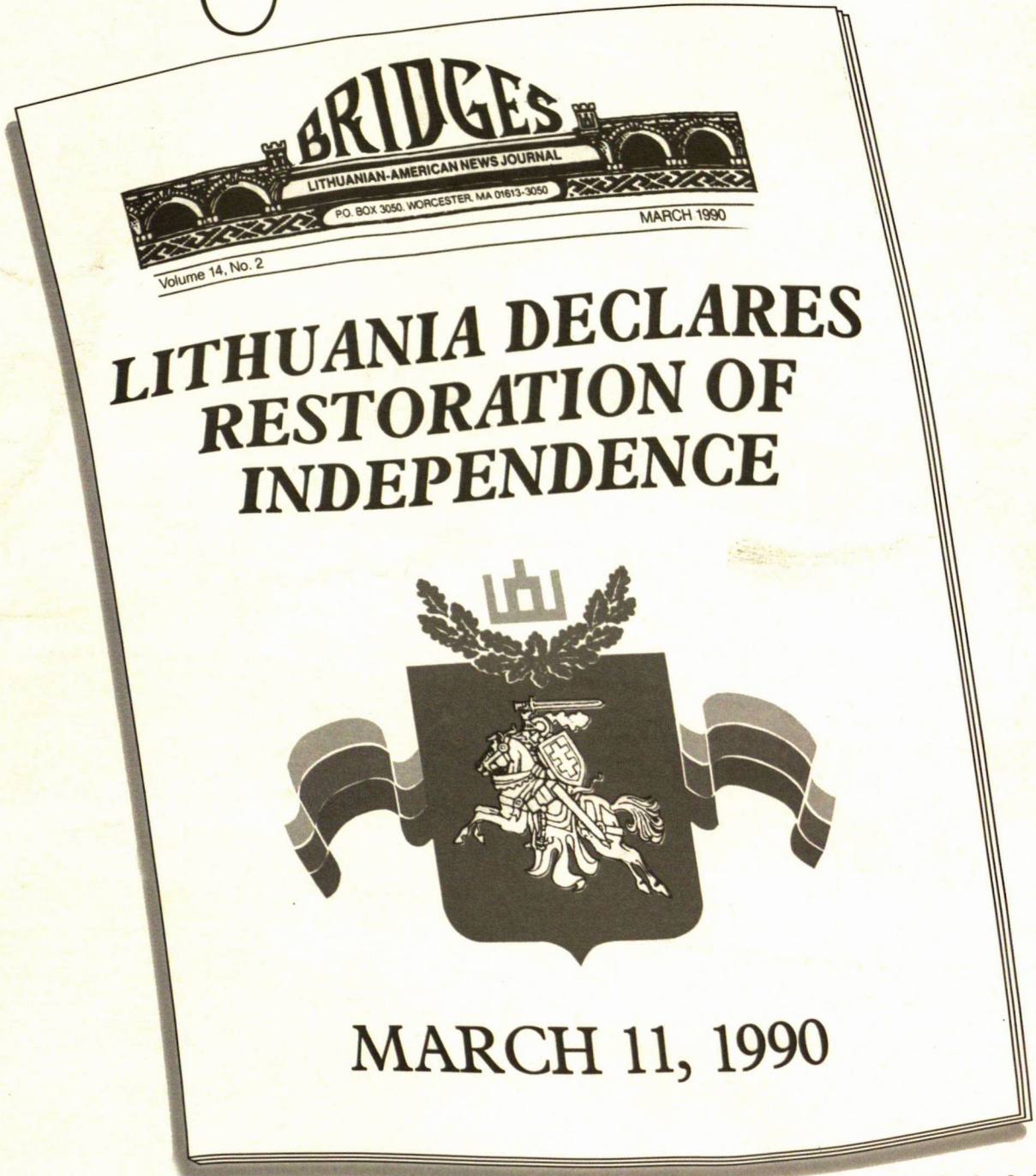


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LITHUANIAN AMERICAN NEWS JOURNAL *march 2005*

Letter from the Editor

It is our pleasure to dedicate this issue to rebirth and new life. Fifteen years ago this month David faced Goliath and once again David won. It is true that history repeats itself. A tiny, determined country that many people never heard of took on the mighty Soviet Union and this month we celebrate that victory. Gema has reprinted the original BRIDGES cover as it appeared in the March 1990 issue. The original cover was in color and perhaps someday we will be able to bring you color in BRIDGES. Indre Plieskyte, a young university student in Lithuania, sent us her childhood memories of the events of January 13. I also recalled my own experiences during those "dark days" of never knowing what would happen from day to day in Lithuania. A special thank you to the National Executive Board of the Lithuanian American Community, Inc. for aiding the establishment of the Communications Center.

We must be grateful for independence, but we must never take it for granted and must continue to be ever watchful and aware of world events.

After a winter that seemed endless to many of us I hope this issue brings you some sunshine. Sister Margarita brings you an Easter message and Gloria O'Brien retells the story of a beautiful Easter legend. Without Gloria's hours and hours of work translating these stories into English we would never have the pleasure of reading them in BRIDGES. Father Peter Burkauskas tells us the sad facts about many of our Lithuanian parishes named in honor of St. Casimir. Rimas Gedeika will introduce you to New Jersey's Honorary Consul, Eugene Rainis. Terese Gecys has written about Resurrection Church in Kaunas. Once again, David conquered Goliath. The church was a dream that seemed dead and buried but today is a living monument to the faith and perseverance of the Lithuanian people. Akvile continued her journey to America and her new home. We are so proud of Florence Morkus and her service to America. We are equally proud of the dance group, Lietutis. A special thank you to Congressman John Shimkus' office for providing BRIDGES with a statement and photo.

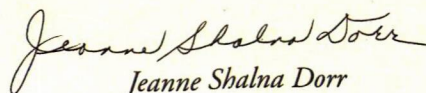
I would like to thank Danute and Rimas Gedeika and my husband, Tim. They read and reread these articles until we could all recite them in our sleep.

The most gratitude goes to you, the readers, who continue to submit articles to BRIDGES.

Thank you, thank you!

May St. Casimir continue to guide Lithuania.

Happy spring to one and all.


Jeanne Shalna Dorr

BRIDGES**Lithuanian American News Journal**

USPS 017131 – Published 10 times per year
(Jan./Feb. and Jul./Aug. combined).

Address of publication is:

LAC, Inc./BRIDGES,
1927 West Blvd.,
Racine, WI 53403

BRIDGES is the official publication of the
Lithuanian American Community, Inc.
Public Affairs Office
P.O. Box 33464
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**THE INFORMATION CENTER FOR
HOMECOMING LITHUANIANS.**

Collects and provides information from
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1927 West Boulevard

Racine, WI 53403

Subscription rate is \$18.00 annually
(US Mail serviced subscribers).

Subscriptions to other addresses are
(US \$28.00), payable in advance (US funds).
Periodicals postage paid at Racine, WI;
and additional locations.

Contact us on the Internet at:

www.javlb.org

Postmaster: Send any address correction
and/or changes to

LAC, Inc./BRIDGES,
1927 West Boulevard
Racine, WI 53403

in this issue

2

editorial

Letter from the
Editor

Jeanne Dorr

8

reflections

Honoring St. Casimir
Rev. Peter Burkauskas

13

reflections

A Look Back
Jeanne Dorr

4

lac news

Lithuanian American
Community

Regina F. Narusis, J.D.

