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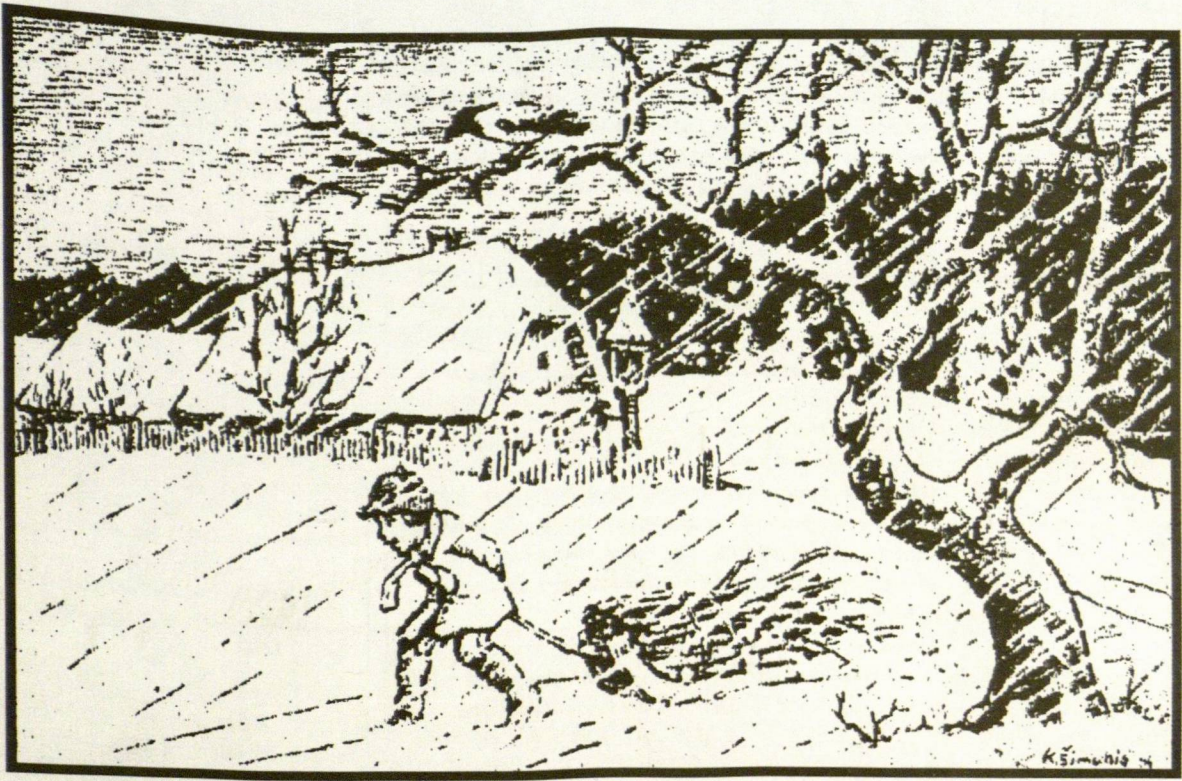
# BRIDGES

• LITHUANIAN AMERICAN NEWS JOURNAL •

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*Linksmu Šv. Kalėdų!*



*Merry Christmas!*

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A Gift to Lithuania's People...A Look At Our Past

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## P e r s p e c t i v e s

*As the holidays approach, there are always questions about Lithuanian Christmas traditions. The serious ones ask – What is the significance of the Christmas Eve meal? How do you decorate the tree? The clueless ones ask – When do you celebrate Christmas? If you don't eat meat, what other foods can you eat? That's the way it goes when your ethnic heritage has never been commercially defined.*

*So, I've decided to let people in on the mother of all traditions practiced by true Lithuanians during the holiest of holidays. It is a tradition that has brought forth priceless facial grimaces on the young that have, to this day, elicited curiously contented feelings for the parents and grandparents. The moment for practicing this particular tradition becomes more of a ritual. A ritual with precise, albeit exaggerated, hand movements and timing. When the moment is right – usually when all the young have been gathered into a warm, cookie-scented kitchen – the tradition of the "silké" begins.*

*The "silké" (to neophytes, it's herring) is a shiny, brilliant, sleek fish that dances in the moonlight on the foaming waves of the Baltic on the first cold November nights. Fishermen gather their sharp, small hooks (my son says they use nets) and cast into the sea, deftly snaring these Christmas prizes.*

*Here, in the United States, the "silké" comes by way of plastic barrel or package or metal tin from Scandinavia or Germany to only select delicatessens. It is not the grayish, anemic herring that languishes in a vinegary brine alongside rubbery onion slices. They are the delicate Baltic fillets nestled in salty oil, waiting in anticipation of eager mouths that entice our crew.*

*When the family has gathered for the precise moment of the "silké" preparation, the younger, more naïve members are strategically placed nearest father. I remember my father gently, no, lovingly opening the lid of the cargo and reaching in for the first fillet. He would slowly smile as he looked into our eyes and placed it most gingerly into his waiting mouth. Only the bravest stayed to continue – the rest scampered away screaming.*

*Our "silké" would end up sliced into bite-sized pieces and topped with a thick, cold tomato and onion sauce or sprinkled with sautéed mushrooms and onions or lightly tossed with browned, chopped walnuts and onions. The finished platefuls were adorned with parsley and took their places on the Christmas Eve table (Kūčiū stalas). The daring younger family members who would partake for the first time always remembered the Christmas they had become true "silké" connoisseurs, like my sons.*

*Ahh, the "silké". Never has a fish been so cherished by a nation as this one. Or at least this one small Lithuanian family.*

*Rasa Ardys-Juška*

Editor

## BRIDGES

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## A SANTA IN DISGUISE

To shore up the government's money-saving drive, Lithuania's President Valdas Adamkus announced that he would do his job for free during the Christmas week.

He also encouraged the presidency's staff members to bolster the campaign as much as they could — either to go without a quarter of December's salary or take an unpaid vacation during the holiday season.

Prime Minister Andrius Kubilius has emphasized the freewill nature of the government call, explaining that the campaign would involve only those civil servants whose salary exceeded the monthly average.

A week's solidarity holiday would allow the national budget to save around eight million litas. ♦



**On the cover:**  
This illustration by K. Šimūnis can be found in the "First Reader" for Lithuanian children entitled *Kregždutė* (The Swallow), edited by A. Rinkūnas, published by Žilburlai Publishing Company in Toronto, Canada in 1956. It appears above a short reading about meals served for the Christmas Eve (Kūčią) dinner.

# The Gift to Lithuania Conference

*The Human Services Council of the Lithuanian- American Community (LAC), the Embassy of Lithuania, and the Washington, D.C. Chapter of the Lithuanian-American Community sponsored a "Gift to Lithuania" conference from November 5<sup>th</sup> to the 7<sup>th</sup>, 1999. Many humanitarian aid organizations participated. The purpose of the conference was to summarize the work that has been done; to analyze what has and has not worked; to gain an understanding of what is still required; to obtain information from individuals who have worked and have continued to work in and with Lithuania's people in providing humanitarian assistance. We include an overview of the Conference, the discussions and results, and an inside look into the work of a humanitarian aid organization.*

## *An Overview*

The conference, which was held at the Marriott Key Bridge Hotel in Arlington, drew participants from virtually every group involved in working for Lithuania. It was officially opened by Rūta Skučienė, LAC, Inc. Washington, DC Chapter president, and Birutė Jasaitienė, Chair, Lithuanian Human Services Council.

