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 LIETUVA

Latest NATO vote...Darius and Girėnas...A Big Family With a Big Heart

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

The Lithuanian World Community XI Seimas (Meeting) will be held in Vilnius from July 7th to the 11th. One hundred fifty elected representatives from around the world will be present.

What would bring together Lithuanians from countries as diverse as, Australia, Britain, Uruguay, Germany, Argentina, France, Siberia? The natural response would be — Lithuanian culture. But it's much more than that. It may be better called, "the Lithuanian missing link".

When Lithuanians fled their country after World War II, they sought refuge not only in America, but in other countries as well. Others who were forced to Siberia, established their own communities with support systems. All these Lithuanians came together where their new homes were to pass the years during their fight for Lithuania's independence not dislocated, not alone, nor stagnant.

Each small or large community produced schools, cultural programs, social support systems, and action-alert committees. When it came time for Lithuanians to publicly express themselves, they were never alone. In fact, anywhere in the world, the Lithuanian was never alone.

To help unite these communities, The Lithuanian World Community came into play. They were the umbrella organization. They promoted exchanges of ideas and programs, provided information about each community through their magazine, "Pasaulio Lietuvis" (The World Lithuanian), and published books to further guarantee that Lithuanian knowledge would be passed on from generation to generation.

The Lithuanian World Community Meetings collect not just 150 Lithuanians in one room, but each life history that has helped Lithuania continue to flourish outside its borders...and in turn has brought back to Lithuania its missing piece of history.

Rasa Ardys-Juška

Editor

BRIDGES

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All of Lithuania in one place...

If you could see Lithuania during the late 19th century and roam the villages and farmsteads, wouldn't that be amazing?! Well, it's possible! Rumšiškės, an ethnographic, open-air museum, allows you to time travel without leaving this century.

Located 25 km from Kaunas, near the Vilnius-Kaunas highway, spans a total area of 175 ha. and contains 140 buildings from the 18th-19th century with restored original interiors and surroundings.

The four ethnographical regions are represented: Aukštaitija, Dzūkija, Suvalkija, and Žemaitija. Each section is highlighted by buildings and farmsteads characteristic to the specific region. The interior of the farmhouses is traditionally decorated with linen tablecloths, towels, and bedspreads.

This is truly a sight to experience.

On the cover:
*A wayside chapel
along a road at
Rumšiškės.
Photo: Bernard Narušis*

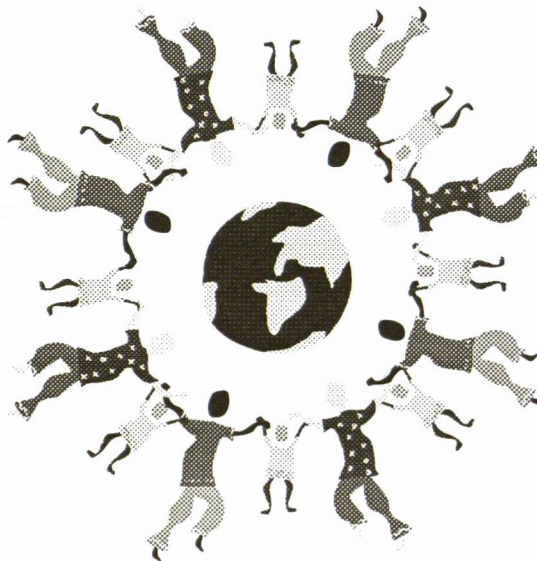
The Joint Baltic American National Committee, Inc.

NATO Treaty Ratified Unanimously by U.S. Senate

The Protocols to the North Atlantic Treaty of 1949 on the Accession of Bulgaria, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Romania, Slovakia and Slovenia were ratified on May 8th in the U.S. Senate by a vote of 96-0. With this, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania and four other countries from Central and Eastern Europe have received conclusive support from the United States to join the Alliance.

Discussion on the Senate floor for Treaty Document 108-4 lasted less than four hours. Senator Richard Lugar (R-IN), chairman of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, along with Senator Joe Biden (D-DE), committee's lead Democrat, managed the debate.

There was a strong support for the Baltics given by all those who spoke, perhaps most notably from Senator Richard Durbin (D-IL). While mentioning his Lithuanian roots, Sen.



Durbin emphasized the importance of remembering just how long the Baltics have suffered to get to where they are today as countries that are actively participating in many peacekeeping operations and acting as de-facto members of the Alliance.

Other strong messages of endorsement were given

by Senators George Voinovich (R-IN) and George Allen (R-VA).

One amendment to the Treaty, a Sense of Congress measure that asks for future consideration of NATO's consensus rule and possible membership suspension mechanisms, was approved during the debate yesterday. These issues would only be addressed at the North Atlantic Council, NATO's parliamentary body, in 18 months, six months after the target date for induction of NATO's newest members. The amendment was introduced by

THE JOINT BALTIc AMERICAN NATIONAL COMMITTEE, INC. (JBANC) representing a million Americans of Estonian, Latvian and Lithuanian heritage, has actively supported efforts to see the three Baltic countries become members of NATO, a move that serves U.S. interests by enhancing Trans-Atlantic security and cooperation. Contact person is Simonas Girdzi-jauskas, and JBANC can be found at www.jbanc.org.

Senators John Warner (R-VA), Carl Levin (D-MI), Pat Roberts (R-KS) and Jeff Sessions (R-AL). This particular point was also debated by Senators Kay Bailey Hutchison (R-TX) and John McCain (R-AZ).

With the successful conclusion of the NATO enlargement vote in the U.S. Senate, this is an excellent opportunity to thank those who support membership for Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania. Please thank your Senator and the President for supporting this round of NATO Enlargement, to include the Baltic countries in the Trans-Atlantic Alliance.

Special thanks should be given to the following Senators for leading the debate:

- Sen. Richard Lugar (R-IN), Chairman, Senate Foreign Relations Committee (SFRC)
- Sen. Joe Biden (D-DE), Ranking Member, SFRC
- Sen. Bill Frist (R-TN), the Majority Leader
- Sen. George Allen (R-VA), Chairman,

Subcommittee on Europe, SFRC

- Sen. George Voinovich (R-OH), SFRC
- Sen. Richard Durbin (D-IL), Co-Chairman, Senate Baltic Freedom Caucus
- Sen. Gordon Smith (R-OR), Co-Chairman, Senate Baltic Freedom Caucus.
-

All Senators voted in favor of ratification except for Ted Kennedy (D-Massachusetts), Joseph Lieberman (D-Connecticut), Lisa Murkowski (R-Alaska) and Thomas Carper (D-DE), who were not present.

In addition please call, fax or write the White House to express your appreciation to President George W. Bush for his vision and leadership during this round of NATO Enlargement.

