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Darius and Girėnas...Lithuania's Basketball Stars...Memorable Visits

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P E R S P E C T I V E S

I'm not very tolerant of the summer. I don't exactly take to the sweltering heat, uncertain weather patterns, the crowded tourist traps, or even the mile-hikes.

Unfortunately, that's how my summer began. We started June with a ride to Boston through what seemed to be a hurricane. There, we were lucky to see the storm blow over and be given the opportunity to explore the Navy Yard, the U.S.S. Constitution, and walk down old, cobblestone roads. The Bunker Hill Monument was amazing. What impressed us was the history of Boston — intact and still alive.

Our next road trip was Washington, D.C. Here, again, the weather not only followed us but, weighed us down step by grueling step. Did I mention that I didn't like mile-hikes and sweltering heat? How about both of these combined? Peaking at 100°, walking 12 blocks from our hotel, Washington swam before our eyes.

Through the haze, The Folk Festival in the National Mall was really very enjoyable. Heavily-costumed participants danced and sang throughout the day. Watching them, gave me this blast of energy to join with them in a dance or two.

When we sat down to plan our next sights to see, I felt as though I was the only one to harp on the prospective heat and associated nuisances. The kids actually looked forward to the next trip. They commented about how boring it was to just lay around watching TV or bicycle up and down the streets. Even my youngest (who seems to request a pool every time we telephone hotels) said he couldn't wait for the next trip.

Finally, my oldest put it all in perspective for me. He said knowingly, "Mama, if the freedom fighters in Lithuania and Revolutionary soldiers of America could put up with snipers, biting flies, unsanitary conditions, the heat, and constant walking and hiding to preserve their culture and history for all to see, then we can put up with it too, and enjoy what many fought for." It just goes to show you.

Rasa Ardyjs-Juška

Editor

B R I D G E S

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BRIDGES

*On the cover:
A section from a monument
in the Lithuania Triangle
Park in Brooklyn, New York
honoring the Lithuanian-
American pilots, Stephen
Darius and Stanley Girėnas.
Photo by Algis Norvila*

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BRIDGES - 20 YEARS AGO

Twenty years ago, BRIDGES reported which areas in Lithuania were open to visitors from the West;

"The areas in Soviet-occupied Lithuania are: the city of Vilnius and travel to it by rail and air; direct rail transit on to Grodno-Vilnius-Leningrad route; the city of Druskininkai and travel to it by rail from Vilnius and by Intourist auto transport; the city of Kaunas with travel to it by Intourist auto transport with a one-day stop in Trakai and Prienai."

Twenty years later, visitors to Lithuania travel about the country experiencing its age, beauty, and welcoming people. This aspect of independence has allowed Lithuania to be seen in all her ancient glory.

Edward W. Baranauskas

Remembering Darius and Girėnas

The year 1998 marks the 65th anniversary of the Trans-Atlantic flight of the two Lithuanian-American fliers, Steponas (Stephen) Darius and Stasys (Stanley) Girėnas. Their attempted non-stop flight from New York to Kaunas ended in tragedy when they crashed into a forest near the town of Soldin, located about 70 miles northeast of Berlin. At that time Soldin was part of Germany, but when the victorious Allies re-drew the map of Europe following the end of World War II, it became part of Poland.

The biographies of these two brave men are similar in many ways. Both were born in Lithuania in the 1890s, and both immigrated to the United States before the First World War with other members of their families. They settled in Chicago, and later had their last names changed. Both joined the army when the United States went to war against Germany in 1917.

Stephen Darius was the son of Jonas Jucevičius-Darašius. (It was not unusual in Lithuania at that time for a family to have two last names separated by a hyphen.) After his father died, his mother married a gentleman named Degutis. Adjusting to their new life in Chicago, his brothers and sisters took the name of Jucevicius and changed it to Jucius. Stephen, on the other hand, decided to take Darašius as his surname, but changed it to Darius in 1917.

Stanley Girėnas was the youngest of 16 children of Juozas Girskis. His parents and most of his

brothers and sisters died during his childhood. He came to Chicago with his brother Petras, and later changed his name to Girch. When he and Darius were making plans for their flight to Kaunas, Darius asked him if he would change his surname, Girch, to a more Lithuanian-sounding name. Stanley did so by choosing the name of Girėnas.

If these two gentlemen had not changed their original family names, then we would be commemorating the 65th anniversary of the flight of Darašius and Girskis. Then again, if Stanley hadn't decided to change his name to Girėnas, these two fliers would be honored as Darius and Girch.

Darius served in France during World War I with a field artillery unit and was awarded two medals for bravery in action. Not only was he wounded, but he suffered from the effects of poison gas that the Germans used during the battles. Girėnas did not go overseas; instead, he was stationed at an airbase in

EDWARD W. BARANAUSKAS has contributed to *BRIDGES* in previous publications. Mr. Baranauskas was a young boy when Darius and Girėnas took off from Floyd Bennett Field in July, 1933. He attended the commemoration of the 65th anniversary of the Trans-Atlantic flight on June 27th at the same airport that was Darius and Girėnas's waiting point before their flight began.

Texas where he served as an airplane mechanic.

When the war ended, Darius went to Lithuania as a volunteer to help the young Lithuanian army fight its hostile neighbors who threatened its independence. He learned to fly and became a military pilot here. He married and had one child, Nijolė. When he decided to return to the United States in 1927, his wife did not want to go with him. She remained in Kaunas with their daughter.

On his way home, Darius stopped in Paris and witnessed Charles A. Lindbergh complete his historic non-stop flight from New York. This event was the catalyst for the Lithuanian-American Trans-Atlantic flight.

Girėnas, on the other hand, received his honorable discharge from the army and returned to Chicago. A few years later, he began taking flying lessons and became a licensed commercial pilot. He never married. It seems his greatest love was aviation.

The Adventure Is Planned

Girėnas first met Darius after he returned to Chicago. Darius shared his ideas of a Trans-Atlantic flight with him. Girėnas liked the idea and agreed to be his co-pilot. They pooled all of their savings together and bought a used six-passenger airplane, a Bellanca. It needed extensive modifications to enable it to fly to Kaunas non-stop as planned. This required more money; something that they did not have.

Representatives from various Lithuanian organizations and newspapers held a meeting in the Lithuanian Consulate offices in Chicago. They organized a Flight Sponsors Committee, and elected fund trustees who would organize and coordinate all of the fund-raising activities. The ownership of the airplane was transferred to the fund with the agreement that it would revert back to the pilots



Capt. S. DARIUS

after the flight. Committees of flight sponsors were organized in many other Lithuanian communities throughout the United States. To raise enough money was no easy task, since the United States at that time was in the middle of the Great Depression with an unemployment rate at about 25 percent. The Fund raised approximately \$4,200 in 1932.

With the additional funds, Darius and Girėnas were able to purchase a new and more powerful engine, make alterations to the wings, add additional fuel tanks, and install stronger landing gear with larger tires to help carry the extra weight. Other

major work was completed, too. After going through this expense, there was no extra money available to purchase the latest navigational equipment, a radio, or a controllable pitch propeller. Even without these items, Darius and Girėnas were confident that their mission would succeed.

It is a tradition in aviation that an airplane should be named, and not be known just as a number. The rebuilt Bellanca was given the number NR688E; the letter "R" meant that it was restricted, could not carry passengers, and was to be flown only by the crew. The pilots' original choice for a name was

LITHVEGA, meaning Lithuanian star. Vega is the brightest star in the summer sky visible from the mid-northern latitude. The Flight Sponsors Committee finally approved the name LITHUANICA, suggested by Mr. Anthony Vaivada of Chicago, because it represented all Lithuanian interests, ideas, and culture.