9

reflections

Images of January 13th
Indre Plieskyte

16

cultural

Cultural Tidbits
Terese M. Gecys

5

treasures among us

Eugene Rainis
Rimas Gedeika

10

dance group

Lietūtis
Seattle, Washington

18

akvile's corner

The Trip
Akvile Dudonyte

7

treasures among us

Stars & Stripes Forever
*Submitted by:
Florence Morkus*

11

reflections

Remarks on March 11
*Congressman
John Shimkus*

19

baltic folklore

The Cathedral of
Vilnius
Henry Gaidis

7

bridges passages

12

reflections

"O Lord, You Are My
Inheritance"
Sister Margarita Bareikaite

22

calendar

* This Cover has been reproduced from the
"BRIDGES" issue of March 11, 1990.

STATEMENT OF THE SEVENTEENTH NATIONAL BOARD OF DIRECTORS OF THE LITHUANIAN AMERICAN COMMUNITY INC.

With regard to the President of the Republic of Lithuania Valdas Adamkus going to the commemoration of the end of the Second World War in Moscow.

On May 9th in Moscow, Russia is planning a celebration to commemorate the 60th anniversary of the end of the Second World War. Russia's President Putin has invited the President of the Republic of Lithuania Valdas Adamkus to celebrate "USSR's victory" over fascist Germany.

For Lithuania the Second World War did not end on May 9, 1945, but continued until the end of August, 1993, when Russia was finally forced to withdraw her occupation army from Lithuania.

The 50 year long resistance by the Lithuanian nation exacted huge sacrifices. The Lithuanian nation lost one third of its inhabitants, tens of thousands of its young men died in the partisan resistance, occupiers slaughtered and tortured innocent Lithuanian people and deported them to distant Siberia.

For 50 years Lithuanian Americans led the fight for the non-recognition of the unlawful and forced incorporation of Lithuania into the Soviet Union. In 1953 the United States Congress created the "Select Committee to Investigate the 'Incorporation' of the Baltic States into the U.S.S.R", which determined that the Baltic nations were illegally occupied by force.

Russia has not condemned the Molotov-Ribbentrop pact, nor has it condemned the Soviet Union's imperialistic goals. The "victory" over fascism helped to enable bolshevism and 50 more years of Lithuania's suffering.

Russia refuses to acknowledge responsibility for Lithuania's injuries and to compensate the Republic of Lithuania and its people for the damages caused by the USSR's long occupation. During the 15 years of Lithuania's re-established independence, Russia found no cause to begin negotiations or to apologize.

Instead, Russia is using the May 9, 2005 sixty year anniversary and "victory" against fascism for its own double meaning purposes.

The Lithuanian American Community, Inc. agrees that Lithuania should be a good neighbor to Russia and should develop a mutually beneficial relationship. However, under no circumstances can it agree that the President of the Republic of Lithuania, Valdas Adamkus, or any other high ranking official of the Lithuanian government should attend the events of May 9th in Moscow, as it would not only infer an assent to the Soviet occupation but an assent to the carried out soviet communist crimes.

Adopted by vote of the XVII National Board of Directors of the Lithuanian American Community, Inc. on January 15, 2005.

Regina F. Narusis, J.D.

*Regina F. Narusis, J.D.
President of the XVII National Board of
Directors of the Lithuanian American Community, Inc.*

LITHUANIAN LANGUAGE COURSE

The 20th annual Lithuanian language course at Camp Dainava, Manchester, MI will take place August 7-14. This one week intensive course, operating under the auspices of the Lithuanian Educational Council of the USA, is designed for beginners, intermediate, and advanced students, or those just wishing to refresh their Lithuanian. The courses are taught by experienced instructors in vacation-like surroundings and atmosphere. There are no limitations regarding age or formal education.

For more information please contact.

**Vytautas Jonaitis, 1332 Sprucewood Dr. N.W., Grand Rapids, MI 49504
phone 616 - 453 - 7549.**

Email vjonaitis@juno.com, or

log on to http://lithuanian-american.org/dainava_lang.php.

Eugene Rainis

Lithuania's New Honorary Consul

On October 24, 2004 in Kearny, New Jersey, Eugene Rainis was appointed by the Republic of Lithuania as its twelfth Honorary Consul to the USA. Vygaudas Usackas, Lithuania's Ambassador to America and to Mexico, officiated at the ceremony.

The newly appointed Honorary Consul can trace his Lithuanian roots to his grandparents who immigrated to America in the 1880's. E. Rainis, as well as both of his parents, was born and raised in Brooklyn, New York. He received his Business Degree from Fordham University and his MBA from the University of Pennsylvania's Wharton's Business School.

Eugene Rainis is the General Partner of Brown Brothers Harriman & Co., a wholly owned and managed private banking, securities brokerage and financial advisory firm. He is responsible for the bank's Global Bond Business. While working at BBH & Co, he was also involved in many other business enterprises. He was a Trustee of Fordham University and was the Chairman of the Board of both Jefferson and Monticello Insurance Companies.

In addition to his diversified business interests, Rainis is also deeply concerned with health and educational issues. Currently he is the Chairman of the Finance Committee and of the Investment Committee of St. Vincent's Catholic Medical Center (the largest trauma center in New York City). He is also a member of the Cardinal's Health Care Advisory Committee for the Archdiocese of New York

Eugene Rainis is the Chairman of the Board of Xavier High School, as well as the Treasurer and a member of the Board of the Gregorian University Foundation.

The Lithuanian Causes

Eugene Rainis' involvement in the Lithuanian Community goes back almost 25 years. It all started when I received a telephone call from one of my business associates informing me that his Lithuanian friend was very interested in learning more about his Lithuanian heritage. Would I be able to help? But of course!!

A week later Eugene and I met for lunch. And thus began a friendship which has lasted to this



Vygaudas Usackas, Lithuanian Ambassador to the United States and Eugene Rainis.

During the past 25 years, Eugene Rainis has been involved in numerous Lithuanian causes. I would now like to share with you few of his accomplishments.

In the 1980's there was a great shortage of incubators in Lithuania. When Eugene learned of this situation, he said, "I'll see what I can do."

Three weeks later he called me and said, "I have 25 incubators. How soon do you need them in Lithuania?"

"Yesterday," I replied. "But we have a problem. The container ship, which Religijos Fondas is going to use, won't leave port for at least a month."

There was a brief pause on the other end of the line and then I heard, "Don't worry, Rimai. They will leave for Lithuania within three days."

Three days later the incubators were on their way to Lithuania.

In 1996 Lithuania was preparing to participate in her second (since her independence) Summer Olympic Games (Atlanta, Georgia). At first it appeared that the four marathon runners who had qualified for the

games would not be able to participate due to a lack of funds. However, three Lithuanian American sports enthusiasts, after hearing of this situation, took the initiative to raise funds to help cover some of their expenses. Eugene Rainis was the major contributor to this fund drive.

E. Rainis is a devout Catholic who has helped various American religious charities and institutions. Several years ago he expanded his "giving" to include Lithuania, specifically, the Jesuits. For the past several years he has provided financial assistance to the Jesuit High School in Kaunas.

