

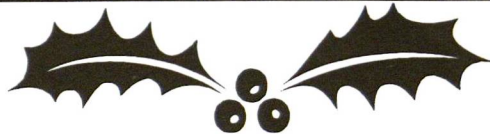
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BRIDGES

• LITHUANIAN AMERICAN NEWS JOURNAL •

Volume 27

Issue 9, November 2003



Lithuanians in the Press...A Successful Gala...Our Saints are Remembered

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

It is just recently that I realized that I have never spoken of my "day job" — an eighth grade literature and language arts teacher. It was not what I originally planned to be. In fact, I started out as a writer. But that swiftly changed when I realized that I was really in my element as a teacher.

Teaching brought together my writing, love of reading, and the chance to guide young minds to places they would only imagine as tiresome or boring. It lit up something inside me that had felt empty.

The best moments come when my students open up and talk about everything from what they did after school or what happened in science class or how one boy "said the weirdest thing and it was just so weird that we all couldn't stop laughing". I like that.

From September to June, amazing growth takes place — both in them and in me. Every year brings unique moments of self-realization as a person, a teacher, and a mother. My students help me grow as much as, I hope, I help them take that step into the high school arena.

I've also been able to bring my Lithuanian language and culture to school. I was hesitant at first, but they started it. During an informal conversation with the class, one boy asked me what my name meant. The whole class froze. I guess they all had been curious but too timid to ask. So I started to tell them stories about being Lithuanian. I began with my name, went to my childhood, and ended up with language lessons.

The one thing they liked about the language lesson was that after I taught some key phrases — "labas", "kaip tau?", "man gerai" — they treated them like a secret language that only the eighth graders could use. Funny, what simple things can affect people.

I guess one of the special aspects of talking about being who I am is that it always brings out the silent ones with rich and unique backgrounds themselves. How wonderful to see that spark of interest in the rest of the group. I suppose that's the reason I continue to teach — it keeps my fire burning.

Rasa Ardys-Juška

Editor

BRIDGES

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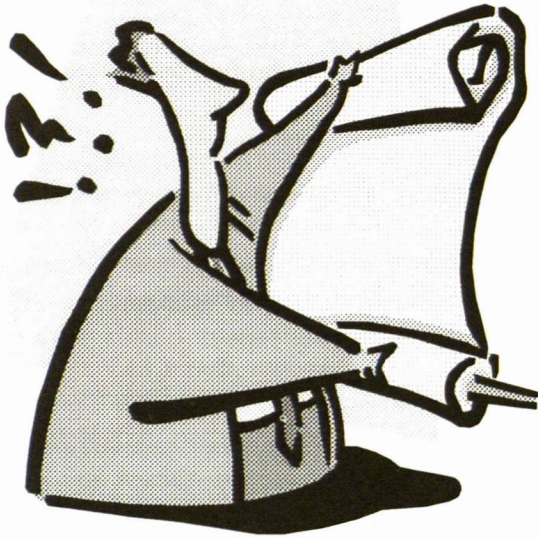
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Two little children who
have benefited from
Lithuanian Orphan
Care.
Photo: Jeanne Dorr



DEPARTMENTS...

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Focus on Lithuania in the news

Lithuanian-American killed in Iraq

First Lieutenant Brian Slavenas, 30, of Genoa, Ill., died along with 15 other soldiers when his helicopter was shot down in Iraq on Nov. 2. He was buried on Thursday, Nov. 13, 2003.

The attack, which also left 20 soldiers wounded, was the deadliest strike against U.S. forces since they invaded Iraq in March. Insurgents fired two missiles into the rear of the giant aircraft, witnesses told The Associated Press. The helicopter crashed in fields west of Baghdad.

His father, Ronald Slavenas described Brian as a "gentle giant". Slavenas loved flying the Chinook helicopter, the type that was shot down, his father had said.

According to different news sources, Brian Slavenas was born in DeKalb, Ill., about 60 miles west of Chicago. After his stop in Fort Wayne, Indiana, he moved back to Illinois and attended high school. Slavenas excelled in academics and athletics. His high school year-book lists activities such as marching band, National Honor Society, and track.

After high school, he became an Army paratrooper and then joined the same unit of the National Guard his father was in. He later went to officer school and decided to become a helicopter pilot. He was from the F Company 106th Aviation Battalion based at the Greater Peoria Airport and had been in Iraq since July and in the Middle East since April.

In Iraq, he flew dignitaries, soldiers, Iraqi prisoners and equipment, and he liked to check out historical sites from his pilot's chair, his father said for news sources.

Slavenas's paratrooper father and two older brothers served in the Army and the Marines.

In addition to his parents, Ronald Slavenas and Rosemarie Dietz Slavenas, and brothers, Brian is survived by a stepmother, a step-brother and stepsister. ♦

—from *MISCELLANEOUS NEWS SOURCES*

Fire destroys Waterbury's 111 year-old Lithuanian Club

The 111-year-old Lithuanian Club in Waterbury, Connecticut was entirely destroyed by a raging fire early Oct. 25, devastating residents of the Brooklyn neighborhood.

