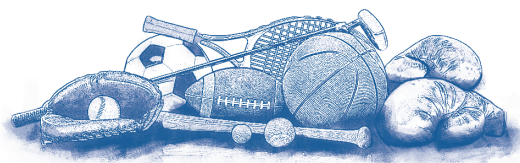


# UP FRONT



## WESTERN PENNSYLVANIA SPORTS MUSEUM

By Anne Madarasz, Director of the  
Western Pennsylvania Sports Museum

### Pysanky on Ice

Traditionally, Ukrainians have found time in the week before Easter to create highly decorated eggs — pysanky — that celebrate the resurrection of Christ. Pysanky's origins date back to a time before Christianity when the egg, a symbol of life, held great power. With its unending surface, the egg represented eternal life. Eastern Europeans believed that the eggs brought blessings of luck to the maker or receiver — the more eggs made, the less evil in the world. As Christianity spread, this symbolism became associated with religion and with the Easter season, a time of rebirth both on the calendar, with spring, and in religious practice, with the resurrection.

The art of pysanky, which comes from the Ukrainian verb “to write,” is represented in the History Center’s collection. A dozen eggs made by Ukrainian American Helen Timo are displayed in the *Special Collections* gallery. Timo’s mother, who came to the United States in 1905, taught her the art, but Helen updated the process, using a pen point instead of the



Lynda Ellis drew on her heritage to share the good luck and positive symbolism of pysanky with her sons' favorite team, the Pittsburgh Penguins.

HHC Collections, gift of Pittsburgh Penguins, 2016.118. Photo by Liz Simpson.

traditional stylus or *kistka*, to draw intricate designs on the eggs. Using a wax resist method, the eggs feature natural and religious symbols and markings in both traditional and more modern colors. The eggs are often given as gifts to share good fortune and ward off evil.

In 1992, Lynda Ellis, the grandchild of Ukrainian immigrants, drew on her heritage to share the good luck and positive symbolism of pysanky with her sons' favorite team, the Pittsburgh Penguins. The Pens had just won their second Stanley Cup when a package arrived at the team's office. Inside were pysanky, created by Ellis. In a letter sent along with the eggs, she explained the significance of their design and the colors they featured. Each

egg is distinguished by the band that encircles it, which represents the continuous thread of life and protects the recipient from evil. The *Ptakhy*, or bird on the egg, which is of course a penguin, is a “talisman of coming good fortune, and denotes exultation and vigilance.” The Penguins colors also have meaning, white for purity, yellow (the color of light) for youth and happiness, and orange for endurance, strength, and worthy ambition. Ellis also stated her wish that the gift of these eggs would bestow, “a long life, good health, good fortune, and great strength” upon the team and its members.

Ellis learned the art of pysanky from her grandfather, Andrew “Jedo” Weryha. Growing up in Greenfield, where she attended

### Pysanky eggs made by Helen Timo on display in *Special Collections*.

HHC Collections, gift of Timo Family, 2004.146. Photo by  
Nicole Lauletta.





St. Rosalia Church and school, she continued to make traditional eggs. In adulthood, she became so adept that she sold her eggs at festivals in Western Pennsylvania and Indiana, where the family moved in 1995. But the eggs for the Penguins were special: she made them to pay tribute to the team's back-to-back championships and to support her sons, who had become huge fans. Guided by her heritage, she shared these symbolic objects with the Penguins, to protect them from evil and bring them continued good fortune.

Ellis' gift is just one example of how fans bind themselves to their teams. Sometimes it is as simple as wearing the color and the uniform of the team to demonstrate affinity and loyalty. In the 1970s, Franco's Italian Army called upon their Italian heritage to demonstrate their support of rookie running back Franco Harris. In this instance, Ellis shares her belief system and an important symbol of her Ukrainian identity with the Penguins. Often made as gifts of the Easter season, these eggs became gifts in recognition of the Penguins accomplishments and a way for Ellis, as she says in the closing line of her letter, to "Thank [the Penguins] for being such a wonderful team and bringing so much to our great city."

Ellis passed away in 2013, but she did see her Penguins rise again and triumph in the 2009 Stanley Cup. Her sons remain fans and occasionally make it back to Pittsburgh to see a game. Hopefully the eggs, which will be featured in the new Hockey gallery of the Sports Museum later this year, continue to bring good luck to the team.



**Though the patterning on this egg is traditional, the coloring is more modern.**

HHC Collections, gift of Timo Family, 2004.146.8.  
Photo by Nicole Lauletta.