Rainis' wife, Jane, who is not a Lithuanian, has always had a warm spot in her heart for the Lithuanian people. A little more than ten years ago, Dr. Jack Stukas negotiated a one year program between Lithuania and the Deborah Heart Hospital (New Jersey), whereby those Lithuanian children who had serious heart problems and could not be operated on in Lithuania would be brought to Deborah Hospital for special surgery. On one such occasion, a nine year old boy underwent an extremely complicated operation. The seven hour operation was a success, however, after a few hours, the boy started to develop serious complications. It seemed that as soon as the doctors were able to resolve one problem, another arose, followed by another, then another.

The boy underwent two additional operations. He fought heroically; he would not give up. The attending physicians and nurses became very closely attached to him. They greatly admired his courageous, fighting spirit !!!

For five weeks, his mother stayed by his bedside never leaving the intensive care unit. Just when the situation began to look optimistic, the little boy's heart suddenly stopped – and he died.

The grief stricken, deeply religious mother's wish was to bring her son's body back to Lithuania, to be buried in her small farming village. To do this required funds which she did not have. The hospital would not pay for transporting the body to Lithuania; it would only pay for a cremation. The mother could not accept this spiritually or emotionally.

After learning of this situation, I contacted several people for assistance, but none of them could help. As my last resort, I phoned Eugene. Jane answered and informed me that he was out of the country. My heart sank!!

But, before I could hang up the phone, Jane asked me what the problem was. I proceeded to explain. After I finished, Jane asked, "How much will it cost?"

Sheepishly I told her the sum (It was a big amount). Jane waited a second or two, and then said, "Okay, you'll get the check tomorrow" And I did.

The mother brought her son's body back to Lithuania and he was buried in the traditional way in the village where he was born.

Goals

Eugene Rainis believes that Lithuania's current social and economic climate is ripe for investment by American businessmen. All that is necessary is that they (the businessmen) be properly informed regarding Lithuania's business laws, its legal system and its banking and investment systems. Rainis considers this to be his top priority.

Not far behind, is his desire to get to know the Lithuanian people especially in the New Jersey, New York, Pennsylvania tri-state area. He believes that by gaining a better understanding of Lithuania's culture, traditions, problems and concerns, he'll be in a better position to help her people.

As a start in that direction, Rainis and his wife, on December 12, 2004, attended the traditional Skautu Kucios at St. Andrew's parish in Philadelphia. Here they met Fr. Burkauskas, who explained the parish's long history and showed them the various Lithuanian sculptures and paintings found in the church. He also informed the Honorary Consul of the many obstacles that the parish was able to overcome; such as its imminent closure by the archdiocese.

At the Kucios table both Eugene and his wife were able to enjoy the traditional twelve dishes and participate in the various Kucios and Lithuanian Scout traditions.

He is a man who will not take his responsibilities of his position as Honorary Consul lightly; he will do all in his power to help Lithuania reach her full potential.

Rimas Gedeika

Rimas Gedeika lives in New Jersey and is an active member of the Philadelphia Chapter of the Lithuanian American Community and the Lithuanian Sports Community

Stars & Stripes Forever



the insurgent held Iraqi city of Fallujah. There was a fly over and at exactly 2 pm the parade came to a halt for a moment of silence to remember those who died in the war.

My name is Florence Litwinas Morkus, and I am a parishioner of Holy Trinity Church and a member of the Knights of Lithuania, C.6. I served in the Navy Communications in Washington, D.C. during World War II.

I was proud to drive my decorated car with Lithuanian "SUDIEV" plates and three members of Navy Waves

"Stars and Stripes Forever" was the theme of the Veterans Day Parade in Hartford, CT. On a lovely Sunday afternoon it was estimated that 40,000 people lined the parade route marked by red, white and blue stripes painted on the city streets to celebrate the patriotism and honor the service of veterans and active duty military personnel. Even as the parade got underway US forces were said to be preparing for an all out assault on

National Organization Unit 42 CT. Yankees. In uniform with white gloves, we waved back to the folks and children with waving flags and smiling faces who were applauding us along the way.

We couldn't help but feel the patriotism and sacrifices of the US veterans.

Submitted by: Florence Litwinas Morkus

Bridges Passages

Bridges
January - February
1988

"Freedom!" Demand 8,000 in Kaunas

After a religious service in the Kaunas Cathedral, the worshippers joined those who were praying at Marionis' grave nearby. They started singing songs and hymns based on Marionis' verse. There were regular exclamations: "Freedom! Freedom! Freedom!" Isolated attempts to disrupt the commemoration were downed by the crowd's applause and cheers encouraging the speakers.

Bridges
January 1989

Thoughts as the Tricolor Flag Flies Again Over the Gedimino Pilis

October seventh, 10 a.m., we all come together in Gediminas Square. We came from Plunge, Svencionys, from Druskininkai and Birzai. Others participated from Chicago, Cleveland and Sydney, from Uchta, Krasnojarski and Kazachstan, from Smolensk, Slavutcius, Chernobyl and Afghanistan. We traveled a long road for many years for this day.

As the flag flew, and a yellow, green and red fireworks display pierced the heavens, in one voice, we sang the Lithuanian National Anthem.

Pride swelled within all of us, our flag had come home. We sang, we danced not because some folk festival was happening, but rather that we did not want to leave.

Was the flag still flying?

All day long wherever we walked, we would check-was the flag still flying? It was flying, and will fly forever more.

HONORING ST. CASIMIR IN OUR LITHUANIAN PARISHES

Most have closed or merged. Can we save any?

Traditionally it is accepted that St. Casimir was canonized by Pope Leo X, who died in 1521. By 1636 the remains of the saint were placed in a silver coffin and elevated above the altar in a beautiful chapel in the cathedral of Vilnius. It was Pope Urban VIII who declared Saint Casimir the Patron Saint of Lithuania.

It was however the Lithuanian people who enshrined Saint Casimir in their hearts and honored him with their prayerful devotion. Wherever they went, far or near, they carried their patron saint with them. This can be seen especially in their immigration to America as they named the first parish after Saint Casimir in Wilkes Barre, Pennsylvania in 1889.

As the wave of immigrants continued, Lithuanians arriving in the United States continued to express their love for the homeland by naming their parish churches after their own beloved Saint who stayed behind in the Vilnius cathedral.

In Pittston, PA a Lithuanian church was dedicated to St. Casimir in 1890; in 1893 two other Lithuanian commu-



nities in Pennsylvania named their churches after Saint Casimir – one in Philadelphia and one in Pittsburgh; in 1894 a church was dedicated to St. Casimir in Worcester, MA; in the early 1900's other churches would be entrusted to the patronage of Saint Casimir: Racine, WI (1903), Nashua, NH (1910), New Haven, CT (1911), St. Clair, PA (1912); Sioux City, IA (1913); Westfield, MA (1915), as well as churches in Paterson, NJ, and E. Vandergrift, PA.

The transplanting of devotion to the Patron Saint of Lithuania to American soil flourished as churches established parish schools and societies.

Sadly, however, shortly after Lithuanian Catholics celebrated in 1984 the 500th anniversary of the death of Saint Casimir, the declining number of parishioners, aging Lithuanian communities, deteriorating church buildings, and the shortage of vocations to the priesthood set in motion the downfall of many Lithuanian parishes in the United States. This March 4th the following churches honoring St. Casimir

were closed and in darkness: Nashua, NH, New Haven, CT, Pittsburgh, PA, Racine, WI, Sioux City, IA, E. Vandergrift, PA; and others have been merged with non-Lithuanian parishes. Only two remain strongly active with parochial schools: St. Casimir's in Los Angeles (founded in 1946) and St. Casimir's (1883) in Philadelphia.