According to the *Republican-American*, "the 4:45 a.m. fire destroyed the 48 Green St. building, wiping out club records and pictures that captured the history of the beloved Lithuanian-American community, and threatened ten nearby homes. Firefighters had to evacuate those neighboring residents, but no one was hurt."

The article went on to describe other damage, "The hall was leveled, except for the front doorway and a billboard that bore the yellow, green and red colors of the Lithuanian flag. A brick building with the bar and a small hall were also lost. A dozen garages, partially wood and brick, were spared."

In a subsequent article, which appeared in the Oct. 28th issue of the *Republican-American*, the story of the fire was expanded. The story began, "About 45 angry and confused members of the Lithuanian community met Monday [Oct. 27] night to sift through the figurative ashes of their club, which burned down Saturday morning. Members and supporters of the Lithuanian Club gathered in the nearby Knights of Lithuania Hall to discuss how to rebuild and to work out a plan to get answers about the fire and the state of the club's finances."

Unfortunately, the story became more complicated as other issues regarding the Club emerged. The article stated that, "the night before the fire, [club member Rich] Gillis said club members met to demand president John Veturis produce financial records. He was



given a Nov. 7 deadline to produce records of revenue, expenses, and hall rentals income. The club also voted to hire an independent auditor to go over the books.

Veturis did not attend Monday's meeting, and many in the crowd said they were no longer members because they were concerned about how it was being operated. Veturis did not return a call for comment after the meeting."

In addition to these matters, "Lisa Velez, who had been an officer in the club, said she had to resign when she found out there was no insurance for the Board of Directors. She and Gillis are part of a core of current and former club members looking to reverse what they claim was an organization too much under the control of its president."

The article added that, "Among the things club members don't know is whether they have insurance. Members of the Lithuanian Cemetery Association, whose board Veturis disbanded in April, say that since the fire, they've checked records and their insurance policy was canceled in June. Velez said she was told that

all the club's financial records were destroyed in the fire. While there was a safe in the building, it wasn't fireproof."

The article ended with the sad note that, "As if a fire, uncertainty about insurance policies and a missing president weren't enough, the club also learned that it owes the city about \$41,000 in back taxes. Tax Collector Karen Mulcahy came to the meeting because her office had been trying to find out who the re-

sponsible party was for the tax payments."

Lithuanian-Americans in Waterbury have their job cut out for them as they try to solve this intricate mystery and await the investigation results, which will determine if the fire was set deliberately or if the fire had been the result of age and deterioration. ♦

—from *The Republican-American*
Waterbury, Connecticut
Photo: Nijole Tirvainaitė

Lithuanian diplomatic service celebrates its 85th anniversary

The 85th anniversary of the Lithuanian diplomatic service was crowned by a series of events on Nov. 13 and 14. The Foreign Ministry held a conference called "85 years of Lithuanian Diplomatic Service."

Participants at the forum listened to addresses by Lithuania's President Rolandas Paksas, Seimas Speaker Arturas Paulauskas, Prime Minister Algirdas Brazauskas, and Foreign Minister Antanas Valionis. Former Lithuanian diplomatic heads and acclaimed history specialists read reports about the Lithuanian foreign office and its policy from the middle ages to the 21st century.

A photo exhibition dedicated to diplomatic activities during the period from 1918 to 1940 was opened right after the conference.

On Nov 14, the International Relations and Political Sciences Institute of Vilnius University organized a round-table discussion about Lithuania's future in Europe. Valionis and Raimundas Lopata, the institute's director, delivered words of introduction at it.

On Nov 3, 85 years ago, the participants of the 11th session of the Lithuanian State Council ruled to establish nine ministries, among them the foreign ministry. On Nov 7, Augustinas Voldemaras became Lithuania's first foreign minister.

Jurgis Saulys became the first officially rec-

ognized diplomatic envoy, granted all the privileges of the diplomatic service, of Lithuania to a foreign country. This country was Germany.

As of Jan 1, 1939, Lithuania had 15 embassies, 8 general consulates, 7 honorary general consulates, 6 consulates, 33 honorary consuls, and 6 honorary vice-consuls in Europe, America, Asia, and Africa. Before the Soviet occupation in 1940, the Lithuanian diplomatic staff numbered 218.

During the years of occupation, Stasys Lorzaitis Sr., who resided in Rome, was the head of the Lithuanian diplomatic service. After his death those duties were taken over by Stasys Bačkis in Washington, D.C.

The current Foreign Ministry was founded on March 22, 1990, following the law of the Lithuanian government. On March 24 of that year, Algirdas Saudargas became the first foreign minister in Lithuania after the restoration of independence.

Presently, Lithuania has 48 diplomatic offices in foreign countries, of which 7 are representative offices under international organizations, 6 are general consulates, 2 are consulates, and 33 are embassies. Nearly 400 people are currently employed in Lithuania's diplomatic service. ♦

—from *ELTA*

UNESCO includes Baltic song festivals on World Heritage List

UNESCO has included the Baltic song festival tradition on the World Heritage List of masterpieces. Juozas Mikutavičius, director of the Lithuanian Folk Culture Center, says this will add greatly to Lithuania from a moral point of view.

