



**POLISH AMERICAN**  
CHAMBER of COMMERCE  
IN TEXAS



# Polish-Texan Business Review

Q3-Q4 2024 Christmas Edition

Official Business Magazine  
of the Polish American Chamber  
of Commerce in Texas

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Consulate General  
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# 01

## Foreword from the Chairman

Dear Readers,

It is a pleasure to present the second edition of the Polish-Texan Business Review, the official publication of the Polish-American Chamber of Commerce in Texas. As we reflect on a year in which Polish-American ties have grown even closer, we've seen Texas take on an increasingly important role in fostering these connections, particularly in the areas of energy, defense, and academic cooperation.

In 2024, Texas's energy sector continues to provide a strong foundation for Polish-American partnerships, bringing together expertise and innovation in ways that benefit both regions. Additionally, defense cooperation between our industries is helping to enhance shared security, while new academic exchanges between Polish and Texan institutions are opening doors for collaboration and discovery. Importantly, this year we have initiated talks to establish a direct flight connection between Houston and Warsaw, a step that would enhance ease of cooperation between Texas and Poland.

As always, our mission at the Chamber is to serve as a platform for cooperation between Texas businesses, public institutions, and their Polish counterparts. We are proud to facilitate meaningful connections that contribute to economic growth, knowledge-sharing, and strengthened ties between Poland and Texas. Through this magazine, we aim to highlight these achievements, provide insights that inspire new opportunities and honor important leaders of the Polish-Texan community.

Thank you to everyone who has supported this publication. We invite you to explore the stories within and look forward to continuing our journey together.

Warm regards,

*Dr. Art Dunal*

**Art Dunal, PhD**

President & Chairman  
Polish-American Chamber of Commerce in Texas



# 02

## Editor's Note

Dear Readers,

Welcome to the second edition of the Polish-Texan Business Review, the official business magazine of the Polish-American Chamber of Commerce in Texas!

As the editor of this publication, I am honored to bring you this edition filled with stories, insights, and updates that reflect the growing strength and depth of Polish-Texan connections. In this issue, we kick off with a comprehensive overview of recent events relevant to Polish-Texan business cooperation, including what's on the horizon for the months ahead. One significant highlight is the recent meetings between PolChamTX, LOT Polish Airlines in Warsaw, and Houston Airport Systems in Houston to explore a direct flight connection between Houston and Warsaw. We are dedicating a full article to this important initiative as we continue our work to make it a reality. We believe that establishing a direct transportation route between Texas and Poland will be one of the most impactful steps in advancing Polish-Texan cooperation to new heights.

This edition also features interviews with prominent leaders of the Polish-Texan community, showcasing the inspiring contributions of Dr. Waldemar Priebe, a renowned cancer researcher; Dr. Greg Kusiński, a veteran of the energy market; and Dr. Zbigniew Wojciechowski, director of the Polish Film Festival. We're also pleased to present an interview with Ms. Magdalena Burdziej, Director of International Cooperation of the Kujawsko-Pomorskie Region, who joined us in September as part of a delegation led by Marshal Piotr Calbecki. We invite you to explore the beautiful Kujawsko-Pomorskie Region, a place I am personally connected to through family ties to Golub-Dobrzyń. In this issue, you will also find an article about one of our key partners, the Consulate General of Poland in Houston, who has been instrumental in supporting Polish-American initiatives in Texas.

And as we near the close of another year, we look forward to celebrating at our Annual Gala Dinner, an evening dedicated to honoring the community's achievements, with awards given by the Board of the Polish-American Chamber of Commerce in Texas. This year, we are proud to feature Dr. Waldemar Priebe, the recipient of the PolChamTX Lifetime Leadership Achievement Award, Maciej Bagiński, the recipient of the PolChamTX Entrepreneur of the Year Award, as well as the young professionals who have been recognized with PolChamTX 5 Under 35 award.

Thank you for joining us on this journey. We hope you enjoy the stories, insights, and achievements highlighted in this edition of the Polish - Texan Business Review.

Warm regards,

*Jakub A. Bartoszewski*

**Jakub A. Bartoszewski**

Editor-in-Chief



# 03

## PolChamTX Insider: News & Events

*In this section, we're presenting news from PolChamTX's activity, as well as events related to Polish-Texan business cooperation, highlighting initiatives organized by both PolChamTX and our valued partners. Stay informed as we explore the diverse landscape of business relations between Poland and Texas.*



### Throwback to PolChamTX's 2024 Austin and Houston Mixers

A throwback to our 2024 mixers in Austin and Houston, where PolChamTX members and friends came together for great conversations, fresh beers, and delicious pierogis—all in the spirit of the Polish-Texan community! Our Austin gathering on May 16th, held just after the May 3rd Constitution Day at Batch ATX, was sponsored by the Polish Investment & Trade Agency and welcomed representatives from Dot Dot Dot, the Austin

Polish Society, and the Polish American Technology Hub. A big thank you to **Gabi Czesak** for organizing this lively event!

Later in the year, we met in Houston at Patterson Park on October 17th, joined by representatives from the Consulate General of Poland. Special thanks to **Brad Mushinski** for making this event another success.

We're excited to keep the momentum going, so stay tuned for more mixers—and more pierogis—coming your way in Q1–Q2 2025!



# Recent and Upcoming Events

**May 16 2024**  
PolChamTX Happy Hour at Batch in Austin

**May 3 - 5 2024**  
Houston Polish Festival

**May 19 - Jun 1 2024**  
Delegation of 24 Texas agriculture professionals from the TALL Program to Poland, led by Dr. Jim Mazurkiewicz

**Jun 3 - 6 2024**  
Polish Investment and Trade Agency Houston Office at the BIO International Convention

**Jun 18 - 21 2024**  
Delegation of US cybersecurity companies to Poland

**Jun 25 2024**  
Webinar on PAX West by Polish Investment and Trade Agency Houston Office

**Jul 9 2024**  
Webinar: Fundraising in the BioTech Sector

**Jul 10 2024**  
Webinar for Game Developers: International Game Sales Taxation

**Jul 18 2024**  
Webinar: Navigating FDA Regulations - Practical Guide for Food Producers

**Aug 30 - Sep 2 2024**  
Polish Investment and Trade Agency Houston Office at PAX WEST

**Sep 4 - 10 2024**  
Delegation of Kujavian-Pomeranian Voivodeship to Texas, led by Marshal Piotr Calbecki

**Sep 25 - 27 2024**  
Delegation from Silicon Valley Innovation Center

**Sep 26 2024**  
Visegrad Four Networking Event in Houston

**Sep 27 - 29 2024**  
Polish Harvest Festival in Houston

**Oct 2 - 3 2024**  
PAIH Business Forum

**Oct 2 2024**  
Delegation of the Polish Institute of International Affairs participated in the discussion "Future of the U.S. Role in Europe" at Texas A&M University's Bush School of Government and Public Service

**Oct 28 - 30 2024**  
Polish Investment and Trade Agency Houston Office at TechCrunch Disrupt

**Oct 31 - Nov 10 2024**  
Delegation of Polish Police to Sam Houston University

**Nov 13 - 15 2024**  
POI Fall Hybrid Summit 2024 with Asseco

**Dec 7 2024**  
PolChamTX 2nd Annual Gala Dinner

**Dec 9 2024**  
Networking Event for Visegrad Group in Austin

**Jan 2025**  
Event with Greater Houston Partnership

**Jan 7 - 10 2025**  
Consumer Electronics Show, Las Vegas

**Mar 8 2025**  
Polish Networking Night at SXSW

**Mar 2025**  
Networking Event for Visegrad Group

**Mar 17 - 21 2025**  
Game Developers Conference, San Francisco

**Apr 2025**  
Quarterly Polish Tech Networking Events in Austin

**Apr 7-10 2025**  
40th Annual Space Symposium, Santa Clara



Dallas



## 04

## PolChamTX in Action

Advocating for a Houston  
– Warsaw Direct Flight

*In the "PolChamTX in Action" section, we spotlight key initiatives led by the Polish-American Chamber of Commerce in Texas that deserve our readers' attention and support. In this edition, we are excited to share our latest endeavor: advocating for the establishment of a direct flight connection between Houston and Warsaw, a project we believe is of utmost importance for strengthening ties between Texas and Poland and fostering new opportunities for cooperation.*

### Our Initiative: Connecting Texas and Poland

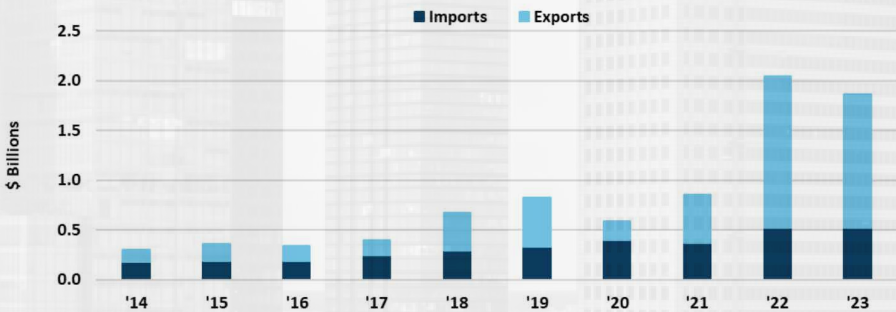
As we have often highlighted, Poland and Texas share tremendous potential for growth, similar entrepreneurial mindsets, and numerous synergies that make them natural partners for cooperation. Each year, Polish-American relations grow closer, with Texas emerging as Poland's primary energy provider and a catalyst for collaboration in defense and academia. Poland, in turn, stands as Europe's champion of economic growth and a gateway to the dynamic Central and Eastern European region, offering a wealth of investment opportunities. With the establishment of permanent offices for the Consulate General of Poland in Houston and the Polish Investment and Trade Agency, we believe that the next step in Polish-Texan cooperation is a direct flight connection. Such a route would significantly strengthen economic and cultural ties between our regions and open new avenues for collaboration.

PolChamTX has taken the lead this year in advocating for this direct Houston-Warsaw connection. A delegation led by Dr. Jim Mazurkiewicz and Jakub Bartoszewski met with representatives from the Houston Airport System, whose director, Mr. Jim Szczesniak, will speak at our upcoming Annual Gala Dinner. This initial meeting underscored the strategic importance of this route for both Houston and Warsaw, with Houston representing one of the most globally connected cities in the U.S., hosting world-class companies in energy, medical, and aerospace industries, and a highly diverse population of over 7.5 million in the greater metropolitan area. Houston Airport System expressed strong support, highlighting that such a route would serve as a vital link to Central and Eastern Europe.



