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## Pierogi by the pound

Eating contest joins American Polish Festival entertainment lineup

By Cortney Casey

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STERLING HEIGHTS — If you've attended the American Polish Festival in the past, you've probably witnessed people devouring Polish food in large quantities — or maybe you've been one of them.

But you haven't experienced the likes of what's on tap for this year, as participants will vie for a trophy and cash in the festival's first-ever Pierogi Eating Contest by consuming as many of the Polish dumplings as humanly possible in 10 minutes.

"The hardest thing is finding bucket holders," joked festival Chairman Arnold Beller, referring to relief for competitors who can't keep the pierogi down.

Pierogi — and lots of them — are among a slew of delicacies offered at the American Polish Festival, put on annually by the American Polish Century Club at its Sterling Heights facilities.

At this year's celebration, set for July 8-10, organizers are particularly proud to be introducing the "Polish nacho," inspired by a similar dish popular at a festival in Milwaukee, said Brian Bonkowski, the "Polish grub" chairman.

"It's going to be kettle-cooked potato chips, and we're going to top that with ground kielbasa, sauerkraut, and we're going to put a cheese sauce over top," he explained. "And then we'll have green onions sprinkled over that. And we'll also have a horseradish, sour cream and dill mixture to go with it."

Also new to the lineup: a fried bologna sandwich with onions, "something a lot of people grew up with," said Bonkowski.

Polish sliders — kielbasa on a slider bun, topped with sauerkraut — are making a return after a successful debut last year.

"They went over great," said Bonkowski. "We sold over 200 pounds of Polish sliders, so that comes out to about 500 orders."

The Polish platter, combining golumpki, pierogi, kielbasa, mashed potatoes and sauerkraut, will be available again, as will the standard kielbasa and sauerkraut on a bun, said Bonkowski.

Dennis Sikowski, the festival's publicity chairman, dubbed the Polish food "authentic and excellent," but for attendees who are less enthusiastic about ethnic cuisine, such American food as hot dogs, French fries and chili fries will be for sale.

Spirits and beer, both Polish and domestic, will be flowing freely, and Beller said the Century Banquet Center will offer additional dining opportunities.

Though they're a major draw, edibles aren't the festival's only appeal. The event boasts one of the largest wooden dance floors in southeastern Michigan, and live music and Polish dance performances are scheduled back-to-back throughout the weekend.

"We do continuous entertainment — from the time the festival opens to the time it shuts down ... there's either live bands performing or live dancers on the floor performing," said Beller.

Scheduled entertainers include the Polish Muslims, the Kielbasa Kings, the K-Tones, New Brass Express, Jimmy K. and Ethnic Jazz, and the Wawel, Zajaczek and Halka dance ensembles.

Oldies and dance music will be interspersed with more ethnic tunes, so "it won't be a steady diet of polka and waltzes," Beller promised.

Around 45 crafters are expected to set up booths throughout the weekend, and a traditional Polish mass, hosted by the American Polish Century Club choir, will be held Sunday morning.

Several community groups will be onsite to sell raffle tickets and distribute information on their missions, and for the first time, the Henry Ford II High School Boosters will man a Vegas room Saturday and Sunday.

"That way, we can get the community involved in the festival," said Beller. "We donated our hall. One-hundred percent (of proceeds) will go back toward the school."

Beller said attendance, depending on weather, averages between 12,000 and 15,000 people annually, and Sikowski has high hopes that this year's event will exceed that.

"It's bigger and better than ever. ... We're looking at 15,000 to 18,000 people this year," he said.

The festival runs 6 p.m.-midnight July 8, 10 a.m.-midnight July 9 and 10 a.m.-9 p.m. July 10. Admission is free; parking is available for \$5 at Sterling Heights High School, on 15 Mile, west of Schoenherr, with shuttles transporting attendees to the event, and at Maple Lane Golf Course (with handicap parking, as available), on Maple Lane, south of 15 Mile. Entry in the Pierogi Eating Contest is \$20 per person; space is limited.

The American Polish Century Club is located at 33204 Maple Lane, north of 14 Mile, west of Schoenherr, in Sterling Heights. For more information, visit [www.americanpolishfestival.com](http://www.americanpolishfestival.com) or call (586) 264-7990.

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