

The Detroit News

Friday, June 15, 2007

detnews.com

Metro Edition

Beyond paczki: Documentary shows the faces of Poland in Michigan

Zofia Szostak of Huron Township, right, was reunited in Poland with her childhood friend, Zosia Abramczuk, whom she hadn't seen in 62 years. They are featured in "Our Polish Story."

On TV

"Our Polish Story"

7 p.m. Saturday
WXYZ-TV, Channel 7



Mary Sitko

BY SUSAN R. POLLACK
The Detroit News

Never in her lifetime did Zofia Szostak think she'd be treated like a movie star.

But that's exactly how the 83-year-old Babcia (Polish for "grandmother") felt when someone approached her after the recent premiere in Novi of the locally produced documentary, "Our Polish Story," and requested an autograph.

"My mom was pretty overwhelmed by all the attention, but she just had a big smile on her face," says Mary Sitko, who lives with Szostak in Huron Township.

Sitko, on the other hand, says she herself cried through much of the dramatic footage of her mother's return to her native Poland for the first time since escaping the country 62 years ago.

Szostak, a Polish underground worker in World War II, overcame a deep fear of flying to participate in the hour-long documentary, which will be shown at 7 p.m. Saturday on WXYZ-TV (Channel 7), her daughter says.

"She feels that all these stories need to be told as generations are dying off," Sitko says.

The film is the second in a series by Visionalist Entertainment Productions, which focuses

on Michigan's immigrant experiences. The project is a collaboration between Metro Detroit celebrity chef Keith Farnie and writer Chris Kassel.

Major sponsors of the Polish documentary are Toni Wisne Sabina, owner of Detroit's Epoch Restaurant Group, and her husband, Steve Sabina, Kassel says.

Szostak wasn't the only representative of local Polish culture captured during 70 hours of filming. Other footage ranges from Detroit's Archbishop Adam Cardinal Maida and Norbert Schemansky of Dearborn, a four-time Olympic weight-lifting medalist, to Hamtramck's annual St. Flor-

ian Strawberry Festival.

Beyond paczki (POONCH-key), the popular pre-Lenten jelly doughnut, the film explores the importance of Polish foods, community, religion, the Scouting movement, language schools and dancing to Michigan's Poles, estimated in the last census at about 1 million residents. Future documentaries on Michigan's Greek, Arab-American, German, Jewish, African-American and Chaldean communities are planned.

You can reach Susan R. Pollack at (313) 222-2665 or srpollack@detnews.com.