



Michelle Genrich,
President of Polka
America Corp.

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1. How long have you been interested in polka and what inspired your interest in polka?

I've been around polka music since I was born and have been interested in it all of my life. The music is a part of my heritage since growing up with it. I'll digress here. The polka music heritage is actually embedded in me generations deep. I met my husband Kevin at the same ballroom that my grandparents courted at 70 years ago. In the winter, Kevin plays for a neighborhood band (The Benaszkeski Brothers.) That family band has been going for generations. My great-grandparents traveled many miles (10 back then) by horse and sleigh or buggy to hear the Benaszkeski family play nearly 100 years ago.

2. Where do you call home and whose music did you grow up with?

Central Wisconsin is home to me although I've lived or flown to many parts of the world while in the Air Force a total of 20 years. I grew up to the sounds of The Jolly Gentlemen, Gene Heier, Greiner Brothers and watched the weekly shows of the local bands Dick Rogers and Jerry Goetsch. This was also during the time when the Lawrence Welk shows were on every week.

3. Why is there a need for this new organization?

Polka America Corporation formed as a large-scale effort to unify the various styles of polka music and promote at a national level. One major focus is to get polkas recognized by the population at large that has no idea about the music we love. Like me, the folks at PAC want to share the great feeling we get through the music with the rest of the world. There are many avenues that we want to pursue such

as putting a polka commercial on one of the national networks, getting corporate and private funding to assist us in main-streaming, getting instruments to children who want to play polkas but their parents can't afford to buy one, getting a couple of polka courses into universities, getting scholarships to college students in the name of polka music and much more. These are all aspects that will heighten awareness and give millions of people the opportunity to decide if they want to be a part of this great culture. My guess is that once we get the word out nationally, the interest will increase many fold.

4. *What changes do you/ or the new organization feel are needed to propel polka in the future?*

First of all, and let me emphasize this, we are not here to change the music whatsoever. What we are doing is committing ourselves to seek corporate and private funding and channel it into the entire field at all levels. We feel that funding is the key to raising awareness. Both Bluegrass and the Latino societies did what PAC is doing today but they did it years ago and are nationally recognized now. If we band together, focus on the general population and incorporate the same programs that have worked for other organizations, we can only envision a positive outcome.

5. *What special abilities/ skills do you bring to PAC?*

While in the military, I was the Chairman of Volunteers for several stations with the American Red Cross over a period of 14 years. In that position, I recruited 100's of volunteers, maintained non-profit records and even expanded into awarding grants to individuals in need. While in the military, most of my military positions were at the command level which was all about executing successful programs. During this time, I also completed 5 Q years of college. I'm finally seeing that the additional education has paid off in the form of endurance needed to process the endless mounds of paperwork required to launch programs for Polka America Corporation.

6. *What interests do you have when you are away from the polka scene?*

I don't think I've been away from the polka scene too much in the last year. We take our vacations to polka festivals. My husband is in a Polish Honky style band (Pat Zoromski & the Boys from Polonia) and I'm on . the go non-stop with polka websites in an attempt to show the world that polkas do exist. So far, I've created the following sites in the last year online.

www.polkajoy.com Pat Zoromski & the Boys from Polonia (launched Dec 05)
www.thepen.polkajoy.com The Polka E News (launched Apr 06)
www.wisconsinpolkahalloffame.com Wisconsin Polka Hall of Fame (not finished)
www.polkavideos.com PolkaVideos.com (launched a few days ago)
www.polkaamericacorporation.org Polka America Corporation (launched Ju106)

I do have 5 cats that are a functioning part of my every day life and love spending time with them. Otherwise, I'll squeeze in canning preserves or syrup, read a book or veg on a good movie.