Congressional contact information on the Web: <http://congress.org>. White House contact information on the Web: <http://www.whitehouse.gov/contact/>. For background information, please visit the JBANC webpage <http://jbanc.org> and <http://expandnato.org>. ♦

U.S. Congressional delegation visits Baltic states

A delegation from the United States House of Representatives visited Riga, Tallinn and Vilnius between May 28 and June 1, 2003, after attending the NATO Parliamentary Assembly's annual spring meeting in Prague, the Czech Republic, the U.S. Embassy's Public Affairs Section in Riga. The NATO Parliamentary Assembly is a group of legislators from all NATO member states and NATO partner states who regularly meet to discuss alliance issues.

While visiting Riga, Tallinn and Vilnius, the delegation from the House of Representatives discussed the future role of the Baltic States in NATO. The eleven-member delegation was led by Congressman Douglas Ber-

euter, Nebraska. While Congressman Bereuter made separate visits to the Baltic States as President of the NATO Parliamentary Assembly, the other members of the delegation was jointly led by Congressman Mike Bilirakis, Florida, and Congressman Joel Hefley, Colorado, during the delegation's visits to Riga, Tallinn and Vilnius.

In addition, the NATO Parliamentary Assembly Secretary General Simon Lunn accompanied Congressman Bereuter in his meetings with Baltic officials.

—ELTA

Edvardas Baranauskas

Darius and Girėnas Are Not Forgotten



Stephen Darius and Stanley Girėnas, two Lithuanian-American pilots,

took off from Floyd Bennett Field in Brooklyn, New York in the early morning hours of July 15, 1933 in an attempt to fly non-stop to Kaunas, the provisional capital of Lithuania at that time. Their single-engine, propeller-driven monoplane named *Lituanica* conquered the treacherous Atlantic, which was then a feat in itself, but unfortunately, crashed in a forest in Soldin, then a part of Germany, but now a part of Poland. After flying for 37 hours and 11 minutes, and covering 3,984 miles (the second longest flight distance record in the history of aviation at that time), they were less than four hours of flying time, or 404 miles, of reaching Kaunas when tragedy overtook them.

In Lithuania, as the 50th Anniversary of their flight neared, a film company wanted to make a movie about them, called “*Skrydis per Atlanta*” (Flight Across the Atlantic). Those were the days when Lithuania was under Soviet rule, and every phase of filming, including

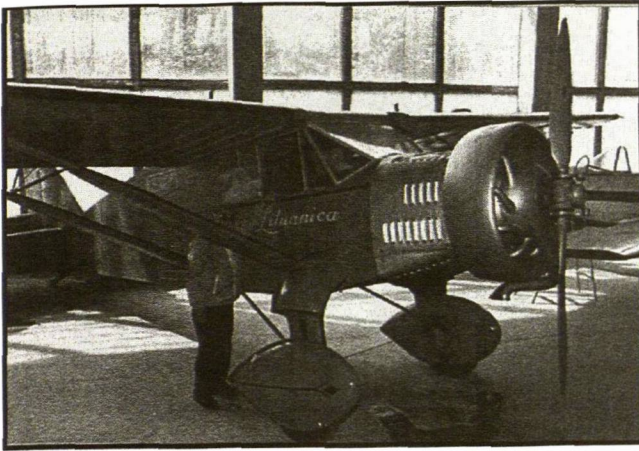
the use of the airplane, first had to be approved by Moscow.

When this subject was discussed, the Soviets laughed, saying, “Do you want to show that Lithuanians can fly? Don’t you know that it was a Russian who crossed the Atlantic first?”

One of the first priorities was to make a replica of the Darius-Girėnas airplane, named *Lituanica*. The producers felt that a Soviet built AN-2 airplane could be painted orange (the color of *Lituanica*), and that would be sufficient. However, Vladas Kengsaila, a pilot and construction engineer at the Panevėžys Aero-Technical Club, was deeply and enthusiastically involved with the project. He objected, and instead wanted a larger airplane, a YAK-12, because he could make a more authentic model of the *Lituanica* from it, but to get one, permission from Moscow was needed.

A YAK-12 was located at an airport in Biržai, a town in northern Lithuania, and brought to Panevėžys where it was completely disassembled, down to the engine. Kengsaila

EDVARDAS BARANAUSKAS is a regular contributor to *BRIDGES* now residing in Lithuania.



The Lituanica replica — at the left as it was test flown after completion. Above, Edvardas Baranauskas has the chance to visit the replica in 1996. Photos courtesy: E. Baranauskas

went to the Kaunas Military Museum where he spent a month studying drawings of the Belanca CH 300 Pacemaker, the airplane from which the Lituanica was made. The wreckage of the Darius-Girėnas airplane was brought to the museum in 1933, from the crash site in Germany, for all Lithuanians to view.

Mr. Kėnsigaila and his crew of technicians worked long tireless hours to construct the new Lituanica as soon as possible. Soviet restrictions prevailed, and the names of the sponsors of the flight were not permitted to be painted on one side of the fuselage (as per the original), only their cities. Also forbidden was Lithuania's national emblem, the Vytis.

The YAK-12's fuselage and wings were modified to be the replica of the Lituanica, but the Soviet made engine and propeller that came with it, were left as is. The plane was test flown satisfactorily.

After completing the movie, which took two years, the Lituanica was flown and exhibited throughout Lithuania, including the birthplace of Darius. It was not just a simple exhibit, but the makers of the film wanted to show everyone the fragile airplane that Darius and Girėnas flew to conquer the fearsome At-

lantic. Also, that the Lithuanian people would always remember their two honorable sons who risked their lives to make Lithuania famous, the land where they took their first breath of life and first saw the light of day.

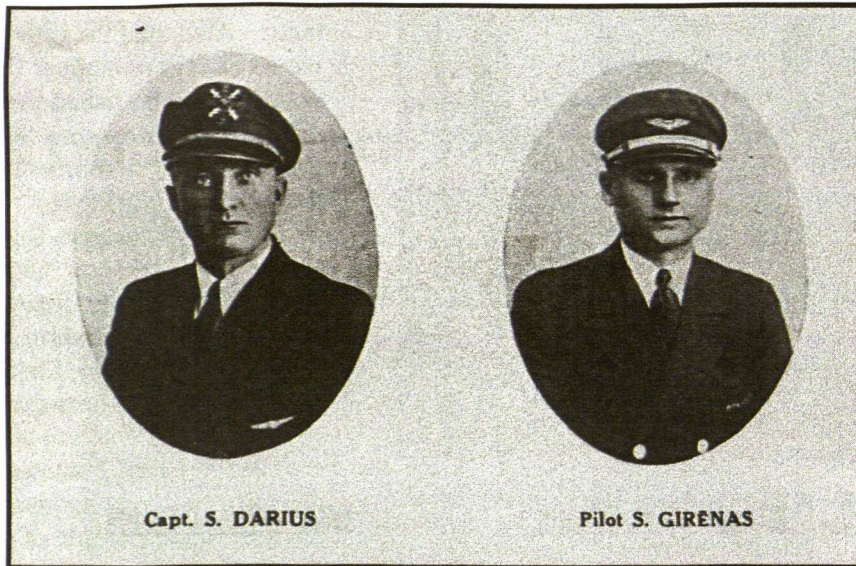
Later, the Lituanica was flown to the Kaunas-Aleksotas Airport where it was hangared at the Lietuvos Technikos Muziejus, Veiverių gatvė 132.

