

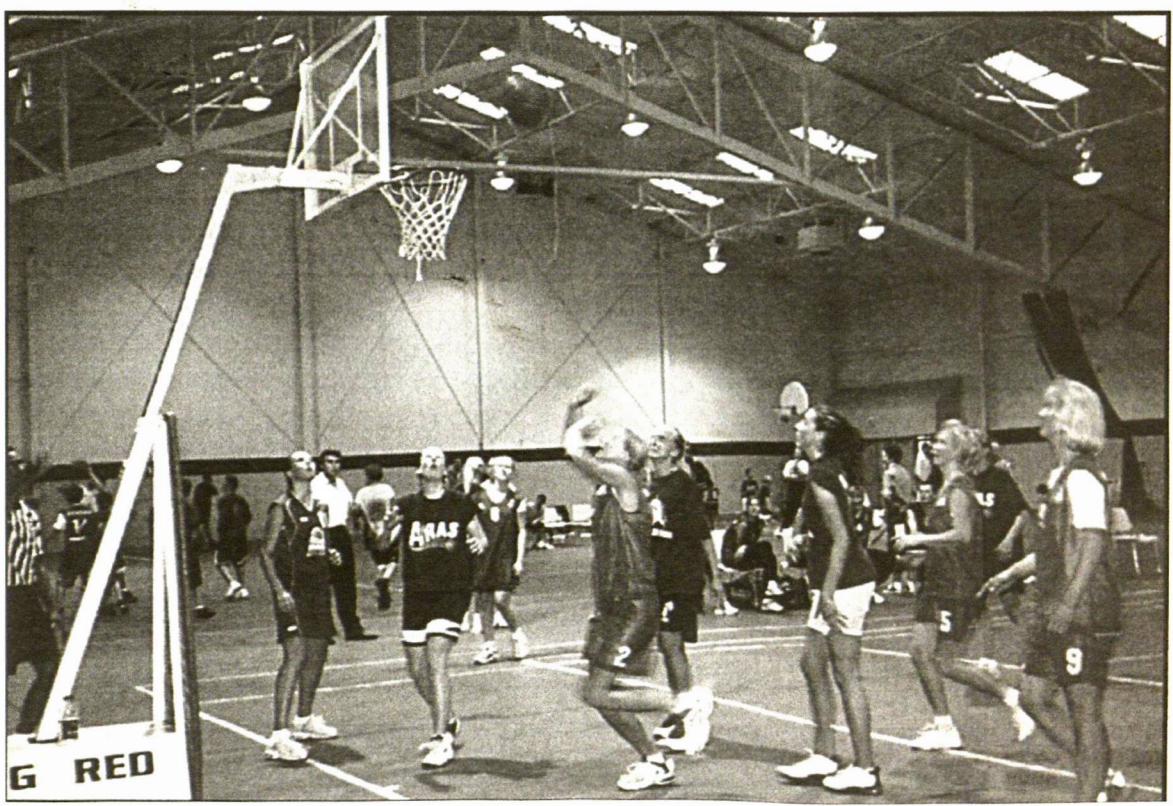
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# BRIDGES

• LITHUANIAN AMERICAN NEWS JOURNAL •

Volume 27

Issue 5, June 2003



*Lithuanians and sports...Adopting a child from Lithuania...June deportations remembered*

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

*On occasion summer just becomes...summer. It is filled with odd jobs, sunny hours, rainy nights, the air scented with fresh mowed lawn, impulsive jaunts to fairs, sandy footprints on the rug, juicy tomatoes eaten while still standing in the garden, and quiet hours as the waves roll in.*

*One poet, Vincas Mykolaitis-Putinas (1893 - 1967), expressed what I call a 30-second moment about summer in his poem "Summer Sun".*

*I closed my eyes — and the sun that midday  
Covered my cheeks, my lips — it gave  
Me such kisses that memory, swirling,  
Still surfs all my thoughts into waves.*

*I opened my eyes — from a sunny countenance,  
Meeting me, issued your smile —  
Later, alone and dejected, I wandered  
On those barren sand drifts a while.*

*Many the days that passed, they changed nothing:  
Sea waves still roll as before,  
I close my eyes — my lips, cheeks still covered  
With midday sun-kisses galore.*

*Now I remember — as I've always remembered  
We were here together — we two;  
I can't figure out, however, who kissed me:  
You or the sun — or the sun and you?\**

*Enjoy the beautiful days, and keep a look out for  
Lithuanian picnics and get togethers in your area!*

*Rasa Ardys-Juška*  
Editor

*\*\* (Translated from the Lithuanian language into English by Demie Jonaitis.)*

# BRIDGES

Lithuanian American News Journal

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## ST. JOHN'S DAY IN THE BALTICS

The Lithuanian parliament announced that June 24, St. John's Day (Joninės), is now a national holiday by amending the country's Labour Code. Lithuania joins Latvia and Estonia with this holiday addition.

Latvia has had St. John's Day as its national holiday for years. *Jani* (pronounced jahngi) is the celebration of the Summer Solstice: Midsummer. Though a time of joy and happiness, it was not without solemnity. When evening came on the day, buildings and cattle were decorated with wreaths and garlands of ferns (*papardī*) and "John's Grass" (*janu zālī*). Children, called *Janu berni* were, and are, fed beer and the ceremonial caraway cheese.

Former Estonian President Lennart Meri, has provided another perspective on *Jaanipäev* in his work *Hõbevalge* (Silverwhite 1976). Meri suggests that the *Jaanipäev* traditions re-enact the fall of the Kaali meteorite in Saaremaa. The meteorite's fall is also said to be the inspiration for Nordic and Baltic mythological stories about the sun falling onto the earth. This idea suggests that the present day bonfires and celebrations actually symbolize the Estonia's connection with its ancient past. The tradition before the Soviet occupation, which has now been restored, was for a fire to be lit by the Estonian President on the morning of *Võidupüha* (June 23). From this fire, the flame of independence was carried across the country to light the many bonfires.

### On the cover:

Connecticut "Audra" vs. Philadelphia "Aras" play during the women's playoffs in the Lithuanian Northeast Basketball Tournament 2003.

Photo: Laurynas Misevičius

*Edited by Rasa Ardys-Juška  
with information from the LGGRTC*

# Where genocide and resistance are not forgotten...

**T**here are only a few dates in history that truly affect deep emotional response in Lithuanians. One such date is that of the June deportations to Siberia from 1939 and on. To keep the memory of the June deportations alive, the Lithuanian government established The Genocide and Resistance Research Center of Lithuania. But the Center does so much more to provide truth and justice in history.

On June 3rd, 1988, representatives of the Lithuanian intelligentsia founded Sajūdis, a democratic reform movement. Soon after, in July, the first commission by Sajūdis was formed – to collect information on the Stalinist regime’s victims – headed by prof. Julius Juze-liūnas.

By 1991, the group with Sajūdis’s help and dedicated workers, including Mečys Laurinkus, Birutė Burauskaitė, Vanda Urbonaitė, Jovita Valevičienė and many others, were able to survey the Lithuanian population for information on the Siberian deportations,

killings, torture, imprisonments. Meticulous records were kept.

By September 1991, a working group was founded to document the USSR-KGB’s actions in Lithuania, headed by Balys Gajauskas and Juozas Starkauskas, with Nijolė Gaškaite-Žemaitienė, Dalia Kuodytė, Algis Kašėta, Dalius Stancikas and others.

With work increasing in intensity, The Genocide and Resistance Research Center of Lithuania (LGGRTC) was established on October 29, 1992. The Center’s missions were written, and Juozas Starkauskas was asked to temporarily head the Center.