"UNESCO's recognition captures the essence of the Festival of Song, a national phenomenon. From this point of view, the World Song Festival held in Lithuania reaches far beyond the limits of this country, growing into a worldwide culture event," Mikutavičius told ELTA.

The international UNESCO jury in Paris considered 56 nominations; of which 28 were announced on the aforementioned list on Nov. 10th. According to Michael Tarm, an Associated Press writer, UNESCO official Yoshihiro Higuchi said that the prestigious designation is meant to raise public awareness of the unique

cultural phenomena and help ensure they don't die out.

The tradition of arranging song and dance festivals in Lithuania began 79 years ago. The very first festival was organized in 1924. Since then, Lithuania has witnessed 15 major song and dance festivals.

"All the jury members were very impressed with the magnitude of these song festivals. They're extraordinary," said Higuchi in Tarm's article, who worked with the UNESCO jurors as they assessed the various proposals – including by watching video films of performances.

The Baltic festivals, like the others, will now be eligible for UNESCO funds, though Higuchi said it wasn't yet clear how much they would receive. He said between US\$100,000 and US\$200,000 had been given to individual cultural protection programs in the past. ♦

– from *ELTA*

Lithuanian-American explores Ukraine for investment possibilities

Geoffrey T. Smith, of *Dow Jones News-wires*, released an article, "FOCUS: Investors Eye Next Market Boom Amid Ukraine Slagheaps", in its October 4th edition highlighting Lithuanian-American Vytenis Rasutis, an international fund manager.

Smith states in his article... Emboldened by a four-year, 325% rally in Russia and increasingly skeptical of Russian stocks' ability to sustain that growth, risk-friendly emerging-market investors are scouting out opportunities in a country that even they have considered off-limits for five years – Ukraine.

Like Russia, Ukraine used its 1998 financial

crisis and devaluation to resuscitate local industry, with the metals and confectionary businesses faring particularly well. Unlike Russia's ruble, however, the hryvnia has stayed competitive, avoiding an oil-fueled appreciation. Manufacturing growth is now really taking off.

"Russia has performed really well for the past four years, but can it continue to perform?" asks Rasutis, a fund manager with seven years' experience in the former Soviet Union. "We're not shorting Russia, but we are looking for additional opportunities."

Smith explains the problems with Russia... The problem starts at state level. In Russia,

President Vladimir Putin inherited a largely complete privatization process and granted a conditional guarantee of its results to encourage new owners, however disreputable, to invest in their property. By contrast, the Ukrainian state still holds stakes in more than 1,500 companies, according to Vadym Vasylev, deputy head of the State Property Fund. That includes such holdings as 92% of Ukrtelekom.

Smith goes on... Ukrainian businesses "are at the stage where they know they need to do something to maximize the value of their assets, but they're not ready to disclose their

ownership fully, or to restructure themselves according to business logic," says Alex Kazbegi, head of equity research at Moscow-based Renaissance Capital. "There's a good chance they will do it eventually, but we're still a couple of years away from that."

Good luck to Vytenis Rasutis as he explores the financial futures of different former Soviet-bloc countries. ♦

— from *DOW JONES NEWSWIRE*

Sent in by Saulius Anužis

Lithuania and the US to face off in the Olympics

In *Sports Illustrated's* Nov. 11, 2003 edition, it was announced that "the defending champion United States was grouped Saturday [Nov. 8] with European champ Lithuania for next year's men's basketball tournament at the Athens Olympics. The two countries are joined in Group B with Angola, Australia, Greece and Puerto Rico. Serbia-Montenegro, the 2002 world champion, and Argentina are in Group A with New Zealand, Italy, Spain and China."

The article went on to say, "The United States survived a last-second miss by Lithuania to reach the final at the 2000 Sydney Olympics. An NBA-led U.S. team defeated France 85-75 for the gold medal. "It'll be a great experience to play Lithuania again after the game we had down in Sydney in the semifinal when we were very fortunate to beat them," said Sean Ford, director of the U.S. men's Olympic



program."

Šarūnas Marčiulionis was quoted as saying that, "he expected the United States to win Group B and hoped his country would at least finish second."

The way the games are designed to be played was also explained in the article: "Besides host Greece, the teams qualified from continental championships. After playing each other in the group, the top four

teams from each advance to the quarterfinals. Each group winner faces the fourth-place team from the other group in the quarterfinals while the second-place team meets the No. 3 finisher from the other group."

The tournament will begin on Aug. 15, 2004. Watch for the games to see how Lithuania fares! ♦

— from *Sports Illustrated*
Sent in by Laurynas Misevicius

Gypsies in Lithuania captured in photos

In the *Baltic Times*' Nov. 7th review of Andrew Mikšys' photo exhibit, reporter Darius James Ross ("Roaming through the intimate life of Vilnius' Roma") enlightens its readers not only of Mikšys' photographic talents, but also of his subjects – the Gypsies or the Roma. Mikšys is a Lithuanian-American photographer based in Seattle, Washington whose work was on exhibit from Nov. 6 to the 21st at Vilnius' UNESCO Gallery, providing an intriguing insight into the Roma's life in Lithuania.