Several years ago, I had the pleasure of visiting the museum, and just to see the Lituanica and to walk around it, simply awed me. I noticed that the names of the flight sponsors are now painted on the left side of the fuselage. The guide who escorted me, Algirdas Gamžiukas, had no objections to my

taking all the pictures I wanted. There was one wish that could not be granted, however. I wanted to sit in the cockpit to get an idea of that feeling of what it was like for Darius and Girėnas. But, there were no doors to permit me to do so, and the only way to get into the cockpit was through an open window, and this required a special stand, something that was not available at that time.

How many pilots today would be willing to fly the same route with this type of airplane, having one engine, being equipped with a single, fixed-pitch propeller, with no radio, and only simple navigation equipment? Flight crews today can sit back in their powerful multi-jet airliners, relax, and be guided to their destinations with the help of high-tech computerized navigational and automatic pilot systems.

In retrospect, we must admire those early pioneers of aviation who wanted to conquer new challenges, and the greatest of those was to fly over the Atlantic Ocean. It was difficult to realize the price many had to pay in that era, for a good percentage of them perished, and other attempted flights ended in failure. Darius and Girėnas knew of the risks involved, but they were willing to take it in order to put "Lithuania on the map".



Capt. S. DARIUS

Pilot S. GIRÉNAS

Flight Testament of Darius and Girėnas

We shall fly to Lithuania!

The Lithuanian nation expects of her sons even more courageous deeds. It befits her sons to join in the common task – to explore the as yet little known air currents of the North Atlantic Ocean, to inquire into the new methods of navigation and adopt them to ordinary daily usage. We, who are living in an era when air is being conquered for the use and benefit of mankind, feel it our duty to do our part honorably in the name of the nation.

Young Lithuania! Inspired by your spirit, we try to accomplish our chosen task. May our success strengthen your spirit and your confidence in your own power and talent! But if Neptune or the mighty, stormy Perkūnas would be angry at us, would prevent our passage to Young Lithuania, and would call LITUANICA to himself, then you, Young Lithuania, will once again have to determine, sacrifice, and prepare yourself for a new journey, so that the gods of the tempestuous oceans are satisfied by your efforts and determination, and will not call you to the Last Judgment.

May the victory of LITUANICA strengthen the spirit of the young sons of Lithuania and inspire them for new deeds

Let LITUANICA'S defeat and its sinking to the depths of the Atlantic Ocean teach young Lithuanians courage and determination, so that a Winged Lithuanian conquers the treacherous Atlantic for the glory of our homeland Lithuania.

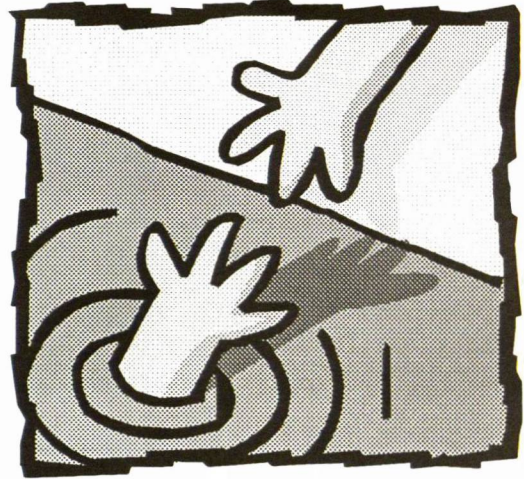
To You, Young Lithuania, we dedicate and offer this flight!

We will begin this great experiment with the hope of Heaven's blessing!

*Signed,
Steponas Darius Stasys Girėnas ◆*

Jeanne Dorr

A Hand to Hold During the Night...



I visited many children's homes while I was in Lithuania. You would think that when you see one, you've seen them all. But like families, each and every one is different. What remains a constant in all of them is the work and effort the foster parents do to raise the children in a family environment. In this article I would like to introduce you to a new couple and their foster children. Please spend a few minutes with me meeting Juratė and Eugenijus Keraminai and their children.

As Regina Svoba, of Countryside Children's Fund, and I drove to the area around Utena, I started to get one of my early morning headaches. I had just returned from that area two days earlier while visiting St. Clare's Hospice. Why, oh why, was I always traveling in circles in Lithuania? This wasn't exactly a trip around the corner from Vilnius. I seemed to spend at least half of every day riding in a car or van or anything else that had four wheels. Well, at least I hadn't been put on a horse-yet.

Regina filled me in on this new group home. When we arrived, it appeared we were driving up to a playground. There were children with a black cat, children with a puppy, and children in

a sandbox. But what really broke me up were the little ones sitting in a car with the windows rolled down and all four doors wide open. It brought to my mind the scene of a lot of people climbing out of a small car with no end to them. Walking up to the car, I noticed four little ones almost sitting on top of each other, and the little boy saying, "Let's go. Let's go."

As introductions were made, I asked Eugenijus where they wanted to go. He replied, "Anywhere." They never sit in the front. All they want is for Eugenijus to drive them somewhere, anywhere will do.

I guess another reason I was reminded of a playground was that the house was once a kindergarten. It is a long, one-story building. The rooms that had once been playrooms have all been remodeled to accommodate family life, albeit a very large family. Juratė and Eugenijus Keraminai have dedicated their house to St. Theresa, so it is known as St. Theresa's Children's Home.

Juratė met us at the door, and I at once felt her warmth. She is young and energetic, and one would never guess she is the "mother" to sixteen children – four of them are her own children. As in any of these homes, it's impossible to tell the natural children from the foster children.

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. All photos by Jeanne Dorr.



Juratė and Monika.

Looking at Juratė you would doubt that she had a care in the world, despite the fact that she can't remember the last time she had a good night's sleep.

As we entered the house, we encountered eighteen-year old Kristina in the hall. She was walking up and down the hall and softly singing to eight-month old Milena. Kristina came to the family from a state institution where children are allowed to stay for no longer than two years.

Kristina and her sister, Juratė, were both placed in an orphanage when they were in first and second grades, respectively. As they grew older, they were transferred from institution to institution. They were thirteen and fourteen years old, respectively, when they came to live at St. Theresa's. Their older brother and sister lived with their father. Kristina, even though she was very young, had a terrible fear of death and would wake up screaming during the night. Juratė Keraminas, their foster mother, would sit with her and calm her fears.

No one realized that Kristina had health problems. The doctors could not understand why her bones were breaking. After many consultations, they decided to perform surgery on her. The first operation lasted eight hours, and the second was six hours. The doctors told Juratė Kerminas they couldn't understand how Kristina ever walked.

She suffered through months of agonizing therapy and had to wear a back brace. She hated

the idea of the brace and feared she would have no friends and that the youngsters her age would laugh at her. Juratė held her while she cried her heart out day after day. At times, the problems seemed insurmountable.

Aside from the serious health problems, there were school problems. Although Kristina is eighteen years old she is only in the ninth grade. Kristina's father would take her from the orphanages for periods of time and bring her home, but he would not permit her to go to school. She was always behind and could never

catch up.