Following this meeting, Dr. Mazurkiewicz and Ms. Magdalena Milewska traveled to Poland to meet with representatives from LOT Polish Airlines: Mr. Robert Ludera, Director of Network & Alliances, and Mr. Wojciech Worona, Deputy Director of Network Planning. We thank Our Future Foundation for their help in organizing the meeting. LOT Polish Airlines recognized the potential for Polish-Texan cooperation and expressed interest in exploring this opportunity further. As the conversation continues, this advocacy effort has also gained support from several notable organizations, including MD Anderson, Orlen, Grupa Azoty, and the Kujawsko-Pomorskie Region, who have provided letters of endorsement. We are committed to working with our partners to make this direct flight a reality, a step that we believe will elevate Polish-Texan cooperation to new heights.

### Total Trade, Houston and Poland



Source: Partnership analysis of WISERTrade from U.S. Census Bureau, Foreign Trade Division data



## Houston to Warsaw: The Case for a Direct Flight

Currently, traveling from Texas to Poland takes approximately 20 hours at best and over a day at worst. This hampers economic cooperation between Texas, the most dynamic economy in the United States, and Poland, the leader of the CEE region, which is the fastest-growing part of Europe. Nevertheless, the geographic distance between Houston, the economic hub of Texas, and Warsaw, the capital of Poland and the largest city in the CEE, is not so large. In theory, the journey should take around 10 hours. The problem lies in the lack of a direct flight connection between these cities. Therefore, we propose to establish one.



### 01 Strategic Cooperation between Poland and Texas in the Energy Sector:

Since 2022, Poland has been leading efforts to strengthen cooperation in the energy sector between the CEE region and Texas, resulting in significant investments in diversifying energy sources. LNG and crude oil imported by Poland mainly originate from Texas. At the same time, Poland aims to develop its energy infrastructure to become a hub for energy resource logistics for other countries in the region, including through the Three Seas Initiative. There is thus a demand and political will to deepen Polish-Texan energy cooperation. Consequently, it is important for leading American energy companies to be present in Warsaw, so they can participate in the opportunities that will arise with the further development of energy infrastructure in the CEE. Conversely, Polish energy companies should have a strong presence in the energy trading hub of Houston. A direct air connection will facilitate the establishment of permanent representations, while also contributing to increased cooperation in the realm of energy.

### 02 Warsaw as a Gateway for American Capital into the CEE Region:

Poland's rapidly growing economy, combined with its strategic location in the CEE region, creates enormous investment opportunities for Texan companies seeking expansion into the European market. This includes a large internal market, upcoming large infrastructure projects and defense-related investments. Texas is currently the most dynamically developing state in America, attracting increasing capital and businesses ready to expand into European markets. A direct air connection to Warsaw will enable Texan companies to capture investment opportunities in Poland and in the CEE region before others. The leading Polish airline, PLL LOT, already operates throughout the entire CEE, creating a transportation hub from Warsaw with direct flights to Budapest, Bucharest, Prague, Vilnius and many others. Importantly, Texas has a great brand in the CEE, which gives it a starting advantage. All that is missing is a direct flight connection.

## 03 Houston as a Gateway to America for CEE Companies:

Texas is the second-largest economy in America and the eighth-largest in the world. It is home to the 'Texas Triangle', a megaregion consisting of 4 out of the 10 largest American cities, with a population of 20 million people. Its economic hub and window to the world is the city of Houston, the largest port in America. Texas, due to the size and dynamism of its economy, excellent infrastructure, and very favorable business environment, currently offers the best conditions for European companies to enter the American market. Poland and its CEE peers are now rich countries that boast numerous companies that are ready for international expansion. Texas offers excellent conditions for entering the US market for companies from various sectors. A direct flight connection from Warsaw to Houston will enable the establishment of regular business contacts between CEE businesses and the most dynamically developing part of the American economy.

## 04 New Tourist Destinations and Facilitating Travel to Asia and the Middle East:

Poland and other CEE countries boast breathtaking landscapes and rich cultural heritage. Yet, charming CEE cities, such as Cracow, Budapest, or Prague, are not as visited as their Western European peers, such as Rome or Paris. This is largely due to poor air connections. A direct flight between Houston and Warsaw is an opportunity to fill a market niche by opening a new set of tourist destinations to Texans. CEE has the potential to become a very attractive tourist destination for holidays in Europe, as it is less crowded, cheaper, safer, and significantly more pro-American than Western Europe. Opening a direct connection to Warsaw will also facilitate travel to Asia and the Middle East, as the city is directly connected to the key transportation hubs there. This becomes increasingly important as individuals from Asia and the Middle East have comprised the largest group of new American citizens in the past decade. Importantly, Houston is one of the largest cities hosting these immigrant groups and is currently the most ethnically diverse metropolis in the US.

### How You Can Get Involved?

This initiative has already received strong endorsements from prominent organizations, including **MD Anderson**, **Orlen**, **Grupa Azoty**, and the **Kujawsko-Pomorskie Region**. If your organization is interested in supporting the establishment of a direct Houston-Warsaw flight, please reach out to us at [office@polchamtx.org](mailto:office@polchamtx.org)



05



**Andrzej Fofara**  
Acting Consul General

## Our partners: Consulate General of Poland in Houston

*In this series of articles we would like to present to you our business and institutional partners. In this edition of our quarterly magazine, we are honored to introduce you to the Consulate General of Poland in Houston. The Consulate General is a public institution of the Republic of Poland that is part of its diplomatic mission in the United States.*

### About us

The Consulate General of Poland in Houston serves as a vital hub for fostering Polish-American relations across the southern United States, with a special focus on Texas. Established in 2017, it is one of five Polish consular missions in the U.S., alongside those in New York, Chicago, Los Angeles, and Washington, D.C. Its primary mission is to provide consular assistance to Polish citizens, promote Polish culture, as well as support economic, scientific and defense cooperation between Poland and the U.S.

Texas holds particular importance in Polish-American relations due to its dynamic economy and thriving industries, such as energy and healthcare, which align naturally with Poland's strengths and ambitions. Over the years, the Consulate has played a key role in connecting Polish and Texan businesses, facilitating numerous delegations, cultural events, and academic exchanges that showcase Poland's growing economy, technological capabilities, and rich heritage. The Consulate also works closely with local Polish communities, fostering cultural ties and promoting Polish-American cooperation.



Consulate General  
of the Republic of Poland  
in Houston



At the helm is Acting Consul General Andrzej Fąfara, who brings a wealth of experience in diplomacy and international relations. Supported by a dedicated team specializing in consular services, cultural promotion, and economic affairs, the Consulate is well-equipped to facilitate Polish-American partnerships. The expanded consular district now includes Alabama and Florida, further extending its support to Polish initiatives and communities throughout the region.

The Consulate General of Poland in Houston stands ready to help build upon the natural synergies between Poland and Texas. Through economic, academic, and cultural cooperation, it serves as a key partner for Polish businesses and organizations looking to establish or grow their presence in the U.S., ensuring that Polish and Texan interests continue to thrive together.

## Contact us

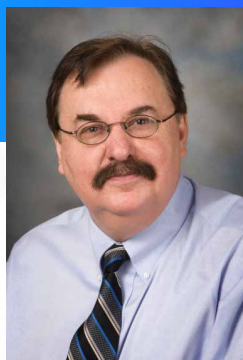
For inquiries or assistance, you can reach out to the Consulate at [houston.consul@msz.gov.pl](mailto:houston.consul@msz.gov.pl).



Consulate General  
of the Republic of Poland  
in Houston



**Warsaw**



**Dr. Waldemar Priebe**

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*My career has been a fulfilling journey from Warsaw to leading cancer research at a top-ranked institution in the USA and in the world.*

06

## Lifetime Leadership Award Interview: Dr. Waldemar Priebe

*The Lifetime Leadership Award honors a member of the PolChamTX community with an outstanding track record of leadership, particularly in fostering Polish – American cooperation involving Texas. This year's recipient, Dr. Waldemar Priebe, is a distinguished medicinal chemist whose groundbreaking research at the University of Texas MD Anderson Cancer Center has led to major advancements in cancer therapies. Beyond his scientific achievements, Dr. Priebe has led numerous initiatives aiming at strengthening ties between Texas and Poland in science and academia. Through this interview, we're honored to showcase Dr. Priebe's distinguished career and his contributions to our community.*

**Jakub Bartoszewski (JB):** Dr. Priebe, thank you for finding the time to chat with us today and congratulations on receiving PolChamTX's Lifetime Leadership Award! Can you tell us about your journey from Warsaw University to becoming one of the leading researchers at MD Anderson Cancer Center?

**Dr. Waldemar Priebe (WP):** After completing my MSc degree at Warsaw University and subsequently a doctorate at the Institute of Organic Chemistry of the Polish Academy of Sciences, I moved to the United States in 1979 as a postdoctoral fellow at Ohio State University, thanks to an invitation from Professor Derek Horton. This opportunity was vital for advancing my scientific career, and I am grateful to my mentors, Professors Aleksander Zamojski and Marian Kocór for their support. Unfortunately, my family due to the Polish government travel restrictions (!) at that time was unable to join me. Thus, despite very promising scientific progress and available funding I decided to return in 1981 to Poland. My primary objective has been to return to the USA with the whole family to continue my research. After numerous government's created challenges, we were able to leave Poland with my wife Teresa and my children Anna and Chris on Dec 6, 1981.



As it appeared later, it was just on the onset of the introduction of martial law in Poland on Dec 13, 1981. While pursuing rewarding research at Ohio State University I closely monitored the situation in Poland waiting for a political change, however, I was continuously disappointed with the overall crisis. This led to a decision to search for a permanent independent position in academia and subsequent acceptance of a tenure-track Assistant Professor position at the University of Texas MD Anderson Cancer Center, where I was subsequently awarded a tenured Associate and a tenured Professor positions. During this period, I have discovered and developed multiple new cancer therapies, some of which are now in clinical trials in cancer patients. My career, marked by significant scientific contributions, has been a fulfilling journey from Warsaw to leading cancer research at a top-ranked institution in the USA and in the world.