Under the Center’s auspices, The Museum of Genocide Victims was opened. The former



*RASA ARDYS-JUŠKA is the editor of BRIDGES. THE LGGRTC is the abbreviation for The Genocide and Resistance Research Center of Lithuania. More information on this Center can be found on [www.genocid.lt](http://www.genocid.lt). Photos from [www.genocid.lt](http://www.genocid.lt)*

KGB building in Vilnius, Gediminas Ave. 40 was used to illustrate the real horrors that Lithuanians had endured. The Museum was established by the order of the Minister of Culture and Education of the Republic of Lithuania and President of the Union of Political Prisoners and Deportees, dated October 14, 1992. The LGGRTC was reorganized in 1997 to include not only the Museum, but also the Center with an Institute to continue researching, collecting, and publishing its findings, and a Foundation to help finance conferences, magazine publications, and seminars. From 1997 to the present, Dalia Kuodytė has been the general director of the LGGRTC and all its components.

The Center's mission includes the following:

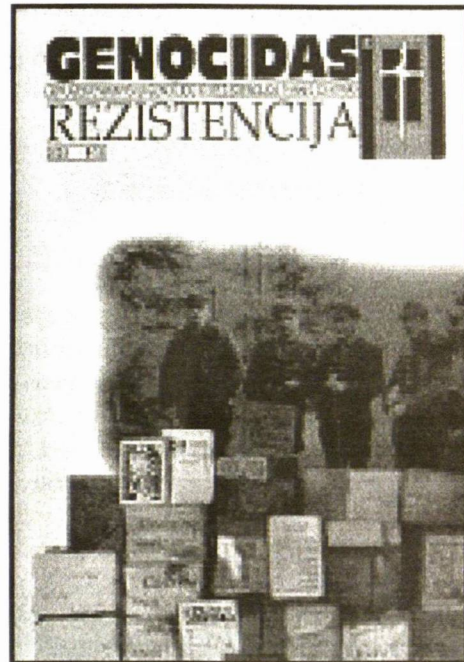
- To ascertain the historical truth through research of the occupations from 1939 to 1990.
- To record Lithuania's people's physical and spiritual genocide accounts and their struggle to fight oppression.
- To memorialize the victims.
- To establish reparations for all victims of the different occupations.
- To research and record resistance against the aggressors between 1920 and 1939 in the Vilnius area.

To make the Center's work open to all, the Center publishes *Genocide and Resistance*, an academic journal that has published such articles as:

- "The Contribution of Foreign Radio Stations to Nation's Struggle for Freedom during the Years of Soviet Regime", (2001), by Juozapas Romualdas Bagušauskas.
- "Meeting in Belgrade: Lithuania's aspirations for liberation", (2000), by Juozas Banionis.
- "The Role of the Resistance Union of Lithuania in the Issue of Freedom for Lithuania", (2000), by Daiva Dapkutė.
- "Character of the Atheist Propaganda in

Lithuania in 1975 to 1988", (2003), by Arūnas Streikus.

- "Lithuanian Security Police and the Holocaust (1941 – 1944)", (2003), by Arūnas Bubnys.
- "Some Features of the Lithuanian Resistance Phenomenon", (2003), by Arvydas Anušauskas.



The magazine's staff includes senior editor Dalia Kuodytė, academic editor Arvydas Anušauskas, and staff writers/contributors: Algirdas Jakubčionis (Vilnius University), Antanas Kulakauskas (Vilnius University), Vytautas Tininis (Army Academy), Antanas Tyla (Lithuanian History Institute), and Liudas Truska (Vytautas Didysis University, Vilnius Pedagogy University).

The Museum of Genocide Victims is truly the heart of the Center. Established ten years ago, it is already interesting to foreign visitors and for Lithuanians – it reminds Lithuanians about their tragic history and losses.

The Museum is unique because it is the only one of its kind in the Baltic States that is established in the former KGB headquarters. The repressive institutions of the occupying



*A table set as in the past...*

power, which planned and carried out deportations and arrests, the persecution of political opponents, and the suppression of the resistance had been housed in the building since the first Soviet occupation in 1940 until 1991.

The Museum intends to present the events and facts about the Soviet repressions, to analyze and propagate the documentary and historical material, and portray the resistance movement against the occupation regimes.

The Museum has different collections, which reflect these goals. For example, the “Armed anti-Soviet resistance” collection was started after the foundation of the museum on the basis of historic documents found in the central KGB building in Vilnius. It consists of partisans’ documents, photographs, and publications that were confiscated by KGB from partisans or their supporters and not included in their criminal cases as exhibits. Lately, this collection has been supplemented with valuables presented by people or organizations, or found during the expeditions.

Another collection is the “Unarmed anti-Soviet resistance”. The material about the unarmed resistance possessed by the museum is still not abundant; it is gradually supplemented and ordered. The base of it was formed from the material seized by the KGB during the So-

viet period from the dissidents and citizens sympathizing with them: books, underground publications, and documents. Almost all issues of the “Chronicle of the Lithuanian Catholic Church” are stored in sets, as well as the underground magazines and newspapers “Aušra”, “Vytis”, “Alma Mater”, “Laisvės šauklys”, “Dievas ir Tėvynė”, “Tautos kelias”, and others.

Special expositions focus on significant details in history that allow visitors to experience the emotions and situations of that time period. The exposition entitled “Lithuania in 1940 and 1941: The Persecutions Start” display documents, photographs, maps, and objects that tell about the difficult and tragic period of Lithuanian history. They remind the occupation and annexation of the State, arranged by the SSRS on June 15, 1940 – the sovietization of the country and the repressions of the inhabitants of Lithuania.

The KGB inner prison and cell of executions are also open to the public as witnesses to the fact that more than a thousand prisoners were killed in the cell of executions arranged at the basement of the central KGB building from 1944 to early Sixties. Approximately one third of them were sentenced to death by Soviet courts or so called “court of three” for participation in the anti-Soviet resistance.

June may be a lazy summer month, but to Lithuanians, it is the month that was chosen by Soviet occupiers to start imprisoning, deporting, and murdering nearly one third of Lithuania’s population over several years. A visit to The Genocide and Resistance Research Center’s Museum is beyond educational – it is a testament to those whose lives were taken by a ruthless and relentless aggressor. ♦

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*The Joint Baltic-American National Committee, Inc.*

# JBANC Meets with New Victims of Communism Memorial Foundation President

**M**embers of The Joint Baltic-American National Committee, Inc.'s (JBANC) Board of Directors met on June 17 with Jay Katzen, the new President and CEO of the Victims of Communism Memorial Foundation, to discuss the status of the Foundation and common goals and interests.

The Foundation's mission is to commemorate the more than 100 million victims of Communism, to honor those who successfully resisted Communist tyranny, to educate current and future generations about the winning of the Cold War, and to document Communism's continuing crimes against humanity. The Victims of Communism Memorial Foundation has been formed to build the Victims of Communism Memorial Museum.

Katzen, a former foreign-service officer, and later active in Virginia politics, recently replaced Lee Edwards as the Foundation's primary fundraiser.

Katzen explained that the Foundation remains even more committed in reaching its goals of establishing a memorial in Washington, DC to honor the approximately 100 million victims of communist regimes around the world. Other plans are to finance a "virtual museum", which will be available online and to establish a local university connection allowing researchers to work more closely with

the Foundation. Katzen said he is optimistic that the Foundation will be able to obtain seed money from the U.S. Congress to aid in the project. The private sector will have to provide matching funds.

The Foundation plans to continue holding annual Captive Nations Week events and awards banquets honoring Freedom Fighters. Prior Truman-Reagan Freedom Award recipients have included Lane Kirkland, Vytautas Landsbergis, Elena Bonner, Vladimir Bukovsky, Sen. Jesse Helms, Sen. Joseph Lieberman, and Viktor Orban. The Foundation will be working closely with embassies in Washington, DC and American-based organizations to reach its objectives.