Then a serious problem arose when the doctors told Kristina that she could never have children. Kristina became very depressed until Milena joined the Keraminas family. She loves children dearly and has attached herself to Milena.

Milena was five months old when she came to Juratė and Eugenijus. She was eight months old when I first saw Kristina carrying her, but I would have guessed she was about three months old. Milena refused to look at a toy or touch her bottle when they first got her. She screamed constantly and feared everyone and everything. It is sheer love that is pulling this baby back to life. Milena joined her brother and sister, twins Monika and Laurynas, when she became a part of the family.

At this point, Monika left the car and joined us in the kitchen, but she would not let Juratė out of her sight. She would scream the minute she lost sight of her.

When Monika and Laurynas first arrived, they also cried most of the night. They would wake up hysterical, and Juratė would rush in to comfort them. She simply held their little hands until they fell asleep again. This went on night after night, several times a night, until they felt secure. Can you imagine having to take care of such a large family and getting up so many times during the night? But their fears were very real; their birth mother left them alone in the house for

three days while she went out to enjoy herself. Eventually both parents were sent to prison for theft.

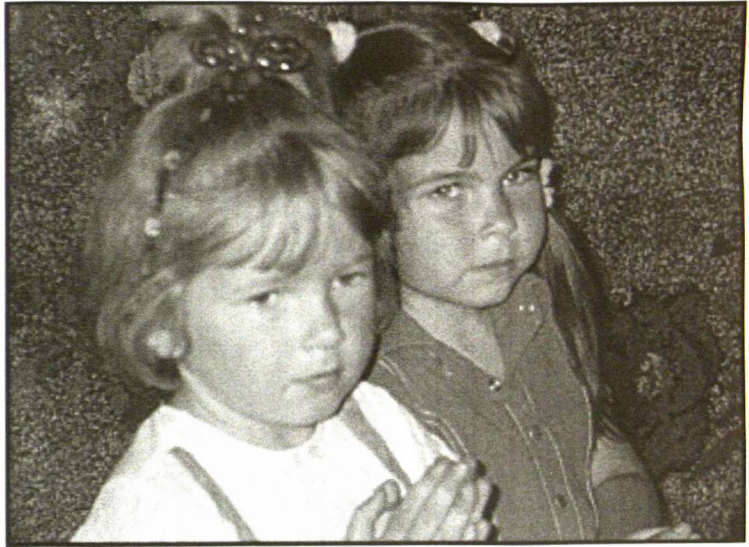
We entered a rather large room where a beautiful table was set. As always, all the food is homegrown. Milena was put into her baby seat and was not too shy to voice her displeasure.

I asked Juratė and Eugenijus how they became involved in such a monumental project. Juratė told me that Eugenijus almost lost his arm in an accident. People helped them and were so good to the couple that they felt they had to give something back in return for this goodness.

At first they thought they might like to help the elderly but later decided to work with children. She discussed their decision with her father as well as her own children. The children had no problem with her plans, and her father gave her his blessings. She told me that all his life her father went out of his way to help others. His advice to his daughter was that if she was going to spend her life doing good, then she must do all the good she can for as many people as she can help. From that day on the couple began to move forward.

They bought the abandoned kindergarten and renovated it with their own hands. Juratė was a florist and interior designer, and her creativity can be seen throughout the house. It seemed to me she can literally make something out of nothing. The first thing that caught my eye was the curtains and the curtain rods. Eugenijus cut the wood from the trees on their property, and Jurate designed the rods. Upon closer examination of the curtains, I realized they were sewn from burlap bags. In a corner of the room was a pile of odd shaped rocks, candles in beautiful holders, and a small statue. All of this was Juratė's handwork.

Around the room were old time student chairs from an American school that someone sent to



Vaiva and Taura

Lithuania. When they were offered to Juratė, she accepted them. She and the children worked for two weeks crocheting seat and back covers for the chairs. Eugenijus made some type of flat bottom for each chair so that the little ones wouldn't fall out.

As we continued our meal, Jurate told us about some of the other children. Originally she started taking several children from the local orphanages for the weekend. They reached the point where the children got hysterical when it was time to take them back to the orphanage. She then started legal proceedings to keep them in her home.

When Dainora arrived, she spoke non-stop about her brother David who was in the hospital. She begged Juratė to buy David a pair of shoes. When Juratė went to visit David, she discovered he was not in the hospital but in a children's home. She took one look at his condition and took him home. David was a year and a half old and couldn't walk. In fact, he could hardly stand. He would shake his head so hard that blood would run from his nose.

Originally, David and Dainora were removed from their house and placed in the children's home when children's services visited their home. The only thing they found in the house was a bucket of frozen ice water; there was no food. The children's home fed him a little every



Milena

hour. His stomach was distended. They recommended that Juratė not take him because he was "backward." Dainora is now seven and David is five. The experts have been proven wrong; both children are extremely bright. David still hates the cold but he no longer turns blue. What they needed was care and love. Juratė had enough to go around for both of them.

The children's natural mother was severely abused as a child and was locked in a cellar for long periods of time. She is still receiving psychiatric care. She visits the children but knows she is unable to take care of them. She is grateful that they have a good home. After their father was released from prison, Dainora visited him at his house. After the first visit she refused to go back to him again. She still gets frightened when the phone rings because she is afraid her father will call to arrange another visit. She has been assured there will be no more visits to her father's house.

The family is hardly the "Brady Bunch." There are many, many problems before small successes are realized. These are children who have seen more in their short lives than most of us will ever experience in a lifetime of living.

Twelve-year old Vytautė had her own problems. Her father refused to let her live at home. He would only keep her two brothers because he was sure she was not his daughter.

Since her mother had nowhere to go, she had to give up Vytautė in order to keep a roof over her own head.

Probably two of Juratė and Eugenijus' most difficult children were sisters Vaiva and Taura. Vaiva is now six years old, and Taura is five. They are with the family a little over three years. They were wild and couldn't talk when they arrived. Neither smiled, and Juratė described them as "dead in spirit."

As the story unfolded, I learned that for a short period of time Vaiva was put

outside and slept in a TV box. When they were found, the authorities said there was nothing but dry oatmeal in the house. Their mother was an alcoholic who did nothing while her boyfriends sexually abused her daughters. Both girls were terrified of men. When Eugenijus would come into the room, they would scream and try to hide. They had no idea how to use the bathroom. Because they suffered from malnutrition, Juratė fed them tiny bits of food every hour. As soon as they ate, they would either vomit or develop diarrhea. Eventually a diet was worked out but that brought about more problems.

They had no idea how to sit and eat at a table or how to use utensils. They grabbed everything with their hands and shoved it in their mouths. They would steal food from the table and hide it under their beds. When offered a small piece of chocolate, they refused. They asked if they could have bread instead.

The sisters rarely are seen one without the other. There are nights they wake up crying but quickly fall back to sleep while Juratė holds their hands. Taura is still extremely nervous and wets the bed at night, but Juratė isn't worried. They're making progress a little bit at a time. The important thing is they are moving forward.