According to Ross, ... "Mikšys started photographing the Roma by accident. "In Snipiškės [a Vilnius neighborhood], I came across three women in brightly colored clothes. The women before me, however, did not fit neatly into the image I had of a Lithuania inhabited by Lithuanians. And these were certainly not conservatively dressed Lithuanians. Who were they then? The women were also curious about what I was doing. I asked if I could photograph them. They agreed."

The experience got him thinking about the Roma and the ethnic diversity in Lithuania. "To some extent I was naive. Perhaps, though, that helped me see things freshly and free of old prejudices or stereotypes," said Mikšys....

Ross's article continued... "Vilnius University professor Dovid Katz, who founded the Center for Stateless Cultures at VU, said that the Roma were one of the medieval peoples of the grand duchy of Lithuania and its successor states since the days of Grand Duke Jogaila in the 14th century."

"In 1501, they were granted self-rule by the grand duke of Lithuania, as well as a charter permitting the election of a Roma chief and the freedom to wander through all the lands of the grand duchy."

"To this day, academics are locked in battle over the authenticity of the document, a controversy itself symbolic of the seemingly eternal attachment of conflict to the legitimacy of anything Roma," said Katz.

He believes that the Roma are one of the "classic stateless cultures of Lithuania," along with the Karaimic, Old Believer, Tatar and Yiddish cultures. Today there are 3,000 to 4,000 Roma living in Lithuania, according to experts.

Mikšys' first visit to the Roma ended when a man in the settlement demanded the roll of film from his camera, most likely because of the mistrust the community has for the Lithuanian media. "Of course, these were the best pictures I've ever taken," he said.

But he was undaunted by the experience: "Since then, I have gained the trust of many Roma and been able to photograph in Vilnius and in villages around Lithuania. As a result, I've been welcomed into their homes, invited to weddings and given an opportunity to learn about their culture."

Ross reports... Katz believes that Mikšys' talent comes from the fact that "he has succeeded in joining Roma people to feel them from inside, and to feel with them and for them, and not as yet another casual Western observer having a field trip to some ethnographic zoo."

"This project was never a sociological study," Mikšys said, "I approached it from the point of view of an artist." His outlook is subjective and he is not trying to create a documentary record of the Roma in Lithuania. "A lot of photojournalism and documentary photography is very formalistic, in an effort to be objective it relies on formulas that attempt to erase the point of view or personality of the photographer."

Ross ended his article with... "According to Mikšys, he simply found the Roma interesting and wanted "to learn about their culture and see how they live". ♦

—from *Baltic Times*

A Christmas tree for New York... from a Lithuanian family

When it was time for David Murbach, garden manager for Rockefeller Center, to choose a tree worthy of its place in downtown Manhattan, he chose the one he had discovered in April while circling the sky in his helicopter. The 79-foot Norway spruce belonged to the Katkauskas family in Manchester, Connecticut.

The Associated Press reported that, "more than 100 neighbors and Manchester residents came out to say goodbye to the tree they say is a town landmark."

The tree had been planted by Frances and her late husband, Adolph, 50 years ago. The



AP stated, "Both Frances Katkauskas, 79, and her son Andy, 44, say they plan to attend the lighting of the tree on Dec. 3. The tree will remain lit with at least 26,000 lights until Jan. 6."

According to the AP, Murbach felt that the tree "stood out, even from up above, for its fullness and dark, green color."

The AP stated further, "The Katkauskas family plans to plant a crimson maple tree where the spruce used to be, and will be donating a piece of the remaining stump to the town's historical society." ♦

– from *The Associated Press*

Tasmania's Lithuanian news journal released

The new Volume 17 of the *Lithuanian Papers* has been released. This is the annual journal of the Lithuanian Studies Society at the University of Tasmania edited by Algimantas P. Taškūnas.

This issue's contents include the following interesting articles:

- ♦ "Women in Lithuania and Feminism" by Dalia Marcinkevičienė
- ♦ "Jonas Žemaitis" by Thierry Pinet – This is a portrait of a Lithuanian leader in the anti-Soviet fight.
- ♦ "National inferiority complex" by Viktoras Alekna, translated by Gintautas Kaminskas – (A fascinating look into the psychological makeup of the Lithuanian)
- ♦ "Vaclovas Ratas" by Tiiu Reissar – The life and works of the well-known Lithuanian graphic artist.

- ♦ "SLIC [Sydney Lithuanian Information Centre] in Sydney" by Ramona Ratas-Zakarevičius – This is a new online English language website project with the aim of preserving valuable historical, cultural, educational, and social material and recording the achievements of the NSW Australian Lithuanian Community over the past 55 years.
- ♦ And other interesting articles portraying the viewpoints and interests of the Australian Lithuanian community.

