

Memphis in May leads to Memphis in Poland

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Elle Perry Digital Producer *Memphis Business Journal*

Two years ago, the Memphis in May (MIM) International Festival honored Poland. In a few weeks, the country will return the favor.

From June 12-18, Memphis in Poland will take place in Gdańsk, a port city on the Baltic coast, and Sopot, a neighboring city.

The idea originated from Ryszard Schnepf, Poland's former ambassador to the United States. The idea was born while he was an honorary guest at MIM 2015.

According to [Jacek Dutkiewicz](#), president of The Polish-American Society of Memphis, the idea began as just a small concert and grew from there. The Polish-American Society of Memphis is coordinating the event.

Goals of the project are to highlight cultural, economic and education exchange, as well as highlighting the similarities between the places.

"There's so much in common," Dutkiewicz said. "[Poland] is so far away, but we have so many [mutual] interests: music, culture, connections in terms of history. The civil rights movement here; the Solidarity movement ... We fought in Poland against communism for human rights."

Next week, a promotional push will begin in Poland that will include five billboards, 5,000 flyers, 30 radio spots and coverage on TVN, the country's largest media outlet.

The festival will kick off with an inaugural [National Civil Rights Museum](#) (NCRM) exhibition at the European Solidarity Center and lectures from [Noelle Trent](#), director of interpretations, collections and education of the NCRM, about the museum.

The event will also include a Memphis barbecue festival featuring Chef [Edward Nowakowski](#), who formerly lived and worked in Memphis; a virtual chess tournament between Memphis' Douglass Elementary School and Jan Matejka School in Sopot; performances from Rock for Human Rights and Memphis Mix, a blues-rock-soul band formed by [Marcin Arendt](#), professor at the Rudi Scheidt School of Music and a member of the IRIS Orchestra.

The festival will also feature performances from a Polish blues band, Blues Night Shift, that competed in the 2013 International Blues Challenge in Memphis.

"The blues community in Poland is quite large," said Pawel Jankowski, vice president of The Polish-American Society of Memphis. "There are several blues magazine and newspapers."

The society raised money from its members to make the event a reality, and the event received a grant from the U.S. embassy in Poland. Sponsors include International Paper, which has operations in Poland. Other sponsors are Memphis-based Belvedere Management and Memphis-based Eco Services LLC. Support also came from the [Memphis Convention & Visitors Bureau](#) (CVB), something that Dutkiewicz said was integral to the success of the festival.

"(CVB president) Kevin (Kane) was the first person we turned to," he said. "From the get-go, he was 100 percent behind the project."

[Regena Bearden](#), marketing director for the CVB, said the office's European team will be at the festival with items such as brochures and free T-shirts.

"It's incredible that we have citizens in our community who want to get the Memphis message out and get a little bit of our culture to other places," Bearden said.

Elle Perry covers hospitality, tourism and health care.