A Questionable Beginning

On May 6th, 1933, the airplane was christened at Chicago's Municipal Airport, now called Midway. Prelate Krušas performed the christening ceremonies, and Darius's mother, Mrs. Anna Degutis, carried out



Pilot S. GIRĖNAS

the traditional honors by smashing a champagne bottle on the propeller hub. The following morning, the LITUANICA left and headed east for its date with destiny.

The pilots landed at Newark Airport in New Jersey and, that evening, attended another farewell banquet. The next day, May 8th, they took off again, but this time it was a short trip to nearby Floyd Bennett Field – that was New York's Municipal Airport at that time. Members of the press and the airport's manager greeted them. The manager invited them to be guests of the City of New York, to stay at a hotel in Coney Island, and to use Hangar No. 7 for their airplane, all at no charge. All of the Trans-Atlantic fliers were treated in the same courteous manner.

What had been an anticipated short time until take-off, the pilots' departure was delayed until the middle of July. The biggest problem was that the U.S. Department of Commerce had to give the pilots their approval for the flight. In addition, they also had to receive authorization from the countries on their flight path, in the event of an unplanned emergency landing en route. All of this paperwork was time consuming. The days dragged on into weeks, and by now the fliers were getting frustrated and restless. They were willing to take off without authorization from anybody. However, the bad weather along their planned route prevented them from taking any action.

On June 15th, the LITUANICA had company in its hangar. Wiley Post, a well-known and famous air pioneer, arrived at Floyd Bennett Field with his airplane, the WINNIE MAE, for his flight around the world. He, too, could not leave because of unfavorable weather over the Atlantic. Just like Darius and Girénas, he had to wait until conditions improved.

On the evening of July 14th, Darius and Girénas heard that Wiley Post was going to leave early in

Atlantic

This period in American aviation history, in the years that followed the end of the First World War, can best be described as "Atlantic Fever". Young fliers sought new conquests of the air. The greatest challenge of that time was to fly over the Atlantic Ocean. It is difficult to realize the price that those pioneers had to pay. From 1919 to 1932, 26 pilots perished out of 84 attempted flights. In 1932 alone, six out of eight attempted flights ended in failure. Darius and Girénas wanted to fly non-stop from New York to Kaunas to make Lithuania famous, and to "put it on the map."

Their planned flight was primitive in comparison to today's ocean-crossing jetliners, which are equipped with the latest high-tech and computerized navigational systems. The LITUANICA had only a compass to guide them in the right direction. It had no radio because there was no money available to buy one. To aid them in calculating their exact location, they took a navigator's sextant, four special watches, charts for celestial navigation, and maps.

The maintenance work performed on the LITUANICA was brought to as near perfection as possible in those early days of aviation. Darius and Girénas were helped by their own mechanic, Victor Yesulaitis, who was a licensed aircraft mechanic and a licensed pilot himself. He

the morning for Berlin. They were elated. This meant that the weather over the Atlantic finally improved, and they made plans for leaving, too – even though they did not have approval from the Department of Commerce to do so. A bag of letters was brought to the Brooklyn Post Office where they were postmarked and then put on board the LITUANICA for delivery in Kaunas.

Darius and Girénas arrived at the field about 4:30 in the morning on July 15th. They walked up to Wiley Post and wished him good-luck. Many newspapermen and cameramen were already there to witness Post's take-off. In the meantime, the LITUANICA was being fully loaded with fuel and oil, drinking water, coffee, sandwiches, fruit, some tools, and the mail bag. This activity aroused the airport manager's curiosity, who asked Darius what was going on with the LITUANICA. Darius told him that it was going up for a test flight to check out the airplane under fully-loaded conditions.

An hour before Post's take-off, Paris sent a cable warning that bad weather was developing over Europe, and that a storm was gathering force in southern Europe and moving northward. Post figured out that since the average speed of the WINNIE MAE was about 180 miles an hour, he would be in Berlin before the bad weather came in.

Fever

took care of the airplane while it was in Chicago, and stayed with it until the morning it took off for Kaunas.

The weight of the airplane, when fully loaded, is a critical factor in determining its ability to get off the ground safely. Darius and Girénas knew that. In order to carry as much gasoline as they could, they did not take any parachutes, life preservers, or a life raft. Fully loaded, the LITUANICA weighed 8,300 pounds. Because of that weight, there was the danger of the tires overheating and blowing up during take-off. It was a risk that Darius and Girénas were aware of, but it was a risk they felt they had to take. In effect, the LITUANICA became a "flying gasoline tank".

The plotted distance between New York and Kaunas was 4,466 miles. If the weather conditions were good, they hoped to reach Kaunas in about 40 hours. The gasoline on board was enough to last 44 hours and a half. Should they encounter bad weather or if they made a navigational error, they felt there was sufficient fuel to last them an additional 500 miles.

How many pilots today would be willing to fly across the Atlantic Ocean in an airplane powered by one single, nine-cylinder engine, no radio, and with only a compass as its primary means of navigation?

The meteorologist explained to Darius and Girénas that the LITUANICA would only be flying at about 100 to 125 miles an hour. They would be caught in the bad weather long before they could get to Kaunas. Despite this advice, they took off an hour or so after Post. Why they did so is difficult to say. Perhaps they were fed up with waiting for better weather conditions. Perhaps they thought that by the time they got to that point, the weather would possibly change for the better. As later events proved, the meteorologist was correct.

With Darius at the controls, the LITUANICA started its engine and began its long journey to Kaunas. The engine roared at full power as it began to roll down the runway. Those who witnessed the take-off began to feel uneasy, and were alarmed because the airplane was approaching the end of the mile-long runway and was still not airborne. Finally, ten feet from the edge of Jamaica Bay, the LITUANICA slowly cleared the water by a few feet as it slowly began to gain altitude.

They had the closest brush with disaster in the history of the field. Their flight almost ended, even before it began.

The Last Sightings

The LITUANICA was sighted over a town in Northern Germany late in the evening of July 16th,

heading northeast. Since the airplane was painted a bright orange color, it probably made it easier to identify. As they approached the Polish border, they met heavy rains, and this bad weather made a change in course necessary. Now flying in a southwesterly direction, they were spotted flying low near a Nazi concentration camp, 120 miles northeast of Berlin, several minutes past midnight. They continued on in the same direction and approached the town of Soldin, circling the area apparently looking for a place to land. It is entirely possible that when they noticed a meadow beyond the forest's edge, they

decided to take a chance and set down there.

A farmer living near the forest said he heard an airplane flying at low altitude, and then a resounding crash. Because of the bad weather, the farmer went back to sleep. He said it was raining, foggy, with low clouds.

The smashed remains of the airplane were found the next morning by some peasant women as they went to gather berries or mushrooms. Darius's body was lying beside the wreckage; while, the body of Girénas was still in the cockpit. A flashlight was still shining, and one of the watches was stopped at 36 minutes past midnight – indicating the possible time of the accident.

German troopers arrived at the scene and stood guard at the crash site to prevent looting, but not before "souvenir hunters" carried away some parts of the plane. What was left of the LITUANICA, the bodies of the pilots, their personal belongings, and the mail bag were brought to Kaunas with the cooperation and help of the German government. The post office delivered the mail to the designated recipients.

Speculations

The disaster which almost took place in New York, took place 37 hours and 11 minutes later in a forest in Soldin, Germany. Darius and Girénas

were only 404 miles short or less than four hours of flying time from reaching Kaunas. Even though they failed to achieve their goal, they had conquered the Atlantic Ocean, which was a feat in itself. Their flight was the second longest in the history of aviation at that time, as far as distance was concerned. They were the first to carry airmail to Europe.