The family had many more problems. Eugenijus was working on his car when the carburetor caught fire. Juratė was terrified that

he would not live. He spent a long time in the hospital and was burned over more than twenty percent of his body. Juratė and the children were beside themselves with grief. They stormed heaven with their prayers and eventually Eugenijus recovered.

As we sat around the table enjoying lunch, and Milena kept us company in her little walker. Two and a half year old Monika refused to let Juratė leave her sight. Monika was given a cucumber from the garden and sat on Eugenijus' lap happily munching away. It was so peaceful. Despite a house filled with children, there were no interruptions. A dog and cat were lying together near the table.

The children all have their jobs to do around the house and yard. Even the youngest ones know how to weed the garden. Each of the children has been given an animal to care for. There are seven cows, a bull, and two horses that are used for both working and riding, and the usual assortment of chickens, pigs, and ducks.

Both Juratė and Eugenijus encourage the children to do their very best in school. Education is a priority, and lessons come before anything else. There are many gaps and deficits in their education. One little boy wasn't sure if he ever attended school before he came to St. Theresa's. Those who have studied English in school tutor the younger ones.

Just as important is religion. In a small alcove, there is an altar, which has been constructed by the children. During the good weather, fresh flowers are placed on the altar, and the children are encouraged to kneel down and pray as they pass the alcove.

As it was getting late in the day, we walked around outside. Monika was still holding on to Juratė and was now on her second cucumber. Laurynas was kicking a soccer ball to Eugenijus, while Vaiva and Taura were climbing a tree. Two others were "playing" school with the dog and cat as students.

While we were walking, Juratė told me about one of the first young men they raised. He is now in the city working and living on his own. But just like clockwork, he's home every Friday night until Sunday. He comes home to help raise his "brothers and sisters." He also turns over as

much of his money as he can spare to help make ends meet. This is the only home, the only parents, and the only family he has ever known.

We continued our walk, and I was shown a very large greenhouse and a huge garden. Bags and bags of cheesecloth were hanging from poles. They were filled with delicious Lithuanian cheese.

Then came the hardest part of every visit. It was time to start the drive back to Vilnius. Even Monika let go of Juratė's hand long enough for a hug and kiss. I didn't mind the cucumber dripping down her chin at all while she gave me a big, wet smack on the cheek. We said our good-byes, and I felt I made more new friends in Lithuania. Actually, these were not good-byes because God willing, we'll meet again.

How can we even begin to thank people like Juratė and Eugenijus for taking such a tremendous amount of responsibility upon themselves? How can we thank them for the patience and love they give to each of these children? I certainly don't have the words to do it. All we can do is continue to support them and wish them our very best.

St. Theresa's is helped by Lithuanian Orphan Care in the form of sponsorship. But there is no amount of money in the world that can ever compensate Juratė and Eugenijus for their love and dedication.

Thank you to Regina Svoba of Countryside Children's Fund for arranging this visit and for all she does to help Lithuania's children.

"Too often we under estimate the power of a touch, a smile, a kind word, a listening ear, an honest compliment, or the smallest act of caring, all which have the potential to turn a life around." — Leo Buscaglia

The cost to sponsor a child is \$150 a year. If you cannot sponsor a child, any donation is gratefully appreciated. Please send your tax deductible checks to:

Lithuanian Orphan Care
2711 W. 71st St.
Chicago, IL 60629 ♦

Vida Brazaitytė
Dalia Augūnas with Teresė Gečys

Awards Given to Two Dedicated Lithuanian-Americans

Distinguished Educator Award...

The Lithuanian-American Community's Lithuanian Education Council's Distinguished Educator Award is awarded annually to a teacher who has devoted many years to the education of young Lithuanians. The purpose of the award is to recognize long-serving teachers and, thereby, promote and reward long-term commitment to Lithuanian education. The 2002 Distinguished Educator Award was awarded to Julius Širka, longtime principal of the Kristijonas Donelaitis Lithuanian Schools (elementary and high school levels) in Chicago.

Julius Širka received his Teacher's Certificate in 1941 in Panevėžys, Lithuania, where he began teaching the same year at Kamėnų elementary school. He taught in Lithuania for only three years. From 1945 until he immigrated to Canada, J. Širka taught at the Weiden-Hamerweg Oberplatz Lithuanian displaced person camp. After crossing the Atlantic Ocean, J. Širka worked at the Maironis Lithuanian School in Toronto for six years. In 1959, he was called upon to be the principal of the newly opened Kristijonas Donelaitis Lithuanian Schools in Chicago.

The K. Donelaitis Lithuanian Schools excelled in the level of education and number of students because of their principal and his idealist teachers. Thanks to principal Širka, the school program was improved and strengthened. K. Donelaitis Schools published 21 textbooks

and workbooks, various educational materials, which were needed to keep the high educational level (these were also used by other Lithuanian schools in the United States and Canada). Classes were organized for non-Lithuanian speaking children and adults who wanted to learn the language. The elementary school published a quarterly periodical (127 issues in all). The high school published a yearbook (26 all together). The school had a yearly Lithuanian Word Day where the students read their own creative works and showed their talents in music, song, and dance.

Julius Širka often expressed that the K. Donelaitis Schools' teachers and students were like a family. In that regard, J. Širka became the head of the family: a strict but forgiving father, strong and wise, but knowing when to back down. The school stood above everything else to him. The main goal was keeping the Lithuanian language, culture, and beautiful traditions alive and passing them down to future generations.

Principal Julius Širka has been awarded with various certificates of merit, an honorary diploma, a medal, and an order for his determination and capabilities. He has received certificates of merit from the Midwest Region of the Lithuanian-American Community in the USA and the Lithuanian Educational Council of the USA. The Lithuanian Institute of Education in Chicago presented him with an honorary diploma for enriching generations of Lithuanian youth, passing on to them centuries-built spiritual riches of the Lithuanian people. The Lithuanian Scouts Asso-

VIDA BRAZAITYTĖ, DALIA AUGŪNAS AND TERESĖ GEČYS are active members of the Lithuanian-American Community, Inc.



Principal Širka surrounded by his teachers. From the left: Gražina Sturonienė, Vida Brazaitytė, Irena Vilimienė, Alicija Brazaitienė, and Vida Radick.

Photo: Stasė Korres

ciation awarded principal Širka a medal with a supporter ribbon for his efforts in educating Lithuanian youth in 1989. In 2002, the Republic of Lithuania awarded him the 3rd Class Order of the Lithuanian Grand Duke Gediminas.

The principal's greatest dream was to publish a book chronicling the history of K. Donelaitis Lithuanian School system. It took more than five years to realize his dream. On March 24, 2002, "Su mokslu į rytojų: Kristijono Donelaičio liuanistinių mokyklų Čikagoje 33-ųjų metų is-

torinis leidinys" (With Education Into the Future: The 33rd historical account of Kristijonas Donelaitis Lithuanian Schools in Chicago) was presented to the Lithuanian community at the Lithuanian World Center in Lemont, Illinois.

