

# Lady Blanka A. Rosenstiel

**Honorary Consul of the Republic of Poland**

**Founder and President**

The American Institute of Polish Culture, Inc. (1972)

and The Chopin Foundation of the United States (1977)

Lady Blanka A. Rosenstiel (nee Wdowiak) was born in Warsaw, Poland to a Catholic family. Yet, her innocent childhood abruptly ended on September 1, 1939 when Hitler attacked Poland and initiated World War II. Her family suffered tremendously - she was exiled to labor camps where she had to survive gruelling conditions with her mother and brothers. Her father and many other relatives were killed in concentration camps.

After WWII, young Blanka was able to move to Brussels where she studied fine arts, including music, painting and sculpture. Thereafter, she performed as a singer all over Europe, modelled and lived in Spain, then moved to the United States in 1956. Her professional life in America began with promoting Polish culture through the arts and volunteering for Polish organizations. In 1967 she married, Mr. Lewis S. Rosenstiel, Chairman of Schenley Industries, who shared his time and wealth with numerous charities and philanthropic institutions. Lady Blanka also became involved with charitable organizations and altruistic endeavours with her husband.

One day her mother Irena said to her: "Blanka darling, you help so many American organizations; perhaps you should do something for Poland." These words touched Lady Blanka deeply and from that time until now, her primary passion has been to advocate for Polish culture in the U.S., along with assisting young artists and scholars in achieving their dreams. Her avid interest in the arts, dedication to helping students, and unwavering desire to promote Poland's heritage while fostering culture in her American homeland prompted Mrs. Rosenstiel to establish The American Institute of Polish Culture, Inc. (AIPC) in Miami in 1972.

Now embarking upon its fifth decade, AIPC has been involved in countless projects locally and nationally - concerts, lectures, poetry readings, radio and television programs, and book signings. The Institute collaborates with prestigious universities and cultural organizations to pave new academic outlets for sharing Polish knowledge. Through the leadership of Lady Blanka and the Institute, a permanent Kosciuszko Chair of Polish Studies was established in 1998 at the University of Virginia; the Chair was transferred to the acclaimed Institute of World Politics in Washington, D.C in 2008.

The positive image of Poland throughout the world is very important to Lady Blanka. As such, AIPC established in 1992 another superb avenue of educational support: the Harriet Irsay Scholarship. This provides one-time, financial awards to talented students - typically of Polish descent.. Moreover, the Lennox Family Award for Excellence was inaugurated in 2019, and new programs are also in development for future scholastic opportunities. Furthermore, in addition to its highly regarded, annual *Good News* publication, the Institute has translated and published books on the history of Poland and famous Poles.

Each year, AIPC organizes and hosts the famous International Polonaise Ball under the auspices of the Ambassador of the Republic of Poland. Lady Blanka's idea was to highlight

the ties between Poland and other countries, such as Native Americans, United Kingdom, Brazil, Greece, France, Japan, Italy, Argentina, Mexico and many more. Each year, distinguished guests from around the world attend the Ball, including, Dr. Jan Kulczyk; members of the Czartoryski, Radziwill, and Sapieha families; the grandson of Winston Churchill; Gersende d'Orleans; Prince Alexander and Princess Katherine from Yugoslavia; Sigvard and Marianne Bernadotte, the Prince and Princess of Sweden; HRH King Kigeli V of Rwanda; and HIH Ermias Sahle Selassie of Ethiopia. The Gold Medal - the Institute's highest distinction and presented by Lady Blanka during the Ball - has been awarded to President Lech Walesa, Krzysztof Penderecki, Martha Stewart, President Ryszard Kaczorowski and Senator Barbara Mikulski, just to mention a few.

In an extension of Lady Blanka's passion for the performing arts, she founded the Chopin Foundation in 1977 as a national non-profit organization with its headquarters in Miami, Florida, to help young, talented American pianists and make classical music accessible to everyone. To fulfill this mission, the Chopin Foundation works with schools of music, music teachers, and other organizations to identify the very best, young pianists nationwide. The Foundation supports selected pianists and their career development by providing financial support through scholarships, prizes, and performance opportunities. An annual series of public concerts further benefits the pianists and enriches the communities where they take place. In South Florida, the annual 'Chopin for All' free concerts are enjoyed by thousands of audience members each year. For the last 45 years, the Chopin Foundation and its flagship event, the National Chopin Piano Competition, have earned a respected reputation in Miami, in the U.S., and abroad. The first Competition took place in 1975 and has been held in Miami every five years since. In addition to substantial cash awards, prize winners are sponsored by the Foundation to take part in the International Chopin Competition in Warsaw, Poland. The next National Chopin Piano Competition will take place in Miami in 2025.

Lady Blanka has received numerous titles and honors; of them all, the following are those she treasures most: Doctorate of Arts *Honoris Causa* from International Fine Arts College of Miami, 1976; the Lady of the Sovereign Order of St. John of Jerusalem by the Knights of Malta, 1984; Ellis Island Medal of Honor, 1995; Cavalier's Cross of Polonia Restituta Order, 1996; Polish Commander Cross of the Order of Merit, 2004; Gloria Artis Medal, 2007; Order of St. Michael of the Wing - Dame Grand Cross, 2007; Dr. Joseph Jachimczyk Polonia Award, 2011; FIU Medallion Cal Kovens Distinguished Community Service Award, 2012; Special Solidarity Award, 2014; Outstanding Pole in the US Award, 2015, Special Dar Mlodziezy medal on the occasion of 100 Years of Independence in Poland, 2018; and a Doctorate of Law *honoris causa* from The Institute of World Politics in 2021.