JBANC expressed support for the projects and said it would make its public aware of the undertaking.

Participating at the meeting in addition to Katzen were Lorraine Ambrose-Boothly of the Foundation, and Janis Bolsteins, Mati Kõiva, Ramunas Kondratas and Karl Altau of JBANC.

For more information, please contact the Victims of Communism Memorial Foundation at: 1513 Sixteenth Street, NW, Washington, DC 20036. Phone: (202) 387-7015; Fax: (202) 387-7017; E-mail: vocmemorial@aol.com. ♦

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*THE JOINT BALTIC AMERICAN NATIONAL COMMITTEE, INC. represents the Estonian American National Council, Inc., the American Latvian Association, Inc. and the Lithuanian American Council, Inc.*



# Our Journey to Adopt

## Part I

**O**ur family's adoption journey started in 2001. My husband, Tomas, and I had always talked of adopting a child from Lithuania. After facing a protracted period of infertility, we decided to pursue adoption in the near future, rather than after having a few "home-grown" children.

Our choice to adopt from Lithuania rather than another country was easy: we both grew up in Lithuanian communities, spoke the language, and had close ties to Lithuania itself. We felt that we could provide a valuable cultural "connectedness" to an adopted child. Further, there are so many children in Lithuania needing permanent homes. Once we saw some of the statistics, our decision was made.

### *Lithuania's Lost Children...*

There are thousands of children in Lithuania's orphanages. According to the Ministry of Social Security and Labour, at the end of

2001 there were 13,452 children in the care of the state<sup>1</sup>. Children ended up in the care of the state for various reasons – some were orphaned, others' parents' parental rights were terminated, and some were abandoned by their

Reason Child Is In State's Care	1997	1998	1999	2000	2001
Orphaned	317	293	273	237	269
Parental rights restricted	362	354	397	388	612
One or both parents unknown	513	732	677	503	515
Poverty	462	361	201	125	131
Parents renounced children	236	177	182	104	81
Dysfunctional families	843	1046	951	755	770
Other <sup>2</sup>	442	539	580	485	485
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>3175</b>	<b>3502</b>	<b>3261</b>	<b>2597</b>	<b>2863</b>

Source: <http://www.socmin.lt/upload/200210/SocialReport2001.pdf>, 2001 Social Report at p.127.

**RŪTA KALVAITYTĖ-SKUČIENĖ** is a member of the Lithuanian-American Community, Inc. If you have any questions about this article or would like to discuss it, please feel free to contact the author directly at [RutaKS@aol.com](mailto:RutaKS@aol.com).



parents.

7,533 of these children lived in foster care or foster care-type institutions, and 5,379 lived in orphanages. And even more children remain at-risk for possible separation from their families: according to the Ministry's report, at the end of 2001, 42,820 children lived in dysfunctional families, which were already receiving services from the state. This number has increased by about 25% over a four-year period (1998-2001).

Yet in 2002, only 147 of these children were adopted: 75 by residents of Lithuania, and 72 by foreigners. In fact, since 1993, only 1,312 children have been adopted out of Lithuania's orphanages.

	1992	1993	1994	1995	1996	1997	1998	1999	2000	2001	2002
<b>Domestic Adoptions</b>	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	124	57	43	37	56	75
<b>Foreign Adoptions</b>	15	30	166	94	104	130	134	92	40	43	72
<b>Total</b>	15	30	166	94	104	254	191	135	77	99	147

Source: <http://www.ivaikinimas.lt/index.php?id=4>

As of December 31, 2002, there were 181 foreign families waiting to adopt from Lithuania. 28 of these families are from the U.S. Two of these families include at least one spouse who is a citizen of the Republic of Lithuania, and 14 of these families are of Lithuanian descent. At the same time, there are 1,046 children eligible for adoption, though 405 of these children are over the age of 12<sup>3</sup>.

Of the 1,046 children eligible for adoption, only 147 – 14% – were adopted in 2002. And only 7% of the children in the care of the state are actually eligible for adoption. Looking at these statistics, a child whose parents' parental rights have been terminated has a very low chance of being adopted in a given year. Unfortunately, once a child is over the age of

three, his chances of being adopted plummet, as most families are looking for healthy young children or infants. Yet to grow up in an orphanage is to be sentenced to a life without a nuclear family to provide love, hope and a future.

### *The Adoption Process Begins...*

Our adoption journey formally began in August 2001. We attended a meeting hosted by a local adoption agency discussing international adoption. As this agency worked in Lithuania, we were particularly interested to hear what they had to say. Following the meeting, we put in a formal application to the adoption agency and received their Blue Binder: a book that details the documents re-

quired to complete the adoption process. With this information, we began to compile our documents and complete the home study.

### *Home Study...*

This is a process required, and governed, by the prospective adoptive parent's state of residence. Regardless of who facilitates the actual location and adoption of the child, the home study must be completed by an agency licensed in the state of the prospective adoptive parent's residence. As we reside in the State of Maryland, the specific requirements for our home study were dictated by that state.

Our first step was the initial of four meetings with our social worker, Heather. She came to our home for the preliminary joint meeting. We discussed our relationship, our preparedness to be parents, our child-rearing philosophies, how we were raised and our relationship with our families of origin. After this initial meeting, we collected the required documents, which were copious and included: (1) letters of reference from three friends; (2) police clearance proving we had no convictions; (3) sanitary survey from the county health de-

partment; (4) fire safety survey from our local fire department; (5) physician's report certifying that we were healthy enough to be parents; (6) net worth statements with back-up documentation; (7) income tax returns; (8) birth certificates; (9) marriage certificate; and (10) clearance from our state's motor vehicle department.

Then we met with Heather three more times: each individually with her to demonstrate that we are each equally committed and prepared for adoption, and then one final joint meeting to wrap up and discuss any outstanding issues. We were relieved when we were told that we passed with flying colors.

Some people find the home study intrusive. After all, parents who conceive a child are not asked by a social worker if their marriage is stable enough for a child, nor are such parents asked to document that their home is sanitary. Unfortunately, the home study is unavoidable and necessary. It provides reassurance at all levels that the prospective adoptive parents are suitable, prepared for the challenge of adoption and have given serious thought to this decision. Luckily, most social workers realize that the process is uncomfortable and strive to make it less of a test and more of an open discussion. Completion of the home study took us approximately four months. The average cost is \$1250.00. The home study is valid for one year and must be updated annually.

### *INS...*

Next, prospective parents must receive approval from the U.S. Immigration and Naturalization Service (now Bureau of Citizenship and Immigration Services) ("INS/BCIS") to bring the newly-adopted child into the United States. Most prospective adoptive parents receive this approval by filing the I-600A form, entitled "Application for Advance Processing of Orphan Petition". It provides advance permission to bring a child into the United States, without needing to specify the child to be adopted.

Once the specific child is identified, the

prospective parents file the I-600, with the child's name and personal information. However, for parents with advance approval, this document may be filed at the last minute, following the adoption and does not involve a waiting period.

Along with the I-600A form, prospective parents must file a copy of their home study, be fingerprinted at an INS/BCIS office and pay a filing fee of \$460.00. On average, prospective parents must wait 8-10 weeks for approval to adopt, and once received, that approval is valid for 18 months.

### *Dossier...*

Completed home study in hand and awaiting approval from INS/BCIS, we prepared to present our application to the Republic of Lithuania's Adoption Service under the Ministry of Social Security and Labour ("Ivaikinimo tarnyba"). The application required another stack of documents, this time all notarized and then marked with an apostille by the Secretary of State, or similar authority of the issuing government entity.