I have known principal Julius Širka for many years. After attending K. Donelaitis Lithuanian Schools for twelve years, I came back to teach third grade for four years. He has become like a second father to me. Principal Širka knew how to open up to a young person's soul. He urged his students to love their parents' homeland, to sacrifice oneself for it, and to love God and every-

thing that is Lithuanian. He motivated his teachers, so that K. Donelaitis Lithuanian Schools would become a bright center of Lithuanian culture.

Principal Julius Širka's 33-year devotion and determination in the Lithuanian educational system in the United States has finally been rewarded.

—Vida Brazaitytė

The Most Coveted St. Apolonia Awarded

After Lithuania regained its independence in 1991, Lithuania's doctors of dentistry formed an association of dentists and chose St. Apolonia as its patron saint. Every year on February 9, the feast day of St. Apolonia, the dental association meets in Kaunas to choose the most distinguished colleague to be awarded the St. Apolonia statuette.

The 2002 St. Apolonia honor went to a Lithuanian-American, Vladas Vaitkus, D.D.S. for introducing and teaching dental implantation to Lithuania's dentists. Because Dr. Vaitkus

could not personally attend the awards ceremony, the St. Apolonia statuette was sent to the United States and presented to Dr. Vaitkus on April 17, 2002 by S. Algimantas Gečys, National President of Lithuanian-American Community, Inc. (LAC) during the LAC Florida Region annual conference dinner in Daytona Beach, FL.

Dr. Vladas Vaitkus was born in 1920 in the United States. When he was very young, his family returned to Lithuania. In 1941, Vladas Vaitkus graduated from the Franciscan High School in Kretinga, and in 1942 started his medical studies at Vytautas the Great University in Kaunas. In 1944, as the WWII front was nearing Lithuania, he escaped in a small boat to Sweden. Because he was born in the United States, Dr.



During the St. Apolonia Award presentation...from left: Teresė Gečys (LAC National Executive Committee sec.), Renaldas Norkus (Minister Counselor, Embassy of Lithuania, Washington, D.C.), S. Algimantas Gečys (Pres. LAC National Executive Committee), Dr. Valdas Vaitkus, and Dalia Augūnas (dir. LAC National Board of Directors).

Photo: Vincas Šalčiūnas

Vaitkus was able to return to America, where immediately he was drafted into the U.S. Army and sent to Germany.

At the end of the war and while still in the Army, Vladas met Lithuanian students at the University of Heidelberg. Among the students was his future wife Ona Savickaitė. After his discharge from the Army, Vladas Vaitkus and his wife went to Switzerland to study at the University of Basel, from which in 1951 he earned a Doctor of Dentistry degree. In the same year, they returned to the United States. However, because his Swiss degree was not recognized in the United States, he had to spend three more years studying dentistry in Minneapolis, Minnesota.

With his studies finally completed, Dr. Vaitkus opened a dental office in Worcester, Massachusetts, a city with a sizable Lithuanian population. As much as his circumstances allowed, Dr. Vaitkus participated in the local Lithuanian American Community's activities.

Dr. Vaitkus truly enjoyed his chosen profession and took advantage of every opportunity to advance his expertise. When a new branch of dentistry, dental implantation, was just being introduced, Dr. Vaitkus immediately began to study this new field and its practical application on behalf of his patients.

During the seventies, Lithuanian-Americans started to reach out across the Iron Curtain into Lithuania. Dr. Vaitkus, also, started searching

for ways to introduce the newest dental practice techniques, including implantation, to his colleagues in Lithuania. Such an opportunity arose in 1974, when Dr. Vaitkus asked Dr. Bagdonas, a visiting surgeon from Lithuania, to take back a letter to a distinguished dental professor, Dr. F. Mačiulis.

Thus began a historical correspondence and collaboration with Prof. Mačiulis, and later Dr. Černikis as well as other colleagues, to teach this new field of dental implantation to future dentists in Lithuania.

Over many years and many letters, Dr. Vaitkus explained the implantation methods and taught all possible scenarios of the process. There was considerable interference from Soviet authorities. His letters would arrive opened and torn, journals damaged. When one of his American patients with implanted teeth was traveling to Lithuania, he wrote his dentist colleagues to meet with her in Kaunas to see the live results of his work. KGB agents found out and did not permit the meeting to take place.

Because of the efforts of Dr. Vaitkus, Lithuania was the first republic to perform dental implantations in the Soviet Union. Also, the first Republic where two of his students were granted doctorates for dissertations on dental implantations: Dr. Antanas Černikis and Dr. Surovas.

After restoration of independence, Dr. Vaitkus attended the first Lithuanian Congress of Doctors of Dentistry in 1993. In 1997, while unable to attend personally, his paper was read at the Congress. In 1995 and 1996, he organized and led dental implantation seminars in the cities of Vilnius, Kaunas, and Klaipėda. Through his love of Lithuania, devotion, and untiring enthusiasm for his work, Dr. Vaitkus has charmed his colleagues and students in Lithuania. They still refer to him as "Our respected teacher".

Although retired from his dental practice, Dr. Vaitkus continues to maintain close contacts and to send dental professional literature to his Lithuanian colleagues and former students. Dr. Vaitkus and his wife Ona live in Juno Beach, FL and Media, PA. They have two sons and a daughter. All three are medical doctors and are raising their own families.

—Dalia Augūnas and Teresė Gečys

Gloria Kivytaitė O'Brien

...as I was visiting Lithuania...

There are so many memorable events and experiences that a person can take home with them after a visit to Lithuania. Gloria O'Brien writes to us about several of those events that many may recognize having experienced themselves.

A ^{dolfas}

Our grandmother was a Kutaitė, and the place where she grew up is known as Kutų kaimas. The last Kutaitė, Česlova, passed away a few years ago, and her widower, Adolfas, remains on the property, living alone except for the occasions when one or another of their three daughters visits. He's a crusty old character with a fine disregard for neatness and order and a penchant for posing teasing, complicated questions to hapless American visitors.

He proudly shows us the fine, sturdy "pirtis" (sauna) he built himself and invites one and all to come and use it. He herds us all into his "main room" where we sit on an ancient sofa or on rickety chairs around a rickety table on which stands a bottle of white stuff and shot glasses, which everyone proceeds to wipe out with their hankies.

Now, this "white stuff" is Adolfas's favorite

firewater, which will bring tears to your eyes and blast your tongue and throat. Don't misunderstand – Adolfas is not a drunk, he's usually a sober individual. But when he takes a drink, this is what he likes. And it amuses him to watch others struggle with it. We know all this way in advance, and we come prepared (Ellie says "ginkluoti" – armed.) We always bring our own bottle, some nice sweet liqueur or a mild fruity brandy or wine. He notices and eyes our bottle with disfavor, shaking his head and grimacing in disgust. Uncooperative people.