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**JB: Thank you for this introduction. So, let's talk a bit about your research. It merges biology with chemistry to design anticancer therapies. Could you elaborate on the concept of "translational research" and its impact on drug discovery?**

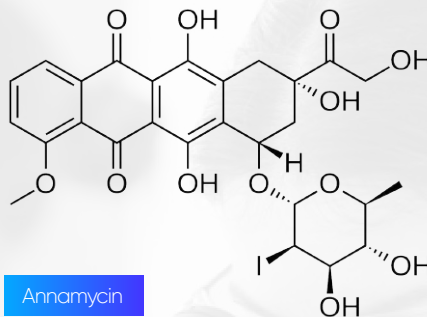
**WP:** Certainly. Translational research is a critical part of the drug development process, which serves as the bridge between discoveries during basic scientific research to clinical applications benefiting patients. Sometimes, a phrase from "from bench to bedside" is being used for translational research to describe this general concept covering "basic research to patient care". As an example, this phrase can involve identification and validation of specific molecular events, then design, synthesis, and evaluation of potential inhibitors, which can be followed by selection of a lead inhibitor and its full validation as a potential drug candidate and completion of preclinical studies required by federal regulators to justify advancement to clinical trials. In particular, our work, in addition to the discovery research leading to identification of a lead compound includes developing synthesis processes that can be carried out under Good Manufacturing Practice (GMP) conditions, conducting formulation and comprehensive toxicology studies, and active participation in the preparation for clinical phases. While our team focuses on the initial stages up to the entry into clinical trials, we continue to support our drug candidates if needed as they undergo clinical testing. This requires collaboration with specialized companies and regulatory bodies like the FDA and the European Medicines Agency to ensure that everything from synthesis to documentation adheres to strict standards. Ultimately, translational research aims to transform results from basic research into tangible benefits for patients, guiding promising therapies from the laboratory to the clinical setting.

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**JB: With over 100 patents, more than 200 peer-reviewed articles, and several companies you founded, what do you consider your biggest achievement?**

**WP:** From a scientific perspective, my greatest accomplishment would be if one of the drugs I've developed becomes used worldwide as a novel effective cancer treatment. So far, my most significant achievement has been advancing from discovery to clinical trials several new drug candidates discovered by us.

We currently have five drugs in clinical trials, while having one drug discovered and translated to clinical studies would be remarkable for any laboratory in the world. Among these five drugs, the most advanced is Annamycin, a drug named after my daughter Anna. It has completed Phase II trials and is expected to enter Phase III soon under sponsorship of Moleculin Biotech, a company, which I co-founded and that licensed it from MD Anderson Cancer Center. On the non-scientific front, my efforts to enhance scientific, cultural, and business exchanges and collaborations between the USA and Poland have been deeply fulfilling. Among others I am a trustee of The Kosciuszko Foundation in the USA and in Poland, Founding Board Member of PolChamTX, and a Board Member of Polish American Council of Texas (PACT). My activities have been recognized with distinctions from Polish Presidents Komorowski and Kwaśniewski, and an appointment to the National Development Council under President Duda. Currently, I am dedicated to the creation of the Three Seas Cancer Initiative (3SCI), which aims to foster broader cooperation within the Central and Eastern Europe region.



Annamycin

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We currently have five drugs  
in clinical trials.

The most advanced of them  
is Annamycin, which I named  
after my daughter Anna.

### JB: What are you currently focused on in your research?

**WP:** Our research remains dedicated to developing new cancer treatments, specifically targeting some of the most deadly types of cancer, such as pancreatic cancer and brain tumors, including glioblastomas. We are also exploring effective therapies for liver metastases and other central nervous system malignancies. These areas are critically important due to the aggressive nature of these cancers and the urgent need for more effective treatments.

### JB: As a founder of multiple biotechnology firms, how do you integrate academic research with entrepreneurship?

**WP:** Successful academic research typically serves as the starting point for creating a biotech company - it's a natural progression. It begins with basic research within an academic setting, moves through translational research, and necessitates collaboration with biotech companies to access funding required to complete the required preclinical studies and to advance and to conduct clinical studies. There's no conflict between research in academia and entrepreneurship leading to the formation or interaction with the biotech company because they are intrinsically linked. The goal of research is to discover cures for diseases like cancer, and when an innovation is identified, the next step is to find ways to translate it into a practical solution for patients. This translation requires proper funding, which is where entrepreneurship comes into play, helping to implement the drug into real-world applications.

**JB: What challenges have you faced in your career, and what lessons have you learned from them?**

**WP:** One of the major challenges I faced was the declaration of martial law in Poland just after I had moved to the USA. Deciding whether to stay in the US and build a career here or return to Poland was a significant challenge. I chose to stay and build my career in the US, which turned out to be a pivotal decision. However, I also decided to maintain and strengthen my connections with Poland, which proved beneficial not only for my personal growth but also for fostering scientific and cultural exchanges between the two countries. The lesson I learned is the importance of building bridges, whether they are professional or personal, that can withstand geopolitical shifts and contribute positively both to one's career and to broader societal benefits.

**JB: Despite being based in the U.S., you have maintained strong ties with Poland. How do you stay connected to your homeland, both personally and professionally?**

**WP:** Maintaining strong ties with Poland has been both a personal and professional priority for me. Over the years, my lab has hosted over 40 researchers from Poland, some of whom have worked with us for extended periods (years). This was particularly significant before Poland joined the European Union, as opportunities for such exchanges were more limited and some are still working at MD Anderson just to mention Drs. Izabela Fokt, Rafal Zielinski, and Stanislaw Skora.. Professionally, I stay connected through regular visits and ongoing collaborative projects. In addition to USA we also conduct clinical trials and experimental cancer therapies in Poland, working with different clinical centers. Phase 3 trials in Poland will play a crucial role in these initiatives. Several prestigious Polish institutions are involved in our collaborations, including the Poznan University of Medical Sciences, the Pomeranian Medical University in Szczecin, the Bialystok University of Technology, Jagiellonian University, and the University of Warsaw. I have also been awarded honoris causa doctorate from the Bialystok University of Technology. Additionally, collaborations with Professor Krzysztof Wozniak from the University of Warsaw and the Lower Silesia Oncology Institute further strengthen our ties. We have also formed a consortium of five institutions in Poland working together with MD Anderson for joint Polish-American grants. Despite some slowdowns due to the pandemic, President Duda has been instrumental in fostering cooperation between Polish oncology and MD Anderson. These extensive collaborations not only foster scientific exchange but also keep me deeply connected to Poland, ensuring that my work contributes to advancements in both countries.



**JB: What is your vision for the future of scientific collaboration between Poland and Texas?**

**WP:** The relationship between Poland and the U.S., particularly Texas, is well-positioned for fruitful scientific collaborations. This is part of a broader strategy within the Three Seas Cancer Initiative to foster deeper connections in the area of preclinical and clinical cancer research including cancer prevention and early diagnosis. In practice, through initiatives at WPD Pharmaceuticals, a company I founded in Poland, we've demonstrated the practical aspects of potential future cooperation aimed to bring validated innovations ready for commercialization to Poland. For example, we licensed the validated preclinically discovery from the Wake Forest Comprehensive Cancer Center and are now further developing it in Poland. This project exemplifies how we can leverage U.S. validated discoveries for the development and commercialization in Poland via obtaining an exclusive license by a Polish company in collaboration with Wake Forest scientists led by Dr. Debinski. This model not only facilitates the transfer of knowledge and technology but also establishes a robust framework for ongoing collaboration.

It shows that Poland can effectively conduct advanced biotechnological research and development, contributing significantly to the development of novel therapeutics and global scientific efforts. Such endeavors not only advance scientific research but also help in building sustainable international relationships that benefit both regions.

**JB: What advice would you offer to young scientists aspiring to collaborate internationally?**

**WP:** Career success varies from person to person. Some might define it as earning a good income, while others might see it as an opportunity to learn continuously and find joy in their work. My advice for young scientists is to choose a field that you are passionate about, one that feels more like a hobby than a job. Achieving this means you can enjoy your work over the long term without feeling the stress of merely surviving. When you are genuinely engaged and intellectually invested in what you do, success tends to follow. This mindset is particularly important in international collaborations, where enthusiasm and commitment can help overcome cultural and scientific differences, leading to fruitful partnerships.

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*My advice for young scientists is to choose a field that you are passionate about, one that feels more like a hobby than a job.*





**San Antonio**



Maciej Bagiński

## 07

### Entrepreneur of the Year Award Interview: Maciej Bagiński

*The Entrepreneur of the Year Award acknowledges the exceptional achievements of PolChamTX members who have demonstrated outstanding entrepreneurial spirit and success in running their own businesses. This year, the award is presented to Maciej Bagiński, founder of BW & CO and a leading expert in international grants. His dedication and vision have supported countless innovative initiatives, fostering collaboration between Poland and the U.S. In this interview, we introduce Maciej Bagiński and explore the story behind his entrepreneurial success.*

**Jakub Bartoszewski (JB): Congratulations on receiving PolChamTX's Entrepreneur of the Year Award! Can you tell us a bit about BW & CO and what has driven its success?**

**Maciej Bagiński (MB):** First of all, I would like to sincerely thank the PolChamTX board for this award. While I'm receiving it personally, this is truly an award for my entire company and team. The success of BW & CO is built on the dedication and expertise of the outstanding professionals I have the privilege of working with. They are the heart and soul of everything we do. infrastructure projects.

What sets BW & CO apart is our ability to find a niche where we bring real value to the table. Our core offering is helping companies secure non-refundable financial resources, such as grants, for innovative projects. This ranges from early-stage technological ventures to research and development initiatives, and even large-scale infrastructure projects.

But what makes us unique is the combination of networking, credibility-building, and our deep knowledge of both European methodologies and the American business landscape.

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*The success of BW & CO is built on the dedication and expertise of the outstanding professionals I have the privilege of working with.*

This approach has allowed us to support countless companies in achieving breakthroughs, creating jobs, and delivering solutions that have a meaningful impact. I also have to highlight the support we've received here in Texas, which has become both a business harbor and a personal home for me.

The Polish community here has been incredibly welcoming. It is no secret that I began my adventure in Texas by making friends with Dr. Jim Mazurkiewicz, whom I would also like to thank here separately, and who also contributed to the success of our company.

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### **JB: How did you start your journey in the world of international grants and consulting?**

**MB:** My business journey began over 20 years ago when I founded a company in Poland. At the time, the European Union's funding programs for research, development, and innovation were gaining momentum, and I saw an opportunity to help companies navigate these complex systems. My background in understanding both the technical aspects of projects and the grant application process gave me an edge in this field.

