

HISTORY OF HELENA MODRZEJEWSKA POLISH SCHOOL

The beginnings of the school are dated between the years 1986-1988 when a new wave of Polish, post-Solidarity emigration reached Southern California. There was a growing need for a place where Polish language, history and traditions could be taught to young generations of Poles living far away from their homeland.

The school's founding was the direct result of the initiative of Mr. Jerzy Czarnecki and his wife Alicja Czarnecki who became the first teachers at the school as well as the founders of the Polish Girl Scouts and Boy Scouts groups. Among the first teachers were also Mrs. Marta Gaudyn-Orzechowska and Mrs. Grazyna Czescik. Mrs. Maria Romanska and her husband were strongly involved in supporting the school as well as the scouts' organization. The idea of creating a Polish school was particularly welcomed and supported by Father Jozef Karp who was also the director and founder of the Polish Center in Yorba Linda.

The school originally offered Polish language classes in three age groups with the small tuition going towards the needs of the church and school, while the teachers worked voluntarily. In 1987, a one hour religious education class was added thanks to Sister Gertruda and Sister Joanna, who with full devotion traveled on Saturdays from Los Angeles to Yorba Linda to meet the young parishioners of our church.

In the year 1988-89 Mrs. Mirosława Gwiazda-Pawelczak became the School Director while Mr. and Mrs. Czarnecki withdrew from school activities focusing solely on developing and improving the Polish scouts organization they had founded.

In the autumn of 1988, as a result of the initiative of Mrs. Grazyna Czescik, the Grechuta family and newly created PNA Group "Piast", the Polish School in Yorba Linda became an independent educational organization. The most active in this transformation were PNA Chairman Krzysztof Cieply, Financial Secretary Zdzislaw Brum and Chairman of the Polish Congress of Southern California, Mieczyslaw Dutkowski. At the same time, the School Board was established and, at the beginning of 1989, Mrs. Elzbieta Rudzinska was nominated to the position of School Director.

During the next several years the number of new students grew consistently and so did the need for new classrooms to accommodate all the students. In the years 1998-99, thanks to the enormous work and efforts of the School Parents Committee led by Mr. Andrzej Grochulski and Mr. Marek Karon, the school was able to purchase trailers which soon became classrooms for our growing population of students.

One of the milestones in the history of our school took place in the year 2000 when the school was named after widely acclaimed Polish dramatic actress Helena Modrzejewska and four years later was established as an educational non-profit corporation with seven Board of Directors members: Elzbieta Rudzinska, Danuta Dobrowolska, Włodzimierz Janczak, Magdalena Kostrzewski, Gabriela Maleszewski, Elzbieta Milligan and Father Douglas Cook.

In 2004, thanks to Father Douglas Cook, the Director of the Polish Center at that time, the Polish School was able to utilize the newly built classrooms attached to the Parish, sell the trailers and provide the students with long awaited, permanent facilities for a more friendly and safe learning environment.

After nearly 25 successful years of being the Director of the Polish School in Yorba Linda, Mrs. Elzbieta Rudzinska passed her reign in 2013 to Mrs. Kazia Kmak, who shortly after initiated the general remodeling of

the school office and refreshing all the classrooms. The following year, Mrs. Anna Kobylecki was appointed as the school Vice Director. The school, in today's form and shape, could not exist if not for the continuous support and hard work of many devoted parents. Also important is Father Henryk Noga, the Director of the Polish Center since the year 2008, whose guidance and patronage of the school greatly contributes to the school's success. The school is also fortunate to have, over the years, many individual donors and sponsoring organizations whose support is vital for its existence and constant growth.

Today, the Polish School in Yorba Linda is proud to offer Polish language, history, geography and religious education to 90 students in grades 1 through 9 with the upper class preparing students to pass the state licensed Polish language exam. There is also a language class for adults. Thanks to a highly qualified staff of 11 teachers, the school is able to provide an excellent level of academic proficiency as well as introduce its students to Polish culture and traditions through their active involvement in different school and church events, and activities outside their classrooms.

The Polish School in Yorba Linda not only plays a crucial role as a Polish language and culture educator, but also ensures that young generations of Poles born abroad grow up in the spirit of patriotism and proud affirmation of their Polish roots.