Remarks were made by Prof. Vytautas Landsbergis, President of the Republic of Lithuania's Parliament, as well as the Hon. Stasys Sakalauskas, Lithuania's Ambassador to the United States. Professor Landsbergis awarded Major General Henry A. Kievenaar, former Principle Director of the European and NATO Policy Office of the U.S. Department of State, with the State award of the Republic of Lithuania - the Third Class Order of the Grand Duke Gediminas. Also in attendance was Defense

Attaché of the Republic of Lithuania to the United States and Canada, Major Kestutis Zelnys.

Vaclovas Kleiza, Hon. Counsel of the Republic of Lithuania, spoke of assistance provided to Lithuania by U.S. Lithuanians until 1940. Assistance provided to Lithuanians by American-Lithuanians from 1990 to today was discussed by John Mankus, Knights of Lithuania; Regina Juškaitė-Švobienė, Aid to Lithuania; Vida Jankauskienė, Lithuanian Catholic Religious Aid; Mr. Veitas, Lithuanian Children's Relief; and Birutė Jasaitienė, Lithuanian Human Services Council. Moderators were Vytas Narutis and Saulius Kuprys.

Dr. Regina Švobienė, President of Country-side Children's Fund, spoke of what has been done and what is still needed. Irena Degutienė, Minister of the Republic of Lithuania Social

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*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. JŪRATĖ BUDRIENĖ is the Vice-President of Information Services of the Lithuanian-American Community, Inc. and an active member of humanitarian service groups. RAMUNĖ KUBILIUS, MALS is Head of Reference and Research Services at the Galter Health Sciences Library in Chicago, Illinois. She is a member of the "Child's Gate to Learning" group and other Lithuanian organizations.*

Services and Labor Ministry, was unable to attend due to a political situation in Lithuania. Her speech was delivered by Rita Kazragienė, First Secretary of the Lithuanian Embassy.

The conference participants broke into small discussion groups focusing on medical aid, aid to children, senior citizens, and partisans. Discussion group leaders were Viligailė Lendraitienė, Indrė Tijunelienė, Jeanne Dorr and Leonas Maskaliūnas.

An evening reception was held at the Lithuanian Embassy.

Sunday morning Mass was celebrated in the hotel. Dr. John Lubicky, Chief of Staff, Chicago Shriners Hospital for Children, and Dr. Kestutis Saniukas, Chief of Orthopedics, Vil-

nius University Children's Hospital gave a symposium entitled "Working in Lithuania". The moderator was Dr. Linas Sidrys.

Discussion group results were read by George Lendraitis, the questionnaire response overview by Algis Augaitis, and the summary by Skirma Kondratienė. Closing remarks were offered by Juratė Budrienė.

The conference organizing committee consisted of Juratė Budrienė (Chair) Algis Augaitis, Birutė Jasaitienė, Rita Kazragienė, Ramunė Kligytė, Saulius Kuprys, Jurgis Lendraitis, Dr. Vytautas Narutis and Dr. Linas Sidrys. ♦

— *Jeanne Dorr*

## *Discussion Group Results*

A large portion of the "Gift to Lithuania" agenda was dedicated to exploring the way in which activities should be conducted in the future. The results of the three discussion groups are outlined below:

### **AID TO THE ELDERLY --**

*Discussion Group led by Jeanne Dorr*

**Current Situation** — data provided by the Ministry of Social Services survey "Population Aging in Lithuania" showed:

- 20% of population is elderly.
- Majority of elderly live in rural areas.
- Destitute "city" elderly have services such as soup kitchens and medical help readily available to them -- this is NOT true in the countryside.
- Focus has shifted to elderly living alone in villages.
- Many of the elderly go to bed hungry.
- There is a shortage/lack of medical assistance and trained social workers for the elderly.

### **Future Needs**

1. Mobile/Itinerant nurses who could visit the elderly once a week.

2. More social workers are needed for the elderly in rural areas.
3. New pilot program developed — "Friends of Lithuanian Elders" — to be run by the Lithuanian Human Services Council of the U.S.A., Inc. and patterned after "Lithuanian Orphan Care". Sponsors will donate \$150.00 per month to sponsor an elderly person in a village. Long distance friendship and care may result in sponsor sending packages of needed goods once or twice a year. "Countryside Children's Fund" (Kaimo Vaikų Fondas) and several priests working with "Lithuanian Orphan Care" will help in administering and overseeing this pilot program.

**Remember:** A country is judged by the way it treats its young AND its old.

### **MEDICAL AID --**

*Discussion Group led by Viligailė Lendraitis*

The medical aid discussion group had the opportunity to discuss the strengths and successes of their programs as well as their downfalls. Most important, long-range goals were discussed and formulated.

During the discussion the following issues were addressed:

1. Most success was experienced when aid was sent directly to a hospital or medical facility. More sister-hospitals are needed, which would include educational training, medical personnel exchanges and physical structure repairs/remodeling.
2. Lithuanian physicians and dentists have requested more educational information. Current books and journals, as well as visual aids are in demand. A suggestion was made to order subscriptions for medical/dental journals when possible. More seminars and conferences conducted by U.S. physicians/universities in Lithuania would provide more doctors with the opportunity to attend conferences.
3. Establishing a more honest dialogue between a hospital in Lithuania receiving the aid and the sender is essential. Medical aid being sent should be truly needed by the hospital. Many times medical personnel feel uncomfortable to state what their specific needs are.
4. It was suggested to use more companies in Lithuania to purchase medicines, supplies, and equipment to alleviate cost and at the same time to help Lithuania's economy. A recommendation was made to compose a list of reliable companies that have been used successfully.
5. Medicines and supplies that are sent to Lithuania need at least one year until the expiration date. No medical equipment should be sent unless requested by the hospital.

### Goals

The major focus of the discussion group was to formulate long-range goals. How can we better help Lithuania's health system?

Three major goals were formulated:

1. Coordinate medical efforts of U.S. organizations. Share information with each other (and others) through a web page or e-mail bank so that efforts aren't duplicated and that we can help each other whenever possible. Partnering with Lithuania's Ministry of Social Security Services may also help in coordinating everyone's efforts. A big thanks to Juratė Budrienė for volunteering to implement the web page and e-mail bank.
2. Focus on education programs. Public Health Education is essential. Last year the University of Illinois provided a curriculum and initiated a health class in some of Klaipėda's middle schools. Šiauliai has instituted this same program this year. It is important to expand this program throughout Lithuania and to incorporate A.P.P.L. E., so that more Lithuanian teachers are trained to teach the class. It is necessary to address issues of hygiene (including dental hygiene), smoking, alcohol, drugs, and sex in the schools.
3. There is a need to tap resources of foundations for more funding. It is essential to find specialists in this area who may approach companies and foundations. The search is on. Maybe someone here today knows someone in this area.

