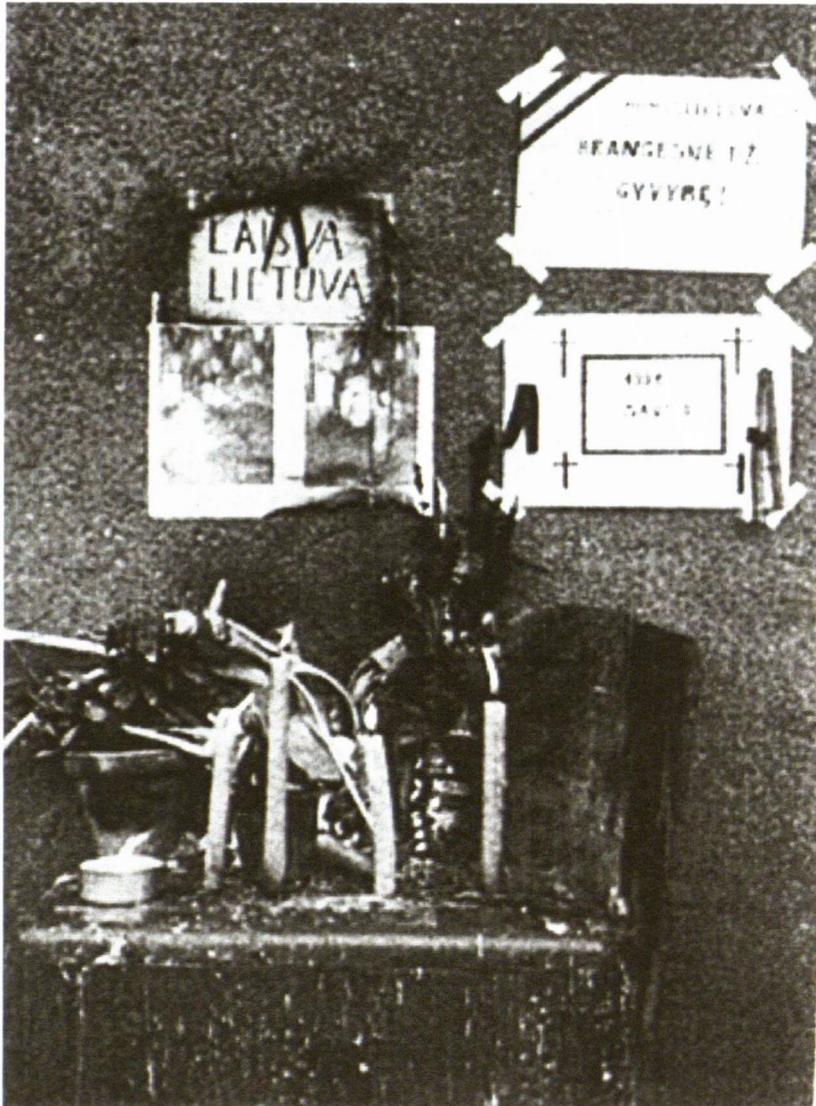


# BRIDGES

• LITHUANIAN AMERICAN NEWS JOURNAL •

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*Lithuania's needy...Commemorating Lithuania's Independence...A mystery of the penny*

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

*Although the cold winds are blowing and snowy days have become the norm for this year, the show must go on. Well, at least the practices for the show or rather the XIIIth Lithuanian Folk Dance Festival. Many dance groups are meeting regularly to practice the intricate new and traditional dances. And our group is one of them.*

*I don't exactly dance in a group — I support it by accompanying my two sons to dance in Liepsna (The Flame) of Elizabeth, New Jersey. When someone doesn't show up, I stand in, whether it be the girl's or boy's part. The aerobic workout alone invigorates every cell; while, the detailed steps and movements bring about a visceral joy.*

*I remember practicing in dance groups at an earlier age. There were a lot of moans and groans. Luckily times have changed, and only those serious about participating in this awesome event come willingly to learn and put their best step forward. It doesn't hurt to have an eternally happy instructor, Dzaneta Bubliss, who acts as a cheerleader even when our left feet seem to dominate more than the right ones do.*

*The practices fly quickly...jokes are bandied back and forth about the lyrics of some of the dance songs...laughter is heard when a dance flows smoothly the very first time...and smiles end each evening.*

*One evening, the hall in which we practice was unheated due to the fact that the fuel had run out. The temperature outside was in the teens, and inside we exhaled clouds of every shape. We grabbed on to each gloved hand and stepped livelier than usual. Practice was practice, no matter the circumstances.*

*In the meantime, you most probably will see many groups perform at Lithuanian Independence Day celebrations or late spring picnics or other such events. Do go see them. Watching and clapping along with the music and the dancing will transport you to another time and place. Somewhere we, the dancers, envision as we polka or as we swing with our partners. Smile along with us.*

*Rasa Ardyš-Juška*

Editor

*P.S. If you are interested in participating in a dance group, look up your area's Lithuanian Community parish or center for details. We would love to have you among us!*

## BRIDGES

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## The Lithuanian press is celebrated...

The National Executive Committee of the Lithuanian-American Community, Inc. proudly announces 2004 as the Year of the Reclamation of the Lithuanian Press.

For forty years, from 1864 to 1904, the Czarist government of Russia banned the printed Lithuanian word. Lithuanians were exiled to Siberia for printing, owning, or even having Lithuanian books or newspapers containing the Latin alphabet in their homes. However, the Lithuanians dared to print such materials and the "knygnešiai" or book carriers distributed these books and newspapers printed in the Lithuanian alphabet throughout the villages and towns in Lithuania. In 1904, the patience and stubbornness of the Lithuanians was justified.

Let us celebrate the centennial of the reclamation of the free press, an anniversary that UNESCO has included in the list of important world commemorations for the years 2004 and 2005.

### On the cover:

A scene from January 13, 1991. After the Soviet tanks left, the people renewed their fight for independence and triumphed.

From *Lietuva: 1991.01.13* published by Lithuania's Press Department, 1991.

From the press...

## Lithuania's "Paksasgate" continues...

**T**he issue of Lithuania's president's precarious political position has been the topic of many news articles of late. How will this affect Lithuania's entrance into the European Union? How is NATO viewing these recent events? These organizations, thus far, have stayed mute on the subject – awaiting how Lithuanians will move on Pres. Paksas' situation and connections.

In a recent online article from the February 2004 issue of *World Press Review* (VOL. 51, No. 2), entitled "Lithuania: Icarus" by Giedrius Blagnys, *World Press Review* correspondent, Vilnius, Lithuania, this subject was broached. Blagnys writes, "The question in Lithuania is no longer if Rolandas Paksas, the stunt pilot-turned-president, will be forced to step down, but when. "The Lithuanian president has no hope—it looks as though he will not avoid the tightening noose of inevitable resignation he has slipped his neck into," wrote Valdas Bartusevičius in *Lietuvos Rytas* (Dec. 8)."

Blagnys goes on to say, "The presidential scandal, known as the "Lithuanian Watergate" or "Paksagate," began in late October, when the Lithuanian State Security Department provided the leadership of Lithuania's Parliament with information that Paksas and his national security adviser, Remigijus Acas, allegedly maintained relations with Russian criminal organizations. A special parliamentary commission of investigation was set up to evaluate these charges."

"Five weeks later, Parliament adopted a report by the special commission: "The commission states that the president has been and continues to be vulnerable. Considering the president's unusual status and responsibility and his role in domestic and foreign policy, this poses a menace to national security." The report also provided evidence that Presi-

dent Paksas, because of his relations with Russian criminal organizations, had abused his presidential oath—one of the constitutional conditions for impeachment."

Blagnys reported on the Lithuanian people's reactions. "Because of the scandal, public support for the president has been shrinking. *Lietuvos Žinios* published the results of a recent opinion poll, according to which just 18 percent of respondents gave the presidency a positive rating, while 73 percent saw it in a negative light (Dec. 7). One month earlier, before the scandal, those figures were almost the reverse."