If you would like more information on this valuable journal, please contact the editor, Algimantas Taškūnas at P.O. Box 777, Sandy Bay, Tas. 7006 Australia or send him an e-mail at A.Taskunas@utas.edu.au. The journal costs \$8 US and is published annually appearing in October or November. ♦

– from *Lithuanian Papers*

Karina Donnelly

U.S.-Baltic Foundation Gala a Success!

William Altman, Chairman of the U.S.-Baltic Foundation (USBF), and His Excellency Jan Eliasson, Swedish Ambassador to the U.S., welcomed more than 350 guests to “A Baltic Celebration”, the Foundation’s Gala awards dinner and silent auction on November 1.

The Gala honored Winthrop Rockefeller, Jr., Lt. Governor of Arkansas, Paul Atkins, U.S. Securities and Exchange Commissioner, and Arturas Zuokas, Mayor of Vilnius, Lithuania. Gala Chair Susan Allen, wife of Senator George Allen and who – like Mr. Rockefeller and Mr. Atkins – has Lithuanian-American heritage, led a star-studded program along with Masters of Ceremony Audrey Gruss, of the Audrey and Martin Gruss Foundation, and Krista Bard, of Bard Associates Inc.

The evening featured a spectacular fashion show featuring Latvian models and top designer Alexander Bibergal of Atelier in Riga, organized by USBF Co-Chairman Hamid Ladjevardi and produced by Baltic Fashion Federation President Elena Strahova, and a classical piano performance by Edvinas Minkstimas, 2003 Grand Prix winner of the Music Without Limits competition held annually in the Baltics.

USBF’s “A Baltic Celebration” is the premiere annual event for American friends of Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania. Patron cuisiner Imre Sooäär and his acclaimed chef Peeter Pihel of Pädaste Manor on the Estonian island of Muhu designed the dinner’s Baltic menu.

The original U.S. Senate roll call vote to admit the Baltic States and four other countries into NATO was purchased during the silent auction by Cynthia Pasky, CEO of Strategic Staffing Solutions, and donated in a dramatic on-stage presentation featuring H.E. Vygaudas Ušackas, Lithuanian Ambassador, and Dr. Michael Haltzel, of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, for permanent display in the Embassy of Lithuania.

The White House hosted a briefing for invited friends of USBF, including business and cultural delegations from Latvia and Lithuania, with President George W. Bush’s foreign policy advisors on the day before the Gala. President Bush stated that “I am proud that the Baltic States are trusted partners and will soon be close allies of the U.S. in NATO,” in a letter to those gathered for “A Baltic Celebration”.

The Gala Honorary Patrons were Vaira Vike Freiberga, President of Latvia, Arnold Rüütel, President of Estonia, and Rolandas Paksas, President of Lithuania. The briefing in the White House was followed by a VIP reception at the Swedish Ambassador’s residence. Guests from the Baltics were also treated to a four-day program including networking meetings for business participants and a cultural program that included tours of Washington museums, a luncheon in the U.S. Capitol, and a visit to the Pentagon.

Jeff Nelson, USBF Executive Director, announced that a record \$233,000 had been raised to support the Foundation’s work in Es-

KARINA DONNELLY is the contact person at The U.S.-Baltic Foundation, 733 15th Street NW, Suite 1026, Washington, DC 20005. Visit www.usbaltic.org for more information.

tonia, Latvia, and Lithuania by Gala sponsors and individual ticket sales, silent auction donations, and special gifts from the Audrey and Martin Gruss Foundation and Kraft Foods International.

The leading sponsors and donors to "A Baltic Celebration" included... National Gala Chairs Audrey and Martin Gruss, Joseph P. and Alexandra Kazickas, National Gala Co-Chair Gene Zolotarev of Parex Bank, plus William Altman and Danguolė Spakevičius, Broadstreet Group, Joseph and Lisa Krivickas, Hamid Ladjevardi, George Ramonas, Edward Clark, Dace Copeland, Eric Harkna, Janis Kulkainis, Astra Michels, and the following corporations: Baltica, Dimensions International, Ericsson, Finnair, Radisson SAS Hotels, Raytheon, SAS Scandinavian Airlines, Shorebank Advisory Services, Strategic Staffing Solutions, Volvo, Windstar Cruises.

The Gala's media partner was The Baltic Times.

Proceeds from the Gala and silent auction support a variety of USBF programs and activities, including new initiatives in the Jewish community of Lithuania, a food bank project for poor families in Latvia, and youth Scouting programs in Estonia.

Since USBF was founded in 1990 to support democratic and free market reforms in Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania, USBF has raised more than \$8 million and established 11 local democratic institutions, including Municipal Training Centers and journalist training institutes in each country. Current activities include strengthening business and cultural relations between the U.S. and the Baltics. USBF also sponsors the Ambassadors Council speaker series in the U.S. Capitol. ♦

Lithuania's farmers need your help...

Thanksgiving and Christmas season is almost here, and with it comes the desire of human kindness to give to those less fortunate. Most of us give generously to large charitable non-profit organizations, directly or through the work place, hoping that our money will be distributed fairly to those in need. But very few realize that large Non-Profits use 30% to 40% (and sometimes more) of our donations to pay for their own salaries and overhead expenses.