From the very beginning, I focused on creating solutions that connected entrepreneurs with the right resources to bring their ideas to life. Over the years, my team and I have supported a wide variety of projects, ranging from building state-of-the-art biogas plants and automated factories to developing innovative technologies like drones for transporting human organs. What made this work so fulfilling was not just securing funding but enabling companies to solve real-world problems and drive progress.

Expanding to the United States was a natural evolution for me. After years of working with European companies, I began traveling to the U.S. about a decade ago to build connections and understand the market. Eventually, I decided that Texas, with its strong entrepreneurial spirit and dynamic economic growth, was the ideal place to establish a real presence for BW & CO. This combination of European expertise and American innovation has defined our approach and continues to shape our success today.

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### **JB: You've supported over 2,000 innovative projects across Europe. Can you share with us a particularly memorable project or success story?**

**MB:** Over the years, my team and I have had the privilege of working on some truly remarkable projects, but one that stands out is the development of a transport drone designed to carry living human organs. This was an ambitious and groundbreaking initiative that combined cutting-edge technology with a profound purpose: saving lives by dramatically reducing the time it takes to transport organs for transplantation. The project involved close collaboration between engineers, medical professionals, and researchers. It was not only about securing the necessary funding, but also about ensuring that the technology met rigorous safety and medical standards. Watching this idea come to life and knowing it could directly improve outcomes for patients in critical need was incredibly rewarding.

Another memorable success was supporting the construction of advanced biogas plants and automated factories. These projects showcased how innovation can drive sustainable development and improve industrial efficiency. Whether it's creating environmentally friendly solutions or tackling bold scientific challenges, the common thread in all these projects is their ability to make a tangible difference.

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*One of our projects that stood out was the development of a drone to transport living human organs.*

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**JB: It seems like at BW & CO you follow most recent technological trends very closely. Which ones are booming right now?**

**MB:** Right now, there's a significant focus on several technological areas. Defense technologies, particularly those related to aviation, hold the largest budgets for grants globally. Following that, medical biotechnology, also known as Medtech is booming, as well as Cleantech, which are technologies related to sustainable energy.

What I'd like to emphasize is that ultimately, we're not just observers of these trends. Rather, we actively engage with them and help them gain momentum by supporting the most innovative projects. At BW & CO, we focus heavily on intelligent specializations, that is projects identified by international political and scientific bodies as vital for technological progress. This includes advancements in artificial intelligence, modern materials science, and safety technologies.

Our proximity to Houston, a global hub for energy and medical innovation, allows us to draw inspiration from these sectors, while Austin's rapid growth in the IT sphere keeps us closely engaged with development in that sector. Texas is truly a great place for a company like ours!

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**JB: Entrepreneurship often involves balancing risks and rewards. Can you talk about a significant challenge you've faced and how you overcame it?**

**MB:** Entrepreneurship is always about balancing risks and rewards, and for me, the key has been finding a unique niche and combining methodologies. Early on, my team and I identified a gap in the market by offering solutions that not only help raise capital but also build credibility for companies through networking and innovative strategies. Working on technologically risky projects, where outcomes are uncertain but the potential for groundbreaking impact is high, has been both challenging and rewarding. These projects often push boundaries, addressing real-world problems and advancing industries. Navigating different markets has also been a challenge. Merging European expertise in grants with U.S. approaches to working with startups and mature companies required adaptability and thorough understanding. However, what drives us as a team is the knowledge that we are contributing to meaningful projects that have a positive impact on the world and future generations. Keeping this purpose in mind has helped us overcome challenges and remain focused on our goals.



**JB: Finally, what advice would you offer to aspiring Polish entrepreneurs looking to make an impact on the American market?**

**MB:** Currently, we're seeing a significant increase in inquiries and visits from Polish IT companies to Austin, as well as companies in the energy and medical sectors to Houston. For aspiring Polish entrepreneurs, it's important to recognize the incredible opportunities available in the American market. At business meetings, it's always a pleasure to hear Polish being spoken: these are individuals proudly representing our country. My American business partner, Josiah Wegner, once told me that it wasn't until he met me that he realized how active and professional the Polish community of managers and engineers is in the United States. He was impressed by how many business people and professionals of Polish origin have achieved success here. Polish engineers, whether in IT or various mechanical fields, are highly admired and sought after on the U.S. market. This opens many doors, but it also comes with challenges. One issue I've observed is that while Polish professionals often find fantastic career opportunities within American companies, this individual success sometimes comes at the expense of broader business expansion. Talented engineers or IT specialists may take on remote or in-house roles in U.S. firms rather than helping Polish companies establish a direct presence here. For Polish entrepreneurs, the challenge is to focus on creating structures and opportunities that enable entire businesses, not just individual careers, to thrive in the U.S. market. To make an impact in the U.S., it's essential to understand the unique dynamics of the American market, which means: building strong local partnerships, demonstrating reliability and value, and maintaining a clear, strategic vision. With the right approach, Polish businesses can do more than succeed here - they can thrive and inspire others to follow.

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*To make an impact in the U.S., it's essential to understand the unique dynamics of the American market, which means: building strong local partnerships, demonstrating reliability and value, and maintaining a clear, strategic vision.*





**Houston**



08



Dr. Greg Kusiński

### Polonia Feature Interview: Dr. Greg Kusiński

*In the "Polonia Feature" section, we showcase the achievements and contributions of prominent members of the Polish-Texan business community. In this interview, we are honored to introduce Dr. Greg Kusiński, a founding Board Member of PolChamTX and a Team Lead of Regulatory Affairs at Chevron's Gulf of Mexico Business Unit. Dr. Kusiński completed B.S., M.S. and Ph.D. programs in Engineering at the University of California at Berkeley, as well as the Executive MBA at Rice University. Having spent over 25 years in the energy industry, Dr. Kusiński, a holder of over 30 patents and 50 journal publications, offers deep expertise in project execution, regulatory compliance, and technology development.*

**Jakub Bartoszewski (JB):** Dr. Kusinski, thank you for taking the time to speak with us today. With over 25 years of experience in the energy industry, you've held a wide range of roles and gained a wealth of knowledge. Could you please tell us about your current position at Chevron – what are your main responsibilities, and what do you find most exciting about your work?

**Dr. Greg Kusiński (GK):** I work for Chevron's Gulf of Mexico business, where I lead the Regulatory Affairs team responsible for securing federal government approvals for our major capital projects. An example, our recent major achievement was the start of production from our Anchor project, the first deepwater high-pressure oil and natural gas development in the world. This means our Anchor facility and equipment are capable of safely producing oil and gas at pressures reaching 20,000 psi from reservoirs some 34,000 feet below the water surface. This required years of hard work and was accomplished through innovation, technology, and human ingenuity.



Located 140 miles off the Louisiana coast, this new \$5.7-billion facility has a design capacity of 75,000 barrels of oil per day and 28 million cubic feet of natural gas per day. As with Chevron's other Gulf of Mexico facilities, Anchor produces some of the world's lowest carbon intensity oil and natural gas to help meet growing energy demand.

Recently, Jim Cramer featured Anchor on MSNBC's Mad Money, where Chevron's CEO Mike Wirth joined him on-site to discuss the role of innovation in delivering affordable energy. For those interested, you can learn more by visiting our Anchor page on Chevron.com.

In my role for the Anchor Project, I developed a strategy for technology verification and validation, ensuring compliance with U.S. Department of Interior requirements. We began this process nearly a decade ago, when the technical capacity for such a project didn't yet exist. We had to design our concepts and demonstrate to the government that these systems would be fit-for-service, meeting strict safety standards for people and the environment. As I often say, "What is reality today was impossible 10 years ago, and what's impossible today will be normal 10 years from now."

I was also responsible for gaining approval from the U.S. Federal Government through the Department of Interior and the Bureau of Safety and Environmental Enforcement, covering all the innovative technologies deployed. As the first high-pressure deepwater production project, we had to outline our process for verification and validation for government approval.

Beyond the Anchor Project, I am involved in supporting new and emerging technologies, particularly Carbon Capture and Sequestration (CCS), which offers a safe and effective way to permanently store CO<sub>2</sub>. I work with Standard Setting Organizations and Industry Trade Associations to help develop standards for CCS and provide input to the U.S. Government as it works on new regulations for this evolving field.

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### **JB: Can you tell us about your journey from academia to the energy industry?**

**GK:** My academic journey began at the University of California, Berkeley, where I earned B.S., M.S., and Ph.D. degrees in science and engineering. Initially, I planned to pursue an academic career, as I was focused on publishing in scientific journals. However, I developed a strong interest in technology development, so I minored in business at Berkeley's Haas School of Business and completed Technology Management credentials. During this time, I also worked at Lawrence Berkeley National Laboratory. One of the technologies I developed had broad applications in the construction and energy industries, which led a group of investors to start a company based on it. I joined the team to support technology licensing, transfer, and development. As Director of R&D and Production, I managed our intellectual property portfolio and scaled up production. It was an exciting role: we raised over half a billion dollars in venture capital to build manufacturing capacity. Although I learned a lot, I still wanted to test my skills in academia. This led me to join Clemson University as a professor in the International Center for Automotive Research and in the Mechanical and Materials Sciences departments.



Working on innovation and teaching was incredibly fulfilling, but I soon realized that my true passion lay in the industry, where ideas are transformed into real products and services. At that point, Chevron recruited me to join their Advanced R&D department and collaborate with Chevron Technology Ventures. This was an incredible opportunity I couldn't pass up. In large energy companies like Chevron, it's common for people to move between roles to gain well-rounded, cross-functional experience.

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*My academic journey began at the University of California, Berkeley, where I earned B.S., M.S., and Ph.D. degrees in science and engineering.*

**JB: You've spent much of your career at a large corporation, Chevron, but you've also been involved in start-ups. Can you share some insights into your experience in the start-up world?**

**GK:** Working in a start-up is both exciting and challenging. It's essential to understand how your idea will be commercialized and generate value - a common struggle for many start-ups. Early on, we were fortunate to focus our technology on a specific market: high-strength reinforcing bars for concrete in high-rise construction. This focus was key to our progress. After leaving that company, I joined Chevron as Director of a Corporate Joint Industry Program to develop innovative solutions, which gave me the opportunity to work with numerous start-ups to find industry solutions. I observed that many start-ups often lack focus or pursue too many unrelated directions, which can dilute their efforts and limit their success.