Blagnys included news on how this has affected foreign policy. "Paksas announced the indefinite postponement of his meeting in Washington with U.S. President George W. Bush, planned for the first week of December. According to an editorial in *Lietuvos Rytas* (Dec. 8), 'President Rolandas Paksas has become an obstacle to protecting Lithuanian interests internationally. The only solution is his immediate resignation.'"

Unfortunately, reports about Paksas' reaction to this are not very favorable to the Lithuanian people. His beliefs negate the people's understanding of his predicament. Blagnys states, "According to *Republika's* Vytautas Bruveris (Dec. 8), the president thinks that at the end of the day, everyone 'will get tired of the long and dull impeachment procedure.'"

In the meantime, the daily Lithuanian newspapers report the day-to-day proceedings of the "Paksasgate". Recent Lithuanian immigrants report their own suspicions and trepidation about the coming days as they think about their relatives still living in Lithuania. Powerless to affect change, they pray a new political upheaval does not occur. ♦

*THE SOURCE* for this article was February 2004 issue of *World Press Review* (VOL. 51, No. 2), "Lithuania: Icarus" by Giedrius Blagnys, *World Press Review* correspondent, Vilnius, Lithuania. For the entire article, log on to <http://www.worldpress.org/Europe/1760.cfm>.

**Karl Altau**  
of *The Joint Baltic-American National Committee, Inc.*

## Death knell sounding for U.S. international broadcasting to Baltics

**B**roadcasts of the Voice of America and Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty to Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania and other countries of the region have slowly disappeared in the annals of history. With no funding for the services included in appropriations legislation, the Baltic language services were closed by the end of January.

Congress was in recess until January 20 without having completed work on the Fiscal Year 2004 Consolidated Appropriations bill (H.R. 2673) which included the Commerce, Justice, State (CJS) appropriations bill, legislation that funds U.S. international radio broadcasting, including VOA and RFE/RL. A Continuing Resolution funded the government at FY03 levels until January 31.

Sen. Richard Durbin (D-IL) had this to say in reaction to the demise of radio programming:

“One of the major disappointments was the deletion of funding in the Commerce-Justice-State-Judiciary appropriations for the Voice of America and Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty broadcasting for Eastern Europe. The Senate bill included this funding, as did the Senate version of the authorization bill: \$9 million for broadcasts to Estonia, the Czech Republic, Hungary, Lithuania, Poland, Bulgaria, Latvia, Romania, and Moldova. Unfortunately, this bill will cut off those broadcasts, and that is not the right thing to do. These are new democracies. They are still subject to instability. There is still gang and Soviet influence. I refer to the old Soviet gangs that still are alive and well and reborn in the form of syndicate operations. These democracies need the help of Radio Free Europe. I think putting that voice, as well as Radio Liberty, in a broadcast is an important thing to strengthen those democracies. Unfortunately, it was cut.”

A House and Senate conference committee met

on November 19 to negotiate CJS bill language. Despite Senate support for continuing the broadcasts, House GOP leadership prevailed and no provisions to fund the services were included in the bill. The CJS bill and six other uncompleted bills were subsequently rolled up into the omnibus bill.

Even with many lawmakers criticizing the increasing spending levels and numerous earmarks, the House voted December 8 on the massive \$820 billion omnibus package. The Senate was tentatively scheduled to vote on the bill upon its return in January. No further changes to the negotiated bill were foreseen. Once passed by the Senate, the bill was signed by President Bush.

The affected Central and Eastern Europe broadcasting services would require about \$8.9 million to remain at current funding levels. These countries have been among the most ardent supporters of the U.S. military and reconstruction efforts in Iraq and Afghanistan and in the war against terror.

The broadcasts ended at a time when the flow of information about the United States to overseas audiences, including Europe, is at a critical stage. Both radios serve important functions. For its part, VOA is a vital channel of information by, from and about the United States. RFE/RL provides concise reporting and analysis about the region, with perspectives that local media outlets often overlook.

JBANC is committed to seeing that the U.S. remains involved and invested in Central and Eastern Europe, and that our public diplomacy, particularly, is present and active there. At the same time, there are concerns about Russian intentions – energy politics and political pressures – in bordering countries, including Georgia, Ukraine, Moldova and the Baltics. Results of the recent Duma elections have added fears about Russia straying from democracy. ♦

*KARL ALTAU is the contact person for JBANC, The Joint Baltic American National Committee, Inc. JBANC represents the Estonian American National Council, Inc., the American Latvian Association, Inc. and the Lithuanian American Council, Inc.*

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*From The Lithuanian-American Community, Inc.*

## *Commemorating February 16 and March 11 – Lithuania's Independence Days*

*During the months of February and March, Lithuania's days of Independence are celebrated and reinforced by its Lithuanian-American communities — as well as all the Lithuanians who live throughout the world. It is a time to remember the struggle, the endurance, and the triumph experienced by the Lithuanian nation. Here is a list of Lithuanian communities who are commemorating these Independence days.*

**Cicero, IL:** Commemoration – Feb. 15  
St. Anthony Parish School hall  
1410 South 49th Court, Cicero, IL, 2004.  
Main speaker: Attorney Paul Žumbakis  
Sponsors: Lithuanian-American Community and  
Lithuanian American Council

**Waukegan, IL:** Commemoration of both February  
16 and March 11 – Feb. 22, at 1:00 pm  
Libertyville Civic Center, Waukegan, IL  
Main speaker: Danute Bindokienė, editor of daily  
*Draugas*  
Sponsor: Lithuanian-American Community

**Portland, OR:** Commemoration of both February  
16 and March 11 – March 6, 6:00 p.m.  
Latvian Hall  
5500 SW Dosch Rd, Portland, OR  
Entertainment: Aitvaras Folkdancers  
Potluck event followed by a night of music and  
dancing.

**Sun City, Arizona:** Commemoration of Independ-  
ence Day – Feb. 22, 1:30 p.m.  
St. Elizabeth Seton Parish Hall  
9728 Palmeras Drive, Sun City, AZ

**Los Angeles, CA:** The Commemoration of Febru-  
ary 16 – Feb. 22  
St. Casimir's Parish  
3855 Evans St., Los Angeles, CA 90027.

**Program:**  
10:15 a.m. raising of the Lithuanian flag, parish  
courtyard  
10:30 a.m. Holy Mass  
12:00 a.m. Program  
Main speaker: Vaiva Vebraitė, LAC National Ex-  
ecutive Committee, President  
Entertainment.

**Seattle, WA:** Commemoration of February 16 –  
Feb. 8, 4:30 pm  
Latvian Hall  
11710 3rd Ave. NE, Seattle, WA  
Main speaker: Vygaudas Ušackas, Lithuania's am-  
bassador to the U.S.

