



## The Kosciuszko Foundation

### THE AMERICAN CENTER OF POLISH CULTURE

NEW YORK, NY

Founded in 1925, the Kosciuszko Foundation promotes closer ties between Poland and the United States through educational, scientific and cultural exchanges. Thanks to donations from Polish-American donors, it awards up to \$1 million annually in fellowships and grants to graduate students, scholars, scientists, professionals, artists, and promotes Polish culture in America. The Foundation has awarded scholarships and provided a forum to Poles who have changed history.

The founder, Szczepan Mierzwa was born to a peasant family in 1892 in a Polish village called Rakszawa. In 1910 he sailed to the United States where Americans changed his name to Stephen Mizwa. In Northampton, Mass., Polish immigrants helped him find work making wooden boxes and washing dishes. Mizwa studied at night and earned a scholarship to Amherst College before completing a master's degree at Harvard University. To give back to the Polish community, Mizwa raised money to fund scholarships, and in 1925, The Kosciuszko Foundation, Inc., was incorporated to raise funds to grant financial aid to deserving Polish students.

#### Raising Funds to Promote Polish Artists and Scholars

In 1928, the Kosciuszko Foundation hosted a dinner at New York's Commodore Hotel to honor Ignacy Paderewski, and by 1933, the Foundation began holding an annual fundraising ball to support its operations.

In 1945, Mizwa convinced Mrs. Patterson, the widow of a rich industrialist, to sell him the The Van Alen Mansion on East 65th Street to use as the Kosciuszko Foundation headquarters. Mrs. Patterson sold the house at a highly discounted price and donated money to help the foundation pay off the mortgage.

With the Kosciuszko Foundation's headquarters in the shadow of the world's most prestigious art collections – Manhattan's Museum Mile on 5th Avenue, Polonia has the perfect place to exhibit paintings by Poland's finest artists. Mizwa raised money to purchase and acquire donations of paintings by Polish masters such as Matejko, Chelmonski, Malczewski, Kossak, Brandt, Styka and others that today fill the gallery on the second floor of the Kosciuszko Foundation. It is open to the public.

In 1949, the Kosciuszko Foundation Chopin Piano Competition was established in honor of the hundredth anniversary of the death of Frederic Chopin. Today the annual Chopin Competition continues to encourage gifted young pianists to further their studies and to perform the works of various Polish composers.

#### Cardinal Wojtyla and the Cold War

During the Cold War, the Foundation worked against communism by exposing Polish scholars to American democracy and capitalism. On Sept. 4, 1976, Cardinal Karol Wojtyla visited the Kosciuszko Foundation and told its members that the work of foundation is "particularly important at this time. We realize that culture creates a national identity, and in the end creates the nation itself."



Cardinal Wojtyla, who later became Pope John Paul II, praised the work of "The Kosciuszko Foundation, which attempts to diligently serve the interests of the Polish people. We must be grateful to everyone who has contributed to these efforts, and to those who are continuing to work towards these goals. This work is one of the greatest components of our national identity."

#### The Future of The Kosciuszko Foundation Depends on You

The Kosciuszko Foundation works to improve the image of Poland in the United States. In 2009, it organized an international conference about the Katyn Massacre at the Library of Congress in Washington, attracting scholars and members of the United States Congress. The Foundation persuaded the United States Senate to show an exhibit about Polish history in the rotunda of the Senate office building.

In 2010, the Foundation posted a petition on its website asking newspapers to stop using the phrase, "Polish concentration camps." The petition was signed by hundreds of thousands of people, and as a result, The New York Times, The Wall Street Journal, The Associated Press, and other media outlets have promised to stop referring to World War II concentration camps as Polish.

While the Kosciuszko Foundation's primary mission is education and promoting Polish culture, as the years roll on and the challenges facing Poland change with the times, the Foundation's work will also evolve to meet those challenges.

These days, young Poles and Polish-Americans are uniquely poised to change the world, not just through humanities and the arts, but through the sciences, technology and business as well. But it takes money to finance their dreams through education. With scholarships, they can become the leaders of tomorrow. But we need your help to do it.

#### The Kosciuszko Foundation Chapters:

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## The Kosciuszko Foundation

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## The Kosciuszko Foundation

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\*The information above was prepared by The Kosciuszko Foundation