What was the actual cause of the crash? That was the agonizing question that everyone was asking and trying to find the answer to.

Notes that Darius took in his log book, which was found in the wreckage, indicated that they passed over northern Scotland and were apparently heading for the North Sea and Kiel, Germany in the face of a severe storm. No further entries were made after that.

The press in Western Europe and the United States printed stories that the LITUANICA may have been shot down by the Nazis because it strayed too close to a concentration camp. This was and still is conjecture. The Lithuanian government appointed a board of inquiry to investigate and determine the cause of the crash.

Two distinguished medical professors, Doctors Ozelis and Zilinskas, performed a thorough examination of the pilots' bodies, recorded the results, and signed a statement. In a statement signed by Dr. Ozelis in 1959, who was living in the United States at that time, he stressed that no bullets or bullet wounds were found on the bodies of either pilot.

A close examination of the wreckage and various components of the engine and propeller by Lithuanian Air Force officers concluded that the disaster

occurred due to difficult weather conditions combined with some defects in engine operation.

There are two other possibilities that should be considered when trying to determine why the flight ended the way it did. One is pilot fatigue. After flying for a little more than 37 hours in a cramped and noisy airplane, their chances of getting much sleep or rest -- or even to relax for a moment -- would be either slim to none. The LITUANICA wasn't exactly a sound-proof airplane. They were under constant pressure to stay on course using celestial navigation, which requires clear weather. Besides watching the flight instruments, fuel and oil gauges had to be monitored. There was enough work for them to do.

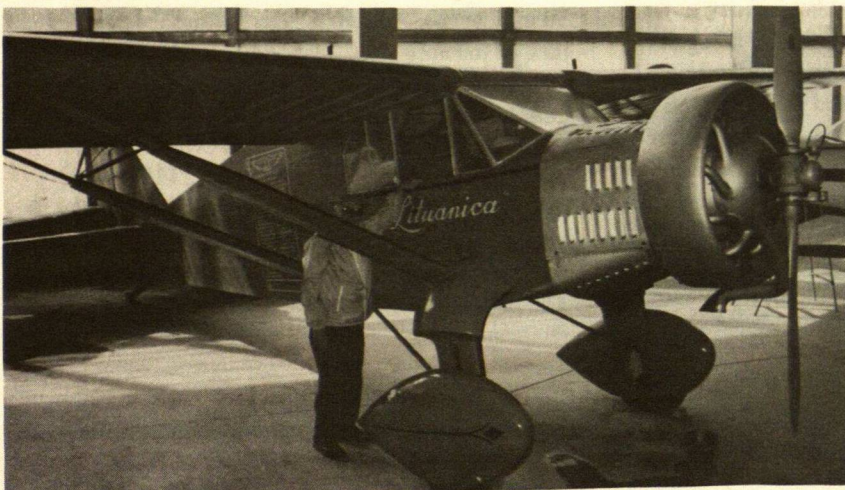
Then there is the possibility of an inaccurate altimeter: a flight instrument that shows the pilot his altitude. Any error in that measurement could be disastrous when you consider the fact that the LITUANICA skimmed the treetops in that forest before crashing.

Not To Be Forgotten

Their courage and determination to fly non-stop to Kaunas, regardless of the dangers involved, made them national heroes and set an example for the youth of Lithuania to follow. A grief-stricken nation memorialized her fallen heroes in many ways.

Many streets, bridges, and squares in Lithuania were renamed after them. Musical pieces and poetry were written, sculptures and medals were made, and postage stamps were issued to honor them.

The Aero Club of Lithuania placed a wayside shrine where Darius's body was found, and erected a



Edward Baranauskas stands by the replica of LITUANICA. This replica is housed at Lietuvos Technikos Muziejus (The Lithuanian Technical Museum) in Kaunas, Lithuania.

Photo from Edward Baranauskas

monument of white granite on the exact spot of LITUANICA's wreckage. The dedication ceremonies took place on July 17th, 1936 with representatives attending from the Lithuanian and German governments. The Lithuanian wayside shrine and monument were badly neglected for decades and were somewhat damaged. Restoration of the monument and the installation of a new wayside shrine were completed not too long ago. These restorations were made possible by donations from Lithuanians living in Poland and other countries. The town of Soldin, the scene of the tragedy, was changed by the Polish government to Mysliborz in 1945.

There were plans for a Darius-Girėnas monument in Kaunas, but it was never built due to the war. The committee in charge of the project selected, instead, the 265-ton rock named Puntukas to memorialize to pilots and a portion of their Flight Testament. Located in a meadow outside of Anykščiai, it is one of Lithuania's popular tourist attractions and best-known landmark. The sculptor Pundzius worked here at great personal risk to himself and his assistants during the German occupation. He completed his masterful job in time to commemorate the tenth anniversary of the flight in July of 1943.

One part of the War Museum in Kaunas is devoted entirely to Darius and Girėnas. Behind a glass-enclosed wall, the LITUANICA crash site was reconstructed with the airplane wreckage portrayed as it was found. On the other side of the room are uniforms the pilots wore during the flight, their shoes, Darius's log book, maps, and other personal belongings. Close examination reveals Stanley J. Girch's name on a Commercial Pilot's License. Apparently he did not have the time to change this document to the name of Girėnas before the flight.

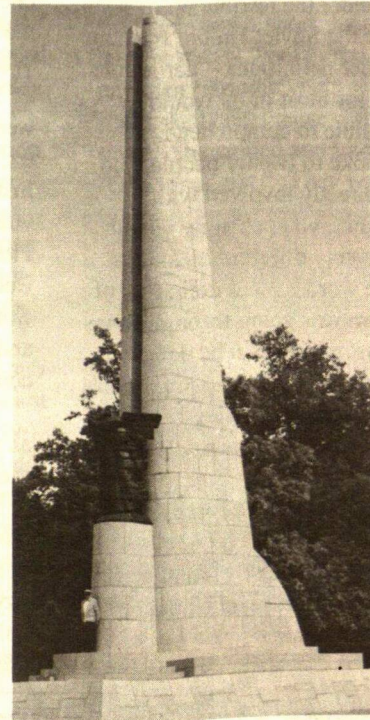
The pilots' bodies were returned to Lithuania by the German government and following a state funeral, the coffins were placed in a mausoleum at the Catholic Cemetery in Kaunas. During the war-time German occupation of Lithuania, the coffins were secretly sealed, for safety reasons, in a basement chamber of the Faculty of Medicine building. After the war was over, their location was tracked down, and Darius and Girėnas were buried in 1964 at the Soldiers Cemetery in the Aukštieji Šanciai part of Kaunas.

To commemorate the 60th anniversary of their

flight, the monument that could not be made before the war was finally built in 1993, according to the original 1937 designs and plans of sculptor Pundzius. It was dedicated and unveiled on July 17th: the anniversary of the day Darius and Girėnas died. The sculpture is made of bronze and weighs three tons. The monument, including the pedestal, stands 75 feet high and is the tallest one in Lithuania. It is located in Kaunas, not far from the Darius-Girėnas Stadium.

On June 14th, 1993, the Lithuanian government introduced its national currency – the litas – and one of its denominations honors Darius and Girėnas. The ten litas note has a picture of the pilots on the front side and a picture of the LITUANICA on the other side.