**San Diego, CA:** Commemorative program to mark  
Lithuania's Independence – March 7, 1:00 pm  
St. James Parish Hall  
625 S. Nardo Ave., Solana Beach, CA  
Main speaker: Danguolė Navickas, Pres. of the Los  
Angeles chapter of the Lithuanian Children's Hope,  
a non-profit group for helping Lithuania's children  
with serious medical needs.  
Entertainment: Folkdance group "Jūra".  
Reception: Coffee/tea will be provided by the  
Chapter, attendees are urged to bring tea sand-  
wiches or other appetizers to be enjoyed by all

**New York:** Commemoration of Lithuania's Inde-  
pendence – Feb. 15, 2:00 p.m.

**Church of the Transfiguration**  
64-14 Clinton Avenue, Maspeth, NY  
Main speaker: Vaiva Vebraitė, President, LAC national Executive Committee  
The cultural program: pianist Edvinas Minkstimas, Maironis Saturday School

**Philadelphia, PA:** Commemoration of Lithuania's Independence – Feb. 22, 2:00 p.m.  
Lithuanian House.  
2715 E. Allegheny Avenue,  
Philadelphia, PA 19134  
Entertainment: Philadelphia's Lithuanian folkdance groups: Žilvinas, Aušrinė, Aušrinėlė and the St. Andrew Parish Chorus

**St. Petersburg, FL:** Commemoration of Lithuania's Independence – Feb. 14, 2:00 p.m.  
Lithuanian-American Club  
4880 46th Avenue North  
St. Petersburg, FL.  
Main speaker: Vaiva Vebraitė, President, LAC National Executive Committee.  
Entertainment: Club's Chorus, maybe folk dance group "Klumpė".  
Sponsor: Lithuanian Club.  
Mass on Sunday, Feb. 15, 1:00 p.m.  
Holy Name of Jesus Catholic Church,  
5800 15th Avenue South  
Gulfport, FL

**Washington, DC:** Commemoration of Lithuania's Independence – Feb. 15  
Mass 10:00 a.m.  
St. Matthew's Cathedral  
1725 Rhode Island Avenue, NW  
Washington, DC 20036.  
Program at 2:00 p.m.  
Latvian Hall  
400 Hurley Avenue,  
Rockville, MD 20850-3121  
Main speaker: Asta Banionis, Chair, LAC Public Affairs Council.  
Entertainment: Baltimore folkdance group "Malūnas"

**Elizabeth, NJ:** Commemoration of Lithuania's Independence – Feb. 29, 12:15 p.m.  
St. Peter and Paul Parish Hall  
216 Ripley Place  
Elizabeth, NJ

Main speaker: Elona Vaišnys, PhD, LAC Vice President for Community development.  
Entertainment: Lithuanian school students and "Liepsna" folk dancers.

**Eastern Connecticut:** Commemoration of February 16 and March 11 – Feb. 15, 2:00 p.m.  
Matulaitis Nursing Home  
10 Thurber Road  
Putnam, CT.  
Main speaker: Dalia Giedrimienė, Ph.D., LAC Board of Directors  
Entertainment: Worcester/Boston song and dance group "Dolija" (manager Egida Matulionienė), accordionist Romas Drazdauskas

**Omaha, NE:** Commemoration of Lithuania's Independence – Feb. 15  
Lithuanian Mass at 10:00 a.m.  
St. Anthony Church.  
Commemoration at 11:00 a.m.  
St. Anthony's Parish Hall.  
Speakers: Kristina Jonykas and Eglė Versecaikaitė.  
Entertainment: Lithuanian Saturday School students, folk dance group "Aušra"

**Cape Cod, MA:** for precise date, contact Algirdas Dapkus (508) 428-2818  
Tentative schedule: Mass (in Lithuanian) 11:30 am  
Our Lady of the Assumption Church  
Osterville, MA  
Commemoration: following the Mass  
Our Lady of the Assumption Church Hall  
Speaker: Rev. Vytautas Gedvainis, Putnam, CT  
Entertainment: Nature scenes and other glimpses of Lithuania on film ♦

Jeanne Dorr

# How Lithuanian-Americans have helped Lithuania's needy

Several years ago I wrote about the "Angels of St. Clare's Hospital." St. Clare's is a hospice in the town of Utena. The article was about the staff, patients, and administrators of this hospital, and how they all hoped for a miracle. Most of us think of a miracle as something that cannot possibly happen: a sudden disappearance of a dreaded disease with no medical explanation or a job when one is on the brink of financial disaster, and all hope has been exhausted. For some the miracle is not so profound. A sentimental object that has been lost for a long time is found or perhaps the quick sale of a house. The angels of St. Clare's wished for an elevator.

The prohibitive cost of building one would surely take a miracle. The thought of having an elevator would make life so much easier for so many people. It was very difficult to transport very sick people up and down several flights of steps on a stretcher. Others had to be moved down in wheelchairs. The opportunity to attend Mass or sit in the garden on a sunny day was a miracle to these patients because many of them know they will never leave St. Clare's alive or see their own gardens again.

The dream of establishing a hospice in Lithuania belonged to Sister Dolorita Butkus and Sister Michele Garas. They envisioned a clean, pleasant atmosphere where people could be well cared for and eventually die in peace. At the time of their dream, this was a rather new and different concept in Lithuania.

A Caritas worker managed to find them a dilapi-

dated building in Utena. The minute the word was out that the Sisters wanted to start a hospice, everyone and his brother decided they needed the building, which had stood empty and was almost falling down, for more important things. Local hospitals felt the competition would cut into their supplies of medical equipment; while the local Mafia thought the building would be a good location for a restaurant or hotel. This didn't faze Sister Dolorita in the least.

The building was offered to her, and she was going to keep it. Hospitals, Mafia, or Lithuanian red tape was not going to deny the building of St. Clare's. Sister always says she has God's help, and who could have a better ally? It wasn't easy, but eventually the rest gave up, and the Sisters had their building.

The building was now officially theirs, and the Sisters and their volunteers poured their hearts and souls into the renovations. Money was tight, and they did as much work on their own as they could. They begged and haggled for the best prices on what they couldn't do. Eventually, the big day arrived, and St. Clare's was ready to receive the first patients.

It's difficult to describe the feeling when you enter St. Clare's. As you come up the drive, you can see patients in their robes sitting outside. The flowers are beautiful, and I am sure many of the patients are thinking of their flowers at home. For many there will not be another spring or summer. Lithuanians are born with a love of flowers, and St. Clare's does not disappoint one. These are not

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*JEANNE DORR is a member of the Board of Directors of Lithuanian Orphan Care, a branch of the Human Services Council of the Lithuanian-American Community, Inc. All photos from Dr. Strolienė.*

symmetrically planned sterile gardens but rather old fashioned. They are not planted with exotic far away plants that no one knows the name of or can't pronounce. These are the flowers that are found all over Lithuania. You could see the contentment on the faces of the people who are enjoying them.

This was my second visit to St. Clare's Hospital, and once again my camera remained in my purse. I felt I could not invade the privacy of these very sick people. Any photos that you will see have been sent to me by the administrator of St. Clare's.

Dr. Auksė Strolienė is a remarkable person whose first thoughts are always of the patients. But then everyone I encountered at St. Clare's is remarkable. The nurses, like nurses all over, are dedicated and committed to the patients. The same is true not only for the rest of the professional staff but also the cooks, dish washers, cleaning people, laundry workers, and grounds people. Dr. Strolienė never stops with an introduction to only her professional staff. Everyone is introduced to visitors because she feels the entire staff is important to St. Clare's. There is no such job as an unskilled menial one. Everyone is treated equally. This is one of the many attributes she possesses that makes her so special.

This was an important day for me because this was the day that St. Clare's angels were going to meet an angel of their own. After publishing the story of St. Clare's and the need for an elevator, I was delighted to receive a phone call from Sister Dolorita. She was thrilled with the *Bridges* story and was sure of another miracle. I thanked her, but was not quite as sure as she had been.

Sister Dolorita seems to have a direct line to heaven and places all her problems in the hands of the Lord. She lets Him worry about it as she goes on with her earthly chores. She constantly tells me not to worry. I wish I could oblige, but I was born worrying.

A few days after speaking with Sister, I received a call from a *Bridges* reader in New York who wanted more details. I put her in touch with Dr.



*Sr. Dolorita (fourth from left), Dr. Strolienė (last on the right), and four St. Clare residents.*

Strolienė, and from there St. Clare's angels had their own American angel. This very generous, anonymous woman decided she would help St. Clare's in any way she could. After months of letters and a phone conversation, we were to meet in person at St. Clare's.

I managed, as I usually do in Lithuania, to talk some friends into driving me to Utena. Once again, Mother Nature was cooperating, and it was a beautiful day. The gardens were lovely, and some patients were outside on benches and in wheelchairs. Although it was quite warm, most patients were wearing sweaters or were covered in blankets.