We – The Auksučiai Foundation – are a small not-for-profit organization with no salaries (all volunteers) and very, very low overhead expenses (only postage, printings, etc.). We do not get reimbursed even for travel expenses, thus almost 100% of your donations go directly to helping the needy, neglected, small-scale Lithuanian farmers, who we hope, with your help, will better their living standards by learning new farming methods and becoming more competitive in the free-market econo-

mies.

We urgently need your help and grassroots support. That is why I am contacting Lithuanian-Americans and other friends so we can provide the resources to our brothers in Lithuania. Your personal involvement in this effort, and in urging others to participate with you, is vital. We hope you will join our group of supporters with a contribution that you can afford today, of \$50, \$100, \$500 or more. By your generous giving you will fulfill your desire of being helpful to others. Please visit our Website at www.aukfoundation.org to learn more about our accomplishments and goals. Please send your tax-deductible contribution to:

The Auksučiai Foundation
2907 Frontera Way
Burlingame, CA 94010 USA ♦

—**Vytautas J. Šliupas, P.E.**
President, The Auksučiai Foundation (USA)

Sr. Ona Mikailaitė

BLESSED GEORGE MATULAITIS —HIS WORKS LIVE ON FOR 85 YEARS

The year 2003 marks the 85th anniversary of Blessed George Matulaitis's consecration and installation as Bishop Of Vilnius, which took place on December 1st and 8th of 1918.

Fr. George Matulaitis was named Bishop of Vilnius by Pope Benedict XV and had been chosen for this position because it was thought that he would be acceptable both to the Lithuanian and Polish inhabitants of Vilnius. At that time the diocese of Vilnius was very large, part of it being in Lithuania and part in Poland. The boundaries of these two countries were as yet far from settled as World War I drew to a close. The Vatican did not want a bishop who would stir up more political wrangling in the area, already a hotbed of controversy.

At the time Matulaitis had just returned to Lithuania, having spent the war years in a suburb of Warsaw. He was intent on reorganizing the Marian Community and founding a religious order for Lithuanian women in the town of Marijampolė. The last thing he wanted was to become bishop. The appointment came as a very difficult expression of God's will.

In his *Journal* he wrote: "Msgr. A. Ratti, the Apostolic Visitor... informed me that I had already been appointed Bishop of Vilnius and also, that if I tried to resign, the Holy Fa-



ther would not accept my resignation. That night I could not sleep. I felt the full weight of the burden that had fallen upon me. It was a difficult time, but I had to make my peace with God' will."

His episcopal consecration took place in

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Kaunas Cathedral on the first Sunday of Advent in 1918. On December 8th, the Feast Of the Immaculate Conception, one of his favorite feasts, he was installed as Bishop in Vilnius Cathedral.

The city of Vilnius had just been reinstated as capital of the newly formed Republic of Lithuania on February 16th, 1918. The city was a contentious mix of nationalities, ethnic groups, and religious bodies. The population was war weary, starving, and fractious.

In his inaugural address, Bishop Matulaitis had to be very tactful. In his *Journal* he describes the ceremony thus: "Having dressed in the Bishop's robes, I began the usual ceremony of installation. A great many people had gathered; it was very crowded, and there was no room for all of them inside the church. I briefly addressed the guests in Latin from the bishop's throne. Then I spoke to the people from the pulpit: first in Polish, then in Lithuanian.

He spoke from his heart, presenting himself as one who truly wanted to walk in the footsteps of Christ, the Good Shepherd, aware of the people's fears and anxieties: "I stand before you as a stranger; and therefore, first of all, I ask one thing of you – to regard me as the servant of Christ, who has been given you to show you the way to heaven and to guide you to eternal happiness. From now on we shall live together as one large spiritual family of which I am to be father and head as we move along on our wearisome spiritual journey... I shall do my best to have love reign among us: that there be no quarrels, no hatred or hurt. I wish to be forgiving to those who do evil, a support for the weak, and a refuge for the good."

This was the first time since the 15th century that a Bishop of Vilnius had spoken in Lithuanian from the pulpit of Vilnius Cathedral. He was careful to speak in Polish first, and that made the Poles happy.

For Blessed George, the years 1918 to 1925 when he served the Church as bishop would be years that taxed both his physical and his spiri-

tual strength to the utmost. He was to survive eight changes of government and countless ethnic quarrels. These difficult years made him a saint.

From the start, his heart was filled with goodness: "May truth and justice, real love and peace reign in your hearts, in your families, in our city, and in the entire country." Unfortunately, the human failings of his flock made this impossible, but his own heart remained anchored in Christ, the Prince of Peace. ♦

(The excerpts from George Matulaitis's Journal were taken from the English translation made by Sr. Ona Mikailaitė and published by the Marian Fathers of Stockbridge, 2003.)

Rev. Msgr. Joseph J. Anderlonis, STD
Regina Juška-Švoba

A special internet site for OUR LADY OF ŠILUVA

Since the recent liberation of Lithuania from the Soviet Union, the Shrine of Our Lady of Šiluva has become an important and revealing destination for many thousands of pilgrims from around the world.

