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Profile High Honors

New Jersey native John Lynch left the U.S. for Poland in 1991 to help rebuild after Communism fell. He never left. Almost 25 years later, he has received Poland's highest civilian award for his efforts.

By Sara Lavenduski

As a young, idealistic business school graduate, full of energy, looking for adventure, John Lynch made one decision that drastically altered his life's course.

A native of New Jersey and a graduate of the MBA program at the Wharton School at the University of Pennsylvania, Lynch is the founder, president and Keeper of the Faith at LYNKA, a promotional apparel company located in Krakow, Poland, that offers garments, caps and bags and in-house decoration. But in 1991, freshly graduated from Wharton, he decided to give of his time and hard-earned expertise to the emerging market in Poland.

Two years before, on June 4, 1989, Poland held its first democratic elections since the country had become a Soviet satellite state toward the end of World War II. "Poland really initiated the fall of Communism in Eastern Europe," says Lynch. "The elections took place in June 1989, the Berlin Wall fell in August, Communism ended in Czechoslovakia before the end of the year. I was one of the first Americans in Poland after

the Wall fell, as part of the MBA Enterprise Corps, and I decided to stay permanently to help the Polish people. I came over to witness history, and for an adventure. I never imagined that Communism would fall in my lifetime. So when it did, I went over to help rebuild."

In 1992, Lynch founded LYNKA in Krakow as a traditional distributorship specializing in apparel. Though Poland certainly wasn't thought of as a crossroads of enterprise back then, says Lynch, its location has served his company well as a European business. "While Poland is considered part of Eastern Europe, it actually borders Germany to the east," he says. "Geographically, it's more Central Europe, so it's convenient for servicing the entire continent."

But when Lynch first founded LYNKA, infrastructure was either in its infant stages or completely absent. Phone lines barely existed, to say nothing of delivery services. New employees worked together to build office furniture from scratch. Lynch also had to learn a culture and a language far different from



John Lynch, founder and president of LYNKA, receives the Gold Cross of Merit from Polish Secretary of State Olgierd Dziekonski at the Presidential Palace in Warsaw.

his native English. But even as he mastered the language, experienced employees were hard to come by. When he decided to offer screen-printing, for example, he had to instruct new employees from the ground up since there weren't any trained printers in the area.

"It was an economy absolutely devastated by Communism," he says. "There were no staple items in stores. People were still queuing every day for groceries. There were no Western companies here yet, and only the most basic supplies were available. But we saw an opportunity to offer promotional products to new companies looking to mar-

ket themselves."

In the years since his arrival, Lynch also founded the American Chamber of Commerce in Krakow in 1994, and has attracted numerous American investors to Poland to further stimulate the economy, among other achievements on behalf of the Polish people.

Almost 25 years after Lynch first arrived in Poland, he has received national recognition from Bronislaw Komorowski, the president of Poland, for his entrepreneurial efforts. Nominated on behalf of the Polish-American business community through U.S. Ambassador to Poland Stephen Mull, and the American Chamber of Commerce in Krakow, Lynch was one of nine nominees who were recently honored with the president's Gold Cross of Merit, the highest award for both Polish civilians and non-Poles.

"Very few people would have left the comforts of the Philly-Jersey area in 1991 to go to a place that was very dark to help rebuild," Lynch says. "So this award is really a nice feather in my cap."