Lithuania requires the following documents: (1) birth certificate; (2) marriage certificate if a couple is adopting, divorce certificate if the applicant is divorced or death certificate if the applicant is widowed; (3) home study; (4) police clearance certifying that the applicant has not committed any major crimes, particularly crimes against children; (5) photocopies of the first page of the applicant's passport; (6) health certificate certifying that the applicant does not have AIDS, TB or other communicable disease; (7) financial statement; and (8) INS/BCIS approval to bring the adopted child into the U.S.<sup>4</sup>

### *... And Then We Wait ...*

As we prepared to submit our dossier, changes were rapidly occurring in Lithuania. Due to changes to the Civil Code of the Republic of Lithuania (Lietuvos Respublikos Civilinis Kodeksas), which became effective on July 1, 2001, adoptions were grinding to a



halt. No one, including our adoption agency, knew what would happen or how long we would have to wait.

We began to contact friends and acquaintances in Lithuania, trying to get information and lobby for reform. At this point, a friend also in the process of adopting suggested that we speak to her lawyer. Rather than working through a pricey U.S.-based adoption agency, this friend had retained the Family Law Center (Šeimios Teisės Centras) in Vilnius to represent her directly to the Įvaikinimo Tarnyba. We spoke to the director, Silva Juratė Savickaitė, who impressed us with her knowledge and professionalism. After some thought, we decided to cease working with our U.S.-based adoption agency and retain Silva.

Although working with Silva and the Family Law Center meant that we did not receive the same amount of hand-holding and document preparation assistance as a U.S.-based adoption agency would provide, it provided significant benefits. We would deal directly with the Įvaikinimo tarnyba, through individuals who worked with them daily. We would be working with people who were on top of Lithuania's constantly changing situation, who could apprise us of the best course. And not insignificantly, the fee for working with the Family Law Center was much, much less than

that of a U.S.-based adoption agency. As the fees charged by adoption agencies (up to \$20,000 or more) are often a deterrent to families, this lower fee was an added bonus.

In March 2002, Silva presented our completed application to the Įvaikinimo tarnyba. At that point, we were No. 247 in the line of families waiting to adopt. Not a month after our application was presented, we received wonderful news: we were expecting! So we settled in to wait for our family to grow: first by the child expected to be born in December 2002, and then eventually by the child we hoped to adopt from Lithuania once we neared the top of the waiting list, estimated at that point to be 2-3 years. ♦

***The next part will focus on:***

*How changes to the Civil Code affected adoptions, and we receive our first referral.*

***Works Cited:***

- 1 Source: <http://www.socmin.lt/upload/200210/SocialReport2001.pdf>, 2001 Social Report at p.126.
- 2 This category includes parents who suffer from long-term illness, parents who moved abroad and left their children behind, disability, problems with guardians once parents were unable to care for children and other reasons.
- 3 All adoption statistics were taken from annual reports available on the Įvaikinimo Tarnyba's web site, [www.ivaikinimas.lt](http://www.ivaikinimas.lt). This web site is an excellent resource for anyone considering adopting from Lithuania.
- 4 For an explanation of the required documents and procedures to adopt from Lithuania, see [www.ivaikinimas.lt](http://www.ivaikinimas.lt).

# Results are in... ...from the 17th Board of Directors National Elections

**T**he results are in for the 17<sup>th</sup> Board of Directors National Elections of the Lithuanian-American Community, Inc. Every person of Lithuanian descent over the age of 18 and their spouses were able to vote for the candidates of their choice in their district. A total of 4,844 persons voted; while 77 votes were rejected due to technicalities. All ten districts were represented and 60 new board directors were voted in for a three-year term.

The new board directors are as follows:

- ♦ **Boston District:** (349 voted, present directors – 5, voted in – 3)

Gintaras Čepas (308-declined), Daiva Navickienė (247), Irena Veitienė (230), Jonas Stundžia (208), Česlovas Mickūnas (206), Andrius Jurkūnas (165).

- ♦ **Connecticut District:** (306 voted, present directors – 4, voted in – 4)

Vaiva Vėbraitė (237), Alfonsas Dzikas (221), Ses. Margarita Bareikaitė (212), dr. Dalia Giedrimienė (189), candidates - Laurynas Misevičius (137), Giedrė Stankūnienė (134).

- ♦ **Florida District:** (359 voted, present directors – 5, voted in – 5)

Genovaitė Treinienė (290), Vida Meiluvienė (286), Kęstutis Miklas (286), Dalia Augūnienė (278), Birutė Kožicienė (221).

- ♦ **"Crossroads" District:** (261 voted, present directors – 2, voted in – 3)

Arvydas Urbonavičius (115), dr. Kęstutis Keblys (111), Kristina Jonyka (108), candidates – Danguolė Antanėlis-Hanson (97), Margarita Sidaravičiūtė-Hathaway(63).

- ♦ **Michigan District:** (347 voted, present directors – 6, voted in – 4)

Saulius Anužis (254), Vytautas Jonaitis (248), Andrius Anužis (244), Narimantas Udrys (244), candidates – Jonas Svera (234), Jonas Urbonas (201).

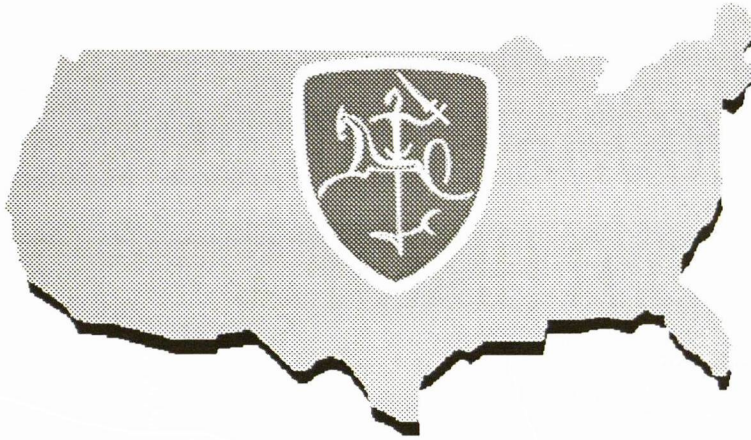
- ♦ **New York District:** (334 voted, present directors – 3, voted in – 4)

Raimundas Šližys (208), Ramutė Česnavičienė (190), Laima Šileikis-Hood (183), dr. Giedrė Kumpikaitė (143), candidates – Kęstutis Bileris(108), Vytautas Čereška (69), Edmundas Adomaitis (51), Tomas Bliznikas (18).

- ♦ **Ohio District:** (527 voted, present directors – 3, voted in – 7)

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*THE LITHUANIAN AMERICAN COMMUNITY, INC. NATIONAL BOARD OF DIRECTORS ELECTION COMMISSION was comprised of Dalia Jakienė, Chairperson of the National Board of Directors Election Commission, and Commission Members Milda Mikušauskienė, Vidmantas Rukšys, and Ieva Vozbutaitė.*



Rūta Gečienė (261), Janina Litvinienė (260), Rimvydas Tamošiūnas (227), Algis Gudėnas (185), Dalia Puškorienė (133), dr. Viktoras Stankus (129), Stepas Matas (118), candidates – Ričardas Širvinskas (70), Zita Maščinskienė (63), Horstas Žibas (60).

- ♦ **South East District -- First Region:** (475 voted, present directors – 7, voted in – 6) Vytautas Maciūnas (354), Roma Krušinskienė (342), Teresė Gečienė (333), Donatas Skučas (300), Rimas Gedeika (292), Kazys Razgaitis (287), candidates – dr. Daumantas Matulis (271), Gintaras Buivys (249), Audronė Pakštienė (227).

- ♦ **South East District -- First Region:** (172 voted, present directors – 3, voted in – 2) Julius Veblaitis (122), Rimantas Bitėnas (113), candidate -Loretta Stukas (89).