The Knights of Lithuania pledged to spread knowledge about and, hopefully, devotion to the apparition of the Blessed Virgin Mary. The circumstances of this apparition, as well as the simplicity and directness of Mary's message of conversion and return to Jesus, prompt us to want others to know about it. Likewise, the sacred place of the appearance as a shrine of pilgrimage, even under the difficult of situations during Soviet occupation, helped to sustain the courage and faith of the Lithuanian people.

For this special and specific reason, The Knights of Lithuania constructed an internet web page dedicated to informing all about the Shrine of Our Lady of Šiluva. Its highlights include the story of the Lady's appearance and what followed.

In 1608, 250 years before Lourdes and Fatima, our Blessed Mother appeared in Lithuania in a town called Šiluva.

The story of Our Lady of Šiluva actually

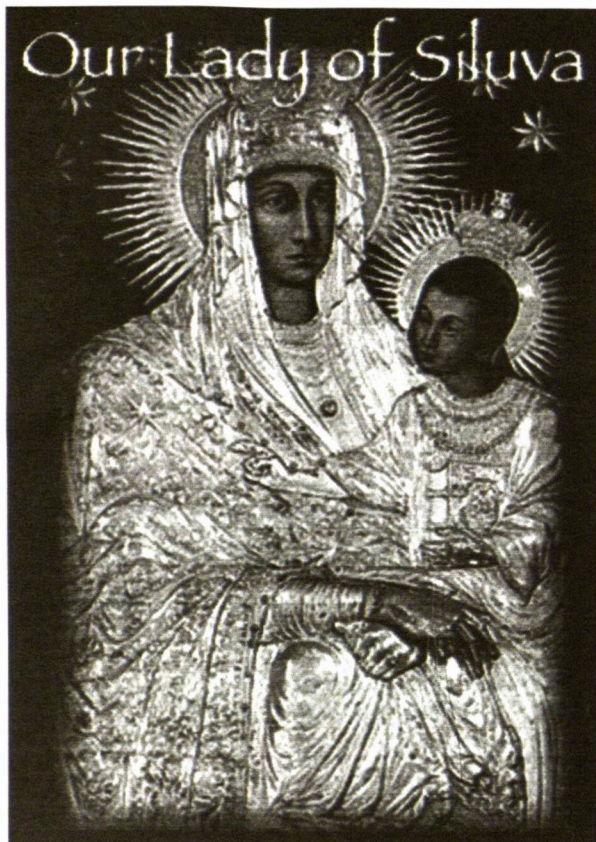
began in 1457, when Peter Giedgaudas, a diplomat for Vytautas the Great, built the first church in the area and gave the land to the Catholic Church. On one of his many travels he went to Rome, and while there, he obtained a magnificent painting of the Blessed Virgin Mary holding the Child Jesus. This he brought back to Lithuania and put it in the sanctuary of the new church in Šiluva.

Over the next hundred years, the Catholic Church in Lithuania experienced troubled times. Since much of the nobility and intellectuals turned to Calvinism and Lutheranism, many people fell away from the church. Property owned by the Catholic Church was confiscated by the authorities.

In 1570, Father John Halubka, the parish priest of the Siluva church, fearing that his church would be targeted, took the treasured painting of the Blessed Mother and Child and other church documents. Father Halubka carefully wrapped them, put them in an ironclad wooden chest, and buried them under a large rock near the church. A short time later, the church was seized by the authorities.

Years later, a new law was passed which gave the Catholic Church permission to reclaim their property if they could prove, with

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official documents, that the property was previously owned by them. The church in Šiluva could not prove that 150 years earlier, in 1457, Peter Giedgaudas had deeded the land to them. The church remained the property of the state.

One summer day in 1608, several children of Šiluva were tending their sheep and resting near a large rock. They heard someone crying, and as they looked up, they saw a beautiful lady standing on the rock, shedding tears, and in her arms she held a child.

Frightened, one of the children ran back to the village to tell others of the happening. As the news spread, believers and doubters went to visit the place of the rock. One day, Our Lady appeared, and everyone heard her crying and saw her tears fall to the large rock on which she stood.

Among the crowd was a Calvinist teacher who earlier had said, "she was the work of the

devil," approached her and asked, "Why are you weeping? Who hurt you?" The reply came, "Formerly in this place my Son was adored and honored, but now, all that the people do is seed and cultivate the land." Having said this, she vanished.

Father John Kazakevičius was appointed to investigate the phenomenon and question all witnesses as to the events. As a matter of historical record, the following is documented.

An old man who had heard of the apparitions remembered that Father Halubka, in 1570, buried a chest near the church in Šiluva. Since the man was blind, he had to be led, and as he approached the rock, his sight was immediately restored. He led the authorities to the exact spot where the chest was buried, and when it was opened, they found the painting of the Blessed Virgin Mary and Child, undamaged, together with the documents, also intact, which proved the ownership of the land. Soon the property was returned to the Catholic Church.