### AID TO CHILDREN --

*Discussion Group led by Indrė Tijuneliene*

#### What's Working?

1. Availability of professionals with great ideas and programs to take to Lithuania.
2. Hospital staffs maximize the benefits of aid received.
3. Evaluating each request for aid according to the importance of the project.
4. Representatives in Lithuania and the charity in U.S. evaluate requests for aid.
5. Requesting help from Lithuanian-Americans who take pride in their heritage.
6. Direct contact with the families or institutions receiving support.
7. Asking for donations of educational aids in stores and garage sales.
8. Mentoring of one group by another in anti-smoking, anti-drug and alcohol lifestyles.

9. Focusing attention on a specific group, rather than general aid.
10. Sponsoring specific children, helping soup kitchens, scholarships for students to continue studying in Lithuania.

#### What's not Working/Difficulties?

1. Raising money.
2. Sometimes it is unclear exactly what kind of help is needed.
3. Slow response in acknowledging donations.
4. In the Lithuanian language, the laws are vague about tax deductions for donations to charity.
5. Working with various government institutions.
6. It is difficult to find new people to be officers of charitable organizations.
7. Receiving large grants or endowments for non-local children's charity.

#### What Changes need to be made to Improve Charitable Aid? Goals? Needs?

1. Do a serious needs analysis.
2. A newsletter about the activities of the various charitable organizations would be helpful.
3. Aid needs to go directly, not through state institutions.
4. Empower people to help themselves.
5. Have more follow-up to insure correct distribution of donations.
6. Donations from corporations, industry, matching funds.

#### Some General Thoughts

- Having a reliable network in Lithuania is essential.

- Having direct contact with those receiving aid is both satisfying and useful.
- Paying for implemented improvements after receiving receipt for work done is advisable, rather than giving cash to remodel.
- Concerns were expressed about adoptions.
- Although aid is needed, burnout and fatigue may prove to be a problem to aid providers.

#### SUMA SUMARUM

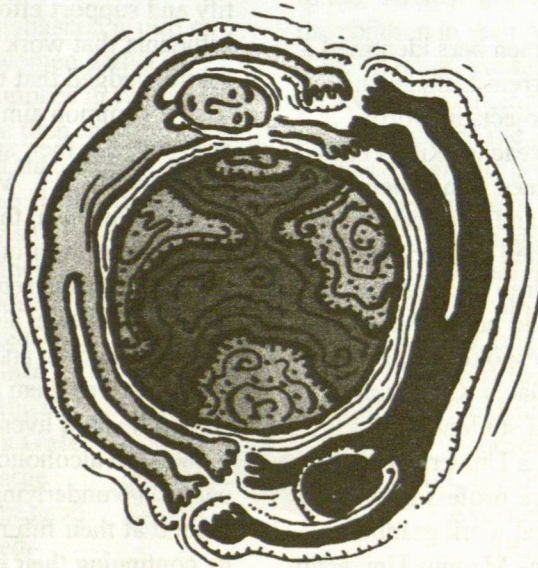
#### What changes need to be made for the future in order to improve charitable aid?

1. Direct contact and two-way honest communication with Lithuanian groups, hospitals, orphanages, and nursing homes -- so that needs are clear and that donations of aid and financial support end up helping those that are in need.
2. Education for medical personnel (as well as teachers and social workers) is needed so that Lithuanian professionals receive the latest information and are trained in the latest techniques

— to empower the Lithuanian people to do more for themselves.

3. Money -- more is needed from fundraising and grants.
4. There is a need for coordination of efforts of U.S. organizations.
5. More people are needed to volunteer and help out with Lithuania's problems -- here and there. ♦

— *Juraté Budriené*



## *A Child's Gate to Learning*

**C**hild's Gate to Learning recently celebrated its first anniversary. The group, called "Vaiko vartai į mokslą" in Lithuanian, is a grassroots collaboration first begun in the Chicago area in 1998 by a group of present or retired teachers and others who sought a way to help Lithuania's children. The group is now in the process of incorporating. In the past year, an energetic affiliated group of **Child's Gate to Learning** was founded in Detroit, and persons in other cities have expressed interest in the group.

The group's founding members identified a niche not addressed by current Lithuanian-American humanitarian projects in North America. Retired French teacher Rita Venclovas and other women listened to a paper read at a Symposium on the Arts and Sciences meeting in Chicago, which mentioned the very real problem of underage children from asocial families in Lithuania who do not attend school.

Soon after, the women spoke with and informally met with Sister Daiva Kuzmickas, a social worker and doctoral student from Lithuania; dr. Rūta Kulys, a University of Illinois at Chicago social work professor and one of the founders of the social work graduate school program at Vytautas Magnus University in Kaunas, Lithuania; and native Chicagoan (Cicero, really) dr. Arvydas Žygas, a major force in the revival of the Lithuanian Catholic association, "Ateities" in Lithuania whose members are largely high school and university students. All confirmed that the problem was very serious and did not bode well for Lithuania's future generations.

An idea to form an aid group was born. Much valuable advice and support was given during the first year from the Lithuanian-American Community's Human Services Council president, Birutė Jasaitis, as well as academics who gave advice about doing research, writing grant proposals, etc.

In 1998, the initial group founded in Chicago planned only to draft a letter to then Minister of Education, Kornelijus Platelis, urging him to give particular attention to Lithuania's underage children who were not attending school. It was realized that trying to initiate societal or political change from across the ocean was not enough. The initiators re-examined their plans and a new grassroots-working model was formed.

**Child's Gate to Learning** decided to identify and support efforts already under way in Lithuania that work with street children. It was acknowledged that these projects seemed to have a common aim of encouraging these children to leave their street lives for more purposeful activities. Various fun outings are organized for them; they learn crafts, they learn to play on a team through sports. Most importantly, they have returned to school. The support they receive, along with the activities, assure the children and adolescents that someone cares; it gives them a sense of purpose to outweigh the hard lives many of them have at home with alcoholic or otherwise troubled parents. The underlying goal is to impress upon them that their future success is better ensured by continuing their education.

**Child's Gate** began charging a nominal membership fee to its members who meet every month or so. This formed a funding base for sending packages to the projects supported in Lithuania's villages. Sending the packages in the large containers sent by other humanitarian groups was not an option. Those are delivered only to large cities. In order to have the packages delivered directly to the religious and teachers working in villages, **Children's Gate to Learning** has paid for and sent packages via other means. Educational materials and sports supplies, toys, and t-shirts have been sent to support projects now under way. Letters and postcards of gratitude and progress reports on



successes have already been forthcoming.

The group has conducted fundraisers to send material support: neighborhood garage sales, a Halloween "Witches' Luncheon" (Raganų pietūs) with a children's talent show and raffle, and cake sales during Lithuanian Christmas bazaars. T-shirts were designed and sent to the "Vilties angelai" group so that the sports team would have a "uniform" when playing sports against other teams. In Chicago, core group members have approached friends and acquaintances in the American community receiving donations of both money and gifts for the children.