**JB: How do you balance the contrasting worlds of start-ups and a major corporation like Chevron and what insights from each have helped you in your career?**

**GK:** I believe that in both start-ups and large corporations, success comes from having a clear goal and executing it with focus. In large companies, roles typically have a more defined scope, but you have access to greater resources. In start-ups, you wear many hats, leading to a broader job scope that can be both enjoyable and, at times, exhausting. I've observed that people with strong entrepreneurial skills often thrive in large companies, especially in projects involving new initiatives and change management.

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**JB: As someone deeply involved in the energy sector, what do you see as the most significant trends and challenges facing the industry today?**

**GK:** The energy transition is a topic that everyone is discussing. When you look at a nation's GDP, there are no wealthy countries that don't consume significant amounts of energy - GDP scales almost linearly with energy consumption. So, access to affordable energy is a priority for the industrial world. The next key issue is sustainability. The current energy transition conversation centers on reducing the carbon footprint. This is a major focus in the industry, but it's also essential to recognize that all forms of energy will be needed for some time as we move toward more sustainable solutions.

**JB: As the founding president of PolChamTX, can you tell us the story behind the founding of the organization and its original objectives?**

**GK:** A group of us recognized that the Polish community in Houston and Texas was very active, primarily around cultural and religious centers. We saw the value in creating an organization focused on business and commercial interests to complement these activities. After several meetings, we decided to incorporate the chamber as a nonprofit entity to provide both legal status and credibility. We then selected influential leaders and formed our original Board of Directors. At that time, the Polish Investment and Trade Agency (Polska Agencja Inwestycji i Handlu - PAIH) did not have a presence in Houston, so we supported numerous visits from Polish businesses interested in expanding into Texas markets. We also advocated for PAIH to open an office in Houston, which ultimately added substantial value and created strong synergies for both Polish and Texan businesses.

**JB: How do you see the future of Polish-American cooperation in Texas, particularly in the energy sector?**

**GK:** It's important to recognize that Polish-American cooperation is already well underway through numerous corporate partnerships and public-private initiatives. For example, significant LNG shipments produced in the Permian Basin in Texas and liquefied on the Gulf Coast have been delivered to the Świnoujście LNG terminal in Poland. Additionally, several companies headquartered in Texas have either established or leverage engineering centers in Poland. Looking to the future, the energy industry is increasingly expanding into digital solutions and advanced analytics. This area holds significant potential for business opportunities, as there is a strong demand for innovation and a wealth of technical talent in both regions. I'm also excited to see Polish start-ups establishing a presence in Austin and Houston, and I'm eager to watch the growth that will come from these initiatives.



*Polish-American cooperation is already well underway through numerous corporate partnerships and public-private initiatives.*



**JB: Looking at Poland's energy future, do you think the country should focus on developing its natural gas shale deposits or invest more heavily in renewables and nuclear energy?**

**GK:** I am a proponent of pursuing all these options. Complex economies require energy resilience, so it's essential to maintain an energy mix that is affordable, competitive, and reliable. Understanding the values and trade-offs of each energy source is crucial, as changes in the energy mix are often influenced by policy and regulatory requirements. For Poland, navigating the complexities of both national and EU policies and regulations, along with political and security considerations, is key. Ultimately, in the short and mid-term, market-driven factors will play a significant role in shaping Poland's energy mix.

**JB: What advice would you give to young professionals looking to make a career in the energy industry?**

**GK:** First, understand what drives you. The energy industry benefits from a wide range of talents across technical, business, and social skill backgrounds. One thing I've learned is the importance of building a network. When working with mentors, it's valuable to set clear goals and objectives. As you develop your one-year, five-year, and longer-term goals, be specific about how they can help you. It's also important to recognize that it's okay to adjust your mid- and long-term goals over time. The pace of change is only increasing, and technology is becoming more critical, so committing to lifelong learning is essential. I encourage young professionals to be flexible and agile, and to pursue diverse experiences early in their careers to broaden their perspectives. As I often say, "What is a reality today was impossible 10 years ago. What is impossible today will be normal 10 years from now." This perspective has held true throughout my career. While I believe I made good choices, I can confirm that my career has taken a different path than I initially envisioned.

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*I encourage young professionals to be flexible and agile, and to pursue diverse experiences early in their careers to broaden their perspectives.*





Kraków





Having experienced the Polish community in Seattle and having earned their trust, I attempted to look for ways to promote common aspects and goals, including seeking advice from organizations such as the Kościuszko Foundation-Houston Chapter, that could help promote mutual support and cooperation among those of the Polish community. My wife and I invited representatives from all avenues of Polish life in Houston to our house in Sugar Land, calling our meeting Forum Polonia. There were close to 20 people that came. We discussed a variety of subjects with the common goal of getting people together. The idea of a community website was born, [www.forum-polonia-houston.com](http://www.forum-polonia-houston.com), which began soon after in 1997. With enthusiasm for new prospects for Houston Polonia, I proposed starting an independent Polish film festival, basing the idea on my experience in Seattle. Realizing that it was time for us to contribute to the community, the first festival took place in November 1997 at the Houston Museum of Fine Arts.

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**JB: How has the Houston Polish Film Festival evolved over the years, and what milestones would you say have defined its journey?**

**ZW:** The first Polish Film Festival in Houston was presented at the Houston Museum of Fine Arts. It was a two day event presenting four films. Opening night began with Henryk Wieniawski "Polonaise" performed by violinist Monika Piszczelok and pianist Alina Klimaszewska. The first film of the festival was "Killer" directed by Juliusz Machulski. Actress Katarzyna Figura was our guest who presented the film and answered questions afterwards. For the second festival we moved to the Angelika Film Center, and returned to the Museum of Fine Arts in Houston for the third. Three films by Krzysztof Zanussi, who was in attendance, were presented: The Last Disc, Heart of Singing, and The Full Gallop. Since the year 2000, 8 festivals have been held at the Angelika Film Center located in the Theatre District of downtown Houston. Andrzej Wajda received the Oscar in Los Angeles for the Lifetime Achievement in Film. Among guests visiting the festival were: Olaf Lubaszenko, Filip Bacon, Jacek Bromski, Jerzy Stuhr, and Agnieszka Holland. Receptions during the festival were taking place at the welcoming Anya Tish Gallery. Some of the film festivals were conjoined with Polish artist exhibits at Anya Tish Gallery. In 2010 Angelica Film Center closed and the festival moved to the AMC 30 theater at Dunvale in Houston. The festival took place at this theater for the following 9 years. It was a very good period for the Houston Polish Film Festival, presenting great films of Janusz Zaorski, Ryszard Bugajski, Andrzej Wajda, Feliks Falk, Marysia Sadowska, Kasia Kwiatkowska, Maria Mamona (Blindness), Jerzy Antczak and the late Jadwiga Barańska. In 2020 the Polish film festival was forced to close due to the Covid 19 pandemic. In 2022, following Covid 19, AMC 30 at Dunvale closed and the festival moved to the Regal cinema where the festival has been since. The festival hosted Bożna Stachura, Magdalena Łazarkiewicz, Jan Kidawa-Błoński, Magda Boczarska and Filip Bajon. In its 25 editions the festival has presented to the Houston film community over 200 Polish feature films and over 20 short films and documentaries. The festival patrons have met over 30 Polish film directors, actors, actresses and producers. All the important films made in Poland in the last 28 years were screened in Houston including The Cardinal by Teresa Kotlarczyk, Revenge, the Wedding and Katyń by Andrzej Wajda, Hatred (Wołyń) and Wedding by Wojciech Smarzowski, Little Rose by Jan Kidawa-Błoński, March 68 by Krzysztof Lang, Aftermath "Pokłosie" by Władysław Pasikowski, and Green Border by Agnieszka Holland, to name a few. The Houston Polish Film Festival has become an important Polish cultural event in Houston.

**JB: Are there any particular moments from past Festivals that you find especially memorable?**

**ZW:** Every year the festival leaves us, the organizers, with memorable moments, such as patrons sincerely expressing their gratitude and appreciation for having the opportunity to experience Polish films on the big screen in a theater with their friends. There have also been moments which we still remember as truly remarkable. Hosting Krzysztof Zanussi, who we found to be an exceptional intellectual, charming, and so very easy to carry on a conversation with. I remember a stunning expression on the face of the Visual Arts director at the Houston Museum of Fine Arts when Zanussi talked about his films and Polish cinematography in general. A visit by director Jerzy Antczak and his late wife Jadwiga Barańska promoting their 2002 film Chopin - Desire for Love. Their presence was like two shining stars descending that evening from the nightly heaven to our cinema. They received a long lasting standing ovation. It was a phenomenal occasion connecting these two accomplished and recognized film personalities with our audience. During Jerzy Stuhr's visit to the Houston Polish Film Festival, we organized together with Anya Tish an event at her Art Gallery, "Meet Jerzy Stuhr, the actor, director and the writer". He shared his life stories and his lifelong adventure with film, television, and theater. Later he mentioned visiting Houston and the festival in one of his books. And last but not least, the festival hosted the greatly accomplished Polish and international film maker Agnieszka Holland, who the film patrons found to be an exceptionally warm and pleasant person. Some of the Polish cinematographers stayed with us at our home and others at a hotel. The opportunity we had to meet them on a personal level and get to know them was precious, for it enhanced our lives.

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**JB: What direction do you see the Houston Polish Film Festival taking in the future?**

**ZW:** The future of the Houston Polish Film Festival is dependent upon the intimate connection between Polish film enthusiasts in Houston and Polish cinematography. As long as this relationship grows the organizers will have a motive to continue the festival. It is a simple supply and demand phenomenon. I believe that raising the bar high by showing the best of what Polish cinematography has to offer will always result in enthusiastic patronage. The festival's goal, directed toward the Polish and American audiences, is to promote Polish film in Houston. However, our potential to promote the festival is limited due to the fact that access to local TV stations and the local press is prohibitively expensive. Therefore, I believe that it is imperative for everyone in the community to assist us in festival promotion by sharing the information with friends. It is very disappointing to see a lack of interest among the younger generation, because after all it is an entertainment, easy to access and occurring only once a year. After all, the festival uses the art of cinematography to advance the virtues and importance of Polish culture to our community. Nevertheless, we are determined to continue this venture with Polish film, looking forward to a brighter future. Three years ago, a passionate and dedicated couple of volunteers, dr. Adam and Kasia Ściuk joined us. They have instilled a sense of good energy and devotion to the project called Houston Polish Film Festival. In the interest of us all as well as of our children, I believe it is our shared responsibility to cultivate our national identity by getting involved and focusing on every promotion of our culture, language, and art. We all should strive to secure our community's distinctive place in this multicultural metropolis of Houston and beyond. No one else will do it for us.