Over the years, more miracles were recorded at Šiluva, shrines were built, and devotion to Our Lady of Šiluva grew until the destruction of freedom in Lithuania during World War II. Since the early 1990s, Lithuania has been free, and pilgrims have been able to return to the shrine.

For more information and visuals, visit www.ourladyofsiluva.com. Also, contact Rev. Anthony Markus, 10524 S. Sawyer Ave., Chicago, IL 60655, or e-mail ALM445@yahoo.com.

Tours to Lithuania and Šiluva are available from the following U.S. travel agencies:

Vytis Tours: 800-778-9847

GT International: 800-462-2584

Visit Lithuania: 585-21.6-9714

Complete Lithuanian tour information is available at. www.tourism.lt. ♦

Laurynas R. Misevičius

Highlights from the Eastern Invitational Basketball Tournament 2003

The Baltimore Lithuanian Athletic Club (BLAC) was established 31 years ago. Last year they had a 30th anniversary, which was celebrated hosting a men's basketball tournament, which gathered many Northeast Lithuanian basketball teams. In October 2002, the winners came out as a newly established Lithuanian Sports Club of Connecticut; team "Ažuolai" who surprisingly took the "Golden Ball" home to Waterbury.

This year BLAC decided to organize such an event again with a strong vow to make it traditional. History repeated itself with the very first game when the hosts "Vilkas" defeated "Vėjas" players from D.C. including Lithuanian Ambassador for U.S. and Mexico Mr. Vygaudas Ušackas, who happens to be an avid sports and especially basketball fan. Baltimore won 48-34, although Mr. Ušackas certainly impressed everyone on and off the court with his tough play, especially when he took on BLAC big man Romas Krywonis with a point saving stifling foul.

Then, New Jersey "Statyba" defeated Philadelphia "Aras" 60 to 54, and last year's champions Connecticut "Ažuolai" won against New York LAC 68:39. Later on, New Jersey lost against Washington, D.C. (50:57). Connecticut as well had to acknowledge Philadelphia's victory (53:57). However, Baltimore stood strong in their second game of the day, now with New York (66:50).

Given the point difference advantage, "Ažuolai" still made it to the final battle for the gold against the hosts "Vilkas"; whereas, Philadelphia "Aras" and New Jersey "Statyba"

had to play for the bronze (third place). Fifth place was quickly taken by Washington "Vėjas" after it won against New York LAC 72:46, and Philly was able to "pay back" New Jersey 69:51 finishing third. The last, but not the least, game resemble last year's final and became yet another winner for young Connecticut "Ažuolai" who might very well call Baltimore their home now – at least as far as the "Armory" arena of Catonsville, MD is concerned where all the games were played! The final score was 55-53, and big smiles shone on seven "Ažuolai" and their Club ladies who came to support them all the way from New England.

The final game was nip and tuck most of the way. Connecticut pulled ahead a little during the second half, then Baltimore tied the score a couple of times. "Ažuolai" took the lead at the end, but "Vilkas" made a three-pointer to cut the score to a two-point game, and that was about it as Baltimore tried to foul for advantage but to no avail.

It was a sweet little tournament indeed, with lots of gratitude to B.L.A.C. and especially its president Mr. Gintaras Buivys and Sports Director Mr. Vytautas Brasauskas. Angelė Walker and her team prepared a fancy Lithuanian dinner and treats for the basketball tournament participants and all the guests over at the Baltimore Lithuanian Hall afterwards. The next scheduled "East Coast Ring" tourney will be held on Dec. 27th hosted by Philadelphia's "Aras"... as the one last year at the same time. Looks like there's quite a revival of sports in the Northeast! ♦

Jeanne Dorr

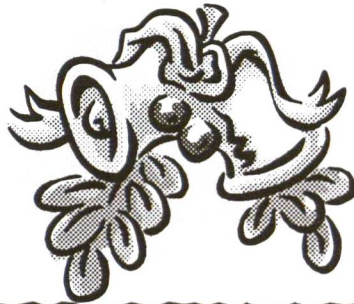
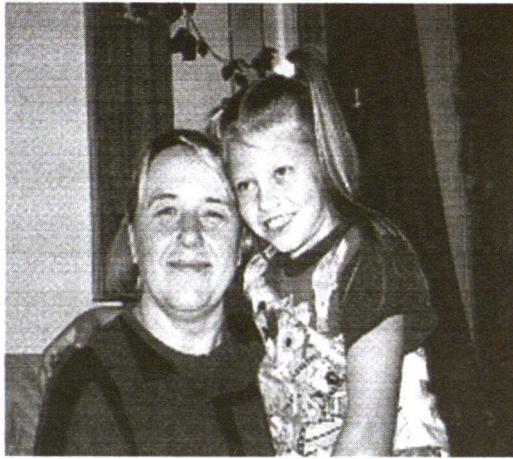


The Lithuanian Orphan Care Committee and the children we serve wish you and yours a Merry Christmas. May you and your loved ones have a year filled with peace, good health and happiness. May every child on this earth enjoy a year filled with peace and love. May God bless each and every one of you for your prayers and support.

Jeanne Dorr



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. All photos from Jeanne Dorr.



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