- ♦ **Western District:** (392 voted, present directors – 6, voted in – 5) Antanas Polikaitis (333), Gediminas Leškys (325), Vytautas Vidugiris (310), Angelė Nelsienė (303), Juozas Pupius (289), candidates - Zigmąs Viskanta (285), Giedrė Milašienė (225).

- ♦ **Midwest District – First Region:** (914 voted, present directors – 12, voted in – 12) kun. Jaunius Kelpšas (722), Birutė Jasaitienė

(628), dr. Petras Kisielius (577), Juozas Polikaitis (574), Marija Remienė (520), Rimas Domanskis (514), Vaclovas Momkus (437), Danguolė Ilginytė (407), Birutė Vindašienė (398), Antanas Pažuolis (398), Kazys Laukaitis (385), Algis Kazlauskas (368), candidates – Jūratė Budrienė (354), Bronius Abrutis (345), Bronius Juodelis (306), Aušrelė Sakalaite (288), Nijolė Nausėdienė (279), Ligija Tautkuvienė (268), Rita Šakenienė (253), Rūta Kuncienė (168), Irena Kirkuvienė (166).

- ♦ **Midwest District – Second Region:** (150 voted, present directors – 1, voted in – 1) Birutė Vilutienė (150).

- ♦ **Midwest District – Third Region:** (181 voted, present directors – 3, voted in – 2) Gediminas Damašius (140), Regina Narušienė (138), candidates – Rimas Sužiedėlis (93), Ramutis Pliūra (71), dr. Raimundas Šilkaitis (53). ♦

John J. Chernoski (Černiauskas) and Arvydas Birbalas

# Lietuvos Beisboolas – A History

The familiar words of “Tinker, to Evers, to Chance” from the poem, “*Baseball’s Sad Lexicon*”, recall the 1910 Chicago Cubs’ famous double play combination and are words recognizable to any diehard American baseball fan. As one travels the globe far from the friendly confines of Wrigley Field to a place in the former Soviet Union, the familiar refrain would be “Stundžia, to Beliauskas, to Kirlys”— the double play combination of the current Lithuanian National Baseball Team. Yes, baseball in Lithuania! Indeed, the 80<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the introduction of baseball in Lithuania was celebrated in Vilnius in 2002.

Lithuania is often associated with the sport of basketball, but Lithuanian baseball and basketball share the same roots — Steponas Darius, a Lithuanian who grew up in Chicago. It is just taking baseball longer to become ingrained in the hearts and minds of the Lithuanian populace.

During the post WWI era, Lithuania reemerged as an independent country after over a century of foreign domination by the Russian and Prussian empires. During the years of foreign rule, many Lithuanians immigrated to the United States. Among these immigrants was the young Steponas Darius.

Steponas was born in 1896 under the surname of “Darašius” born in Rubiškė, county of Tauragė in the Klaipėda region of Samogitia. Steponas’ father died in 1905, and his mother remarried in 1906. The family journeyed to America in December of 1907 living in Newark, New Jersey and Elizabeth, New Jersey. Finally in 1909, the family moved to the Bridgeport section of Chicago, Illinois. As a

teen, Steponas immersed himself in sports, playing baseball, basketball, football, and ruby.

With the arrival of WWI, Steponas joined the U. S. Army and shortened his surname from Darašius to Darius. Thereafter, Steponas was simply known as Darius. He fought on the battlefields in France, where he was wounded and awarded the Purple Heart. Upon his release from the U.S. Army, Darius returned to Chicago where he studied at the University of Chicago and became involved in Veterans’ activities, organizing the Alliance of Lithuanian-American Soldiers.

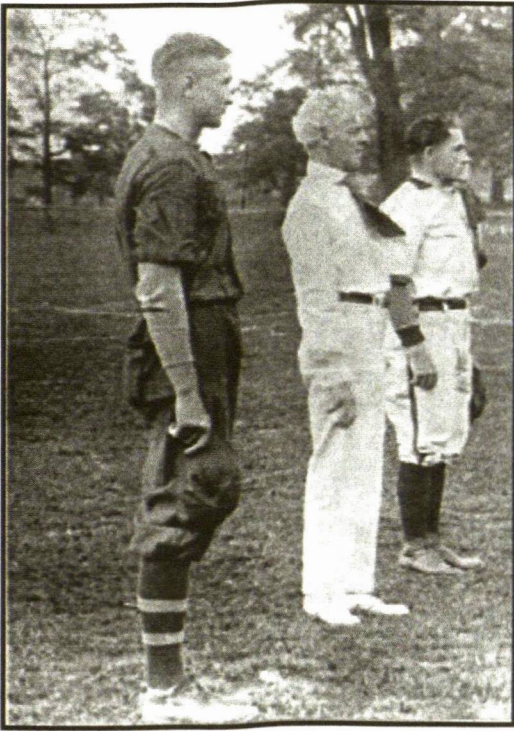
In 1920, Darius returned to the newly independent Lithuania where he entered the Military School located in the provisional capital of Kaunas. In 1921, he graduated from the School and was commissioned a Lieutenant, thereafter serving in the Lithuanian Air Force.

Darius is perhaps best known for his 1933 fateful crossing of the Atlantic with his fellow Lithuanian-American and war veteran, Stasys Girėnas, in the airplane “*Lituanica*.” The pair began their journey on July 15, 1933, by flying the *Lituanica* from Floyd Bennett Field in New York. Their goal was to fly directly from New York to Kaunas. On July 17, only three hours from their goal, the *Lituanica* went down in a German forest near the Polish border. The two aviators did not survive the crash, but they were celebrated as Lithuanian national heroes and honored with a State funeral.

Some seventy years later, Darius and Girėnas remain as important fixtures in Lithuanian history, as their images adorn the front of the modern Lithuanian Ten Litas banknote, with an image of

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*JOHN J. CHERNOSKI (ČERNIAUSKAS)* is an attorney and a high school baseball and softball umpire. He resides in Ewing, New Jersey. *ARVYDAS BIRBALAS* is a former player on the Kaunas Atletas baseball team and a former coach of the Kaunas baseball team. He is currently an active baseball umpire in Lithuania. He resides in Kaunas, Lithuania.



*Steponas Darius and the American ambassador of Lithuania in an undated photo.*

the *Lituanica* found on the reverse side of the banknote.

Darius was truly a “man for all seasons” — an aviator, a member of the American and Lithuanian military, and an athlete. Growing up in America, Darius experienced the pleasure and benefits of playing many sports, including baseball. Sports in America is truly the great equalizer allowing players of every ethnic, social, and economic background to compete on a level playing field where only playing skills are the measure of success. Baseball takes this a step further by requiring a steadfast group effort by individual players to achieve ultimate success. In many ways, the game of baseball embodies the American democratic experience; respect for the rules of the game, pride in individual success, but with ultimate success only being achieved through the unified efforts of the group.

When Darius first returned to Lithuania, he took with him the Americans’ love for sports. The result was that Darius introduced many types of athletic competition to the Lithuanian people. This

included tennis, soccer, basketball, and baseball. Basketball certainly ignited a passion within the citizenry, which has gained Lithuanian teams and players wide international acclaim.

On the other hand, baseball in Lithuania did not enjoy the same ultimate success. Darius certainly planted the seeds for baseball. He envisioned and drew plans for a major outdoor sports complex in Lithuania, with tennis courts, basketball courts, a soccer field, and a baseball field. In 1922, Darius organized a Lithuanian baseball league. The 1922 champions were the “Lietuvos Fizinio Lavinimosi Sajunga” team from Kaunas. The first pitch of the 1922 championship series was thrown by United States Ambassador Edwards. A year later, Lithuanian baseball went international when the Kaunas “Aviacijos” team played a team from Estonia and won 11 to 7. Further, in 1924, Darius undertook the time-consuming and painstaking task of translating the complete “Rules of Baseball” from English to Lithuanian.

