## Exquisite pairings in a spirit of creative collaboration at The Polish National Home of Hartford

At the 2017 Beer Tasting Night the Polish National Home of Hartford, an exclusive event brought back by popular demand after a great success in 2016, the locally-brewed beers were delicious and the food pairings were exquisite, but the true centerpiece of the sophisticated event was the spirit of creative collaboration.

In the hundredth year since the founding of this center of Polish community in Hartford, the beautiful Art-Deco Chopin Ballroom was filled with lovers of tasty beer, gourmet Polish dishes, and good companionship. The event sold out so quickly in advance that some latecomers who attempted to purchase tickets at the door had to be unfortunately turned away. Many of them end up at the lengthy waiting list. The attendees from across Connecticut were skillfully gathered for this highly-anticipated tasting by the PNH's Event Coordinator, Asha Lassen. They were brought together for the kind of creative dinner that can only come from a place that is more than just a restaurant or a banquet hall, but is a community. To the PNH's enthusiastic "Chef Jeff," the key to the event was the collaborative atmosphere. "Back East Brewery is more than just a local brewer: they are a member here," he said, expressing gratefulness for the Connecticut brewery's eager cooperation. "Everyone knows everyone, and people are all learning to step up and see how they can contribute. There's a confidence that comes from the experience we have working together." It was this teamwork and the atmosphere of open creativity that he credited with the evening's success.

"These special dinners are the best opportunity to bring people together to explore new ideas for food and drink pairings, because that's where people are most open to experimentation," he said.

Back East Brewery owner Tony Karlowicz provided a special selection of rare beers, all locally-brewed, each with their own unique flavor, and each an opportunity for the PNH to push the envelope with special dishes.

The first rounds of ale were paired with a unique fusion of the classic and the original. Chef Jeff had spoken with longtime members about an old recipe from the 1960s, when the PNH used to serve its golabkis with brown gravy, and decided to revive this cabbage-based gravy with a unique smoked-chicken golabki stuffing. The combination was a hit with the event attendees, and the chef noted with satisfaction that members are already asking for it to become a standard on the menu.

With the next round of beers, Tony Karlowicz's famed "Intergalactic I.P.A.," the PNH paired a special revival of traditional goulash with "kopytka" dumplings made with a spin on the central ingredient. Rather than made of potato, the dumplings were made with farmer's cheese, for a light and flavorful new dish.

For the catchy "Palate Mallet I.P.A." beer that followed, the PNH felt they were given a challenge, and rose to the occasion with a unique Gyros made from Lamb Kielbasa made by a dear friend of PNH, Joe Gorski, owner of local polish store, Adolf's Meat & Sausage. And for the final dessert, alongside a hearty locally-brewed porter, Chef Jeff served hand-crafted pączki filled with Nutella —a sinfully rich delight in the spirit of "Tlusty Czwartek" Fat Thursday.

"I must emphasize that these special events are designed with a very elegant style in mind, with class that can be only achieved in our Chopin Ballroom, to create a culinary experience that can come only from a skilled chef supported by a devoted team," said Ms. Lassen. She noted with satisfaction that this team of collaborators extended from hardworking servers from Polish immigrant families, to the PNH's in-house professional Randy Kemp Jazz Trio, who provide perfectly-suited music for a stylish atmosphere.

The theme of the night was made loud and clear to all those in attendance: the spirit of the Polish National Home is a spirit of creativity and cooperation – working together to invent the new while proudly drawing on the traditional Polish heart and soul. As an organization built around its members, Chef Jeff said that most of the best ideas come from simply sitting and talking with members and volunteers. Ms. Lassen said that with 18 new members joining our Polish Home family that evening, there will be many more ideas to come. Ms. Lassen was proud to announce two new additions to this year's special event calendar, with an Oktoberfest dinner on October 6<sup>th</sup>, and a return of the PNH's sophisticated Venison Dinner on November 10<sup>th</sup>. From brewers to ballroom dancers, from proud immigrants to homegrown lovers of Polish culture, all are welcome at the Polish National Home of Hartford.

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