In Detroit, the newly established group of about twenty enthusiastic women gathered enough school and other supplies in two weeks to fill 30 boxes, which were then sent to Rumboniai village. It is planned that groups in various cities may choose to use either similar means of raising awareness and funds for the projects, or they may try others. Whichever means they choose, the plan is that they will begin to support projects **Child's Gate to Learning** has already identified.

In the past year, **Child's Gate** identified some groups in large Lithuanian metropolitan areas and in the countryside where dedicated religious and teachers were already working with former street children. So far, contact has been maintained with the "Vilties angelai" (Hope's Angels) project and "Visų šventųjų" (All Saints) parish in Vilnius, a group in Marijampolė, and efforts in Rumboniai and Obeliai villages. The aim is to provide continuing moral and material support to these few projects, rather than to try duplicating other projects or spreading out too thinly.

A subgroup of **Child's Gate** formed to write grant proposals to large American corporations asking for funding. During the grant writing process, the need for a Board of Directors arose; so, three capable professionals from the Chicago area Lithuanian-American commu-

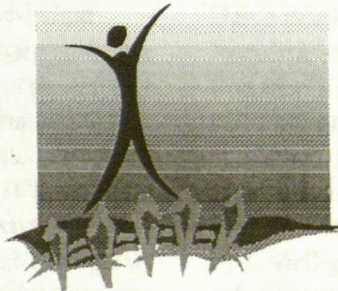
nity were sought out. All agreed to help without hesitation. Such is the support **Child's Gate** founders have felt since their idea was first born.

Many of **Child's Gate to Learning** members already work with other projects (such as A.P.P.L.E., "Saulutė", and "Ateitis"), but they have seen **Child's Gate** as a complementary, not duplicating effort. There has been a gratifying indication that volunteerism is on the rise in Lithuania. The director of one of the projects in Vilnius has written that she has been able to interest university students who belong to the "Ateitis" organization in helping occupy the children in their after school activities. (One "Ateitis" guideline is that members should be involved in their communities.) With support on both sides of the Atlantic, the efforts of dedicated persons need not be done solo.

The next stage of **Child's Gate** will probably begin in early 2000 when founding member Rita Venclovas and others plan to visit Lithuania for longer or shorter periods, and work side-by-side with some of the dedicated Lithuanians through a coordinated program now called L.E.A.P. (Lithuanian Educational Assistance Program).

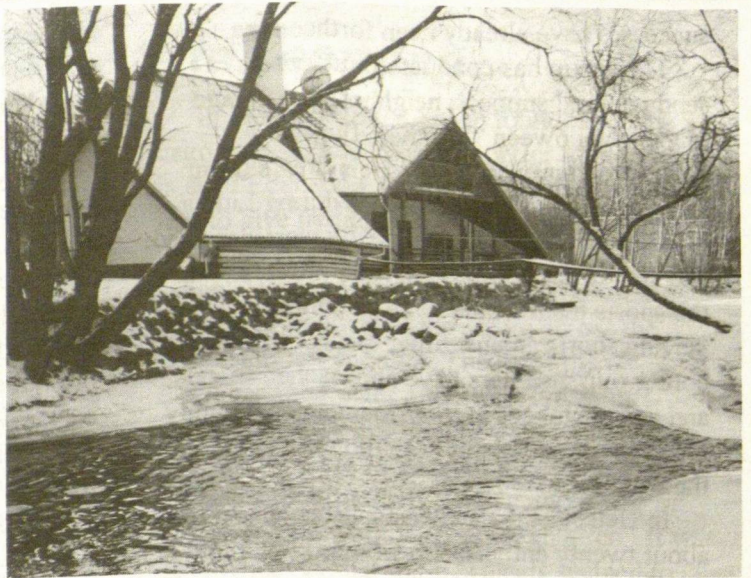
BRIDGES articles by Jeannie Dorr and others have always been very interesting to readers. They have shown that for those who care, there is always work to be done for Lithuania and Lithuanians. In the past year, **Child's Gate to Learning** has joined in this worthy and satisfying endeavor. Its members networked with other Lithuanian American humanitarian aid group members at a recent conference in Washington, D.C., and the enthusiasm to work continues into the New Year. For more information about **Child's Gate to Learning**, contact Rita Venclovas (e-mail [venclovas@aol.com](mailto:venclovas@aol.com)) or by writing to 507 Longfellow, Deerfield, IL 60015. ♦

— *Ramunė Kubilius*



Ramona Kasimira Gonski

# A Wintry Vacation at a



## Lithuanian Country House

While many people were sitting down to a traditional Thanksgiving Day dinner: passing around the cranberry sauce, fighting over the last bit of stuffing, my thoughts during this year's holiday turned nostalgic. I was once again back in Kupiškis, Thanksgiving Day 1998, feasting on *blynai* with sour cream and berry sauce. Thanksgiving Day was spent at a wonderful bed and breakfast, in a rural setting, that was run by Daiva and Kestutis Jackūnai.

In the summer of 1998 my husband, Edward, and I were planning a November trip to Lithuania to visit my cousin, Gražina, and her two young children, Almeda and Šarunas, who lived in Panevėžys. It soon became apparent that under no circumstances were we to stay in a hotel; therefore, Gražina graciously opened up her apartment to us for our week's stay. It was very kind of her, but I had in the back of my mind to venture out a bit on our own and

was intrigued with the idea of staying at a Lithuanian country house.

In the early planning stages for this trip, I had come across information about the Lithuanian Rural Tourism Association (*Lietuvos Kaimo Turizmo Asociacija*) in an issue of *Bridges*. I faxed the Association requesting a recommendation for a *sodžius* (country house) near Panevėžys and promptly received a fax back with Daiva's telephone and fax number. The hard part was over; I had a contact and quickly made arrangements with Daiva to spend one night at her Bed and Breakfast. I had included my cousin and her two children; but unfortunately, accommodations could not be made for them.

Daiva could not have been more accommodating. Because her house was off the main road and difficult to find, she picked us up in her car at a designated spot and drove us back to her home. We drove down a country road

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RAMONA KASIMIRA GONSKI works in the Immunology and Infectious Diseases Department of the Harvard School of Public Health.

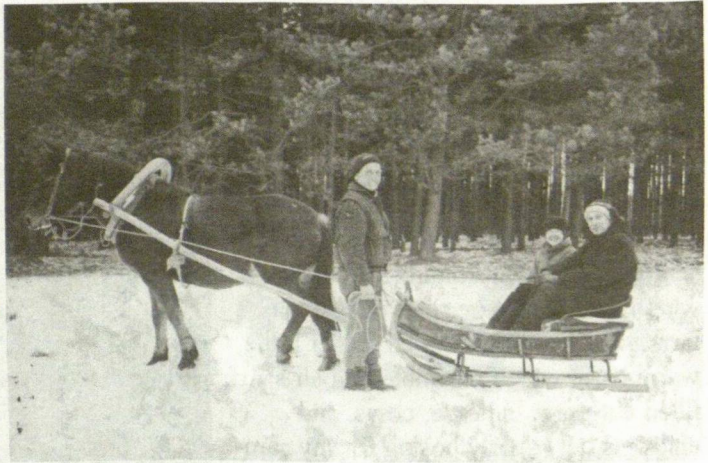
and came upon a handsome, 20<sup>th</sup> century house of stucco. In back of the house ran a small brook and beyond, a grove of pines that led into a forest and farmlands. The setting was truly picturesque; more so because snow was everywhere.