He will bring out a fine home-pressed cheese, maybe some cucumbers sliced lengthwise, and then the best honey from his own bees. Spread some of that on a slice of cheese or cucumber, sip a little drink, and settle down for some interesting talk. Adolfas is an educated, well-informed, and opinionated man. ♦

GLORIA KIVYTAITĖ O'BRIEN is a first-generation Lithuanian-American, one of three children of Anthony and Mary Kiveta. Born and educated in Brooklyn, NY, Annunciation parish, she sang in the church choir from childhood until she married and moved to New Jersey, where she now lives in contented retirement, and annually visits her many relatives in Lithuania.

Pat Mulcahy

“I was unprepared for the impact of Lithuania...”

When I first heard about the possibility of getting involved with the Vineyard Christian Church in Vilnius, I had to look at a map to find Lithuania. All I that could remember was that it was small country, somewhere near the Baltic, that used to be a part of the Soviet Union.

Then I traveled to Vilnius this past March. I spent eight days in Lithuania, together with five other Americans; all of us were either pastors or members of Vineyard churches here in the U.S. We went with the idea of getting to know some people, touring a few cities, getting a taste of the culture and geography. We wanted to find out how we could help the Vineyard Church in Lithuania.

Vilnius is beautiful: the architecture, the sculpture, the churches, the streets of Old Town. It is a wonderful city to explore. In Kaunas, we strolled through the streets as the sun was setting one beautiful spring evening; it was absolutely breathtaking. On another day we visited the castle at Trakai, and absorbed the history of the land.

But it wasn't the culture, or the history, or even the beauty of Lithuania that made such an impact on us. It was the people. Jūras, who pastors the Vineyard in Vilnius, who has the mind of an intellectual and the heart of an artist. Juozas and his beautiful wife Anastasija, who spent those eight days doing everything in their power to make us feel welcome and accepted, and to see that our every need was met. Tomas, a young man who, in the middle of a four year

prison term for a crime committed years ago, is bringing hope and life to his fellow prisoners. Žilvinas, who at age 16 was risking his freedom to pastor an underground church in Soviet-ruled Lithuania, and who continues to devote his whole life to that work in Panevėžys.

In Lithuania there is corruption and superficiality, as in all parts of the world. The bureaucracy of government can be suffocating. Many of the people whom you see wearing the latest fashions can barely afford to buy food. Independence as a nation hasn't produced the utopia that was hoped for. Most people that you see on the streets aren't smiling.

But what we found in the people was a hunger for truth, a passion for freedom, and a generosity of spirit that never ceased to amaze us. Our hearts were knit together with those of the Lithuanians we spent time with. We went to Lithuania wanting to find out how we could help, but what we found more than anything was friendship with people we grew to love. We left feeling that perhaps the greatest contribution we can make in Lithuania would be to help our new friends realize how much they have to offer.

As I write this, I've been back home for just about a month. I don't remember the names of most the streets where we walked or of the cafes where we ate. But I remember the people, I remember their names, and I'm eagerly awaiting my next trip to visit them. ♦

PAT MULCAHY is a member of the Vineyard Christian Church in Wisconsin.

R E F L E C T I O N S

Bernadeta Miliauskaitė-Harris

Offering Our Pain to Our Blessed Mother Mary

On April 21, 2002, Bernadeta Miliauskaitė-Harris published an article in *Our Sunday Visitor* about Adelė Dirsyte, one of four Lithuanian women in a Siberian Concentration camp who wrote prayers on scraps of paper bound as a small, 2-inch by 3-inch booklet entitled “Marija Gelbeki Mus!” (Mary, Save Us!).

Not long after, people wrote and called from all over the U.S. asking the Sisters of the Immaculate Conception for a copy of the booklet sitting for years in the convent. Sr. Margaret Bareikaitė reported that they sent out about 300 copies.

Here is an excerpt of this article in honor of Our Blessed Mother Mary, whose inspiration spurred many in the Siberian concentration camps to believe, to live, and to fight for the humanity that had been taken away from the many captive Lithuanians.

[The booklet] made it out of the Soviet Union, and hundreds of thousands of copies have been published in seven languages. For Lithuanians who had fled their homeland under Soviet occupation, it became known as the “Siberian Prayer Book”

The heartfelt prayers dramatically drew the world’s attention to the plight of communist-occupied Lithuania and its people — although



Adelė Dirsyte

Lithuania itself has only recently begun to learn of Adelė Dirsyte and her booklet after one of her companions spoke to a Lithuanian magazine in 1997, years after the collapse of the Soviet empire.

Until that time, the author’s identity was a mystery. She and her companions were known

only by their first names and initials mentioned in the introduction, a note dated Feb. 16, 1953: “Pranute, we send this prayer book to you in order that you maybe able better to feel, think, and worship the Lord with us. Lionė G. made it, Vale Ber. drew it, Levutė Viz. glued it together, and I wrote it. — Ad.”

With the fall of the Soviet Union came the discovery of the women’s identities. The principal author, Adelė Dirsyte, was listed in the Vatican’s martyrology of the 20th century, and is now a candidate for canonization.

Dirsyte’s short life of 46 years was a testimony to her strong Catholic faith. A teacher of German who took part in the Lithuanian resistance against the Soviets, she taught religion to her students even though it was banned. She organized Catholic youth

BERNADETA MILLAUSKAITĖ-HARRIS is a member of the Council of Religious Affairs in the Lithuanian-American Community, Inc.

groups and published religious poetry and articles urging young people to pursue Christian ideals. She also directed efforts to aid the poor.

These activities drew the attention of the communist government resulting in Dirsytė's arrest on March 6, 1946...

...Dirsytė urged her companions to seek strength in prayer and to search for the good in all people.

In each of several subsequent labor camps, she organized fellow prisoners to pray, recite the Rosary, celebrate holy days and do good deeds. But her own "subversive" activities often earned her mistreatments, interrogations, and periods of solitary confinement.

In Magadan, around 1950, scrap paper was more readily available, so Dirsytė made and distributed prayer books, which had to be kept hidden in secret. One copy made its way to the United States, where it was published in Lithuanian in 1959 and translated into English the following year. In a foreword to the English edition, Cardinal Richard Cushing of Boston described these prayers as "beautiful in their simplicity and meaningful in their content, revealing the mysteries of love and the power of the soul."

Dirsytė obtained patience and strength by uniting her suffering to that of Christ, as can be seen from her meditations on the Stations of the Cross:

"...Jesus, what do You wish to tell me by this pain? In everything that happens, let me fully understand all You want of me. Behold, I am the handmaid of the Lord" (from her meditation on the second station)."

When spies reported on Dirsytė's activities, she was beaten and locked in a freezing underground cell. In a 1997 interview, one of her surviving companions recalled how Dirsytė had been abused.

"I could see how much she suffered," Levutė Vizbaraitė told a Lithuanian Catholic magazine. "She always offered her pain to our Blessed Mother Mary for Lithuania. The continual torture weakened her health, and she was

often in pain."

...Dirsytė urged her fellow prisoners to pray for their guards because "they do not know what they are doing."

Last seen in the psychiatric ward of the camp hospital in late 1954, when her friends brought her the traditional Christmas wafer to share, Dirsytė died on Sept. 26, 1955, not long before her scheduled release. The death certificate was sent home from the Chabarovsk region, but her burial place is unknown.