It is quite evident that the Lithuanian people have the greatest love, respect, and admiration for Steponas (Stephen) Darius and Stasys (Stanley) Girėnas. These sons of Lithuania have earned their place in history and will never be forgotten. ♦



Edward Baranauskas at the base of the Darius-Girėnas Monument in Kaunas.
Photo from E. Baranauskas

Jeanne Dorr

Free – dom n. state of being free; independence. That's what I found for the meaning of this powerful word when I looked in Webster's dictionary and thesaurus. Freedom was sandwiched between freebie and freeze. It doesn't sound too impressive or exciting; that is, unless you've lost it or never had it.

To those of us who worked for Lithuanian independence or traveled to Lithuania during the dark days of Soviet occupation, freedom has a more personal meaning. For the people who lived under the terrible oppression of the Soviet Union, freedom has other definitions – definitions which for most of us would be impossible to comprehend. If you spoke to twenty people who were directly involved with Lithuania, you probably would hear twenty different meanings for the word. What definition of freedom was going through Jonas Pleškys' mind when he defected from a Soviet nuclear submarine in 1961?

Over the years many articles have been written about Jonas Pleškys. Among the most famous was the novel *The Hunt for Red October* by Tom Clancy. After the novel reached the best seller list, a movie was made

A Definition of Freedom

based on it starring Sean Connery.

It is not my intention to write anymore about this famous man, except to give a little background of his life. My intent is to introduce you to one of his sisters and her family. What happened to the family left behind when someone defected? What, if any, were the consequences they faced? What were their emotions?

I've read interviews which were done with Mr. Pleškys' sister, Eugenija Pleškytė, an actress. Instead, I would like to introduce you to another sister, Emilija Pleškytė. She isn't prominent or well known. She is simply a woman who loved her brother and tried to make the best of a complex situation.

It was my pleasure to spend an afternoon with Emilija Pleškytė in her lovely apartment in the heart of Klaipėda. Within minutes of our meeting, I thought this woman had the charm of royalty. She made me so comfortable that I felt I knew her all my life. I still can't determine what it

was about her that put me so at ease. Perhaps it was her soft voice or her genuine friendliness or maybe it was just her need to talk at that particular moment. Again, maybe she just needed someone to listen. I went away feeling that we both benefited greatly by the pleasant afternoon we spent together.

I asked Emilija about her childhood. She spoke lovingly about her family, especially her brother. She told me that Jonas was born in 1935 in Tvėrai, western Lithuania. As in the case of so many Lithuanian families, their parents were deported to Siberia in the late 1940s on suspicion of being anti-Soviet. Over the years that term would cover a multitude of sins depending on the mood of the investigators.

As was typical, the deportees were exiled from Lithuania by train. Their father, Juozas, and their stepmother actually pushed the children off the train. The children were separated for several years. Over the years, Jonas worked hard in school but, was still expelled for anti-Soviet activities. With some influence from the instructors, the "accused"

JEANNE DORR is a member of the Board of Directors of Lithuanian Orphan Care, a branch of the Human Services Council of the Lithuanian-American Community, Inc. She is also a Social Studies teacher in New Jersey.

were given another chance to reform by the authorities. Eventually Jonas rose to the rank of captain on a Soviet submarine.

Pretending there was a serious defect with the submarine's navigating system, Jonas insisted he would have to go ashore in Sweden to find their exact location. After much haggling with the ever present "plants" on the ship, he wielded his authority and insisted that he was the captain and had the final say. When he left the ship, he bolted. The year was 1961, and the captain was 26 years old. He eventually found his way to the United States.

Before you get excited and say that's not what was written in the book, or it's not the way the movie portrayed it; please, remember, this occurred during the Cold War. Jonas was alive, and it was suicidal for him to have the facts printed as they really had happened. Therefore, all parties involved agreed to alter the truth.

Most of our conversation that afternoon centered around Emilija's own family. She married and had one son. The marriage was not a happy one and ended in divorce. Her husband not only divorced Emilija, he also divorced his son. He would pass the young man on the street and not even nod to him. Not even a hello would leave his lips. I wonder what that young boy felt when he saw his father. In my wildest imagination, I can't comprehend my father ignoring me. Certainly, this would have an emotional effect on the young man.

This situation was compounded by the local communist party secretary's wife, who was the principal of the school the boy

attended. There seemed to be constant problems between the young man whose uncle defected from the Soviet Union and the woman who believed that communism was the perfect way of life. She accused the boy of "hooliganism", a favorite word during the days of occupation. She said she was afraid of him. Matters came to a peak, and Emilija took her son out of school in 1980. How ironic that she withdrew him very near to the date of Lithuania's Independence - February 16th. Coincidence?

After her son's formal education ended, his quality of life definitely began to deteriorate. There was a period when he didn't want to leave the house. While he was at home, he wouldn't read a book or watch television. He just sat, stared, and did nothing. In retrospect, Emilija told me she should have gone to the principal's husband and tried to have interceded on his behalf. Maybe he would have been readmitted to the school to complete his education.

Emilija also felt part of the problem was that he never had male influence. The young man is now in his 30s and is still unable to hold a job. He depends on his mother for everything. I knew this was a very painful subject for Emilija, and I didn't want to pry. I didn't meet her son because he had gone to town. I did meet her charming nephew from Vilnius and his family. His aunt told me how happy she is when he comes to visit with his young children.

After the usual Lithuanian hospitality of a table set with all kinds of pastries and a break for general "small talk", we got back

to our interview. She showed me all her precious family photographs. They were taken in happier days, when they were all together.

I asked Emilija what her reaction was to the situation when her brother defected. She told me the defection was kept quiet but, that the family received a letter from him when he was in Sweden. After that, there were long gaps between letters, sometimes several years would go by without a word. She had her usual "visits" from the K.G.B. She said they were always very polite. Initially, I couldn't understand why they would be so friendly toward her. At this point, she smiled and reminded me that you can always get more from people by being nice. Her "visitors" tried to charm her with flattery. In the beginning, the house was watched from a short distance but, later they would drop by to pay their periodic visits.

I asked her if these were Russians. She smiled and told me, "Of course, not." They were



Emilija Pleškytė with Jonas' letters.

Photo by Jeanne Dorr

Lithuanians and some of them are now good, upstanding Lithuanian citizens who have government jobs. That's something that anyone living in Lithuania could tell you. There is that rather large group who took off their hammer and sickle pins, and replaced them with lapel pins bearing a cross. Now they are good Lithuanian citizens. Yet the people whose lives they destroyed know the truth. Through all this, her personal life was also falling apart. Finally, she was able to ascertain that her brother was living in California. At least she had one less problem to worry about – her brother was safe.

In 1992, Jonas returned to the land he loved so much. He was finally able to sit with Emilija and tell her so many things that happened. She told me that he never truly left Lithuania in his mind or heart. According to her, when he reached Sweden, the West was very skeptical of him. Frankly, they weren't sure if he was a legitimate defector or a Soviet "plant".

The entire episode of a 26 year-old captain in charge of a then state-of-the-art nuclear submarine seemed too much like a setup. Could it be that the incident was planned and carried out by the Soviet Union to actually gain information about other nations? Could Jonas have actually had the blessing of the Soviet Union when he defected? After all, this was the height of the Cold War and nothing was impossible. It seemed spies were turning up in every closet.

After finally convincing the authorities that he was legitimate, his life did not become easier. In

fact, he was always in danger. A Soviet Military Tribunal condemned Jonas to death. The death sentence was never lifted. Can you imagine living with a death sentence hanging over your head?

At one point, he spent years hiding in the jungles of Central and South America. Emilija learned that Jonas had fathered a daughter during this time, and that the young woman still lived in Central America. The United States government moved him from place to place. Eventually Jonas settled on the west coast. He told his sister that he felt Lithuanian-Americans did not fully trust him or accept him in the beginning. Given the times and the circumstances, this was understandable.