It was already 2:00 o'clock in the afternoon when we arrived, and Daiva's concern for her guests' comfort and enjoyment was apparent when she suggested an old-fashioned sleigh ride through the woods after our lunch. We quickly settled our luggage in our small, but cozy room and headed out to explore the nearby woods, guided by a small, black, short-legged guardian, Daiva's dog.

We returned for lunch to find a dining table overflowing with an astonishing assortment of traditional Lithuanian dishes: potato-filled dumplings, herring and salad, home-baked breads, hot sauerkraut, cold cabbage salad, big, steamy boiled potatoes with pork, sour cream, fresh apple and carrot juices, linden blossom tea, and home-made pickles. Daiva prepared everything herself. Her overnight rate includes breakfast (another tantalizing feast), and for a modest fee, she will prepare lunch and dinner.

While enjoying our meal, we spied our big, brown, friendly horse hitched to his turn-of-the-century sleigh, patiently waiting for us. Our driver and his five year-old horse were from a neighboring farm. My husband and I got into this charming sleigh, and with Daiva taking a video shot of us; we trotted off into the snow-covered forest. We sped only when *Ponas Arklys* (Mr. Horse) was gently prodded; otherwise, it was a leisurely trot through pine woods and over fields.

When we came to a nearby farm house, we stopped for a little tour while our driver had a chat with his neighbor. We found a very contented woman of 72 in a very old, cold barn, lit by a single bare light bulb, happily engaged at her antique electric wool-processing machine.



*A neighbor with his horse and sleigh take Ramona and Ed Gonski for a trot through the woods.*

*Photo: Ramona Gonski*

In the dark corners of the barn were big, soft, white bales of processed cotton-soft wool.

After the sleigh ride -- it was rapidly getting darker and was quite dark by 4:00 o'clock -- Daiva drove us to an arranged private-guided tour of a local ethnographic museum's collection of pre-industrial implements for farming, cooking, and textile-making. She intended that we should get as much out of our short visit as possible. From the ethnographic museum we walked to a lovely local church. We were back by 6:00 o'clock in the evening and were served our "Thanksgiving Day" dinner.

After dinner, Daiva set out a bottle of champagne, chocolates, and presented us with a hand-made gift in celebration of our visit. As it turned out, we were her first American guests.

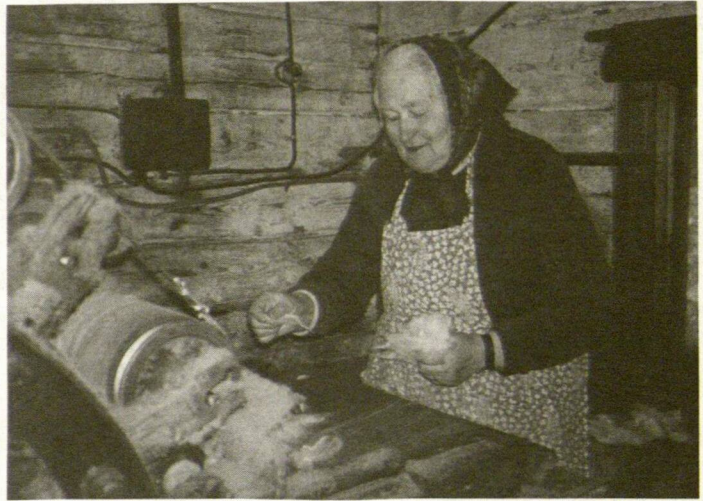
The following morning we were once again beside ourselves with her culinary feats: omelets, farmers' cheese, a variety of cold meats, freshly baked breads, fresh cow's milk, pastry, coffee, and sugared cranberries. Daiva's dedication and commitment to preserving country traditions was clearly evident in her enthusiasm for growing her own vegetables, cooking, and canning. She showed us her compact, yet capacious preserve and root cellars, chock-full of nature's bounty. And yet, she is an extremely attractive young mother, who looks as if she

stepped out of a *Vogue* catalog!

Daiva was not through with us yet! We had time for one more excursion before my cousin and her brother came for us. Daiva's husband and three-year-old daughter accompanied us on this short trip. First we stopped to fetch an elderly neighbor who was coming with us and who lived just up the road on a small farm. She proudly showed us her large, warm barn, which resembled Noah's Ark filled with pigs, a horse, cows, and chickens, all eagerly posing for my camera.

At last we were on our way to *Adomo Petrausko Etnografinis Muziejus*, (ethnographic museum of Adomas Petrauskas) in Uoginis, a village of Kupiškis. Mr. Petrauskas was a veritable character and quite the collector of folk art. After touring his museum he invited us to his modest home to warm up, eat some apples, and a little conversation. All too soon it was time to leave; we thanked our host, bundled up our coats against the bitter cold, and headed back to Kupiškis.

Thus, ended our first stay in a Lithuanian country house and, hopefully, it will not be our last. Daiva and Kestutis' brochure aptly puts it, "... So, come to us and you'll find the quietness of the village in Lithuania -- it cures everything!" ♦



An elderly woman showed the Gonskis her electric wool-processing machine.

Photo: R. Gonski

## *A Countryside Inn Awaits You...*

**I**t was the countryside that preserved Lithuania's national heritage and cultural traditions — and it has become the unique area to visit.

As in Ms. Gonski's article, the Bed and Breakfast trade in rural Lithuania provides visitors with specific-to-the-area services and recreation. It is a special time to see wild boars and foxes, unique landscapes, clear rivers and lakes, and countryside charm described in Lithuanian folk stories and songs.

The "Lietuvos Kaimo Turizmo Asociacija" (The Lithuanian Rural Tourism Association) was specifically formed by a group of

Lithuanians living in the countryside. This association is recognized by the European Rural Tourism Association. Each major Lithuanian city has information on the Association at the Tourism Centers.

For further information about the Association and the numerous country homes open to tourists, please contact:

Regina Sirusienė, president  
K. Donelaičio 2  
3000 Kaunas Lithuania  
Tel/Fax: +370 7 22 64 72 ♦

## A Lithuanian Club Is Born



Ed and Mary Pribush were pleased with their retirement home in Whiting, New Jersey, but they missed their Lithuanian friends from their former home in Linden, New Jersey. The solution was to form a club, and so they invited nine people to their home in October 1984 to discuss it. A notice was placed in local papers, and eventually forty people came together to form what is now known as the "American-Lithuanian Club, Inc."

We found quarters in the Hilltop Club House, where we have monthly meetings, ending in coffee and tasty baked goods that are donated by our members. We always have *suris* (Lithuanian cheese) and occasionally *midus* (Lithuanian mead) from Lithuania. It is kind of a no-no, but a tiny sip evokes a "*sveiks*" ("to your health").

