

A BREEDING GROUND FOR BUSINESS TALENT

"Guild members are not only pioneers of Polish entrepreneurship, but also patriots cherishing traditions," says

MAREK NOWAK, Prime Warden of the Cech Rzemiosł Metalowych i Innej Przedsiębiorczości (Guild of Metalworkers and Other Trades). In an interview for "Polish Market", Marek Nowak also points out that the organisation is keeping up with the times, providing qualified workers for the market, including in trades involving modern technologies.

During the Honorary Pearls Gala, the Guild of Metalworkers and other Trades was granted by the Editorial Staff of "Polish Market" a distinction which refers to the 100th anniversary of Polish independence - "for promoting crafts traditions, patriotic values, the work ethos and educating young generations."

We were very proud to receive this distinction. It proved that the Editorial Staff appreciated the values fostered by Polish guilds, the oldest social and trade structure in Poland, which has been the guardian of our national, local and vocational identity. For centuries guilds have been the source of role models, work ethos, patriotic traditions, and responsibility for educating new generations. Guild members, as pioneers of Polish entrepreneurship, have always stressed their patriotism and involvement in upholding traditions. This is clearly apparent in the fact that guilds have their banners. Our guild banner is a symbol of devotion to conscientiousness, work, patriotism and religion.

The highest distinction for guild members is Kiliński's Sabre, as this craftsman was the one who led other guilds and burghers to revolt against the partitioning powers on 16 April 1794, expressing his patriotism and devotion to freedom. In the past, guild members were responsible for defending town walls. Today, as members of the Guild, we can express our patriotism in other ways: by paying particular attention to the quality of our products and teaching vocational skills to the young generation - as in the past when craftsmen's products were subject to thorough inspection by guild authorities - respecting the work ethos, and providing qualified workers indispensable for Poland's



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economic growth. It is worth noting that the Guild of Metalworkers had its share in the rebuilding of Warsaw and the reconstruction of the Old Town, which also had its patriotic dimension. The Guild's membership fees were allocated for the rebuilding of a historic tenement house in the Old Town, destroyed during the Warsaw Rising in 1944. The building is currently a Guild Hall used by our members. It is situated in the vicinity of the historic workshop of our spiritual leader, Jan Kiliński.

The Guild of Metalworkers, one of the oldest in Poland, was established at the turn of the 15th and 16th centuries, and since then these trades have undergone remarkable technological transformation. And what is today's Guild of Metalworkers like?

I am afraid that the majority of the public associate metalworking with a blacksmith in the countryside, or with

simple crafts or artistic works, and this is still a popular view. But the reality is far from this archaic perception. Our Guild brings its members together in 13 sections. Many of the members have developed businesses run previously by their fathers and grandfathers. They have been running their businesses on average for 40 years. The businesses are among leading modern enterprises, which have patented innovative technological solutions and equipment. Among our members are businesses whose products for the automotive industry meet the highest international standards and are available all over the world. They cooperate with major international business partners. They deliver to Polish banks technologically advanced equipment which meets the highest security standards. They are authorities in the security products sector, and leading manufacturers of high-security locks. They are major Polish and European suppliers of medical devices and products based on their own solutions, having patented their designs, which is a substantial contribution to the growth of Polish healthcare services, and they are experts in numerous disappearing trades which are still important for the economy. It would seem that we are similar to other enterprises, as we are employers, and we have all the necessary certificates to manufacture our products. But only guild members prove their vocational qualifications for practicing a specific trade by learning practical skills under the supervision of other guild members, passing apprentice examinations and master examinations, after which they can teach new apprentices. One of the most important tasks of guilds is vocational teaching and introducing qualified workers to the market. They are the only employer organisations which hold apprentice exams and master exams, and issue certificates confirming qualifications which bear seals with the Polish national emblem.

Following years when there was a gap in systemic solutions supporting the growth of Polish small business, we can currently witness positive changes concerning the guilds' priority task involving vocational training. We need to realise that Polish guilds represent the economic potential of approximately 300,000 businesses.

The economy needs highly qualified staff, including specialists in disappearing occupations, precision locksmiths, electroplaters, highly qualified welders, mechanics, and machining-tool operators. According to statistical data, guild members are currently training approximately 100,000 students in over 150 occupations. Over 2.5 million apprentice certificates and nearly 600,000 master certificates were issued between 1945 and 2017. The first non-public schools established on the initiative of guilds were opened in 1993, and were the expression of our community's commitment to education. Guilds and crafts chambers are opting for creating new vocational schools. Apprentice-Master relations, the combination of practical training under contracts of employment at workshops, the theoretical knowledge acquired at schools, and the role of guilds as intermediary institutions, are all arguments in favour of learning a vocation in a form proposed by guilds.

Nearly 6,000 students currently attend 38 vocational schools run under the auspices of our organisations. 1,132



From left: Mirosław Kaczmarek, Elder of the Guild of Metalworkers and Other Trades, Marek Nowak, Chief Warden of the Guild of Metalworkers and Other Trades, Joanna Fabisiak, parliament member, Krystyna Woźniak-Trzosek ("Polish Market"), Zbigniew Kłos, Elder of the Guild of Metalworkers and Other Trades

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teachers have found employment there. So far, over 14,000 students have graduated from these schools.

In September 2018, the employees and employers from the Social Dialogue Council expressed their approval for the directions of changes proposed by the Government in the draft Act on amending Education Law, the Education-System Act and certain other Acts. The changes should be regarded as positive, as they are introducing solutions supporting a closer link between education and the labour market, making employers' opinions more prominent as regards the preparation of curricula in vocational education, and facilitating the acquisition of sector-specific qualifications required for working in a given occupation. Our Guild and the whole community will endeavour to fulfil their tasks successfully, educating young generations for the Polish economy consistently and with a sense of responsibility.

Going back to the beginnings of guilds, we have our share in the success of the Pearls. We were a grain of sand in a shell which gave birth to today's Pearls of the Polish Economy.