As the story unfolded, Emilija was better able to comprehend what the past was like for her brother. She told me they had a pleasant visit but, he always seemed to be in a hurry. He wanted to visit friends left behind many years ago. He wanted to walk in his beloved woods. In fact, it was hurry, hurry, hurry. In retrospect, it appeared to her that he wanted to see and do everything during this one visit. He promised her he would return to Lithuania and bring his daughter who was his pride and joy. That was a promise that Jonas was unable to keep.

Life continued for brother and sister, and communication resumed through their letters. In 1993, Emilija's letters to her brother began to return to her marked, "Not Reclaimed". She worried but, was unable to gain any news of him. All she had of

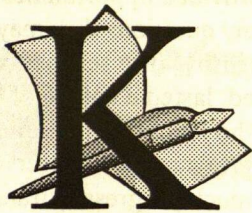
Jonas was silence. There were no more letters or postcards of the "big California bridge" which Emilija was always so proud to receive. Silence and more silence. The waiting and the uncertainty were maddening.

Then, one night, Emilija had a dream. To her, the dream was foreboding. She dreamed of black blood. She immediately telephoned a friend who she said understood dreams. The friend told her the black blood meant the death of someone very close to her. She spent the next two weeks filled with anxiety. It was then that her sister notified her of Jonas's death.

It seemed isolation would also be with Jonas in death as well as in life. He died alone in California of a brain tumor. The fact that he had been ill for a period of time tore Emilija apart. She kept insisting to me that he could not have been so ill. After all, why wouldn't her beloved brother tell her of his illness when he visited her. He looked so healthy; he could not have been so gravely ill. I tried to reason with her that perhaps her brother just wanted to spare her the pain of knowing he was so sick. Yet, Emilija will never concede that he died of natural causes. In her mind, her brother paid the price for his freedom with his life. It was a question we could not resolve that afternoon.

As I left Emilija, she was sitting at the table with tears welling in her eyes, deep in her own thoughts, holding the letters her cherished brother sent to her. In her lap were the letters marked, "Not Reclaimed".

George Leute



kaunas

Revisited

Five teachers, all language majors and representing Delaware County Community College, Media, Pennsylvania (DCCC), departed for Kaunas, Lithuania, to present a four-week program of English instruction to professors, graduate students, and some employees at Kaunas University of Technology (KUT) on June 5th, 1997. Coordinating the group was George Leute, a former Administrator for International Education in DCCC's Office of International Studies. Other members were two language teachers at DCCC; Patricia Stewart and Eileen Leute, and two English teachers from Neptune Beach Florida; Bacot Wright and Gregory Leute, both of who had had extensive acting experience.

The need for instruction in English by native speakers had long been known, well before Independence. Before Independence, contact with "Westerners" and travel to English-speaking countries were largely restricted. The need for English in engineering, business, and computers (whose language was primarily English), became increasingly important. The advent of the Internet further heightened the need

for English. Now professors are reaching and teaching students from many countries in a common language – English!

George and Eileen Leute were returning for their third teaching program in Kaunas and their ninth overall trip in the Newly Independent States (NIS) of Europe. They had been there in June 1992; some eight months after the Soviet Union recognized Lithuania's independence. Though the first time for Patricia Stewart, she had presented similar programs before at Czech Technical University in Prague and at Slovak Technical University in Bratislava. Gregory had high school teaching experience in Jacksonville, and Bacot taught English and had library science experience. Both are well known in Jacksonville's Summer Shakespearean Festival and other theatrical presentations. Both also were participating in these programs for the first time.

The English Program consisted of 60 hours of classroom instruction and many hours of out-of-class contact in collateral experiences, such as field trips, cafe conversations, cultural excursions, and invitations to homes and apartments.

GEORGE LEUTE, now retired, was in the military and a former Administrator for International Education in Delaware County Community College. He and his wife Eileen participated in English Program at Kaunas University of Technology (KUT) three times.

The program, which was coordinated by KUT's very capable Foreign Language Department, enabled KUT people of varying ages to participate in a concentrate period of immersion in both oral and aural English.

The program was designed to improve listening and speaking confidence, to build vocabulary, and to improve pronunciation. To a lesser degree, composition and writing were included. Class presentations included a variety of topics and approaches, including discussions, essays, oral readings, music, humor, American culture, business, and others.

As you would expect, the students were bright, eager, and serious about improving their English, providing an ideal teaching situation. The last hour of each week was used as a special program during which some sort of music with words was presented. For the last hour of the last day, during a concluding ceremony our teachers and five students spoke briefly. This was followed by the awarding of diplomas, champagne, cookies, much singing, and a thoroughly enjoyable, convivial experience.

In addition to the formal instructional program, there were two other contributions by members of our group. First, Patricia Stewart, who had had experience with adult education and continuing education programs, was asked to take part in an educational seminar. Her presentation was well received. Secondly, although Kaunas Tech's English teachers are excellent, they were still able to profit from a sem-

inar presented by Eileen Leute. She stressed current idioms and provided opportunities for the students to ask any questions they may have about "American English". The seminar, which was also well received, lasted a couple of hours.

For those of us who had been in Kaunas in 1992 and 1994, there was much to observe in the way of change: much progress in transportation, the proliferation of cafes and restaurants, new shops, an abundance and variety of food, and other noticeable changes. Nowhere were these things more in evidence than in the resort city of Palanga on the Baltic Sea. No doubt, many problems remain, particularly for some groups like those on pensions and relatively fixed incomes. Though we were told about some crime, we saw no evidence of it. Nevertheless, it was apparent that automobiles seemed to be parked in "safe" areas and parking lots.

What has not changed in our minds is the people we met, worked with, and those with whom we had reunions. As always, they were cooperative, warm, hospitable, and gracious. Also, they were very capable, cultured, and sophisticated – making them most comfortable to be with.

We all left Lithuania hoping that our work had been somewhat helpful. In the absence of such a program as ours, we would never have been able to have had such a truly worthwhile experience with our international colleagues and at such historical times! ◆

MT. LEBANON SCHOOL CHILDREN AWED BY LITHUANIA

from the Lithuanian Citizens' Society Newsletter, June 1998

As a part of Catholic Schools Week, each class at St. Bernard's Catholic School in Mt. Lebanon, Pennsylvania, was assigned one country to study. Miss Luann Wilding's 25 third graders contacted Frank Ziaukas to come and share his information about Lithuania.

Mr. Ziaukas, a retired librarian information specialist of the University of Pittsburgh, led an information-rich talk about the country from which his parents, Joseph and Anna, emigrated in 1913. He came to class laden with books, song cassettes, a video, artifacts, amber, sweatshirt and photo depicting the Žalgiris basketball team, and photo albums filled with Lithuanian cultural and landmark depictions.

The children expressed their fascination and awe with letters of thank you for Mr. Ziaukas's efforts. Miss Wilding asked him to hold on to his materials for future presentations for school children. ◆

Rimas Gedeika



After Šarūnas Marčiulionis and Arvydas Sabonis —

WHO'S NEXT?



Their names are synonymous with basketball in Lithuania. Through their exceptional basketball skills, their strong will-power, determination, courage, and their great love for Lithuania, they have made Lithuania's Basketball Team what it is today -- one of the finest national teams in the world. In the process, Lithuania is now known to millions of people all over the world.

To attain this position was not an easy task. It did not happen overnight. Šarūnas Marčiulionis and Arvydas Sabonis had to make many personal sacrifices, spend countless numbers of hours obtaining financial support, organizing the players into a team so that Lithuania, for the first time as an independent country, could form a team which would qualify for the 1992 Summer Olympic Games in Barcelona. Their efforts paid off. The whole world was amazed that this hastily-organized team could not only compete with the best teams in the world, but even more amazingly, win a bronze medal!