Pray that St. Casimir will never be forgotten!

Rev. Peter Burkauskas

Father Peter Burkauskas is the pastor of St. Casimir and St. Andrew Churches in Philadelphia.

Congratulations to **SAULIUS ANUZIS**

who was elected Chairman of the
MICHIGAN REPPUBLICAN PARTY.

Michigan Republicans chose the Lansing businessman to lead them in their fight to regain the governorship and a U.S. Senate seat in 2006.

Saulius Anuzis was unanimously elected at the GOP state convention to lead the Michigan Republican Party for the next two years.

The first member of his family born in the United States after his family left Lithuania following World War II, Saulius told reporters he expected to get a call Saturday night from the president of Lithuania congratulating him on his election. He has traveled to Lithuania more than 20 times for business and pleasure.

Saulius is the president of the Lansing, MI. Chapter of the Lithuanian American Community and is also a member of the LAC Taryba (Congress)

Indre Plieskyte



Indre Plieskyte was eight years old when the horrors of January 13 took place. The following are her memories which are fast moving recollections...

Images of January 13th

That evening I played with our neighbor's children. I remember glancing at the TV and seeing "uncle," who was speaking very seriously. Although at that time I was only eight years old, I already knew Gorbachev, Yeltsin and Landsbergis – but then I did not call them by their names, instead I asked mother which "uncle" was good and which one was not. At that moment the good "uncle" (Landsbergis) was urging all the people to go to the TV station, and to the parliament building.

I remember very little of what my parents and neighbors were saying. Today, after 14 years, memories flash by as if they were appearing on a movie screen. It seems that during all those turbulent days we sat glued to the TV (father was at the TV tower). Children's games were no longer important to us. We were able to express our emotions only through drawings. Truthfully speaking, the emotions experienced during this period are impossible to be put in writing, for after so many years, all that remain are unknown, fragmented feelings. Only brief flashing glimpses remain – I see many people, including children gathered around bonfires. They are all singing hymns, playing accordions, drinking hot tea – there is a feeling of unsettling calmness. However, on January 12, the TV screens showed a boy whose entire face was drenched in blood. It was very frightening... but the full terror was felt only the next day. We children, full of fright and with jaws agape, listened to the young television director, Egle Bucelis, who with trembling voice was announcing the latest news. In the studio a telephone rings – the soldiers are already in the building! Scenes flash by – We see soldiers quickly entering the building. I think to myself, "How come they don't see the operators? For they can shoot them!" Few more images-and then the TV screen goes blank – Uncertainty!

Soon the TV broadcasting was moved to Kaunas, the city of my birth. The following morning was more terrifying than the night itself. Clinging tightly and more tightly to my mother, I listened to a young boy saying how he found his father in a morgue. Great, big, tears rolled down his face for he was not allowed to go near his father's body. For another family, the time has stopped – their father was also killed.

A classroom was shown; its students very somber. To me they appeared to be such grown people, but in fact they were students, barely eighteen year old boys and girls. A candle burned on one school desk. The teacher was sadly saying something very softly, while writing on the blackboard... One of the boys, whose name was Ignas, his name was the same as my brother's, would be killed that night. His eyes, so pensive, his lips, oh so tightly clenched, He appeared to me to be so handsome, so heroic. And Loreta – the only

woman to be killed – being questioned – her sister wiping away her tears. What is she saying? I don't remember – I only see Loreta's photograph – what a beautiful, beautiful young Lithuanian. I don't know why, but I always imagined that they showed her being alive in the hospital. Perhaps that was not her, but, that young lady left a deep imprint in my mind. She answers the doctor's questions: her name, address, telephone, and – very quietly asks, "Will I live?"

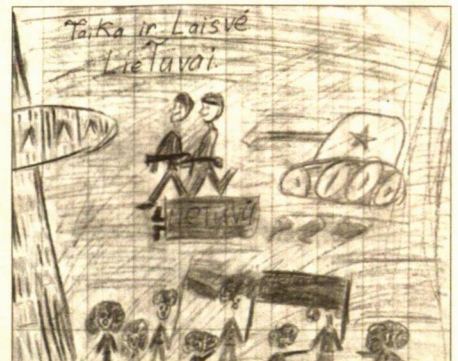
That night everything was chaotic. The soldiers were brutally beating people with their rifle butts. Later they started to fire at them. Big, black, heavy and very frightening tanks rumbled towards the people. In Kaunas, next to VI Fort, a soviet tank stood as if mocking the adjacent house where Independent Lithuania's foreign minister, J. Urbsys lived. My brother and I often tried to touch and climb on top of that tank. I never thought that tanks would drive over people, but they did. It appeared that they were driven not by humans, but by some heartless things. People barehanded tried to stop the black, cold, metallic heap, to no avail – it kept on coming, crushing them.

When the well known hymn, "Marija, Marija" ended, the murmuring praying turned into continuous sobbing. Thirteen coffins lying in a straight line, a face being stroked gently, children, not tall enough to reach the coffins, standing next to them, candle lights flickering in the dark looked so frightening – we were all quiet and deeply immersed in our own thoughts. Anxious, confused and frightened we went to school. I believe there was no class work. I only remember that we drew pictures. We also drew that horrible night. I remember very well what I drew. I looked everywhere for that drawing, but I could not find it. Perhaps the teacher collected all our drawings and sent them to Vilnius to be nailed to the barricades surrounding the parliament. These barricades had drawings that were drawn by children from all parts of Lithuania. I remember all the dead people, for at that time, no one tried to keep the atrocities away from us, the children. We knew that those people died for Lithuania's freedom. They were Lithuania's true heroes!

Today on that spot lies a big cross, a symbol of the pain and struggle for freedom. Adjacent to the television station, there stand wood crosses in memory of those who sacrificed their lives. All of us who witnessed this painful struggle for freedom have a duty to inform our future generations about Lithuania's great courage and her great desire to be free.

Indre Plieskyte

Indre Plieskyte has two great passions; art and journalism. She studied art in high school and her work has been awarded several prizes. She is currently studying journalism and will graduate in June 2005. She intends to pursue a master's degree in journalism.



Eight year old Indre's drawing

Lietutis

SEATTLE, WASHINGTON

A Look at 24 Years of Lithuanian Dance in Seattle

February 2005 marks the 24th anniversary of Lietutis, Seattle's Lithuanian Folk Dance Troupe. The group was born, so to speak, at the Lithuanian Independence Day Commemoration of 1981, when, after the potluck dinner, Zita Petkus inadvertently attracted an audience of children while demonstrating a few dance steps to a friend. She ended up teaching the eager youngsters a folk dance on the spot. There was no turning back after that – the parents refused to let Zita go, coaxing her into gathering a group together for another session ... and then another, and another. By the following year's February 16th event, the group had a modest repertoire, a name, and a mission: to keep in touch with one's heritage through the joys of Lithuanian folk dancing. Membership was open to young and old; the only requirement being some sort of connection with "Lithuanianism". Ages ranged from – facetiously – 6 week old newborn Ona Johnson who arrived at practices with her dancing parents, Irena Blekys and Allan Johnson.