I arrived first and what struck me was the calming effect St. Clare's seems to have. There are no hospital or nursing home odors. There are no public address systems paging people. There was just a feeling of peace and tranquility. I met Sister Dolorita and Dr. Strolienė, and we chatted about St. Clare's. Both women asked me several times to thank all the *Bridges* readers for their prayers and support. I received the same message over and over, and that is that St. Clare's cannot exist without the charity of outsiders. People like you, the *Bridges* readers and organizations, keep St. Clare's alive and well.

The guest from New York arrived shortly after with some of her family members. She wanted no thanks, and she wanted no praise. In her own words she told me that if she could help, she would

be glad to do it. We had a wonderful lunch in Dr. Strolienė's office with the crowning glory being a magnificent cake baked by one of the nurses. When Dr. Strolienė offered to pay her for the ingredients, she simply shook her head and said this was her gift. She didn't stay to enjoy it, saying she had work to do. She did tell us everything came from her home from her chickens' eggs to her cow's milk to the berries she picked the day before.

After lunch we were given a tour of the hospital. I saw so many improvements since my last visit. The patients who were ambulatory had a new bathroom, so that they could be more easily moved into a tub or shower. As I wrote earlier, every room and every employee is included on the tour. The kitchen had a new stove after the old one could not be repaired. One of the clothes dryers also had to be replaced.

Wherever I looked and to whomever I spoke with, I saw and I heard of the improvements made to St. Clare's by her generous benefactors from all over the world. The praises came not just from the staff but also from the patients. Imagine the heart-break in watching an elderly woman struggle to sit up in her bed. She had tears coming down her wrinkled cheeks as she asked, "Where would I be without St. Clare's? What would happen to us?" I learned she had no family and no one to take care of her in her final days.

For a fleeting moment I also wondered what would happen to them. Many were very sick and elderly. Some had outlived their families. Others no longer had the strength to tend to their own needs. Some lived with dirt floors and without indoor plumbing. Yes, St. Clare's was their miracle.

One thing I did learn about the angels of St. Clare's is that they have a sense of humor. I guess you have to in this kind of work. As we approached the bed of a ninety-nine year-old woman she kept staring at Dr. Strolienė. After giving her the once over from head to toe, she looked up and announced to the other women in the room that she was right.

The doctor asked her what she was right about. She informed all of us that she had told the other women that Dr. Strolienė either had an important meeting or she was receiving guests. When the doctor asked how she knew, she simply chuckled and said to Dr. Strolienė that she knew because the doctor was wearing her "good" dress, her "good" shoes, and had taken time with her hair. Everyone shared a laugh, and we all gave her a hug, being careful of her fragile body.

People this age rarely keep their thoughts to themselves, and so we were given advice and told stories in many of the rooms we visited. We were told so many stories – some heartbreaking and some humorous. One very elderly woman accused the entire staff of taking her new teeth, which she had received as a Christmas gift. They tried, in vain, to explain to her that the teeth were of no use to anyone else. But she wasn't buying that story. Laundry was halted while every sheet, pillowcase, and blanket was searched. The room was cleaned with a fine toothcomb, while the trash was sifted through with great care.

After a week with a very unhappy lady, a nurse entered to see her sitting up and wearing her new teeth. Her family had brought her cookies for Christmas. After they left, she had taken a bite and closed the bag. Apparently, the teeth, which she wasn't used to wearing, got stuck in a cookie. It was only after a week, she decided to finish the cookie she had sampled earlier. Lo and behold, there were the teeth still in the cookie. That discovery led to a very happy patient and an even hap-



*St. Clare nurses at work.*

pier staff. But she still wouldn't believe her teeth were of no value to anyone else. At least the case of the missing teeth had a happy ending.

We rarely passed a room where the patients didn't praise the angels of St. Clare's. If there were no kind words, it was because those patients were too sick to talk. But words aren't always needed; you can easily read people's eyes. In some cases it was the families who had words of gratitude.

As we were walking down the hall, I noticed two nurses carrying a huge pot of steaming soup. Soup is served at most meals, since it is a Lithuanian staple. But at that moment I couldn't help thinking of what would happen if that pot spilled or was dropped. Without a doubt, someone would be badly burned. How much easier this would be with an elevator.

We stopped to say a prayer in the beautiful chapel at St. Clare's. It's always so uplifting to just sit and meditate in the peaceful surroundings.

As we entered back into Dr. Strolienė's office, the discussion turned back to the elevator. Things were going well, but they were still \$1,000 short of their goal. It was my privilege at that moment to hand Sister Dolorita a check for \$1,000 that was a gift from the Lithuanian Citizens' Society of Western Pennsylvania. This Pittsburgh group of hard-working people has done so much for so many I would run out of space to mention all their good deeds. I wish they, and you dear readers, could have seen the looks on Sister Dolorita's and Dr. Strolienė's faces. One more miracle for St. Clare's!

It's always so sad to say goodbye, but we have to hope that we will meet again. As we were driving back to Kaunas, we passed the graceful storks in the fields and the farmers in their horse drawn wagons. In some ways time seems to have stood still in Lithuania. But a hospital such as St. Clare's brings us very quickly into the present. I thought of the angels who never are too busy to hold a hand, wipe a brow, wipe away, a tear, or put a loving kiss on a withered and wrinkled cheek.

I thought about the love and tenacity of Sister Dolorita who continues to work every day at St. Clare's when she could be enjoying retirement, and I thought of Dr. Strolienė who continues to make St. Clare's such a fine institution without ever losing the human touch. But most of all, I thought about the people who made the miracle of the elevator happen: the individual donors and the organi-

zations.

There are many people who are helping to support St. Clare's, and although Dr. Strolienė has sent me a list I hesitate to print individual names for fear of omitting anyone. Yes, the elevator has been built and is now in use. Each and every one of you has the prayers and thanks of Sister Dolorita, Dr. Strolienė, the angels, and the patients and their families. A very special thank you to the Lithuanian Citizens Society of Western Pennsylvania and to the American angel, D.D., from New York

Readers, please do not forget St. Clare's. The hospital is so special because it has outside help. It needs YOUR help to keep it special. The hospital now has a memorial plaque in their beautiful chapel. On that plaque are the names of people who have donated to St. Clare's in memory of their beloved dead. What a beautiful thought that in death they are bringing comfort to those in their final days on this earth.

*"To keep a lamp burning, we have to keep putting oil in it." –Mother Teresa.*

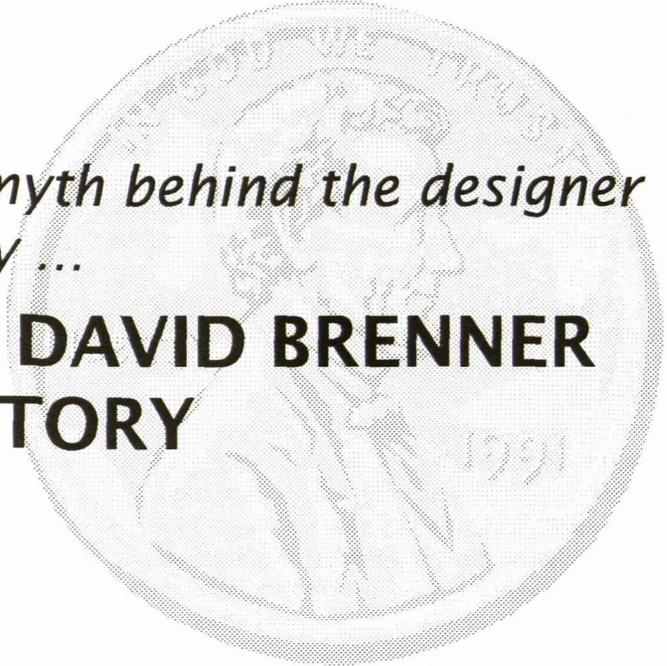
We must help St. Clare's light keep shining for all who need the hospice.