To show the world that the 1992 bronze medal was no fluke, the Lithuanian Team in the 1996 Olympic Games, in Atlanta, Georgia, again won the bronze medal. Again, it was Šarūnas and Arvydas who provided the leadership, the drive, the never give up attitude that inspired their teammates to give their all, to play to their highest level. Both played with enthusiasm, pride, and courage. They played with swollen knees, swollen ankles, and bad backs. They ignored the pain. They played. And they won. They won not only the bronze medal, but the hearts

of all Lithuanians everywhere. They raised our Lithuanian pride one hundred fold.

In addition to their Olympic success, they have also had great success in Europe and in the NBA. Their stature on and of the basketball court has been very instrumental in opening the doors for young Lithuanian basketball players to get scholarships to play basketball in American colleges.

As much as we hate to see it, the day will come when both Šarūnas and Arvydas will have to hang up their playing shoes. Šarūnas has already done so due to ailing knees shortly after the 1996 Olympic Games. Arvydas is now in the twilight of his brilliant career. This being the case, the question that is foremost in everybody's minds is what will be the future of Lithuania's basketball after Šarūnas and Arvydas? Will Lithuania have any players who will be able to fill their shoes?

Currently, Lithuania has a core of players which might produce successors to Šarūnas and Arvydas. Some of the players are already known to us. For example, there is Arturas Karnišovas, who has played very well on both Olympic teams. In 1996, he was selected as Europe's best basketball player. Then there is the 7'3" Žydrūnas Ilgauskas who, this year, in his rookie year, has taken the NBA by storm. In the Rookie All-Star Game, Žydrūnas was selected as the game's MVP; the first time that a foreign player received such an award. He was also selected on the NBA's 1997 Rookie All-Star Team.

In addition to Arturas and Žydrūnas, there are

RIMAS GEDEIKA, a marathon runner, is a senior product development analyst in an insurance corporation. He is also an avid Lithuanian sports enthusiast.

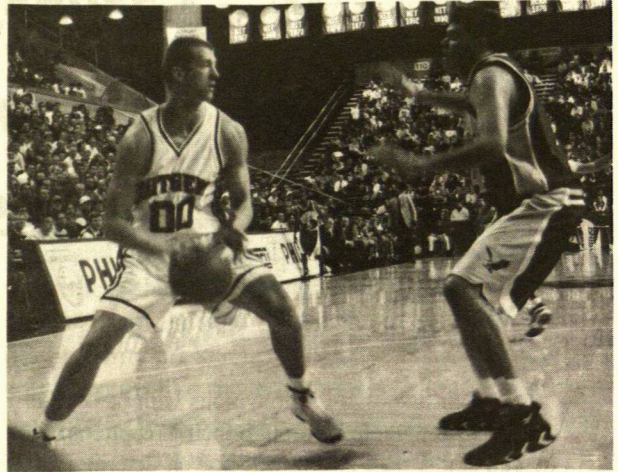
other good Lithuanian basketball players, such as Einikis, Timinskas, Pačėsas. They are currently playing in Lithuania. There is another group of players who are playing in colleges in America. It is this group that I would now like to introduce to you.

Alvydas Tenys -- 23 years old, from Vieksniai, a 6' 11" freshman, center, from Rutgers University, New Jersey. (Alvydas is about to drive to the basket at the right.)

Playing center is probably one of the most demanding positions in basketball. Coming from Europe, where defense often plays second fiddle to offense, to play in the Big East Conference which has always been known for its big, physical centers, required Alvydas to make drastic, quick adjustments to his accustomed playing style. It was not an easy transition: for it required learning many different defensive plays and playing at a more intensive, physical level. Even though he had to make adjustments to his playing style, this did not prevent him from leading his team in blocked shots, or from being among the top shot blockers in the Big East Conference

For a big man, Alvydas has a nice, soft shot from anywhere within the paint. He is an agile rebounder, and when the need arises, he can make the three-point shot. He is also a fine passer who often finds the open man for an easy lay up.

This year, Alvydas helped Rutgers, for the first time in many years, reach the Quarter Finals in the Big East Tournament. After evaluating Alvydas's first year's progress, Rutgers's coach stated that this fall Rutgers's fans will see the emergence of the real Alvydas, a player whose impact will be felt for the next three years.



Šarūnas Jasikevičius -- 23 years old, from Kaunas, a 6'5" senior forward, from Maryland University.

Šarūnas played on the 1997 Lithuanian Junior Team which competed in the World Junior Championships. This year, he was selected to play on the Men's Team which will play in the Men's World Basketball Championships in Greece.

The 1997 season was his best. He led the team both in three-point shooting and in foul throwing. He helped Maryland get into the NCAA Tournament where his overall playing (especially his three-point shooting) enabled Maryland to reach the "Sweet Sixteen" group.

Rimantas Kaukėnas -- 22 years old, from Kaunas, a 6' 4" sophomore guard, from Seton Hall University, New Jersey.

Rimantas drives well to the basket, has a good shot from within the paint, and a very good shot from the three point range. He plays a tenacious, aggressive game -- always giving more than a 100% effort.

In 1997, he played on the Lithuanian Junior Team which played in the World Junior Championship Games, in Sydney, Australia. This year, he, along with Kestutis Marčiulionis, has been selected to play for the Lithuania in the European Junior Championships.

Antanas Viličinskas -- 23 years old, from Kaunas, a 7' 0" senior center from Valparaiso University, Indiana.

1997 was truly an outstanding year for both Antanas and Valparaiso. He helped Valparaiso achieve the following firsts: win its conference championship; play in the NCAA Tournament; and reach the "Sweet Sixteen" Group. In so doing, Valparaiso became the Tournament's Cinderella Team.

During the Tournament, Antanas played with great zest -- putting forth that "extra something". In its second game, Valparaiso was trailing by a point with a minute left in the game. A teammate shot the ball. It was off target. Antanas grabbed it and, with one tremendous upward push, he rose through Michigan's giants, and drove the ball through the hoop! With that, Valparaiso was off to the Sweet Sixteen!



Marius Kovalukas -- 22 years old, from Kaunas, a 6' 7" freshman forward, from Central Connecticut University. (Marius scores another two points with this shot on the left.)

As a freshman, Marius was the team's leading three-point scorer and second in total scoring. He handles the ball well, is a strong rebounder, and has good moves driving towards the basket.

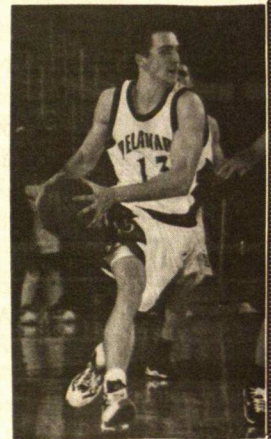
Kestutis Marčiulionis -- 22 years old, from Kaunas, a 6' 2" sophomore guard, from University of Delaware. (Kestutis drives towards the basketball below)

Many consider Kestutis to be Lithuania's premier point guard. In 1994, playing in the 18 and under European Championships, Kestutis helped Lithuania win the European Championship. In that tournament he was selected as its MVP. In 1996, he played on the Lithuanian Team which won Europe's Junior (under 22 years of age) Championship. In 1997, he was a member of the Lithuanian Junior Team that played in the World Junior Championships in Sydney, Australia.

This year, Kestutis was selected to play on both the Lithuania's Junior Basketball Team (European Championships), and Men's Basketball Team (World Championships).