The name "Lietutis" (gentle rain) is the brainchild of the director's husband, Juozas Petkus, who thought it would be both fun and fitting to adopt a Northwest characteristic



Entertaining Lithuanian Ambassador Vygaudas Usackas at the diplomatic reception for Lithuania's new Honorary Consul in Washington State.



Lietutis at the Lithuanian Days Festival in Los Angeles, 2000.



Neris Palunas, director of the children's group Lankas, with Zita Petkus, director of Lietutis. Missing from the picture is Sandy Kuprenas, director of the teen age group, Linas.



Al Yulefest, at the Nordic Heritage Museum.

for the group's name. Ever since, Lietutis has joked to American audiences about being the Lithuanian Raindancers of Seattle.

To date, Lietutis' resume lists over 95 performances. In addition to annual appearances at the February 16th celebration, Lietutis has represented Lithuanians at the hugely attended Northwest Folklife Festival in Seattle for 18 years, the greatest venue of its kind in the Pacific Northwest. Lietutis performed at Lithuanian International Folkdance Festivals in Hamilton, Canada (1988) and Chicago (1992 and 2004), at Expo '86 in Vancouver BC; in



Congressman John Shimkus (R, Illinois-19) on the right with Lithuanian Ambassador to the United States Vygaudas Usackas (left) at the White House ceremony in March 2004 welcoming the new members of NATO.

Congressman Shimkus's remarks on March 11

This is a quote from Congressman Shimkus concerning Lithuania's upcoming anniversary:

"It is hard to believe it has already been 15 years since Lithuania and the other Baltic States gained control of their own destinies after suffering so long under the thumb of communism in the Soviet Union. As a former U.S. Army officer in Europe who stared down the communist bloc during the Cold War and as a Lithuanian American, I am so proud to mark this historic occasion.

Congressman John Shimkus

*Congressman John Shimkus (R.) II.
Is co-chair of the Baltic Caucus.*

1987 and 2000 at the Los Angeles Lithuanian Days Festival, and at various other local and regional events. Over its 24 years, over 106 dancers have left their footprints on Lietutis.

One of the unexpected rewards has been the formation of the children's dance group in 1986 by young parents of Lietutis who wanted their children to learn to enjoy Lithuanian folk dancing. As an offshoot of Lietutis, the children's circle grew and eventually split into two distinct groups: a young children's group, Lankas, and a group for teenagers, Linas. Violeta Kuprenaite Jessen, the current director of Linas, is a Lietutis alumna, as is Neris Palunas, who teaches Lankas. In 2004, all three age levels participated in the Folk Dance Festival in Chicago.

In 2002, professional guitarist Vidas Svagzdys organized an ensemble of musicians to accompany Lietutis during its

performances. We now enjoy the added joy and inspiration of live accordions, violins, and percussion instruments during our shows. Lietutis is self-supporting and operates on a shoestring. A major "Aciu" goes to dancer Steve Buck, who took on the duties of treasurer back in the 80's and still handles the group's finances. Without his participation, life would be a lot more complicated for Zita, who continues to this day as the director and teacher of Lietutis.

To a whole generation in Seattle, Lithuanian life without Lietutis is unheard of and unthinkable. The comparatively small Community of Lithuanians in Washington State takes enormous pride in Lietutis, its unofficial goodwill ambassador.

Submitted by Zita Petkus

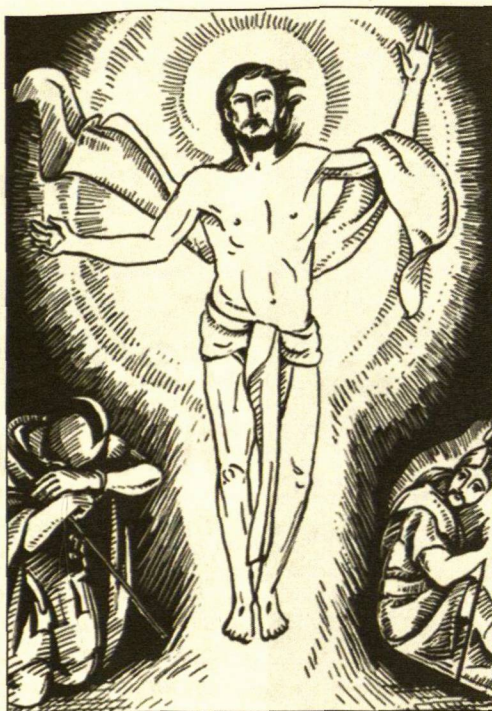
**“O Lord,
You Are My
Inheritance”
...Alleluia!**

Easter has come again; the feast of feasts, the only feast in the early Church.

Easter presents to us the sublime truths of our faith. The liturgy has a whole world of thoughts, and it echoes the enthusiasm of the first Christians.

The two themes on which all the prayers and ceremonies of the liturgy of Easter are focused are the life of grace and the resurrection of Christ. Easter is the feast of our redemption. Redemption does not mean simply that we are freed from sin; it means that we are endowed with grace. The grace of baptism is represented by means of three symbols: The Pascal candle, the word of Sacred Scripture and the baptismal water. The Pascal candle represents “The light of Christ”. The Easter candle represents the light given to each of us when were baptized.

Christ himself frequently spoke about grace under the symbol of water. His conversation with the Samaritan woman at



Jacob’s well; He said He would give a living water and all this has reference to grace.

The resurrection itself is the divine testimony that the Redemption has been accomplished.

During the season of Lent we were thinking of Him as Sufferer, but Easter brought us new thoughts; Christ as Conqueror. The second figure of Christ, we see Him as the figure of the Lamb; as one of peace. The image of the lamb is found also in the Old Testament. The Church uses it as a typical symbol of Easter; the Paschal Lamb. The term has become so dear to the Church that it is used in the liturgy during Mass. In Gloria we sing the Lamb of God has taken away the sins of the world and it also is repeated just before Holy Communion. Christ is the Lamb sacrificed on the cross

and He is the Lamb glorified in the resurrection; He is the lamb who becomes our food in the Eucharist.

Sister Margarita Bareikaite

Sister Margarita Bareikaite belongs to the order of the Sisters of the Immaculate Conception of the Blessed Virgin Mary, a Lithuanian order in Putnam, CT. Sister Margarita is the Chair of the Religious Affairs Council of the Lithuanian American Community and is a regular contributor to Bridges.

**Illustration by Sister Mercedes SSC*

**March the 4th
is
St. Casimir’s Feast Day,
The Patron Saint of Lithuania.**

*St. Casimir, son of King Casimir, buried in Vilnius.
Picture is reproduced from the title page of the oldest extant biography of St. Casimir by Zacharias Firrcri, 1321.



St. Casimirus Regis Casimiri filius quatuor Regum 7 unius Cordi nalis germanus ac Ludouici Hungariae 7 Boemae Regis patruus.