Please send your donations to:  
St. Clare's Hospice  
S. Darius and S. Girėno 14  
4910 Utena  
Lithuania ♦

*Edvardas Baranauskas*

*The truth and the myth behind the designer of the Lincoln Penny ...*

## THE VICTOR DAVID BRENNER STORY



**T**he one-cent piece, also called the penny, is the lowest denomination of the United States coins. It had displayed the Indian Head design since 1859, but in 1909, the U.S. Mint replaced it with a new one honoring the memory of one of America's most famous and beloved presidents, Abraham Lincoln.

This coin broke all tradition because it was the first one bearing the image of an American president. Art critics praised its beauty, and it sparked great interest. It was to become the most popular coin ever made, a fact some could have predicted on the first day of its issue. Seven hundred thousand were issued the first two days, and there were scenes wherever the cents were released.

The design and artist were favorably reviewed by the early press, but only very few knew that the designer was not American born. His name was Victor David Brenner.

Quite a furor was raised, however, because Brenner put his initials "V.D.B." on the reverse side of the coin. So great was the public's reaction, that after a week, the treasury secretary

issued orders to remove the initials and to recall all coins already cast. To this very day, those coins that were in the public's hands remain a collector's item. Over one hundred million were put in circulation the first year, and with billions minted since then, Brenner's bust of Lincoln on the one-cent coin holds the honor of being the most-reproduced work of art in the world.

Our story begins a few short years after the tragic assassination of the president, in the town of Šiauliai, called Shavli during the years Lithuania was under the rule of the Czars of Russia. David, the son of George and Sarah (Margolis) Brenner, was born on June 12, 1871. The Brenner family was Jewish and part of the Yiddish-speaking community. David's grandfather was a blacksmith, and his father was skilled in ornamental carving and engraving. David was trained at the early age of thirteen to master the trade.

David Brenner, who later took the professional name of Victor David Brenner, left his homeland at the age of nineteen and arrived, almost penniless, at the Port of New

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

York aboard the vessel Gellert on May 17, 1890. He was naturalized a citizen of the United States on April 27, 1896 with the name of David Brenner, but he applied for his United States passport in 1898 with the name of Victor David Brenner.

It is not exactly certain when he decided to use the first name of Victor, but medallic evidence indicated that he signed his works alternatively as D. Brenner and V.D. Brenner in the 1890s.

In New York, he worked during the day in a medal engraving shop and studied at night at Cooper Union. Saving enough money, he was able to go to Paris in 1898 where he studied for three years to do more creative work with metals under several famous designers.

At the Paris World's Fair in 1900, his exhibits took the highest honors. After returning home, his exhibits at the Buffalo and St. Louis expositions also took the highest honors. His feet were now firmly planted on the ladder to success.

In 1908, President Theodore Roosevelt, the famed colonel of the "Roughriders", visited his studio to pose for a Panama Canal Service medal that Brenner was working on. The president was so captivated by a bronze plaque of Lincoln on the studio wall, that he immediately commissioned him to make a similar one for the new U.S. penny in honor of the centennial of Lincoln's birth.

The Lincoln cent would go on to be issued longer than any other coin in U.S. history, and in far greater numbers than any other coin in the world.

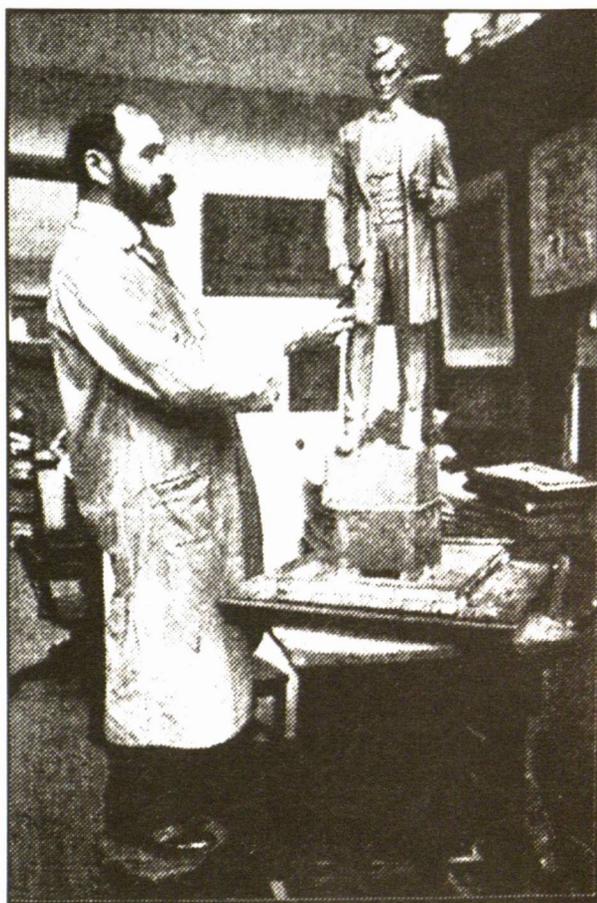
Victor David Brenner came to the United States where he found fame and fortune. The final years of his life were plagued by a long, draining illness that left him with very little energy for engraving. He died at a New York hospital on April 5, 1924 at the age of 53.

Lithuanian-born Victor David Brenner will always be remembered as a great medalist: the one whose Lincoln cent is the longest-lived series in U.S. coinage history.

It is difficult to kill a numismatic myth. Now it is time to lay to rest, once and for all, the story that has been around for more than 70 years dreamed up by Dr. Alexander M. Račkus about Victor Brenner. As with a lot of falsehoods, or myths, repeat them often enough, and people eventually will accept them as fact.

Dr. Račkus, a physician and numismatist, was born in Lithuania on April 7, 1893. Coming to the United States in 1910, he studied at medical schools in Canada and the United States.

While studying at St. Laurent College in Quebec, Canada, Račkus was employed at the Quebec City Museum and became interested in numismatics, his second vocation. He



*Victor David Brenner working on a statue of President Lincoln in his New York City studio.*

established a museum of Lithuanian numismatics in Chicago in 1917, which became the largest in the world.

Račkus belonged to several numismatic societies and contributed articles to the magazine, *The Numismatist*. In the November 1929 issue, he wrote a story titled "Twentieth Anniversary of Lincoln Cent", in memoriam of its designer, V.D. Brenner. Dr. Račkus read his paper at the Annual Convention of the Numismatic Association held in Chicago on August 24 to 29, 1929, and what he said and wrote attracted the attention of many of Victor David Brenner's historians.

Here is a brief summary of some of the bold statements he made, but unfortunately, he could not provide any corroborating evidence to prove them.

According to Dr. Račkus, Victor D. Brenner's real name was Viktoras Barauskas. (Note: he later changed the spelling to Baranauskas, after the famed poet and bishop). Dr. Račkus gave two reasons why Barauskas changed his surname to Brenner. First, because it was more convenient for Americans to spell it, and second, because he did not want to be bothered by Russian spies.

Dr. Račkus continued his fable by saying that Brenner was arrested by the police for being a "counterfeiter", was going to be exiled to either Siberia or Kamchatka, he succeeded in escaping from the clutches of the Czar, and fled to America in 1890.

These unproven statements presented a real problem for Jonas K. Karys, the dean of Lithuanian numismatics, who spent many years trying to convince all those who were prepared to listen, that this story by a terribly sincere Lithuanian nationalist was a complete fabrication because all of these "facts" could not be substantiated. Years later, Račkus renamed the sculptor's father, George Brenner, "Dovas Baranauskas".

Brenner did not leave an autobiography or authorize a biography. He gave an interview to Paul Kellogg, in 1915, published in "The Survey", a Jewish social service magazine

edited by his wife, Anne Reid Brenner. He discussed his early years, but not his original name or religious or ethnic origin. Nowhere is found the story made up by Dr. Račkus in 1929 concerning Brenner's troubles with counterfeiting and the Czar's police.