Now, to get serious about our activities and goals. Thanks to the foresight of the original members, Ed and Mary Pribush, Frank and Stella Pelan, John and Mildred Deldon, Frank and Dorothy Grinchis, Antoinette Licata, Mary Kulis, and Madeline Petkus (*remember that name*), we have a club to be proud of.

We changed from just a social club when we received a phone call from Deborah Heart and Lung Hospital, informing us that a little girl from Lithuania, named Miglė, was there for heart surgery. Through Madeline and George Petkus, we were kept informed of her progress. Deborah does not charge for their services, so

our contribution to her was warm winter clothing. We have been so delighted to hear that little Miglė is now grown and well. From that first involvement, we became fully committed to many Lithuanian causes.

A strong willed, delightfully ruthless activities' chairlady named Madeline Petkus finds means to use our limited funds in the most rewarding ways. Money is raised through trips, dinners, 50/50s and individual contributions. Here is a condensed version of some accomplishments:

- We are especially fond of the orphans and have aided in their many medical, educational, and clothing needs.
- Funds are sent to churches and religious orders.
- Drugs and toiletries are given to a home for the elderly.
- Large shipments of medical journals to the universities, including nursing and pediatric magazines, are collected.
- Money donated toward a shipment of computers to a high school.
- Each year we all participate in a clothing and household articles drive, which we also helps to defray shipping costs.
- Members knitted 200 caps for wayside children.
- Participated in Lithuanian Mercy Lift.
- Donated to a Blind school toward the purchase of a van.

ALDONA MILLER KELLY is a member of the very active American-Lithuanian Club in Whiting, New Jersey.

- Gave toward the Šarūnas Childrens' Fund.
- Provided warm winter jackets for two blind boys.
- Donated to Deborah Hospital for their surgery on other Lithuanian children, for having Lithuanian doctors here to learn more about heart treatment. This in turn led to sending 30 doctors to Lithuania to perform surgery and hold a symposium.
- Madeline, on her own, collected \$2,000 to have a hospital room renovated. *What a treasure she is!*
- She also received 25 blankets free for the hospital.
- Donated local library subscriptions of "Lithuanian Heritage" and "Balfas"
- Some members support A.P. P.L.E.

There is more, and our members make it all possible as well. They are a great group, starting with the officers, the refreshment couple, the Lithuanian Liberation Day organizers, and flag raising arrangers. We have Christmas dinners and picnics. All help to make them a success. Our oldest member, Veronica Dugan, was honored with a mass on her 100<sup>th</sup> birthday, a very special occasion for all.

We plan to carry on in the same manner. We do it to honor our parents and their families now living in Lithuania and to help their homeland recover from oppression. It would be very interesting to hear about other clubs in the United States. ◆

## Our Colorful Past...

"The Lithuanian Citizens' Society Newsletter" introduced a new monthly section edited by Nancy Binkney starting December 1999 – "The Colorful Past of our Lithuanian Immigrants". Below is an excerpt from this new column.

When our Lithuanian parents or grandparents came to these shores they did not find a land of milk and honey, nor did they find roads paved with gold. What many of our ancestors found instead, after enduring a (mostly) terrible passage via steerage class, was discrimination, hatred, abuse, and hard labor. Typically, the men toiled in the mills at hot, dirty, back-breaking jobs or they mined coal confined underground twelve hours a day, subjected to extreme danger from cave-ins. The women often married young, bore many children, and frequently worked outside the home or turned their homes into boarding houses for the newly arriving immigrants. They labored mightily and made a better life for us, their descendants. The following [anecdote gives] some idea of the early life of our beloved immigrant ancestors.

### ***A Narrow Escape***

From John McCloskey comes the following story about his father's journey to America: [Jonas] Mikalauskas, in the early 1900s, made his way to America via steerage class aboard a German vessel out of Hamburg. It was a long journey from his Lithuanian home and family and we can only speculate what mixed emotions the young lad experienced on that trip -- the anticipation of seeing a new world, coupled with the bittersweet memories of a home left behind. But it was a journey that almost never happened.

Back in Lithuania it was customary for Russians to conscript young men to military service. Every week the Russian conscript wagon would scour the villages for able-bodied young men who came of age to serve in the Russian military. Russian soldiers arrived at the family homestead, unceremoniously clipped his hair, and told [Jonas's] mother she had one week to get his affairs in order. This could not have come at a worse time; since [Jonas] was awaiting the arrival of a ticket to America from his sister.

When the conscript wagon came the following week to take [Jonas] away, his passage to America had just arrived. But [Jonas] could do nothing except to leave with the soldiers who came for him. Clutching his ticket close to his heart and torn by his impossible circumstance, [Jonas] climbed aboard the wagon and sadly watched as his village receded into the distance. Little did he know his greatest adventure was about to begin.

The conscript wagon arrived at the German border and was secured on the Lithuanian side by a Russian patrol. To [Jonas's] surprise, many furtive words were exchanged, money changed hands, and before he knew it, [Jonas] was on his way to the port of Hamburg where he boarded the ship to America! A narrow escape, indeed. ◆

Kay A. Yankoski

# A Sentimental Journey

**O**n a bright and sunny Sunday, September 19 (Mother's 84th birthday), she and I began our "Sentimental Journey" back to our old neighborhood in Wilkes Barre, Pennsylvania.

This was something I've wanted to do for a while and Mother was interested in joining me.

We drove up the Pennsylvania Turnpike to Wilkes Barre where we quickly found Holy Trinity, the Yankoski family Lithuanian church. It was locked (as many churches are these days); so we went to the Rectory where the pastor welcomed us. We explained that this was Daddy's church, I had been baptized there, etc., and he unlocked the church for us.

It was ornate and beautiful. They have not had a Lithuanian priest in years and there are no more grandmothers to make potato pancakes in the church basement as I remembered — the stoves hot, the door open for some fresh air, and all the women busily grating potatoes. The priest said he was losing parishioners and that soon churches like this would only be seen in books. There is no one left there to uphold the old Lithuanian traditions. While the neighborhood looked nice enough, the church had been vandalized several times and could not be left open.



Actually we had proceeded to Grandma's house first, then we had visited the church. We were delighted to see Grandma's house white and bright with siding, the garage and everything else as we remem-

bered it — although the back door/side porch was now enclosed. We strolled down Kent Lane to the end and those houses too were well kept. Next we went to Sheridan Street to see our house and thought we remembered the right one. After that we proceeded to Holy Trinity and then to Kingston to see the maternal side of the family.

We got within a block of River Street and it was closed. We headed toward the Square and found Market Street Bridge closed too — there was a wheelchair race scheduled. We lost about an hour because we could not get across the river; other bridges were closed too. It was disappointing because the bridge and avenue into Kingston loomed very large in my memory. Finally we were able to get over Cross Valley Bridge after waiting in line for a long time, but at least we moved along and were finally in Kingston — despite somebody's best efforts to keep us from crossing the river! Finally we spotted East Vaughn Street; we used to live on West Vaughn Street. So, we backtracked and

*KAY YANKOSKI is a world traveler and an active member of the Washington Lithuanian-American Community.*

began the Kingston portion of our journey at the end instead of the beginning.