During this same period in the early part of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, baseball was becoming an important part of the Lithuanian community in America. The Knights of Lithuania, a Lithuanian-American fraternal organization, through its various chapters established highly regarded recreational baseball teams of Lithuanian-American players. In fact, Darius had sought the assistance of the Knights of Lithuania to aid his quest to bring baseball to Lithuania.

Reluctantly, however, Darius recognized that economic conditions were not yet right for the game of baseball to take hold in the land of his birth, and the further development of the game was put on temporary hold. Darius only envisioned a short hiatus for Lithuanian baseball.

Several days before the start of his ill-fated 1933 transatlantic journey, Darius told a newspaper reporter, “...if I succeed in flying to Lithuania and conquer the Atlantic in Lithuania’s name, my goal will be to bring Lithuanian-Americans and the youth in Lithuania closer through the sport of baseball.” (Nijolė Dariūtė-Mastarienė, *Darius ir Girėnas*, Vilnius, 1991, p. 58). Alas, with the crash of the *Lituanica* and the resulting death of Darius, Lithuanian baseball was dealt a near fatal blow as it entered a hiatus of several decades, rather than a few years.

In the 1930’s, Lithuania along with the rest of Europe went into the economic, political, and so-

cial darkness of the pre-WWII and WWII years. Lithuania lost its independence in 1940 when the Soviet Union annexed the Lithuanian Republic. Thereafter, Germany captured Lithuania in 1941, and the Soviets retook Lithuania in 1944.

After the war, Lithuania along with the rest of Soviet bloc entered the cruel Stalinist era and the long Cold War. These long years were times for survival, rather than for games. Further, baseball was the "American" past time, and a sport certainly not in initial favor with the Soviet rulers.

In a bit of irony, it was the Soviet Union that reintroduced baseball to Lithuania in the 1980's. During the 1980's with the incorporation of baseball as part of the Olympic games, the Soviet Union embarked upon a campaign to develop Soviet athletics into competitive baseball players. Among this corps of Soviet athletes were a few Lithuanians. Indeed, one of the pitchers of the Soviet National team was a Lithuanian, Edmundas Matusėvičius. (Edmundas had been trained as a javelin thrower and was recognized as one of the best javelin throwers in the Soviet Union.)

In 1989, the Soviet National team toured the United States to learn the game of baseball. The tour included a debut game at the United States Naval Academy against the Midshipmen. Navy beat the Soviets 21-1, but the Soviet players had experienced baseball the way it should be played with a pitcher's mound, a manicured grass field with dirt base paths, team benches, and team discipline. Further, during this inaugural game, Matusėvičius was brought in to pitch in relief during the first in-

ning after the starting Soviet pitcher had been shelled by Navy's batters.

During this same period, baseball was reestablished within the Lithuanian Soviet Republic. In 1986, Vidas Šaparnis, an ice hockey lecturer at the Kaunas Physical Culture Institute conducted the first Baseball Seminar in Lithuania during the Soviet era. Also attracted to the reestablished sport was another Institute instructor, Linas Viltrakis. Vidas and Linas became the coaching staff for all of the Lithuania S.S.R. The pair sought recruits from students of the Institute. One of the recruited students was co-author Arvydas Birbalas.

Arvydas fondly recalled his initial introduction to the game of baseball. "For me the game was 99% new. We had heard little about baseball, and we did not know the Rules of the Game. We had one Ice Hockey goalie glove and one very old, but real, baseball glove that had been donated by a Cuban student. Instead of authentic baseballs, we used field hockey balls."

Arvydas and other Institute students became the core of the "Lithuanian" baseball team, which participated in the first U.S.S.R tournament in April of 1987, held in Kiev. (A few Latvian players were recruited, since there were not enough players to make up a full Lithuanian or Latvian team.)

After the tournament, more Lithuanian players were attracted to the game, and an all-Lithuanian team, "Atletas", was established in Kaunas. This team played in a 1987 summer Leningrad tournament against teams from Latvia, Leningrad, and Cuba (made up of Cubans attending school in the



*The Kaunas "White Nights"  
in 1987.*





TOP: The Rukla Little League banner.

LEFT: A shot of a Little League game.

U.S.S.R.) Thereafter, interest in baseball continued to grow with the establishment of another Kaunas team, “Banga”, and two teams from Vilnius, “Elektronas” and “Žalgirietis”. These teams participated in the first all-Lithuanian tournament, the Vilnius Cup, in August of 1987 with Kaunas’ Atletas team winning the tournament.

In September of 1987, the Lithuanian Cup tournament was organized in Kaunas with the Atletas team again taking the honors. In view of the renewed interest in baseball in Lithuania, the Lithuanian Baseball Federation was established in the autumn of 1987 as the governing body for the sport.

The sport continued to expand in Lithuania with the establishment of a team in Utena in 1988. At this juncture, there were over one hundred young men playing baseball on nine different teams throughout the Republic. While perhaps small by American standards, the growth of the game in Lithuania in only two years from using field hockey balls as baseballs and not having enough Lithuanians to even field a national team was significant.

In 1988, a noteworthy event occurred when Lithuanians had their first opportunity to play baseball against Americans. At the time, Kaunas was a closed Soviet city, and westerners were forbidden from even visiting. However, permission was granted for a baseball team of 14 to 15 year olds from Illinois to play in Kaunas. While the Kaunas team was comprised of players no younger than 18 years old, the American team handily defeated the Lithuanians in each game of the three game series. Defeated, yes, but for the Lithuanians it was an important milestone, as they had an opportunity to ex-

perience baseball, as it ought to be played and to learn from the experience. Further, it was a reconnection with the spirit of Darius as he had envisioned baseball as the bridge between the American and Lithuanian peoples.

In 1991, Lithuania was the first Soviet Republic to restore its independence. With independence, Lithuanian baseball expanded in new directions, and it has continued to grow. In the early 1990’s, teams from Lithuania journeyed to Sweden, France, and the United States to participate in various tournaments. The Kaunas Sports Institute has included in its curriculum a baseball course. Following in the footsteps of Darius, the Institute’s Assistant Professor of Baseball, Sigita Kamanulis, along with Petras Vilčinskas, an Associate Professor of Social Science at the Institute, have translated the official “Baseball Rules” into Lithuanian.

Today, the Lithuanian Baseball Federation is associated with the European Baseball Federation, and the Lithuanian national team is a regular participant in the European Cup. While the initial focus of the sport in Lithuania was to encourage young adults to play, the Federation has actively sought junior high and high school age players to join. For these younger players, the Federation is associated with Little League International. Indeed, in 1999 the Silva Little League team from Kaunas captured the European Region Championship and traveled to Tucson, Arizona to compete in the World Series for 16 to 18 year old player teams. Currently Lithuania has nearly 500 players with 23 active teams located throughout the country in big cities, like Vilnius and Kaunas and in small places

like Rukla and Linksmakalnis.

While the slow expansion of baseball throughout Lithuania and the expansion of the game to various age groups are positives, the conditions that the game is played under are less than positive. Games are often played on abandoned soccer fields or on simple grass fields where you will not find a pitching mound or backstop anywhere in sight and where the foul lines are wood chips instead of chalk.

Team uniforms often consist of hand-me-down gifts from America. Baseball gloves, balls, and other equipment are not readily available in Lithuania and, if available, are very costly. Thus, the Lithuanian Baseball Federation must often rely upon the goodwill of American friends to purchase and send these items. In short, for the game of baseball to continue to grow in Lithuania the help of the Lithuanian-American community and other baseball fans is important. Monetary and equipment donations are welcomed. Also, the Federation would like to locate American enthusiasts of Lithuanian baseball and hopefully have them join together to assist in the development of the sport in Lithuania and perhaps to help organize a future American tour for the national team to play college-age teams.