*This Information is from the book "LITHUANIA 700 Years"

A Look Back, A Personal Reflection

Fifteen years ago my life was turned upside down, inside out and any other way it could shift. I would never again return to a "normal" life. Until that time I was a wife, mother and teacher who went about the day doing what was expected of me. I cheated now and then because as a social studies teacher I was expected to teach a unit on the Soviet Union. I went through most of it like a house on fire and spent much of the time on Lithuania. My students knew more about communism than the average American student could even begin to imagine. They were thrilled to have pen pals from Lithuania (my cousin is an English teacher). Every day was filled with anxiety waiting for the school office to deliver the mail to us. They learned what it was like to receive letters that obviously had been opened and they also learned "to be careful" of what they wrote. There would be no writing about politics or about the material goods they had in their houses. Year after year new students would come to my classes unable to contain their excitement at having Lithuanian pen pals. When they would ask me if Lithuania would ever be free I always answered, "Not in my life time." Even today when I meet these grown up ladies and gentlemen they express their gratitude for making their world larger and for helping them to "live history", not just read about it. And so I was just an average American teacher with a few quirks here and there along the way. In my spare time I was a Literacy Volunteer and enjoyed teaching English to Portuguese immigrants. I had absolutely no ties with anything or anyone Lithuanian in this country.

My husband and I made our first trip to Lithuania in 1979. My parents were horrified that we would even think of such a thing. They believed we were being used by the communists, but we had different ideas. We had been com-



Protest Rally in Washington, DC

municating with cousins for several years. Ironically, it was my mother who got the address at a wedding. She later regretted ever giving it to me. The family ties were cut after the war and as in many families, all communication was lost.

My husband, a non Lithuanian, was at the festival at the Lithuanian Music Hall in Philadelphia and started talking to a travel agent. He came home with brochures and the rest is history.

I never regretted those early trips to Lithuania because if I had never gone during the "dark days" I would not understand what life was like under soviet oppression. All the books that have ever been printed cannot make a person feel or understand the sadness at seeing the Lithuanian people walking the streets with their heads down. You could almost sense and feel their hopelessness. How can you describe to someone who was never in Lithuania during the "dark days" the sadness of looking out of a train window and wondering if you will ever again see the people you have grown to love? As tears flowed from everyone's eyes I always had that sick feeling in the pit of

my stomach. Everything hinged on what kind of day a bureaucrat might be having when he looked at your visa application. Or perhaps an international incident, something you had no control over, might end it all and there would be no more traveling. We did everything we could do to make their lives better.

I remember the nail biting and wondering if Lithuania would really declare independence in 1990. We had gone to dinner with friends and I was constantly excusing myself on the hour and half hour, making a dash to the parking lot and turning on the car radio. Our friends understood my anxiety as they had family in Croatia. When the news finally broke I had mixed emotions. First came "thank God" followed by "now what happens."

We stumbled upon shortwave Radio Vilnius and everything we did centered on their broadcasting time; we had to be home to listen to the radio. I began to write letters to the staff and before long we had a working relationship.

I met a Lithuanian woman in my area

reflections

and she encouraged me to try the Lithuanian church in Philadelphia. I kept putting her off because, quite frankly, I saw no reason to drive to Philadelphia when there was a church almost in my back yard.

In the meantime, things were getting worse in Lithuania. The oil embargo was having an impact but the Lithuanian people were creative in getting from place to place. My new friend convinced me to go to a protest in New York. It sounds great, but about two hours before we were to leave she changed her mind. One does not argue with a lady who is more than twenty years older than you are. My husband couldn't go, as his plans could not be changed. As hard it is to believe, I was a "shy violet" in those days so I drove to Philadelphia and forced myself to board a bus with people I never met. I took a seat and was drawn into conversation by my seatmate, another elderly lady. God bless her soul, I didn't know you had to bring your own lunch. She generously shared half of her sandwich with me. After exiting the bus we were given signs to carry as we started marching toward St. Patrick's Cathedral. We were joined by many different ethnic groups offering their support. As we approached the cathedral the group seemed to scatter and we were told we could not take the signs into the church; they had to be left in the foyer. I was still caught up in the excitement of the march, the beauty of the Mass, and the magnificent voices of the choir when I felt like a lightening bolt struck me. I didn't recognize anyone around me and I didn't remember anyone from the bus except my seatmate and she was nowhere in sight. I asked both people next to me if they were from Philadelphia and received a negative reply. I tapped the people in front of me and turned to the people in back of me. No one was from Philadelphia. How can a full bus load of people disappear? Next came sheer panic. I had no idea of the name of the bus company or its number and I also couldn't remember where the bus driver said he would meet us. I had some

cash and a credit card so all was not lost. But I would never hear the end of this from my husband. Fortunately, as we left the cathedral I spotted my seat mate and I managed to get home. It was several years later that I finally told my husband the entire story. I am one of those people who really can't find my way out of a paper bag.

We continued to listen to Radio Vilnius, the news continued to get worse, and the world began to open one sleepy eye to the plight of the Lithuanian people. More demonstrations followed in Washington, DC where so many different groups gathered together. It seems when I look at my photographs the only thing that changed was our clothing. We went from summer clothes to winter coats. Speakers encouraged us to not let up on our elected officials. We were told to keep writing, keep calling, and keep visiting their offices. There were days set aside only for the purpose of visiting offices and trying to explain our position. As we picketed the Soviet Embassy we began to meet new people. We had to keep moving, we were not allowed to sit down, but just looking across the street to the AFL-CIO building was enough to keep us going. They flew the flag of free Lithuania every day directly across from the Soviet Embassy. They opened their doors to us so that we could get warm and drink

some hot coffee. There were some humorous moments like the time someone slapped a "Free Lithuania" bumper sticker on the back of one of the embassy cars. The buses continued to roll into Washington despite extreme heat, rain, snow and sleet. This was nothing compared to what the people in Lithuania were enduring. The people who organized these events are owed a huge debt of gratitude.

In the meantime we decided to try St. Andrew Church. What my "mentor" neglected to tell me was that on Easter Sunday there was no 10:30 am Mass. We came home to New Jersey and went back to Philadelphia for the 12:15 Mass. This time there was a Mass but no Lithuanians. It seemed the schedule changed for Easter. Just chalk it up to one more mishap.

Radio Vilnius kept warning of an immanent attack and that they might be off the air. The protests continued and on January 12 we were back in Washington. It seemed like things were somewhat calmer but looking back it probably was just hopeful thinking. After soaking my aching feet I fell into bed when my husband started shouting that CNN was showing the attacks on the people in Vilnius. I just stared at the television unable to say a single word. I'm sure none of the people who



Only the seasons changed as the protesters continued their trips to Washington, DC.

protested were able to sleep. If it was such a long night for us, how long was it for the people in Lithuania who were standing outside for hours?

The next day the atmosphere was somber and bleak at St. Andrew's Church. The church was draped in black and the parishioners seemed to be in a daze. From there we moved to the Liberty Bell for a protest, again, being joined and supported by other ethnic groups. The weather matched the mood of the people. The wind howled as we tried to hold the signs we were carrying.

The next morning around 7 am we were back on the buses to join other groups protesting in Washington. Again, the weather was bitterly cold but no one seemed to think twice about it. How could we complain when the people in Vilnius were standing outside hour after hour, day and night, guarding the TV tower and the Parliament?

Winter turned to spring, spring turned to summer and the protests, letter writing, and phone calls to politicians continued.

