



Macomb Daily staff photo by Ray J. Skowronek

Ted Radzilowski and Virginia Skrzyniarz founded the Piast Institute, a think tank and resource center for Polonia.

Polish organization stays true to county ties

By Gordon Wilczynski

Macomb Daily Staff Writer

The recently founded Piast Institute outgrew its home on Talbot Street in Detroit and moved last month to new headquarters on Casmere Street in Hamtramck.

Founded a year ago by Thaddeus Radzilowski, a scholar and former president of Orchard Lake St. Mary, and Virginia Skrzyniarz of New Baltimore, the organization is set on helping and representing Americans of Polish decent.

Radzilowski said Piast also serves as a research center and think tank aimed at preserving Polish-American heritage.

"We find creative ways to meet the modern needs of our people and to get out accurate and the most recent information on Polonia," said Skrzyniarz, former vice president for administration at St. Mary. "Piast's analysis and research focuses on social, political, cultural, religious and economic problems."

Radzilowski said Piast will benefit Ma-

comb County because of its extensive Polish population.

The organization was named after the first dynasty of Polish dukes and kings. The name was derived from a legendary ancestor who was a simple peasant.

Radzilowski said it is impossible to fully understand the history and development of Polish settlement in Detroit unless people realize it was tied to Macomb County. He said the culture and economy of Polish Detroit shows it was in a deep symbiotic relationship with Polish settlements in Macomb County.

"The earliest Polish farmers who took land in Macomb County were from many of the same families that founded the Detroit Polish colony," Radzilowski said.

"They went to Macomb because they wanted to return to the soil and they saw a big business opportunity to serve the special needs of the Polish settlement in Detroit."

He said Polish immigrants preferred to deal with Polish farmers because of lan-

guage and culture familiarities and the availability of familiar products such as duck's blood soup, horseradish root, sorrel, beets and cabbage.

"Their meats were sold to Polish butchers, who often made their own sausage products," Radzilowski said. "You would always see their meat wagons at Eastern Market, Chene and Ferry Market and the farmer's market on Conant, north of Holbrook in Hamtramck."

Radzilowski said the Polish neighborhood provided the Macomb County Polish community with cultural and religious goods and services. He said Macomb County Poles were drawn to Detroit and Hamtramck for shopping and celebrations.

Today Macomb is home to 25 percent of the Polish population of southeastern Michigan with over 150,000 residents, Skrzyniarz said. "Poles constitute the largest group of new immigrants to the area, and we're here to help them."

For more information, call (313) 891-8156.