While financial assistance is needed and appreciated, the sharing of baseball wisdom is also vital to the growth of the sport. In this regard, any visit or contact from a knowledgeable baseball coach (active or retired) would be of great assistance to the Lithuanian coaches.

The co-author, John Chernoski, had an opportunity in September of 2002 to watch a baseball game in Rukla between 13-14 year old teams from Rukla and Kaunas. The playing conditions were indeed primitive by American standards, but the players exhibited enthusiasm for the game and a skill level equal to most American recreation baseball players of that age.

The five Rukla fans included two young teenage girls. He overheard one of the girls say "Amerikietis", and he responded "Taip." John joined the girls, learned that they each had a boy friend on the Rukla team, and had a delightful conversation in English about baseball. As John was leaving, he asked one of the girls if they had ever met an American before. Her response was that he was the first American that they had ever met!

The words of Darius had proven true as it was

through baseball that a Lithuanian-American was making "first" contact and connecting with these young Lithuanians! Hopefully baseball will provide many more opportunities to fulfill Darius' dream. ♦

### References:

*Nijolė Dariūtė-Mastarienė, Darius ir Girėnas, (Vilnius: 1991.)*

*Andrew Rosenthal, Soviet Team Out of its League in US. Debut, New York Times, April 4, 1989, p. A1.*

*William Wolkovich-Valkavičius, Lithuanian Fraternalism: 75 Years of the US. Knights of Lithuania (Brooklyn, NY: 1988).*

"Steponas Darius" (<http://www.geocities.com/SouthBeach/Boardwalk/4970/FamousPeople/Darius.htm>)

The coauthors extend their deep appreciation to Antanas Adomėnas and Sigitas Kamandulis for their inspiration and assistance in researching and preparing this article.

*(For further information about Lithuanian Baseball or to send a donation or equipment or to offer assistance, please contact the Lithuanian Baseball Federation's website at [www.beisbolas.lt](http://www.beisbolas.lt), or contact Sigitas Kamandulis by e-mail at [sigiskam@one.lt](mailto:sigiskam@one.lt) or at the following mailing address: Plechavicius 7-10, Kaunas 3043, Lithuania (LT).)*

Laurynas (Larry) R. Misevičius

# LITHUANIAN NORTHEAST BASKETBALL TOURNAMENT 2003

**P**eople see the things that are and ask themselves, "Why"? I think of the things that never were and ask myself, "Why not"? (Robert F. Kennedy, after George Bernard Shaw—ed.)



The New England Men's "A" Team sponsored by the Knights of Lithuania New England District

The idea of having this year's Northeast Lithuanian basketball tournament in Connecticut floated in the air since last year's games held in Philadelphia. There was no other Lithuanian sports club willing to take it over, so we had to come up with one of our own!

On November 1, 2002, we started a history; a bunch of basketball and other sports crazy people of Lithuanian origin organized a Lithuanian Sports Club of Connecticut, and soon it began to grow. Today the Club has about 100 in membership and is officially established around St. Joseph R.C. Church and Parish in Waterbury, CT – the area that is known as a long-time Lithuanian neighborhood.

Basketball practices are held three times a week at St. Joe's School Hall right next to the church. However, June 7 and 8 was not just about a shoot-around in Waterbury – we had quite a competition at the "University of Bridgeport" in the city of

Bridgeport!

Northeast Lithuanian sports festivities take place during the month of June already the third year in a row now; the first two were held in Long Island, NY (2001) and Philadelphia (2002). On June 7 and 8, the host happened to be the Lithuanian Sports Club of Conn. A total

of 18 teams representing eight states and Canada participated in four different competition levels (men's "A" – college level, "B" men's – non-college, and other – women and children), altogether 200 or so people.

Philadelphia "Aras" claimed the gold in men's "A" tournament and also won the children's competition. Connecticut "Ažuolai" ("Oaks") - the 1<sup>st</sup> team - came out on top in men's "B", and the joint New York/New Jersey women's team was the best in their tourney.

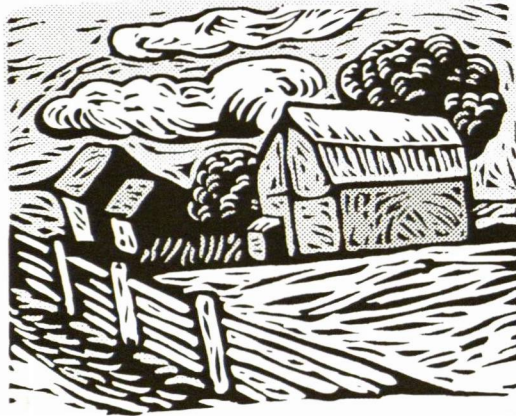
We thank the "University of Bridgeport" for their facilities, Fairfield County Referee Assoc. (president Albert Vazquez) for excellent officiating, and our own Lithuanian-American Community people for their restless assistance during the event. ◆

LAURYNAS (LARRY) R. MISEVIČIUS is the president of the Lithuanian Sports Club of Connecticut.

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

### The Auksučiai Project receives feedback

**P**rof. Dr. Calvin Qualset, world renowned Plant Geneticist with Univ. of California, and Prof. Dr. Charles A. Francis, Agricultural Consultant at Univ. of Nebraska, recently returned from Lithuania. They traveled there to observe and make evaluations of progress achieved at the Auksučiai Project farm, part of the Auksučiai Foundation program, near Kuršėnai, Šiauliai district, Northern Lithuania.



The purpose of the Auksučiai Foundation program for Agricultural and Forest Development is to help small scale Lithuanian farmers become more self-sufficient and competitive in a free market economy and to sponsor and organize agricultural education exchanges for young farmers and students.

It is best to quote from conclusions drawn by Charles A. Francis in his 13-page report:

“At the invitation of Dr. Calvin Qualset, a planning trip to Lithuania was accomplished in May 2003 with a visit to the Auksučiai Foundation Farm near Šiauliai, interviews with several key people in university and ministry of agriculture, and participation in a rural development at Lietuvos Žemės Ūkio Universitetas in Kaunas.

“This is an exciting and extremely ambitious project, one that deserves to move ahead as quickly but as prudently as possible. There is a high level of enthusiasm on the part of some [founders], on the part of the field people who are involved in implementation, and on the part of people with Lithuanian ancestry now living elsewhere who would like to

make a difference in their former country. The key is to establish clear goals and a vision of how to achieve them...

“The practical experience of a U.S. advisor and a Lithuanian farm manager has been supplemented by student expertise and labor in setting up the farm and its initial production and demonstration enterprises.

What is in the field is good, and needs to be expanded and adopted to local conditions and market realities...

“The mission statement to increase production and improve markets for products from the farm is a commendable goal that can help local farmers improve their incomes and families... There is great potential for this project to make a difference in the economic lives and the quality of life for small farm families in Lithuania. With hard work and thoughtful planning these goals can be achieved...

“An obvious role is raising money from the Lithuanian-Americans and from other individuals and groups interested in promoting development of the Lithuanian small farmer, rural sector...”

More thorough information on the Auksučiai Project and its goals can be found in the Internet Website <http://www.aukfoundation.org>. Individuals wishing to contribute to the achievements of this non-profit, tax-exempt undertaking can send their donations to:

THE AUKSUČIAI FOUNDATION  
2907 Frontera Way  
Burlingame, CA 94010 USA ♦

## Outgoing U.S. ambassador awarded Lithuanian medal

**D**efense Minister Linas Linkevičius awarded the Medal of Merits to the outgoing American Ambassador John F. Tefft in Vilnius on June 26. The Medal of Merits is the highest defense award of Lithuania.