We stopped for lunch at the corner of Wyoming Avenue and West Vaughn Street — who "da thunk" that we'd be eating Chinese here? Back then, Chinese food was what Chinese people ate!

Refreshed, we proceeded a few car lengths to Schuyler Avenue Elementary School (we moved away from Kingston when I was in 5<sup>th</sup> grade). It looked old and tired. The field across the street where we picked violets was now part of the small shopping mall where we had lunch.

Down toward the next intersection was #78, our house. It too had matured nicely — white shingles, still with upstairs and downstairs back porches. The garage that seemed waaay down at the end of the yard was not that far down now. We went to our friends and neighbors, the

Dodsons and the Hathaways: the former two houses down, and the latter right across the street. Again, they seemed larger in my memory (that of a 10 year-old). The neighbors are long gone, but the houses reminded us of some good times and good neighbors.

The aforementioned school was on the corner of Schuyler Avenue and West Vaughn — Aunt Mary (Mother's other older sister) lived at the corner of Schuyler Avenue and Newitt Place. We proceeded there and found it also in good condition. Newitt Place is a one-way street (as were many now). I remembered the hanging tiffany lamp in her dining room and wondered if it was still there.

On to St. Mary's Annunciation in Kingston, where Mother and Daddy were married. We naturally stopped at the Rectory first (since I made memorial gifts to both churches in the names of both families) and spoke to the priest. He showed us some Lithuanian artifacts — two pictures made of thin pieces of light wood on darker wood and a small one made of shards of amber. He keeps St. Mary's open, so we went inside. It was not nearly so ornate as Holy

Trinity: paintings on a solid color ceiling unlike the other with a patterned ceiling. Compared to my current modern "box" church, both were vestiges of another time and place.

Because of the one-way streets, we turned the corner to look for Penn Street School, my first one. But, it had been torn down. Mother's family lived next door to the school at one time and because the school was gone, we could not find the house either. We headed over to see Aunt Martha (recent widow of Mother's baby brother, Uncle Chuck). We had a brief visit and headed back toward Grandma's house on Pringle Street. It too had weathered the years, but the house next door was gone. In its place, was a small parking lot. We admired the stained glass windows that remained in Grandma's living and dining rooms and remembered the man who brought those wonderful chocolate covered donuts through the neighborhood in his truck. On to our last stop -- Aunt Annie's house. She is Mother's elder sister and they are the only survivors of nine children.

It was with a sigh of relief that we left for home; we had seen everything on our memory list. BUT, not before stopping for a frozen custard — Aunt Martha's "hot tip" and a small seasonal business partly-owned by her daughter and son-in-law. We headed down Zerbey Avenue to Edwardsville. It was a good stop and great custard. Her grandson happened to be working there and Mother recognized him. He led us on our way to Rutter Street and home.

We made a minor detour — I went the wrong way on the Turnpike — but we were home before dark. It was an exhausting day, but also a one-of-a-kind day, unlikely to happen again. ♦



# There Shines a Star

Caroling, as we know it, is not the typical Lithuanian fare. In fact, the majority of Christmas songs were written as hymns to be sung by choirs for Midnight Mass (Bernelių Mišios) on Christmas Eve (Kūčios) night or for early Christmas (Kalėdos) morning Mass.

In earlier times, country people would sing hymns as a reverent expression before breakfast on Christmas morning. During the days of the first independence, 1918 to 1939, the country folk would assemble at a landowner's home and sing, pray, and make merry. During this time period, the city people introduced the custom of decorating a Christmas Tree. The ornaments were chiefly imported from Germany — made of glass in the shapes of toys. In addition, shiny wrappings, apples and candy were hung alongside these glass ornaments. Real candles lit the entire tree. The candles were only used once, on Christmas Eve night for fear of a fire.

This joyous holiday was never commercialized or developed in the same way Americans were doing. The Soviet occupation, with its atheistic stance, forbade celebrating Christmas. Christmas entered the twilight zone — frozen it in a time period long remembered and practiced by immigrants, refugees, and displaced persons living in the free world.

In the United States, as the tradition to celebrate Christmas Eve with the Lithuanian community in schools and parishes took hold, singing the Christmas hymns became more prevalent.

Composers expressed their creative talents using Lithuanian-style musical composition and the words of poets.

Christmas hymns have been published by Lithuanian-American groups, as the Lithuanian Organists Guild (Sąjunga Lietuvių Vargoninkų Amerikoje), since as early as the 1900s. The hymn to the right is an example of one composed and published by this guild in 1940.

This particular piece is not widely known, but it represents the subject matter repeated in many of the hymns — both Lithuanian and American...

*Be joyful, mankind,  
End your sadness,  
The long-awaited happy morning  
has come!  
Christ is born,  
We have a sign,  
On Bethlehem, there shines a star... ♦*

RASA ARDYS-JUŠKA is the editor of *Bridges*.  
Source on traditions: *Lithuanian Customs and Traditions* by Danutė Brazytė Bindokienė.

**Džiaukis, žmonija**  
Kalėdų Giesmė

VL. PAULAUŠKAS

Linksmal

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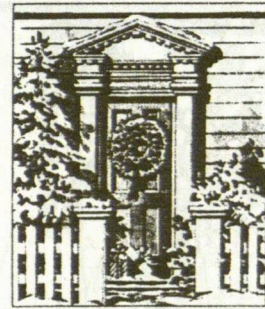


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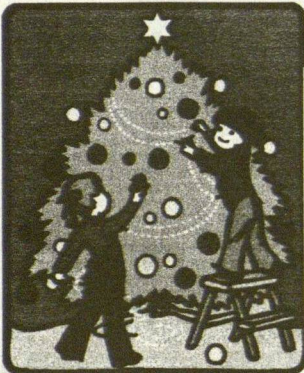
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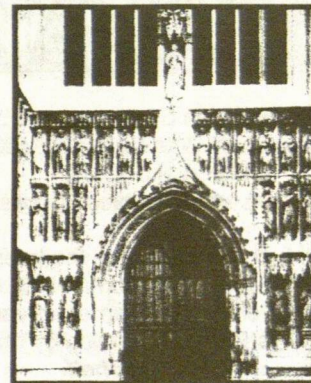
# From Christmas to the Millenium

**T**he Feast of the Immaculate Conception is celebrated on December 8th. In addition, December 12th marks the Feast of Our Lady of Guadalupe, Patroness of the Americas. Appearing to the humble peasant Juan Diego in 1531, Mary blessed all the Americas and revealed that her Son has come to dwell among us, hears the cry of the poor, and listens to us in our every need.