The apparent myth about Brenner's name change has been around for more than 70 years. As with other myths in history, repeat them often enough, and they become accepted as fact.

How true. Case in point. One day I decided to do a "Google" search for Victor David Brenner on my computer, and I found Račkus' fantasy was never corrected in two Coin Club Newsletters, much to my surprise.

One stated that Victor David Brenner was probably the only convicted counterfeiter to design a U.S. coin; another stated that Viktoras Barauskas (that is the way it was spelled) was born in Shavli, Lithuania, was arrested for counterfeiting, and escaped to America where he changed his name to Victor David Brenner.

Brenner died in 1924, five years before Dr. Račkus made those statements, and little did many realize that this misinformation would posthumously enter the numismatic world. Whether the Brenner name change story is completely laid to rest, remains to be seen. It is time for the numismatists to do so. ♦

## First Philadelphia Lithuanian Youth Association mission accomplished

**Laurynas R. Misevičius**  
BRIDGES correspondent

**T**he beginning of the last year marked a revival of yet another Lithuanian organization in the Northeast. Filadelfijos Lietuvių Jaunimo Sąjunga (FLJS – Philadelphia Lithuanian Youth Association) was re-established after being dormant for quite a few years.

A young 33 year-old Doctor of Biology, Daumantas Matulis, who graduated from the University of Minnesota and moved to Philly a couple of years ago is heading the FLJS (*as well as the Lithuanian-American Community Philadelphia Chapter – author's note*), whose mission is to unite the Lithuanian youth in the Greater Philadelphia area and to foster Lithuanian culture among everyone there.

The organization gathers periodically in the Lithuanian Music Hall (2715 E. Allegheny Ave. in the City of “Brotherhood and Love”), and embodies and invites all Lithuanians – the ones who have arrived to the United States quite recently and also those who were born here and are interested in their Lithuanian heritage. They strive to make the youth organization an island of revival for every Lithuanian soul. FLJS has a close relationship with the Lithuanian Sports Club “Aras”, also based in Philadelphia. The club has a lot of new immigrants as well as older Lithuanians as members and maintains men’s, women’s, and children’s basketball teams.

Just a few weeks ago a new chairman was elected to lead the LSC “Aras”. A “third-

waver” as well, Modestas Bužinskas, once a Chicagoan now a Philadelphia resident, is an avid sports and especially basketball fan. FLJS and “Aras” also hold interstate tournaments between various Lithuanian basketball teams, first of which took place in the end of 2002 and was promised not to be the last one! Well, that wasn’t just a “loud word” spread out across all of the Northeast and beyond. On December 27th, 2003, a total of twelve men’s teams came from the New England states of Massachusetts and Connecticut, also New York, New Jersey, Maryland (the hosts), and even a squad from Minnesota, who came to Philadelphia in a mini-van through the cold and snow dreaming about every Lithuanian’s obsession: sports, which is No. 1 in almost every Lithuanian heart.

The competition was held in three courts simultaneously – all in close proximity to each other and to the Lithuanian Music Hall, an historic Lithuanian-American Community neighborhood. There was even a women’s exhibition game where a group of players from Connecticut and Pennsylvania defeated a joint New York-New Jersey team.

The men’s tournament produced a series of outstanding games. The most spectacular of which was the semi-finals and finals. Connecticut’s “Ažuolai-1”, who had two European champions of the year 1994, “Old Continent” youth competition Marijus Kovaliukas and Ramūnas Petraitis, came out on top defeating

their own second team in the semis (52:28) and winning the final against a newly established New Jersey team, based in the North Wildwood area (60:41). Third place was claimed by the younger Connecticut “Ažuolai-2”, winning the “little” final thriller against the host Philadelphia “Aras-1” after the overtime (57:54). The hosts had their chance both in this game as well as the other semi-final, but they lost to New Jersey only by a point (39:40); however, they were pretty tired in the end of the tourney and were not able to “pull” out either of the games.

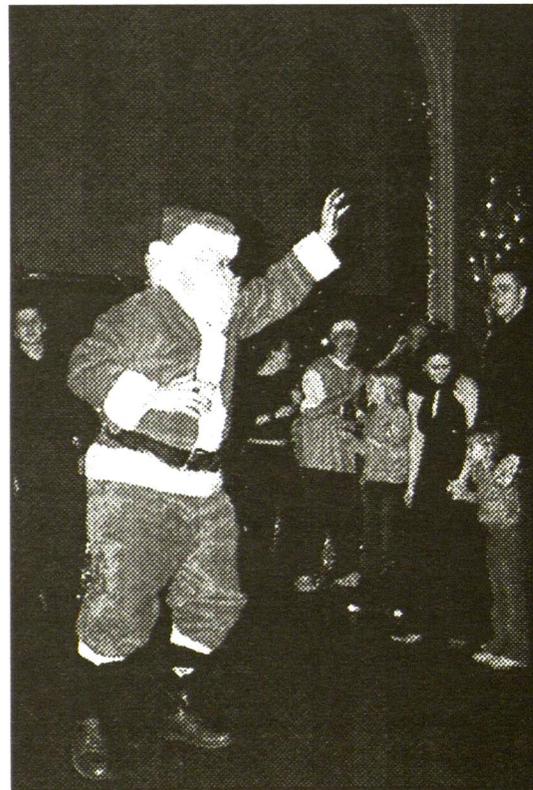
To their credit, we all have to admit the organization of the tournament itself as well as the “New Year’s Eve” carnival-party held at the Lithuanian Music Hall afterwards was truly award-winning! There were over 200 predominantly younger generation Lithuanians gathered together by the outstanding FLJS effort that night. They all cheered in the holiday mood boosted by a surprise visit of Santa Claus, who proved to be very athletic looking and sports educated (therefore there was an immediate rumour in the air of his resemblance to a very well-known Philadelphian, related to all kinds of sports activities in the city, Mr. Rimas Gedeika...)

The evening was filled with disco music dancing as well as Lithuanian national dishes “cepelinai” and “vėdarai”, prepared by Lithuanian-American Community Philadelphia Chapter women, which went very smoothly with Lithuanian “Kalnapilis” and “Zhiguly” beer, made available by the Lithuanian Music Hall bar.

Hope to see everyone next year in Philly again as the FLJS and “Aras” vowed to make this basketball tournament and carnival-party an ongoing annual tradition. And we already know they deliver what has been promised. ◆



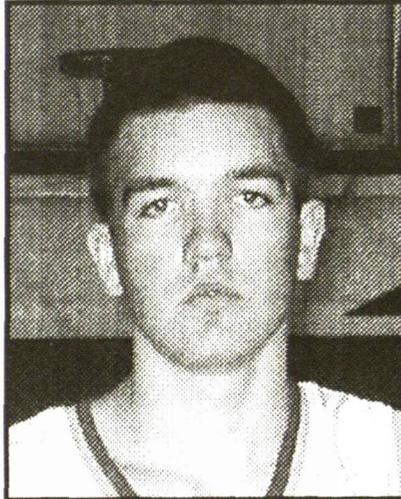
*Scenes from the tournament and festivities!*



# Lithuanian basketball player gets the Hollywood treatment

Sent in by Saulius Anužis

A recent article by Eric Sondheimer of the *Times*, California, entitled, "Star Rising in Hollywood: Arturas Lazdauskas, a 6-7 center from Lithuania, becomes a force in the post" appeared on December 10, 2003. He wrote of an upcoming basketball player who is sure to step into the shoes of his famous predecessor, Arvydas Sabonis, but with an L.A. twist. Here is an excerpt from the article:



"Walking down Sunset Boulevard on the way to classes at Hollywood High, Arturas Lazdauskas might as well be humming Randy Newman's "I Love L.A." Born and raised in Lithuania, Lazdauskas moved to Hollywood two years ago with his mother, father and two siblings to play basketball and prepare for a college education.

Last season as a sophomore, he led the City Section in blocked shots with 147 in 25 games and averaged 14.4 points and 10.3 rebounds. He's 6 feet 7 and isn't finished growing, with an older brother who's 6-9, a father who's 6-6, a mother who's 5-10 and a sister who's 6-1.

It's still too early to tell whether he'll develop into an elite basketball prospect, but there are flashes of ability.

"He changes shots, gets into the way and doesn't foul out," said North Hollywood Coach Rob Bloom, whose team lost for the first time in five years to Hollywood last season because

of Lazdauskas. Lazdauskas figures to dominate the Sunset Six League because he has the size and strength to post up and force teams to either foul him if they try to deny him the ball or risk giving up points playing him from behind.

"He's still behind as far as knowing the game," said Dave Benezra, who runs the Rockfish team. "He has the beginnings of a nice set of skills." Lazdauskas came in as the typical European player.

"In Lithuania, I was a shooting guard," he said. "In Lithuania, our basketball was just passing and shooting. In America, everyone is stronger."

"I'm happy," he said. He does, however, have one complaint since his move. "I thought I'd see movie stars," he said. "I've seen nothing."

He shouldn't worry. Hollywood High, celebrating its 100th anniversary, may have found its first athletic star of the 21st century in Lazdauskas. ♦

# Two for an Olympic medal

*Sent in by Regina Narušis*

In the Jan. 2<sup>nd</sup> *Daily Herald* (Chicago area) issue's article "Sharing an Olympic goal", by Garrett Ordower, two Lithuanian swimmers were highlighted. Their unique story centers on the fact that one swimmer, Darius Grigaliunas, 26, a native of St. Charles, Illinois brought Saulius Binevičius, 24, from Kaunas, Lithuania to America to practice for the Olympics. Both will be swimming for Lithuania with the Lithuanian Olympic swim team.

The story states, "The country of 3.6 million has only two Olympic-sized pools. One, Binevičius said, dates to the 1940s and is perpetually under construction. But in the land where Binevičius ran into dead ends, St. Charles native Darius Grigaliunas has found promise."

"Their mutual goal of competing for Olympic medals has led to a trade of sorts. Grigaliunas brought Binevičius — one of the Lithuanian national team's best swimmers — to the United States to help him become the best he can through training here."

"In exchange, the [Lithuanian] team fully accepts Grigaliunas [from St. Charles] as one of their own — a team member at least by blood if not by birth — and gives him the opportunity he wouldn't otherwise have to compete in the Olympics."

The article explains this decision, "While clearly an elite swimmer, in the United States, Grigaliunas' abilities would be lost in the crowd. Not so in Lithuania, where Grigaliunas has been welcomed to join the [Lithuanian] Olympic team."

"I grew up in America," Grigaliunas said. "I love it here, but my blood is Lithuanian."

Why should Binevičius [of Lithuania] come to America for training? The article states, "The real difference between the training in the

United States and Lithuania is exemplified by the facilities at Delnor [the Delnor-Community Hospital's swimming and fitness facilities in Geneva, Illinois] and people like Johnson [trainer Brian Johnson] who know how to use them."

"Their weekly schedule usually involves 30 hours of rigorous practice. While much of it is spent in the water, the real difference between training in the United States and Lithuania is the emphasis on what takes place on dry land — the difficult process of improving coordination and building specific muscles through intense weight training."

The article explains, "He (Johnson) takes that muscle out of your body and works it to death," Grigaliūnas said. Both pay heed to Johnson's advice and their own drive. Their schedule leaves room for little else besides training and more training, which is what they prefer."

The results? "The two months of training have already paid off. Binevičius recently scored an impressive victory during the European short course championships. In the qualifying round for the 200 freestyle last month, he narrowly beat Pieter van den Hoogenband, a two-time Olympic gold medalist for Holland, and placed third overall. Grigaliūnas fell ill for much of the mid-December championships in Ireland but was able to mount an impressive time in the 200 freestyle relay."

"SwimNews stated simply that his 'improvement is due to training in the USA.'"

Sponsorship or donation inquiries may be made to Lithuanian Olympic Swim Team, 115E. Main St., St. Charles, IL 60175. ♦

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## C U R R E N T   E V E N T S

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### Friend of Lithuania honored by the University of California

**A**t the University of California Davis campus on Nov. 14, 2003, the College of Agricultural and Environmental Sciences presented its annual prestigious Award of Distinction to Prof. Dr. Calvin O. Qualset, the world-renowned scientist and founder of the University's Genetic Resources Conservation Program.

Dr. Qualset travels continuously, serving on boards and committees for agricultural development organizations and lecturing worldwide. He is one of the founders of the not-for-profit Auksučiai Foundation (USA) and the Auksučiai Farm and Forestry Center (Lithuania), which are assisting in the development of a new agricultural research and demonstration farm in Lithuania. He serves as the Vice President and Director of International Programs for the Foundation. Dr. Qualset has visited Lithuania, its teaching and research institutions, and the Auksučiai Project several times.

Former two-time Fulbright Fellow and the president of the American Society of Agronomy and the Crop Science Society of America, during his extended teaching career at the UCD Dr. Qualset trained 26 Ph.D. and 24 M.S. students and hosted 37 postdoctoral and visiting scientists from 33 countries. His primary research emphasized genetics and breeding of cereal crops, most notably wheat, triticale, and oat. His team released nearly 20 new crop varieties to California and world agriculture. This work contributed to doubling per acre yields – representing added farm gate value of about \$100-million to California's agricultural economy each year. He has published with students and colleagues more than 350 articles and reports.

Dr. Qualset and other members of the Auksučiai Foundation team are organizing an international workshop at the farm site in Lithuania

to develop new strategies about how to develop new enterprises for the farmers for improving their economic status. Engaging farmers and Lithuanian scientists in agricultural development is a key philosophy of the Auksučiai Foundation.

In early November of this year, Dr. Qualset was a speaker at the annual American Society of Agronomy Conference in Denver, Colorado; his subject was – “A New Paradigm in Agriculture Development– the Auksučiai Farm Project in Lithuania”. He made contact with Cecelia Lankutis of the Colorado Lithuanian-American organization.

The Auksučiai Foundation is indeed fortunate having Professor Qualset voluntarily helping the small-scale farmers of Lithuania. We congratulate him on receiving this prestigious academic recognition award.

#### **The Auksučiai Foundation thanks you for your help**

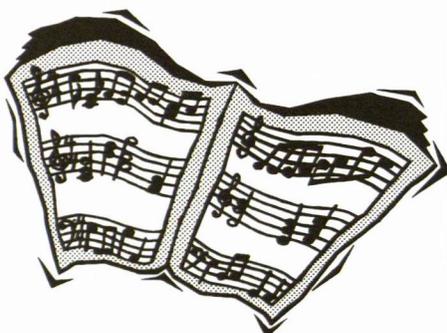
We would like to thank all the donors who in 1998 to 2003 responded to our request for assistance in creating an agricultural and forestry research, teaching, and demonstration project dedicated to helping the Lithuanian small-scale farmers to return back to normal life and to compete in the modern free-world markets. Our sincerest thank you. ♦

— *The Auksučiai Foundation*

*For more information, please contact The Auksučiai Foundation (USA), 2907 Frontera Way, Burlingame, CA 94010 USA. Or on the Internet at [sliupasvyt@earthlink.net](mailto:sliupasvyt@earthlink.net) or: [ldclement@ucdavis.edu](mailto:ldclement@ucdavis.edu) or at the website: [www.auksuciai.org](http://www.auksuciai.org).*

## New Jersey Lithuanian's musical composition performed

On Sunday, January 18, 2004, *The Philadelphia Inquirer* printed an article entitled, "Former music teacher's composition to be performed by the Philharmonic of Southern N.J.", Inquirer Suburban Staff Writer Jan Hefler. Here are excerpts from the article.