Linkevičius said that US-Lithuanian defense cooperation was conducted on the basis of common values. The US envoy was quoted as saying that diplomatic service in Lithuania represented a special period in his career.

"I am happy to have been able to support Lithuania's accession to NATO. My link with your country will not cease," he said.

Lithuanian Commander-In-Chief, Maj. Gen. Jonas Kronkaitis thanked Tefft for his personal tribute to implementing the defense goals of Lithuania. The country's armed forces achieved a particularly marked progress during the diplomatic service of Mr. Tefft in Lithuania, he said.

A Defense Ministry report suggests that, after his term in the Baltic state, Tefft will give lectures at a Washington-based National War College. ♦

## Vike-Freiberga re-elected Latvian president

**T**he Latvian Saeima elected President Vaira Vike-Freiberga for a second four-year term on June 20.

Eighty eight deputies voted for re-electing Vike-Freiberga, and only six deputies voted against. All Saeima deputies of the New Era, the For Fatherland And Freedom/LNNK (TB/LNNK), the Union of Greens and the Farmers (ZZS), Latvia's First Party (LPP), the People's Party (TP) and the National Harmony Party backed Vike-Freiberga during the vote.

Latvia's Socialist Party parliamentary group had declared that they would vote against Vike-Freiberga, but four deputies from the For Human Rights in A United Latvia did not plan to take part in the vote.

Vike-Freiberga's next term of office will take effect as of July 8, when she will give the oath of office, the Saeima Legal Bureau head Gunars Kusins told LETA. ♦

## Twelve more Lithuanian officers finish Baltic Defense College

**T**welve Lithuanian officers finished studies at the Baltic Defense College, a multilateral project set into motion in 1998, in June.

The new group of graduates brought the number of high-ranking Lithuanian officers holding the College's diploma to a total of 38.

In addition to the military, two officials of the Lithuanian Defense Ministry completed a special course for civilians last February. This year Lithuania also sponsored studies at the Baltic Defense College for one Georgian officer.

The college, based in the Estonian Tartu city, is coordinated by Sweden. Danish Brigadier General Michael Clemmesen is in charge

of the military education institution. The project's goal is to have a common school for the Lithuanian, Latvian, and Estonian senior staff officers, which can offer professional enhancement and lectures by Western specialists.

The college program is geared toward specific conditions of the Baltic countries, namely their geopolitical situation and military forces.

Apart from Baltic officers, the student roll at the Baltic Defense College shows names of the Czech, Danish, British, American, Canadian, Polish, Finnish, Swedish, Hungarian, Germany, and Bosnia and Herzegovina officers. ♦

## Lithuania fulfilling commitments to EU

**L**ithuania sent an annual report on its progress achieved during the preparations for the EU membership to the European Commission on June 27.

The report contains the analysis of how the Baltic state meets EU commitments, and how it keeps with the set terms and conditions.

European Committee Director General Petras Austrevičius said only Lithuania and Slovenia have avoided the Commission's criticism over the preparations for joining the union.

"Although we have managed to keep in line with the set time-table, we should not relax as too many things are left to be implemented in agriculture, environment, power, culture, and audio-visual policy and other fields," Austrevičius said.

The European Commission-prepared a statement in late May giving a positive evaluation to the reforms in all ten candidate countries. However, it pinpointed 28 cases in which the would-be EU members must take steps to remove obstacles to catch up with the time-table.

During the six months until the planned date for the EU accession, the European Commission is to draft a report about how the newcomers are prepared for the participation in the activities of the union.

Lithuania will become a full-fledged member of the EU on May 1, 2004. ♦

## U.S. Army commander visited Lithuania

**U**pon his arrival in Vilnius on June 18, Gen. Richard B. Myers, chairman of the U.S. Joint Chiefs of Staff, praised Lithuania's defense system giving a positive evaluation to Lithuania's political and operational assistance in the fight against terrorism. The founding of NATO military base on Lithuanian territory will depend on the decision of the Alliance members and the Baltic country, Myers said.

Gen. Richard B. Myers, chairman of the U.S. Joint Chiefs of Staff, arrived for his first visit to Lithuania on the invitation by Lithuanian Army Commander-in-Chief Maj.Gen Jonas Kronkaitis.

When in Vilnius, Gen. Myers met with Defense Minister Linas Linkevičius, the U.S. ambassador to Lithuania, and other high ranking local officials.

The chairman of the U.S. Joint Chiefs of Staff told journalists that during his meeting with President Rolandas Paksas he talked about Lithuanian troops' participation in peace-keeping operations and further military cooperation between Lithuania and U.S.

"They are especially good in Afghanistan. All other anti-terrorist missions there are proud of them," Myers said about the Lithuanian troops in Afghanistan.

When asked about the preparedness of the Lithuanian armed forces for membership in NATO, Myers noted "an impressive progress" made in this field.

To the journalists' question about the opportunities for the U.S. to have its own military base in Lithuania, the U.S. Joint Chiefs of Staff said he did not have an answer to that, adding that the decision will depend on Lithuania and NATO members. ♦

## Lithuanian Green Movement protests Russian oil field

**T**he Lithuanian Green Movement staged a protest at the Russian embassy in Vilnius on June 23 to call for the halt of oil pumping in the D-6 field lying in the vicinity of the Kuršių Nerija (Curonian) Spit, which is shared by Lithuania and Russia.

Holding posters, "Do not harm nature in the Kuršių Nerija" and "No to D-6 oil-field", the protesters demanded that the Russian government and LUKoil cut short oil extraction in the D-6 field and other targeted areas in the Baltic Sea.

The Russian Ministry of Natural Resources approved the D-6 project without taking account of the violations of the national and international law and of legal proceedings instituted against LUKoil over holding back information and hindrances to an independent ecological probe. The Green Movement of Lithuania says the Russian government shall assume full responsibility for D-6 after-effects.

Linus Vainius, vice-chairman for the Green Movement, said at the rally that the Russian government neglected multiple pleas and calls from the Lithuanian government, the Helsinki Commission, UNESCO World Heritage Committee, and international NGOs. He said Russia had declined to provide any information on the operation of the D-6 oil field for three years.

Experts estimate that given that the D-6 field pumps up to 700,000 tons of oil a year, up to 200 g/ton will be emitted into the environment for technological reasons (up to 1,400 tons yearly).

The Green activists affirm the D-6 operation would not avoid environment pollution, oil spilling cases, and other impact. Both the Kuršių Nerija and the Baltic Sea, two fragile and vulnerable ecosystems, seem to be in great jeopardy.

Maria Urazova, a spokesperson for the Russian embassy in Vilnius, told ELTA that her



country, like Lithuania, also held an interest in protecting the unique nature of Kuršių Nerija as much as possible. The official affirmed that LUKoil was attentive to the ecological safety of new oil manufacturing projects – in oil-fields based in the Caspian Sea it was using “zero pollution” technologies.

Urazova added that Russia furnished all required information about D-6 to Lithuania during bilateral talks held in Moscow last March.

Lithuanian Prime Minister Algirdas Brazauskas, when asked about steps taken by his office to head off the D-6 operation in the Baltic Sea, stressed that "this territory belonged to this country (Russia)". On the other hand, he said, Lithuania would not leave the issue unsettled.

Brazauskas reportedly signed a letter to Russian Premier Mikhail Kasyanov asking permission for Lithuanian environment specialists to study the conclusions of an international commission's probe in the oil platform.

Kasyanov had earlier pledged to Brazauskas to see to the consistency of ecological safety requirements regarding the new oil field, and to provide the international commission's conclusions to the Lithuanian side before D-6 was put into operation. ♦

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