

# Fort Wayne's sister city seeks tourists, foreign investment

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(Second in a six-part series)

In a climate of greater private initiative and far less interference by the central government, residents of the provincial city of Plock are actively engaged in marketing their city.

During my visit to the Plock Agricultural Advisory Center (rural extension office), employees wasted little time in attempting to market the favorite regional condiment, a black currant meat sauce. Their mid-morning sales pitch even included a tasting by this unsuspecting and still groggy American reporter. With a horseradish kick that had the effect of a cup of strong Colombian coffee, the sauce snapped me to attention.

An American marketing expert would probably advise them the sauce would be better marketed with the cushion of a hearty meal, preferably at a later time of day.

The eagerness of the employees in pushing their local product is reflective of Plock in general. Polish farmers, city executives and industrial managers are joined together in search of foreign investment and export opportunities.

Tourism, a tradition of private farming, the largest petrochemical refinery in Poland and generous terms for foreign investors are the city's chief selling points. The sister city of Fort Wayne, Plock is surrounded by lakes, and a bed and breakfast tourism industry is developing. Furthermore, the city is located in the heart of the Polish breadbasket, with private farms accounting for more than 90 percent of all farms. In addition, Plock is home to the Mazovian Refining and Petrochemical Works, which processes oil from the Soviet Union into fuel for 80 percent of Poland. Finally, an attractive package of incentives has already convinced the American clothing manufacturer Levi Strauss and Co. to build a production plant in Plock.

But Plock's aggressive selling strategy is also directed toward addressing the city's blights, such as unemployment and pollution, each a legacy in its own way of the Communist system which controlled the Polish economy from the late 1940s. Bloat-ed payrolls at unprofitable enterprises are not uncommon in Plock, and whole industries are going bankrupt now that the government no longer guarantees employment. The unemployment rate in the region is about 10 percent and rising. One of the city's major industries, a harvest combine manufacturer, is closing down because the combines are too big for Poland's private farms, which average only 14-15 acres. The combines had traditionally been sold to Poland's larger state and collective farms, but they are being broken up as part of the Polish government's efforts to privatize the economy.

With a dearth of local private capital, the city is looking abroad for foreign investors to finance new projects. The landing of the large American jeans manufacturer Levi Strauss is a coup for this city of 130,000. The plant, which is scheduled to open in November, will employ over 1,000. It will be the largest Levi Strauss plant in Europe and by exporting 70 percent of its output will bring in badly needed foreign currency.

For the city's agricultural specialists like Slawomir Sikara, director of the Agricultural Advisory Center, foreign investment is crucial to redressing an imbalance between food production and food processing facilities.

"The problem is that Plock is a great production area, but



**POLISH MAYOR** — Elected democratically last year, Plock Mayor Andrzej Dretkiewicz faces the task of developing Plock. He sits under the emblem of the newly democratic Poland, an eagle with the crown restored.

there are too few production plants. Much of our fruit and vegetable crop rots for lack of storage," he said. "There are too few milk processing facilities, and little refrigeration makes supply low and price high. We need improved technology to increase supply, and for this we need foreign investment."

With the help of two American specialists sent by the Department of Agriculture, Plock is considering the construction of cold storage facilities, a dairy processing plant and a potato chip factory.

Another problem that needs to be addressed immediately is pollution. The petrochemical plant and other industries spew out smoke and contaminate the Vistula river, which runs through Plock south to Warsaw. On a walk through the city, Agnieszka Lakoma, a reporter for the local newspaper, lamented the years she spent growing up in Plock, breathing the air and drinking the

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water. She told me her blood contains high amounts of phenol, a poisonous compound used in making plastics.

As mayor of Plock, Andrzej Dretkiewicz confronts the dilemma of promoting development in an ecologically sound manner. The factories have no money to upgrade pollution control, yet they must continue to operate because they employ so many people. The petrochemical works is a case in point: it is one of the chief polluters, but it also provides jobs for 8,000 workers.

Dretkiewicz sits in his office overlooking the Plock city square, pondering such problems. An eminently practical man, the mayor was elected a year ago. He did not run on any party platform but rather emphasized what he sees as the reality of Poland in the 1990s: Money talks.

"The law is money. This is the economic law," he said. "All parties supported me because they want a

better situation for Plock."

Part of the mayor's task is to gain a more equitable share of the economic pie for Plock. For example, the petrochemical works still sends 90 percent of its profit back to the central government. However, as Sikara notes, laws calling for decentralization of industry could also work to Plock's disadvantage if they force Plock to take the responsibility for financing institutions long supported by the state, like health and education.

"Certainly, we must change laws at the government level (to enable Plock to retain more of its earnings), but the flip side, which hurts us, is that at the same time we will also have new laws on schools and hospitals because they are state-funded," he said.

For now, it is easier for the City Council to deal with less contentious matters like the changing of street names. At a council subcommittee meeting, members were unanimous in their decisions to shed street names adopted during the years of

Soviet control and replace them with Polish titles. In a vivid rejection of the Communist legacy, members voted to change the name of Stalingrad Street to Marshal Pilsudski Street to commemorate the Polish leader of the 1920s and 1930s. The Street of the Cuban Revolution was renamed in honor of a famous Polish industrialist.

At the meeting, Zenon Bylewski, a stocky man who is manager at the petrochemical plant, pulled no punches in showing his disdain for the way in which Poland was treated. "Stalin killed Poles and Russians, and we have a street named after him! We don't want that."

Plock residents have undertaken the arduous and complicated task of restructuring their city, guided by the belief that, though the path may be difficult, at least they will be more in control of their destiny. Who knows, if Plock succeeds, DeKalb and Noble County residents may find Polish black currant meat sauce on the shelves of local markets.