

‘Potrzebna pomoc’ or ‘help wanted’: Local Polish newspaper struggles to find staff

At a time when other newsrooms are downsizing, Dziennik Związkowy is hiring—or at least trying to.

The Chicago-based, Polish-language newspaper has been publishing continuously since 1908. Called the Polish Daily News in English, Dziennik Związkowy is the largest Polish-language newspaper printed outside of Poland and the oldest continuously printed Polish newspaper in the world.

But editor-in-chief Alicja Otap said [the paper](#) is struggling to find staff members who speak English and Polish.

“Our demographic is shrinking. Many people are moving back to Poland for their retirement and there are not as many young people who speak the language fluently,” she said.

Located on the second floor of the Polish National Alliance, the paper currently has a 16-person staff. It covers a wide variety of current Polish, American and global affairs as well as cultural events and local news for the Chicago area. It is a subsidiary of the PNA.`

Chicago has been home to a large Polish community since Polish people started immigrating in the 1830s. According to U.S. Census Data, the population of people with Polish descent in the city-proper and the surrounding suburbs is approximately 1.5 million.



(Photos courtesy of Polish Daily News)

After English and Spanish, Polish is the [most common language](#) spoken at home in Illinois. In neighboring Missouri, it is Chinese and in Indiana and Kentucky, German is the most common language, according to an analysis Business Insider did from 2017 American Community Survey data published by the [Minnesota Population Center's Integrated Public Use Microdata Series](#) program.

An estimated 60,000 American adults relied on some form of ethnic media by 2009, according to [Ethnic Media Services](#).

“Ethnic media is a bond, a link, a key to the past and the future. It preserves a language and a culture,” said Stephen Franklin, former ethnic news media project director for the Public Narrative nonprofit.

New York City, which has the largest population of Polish people outside of Poland, also has its own Polish-language newspaper, Nowy Dziennik.

In Chicago, Otap has been working for Polish Daily News since 1984 when she was hired as a reporter. She has worked her way to the top and said she would be sad if the paper disappeared, not only for her employees but because of the paper's legacy.

Adam Kusz, network administrator at the [Polish American Association](#), said the paper exemplifies how vast the Polish population is in Chicago, but he generally reads his news online from Polish sources.

Kusz said Polish-speaking readers have a high engagement rate online because being online connects them both locally and internationally. He added that Polish Daily News is also a way to keep the Chicago Polish community engaged with events around the world.

"I know it's hard for some of the younger generations to get involved with the community because there is becoming such a language barrier," Kusz said. "Unless they are being taught at home or at one of the weekend schools that are offered, there isn't much exposure to the Polish language."



A runner carries the Polish flag during a race in Chicago in November 2019 that commemorated the country's independence. The city's Polish-language newspaper, which was founded in 1908, covered the event. Poland celebrates the recovery of its sovereignty in 1918. (Photo by Erin Dickson)

Polish Daily News is distributed in over 250 retail locations across Chicago. There are over 10,000 daily editions circulated and 15,000 weekend editions circulated. The weekend edition is published every Friday and has a variety of special sections over 72 pages.

"Ethnic communities are not homogenous and therefore ethnic media is not homogenous," said Sherry Yu, an assistant professor at the University of Toronto and co-author of a [2019 book on ethnic media](#). "So even Polish media in America will not have a singular format, but they will take all the forms and they will create different types of outlets to serve different needs within the community. across generations. It's important that we point that out."

Some efforts have been made to try and bring more exposure to

the paper from non Polish speakers as well.

“My daughter has helped translate certain articles from Polish into English,” Otap said.

“Sometimes we do that so that the article can reach a larger demographic. For certain articles, especially ones about American politics, we would like for more people to read them.”

Reporter Joanna Marszalek said although there are less Polish-speaking people in Chicago, it is still being used.

“There are Saturday schools for kids to learn Polish if they are not learning it at home,” she said. “There are plenty of people who want to keep the language thriving within the community.”

After moving to Chicago from Poland a decade ago, Marszalek said she joined the staff when there was an opening. She said she found the newspaper to be an important outlet for the Polish community.

“Chicago’s Polish heritage is rich and its influences can be seen throughout the city,” Marszalek added. “The paper is just one of the many things that Polish people have contributed to this city.”

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