Because I was a teacher and was free during the summer I was asked to help at the Communication Center that was housed in the Lithuanian Music Hall in Philadelphia. These people did the most incredible job that you could ever imagine. They worked all hours of the day and night at the Center, often using their own money for supplies. There were so many people involved that I dare not mention names. To omit even one name would be an injustice. However, I will write about one person and he was my introduction to Washington politics. My job would be to answer the phone, stuff envelopes and anything else that had to be finished from the evening meetings. These people who did the planning worked all day at their regular jobs and then put in a second shift at the Center every night and all weekend. I will never understand how these unsung heroes, men and women, did it all.

During the day there were basically two of us in the Center. Andrew Eiva, a former Green Beret and I were there to

carry out the plans which were formulated during the evening work sessions. I had heard Andrew speak in Washington earlier in the year. I knew of his impressive resume and that he had been in the Lithuanian parliament building during the January siege. To say that I was intimidated is an understatement. Andrew issued orders as though he was still a part of the military. Being a teacher and being used to giving orders all day, I wasn't too good at taking his orders. However, the fact that I had no idea of what I was doing quickly had me taking directions from this big, burly man. Events were happening and changing by the hour and I was quickly pressed into talking to congressional aides and sending memos. What I learned very quickly is that our elected officials were besieged with phone calls from people with ethnic names. The callers were often told "someone will return your call" and then they never heard another word. Having an American name opened doors that were often closed to others. Once I got through they couldn't get rid of me. At one point Andrew asked me to send a fax. As I stood staring at that strange machine I tried to figure out how I was going to get that 8 by 11 inch piece of paper through those skinny wires. Yes, that's how naïve I was. Every time I approached Andrew for help he insisted he was busy and I was "derailing" his thinking process. A few hours later I was still in front of the fax machine with the paper in my hand. All is well that ends well and I finally was instructed on how to send a fax.

Then came the murders of the Lithuanian border guards in Medininkai. There was no time to stop and think and no one was eating or sleeping. It was extremely hot where we were working. The Center was in the basement of the Lithuanian Music Hall and had no windows that could be opened. Fans were of no help and we were soaking sheets in ice water and draping them over ropes for some relief. Finally, Andrew told me to write a letter on the computer. Although we were getting along quite well, that was

the straw that almost broke the camel's back. I was scared out of mind of the computers. My worst fear was that I would delete all the work done by the savvy computer users from the night before. I valued my life and I figured it would be all over if that ever happened. We argued and argued; he could have written the letter himself in the time we spent arguing about it. Out of frustration I heard this booming voice yell, "Lithuania will never regain independence and it will all be your fault because you're too dumb to use a computer". Needless to say, I was crushed. We managed to patch things up and I found the "on" button. So far so good-I didn't think I deleted anything. I even managed to pick at each letter on the key board and get the letter written. The only problem was that I didn't know you had to save it. Live and learn, back to square one again.

The Center was busy with volunteers coming and going all hours of the day and night. Phone calls and faxes from all over, including many chapters of the Lithuanian American Community, were coming into the Center.

Eventually the Russian coup took place, and on September 2, 1991, Lithuania was finally recognized by the US government.

I owe a tremendous debt of gratitude to Andrew Eiva. He willingly shared his knowledge and his love for Lithuania had no bounds.

The unsung heroes who ran the Center, the people who prayed, marched, protested, wrote letters, called and visited their elected officials; you all had a part in seeing a nation regain independence. Could you have received any greater gift than to be a living part of history? Very few people are ever given that opportunity.

Jeanne Dorr

Jeanne Dorr is the Editor of Bridges and 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.

cultural (and other) tidbits

RESURRECTION CHURCH (*Prisikelimo baznycia*) in Kaunas

The church whose cornerstone was laid in 1934, finally was consecrated not only as a house of prayer, but as the symbol of Lithuania's long awaited resurrection. The history of "Prisikelimo baznycia" parallels the history of Lithuania: the rise from Tsarist Russia's oppression, the fall to Soviet occupation and rise anew with restoration of independence in 1990. So too, the spires of "Prisikelimo baznycia" rose during the initial construction, was nationalized and converted into a radio and television factory during Soviet occupation, and through stubborn determination of a handful of idealists has risen once again to dominate the skylight of Kaunas. While first and foremost it will be a house of prayer, its doors will be open to concerts, as well as significant national and cultural celebrations.

Historical background

The initial idea for a memorial church of thanksgiving for Lithuania's re-established independence in 1918 was proposed by Rev. Petras Bucys in 1922. It was not until 1926 that a 20 member church construction council was formed with representatives of church hierarchy, city of Kaunas administration, architects and engineers. In 1927 Rev. Feliksas Kapocius was appointed pastor of the yet only on paper church. In the same year, city council of Kaunas donated a parcel of land at the intersection of Zemaiciu and Ausros streets. By 1934 the church foundation was completed. With funds raised by youth organizations, a cornerstone was brought to Kaunas from Palestine's Mount of Olives. The blessing of the cornerstone took place during



Lithuania's First Eucharistic Congress July 1, 1934. Tens of thousands from throughout Lithuania with President Antanas Smetona, Archbishop Juozas Skvireckas, government dignitaries, the armed forces, many from Lithuania's diaspora witnessed the blessing of the cornerstone. On their knees, in front of the Blessed Sacrament, led by metropolitan archbishop Skvireckas, the gathered dedicated themselves and the entire nation of Lithuania to the Sacred Heart of Jesus. A declaration of the church dedication, signed by dignitaries from the archbishop and president to prime minister and council of Kaunas, was placed in the church with its cornerstone.

The construction continued until June of 1940. At that time the main outside building was finished, but the interior was far from completion. Until this time, funds for the church construction were raised by public donations. My husband remembers his parents buying for him special stamp booklets to be filled with stamps representing bricks as donation for "Prisikelimo baznycia".

With the Soviet occupation, construction stopped. The church was nationalized and reconstructed into a several story radio and television factory called "Banga". During our first visit to free Lithuania in 1991, my electrical engineer cousin took us on a tour of the factory already returned to Kaunas archdiocese and in process of interior demolition prior to reconstruction as a church. He took us up to the third floor where his office had been and which very soon would be demolished for the rising arches of "Prisikelimo baznycia".

Re-consecration of "Prisikelimo baznycia"

December 26, 2005, on the second day of Christmas, tens of thousands of people once again converged on Kaunas to witness the resurrection of a church. Led by His Eminence Cardinal Backis, archbishop of Kaunas Tamkevicius, bishops of all Lithuanian dioceses, hundreds of priests and President Valdas Adamkus with government dignitaries, the Church of Resurrection "Prisikelimo baznycia"

was re-dedicated as the symbol of a reborn nation in 1918, of its desecration during the Soviet occupation and a new spiritual and national beginning after 1990. The first to speak was the pastor of the church, Rev. Vytautas Grigaravicius: "Today marks the ascent from darkness to light". Archbishop Tamkevicius reminisced: "... the original builders of the church had no idea what torturous road lay ahead. as the cross was wrenched from the church tower, railroad freight cars were carrying deportees to Siberia. but the church is built on a foundation of prayer to encourage us to rise no matter how many times we may fall." President Adamkus commented: "I believe this sacred building always will continue to bring together our nation in times of greatest joy and times of deepest sorrow."