**JB: What role do you think the Festival plays in shaping the perception of Polish culture and cinema in Texas?**

**ZW:** There are two Polish Film Festivals in Texas, in Houston and in Austin. The Austin Polish Film Festival is organized by the Austin Polish Society in association with the Austin Film Society. Both festivals definitively have influenced the perception of Polish culture in these two cities, in Austin perhaps more than in Houston. I say more in Austin because of the association with the Austin Film Society, which provides better exposure among American film lovers. Both film festivals, similar to other Polish Film Festivals in various cities, have predominantly Polish-American audiences with usually a small group of American viewers who are either foreign film buffs or friends of Poles who come to support the festivals. Two main factors which negatively impact the foreign film American audiences are: competition with Hollywood and subtitles reading. In conclusion, our target audience for shaping the perception of Polish culture in Texas through the Polish Film Festival should be Polonia, particularly the younger generation of Poles living in Texas as well as the second generation of Polish-Americans. Their cultural awareness of Poland can be enhanced through language, traditions, and their upbringing in Polish families. Through film they can naturally expand their knowledge of today's Poland as well as Poland throughout the twentieth century.

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**JB: In addition to running the Festival, you've served as an important leader for the Polish community in Houston. Can you tell us more about how you first came to the United States and what led you to settle in Houston?**

**ZW:** My wife and I together with our two small daughters defected from Poland on December 13, 1981, shortly before the crackdown on Solidarity (which I was an active member of). After 10 months in the refugee camp near Vienna, Austria, we were accepted to immigrate to the US, and with the help from Caritas, arrived in Salt Lake City in September of 1982. Three years later we moved to Seattle where I started residency training at the University of Washington Hospital. In 1993 I was offered a position at the Methodist Hospital Heart Center, then affiliated with the Baylor College of Medicine in Houston. This summer marked my 30 years of service at this institution.

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**JB: You served as the Honorary Consul of Poland in Houston from 2003 until 2017. How did this experience shape your engagement with the local Polish community, and what accomplishments during this period are you most proud of?**

**ZW:** Yes, indeed I served as the Honorary Consul of the Republic of Poland in Texas for 14 years. It was an incredible experience and a journey, following the former Honorary Consul Leonard Krażynski after he stepped down from this role. With time I have realized how important my position was, both inside the Polish community and outside. As the representative of Poland I started attending Consular corps meetings in Houston. My wife Grażyna joined the Consular Ladies Club which she very much enjoyed. She was elected as the treasurer of the Club. I was introduced and recognized as the Honorary Consul at all the meetings that I attended. I was also hosting representatives of the Polish government and local Polish authorities visiting Houston and Austin.

My responsibilities included providing assistance to Polish citizens traveling through Texas as well as to Polish citizens living in the area. That included helping qualified persons to receive Polish passports. As the Honorary Consul I have established great relations with the Holocaust Museum of Houston where I organized many events that brought together both Polish and Jewish communities. There were many moments, some sad and some proud, during my service as the Honorary Consul. During the mass following the passing of John Paul II, and the plane crash in Smoleńsk on April 10, 2010, where the Polish President Lech Kaczyński, his wife, and political elite perished, were sad tearful moments of my service. On the positive note, I was fortunate to help the lady who was born and raised in Bielsko Biala who with her husband from Warsaw settled in Houston following WWII. Her husband was on the transport from the Warsaw ghetto to Auschwitz during the War. He escaped by jumping off the train near the city of Szydłowiec in Poland. Walking at night barefoot in snow he approached a house at the outskirts of the city and received help from a Polish family. He stayed with the family for a while receiving doctor's care. While in Houston he and his wife exchanged letters with the family that saved his life, but eventually contact was lost. Although the lady's husband passed away, she remained vigilant in trying to find the family in Szydłowiec. She asked me if I could help. With the information she gave me I went to Szydłowiec during my trip to Poland, and with the help of the local Parish priest I was able to locate the daughter of the parents who had saved the life of the woman's husband. Although her parents had died, she, as a little girl, remembered how her parents had rendered aid to the escapee. With the priest I went to her house, told her about the purpose of my visit, and called Houston. Both ladies cried and talked for a while. Two years later during the ceremony at the Israeli Embassy in Warsaw the daughter received the medal of the Righteous Among the Nations on behalf of her deceased parents. The family from Houston was in attendance.

**JB: What challenges did you encounter in building a strong Polish community here in Houston?**

**ZW:** Building a strong community cannot be accomplished by one person; it is an effort of many. It takes time as well as the talent and hard work of many members of the community. Success requires planning that overcomes discouragement, listening to constructive criticism, and a never give up work ethic. Being active in any community creates challenges. You cannot satisfy everybody, but as long as you follow your heart and conscience and you stay honest, you will win the gratitude of the majority. Through hard work and commitment your deeds will eventually prevail. Many times, as the Honorary Consul I was told, "you are the leader, people will listen to you, you need to take a stand". I have never felt like being the leader. I felt that through my position I can better serve the Polish community.



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*Building a strong community cannot be accomplished by one person; it is an effort of many.*

**JB: As someone deeply invested in both medicine and culture, how do you balance your role as an anesthesiologist with your involvement in cultural projects like the Festival?**

**ZW:** Somehow medicine and the arts go together in many forms. Many doctors, including me, are art collectors, and frequent the symphony, opera, and ballet. Film is everyone's domain. Organizing any cultural event requires funds which can be raised through donations, sponsorships, grants from the city or institutions, and through ticket sales. If all the above fails to finance your cultural event then the last option, if you have the economic means, is for you to support and fund it yourself. Living in Seattle I learned two principals: 1. There are no government funded institutions to support your cultural event, 2. At first you are a participant of the cultural event but at some point you have to step up and be the organizer of the event. It helps tremendously if you can assist with the funding yourself.

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**JB: What message would you like to share with the next generation of Polish-Americans who want to stay connected to their roots and contribute to Polish cultural life abroad?**

**ZW:** No one else is going to show up one day and cultivate your traditions and culture for your benefit. You have to do it yourself. There is a beautiful example of an active community under the Polish church umbrella. Working together, the members of the Polish Parish continue Saturday school for children, the annual Polish May Festival commemorating the signing of the Constitution on May 3rd 1791, as well as the Harvest Festival in the fall. They not only brainstorm and organize these events, but by participating in them with their children gives the children an example to follow. It's precious. One more message to the young generation of Polish Americans. Very soon we all will celebrate Thanksgiving Day, our 'adopted' holiday when Americans commemorate their ancestors, pilgrims who because of their quest for the New World, created the basis of the American Dream. The opportunities which were created for us to join the American Dream and come to this country have roots in Poland's not that distant history. The young generation of freedom fighters during WWII, whether with the underground army (Armia Krajowa) or on the streets of Warsaw in 1944, might have dreamed of joining the American Dream or living freely in an independent Poland. They never had the chance; they gave everything, including their lives, for us. Their sacrifice gave us our opportunity, and we owe them for it. Turning our backs on them would be morally wrong.

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**JB: Finally, what do you find most rewarding about your work with the Festival and the Polish community, and what keeps you motivated after so many years of service?**

**ZW:** The sincere appreciation of people leaving the cinema after the end of each film. The smiles of joy or tears of sadness in their eyes, the signs of deep emotions expressed following the screening of films at the festival. Every year the last sentence of my welcome note in the festival's program book goes like this: "Finally, we thank you the patrons of the Houston Polish Film Festival for continuous support and encouragement which motivates and gives us inspiration in our quest for ways to benefit Houston's Polish community and enhance exposure to Polish film." Thank you for this interview and your questions.



**Toruń**



**Magdalena Burdziej**

# 10

## Rzeczpospolita Feature Interview: Kujawsko-Pomorskie Region

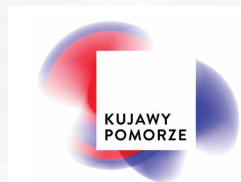
*"Rzeczpospolita" is the Polish word for "republic," a direct translation from the Latin phrase "res publica." In this section, we feature interviews with representatives of the Republic of Poland active in Texas. In this edition, we are honored to present Magdalena Burdziej, Director of the Department of International Cooperation at the Office of the Marshal of the Kujawsko-Pomorskie Voivodeship, a Polish region which hosts one of the US Army battalions. We spoke with Ms. Burdziej to learn about the recent visit of the Marshal of Kujawsko-Pomorskie to Texas and to explore potential areas for cooperation between this Polish region and Texas.*

**Jakub Bartoszewski (JB):** Thank you for taking the time to speak with us! What motivated the delegation from the Kujawsko-Pomorskie Voivodeship and the City of Toruń to visit Texas, and what were the main objectives of the visit?

**Magdalena Burdziej (MB):** For years, the Kujawsko-Pomorskie Voivodeship has maintained close cooperation with the state of Texas, and it is also developing contacts in New York. The United States has been and will remain Poland's most important partner in security matters, and there is growing interest among Polish entrepreneurs in the American market. We are also open to American investments in our region. We are committed to strengthening our connections in the United States, and personal meetings have proven to be the most effective way to establish and maintain these ties. The September delegation to Texas, which was preceded by a brief visit to New York, provided an opportunity to combine several objectives. For the first time, in addition to the local government authorities of the Kujawsko-Pomorskie region, the delegation included representatives from the City of Toruń, represented by Mayor Paweł Gulewski, and Nicolaus Copernicus University, represented by Vice-Rector Dr. Adam Kola. The primary goal of the visit was to foster bilateral cooperation between Toruń, one of the region's capitals, and the cities of Bryan and College Station. The cities signed a partnership agreement, which is the culmination of several years of collaboration between representatives of both sides.



*The United States has been and will remain Poland's most important partner in security matters, and there is growing interest among Polish entrepreneurs in the American market.*





During the visit, a letter of intent was also signed regarding cooperation between the regional government and Texas A&M AgriLife Extension, building on existing research collaborations in agriculture, education, and international youth exchanges. While in Texas, university representatives discussed opportunities for joint scholarship programs, including a meeting with the George Bush Presidential Library, where future cooperation between Texas A&M University and Nicolaus Copernicus University in Toruń was explored. Another key aspect of the visit was meetings with representatives of MD Anderson Cancer Center, where discussions focused on potential collaboration in cancer research.