"Joseph Kasinskas, a Cherry Hill letter carrier, spent much of his last 20 years mentally fiddling with the rhapsodies and rhythms of "Blezdingėlė Sadutė," a Lithuanian wedding dance, while pacing out his route and composing other classical pieces."

"Voilà!"

"Kasinskas' finished suite, *Lithuanian Folk Dance Suite*, [made its premiere Saturday, January 24,] performed by the Philharmonic of Southern New Jersey. His wife, Bridget, who shares a Lithuanian heritage with him, [performed] solo violin when the 10-minute piece [opened] the concert, dedicated to international folk dances."

"Blezdingėlė Sadutė," which translates as "Sadutė [a girl's name] the Bird," is one of several Lithuanian folk dances that Joseph Kasinskas included in his suite. "Gyvataris," which means a lively dance, is another."

"'The suite is like a fast polka,' said his wife, who enthusiastically hummed a snippet: "Do-da-diddle-do-bom-bom-bom... It makes everyone want to dance."

"Kasinskas, 57, who earned his doctorate in composition from the University of Colorado about 30 years ago, has also written an opera, *Demeter's Lament*, and about 50 other pieces in his spare time. Soon after his graduation, he was employed as a music professor at Glassboro State College (now Rowan University) for one year, but gave up the job to become a letter carrier and a part-time composer."

"Currently, Bridget Kasinskas is an associate concertmaster with the Philharmonic and plays professionally with other symphonies. She also teaches private string lessons."

"Her husband is a third-generation Lithuanian. She was born in Germany and raised by Lithuanian parents,

immigrating to America when she was eight. The couple has three grown children and two grandchildren."

"'I wrote this work [the suite] in stages,' Kasinskas said. 'First I wrote it for a string quartet, then rearranged it for guitar and violin, and then again for a string orchestra. This is a fourth generation of the work and is written for the full orchestra and a violin solo.'"

"Kasinskas has also written pieces performed by the Philadelphia-based Relâche Ensemble, in which his wife played violin. Now a consultant to that band, Kasinskas is with an avant-garde ensemble called 3 of 3."

"'It's part music, ritual and visual art,' he said, explaining that the ensemble plays in art galleries while a sculptor works."

"Kasinskas' latest interest is bluegrass. 'I'm fascinated with it and am working on understanding how the violin part moves in that type of music,' he said. 'A new piece is in the works, but it's pretty nebulous right now.'"

—from the *Philadelphia Inquirer*

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## Regarding recent events with the South Boston Lithuanian Citizens Association

On November 15, 2003, the South Boston Lithuanian Citizens Association (SBLCA) held its annual "Šurum Burum" member's appreciation banquet with an open invitation to all Lithuanians in the greater Boston community. The SBLCA Board of Directors strives to create the opportunity for SBLCA members and non-members alike to gather in a comfortable setting and enjoy an evening of eating, dancing and celebrating among people who share a common heritage. It's our intention to bring together the new generation of recently arrived Lithuanians with the existing Lithuanian-American community to foster interest and participation in the SBLCA.

The festivities came to an abrupt end with a senseless attack upon one of our young attendees. Fortunately, the young man who was attacked is recovering from his injuries. Unfortunately, a few individuals, through their unwarranted actions, forced the evening to end on a bad note. This incident of Lithuanians attacking fellow Lithuanians, and a total disre-

gard and disrespect of an event held in honor of our members is embarrassing and damaging to the image of the Boston Lithuanian community as a whole.

This type of behavior will not be tolerated at the SBLCA or any of its events! The SBLCA is a place for all Lithuanians to come and share their heritage, to celebrate, to be comfortable and to feel safe. It is the home to the greater Boston Lithuanian community regardless of SBLCA membership. The Board of Directors of the SBLCA will take all necessary actions and policy change to insure public safety, to maintain integrity of this institution and to execute the philosophy and bylaws of the SBLCA constitution. This includes doing everything in its power to work with the authorities to bring those responsible for this incident to justice. ♦

—**Juozas Austras, President**  
**Board of Directors**  
**South Boston**  
**Lithuanian Citizens' Association**

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## Fourth Baltic Film Festival takes place in Canada

The fourth Baltic Film Festival took place in Canada from Jan. 22 to the 24<sup>th</sup>.

This year, the festival took place in Ottawa, organized by the Canadian Film Institute in conjunction with the Latvian National Film Centre, Latvian Embassy in Canada, Lithuanian Embassy in Canada, and the institute's founder, Canadian Latvian Andris Kesteris.

Una Celma's *A Handful of Bullets* represented Latvia at the film festival. Representing Lithuania were *Flight over Lithuania* directed by Audrius Stonys and Arūnas Matelis; *Sun-*



*day: The Gospel According to Liftman Albertas* directed by Arūnas Matelis; and *The Last Car* directed by Audrius Stonys. The Estonian film was *Made in Estonia* directed by Rando Pettai.

The first Baltic Film Festival in Canada was held in 2000. The festival's films were shown in several other Canadian cities after the festival - Vancouver, Winnipeg, Manitoba, and Toronto. ♦

# R E F L E C T I O N S

Ernest C. Raskauskas, Sr.

## The Power of Young People and the Human Spirit



*Mr. Raskauskas frequently travels to Lithuania and finds many different organizations, which help children, senior citizens, and the homeless, to support. As any grandparent, he communicates with his grandchildren and tells them of what he experiences and how he feels. Here is such a letter remembering January 13<sup>th</sup> and the great sacrifice of a special Lithuanian woman.*

**T**hirteen years ago to this day, Loreta Asanavičiūtė was a young Lithuanian woman of 23, living in the city of Vilnius. Like you, my 20 something or nearly twenty something granddaughters, she had hopes and dreams and aspirations. She was young, she was beautiful, she was happy, she was in love. Her plans were to be married in a short three months. It was not to be.

Thirteen years ago to this day, she gathered with hundreds of other young people to form a human shield around the TV Tower in Vilnius to keep the Soviet troops and tanks from storming the Tower and taking control of the country's media center. At first, the air was festive. It was adventurous, it was patriotic, it was exciting.

Groups were gathered around bonfires singing. They were doing all the things young people everywhere do. Lithuanians love to sing. Loreta was in high spirits, and she called her mom to let her know that she was safe and O.K.

Thirteen years ago to this day, the Soviet tanks suddenly advanced, and when the young people refused to move, the soviet troops started to run them down with their tanks. Hundreds were in-

jured, and 14 were killed. The singing morphed into screaming, and the festive air turned to frenzy.

Thirteen years ago to this day. Loreta was run over and then back over by a tank. Her legs were crushed, and as she was being taken to the hospital, she asked her uncle, "Are my legs too crushed to get married and have children?" That night she died.

The massacre of that night galvanized the spirit of the Lithuanian people and perhaps a 100,000 came out to protect the Parliament building with their bodies and with all kinds of concrete barricades and bumpers.

Just a few months later, your grandmother and I were in Lithuania. Candles still flickered in front of crosses at the TV Tower. The barricades were still in front of the Parliament building. There were still soviet tanks and soldiers in the streets, but finally the Soviets, after a failed coup in Moscow, learned that tanks and troops are flimsy reeds against the power of people. They recognized the new Lithuanian government in August of 1991 and agreed to remove all of their troops in 1993.

Thirteen years ago to this day, Loreta and hundreds of other young people like her, without firing a shot or even throwing a stone, proved that no tank, no army, no thermo nuclear device can overcome the incredible, overwhelming power of the human spirit. Loreta and her confreres started a process with Lithuania that night that one by one toppled an entire soviet empire. She did, and you can make a difference.

Blessings, and in love and service, Pops ♦

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