On April 17, 1999, near the 90th anniversary of her birth, a wooden relief sculpture of the Blessed Mother was dedicated as a memorial to Dirsytė in the churchyard of St. Joseph's Church in the city of Kedainiai, where she had attended school as a youth.



The first English edition of "Mary, Save Us!" was translated by Father Kestutis Trimakas and published by Paulist Press in 1960. Three other English editions appeared later, including a large commemorative edition, "The Living Testament of

Faith and Courage," in 1965, to mark the 25th anniversary of the Soviet occupation of Lithuania.

In the 1960s, the booklet, was translated into many languages, including German, Dutch, Italian, Spanish, Portuguese, French, Polish, Korean, and Chinese. Each included introductions by bishops and cardinals of these nationalities.

The Sisters of the Immaculate Conception have a limited number of copies of the only English edition of "Mary, Save Us!" still in print. They can be contacted at 600 Liberty Hwy., Putnam, CT 06260, phone (860) 928-7955. ♦

C U R R E N T E V E N T S

Napoleon's army's soldiers at rest in Vilnius

The reburial of Napoleon Bonaparte's soldiers who were buried in Vilnius nearly two centuries ago took place June 1st in Vilnius's Antakalnis Cemetery.

The ceremony included reenactments of battles during the ill-fated French attack on the Russian Empire in 1812. Some 1,000 men dressed in period costumes staged mock battles. Forty horses and antique cannons were used. In addition, an actor depicting Napoleon was given symbolic keys to the city of Vilnius.

France paid for a monument which was designed by Lithuanians and unveiled during the ceremony.

The reburial of the French army soldiers' remains was one of the major moments of the ceremony dedicated to the commemoration of the year 1812 events in Lithuania.

The finding of the largest gravesite of Napoleon army soldiers in Vilnius Šiaurės Miestelis (Northern Town) two years ago will serve [science for years to come], Lithuanian anthropologist Rimantas Jankauskas said. Local archaeologists and anthropologists believe

the gravesites can contain the remains of about 7,000 Napoleon army soldiers.

The finding has made Lithuania's name famous worldwide by attracting reporters of leading foreign media. Late last year, Discovery and BBC TV stations shot films on the subject.

The gravesites were found in November 2001 within the territory of the Northern Town, as workers dug a communication trench. Then builders were replaced by archaeologists. Last spring 2002, researchers explored remains of almost 2,000 soldiers in a 40 m long and 6 m wide trench. Later on, the specialists of Vilnius University Medical Department joined the research work.

Jankauskas said that, after lying 200 years in the ground, human bones "conveyed" to the scientists fresh information about both the fate of Napoleon army and people who had lived in early 19th century, also their diseases and medicine level in western Europe. Researchers believe some ten gravesites of the French army are thought to be lying in Vilnius. ♦

Lithuanian-American writer receives Lithuanian-Polish award

ALithuanian-American writer, Prof. Tomas Venclova, received an award from the Lithuanian-Polish Inter-Parliamentary Assembly, the Both Nations Prize, and a statuette on May 15th.

The Assembly's Co-Chairman Artūras Skardžius said Venclova was working toward improving relations between both nations. Venclova was quoted as saying that this was a big honor for him to receive the prize along with Polish poet Prof. Czeslaw Milosz. The Lithuanian-Polish Assembly awarded its prizes

to Milosz and Venclova in 2002. Milosz accepted his award in Krakow at that time, while Venclova wasn't able to.

The Both Nations Prize was founded in 1998 to award the Lithuanian and Polish artists and scientists for their significant works. The first awards were granted to Lithuanian language specialist Bronius Savikynas, Polish History Professor Jerzy Kloczowski, Lithuanian historian Alfredas Bumblauskas, and Polish publicist Bogdan Cywinski. ♦

News from Lithuania: ELTA

The World Lithuanian Song Festival approaches

This summer in July, Lithuania will host the World Lithuanian Song Festival and its myriad participants and guests between June 30th and July 6th. The capital city of Vilnius will be the focal city housing the different programs and presentations associated with the Festival.



Sereikiškės Park and the castle area featuring Lithuanian folklore ensembles from all the ethnic regions of Lithuania and foreign ensembles, singers, musicians, masters of traditional crafts. Program Director is Vida Šatkauskienė.

The opening of a

The Song Festival's basis relies on five principles:

1. Lithuanian Song festival is an overall nature phenomenon spiritually equal to the ancient Greek Olympic games.
2. Lithuanian Song festivals exalts man's creative self-expression, vitality of national culture, love for the native land and solidarity.
3. The basis of the success for Lithuanian Song Festival tradition is the creative work activity of the amateur artistic groups, and local and regional song festivals.
4. Participation at the Song Festival is voluntary and in accordance with the ability to arrange and perform provided repertoire perfectly.
5. Lithuanian adult and schoolchildren Song Festivals run every four years,

What can a visitor expect to see from June 30th and July 6th. The choices are remarkable and exciting. In addition to the King Mindaugas' Coronation programs listed in last month's *BRIDGES*, the following will also be presented:

- On July 1st – The musical *Velnio Nuotaka* (The Devil's Bride) will feature the Lithuanian State Symphony Orchestra, singers, musicians, and actors. Artistic Director and Principal Conductor is Gintaras Rinkevičius.
- On July 3rd – The Opening of the World Lithuanian Song Festival in Daukantas Square. Folklore Day: "Our Great Family in

folk art exhibition in ARKA gallery. Exhibition Coordinator is Alė Počiulpaite.

- On July 4th – Ensemble Evening "Virsmo Spalvos" (Colors of Change) in Kalnų Park will feature song and dance ensembles, folk instrument orchestras, and capellas. Program Director is Vidas Aleksandravičius.
- On July 5th – Dance Day: "Gyvybės Žalias Medis" (The Green Tree of Life) in Žalgiris Stadium featuring Lithuanian and foreign dancers of all ages. Program Director is Laima Kisielienė.
- On July 6th – Song Day: "Karūna Tėvynei" (Crown for the Motherland) in Vingis Park featuring male, female, child, and mixed choirs, brass and wind orchestras, actors and foreign Lithuanian choirs. Creative Team Leader Alfonsas Vildžiūnas.

Tickets are now available for the artistic programs of the Dance and Song Days at .

by e-mail: <http://lietuvoje.lt/bilietai/pirkimas>

on-line: <http://lietuvoje.lt/bilietai>

e-mail: info@lietuvoje.lt

phone: +370 5 2398893

fax: +370 5 2398893

Note: the program may change. Check the Web page of the Song Festival at: dainusvente.lfcc.lt or www.lfcc.lt/ds.

—The World Lithuanian Song Festival

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| CLEVELAND | 27 | 11 |
| DETROIT | 27 | 11 |
| LOS ANGELES | 28 | 11 |
| NEWARK | 28 | 13 |

| CITY | DEPARTURE JUNE | RETURN JULY |
|---------------|----------------|-------------|
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