For Lithuania, Kestutis plays point guard; for Delaware -- a shooting guard. He has an excellent understanding of the game, and handles the ball very well. He is very fast; drives well towards the hoop. His passes are crisp and accurate, often times arriving in the hands of a surprised teammate for an easy basket. When Delaware needs instant offense, it turns to Kestutis. He can shoot from any where on the floor especially from the three-point range. He was the team's leading three-point scorer.

This year, Kestutis led Delaware to its Conference's title and to its first appearance, in the last five years, in the NCAA Tournament.



Marius Janulis -- 23 years old, from Vilnius, a 6' 5" senior guard, from Syracuse University, New York.

In 1996, Marius played on Lithuania's Team that won the European Junior Championships, and in 1997, he was also on the Team that played in the World Junior Championships in Australia. He led the team in both three-point scoring, and in foul shooting.

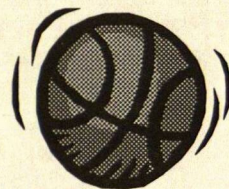
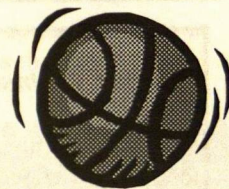
Marius was instrumental in helping Syracuse win second place in the Big East Tournament, and be ranked 15th in the final standings. His NCAA Tournament play was excellent. In his first game, with 1.2 seconds left in the game and Syracuse trailing by two points, Marius received a pass well outside the three-point range. Grabbing the ball, he jumped, let it fly, and swoosh, it went right through the hoop. A victory for Syracuse!

In the next game, Marius shot several crucial three-point baskets that enabled Syracuse to win and move on to the "Sweet Sixteen" group.

Marius is just as talented off the court as he is on the court. This year, he was selected on the All-Academic All-Star Team having a four year grade point average of 3.84 (out of 4).

This summer he'll graduate with a double major: one in Computer Science and the other in Economics.

His dream is to play in the NBA for several years, then return to Lithuania, and use the skills that he gained in the classroom to aid Lithuania in Her economic progress.



Mindaugas Lydedka -- 22 years old, from Kaunas, 6' 8" sophomore, from Daytona Beach Community College, Florida.

He is a strong rebounder with excellent moves towards the basket. This year we will have a greater opportunity to see Mindaugas in action for he will be playing for Sacred Heart in Connecticut. Mindaugas recently played in the World Junior Championships in Australia.

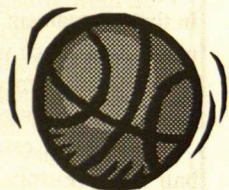
Gintautas Vileika -- 23 years old, from Vilnius, a 6' 5" senior forward, from Monmouth University, New Jersey.

Gintautas was the second high school player from Lithuania to receive a scholarship to finish his senior year at an American high school. (The first was his ex-teammate, Giedrius Aidietis, who graduated from Monmouth in 1997.)

Gintautas is a greater leaper with springs in his leg: he has a very fast first step off the drill. This step, more often than not, leaves his defender flat-footed on the floor.

In 1997, playing together with Giedrius (the first time that two Lithuanian players played on the same American college basketball team), Gintautas helped Monmouth University win, for the first time in its history, its Conference Championship and be invited to the NCAA Tournament. Gintautas also played on the Lithuanian Basketball Team which played at the World University Games in Spain.

Gintautas is graduating this year with a B.A. in Business Administration. He returns to Lithuania to face new challenges -- both on and off the court.



During this past season, I had many opportunities to see most of these players in action. I also had an opportunity to talk to them about their experiences both on and off the court.

All of the players want to continue playing basketball after graduating from college. They want to play at the highest level that their talents will take them to, whether it be in the NBA, in Lithuania, or in any other country in the world. However, they are also very cognizant that their playing days are limited, and that they must prepare themselves for "life after basketball". Thus, after evaluating all their options, they had concluded that by going to college in America, they had the best chance of achieving both of their goals.

To attain both of these goals in Lithuania would be extremely difficult. To have a shot at having a career in basketball, one must first be selected by one of the professional clubs. Once selected, he must practice, practice, and practice. Such a schedule makes it extremely difficult to pursue one's studies in a University. This is not the case in America.

Here they can go to college where they can further refine their basketball skills, play against top-notch competition, and study for their degree.

To obtain a basketball scholarship, and then once having obtained it not to lose it, is not an easy task. With very few exceptions, most of them completed their high school junior year in Lithuania, or graduated from high school in Lithuania. Those who completed their junior year, entered an American high school to complete their senior year. The others entered an American preparatory school.

During their high school senior year in America, they faced a number of challenges. One was to quickly master the English language so that they would be able to graduate and pass the college entrance exams. The second one was to play great -- for they only had one year in which to impress the college coaches for a basketball scholarship. The third one was to adjust to their new environment.

To overcome these challenges they had to possess good athletic skills, intellectual abilities, a huge amount of self-confidence, courage, and when knocked down, the strength to bounce back and continue to move forward. They also received help from outside sources -- their American host families (families with whom they stayed while attending high school). These families helped them to over-

come various culture shocks and adjust to the American way of life.

After many a game, I have observed that they are quite popular with the student body and their fans -- young and old. Quite often they are asked for their autographs and older folks want to congratulate them or want to say hello. They are easily approachable, easy to talk to. Thus, they in their own way have already become Lithuania's ambassadors of good will.

Six of the nine players appeared either in the Big East or the NCAA Tournaments. They were frequently seen on national television and their play was frequently commented upon by the announcers. Their comments went something like this, "They have an excellent understanding of the game, handle the ball well, are excellent three-point shooters, good foul shooters, and they hustle. Their one weakness is their defense, and this may be because defense is not as important as offense in Europe. In America, it is just as important and, in some instances, even more so."

It was also nice to see that even with busy athletic and academic schedules they still have time to visit the Lithuanian Community in their area. We, in Philadelphia, are fortunate to have several of the players residing within a short distance of St. Andrews Church -- the hub of all our activity. As a result, we have had Alvydas Tenys visit our Vinco Krévés School. He talked about his experiences as a basketball player -- here and in Lithuania.

Kestutis Marčiulionis has also helped prepare our young basketball team, ARAS, for their competition in the Lithuanian Junior Basketball Championships in Detroit.

In conclusion, I would like to return to our original question; "After Šarūnas and Arvydas -- what next?" It appears that Lithuania has the talent, but is talent alone good enough to win an Olympic Medal? Šarūnas and Arvydas did not elevate Lithuania's Basketball to its present heights by just their talents, but by their hearts, their souls, and their love for Lithuania.

Will the current crop of Lithuanian players be able to do this? If yes, then we will have players who will be able to fill their shoes. We will know better this summer -- after the European Junior Championships and Men's World Championships. ♦

CURRENT EVENTS

LITHUANIAN SOCIETY SHARES COMPASSION WITH DONATIONS

from the Lithuanian Citizens'
Society Newsletter, June 1998

The latest figures of charitable donations of the Lithuanian Citizen's Society of Western Pennsylvania shows that it has given \$213,923.76 to 54 Lithuanian and 23 local groups since it started in 1994. No donations have gone to individuals.



The origin of the Society's Charity Committee was a joint idea, and many hours have been spent sorting through requests, letters, and other details in decision making. Currently, funding decisions are handled through the Committee's members: Tillie Milauskas, Agnes Kuzin, Jay McCloskey, and Mary Tamy. Margie Turner, who moved to Florida, was on the original Committee.

The largest effort so far is in the dismantling, shipping, and financial aid for the installation of the organ and Stations of The Cross removed from St. Casimir's Roman Catholic Church on the south side of Pittsburgh, and sent to Lithuania. Nell Brazauskus, who lives two doors from the Church, was extremely helpful to meet this goal.