The delegation also presented the investment opportunities of Kujawsko-Pomorskie as a region with significant potential, open to economic partnerships with American partners. In meetings with Consul General Andrzej Fąfara in Houston, several issues related to economic promotion of the region were discussed, emphasizing the importance of establishing a direct air connection between Poland and Houston. Contacts were also made with representatives of the Foreign Trade Office of the Polish Investment and Trade Agency in Houston. Thanks to these connections, an informational meeting on opportunities for the Polish IT sector in the United States was organized in October, attracting significant interest.

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**JB: Could you share the most important meetings or events that took place during your visit to Texas and the United States in general?**

**MB:** During the visit, the delegation took part in several important meetings with the authorities of various cities, including New York, College Station, and Bryan. These meetings provided an opportunity to strengthen bilateral ties and explore potential areas for collaboration. In addition to these, the delegation also met with a representative from the Greater Houston Partnership, which focused on fostering economic development and building stronger business relationships. The delegation had productive discussions with state officials from Texas, where key topics of interest included economic cooperation, investment opportunities, and future initiatives that could benefit both Texas and the Kujawsko-Pomorskie Voivodeship. Furthermore, the visit included meetings with representatives from the Consulates General in New York and Houston, as well as with members of the Polish Investment and Trade Agency (PAIH) in both cities. These meetings helped solidify ongoing cooperation and highlighted the importance of strengthening Poland's presence in the United States.



Another significant aspect of the trip was the delegation's engagement with prominent institutions such as MD Anderson Cancer Center and Texas A&M University. These discussions focused on potential collaboration in the fields of medical research and education, with an emphasis on expanding opportunities for joint programs and initiatives. The delegation also took the time to meet with members of the Polish-American community in Texas and Polish entrepreneurs who have established businesses in the United States. These interactions were vital in strengthening the relationship between Poland and the local Polish diaspora, and they provided valuable insights into how Polish businesses can expand their presence in the American market. Additionally, the delegation met with representatives from the NYPD and FDNY Pulaski Association. This meeting was particularly meaningful as it emphasized the shared Polish heritage within these influential American institutions, further deepening the cultural and historical ties between the two nations.

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**JB: Was this the first visit by representatives of the Kujawsko-Pomorskie Voivodeship to Texas, or have you been collaborating with this region for a longer period of time? How have these relationships developed over the years?**

**MB:** The cooperation between the Kuyavian-Pomeranian Voivodeship and the state of Texas began in 2012 with the participation of Marshal Piotr Całbecki in a visit organized by the U.S. Department of State. The purpose of the visit was to analyze the socio-environmental aspects of obtaining gas from shale gas deposits in the United States. During the visit to Texas, Dr. Jim Mazurkiewicz was contacted through the acquaintance of Piotr Doligalski with Marshal Piotr Całbecki, who had visited Texas in 2011. In 2012, during a free weekend of the Marshal's visit, the Marshal's office reached out to Dr. Mazurkiewicz to organize a program related to the socio-environmental aspects of obtaining gas from shale deposits. The program included visits to personally meet Texas landowners, energy companies, and workers in the fields and at oil & gas well sites located near schools and residential areas. This allowed the delegation to see firsthand how the energy industry and society coexist harmoniously in Texas. Later that same year, a delegation from Texas, led by Dr. Mazurkiewicz with invited guest Texas Senator Glenn Hegar, visited the voivodeship. Since then, primarily due to Dr. Jim Mazurkiewicz's involvement, the parties have met regularly, engaging the academic, business, artistic, and Polish communities in their collaboration. Among those involved was Michael Morrissey, former Deputy Chief of Staff to Texas Governor Rick Perry, who visited the Kuyavian-Pomeranian Voivodeship and Poland six times at the invitation of Dr. Mazurkiewicz.



These visits helped establish the relationship between Texas and Poland, ultimately leading to the first LNG contracts with Poland in 2017 with Cheniere Energy, a partnership that continues today. It is also worth mentioning that since 2017, artillery battalions of the U.S. Army have been stationed in Toruń, the capital of the Kuyavian–Pomeranian Voivodeship. This includes several visits by Texas troops, and the Marshal's office has maintained ongoing contacts with them, involving the soldiers in numerous regional events. In September, a partnership agreement was signed between Toruń, Bryan, and College Station. Additionally, since the spring of this year, high schools from the City of Copernicus (Toruń) and Texas have been organizing regular student exchanges.

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**JB: How do you see the development of economic cooperation between Kujawsko–Pomorskie and Texas? Are there any specific sectors or industries that offer opportunities for collaboration and synergies between the regions?**

**MB:** The Kujawsko–Pomorskie region has long been open to new markets, with local entrepreneurs actively seeking opportunities for expansion. We support these efforts through trade missions, export workshops on best practices, and by facilitating B2B meetings with companies from around the world. So far, one direct investment from a Kujawsko–Pomorskie business in Texas has been made by a company in the metal industry. However, most connections between our regions will likely focus on trade exchanges. Economic cooperation between regions like Kujawsko–Pomorskie in Poland and Texas in the United States shows promise across a range of sectors, including food production, energy, automotive, plastics, and technology innovation.

In agribusiness, Kujawsko–Pomorskie is a top agricultural region in Poland, especially in grains, vegetables, fruits, and dairy. Similar to Poland, Texas has a strong agricultural economy, particularly in beef, poultry, cotton, and grain. Cooperation here could involve the exchange of advanced agricultural technologies, innovative farming practices, and collaborative projects related to food export. Texas's large consumer market is especially appealing for Polish food producers.

In energy and technology, Texas is a leader in both renewable energy (wind, solar) and traditional sources (oil, gas). Kujawsko–Pomorskie has been increasing investments in renewable energy, particularly in wind farms and solar panels, and there is strong potential for collaboration on technology exchange, green energy investments, and joint R&D initiatives.

In the automotive and rail sectors, Kujawsko–Pomorskie is a significant hub in Poland, with major companies and suppliers that produce components for the automotive industry, such as metal parts, plastics, electronic systems, and engine components. The region is also home to PESA, Poland's leading rail vehicle manufacturer, whose trains and trams operate across Europe and Asia, including in cities such as Warsaw, Moscow, Kyiv, and Sofia. PESA vehicles are also used by Germany's Deutsche Bahn, Italy's Trenitalia, the Czech Republic's České dráhy, and Belarussian Railways, among others. Collaboration with Texas could provide opportunities to access new technologies and establish joint R&D initiatives.

The IT, startup, and innovation sectors in Kujawsko-Pomorskie, especially in Bydgoszcz and Toruń, are also growing rapidly. Texas, with cities like Austin and Houston, is known for its thriving tech and startup ecosystem. Joint efforts to support startups, establish business incubators, and organize shared events, such as conferences and exchange programs, could foster significant growth in technology and innovation.

In tourism and culture, though more indirectly, cooperation has considerable potential. Kujawsko-Pomorskie, with its rich history, tourist attractions, and traditions, could appeal to tourists from Texas, while Texas's expanding tourism industry could draw visitors from Poland by offering a wide range of experiences. The plastics industry in Kujawsko-Pomorskie also plays a crucial role, merging traditional industry with modern technology. The region's Bydgoszcz Industrial Cluster brings together companies involved in the production, processing, and recycling of plastics, and fosters innovation and technology transfer. Collaboration with Texas could facilitate knowledge and technology exchange, as well as investments in recycling and biodegradable materials. As a global center for petrochemicals, Texas supplies essential raw materials to Kujawsko-Pomorskie's plastics companies, enhancing trade and economic ties. Additionally, other established sectors with high investment potential in Kujawsko-Pomorskie include machinery, chemicals, and interior furnishings, all of which hold promise for productive Polish-American partnerships.

In conclusion, economic collaboration between Kujawsko-Pomorskie and Texas has broad potential across agriculture, energy, technology, transportation, and innovation. Experience-sharing, joint research, and strategic investments could form a strong foundation for future development in both regions. To fully leverage these opportunities, maintaining dialogue and building trust among entrepreneurs, local governments, and economic institutions in both regions will be essential.



*Kujawsko-Pomorskie is a significant hub in Poland for the automotive and rail industries.*

### **JB: During your visit, were any agreements or initiatives planned to promote cultural exchange or tourism between Kujawsko-Pomorskie and Texas?**

**MB:** We did not plan any formal agreements, but we engaged in discussions about potential activities to support cultural and tourism promotion. Next year, we plan to hold an art competition in Kujawsko-Pomorskie for children and youth focused on the theme of Texas, and we would be delighted to welcome representatives from Texas to the award ceremony to honor the young artists. Our region also has tremendous potential in music. This is where Frederic Chopin used to spend his holidays, and today, future generations of musicians train at the Bydgoszcz Academy of Music. We are eager to promote our outstanding artists, including not only classical musicians but also jazz, rock, and folk performers. Kujawsko-Pomorskie is also home to prominent visual artists—painters and sculptors—and the Fine Arts Department at the Nicolaus Copernicus University is widely known for its excellent heritage conservation program. In Bydgoszcz, a city of music, the Pomeranian Philharmonic and Opera Nova operate vibrantly, offering venues capable of hosting even the largest musical events

**JB: What message would you like to convey to Texan businesses or investors who may be interested in collaborating with Kujawsko-Pomorskie?**

**MB:** We hope that the European Union will succeed in negotiating favorable future trade terms between the U.S. and the EU. However, the ultimate success will depend on the openness of the U.S. administration to imports from the EU. Our message to Texan businesses and investors interested in collaborating with Kujawsko-Pomorskie focuses on the region's key strengths: strategic location, dynamic economic growth, industry-specific potential, and ample opportunities for joint investments. Kujawsko-Pomorskie is a rapidly developing region in Poland, offering an excellent gateway to the EU and other international markets. With its strategic position in the heart of Europe, modern infrastructure, and well-developed economic sectors, Kujawsko-Pomorskie stands as an ideal location for business cooperation and investment.

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**JB: Are there any specific projects or investment incentives in Kujawsko-Pomorskie, such as special economic zones, that would be of interest to potential investors from Texas?**

**MB:** Kujawsko-Pomorskie is a region open to investors from any country, evidenced by the numerous American-owned businesses already established here. The available investment support tools vary depending on the status of the investor. For instance, regional assistance is directed primarily toward micro, small, and medium enterprises (SMEs) that are already active in the voivodeship, with tailored regional support instruments provided for these businesses. However, for companies benefiting from support under the Special Economic Zone (SEZ) framework, the SME status requirement is waived, and sector-specific incentives are applied to match the unique investment needs.