Symbolically the cost of reconstruction was shared equally by private donations, national government and the city of Kaunas. Until 1940 one million litai, mostly from private donations, were spent, of which only 145,000 was given by the government. Since the start of reconstruction in 1989, 14,800,000 litai (approximately \$5,000,000) already have been spent. Over five million litai from the national government, almost an equal amount from donations and 4,600,000 from Kaunas administration. Many more millions litai will be needed to complete the interior of the church. Rev. Grigaravicius, the fifth pastor since the start of reconstruction, sighs at the overwhelming task ahead. With a smile he remarks: "I pray to God that if this sacred building is in His plans, He will help me."

.... and more tidbits from Lithuania

During the week of January 3, in Palanga, 50 mentally and musically gifted students from throughout Lithuania participated in a "Student academy" sponsored by Mstislav Rostropovich Foundation "Aid for Lithuania's children". The students worked on joint projects for metally and musically gifted. Fourteen were talented in music and thirty-six had earned

recognition for outstanding academic achievement. During the six day session the children were treated to discussions and workshops led by prominent Lithuanian and foreign lecturers from many fields. All participated in cultural excursions. Evening activities included musical performances and introduction to various creative arts. This winter session was the second one sponsored by the Rostopovich Foundation. Last summer's session had brought 49 mentally gifted students from all parts of Lithuania.

The National Philharmonic of Lithuania, the largest concert organization in the nation, has started its 65th jubilee year. Professor Juozas Domarkas, who has led the Philharmonic for four decades has planned a very ambitious program to mark the jubilee. The orchestra will give performances led by distinguished conductors from Lithuania and abroad. Young winners of conducting and performance medals will have an opportunity to showcase their talents as well as composers of new works. One premiere work will be by composer Algirdas Martinaitis – "Book of Remembrance" on a Holocaust theme. Among other participants in this jubilee year of music will be the Ciurlionis quartet, orchestra "Musica humana" led by Algirdas Vizgirda, and others. Orchestra performances will be joined by "Azuoliukai" choirs, "Polifonija" choir of Siauliai, violinist Gidon Kremer and over 30 other invited performers. All classical music performance groups are in the process of producing new CD's. We shall look for them in U.S. music stores and on the internet music outlets.

.... and some news from our own LAC Cultural Council

In her first newsletter of the New Year, Marija Remiene reminds us that in fall of 2005 the Cultural Council again will sponsor Cultural awards. She will look for your nominations in the fields of Fine Arts, Music, Drama, Radio, Journalism and Folk Dance. Her e-mail is mremiene@aol.com.

This year marks the 15th anniversary of the restoration of Lithuania's independence. The LAC National Executive Committee wants to encourage all chapters to organize art and writing contests for young people on themes of Lithuanian heroes. Let 2005 be the year of youth to celebrate the rebirth of young democracy in Lithuania.

All chapters of LAC already should be preparing for the Lithuanian Song Festival in 2006. More information will become available on the LAC web site: www.javlb.org. Be sure to visit the web site often for updates on local and national activities and projects of the Lithuanian-American Community, Inc.

A new addition on the web is the calendar of various Lithuanian historical and cultural dates worthy of our notice. A good way to brush up on our knowledge of Lithuanian history.

.... and for those who do not have access to the web, some notable March dates

- March 2, 1939 in France, died Oskaras V. Milasius, poet, philosopher, diplomat.
- March 4, feast of St. Casimir, patron saint of Lithuania (1458-1484)
- March 11, 1990 the restoration of Lithuania's independence.
- March, 16, 1846 born Jurgis Bielinis, the most notable book "smuggler" during the prohibition of Latin alphabet by Tsarist Russia.
- March 22, 1388 establishment of the of Vilnius.
- March 23, 1939 Nazi German army occupied the Klaipeda region of Lithuania.
- March 25, 1831 the first uprising against Tsarist Russia.
- March 28, 1911 died Mikalojus Konstantinas Ciurlionis, composer and artist.
- March 29, 1869 born composer Juozas Naujalis, best known for his choral music, especially the beloved "Lietuva brangi" to a poem by Maironis, which during the Soviet occupation had become a spontaneous substitute to the forbidden national anthem.

Terese M. Gecys

Terese M. Gecys is Fourth term member of LAC Board of Directors, 2000-2003 secretary of LAC National Executive Committee and past as well as current president Philadelphia Chapter of LAC.



The Trip

March.

One month left...

Dear Lithuania.

Dear friends, relatives- "Goodbye, see you soon, don't forget about us!" These were the words that we were saying to everybody. Of course, there was happiness (for our new future) and sadness (for our happy past). There was joy, laughter and sure, there were tears; happy tears, big, wishing luck hugs, kisses... all happy, on the other hand sad, things happening so fast. I'm leaving, no big deal. This could happen to anybody; think about it, moving to another place, sounds good. As usual, there is always one "but". My "but" is that I'm moving to another country across the ocean. Yes, I'm leaving...

I can remember it as it was yesterday. My mom organizes her goodbye evening. She invites all her family and closest relatives and dearest family friends. Mother prepares everything; she wants it all to be perfect. She doesn't want misunderstandings. According to her she wants it all done without a blemish. That's fine with me and my dad. We are all involved in the "big goodbye". Relatives come, friends come, and our house is full of people. They bring little gifts so we would remember them. It's all fine until they start those long crying speeches... thank goodness I was upstairs and didn't hear people crying for us. Come on, we're not dying! There is no need to cry. They should be happy for us. Well, maybe they cry for all those times we were together. We became important and now the important part leaves. I know it is hard to face

it for our friends, think how it is hard for me to leave. Girlfriends, boyfriends, grandparents, my best friend, my pet; I will have to leave them all. But I'll never forget. Of course, I will keep in touch with them: emails, letters, pictures, and phone calls. Anyway, I still think they should be happy. Look at the bright side; we will be happy if we leave with happy memories.

I remember when I was planning my "Big Goodbye". It was sad but what can I say? Only my best friends gathered in my house. Friends who supported me when I needed them. I planned to do some fun stuff, like playing our favorite games, but all we did was just sit around drinking orange juice and remembering the good times; ice-skating, dancing, doing some crazy stuff like dressing up for Halloween and scaring people. We were remembering those phone calls at night and holidays that we spent together; it was fun. And now it was my last night with them.

April. Only a few days left. Time for packing things, gifts, last goodbyes, last times. I know, it is really sad, but we'll have a good future. Still, I can't forget my last goodbye with special people like Brigita and Adrius. The most important people in my life. They stayed with me on my last day in Lithuania. All night we were sitting holding each other so tight. I didn't want anybody to separate us, not for a minute, not even for a second. It was a sleepless night. We were together, just like I wanted. I'm very happy now to know how those two people love me, I'm very happy to have these tears in my eyes. It is the best feeling in the world. So, until the last minute, they were with me. As were my grandparents and godmother. I felt so special.

It was five in the morning, when we had to leave for our flight.

We said our last goodbyes and... left. We promised each other not to cry. My best friend gave me her last gift. She made a huge book with a lot of pictures with my friends, notes and secrets. When I opened it I was crying so bad... I couldn't stop. It was the best thing she could give me. The flight was extremely long. Time was passing by so slowly; I thought we were flying forever but it was only four hours to Amsterdam and eight hours to Philadelphia. Twelve hours in the air plus the time we were waiting in the airport. I think it will be worth it. We will have a new life, new friends and new experiences. It sounds exciting. For the last few hours before we reached Philadelphia I was thinking only about that. We landed. