Kucera;
Teri O'Brien
- 30th** – Dianne Winiarz; Grazyna Danielczuk;
Sandra Hrynio; Michael Frost





1st – Rosanna Kutas;
John Prytko, Jr.

2nd – Jim Weber; Elaine Kulak-Bagby;
Judith Ozanich

4th – Ken Pienta

5th – John Krawisz

6th – Susan Jurevis; Richard Zebrowski;
Kim Bukowski; Julie Czerniak; Noah Monstwil;
Alfred Vrazel

7th – Jeanne Henderson; Edward Skalka

8th – Brad Turk

9th – John Mikos

10th – Jeffrey Guyette

11th – Mary Jean Sweeney; Ted Kania;
Lori Urbanczyk

12th – Janice Prushinski; Corrine Ganiec;
Linda Maurer

13th – David Bonczkiewicz; Jeff Heinz

14th – Butchie Jasiewicz; Dolores Kozlauska;
Velva Jankowski; Bruce Edwards

15th – Rob Piatkowski; Joyce Bohuslav; Pat Jayo

16th – Krystyna Bylinowski; David Gajda;
Lillian Schmidt; Lenny Gomulka

18th – Kenneth Larson; Danny Mateja;
Corinne Turk

19th – Richie Kois

20th – Judy Rosinski;
Eugene Brenek; Felicia DeKarski;
Rev. Canon Walter Ptak

21st – Steve Drzewicki; Marilyn Miaso

23rd – Ted Kiewicz; Andrew Kuczarski;
Rita Broccolo

24th – Donna Cotrupe

25th – Kevin Kwiatkowski; Joseph Ryndak

26th – Dan Czerniak; Bob Wolinski

27th – Mike Nowakowski

28th – Lori Young

29th – Willie Bohuslav; Veronica Costa;
Dennis Rymanowski; Dan Johnson

30th – Dennis Popiel



2025 IPA Polka Hall of Fame®

Inductee

Bob Earl, Sr.

Deceased Category



Bandleader of The Imperials of Toledo, Drummer, Vocalist, Emcee, Polka Promoter, founder of The International Music Association.

Bob was born on August 21, 1930, to a Polish mother and an English father. Bob grew up in a Polish neighborhood in Toledo, Ohio. In 1951, Bob married his wife, Mary, and had three children, Jim, Bob Jr, and Mary. Bob founded Earl Bros. Transmission and Auto Repair Centers and quickly trained his sons to take over the business, allowing him to spend more time pursuing his real-life passion: traveling with his polka band.

His love of polka music started at an early age. A family band consisting of cousins Al Perzynski on trumpet, Jerry Pacer on accordion, and Bob on drums soon played for local Polish weddings, dances, and parties. Their group, the Polka-Berek's, grew in popularity. In the 1960s, the band expanded its sound to include two trumpets, a saxophone, a clarinet, an accordion, a bass guitar, drums, and a dedicated Polish vocalist. The band became known as "The Imperials of Toledo". In the early 1970s, Bob took the band into the studio for their first recording session. The album "*Let's Go to a Polish Wedding Reception*" with the Imperials of Toledo was an instant hit. Soon, the band traveled the country, sharing the stage with polka greats like Eddie B, Happy Louie, Marion Lush, Frankie Yankovic, Jimmy Sturr, Lil Wally, Dick Pillar, Lenny Gomulka, and The New Brass, to name a few. The Imperial sound took off with offers to play all over the country. In 1976, East Coast friend and polka promoter Adam Rogodzinski formed the Imperials of Toledo Fan Club, which had a large member base spanning from Massachusetts to Maryland.

As a musician, Bob played drums from 1947 to 1996. He had the opportunity to gig with Frankie

Yankovic during the late 1960s. As a student of Yankovic, Bob learned how to properly introduce his band to the polka promoters for future engagements for the Imperials. Bob often mentioned how fortunate he was to have had the opportunity to travel with Yankovic and learn from the master himself. Frank was instrumental in the Imperials' performance on the *Polka Varieties* TV show in Cleveland, and he suggested that recording an album was the best way to gain greater exposure for the band. The Imperials had many recordings throughout the years such as "*The Imperials Go To A Polish Wedding Reception*", "*How About That Polka Sound*", "*Fiddlin' With The Brass*", "*Just For Fun*", "*Play Your Favorites*", "*Just For You*" "*The Imperials Go International*", and their popular "*Polka Mass*" album to name a few. Bob also had two recordings under the name "*Bob Earl and The All Stars*", a side band he formed to keep playing when the Imperials wanted time off for family activities. The All Stars played a diverse European-style polka music to avoid being mistaken for the Imperials.

As a promoter, Bob hired not only local talent but many of the county's most popular polka bands as they traveled through the Toledo area for dances held at the DC Ranch Ballroom in Perrysburg, Ohio. In 1977, Bob hosted "Toledo Polka Days" at the Lucas County Rec Center for a couple of years, featuring most local bands along with a few out-of-town groups. In the years 1985-1988, Bob purchased the La Park Nite Club, a popular Toledo hotspot that featured polka bands on Fridays, Saturdays, and Sundays from the 1970s through the 1990s. The owner wanted to retire, and Bob wanted to see the place continue offering weekly polka entertainment.

In 1982, with the help of friend Irv Gonya, Bob co-founded a non-profit organization to promote all styles of polka music. The International Music Association was formed. Membership among Toledo-

area polka fans grew to over 500. Donations to the American Cancer Society were made yearly with excess profits. The club hosted dances at various locations throughout the years, such as the D.C. Ranch Ballroom, La Park Nite Club, American Legion, and PRCUA Halls. Bob hired Polish, German, Czech, and Slovenian bands to perform. The I.M.A. disbanded in 2017, 3 years after Bob's death. The club hosted a free final dance for its membership and donated the remaining funds to Hospice of NW Ohio.

Between 1975 and 1996, Bob also hosted numerous bus trips, inviting polka lovers to follow the Imperials to some of the greatest polka events around. Trips to Hawaii, Germany, Austria, and the Caribbean, as well as Polka Cruises, were also offered. The Imperials also hosted a yearly Thanksgiving Dinner Dance, featuring the Imperials and a prominent out-of-town band.

Whenever Bob was not performing with the band, he could also be found attending other polka events. He truly loved polka music and believed that the only way for it to continue was to either promote a dance yourself or to support any other function by attending whenever possible. Bob has also inspired his family members to enjoy this wonderful music.

Over the years, sons Jim and Bob Jr. have played in various bands, most notably as founding members of the group "A Touch of Brass" for over 30 years. Grandson Daniel Earl co-hosted the Golabki Polka Show for a few years on Polish New Castle Radio with cousin Ben Lynn, and Brian Earl is presently playing drums with John Gora and Gorale. Granddaughter Holly Lashway has acquired Grandpa Earl's love for polka music; today, you'll find her at most polka events. The Polka Field lost Bob Earl Sr. on December 4, 2014. Bob has done so much for polka music through his lifetime of events, but his passion for polka music will continue through all that he has inspired.



IPA Membership Raffle

MEMBERSHIP@IPAPOLKAS.COM

We have some exciting news to share! If you join us as a new member or renew your membership between September 1, 2024, and August 31, 2025, you'll automatically be entered into a fantastic raffle!

One lucky winner will receive a **Lifetime Membership** valued at \$200! That's right - lifetime access to all the fantastic benefits and connections of being part of the IPA community. The drawing will take place during the IPA Festival and Convention, Labor Day Weekend 2025 in Cranberry Township, PA.

Make sure to email us at the above address with any questions.

Thank you for being part of the IPA community. Good luck to everyone - let's make this an unforgettable year together!



2025 Joe Jozwiak Award

Harold Otto



Harold grew up in Appleton, WI, where he was raised by his aunt and uncle on their farm. Being a diligent worker, he took odd jobs for money, one of which was working the door at the Cinderella Ballroom. That night's entertainment was a polka dance featuring the Dick Rodgers Orchestra and that is where Harold's love for polkas began. Dick took Harold under his wing as he hired him to be the band's driver/merchandiser. This position allowed Harold to move to Pulaski, WI, where his passion for polkas grew stronger. For over 40 years, Harold hosted two live, in-studio radio shows: "N.E.W. Polka Time" on 1360 AM WGEE in Green Bay, WI, which aired on Saturday evenings, and "Sunrise Polka Time" on Sunday mornings. During this time, he also co-hosted the "Polka Variety" TV show with his friend Dave O'Brien. As the name suggests, the show featured various styles of polkas and aired for over 20 years. His continued friendship with Dick and devotion to polkas led him to manage, and eventually own, the Stop Inn Bar in Pulaski, which hosted polka bands every Sunday afternoon. From the Stop Inn, Harold and Dave also hosted live radio broadcasts on WAUN out of Kewaunee, WI. After Dave's passing, Harold continued this regime for another 10+ years, spanning a total of 23 years. Soon after, WGEE turned to a different format, so

Harold found a new home for his Saturday evening show on Clintonville's 92.3 FM WJMQ. He hosted and produced that show for 17 years. As live radio shows started to fade, he turned his interest to being an IJ on 247PolkaHeaven.

However, most notably, Harold has served as chairperson and promoter of Pulaski Polka Days for the past 46 years, which features various styles of polka bands from all over the U.S, Canada, and even Poland. He takes pride in being able to foster his love for polkas while raising funds for his community, as all proceeds go directly back to the local non-profit clubs that volunteer.

Harold and his wife of 56 years, Noreen, currently reside in Pulaski, WI. They have three children: Renae (Kevin) Strassburg, Darren (Sharon) Otto, and Joanne (Ryan) Homa. They are blessed with seven grandchildren: Adam, Alena, Nathan, Savannah, Brayden, Abigail, and Nicholas. When not promoting polkas, they enjoy supporting their grandchildren's events, which include auto racing, horse shows, baseball, soccer, and football.

Having promoted polkas for over 60 years, Harold is deeply humbled to have been awarded the Joe Jozwiak award this year and thanks the entire IPA for the recognition.

Mollie B and Jimmy Sturr sail the Caribbean

By Mollie Busta-Lange

In January 2025, Mollie B and Jimmy Sturr successfully hosted their 12th annual Caribbean Cruise. This latest cruise featured an impressive lineup, including Barefoot Becky, The Jimmy Sturr Orchestra, The Concertina All Stars, The Zweifel Brothers, Music Connection, Garrett Tetano, and SqueezeBox.

Their upcoming cruise is set to include the Gruber Family Band, Music Connection, Barefoot Becky, The Jimmy Sturr Orchestra, and SqueezeBox, which includes seven members from the International Pol-

ka Hall of Fame. Alongside over 40 hours of music, participants will enjoy several complimentary perks.

However, we must inform you that the 2026 cruise is already sold out and has a waiting list of interested travelers. We are excited to announce that another Caribbean Cruise is planned for 2027. It's never too early to secure your reservation by calling 845-651-4266.

We look forward to welcoming you aboard!



SAVE THE DATE

57th Annual International Polka Association Festival and Convention

**August 28th, 2025 – 7 -10 pm Kick Off Party
with Alex Meixner**

August 29th – 31st, 2025

Labor Day Weekend

**Double Tree by Hilton Hotel – Pittsburgh Cranberry
724-776-6900**

4 Fun-filled days of Polka Entertainment by:

Polka Country Musicians, The Natural Talent, Eddie Forman Orchestra, Frankie Liszka's Blue Magic, IPA Tribute Band, Klancnik and Friends, The Music Company, Dennis Polisky's Maestro's Men, Michael Costa and the Beat, Polka Family Band, Twin Cities Soundz, Mon Valley Push, John Stevens Polka Band and Special Guest Appearance by Mollie B
(Bands subject to change)

Welcome Party, Hall of Fame and Music Awards Banquet, Pool Parties, Polka Mass, Election of Officers and Directors, and much more!



More details and information to follow.
Visit our website: www.ipapolkas.com

Be sure to listen to the IPA Radio Show:
Polka Jammer Network
Sunday's 11 am to 12 pm (CT)



2025 IPA Polka Hall of Fame®

Inductee

Chester Pala

Deceased Category



Chester Pala started his musical career in 1958 with accordion lessons at the Monarch School of Music in Hammond, Indiana. Here, Chester acquired a keen musical knowledge and developed numerous musical abilities, which enabled him to excel quickly at playing the accordion. It was at this point that Chester Pala started going down the road to become a Professional Musician.

After two years of music study, Chester began playing the trumpet, which allowed him to participate in the Concert Band at Thornton Fractional North High School. The trumpet seemed to be Chester's calling, as he added his exclusive style, which he continued to develop throughout his entire musical career.

In 1961, Chester and his younger brother Albert, who played the accordion, started rehearsing together with the idea of forming a polka band. With this, their older brother, Wally, also wanted to be a part of and involved in the formation of the polka band. With a drummer needed, Wally Pala started playing the drums. Soon, to both Chester's and Albert's surprise, Wally not only excelled on the drums but also became their lead vocalist. The three brothers then added Dale Bala and John Ostowski to the band, both of whom played saxophone and clarinet. The band, now known as the Pala Bros., was seriously taking shape with great musicians and great chemistry. With Chester, Wally, and Albert Pala being raised in the Burnham, Illinois area, there were three different Polka Lounges within two blocks of their home. Soon, they started playing in all three lounges, playing at least 3 nights a week, without leaving their neighborhood.

After a short period of time, Dale Bala and John Ostowski left the band. The Pala's then found Jules Preda, who had just returned from active duty in the Army. He was a perfect, natural fit with the band and played with the Pala's until they disbanded in 1987.

In the early 1960s, the Pala Bros. met Bill Pakusa. He was a bass player, vocalist, and an excellent songwriter. Bill was quickly added to the Pala Bros. Polka Band. Soon, the Pala's began setting their sights on recording their first polka album. In 1963, the Pala Bros. established a relationship with Mr. Chet Shaffer, the owner and operator of Chicago Records. It was under this label that The Pala Bros. decided to record their first studio album, which further led to a total of 11 studio polka albums. All the albums were instant successes and classics among many polka music fans.

The albums recorded by the Pala Bros. all had original lyrics and are listed as follows:

- *Something New Just for You Polka Fun for Everyone Sing and Dance with the Pala Bros.*
- *Polish "F" Troop Palatively Yours An Evening to Remember*
- *The Latest and the Greatest Love those Polka Joyous Noise*
- *Good Times, Good Music, Good Friends Christmas Bells are Ringing*

The Polka Community soon took an instant liking to the Pala Bros. Polka Band, with Chester Pala becoming the Main Attraction. Chester's unique style was praised by many. His distinctive style of trumpet playing, characterized by one-handed technique and a horn held high in the air, was praised,

watched, and appreciated by many. As Chester's career progressed with the Pala Bros. Polka Band, he was presented with many offers to leave the Pala Bros. Band and join some of the best Polka Bands in the country. At one point, a talent scout from California approached Chester to audition. Chester refused the offer, as he never wanted to leave his brothers and the Pala Bros. Polka Band. So, Chester's career and fame continued to develop. Chester became an announcer for Polka Shows on Channel 26 in Chicago and on WTAQ Radio on Saturday Afternoons as a DJ. Chester was happy playing with his brothers and their growing popularity and status in the Polka Community. As this popularity continued, appearances were made on TV shows in South Bend, Indiana, on WHME.

Excitement was building for Chester and the Pala Bros. Polka Band. The Pala Bros. expanded their mainstay in the Indiana-Illinois area, playing in their neighborhood, as well as at other venues like Club 505, Tally Ho, and Crumstown, Indiana. Fans throughout the country also wanted the Pala Bros. to play at their respective events. So, the traveling began for the band, ranging to areas including Pennsylvania, Feeders Grove, Ohio, Buffalo, New York, Kansas City, and the Wisconsin area.

Along with the Pala Bros. becoming popular, sever-

stantly requested at their jobs: "White Roses Waltz," "Stella at the Wheel," and the "Pisia Krew Polka." To this day, many polka bands continue to play these Pala Bros. songs, as they are still frequently requested and popular. Just about every recording that the Pala Bros made as an original has been re-recorded by other polka bands.

Chester, along with his brothers, has played in almost every popular Polka venue of their time, filling arenas, ballrooms, lounges, clubs, and picnic groves, playing for the happiest people on earth—the polka people. To this day, Chester sees people who recognize him and thank him for his music and the fond memories it brought to their lives.

Chester's flamboyant style of playing the trumpet will always be remembered but never duplicated. Only Chester can do and play like Chester played. The music, style, and good times that Chester brought to people will always be cherished. To this day, Chester can be seen dancing at almost every polka event. Chester truly is one of the true "icons" of the polka music field and is recognized by many as such.

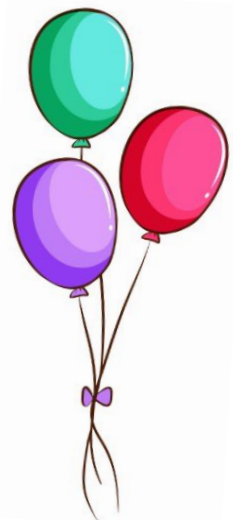
Chester A. Pala passed away peacefully on January 16, 2023

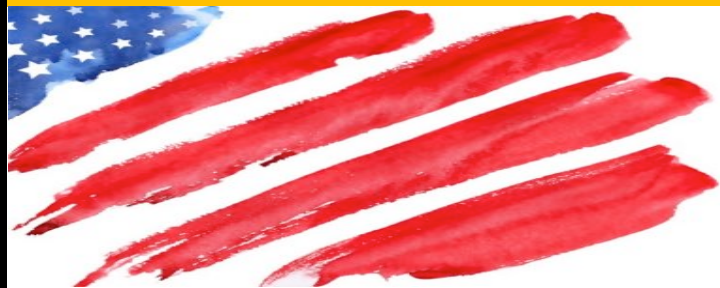


Tony Blazonczyk's New Phaze

3d · 🌐

On behalf of myself and all the guys in New Phaze, we would like to extend a huge thank you to the International Polka Association and to Janice Lochner for honoring the band for our 20th Anniversary this past weekend in Pennsylvania.





New Members

Robert Kolo, MI
 Jim Kucera, NE
 Michael Magdon, PA
 Dana Lindblad, AR
 Dawn Pitt, WI
 Gerry Pitt, WI
 David "Nigel" Kurdziel, MI
 Michelle Edwards, PA
 Bruce Edwards, PA
 Holly Earl, PA
 Randy Theis, PA
 Kenny Konopka, MI
 Brian Svetlik, TX
 Dennis Rymanowski, NY
 Stan Drobnich, CANADA
 Rev. Canon Walter J. Ptak, MI
 Patricia Hickock, NY
 Cliff Hickock, NY
 Drew Kellar, TX
 Richard Gretchen, OH
 Martha Gretchen, OH
 Gary Kunkel, TX
 Bruce Korosa, IL
 Tommy Bulanda, WI
 Gene Urkoski, NE
 Elaine Benda, OK
 Debbie Majka, PA
 Sharon Skupny, MI
 Craig Skupny, MI
 Jack Beachly, PA
 Duane Wilks, NE

Is your Membership Current?

Don't forget to renew online!



**You can also renew online and pay
through**

zelle



New Lifetime Members

Thomas Reder, MI
 Robert Page, PA
 Walter Monstwil, PA
 Noah Monstwil, PA
 Larry Olsen, MI



5th Annual IPA Golf Outing with Friends

Honoring Richie & Jerry Tokarz along with all
polka friends that have passed recently.

IPA Weekend—Friday, August 29, 2025

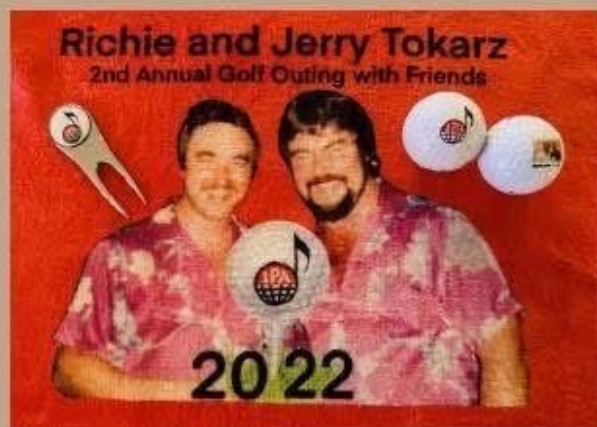
Strawberry Ridge Golf Course

135 McNulty Lane

Harmony, PA 16037

Shotgun Start—8:00 am/Scramble Format

Golfers must be ready to go at 7:45am.



Price per golfer—\$60
Venmo—@Jeffrey-Yash
RSVP to Jeff Yash
jeffreyyash@gmail.com



Pulaski Polka Palooza

Saturday October 25, 2025

6pm-10pm

Doors open at 5:30 pm

ADMISSION

Saturday: \$20

Sunday: \$20

*18 and under free
with paid adult

For more
information visit
ipapolkas.com or
scan the code.



Polka Country Musicians

*All bands subject to change
without notice.

Sunday October 26, 2025

12 pm – 5 pm

Doors Open at 11:30 am

Pulaski Area Festival of Bands

LOCATION

Townline Pub & Grill

2544 Lineville Rd.

Suamico, WI 54313

*Food and Drink available for
purchase.



The Mix



The Natural Talent



Aaron Socha & Livewire



Maroszek Brothers



The New Generation



Missing your favorite
band recording?
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your recording needs.



Join PucoYashu for Polkamotion by the Ocean 2025!

September 18—20

**Rehoboth Beach Convention Center
229 Rehoboth Avenue
Rehoboth Beach, DE 19971**

Wednesday Night Welcome Party with The Burgh Boys!

Wednesday, September 17th 7pm—11pm

Conch Island Key West Bar and Grill

37169 Rehoboth Ave Ext Rehoboth Beach, DE 19971

Happy Hour with DJ Bruce Z 4:30pm—7pm

Admission \$5

Join our mailing list!



For More Information:

Michael Pucowski—908.209.9843

michael.pucowski@gmail.com

Jeff Yash—518.281.1587

jeffreyyash@gmail.com

****Band schedule subject to change.****

Food and Beverage available for purchase.

NO BYOB/NO BYOF

Thursday, September 18

Polka Family Band

Frankie Liszka & Blue Magic

Lenny Gomulka & Chicago Push

Doors Open 4pm

Music & Dancing 5pm—12:30am

Admission \$25

Friday, September 19

Above the Dunes

DJ Party with John Cieplik

11:30am—2pm

Frankie Liszka & Blue Magic

Eddie Forman Orchestra

Polka Country Musicians

Doors Open 4pm

Music & Dancing 5pm—12:30am

Admission \$25

Saturday, September 20

Lenny Gomulka & Chicago Push

Michael Costa & The Beat

Doors Open 5pm

Music & Dancing 6pm—12:30am

Admission \$20

Future Dates for Polkamotion

Sept 17—19, 2026

Sept 16—18, 2027

Sept 14—16, 2028

3/4 Day Pass \$65

**Buy in advance,
or at the door**



Hotels in the Area:

Holiday Inn Express—302.500.2415

Atlantis—302.227.9446

Brighton Suites—302.227.5780

Breakers—302.227.6688

Sleep Inn—302.645.6464





2025 International Polka Association
Festival and Convention



5th Annual Kick-Off Polka Party

Thursday, August 28th, 2025

IPA Hall of Famer

Alex Meixner Band



Music from 7:00pm to 10:00pm

Doors Open at 6:00pm

Tickets: \$20 per person

Limited Number of Tickets Available for this Performance

Cranberry Elks Lodge #2249

20720 Route 19

Cranberry Twp., PA 16066

All proceeds benefit the Veterans
Commission of the Elks Lodge #2249

Food and Drinks will be available for purchase! No BYOB!

For tickets, table reservations, or more information contact:

Chris Bogdon - 412-260-9725 or chris@westernpapolkas.com

*For more information about the 57th Annual IPA Polka Festival and Convention
in Cranberry Twp., please see <https://www.ipapolkas.com>*

Pittsburgh's Polka Hot Spot **Kinloch Fire Hall**

2025 Polka Schedule

Sunday Aug 17 th , 2025	First Appearance at Kinloch Firehall Crusade featuring Eddie Biegaj	2:00pm – 6:00pm \$20.00 per person
Sunday Sept 21 st , 2025	Join us with the Incomparable John Gora and Gorale	2:00pm – 6:00pm \$20.00 per person
Sunday Oct 12 th , 2025	Join us for their final gig in Western PA Michael Costa and the Beat	2:00pm – 6:00pm \$20.00 per person
Sunday Nov 30 th , 2025	We welcome one of the best back to Kinloch Polka Family	2:00pm – 6:00pm \$20.00 per person
Sunday Dec 14, 2025	Our 2 nd Annual Christmas Dance with the great Slovenian Band Garrett Tatano Band	2:00pm – 6:00pm \$12.00 per person

The schedule is subject to change.

Kinloch Fire Hall
915 New York Ave
New Kensington, PA 15068

Food and drinks will be available for purchase. No BYOB!

For table reservations or more information, contact:
Chris Bogdon - 412-260-9725 or chris@westernpolkas.com

For a list of all polka happenings in Western PA and to sign up for our mailing list, go to: <https://www.westernpolkas.com>

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IPA Newsletter

The "IPA Newsletter" is the official publication of the INTERNATIONAL POLKA ASSOCIATION, INC.®. The "IPA Newsletter" welcomes submissions from readers and will publish them with consideration to space and time requirements. Pictures are welcome but used only when budget and space constraints allow. All items become the property of the IPA. If you would like a photograph returned, please include a self-addressed, stamped envelope.

Editor:

Lynn Kaminski
newsletter@ipapolkas.com

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International Polka Association, Inc.®
PO Box 1484
Plainfield, IL 60544
1-800-TO-POLKA
(1-800-867-6552)
Website: www.ipapolkas.com

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Membership

Dues are \$15.00 per person for all members. You can also purchase a lifetime membership for only \$200.00 per person. If you would like to join the IPA, please send your check or money order to:

Lynn Kaminski, Financial Secretary
International Polka Association
PO Box 1484
Plainfield, IL 60544
Email: membership@ipapolkas.com

Renew your membership online!
Visit: www.ipapolkas.com/store

**Current IPA Officers and Directors****Officers:**

President: Chris Bogdon (PA)
1st Vice President: Jill Styczynski (WI)
2nd Vice President: Henry Lenard (DE)
Treasurer: Matt Olszewski (PA)
Secretary: Cindy Olszewski (PA)
Financial Secretary: Lynn Kaminski (IL)
Sergeant at Arms: Randy Koslosky (PA)
Ex-Officio: Christy Krawisz (IL)

Advisors:

Advisor: Lori Hudy-Lewandowski (IL)
Media Advisor: Keith Pietranczyk (IL)
Chaplain: Fr. Dennis Bogusz (PA)

Directors:

Andy Bojczuk (NY)
Emma Bogdon (PA)
Stephen Kaminski (IL)
Brian Kapka (IL)
Dan Mateja (IL)
Lindsey Mateja (IL)
Christy Nowakowski (IL)
Sue Szela (MA)
Brad Turk (FL)
Brian Urbanczyk (NY)
Jeff Yash (NY)
John Zelasko (MI)

Current IPA Hall of Fame and Awards Committee

Gary Brueggen * Craig Ebel * Jackie Libera * Mike Matousek *
Jimmy Weber

Would you like your newsletter emailed to you?

The IPA would like to go green! Help us save money on printing costs and postage. If you would like your newsletter emailed to you, please send an email to: newsletter@ipapolkas.com.

Please put in the subject line:
PLEASE EMAIL MY NEWSLETTER.

**IPA RADIO SHOW**

Don't forget to listen to the IPA Radio Show on
on the Polka Jammer Network on
Sundays, 11:00 a.m. - 12 noon Central Time and also available in
the Polka Jammer archives. Be sure to tune in! Visit
www.polkajammernetwork.org

Each show features IPA officers and directors.

The IPA Radio Show is also broadcast Please call 1-800-TO-POLKA if you are interesting in advertising on the IPA Radio Show.
WE NEED SPONSORS!



Sunday, August 3rd - Parade of Polka Bands Picnic
(page 3)

Thursday, August 28th - IPA Kick-Off Polka Party
(page 14)

Friday, August 29th to Sunday, August 31st -
IPA 57th Annual Festival and Convention
(page 28)

Saturday, October 25th & Sunday, October 26th -
Wisconsin's Polka Palooza
(page 26)

Advertise in the IPA Newsletter

One Issue

Full Page	\$75.00 per issue
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Quarter Page	\$40.00 per issue
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Full Page	\$67.00 per issue
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Six Issues

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Quarter Page	\$32.00 per issue
Eighth Page.....	\$20.00 per issue

DEADLINE FOR October 2025 NEWSLETTER: August 15

Contact Lynn Kaminski with any questions using:

newsletter@ipapolkas.com

IMPORTANT NOTICE ABOUT MEMBERSHIP RENEWALS!!

As reminders for membership renewals are mailed out, it would be greatly appreciated if these could be returned **as soon as possible**. Not only are these fees used to allocate printing and mailing expenses, but for various other causes. **So please return your renewals in a timely matter.**

International Polka Association, Inc.®
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