**The egg for Mario Lemieux is slightly larger than the others to indicate his importance to the team.**

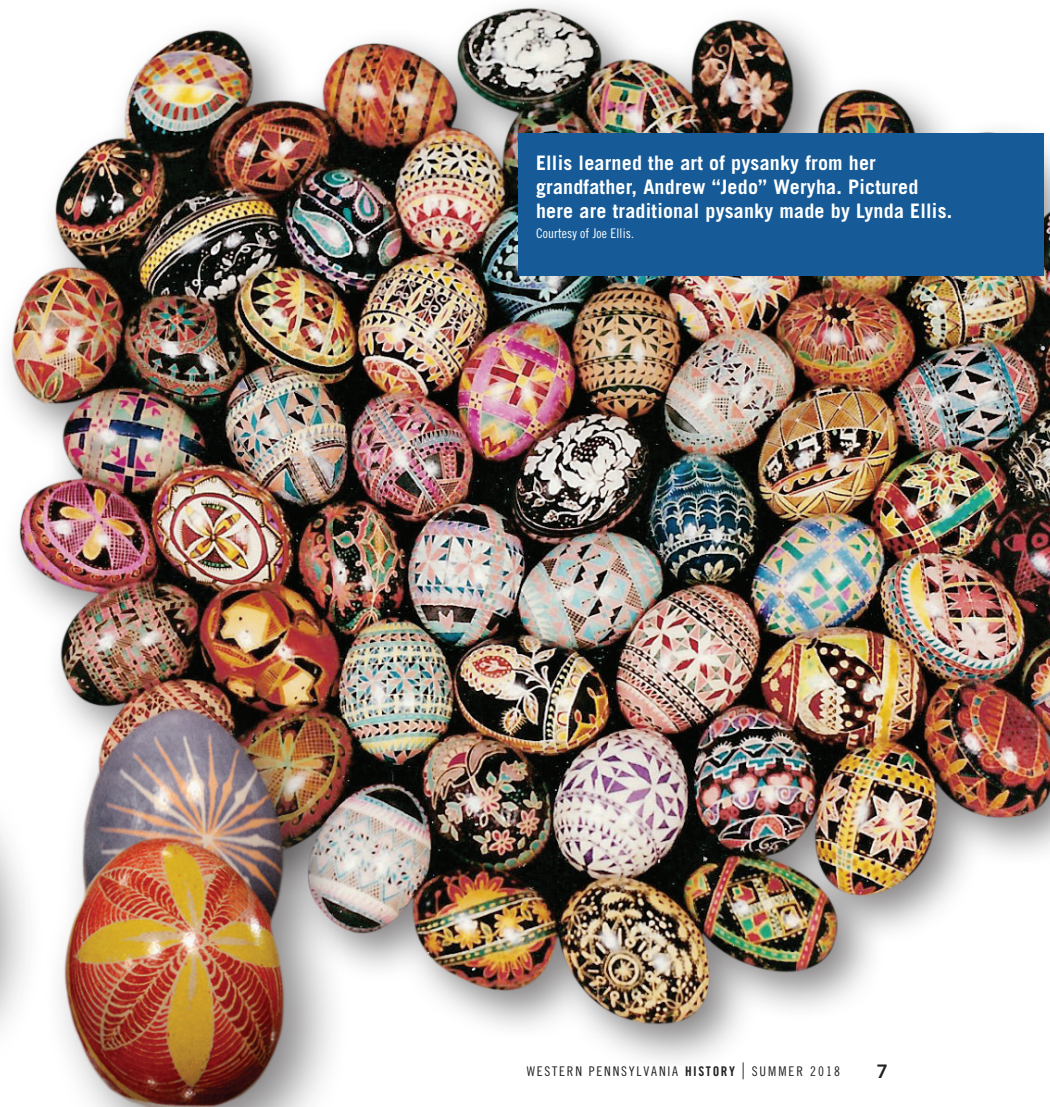
HHC Collections, gift of Pittsburgh Penguins, 2016.118.1j. Photo by Nicole Lauletta.

**This egg blends traditional religious and natural imagery.**

HHC Collections, gift of Timo Family, 2004.146.14.  
Photo by Nicole Lauletta.

**This egg, done for former Head Coach Scotty Bowman, shows the band that encircles each egg and represents "the continuous thread of life."**

HHC Collections, gift of Pittsburgh Penguins, 2016.118.1b. Photo by Nicole Lauletta.



**Ellis learned the art of pysanky from her grandfather, Andrew "Jedo" Weryha. Pictured here are traditional pysanky made by Lynda Ellis.**

Courtesy of Joe Ellis.

