

Bush visit fills Oakland County residents with pride

BY ANN ZAKIEWSKI
STAFF WRITER

The crowds of people who flocked to Oakland University Thursday brought more with them than a desire to catch a glimpse of the president. Displays of patriotism — American and Polish — were evident everywhere. Many people came draped in red, white and blue clothing decorated with glittering pins. A few dressed in traditional Polish costumes, giving the long procession making its way across campus to the recreation center the colorful appearance and enthusiasm of a parade.

And, although small flags and T-shirts commemorating the official state visit of President George W. Bush and Polish President Aleksander Kwasniewski were souvenirs taken from the event, many will remember the overwhelming sense of pride that rippled through the arena.

"It was probably one of the

most patriotic and memorable events a Polish-American could attend," said Dianne Morje of Rochester. "It was great to have both presidents bonding as friends, and supporting a common cause as a result of 9/11."

Morje's parents came to the United States from Poland in the 1940s with nothing "but hopes for freedom and hopes for a good life."

As she watched, Morje was pleased to note her 9-year-old son Nathan listening intently to messages of Polish and American unity.

Although her only connection to Poland may be an affinity for pirogues, Fran Dorn of Auburn Hills also enjoyed the event. She spent more than 20 years working for the Republican Party in Oakland County and said the program put a positive light not only on the local area but also the president.

"I thought it was one of the best rallies I've been to. What impressed me was how warm and friendly they were. I think

its dynamic he (Bush) tells us the message America needs to hear," said Dorn.

Dorn and Morje weren't alone in their support. The appreciative crowd of 4,000 cheered enthusiastically several times as both presidents expressed a desire to continue working together toward what Bush called a "vision for a peaceful world."

Sandra Wiecezorek Nieman of Rochester Hills has a firm connection to her heritage, even taking Polish folk dancing lessons as a child, but before the rally said she never realized "how much of an alliance we have with Poland."

While the partnership between the two countries was the common theme, each president made several references to the ongoing war on terrorism.

Bush's fighting words were largely well-received but caused a handful of protesters to stand and, while brandishing signs with inscriptions like "thief," loudly chant anti-war sentiments. Bush, unfazed, continued

talking as Secret Service agents whisked the group away.

"What was really meaningful about today's event was that he stood up to them," Dorn said. "He wasn't ruffled and didn't even flinch."

Vinlander Moudgil, interim vice president for academic affairs and provost of the university, called the protest "ill-placed," but called it in no way tarnished the day.

"This is a very historic moment for Oakland University

and our region of Oakland County to host two sitting presidents of great democracies," he said. "It was a show of unity ... and that we all stand together as a nation."

Roughly one in 10 Americans claim Polish heritage. At the American Polish Cultural Center in neighboring Troy, Bush and Kwasniewski attended a luncheon following the Oakland University forum.

There, hundreds of people swarmed the center when free

tickets to the Rochester event were released Tuesday afternoon. Many staked out spots in line far in advance but a few lucky people avoided the wait, including Morje, who got a last-minute invitation from her neighbor.

"The Polish community is a very proud, proud community. I think they were just extremely happy to have those presidents there and experience that. Whoever was there felt very privileged," she said.

Democrat, Republican opponents set sights on Knollenberg

BY DAN WEST
STAFF WRITER

Both of his opponents in his re-election campaign have unleashed strong criticism against Congressman Joe Knollenberg in recent weeks regarding high-profile issues.

Democrat David Fink of West Bloomfield charges Knollenberg's recent votes involving new corporate responsibility laws favor companies which are based overseas.

Meanwhile, Knollenberg's Republican challenger, Bart Baron of Troy, contends the congressman's support of an aid package to the people of southern Lebanon two years ago helps an anti-American terrorist organization.

Knollenberg, a Bloomfield Township Republican, defends both actions, claiming his opponents don't know the whole story. Knollenberg and Baron are facing each other for the GOP nomination in the 9th Congressional District in the Aug. 6 primary. The winner faces Fink in November.

Fink was critical of Knollenberg's votes against a corporate reform bill amendment that would prohibit corporations with headquarters out of the country from receiving government contracts. Fink said some companies move

overseas to avoid paying taxes and this vote is unfair to U.S.-based companies that pay a fair share of taxes.

"In a time when we need more corporate responsibility and more corporate accountability, Rep. Knollenberg voted to allow big companies that avoid paying taxes to get government contracts," Fink said. "He has not done his part to protect Americans from corporate greed."

Knollenberg spokesman Chris Close said Knollenberg's votes were to help constituents and not corporations. For example, there are 175 people employed at a Detroit office of Accenture, a consulting firm based in Bermuda that does business with the U.S. government.

"This provision would not crack down on corporations as much as it would cost jobs in his district," Close said. "Of course the congressman wants businesses to stay in the U.S., but he doesn't want people to lose their jobs."

Baron questions Knollenberg's 2000 support of a \$268 million in a USAID package designed to help the impoverished people in southern Lebanon who are controlled by Hezbollah, a terrorist group with some links to Al Qaeda and a history of involve-

ment in anti-American activities.

Baron was to organize a protest of Knollenberg's actions during Saturday's 9th Congressional Committee Picnic in Rochester Hills.

Close said the criticism against Knollenberg is unfounded, based on comments by USAID administrator Andrew Natsios to a congressional subcommittee.

"Just let me say categorically the funds from this program do not go to assist or through Hezbollah," Natsios said in May 2001.

Close added the USAID package takes away from desperate conditions in southern Lebanon so it does not become a terrorist breeding ground.

The 9th Congressional District is a largely new one following redistricting. It covers much of Oakland County, including Auburn Hills, Beverly Hills, Bingham Farms, Birmingham, Bloomfield Township, Farmington, Farmington Hills, Franklin, Keego Harbor, Lake Orion, Oakland Township, Orchard Lake, Orion Township (part), Rochester, Rochester Hills, Troy, Waterford and West Bloomfield.

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