Editor's note: We'd like to thank the Lithuanian Society for their generous donation to BRIDGES. Dékojame!

A VARIED CALENDAR OF EVENTS FROM SEATTLE from the Tulpé Times Newsletter, May 1998

The Lithuanian-American Community in Seattle, Washington offers interesting activities and programs. Their calendar and community news can be found in their newsletter, the Tulpé Times.

On July 26th, the Daughters of Lithuania will sponsor the annual Blueberry Picnic, hosted by Dalia Tutlys Mrowiec and Emilija Tutlys. Throughout the month of July, a Lithuanian exhibit mounted by Aušrelė Ramanauskas and Zita Petkus will be featured at the Kirkland Public Library.

For more information about the Lithuanian-American Community in Seattle, contact Marie Jozaitis, 6562 49th Avenue, Seattle, WA 98136, or go to their web page at <http://members.aol.com/lapelis>.

FRIENDSHIP DAY PICNIC IN CONNECTICUT

The traditional annual Friendship Day Picnic hosted by the Sisters of the Immaculate Conception of The Blessed Virgin Mary will be on Sunday, July 26th on the Putnam, Connecticut Convent grounds.

A Holy Mass will open this Friendship Day at 11:00 a.m., and an Hour of Prayer for all the people of the world will close it. Particular attention will be paid to praying for Our Father's guidance into the Third Millennium and the 80th Anniversary of the Order's founding in Lithuania in 1918. Included in the program for the day is lunch with a variety of Lithuanian foods, activities, drawing of gifts, and a festive folk presentation by the Camp Neringa campers.



TEXAS LITHUANIANS PREPARE FOR FOLK FESTIVAL

from the Lithuanians in Texas in
San Antonio Newsletter, May 1998

The Lithuanians in Texas group will be participating in the Folk Life Festival at the Texas Institute of Cultures between August 6th and 9th. The booths representing Lithuania will feature foods, such as potato sausages, "little ears", and honey heart cookies. They will also feature displays and presentations.

For more information about Lithuanians in Texas and or the Folk Life Festival, contact Lita Javors, 215 Blackwater Lane, Houston, Texas 77015.

1998 GOODWILL GAMES

The 1998 Goodwill Games will be kicking off July 19th with 15 different sports featuring the world's best athletes. This multi-sport invitational takes place in the New York metropolitan area, including Manhattan, Long Island and Staten Island. Approximately 60 countries will be represented along with Lithuania's Basketball Team.



The Lithuanian Basketball Team will play its first game against Russia at 7:00 p.m. on July 19th. Other games are Lithuania vs. Argentina – 12:00 p.m., July 20th; and Lithuania vs. Australia – 12:00 p.m., July 21st. On July 23rd, the semifinals will be held, with bronze and gold-medal games on July 24th from 7:00 to 11:00 p.m. All basketball games will be held at the Madison Square Garden in New York City.

Turner Sports is the host broadcaster and will televise three hours of prime-time coverage each night. CBS will televise 10 hours of weekend afternoon coverage. Those interested in attending, should call [Ticketmaster](tel:212-307-7171) at 212-307-7171.

EUROPEAN COMMISSION GIVES LITHUANIA THUMBS UP

President of the European Commission (EC), Jacques Santer, gave a favorable evaluation of Lithuania's achievements in its preparation to enter the European Union (EU). He met Lithuanian Premier Gediminas Vagnorius in the Swiss resort of Crans Montana on June 27th, where an international forum took place.

Vagnorius and Santer discussed how Lithuania was implementing a partnership program, and what progress was made on its way to EU membership. The progress is to be reflected in the EC report to be presented to the European Council of Ministers by the end of 1998. Having reached stability in macroeconomics, Lithuania has the right to demand impartial and unbiased evaluation, and to be invited to start real negotiations with the EU next year, according to Vagnorius.

U.S. RANKS FIRST TO GIVE AID TO LITHUANIA

According to Lithuania's Statistics Department, almost half of the foreign aid and charity Lithuania received last year came from the United States. Different Lithuanian institutions and individuals received charity and aid for the total sum of 236.1 million litas (\$59.025 million). Foreign charity and aid comprised 79.2 percent of the total sum, the Statistics Department revealed.

The U.S. supplied Lithuania with charity estimated at 81.9 million litas, what comprises 44.2 percent of the total charity received. Germany donated an estimated 50.1 million litas (27 percent), ranking second. Help from French and Swedish charity organizations account for 7.4% and 5.7 percent of the total.

Those receiving aid were, in order: State administration institutions and offices; public organizations; education, culture and sports institutions; and health care and social institutions.

AMERICAN HUMVEES FIRST CHOICE FOR LITHUANIAN ARMY

The Defense ministry plans to buy 200 light cross-country vehicles made by General Motors in the U.S. Negotiations are going on, but the Cabinet has already allowed the purchase of 160 tactical, 38 transport vehicles, 15 sanitary ones, as well as 15 cars for communications and three special ones to be used for reconnaissance.

The NATO-requirements-meeting, military vehicles are to satisfy all the vehicle needs of the entire Geležinis Vilkas motorized infantry brigade and two other battalions.

By the way, the Lithuanian army has already 142 military cars made by GM, and given as a present by the U.S. Government in 1996. By the year 2005, Lithuania plans to buy about 900 light and 130 special cross-country vehicles.

Source for news from Lithuania: ELTA News Agency

 REFLECTIONS

The Awesome Human Potential

From the Journals of Blessed Jurgis Matulaitis

Archbishop Jurgis (George) Matulaitis was beatified by Pope John Paul II on June 28th, 1987. The Pope spoke of him as a special gift for the Church and for the Lithuanian nation. Blessed Jurgis's life and words speak to us even today through his writings, letters, and journals. He expressed his conviction that every human being has great power at his disposal. Here are some thoughts from Blessed Jurgis's journals.

"The human mind is the source of all kinds of ideas that eventually reach the masses and spread throughout the world. The human will is a power that either draws people to itself, raises them up, sways and moves them toward a positive goal or, on the other hand, it can drag them down, bringing humanity either happiness or misery. The human heart, burning with emotion, can be a powerful source of energy that warms, enkindles, ignites others – like steam or electricity – inspiring people to do good or it can be an evil and destructive force." (Journal: Nov. 17, 1910)

"The Spirit, the Spirit is what we need. Nothing can put down the Spirit. We endeavor to give our country the teaching of Christ, to bring the Spirit of Christ wherever we can without despising, of course, any good work or suitable means...What can be greater or more noble than the teaching of Christ and His Spirit? When the human soul is caught up by the Holy Spirit and lifted up into those realms where the holy Trinity dwells, infinite and ineffable in its radiance, and when it looks down upon this world, how very small it appears. Looking at the world from that perspective, you can rightly evaluate everything that is on this earth and put it in its proper place." (Journal writings)

"We must pray that God would give us more peace. Of course, we cannot change other people, but we must learn to see and not to see, to hear and not to hear; we must learn not to feel injuries and malice so deeply, nor to trouble ourselves over it. You can achieve this peace by uniting yourself with the Sacred Heart of Jesus and giving Him all the hurts in your heart." (From a letter to a friend written in 1913)

Blessed Jurgis Matulaitis expressed a last resolution recorded in his Journal. This was: *"To pray more for those from whom I have experienced any kind of evil." (Journal: August, 1925).* Now more than ever, these words ring true for Lithuanians as they turn a country that has been misused, mishandled, and degraded to a proud nation moving forward culturally, spiritually, and politically. ◆

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