Among the regional support instruments available are several targeted loans, including the Development Loan (Pożyczka Rozwojowa), which supports SMEs in making investments that boost productivity, implementing innovations, and enhancing market reach or product offerings. This can involve purchasing new equipment, technology, or essential components, as well as digital transformation and export-related activities. The Eco-Loan for Enterprises (Ekopożyczka dla Przedsiębiorstw) provides financing to help reduce resource consumption and waste production within companies operating in the region. The Energy Modernization Loan (Pożyczka na Modernizację Energetyczną) aims to improve energy efficiency through initiatives like upgrading production lines, introducing energy-saving technologies and installations, and enhancing the energy efficiency of facilities. There is also a Working Capital Loan (Pożyczka Obrotowa) for purchasing raw materials and goods, covering business expenses like advertising, rental, legal, accounting, and IT maintenance, and a Business Premises Investment Loan (Pożyczka Inwestycyjna) for acquiring property dedicated to business activities.

The Polish Investment Zone, through the Pomorska Special Economic Zone, offers additional support for investments within Kujawsko-Pomorskie. The level of support depends on the size of the enterprise: up to 60% of eligible costs for micro and small businesses, up to 50% for medium-sized businesses, and up to 40% for large enterprises.

The exact level of assistance also depends on the geographic location of the project. The support can be offered as a reimbursement of investment expenses, tax deductions, or coverage of two years' employment costs for jobs created by the new investment. Both qualitative and quantitative criteria apply, and each investment case requires an application developed in collaboration with the SEZ office. Any investor interested in establishing a presence in Kujawsko-Pomorskie is provided with complimentary support through the Kujawsko-Pomorskie Investor and Exporter Service Center (K-P COIE). K-P COIE offers access to a database of investment sites, liaises with landowners, and provides guidance on the support instruments available for specific investments. Additional economic information can be found at: [www.gospodarka.kujawsko-pomorskie.pl](http://www.gospodarka.kujawsko-pomorskie.pl)

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**JB: How do you plan to build on the relationships and connections made during this visit? Are there any plans for further visits or initiatives?**

**MB:** We are very hopeful that these connections will continue to grow. As a region, we aspire to become an increasingly attractive place for tourism, study, and business development. We are actively promoting our unique advantages and believe that the relationships we've established will support these efforts. On our part, we are committed to supporting the initiatives of our international partners, as we value fostering a positive approach to international cooperation at the regional level as well. Next year, we plan to organize an art competition in our voivodeship dedicated to Texas, and we're also aware of ongoing youth exchanges between our region and Texas. We would love to send our artists to showcase their talents on American stages – culture is often the best way to build mutual understanding.

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**JB: For Texans who have yet to discover the Kuyavian-Pomeranian Voivodeship, what would you like them to know about the culture, tourist attractions, and unique qualities of the region?**

**MB:** Did you know there's a region in Poland where residents and visitors alike can experience the beauty of Gothic cathedrals and castles, delve into the mysteries of astronomy, and enjoy the natural richness of numerous scenic parks? The Kuyavian-Pomeranian Voivodeship is a truly unique place on Poland's map. History and science enthusiasts should not miss Toruń, the birthplace of Poland's most famous astronomer, Nicolaus Copernicus. His family home is located right in the heart of the historic Old Town, which, with its remarkable Gothic architecture, is a UNESCO World Heritage site.



Adding to the region's intellectual legacy are two other globally renowned figures born in Kuyavia and Pomerania: Jan Czochoński, whose discoveries were pivotal for modern computing and Silicon Valley, and Marian Rejewski, who cracked the Enigma machine code, significantly impacting WWII outcomes. The economic heart of the voivodeship is undoubtedly Bydgoszcz, the region's largest urban center. Fans of industrial heritage restoration will appreciate the story of Mill Island, a unique urban renewal site. Visitors can take a boat ride along the Bydgoszcz Canal and learn about the city's history at the beautifully restored Rother's Mills complex, known for its innovative approach to conservation. Every year, Bydgoszcz attracts music lovers from near and far with its vibrant classical, jazz, avant-garde, and opera scenes, held in the highly acclaimed Opera Nova and Pomeranian Philharmonic, renowned for their outstanding acoustics and programming.

Those interested in Poland's ancient history will certainly hear about the Archaeological Museum in Biskupin, one of Europe's most important prehistoric settlements. Picturesque Biskupin is nestled among historical manor houses and palaces in the Pałuki region. Meanwhile, fans of medieval Gothic cathedrals, castles, and knights will be drawn to Chełmno Land, home to nearly 80 medieval sacred monuments.

Anyone who has already visited Kujawsko-Pomorskie will undoubtedly remember the charm and pristine beauty of the Tuchola Forest and Brodnica Lake District. For those who appreciate tranquil relaxation and top-quality medical and rehabilitation care, the saline baths of Ciechocinek and Inowrocław offer a perfect retreat.

This invitation offers just a glimpse of the rich array of experiences in Kuyavia and Pomerania. Here, one can explore medieval legends surrounded by untamed nature, admire 19th-century technological marvels in modern settings, and savor regional heritage along countless culinary trails.

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*History and science enthusiasts should not miss Toruń, the birthplace of Nicolaus Copernicus and a city featuring remarkable Gothic architecture.*





**Golub-Dobrzyń**



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## Young Professional Feature: **2024 PolChamTX 5 Under 35 Award**

*In the Young Professional Feature, we highlight the careers of young professionals of Polish origin active in Texas. In this edition, we are pleased to present the recipients of the 2024 PolChamTX 5 Under 35 Award selected by the Board of the Polish-American Chamber of Commerce in Texas, in recognition of their professional merit and contribution to the Polish-American community in Texas.*

### **Introducing the 2024 PolChamTX 5 Under 35 Award Recipients**

In recognition of their professional merit, contributions to the Polish-American community, and exceptional career potential, the Board of the Polish-American Chamber of Commerce in Texas has decided to select the following individuals as recipients of the 2024 PolChamTX 5 Under 35 Award: Gabi Czesak, Matt Romanow, Ben Smolij, Natan Sojko, Jakub Bartoszewski. Each of these young professionals has demonstrated remarkable dedication to their fields, and we are proud to celebrate their achievements and contributions. We congratulate them on this well-deserved recognition and wish them continued success in their careers.

Warm regards,

*Dr. Art Dunal*

**Art Dunal, PhD**

President & Chairman  
Polish-American Chamber of Commerce in Texas



**Gabi Czesak**

Gabi, the visionary co-founder of Design Allies, a digital product design studio, and 25wat, a growth marketing agency, stands as a prominent figure in the realm of UX/UI design. With a wealth of experience in product design, she is renowned for her innovative approach, exceptional problem-solving skills, and the development of effective marketing strategies. Gabi's career has been dedicated to crafting cutting-edge products, cultivating ecosystems that enhance customer and partner effectiveness, and even creating her own client-beloved products. Her expertise also extends to engaging marketing initiatives that capture customer attention and heighten brand awareness. Under Gabi's leadership, Design Allies and 25wat are not just companies; they serve as beacons of creativity, innovation, and unparalleled design expertise. She moved to Texas in the fall of 2023 and is now based in Austin.

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**Matt Romanow**

Matt Romanow is a Digital Product expert who specializes in creating and developing digital products for rapidly growing scale-ups, established enterprises, and startups gaining momentum. He has honed his expertise over 12 years in the industry, completing over 150 projects from idea to launch. Matt aims to work directly with owners, C-level executives, or product owners from the customer side to understand their vision, needs, and goals. He then provides services to build digital products, starting with UX and business analysis, through UI and platform/system architecture, and ending with cloud performance and DevOps CI/CD processes. He has worked on successful projects for clients such as Zoom.us, Amazon, Sapiens, Google, Sony Music, Opel, Apple, and SoftServe. He has also worked for public institutions like the Ministry of Digital Affairs and the Ministry of Health in Poland.

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**Natan Sojko**

Natan is a first-generation immigrant from Bialystok, Poland, with a B.S. in chemistry who transitioned into entrepreneurship right after college. He co-founded a glass business in Chicago, growing it from a small distribution operation into a robust glass fabrication enterprise. In 2020, he expanded the business to Houston, where he plans to upgrade the distribution into another fabrication operation early next year. Known for his forward-thinking approach, Natan is passionate about autonomous manufacturing and optimizing international supply chains, seeing them as essential to modernizing the industry.

**Jakub Bartoszewski**

Born in Gdynia, Jakub moved to the United Kingdom as a teenager on a British Alumni Society high school scholarship. He went on to study at New York University, graduating in 2019 with a Bachelor's degree, majoring in Economics, and at Texas A&M University, where he earned a Master's degree with a major in International Economics, Trade, and Energy in 2021. Jakub began his professional career in the oil & gas industry at TotalEnergies, completing a two-year Graduate Trading Program. Currently, he works as a Quantitative Analyst at an energy commodity trading hedge fund in Houston.

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**Ben Smolij**

Born near Katowice, Poland, and raised in the United States, Benjamin ("Ben") Smolij has been an active member of Polish-American civic and business organizations for over three decades. A proud Texas resident since 2000, Ben completed his education both in the U.S. and abroad. He finished high school at the prestigious United World College boarding school and obtained his Bachelor of Science degree in Business Administration from Babson College near Boston, Massachusetts. He also completed international study programs at H.E.C in Paris, France, and at the Jagiellonian University in Krakow, Poland. After a brief career in finance, Ben obtained his Juris Doctor degree from the University of Houston Law Center and joined the Texas Bar in 2013. As a corporate attorney, he advises public and private companies, private investors, financial advisory firms, and private equity clients in a variety of capital markets and M&A transactions, including disclosure and reporting obligations under U.S. federal securities laws, stock exchange listing obligations, and general corporate governance matters. Ben's broad capital markets experience includes various securities offerings, as well as extensive experience representing sponsors, investors, and underwriters in initial public offerings (IPOs) and business combinations. Ben remains involved with cross-border trade between the U.S.—specifically Texas—and Poland. He assisted in the formation of the Polish-Texas Chamber of Commerce and previously represented Polish-Texas interests on the City of Houston's Mayor's International Trade and Development Council for the Europe region, where he served in an officer capacity. For these efforts, Ben received special recognition from former Houston Mayor Anise Parker. When not tending to his busy law practice, Ben is an avid outdoorsman and enjoys traveling with his wife, Auburn, and their four children.