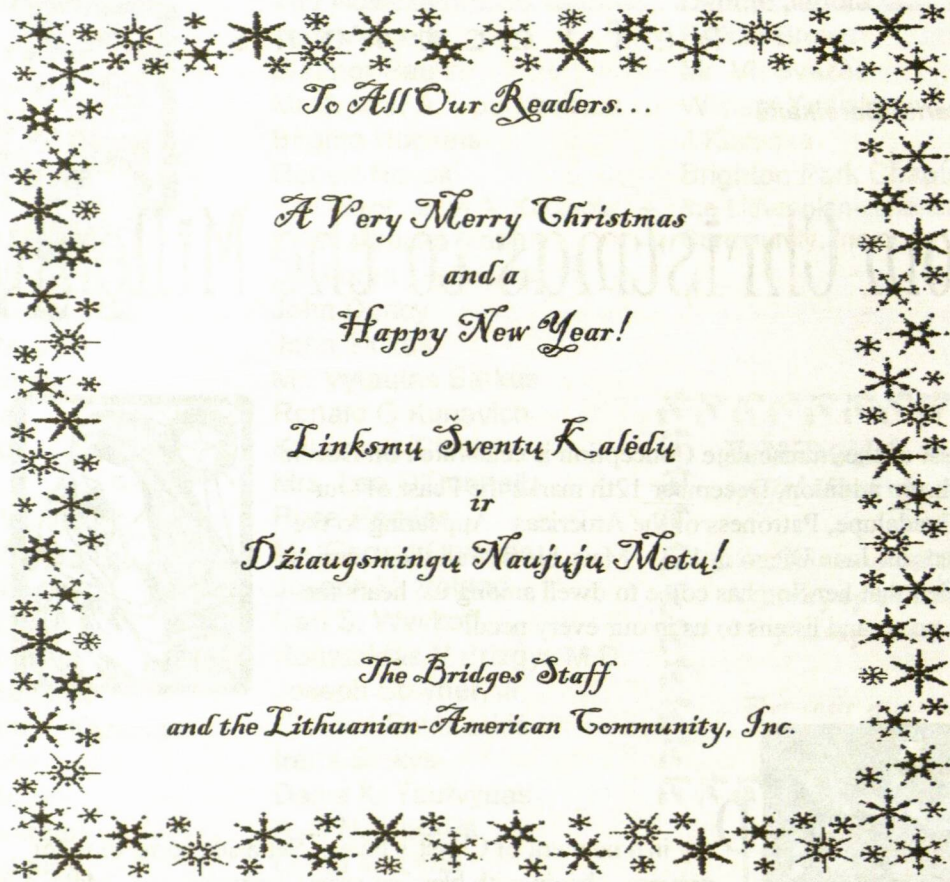


**P**ray in a new era of Christ's favor. Set aside some time for prayer — begin with blessing your Christmas tree. Make a little ceremony of putting the figures in the manger, telling the story or reading Chapter 2 of Luke and Chapter 2 of Matthew's Gospel. Pray that each of us may recognize Christ when He comes to us in others.

**O**n Christmas Eve, Pope John Paul II will open the great Holy Year Door in St. Peter's Basilica. This symbolizes welcoming home all Christian on a journey to deepen their faith as we enter a new era in Christianity. Begin your spiritual pilgrimage with Advent and profess your faith proudly as the Year 2000 arrives.



***SR. MARGARITA BAREIKAITĖ** belongs to the order of the Sisters of the Immaculate Conception of the Blessed Virgin Mary, a Lithuanian order in Putnam, Connecticut. She is also the Chairperson of the Religious Affairs Council for the Lithuanian-American Community, Inc.*



To All Our Readers...

A Very Merry Christmas  
and a  
Happy New Year!

Linksmų Šventų Kalėdų  
ir  
Džiaugsmingų Naujųjų Metų!

The Bridges Staff  
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# Call Lithuania for only \$0.33/minute and help support your Lithuanian-American Community, Inc.

We are pleased to announce the Lithuanian-American Community, Inc. has contracted with a major international phone company to provide you with some of the lowest rates and most reliable service available for all your domestic and international calls. And every time you use the service, you'll not only save money, a portion of every call is donated back to our organization. Please take advantage of this special offer now and sign-up today!

<p><b>PLAN 101</b> <i>Switch your long distance company and save.</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Low rate to Lithuania \$0.33/min.</li> <li>• Low rate inside the U.S. \$0.089/min.</li> </ul> <p>No charge to sign-up. \$2.95 monthly fee if usage is less than \$15/month. NO fee for usage more than \$15/month. Rates valid 24 hours/day. Businesses- call for lower rates.</p>	<p><b>PLAN 530</b> <i>Switch your long distance company and save.</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Low rate to Lithuania \$0.42/min.</li> <li>• Low rate inside the U.S. \$0.089/min.</li> </ul> <p>No charge to sign-up. No monthly fee. Rates valid 24 hours/day.</p>
<p><b>PLAN 102</b> <i>NO switch or change to your long distance co.</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Low rate to Lithuania \$0.35/min.</li> <li>• Low rate inside the U.S. \$0.099/min.</li> </ul> <p>No charge to sign-up. No monthly fee or min. requirement. To use, you'll dial a 1010XXX number before the number you want to call. Rates valid 24 hours/day.</p>	<p><b>PREPAID CARD</b> <i>The lowest rates.</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Low rate to Lithuania \$0.22/min.</li> <li>• Low rate inside the U.S. \$0.07/min.</li> </ul> <p>First minute surcharge of \$1.50 applies (U.S. \$0.50). Card comes in \$20 denomination. Rates valid 24 hours/day.</p>

**TO ORDER** Use the form below and submit by mail, fax or phone:

KMI Communications/84038  
2708 Swafford Rd.  
Knoxville, TN 37932-1311

(800) 454-2102  
(865) 539-9624 fax  
www.kmicom.com



**Lithuanian-American  
Community, Inc.**

*Yes* Please sign me up for the Lithuanian-American Community calling plan. Please check the box next to the plan you want.

PLAN 101 Check here only if you are a current customer of IECom and would like to switch to the Lithuanian-American Community account.

PLAN 530 Check here only if you are a current customer of Cyberlink/RSLCOM and would like to switch to the Lithuanian-American Community account.

PLAN 102 Check here only if you are a current customer of IECom and would like to switch to the Lithuanian-American Community account.

PREPAID CARD Please send me an order form. Or order by phone with your credit card.

Name \_\_\_\_\_ Social Security # \_\_\_\_\_  
Required for PLANS 101 & 530 ONLY

Addr \_\_\_\_\_ City \_\_\_\_\_ St \_\_\_\_\_ Zip \_\_\_\_\_  
No PO Boxes

Phone \_\_\_\_\_ e-mail Addr \_\_\_\_\_ Org. # 84038(LAC)  
Number you will be making calls FROM

Signature \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

**PLAN 101 NOTE:** by your signature above, you are choosing International Exchange Communications to provide your long-distance service and you authorize IECom to notify your local telephone company of this choice for all of the telephone numbers listed above. You understand that you may choose only one long distance company for each telephone number. If your telephone company charges you to switch your service, IECom will reimburse you for this fee. You only need to send a copy of this charge to IECom at 26565 W. Agoura Rd., Suite 305, Calabasas, CA 91302. **PLAN 530 NOTE:** By my signature above, I hereby choose RSL COM U.S.A. as my long-distance carrier, and to act as my agent for changing my long-distance carrier for the telephone numbers listed above. I understand that I may designate only one long-distance service and that my local telephone company may assess a service charge for each line changed. I certify that I am at least 18 years of age and that I have the proper authority to sign this letter of agency.

# BRIDGES

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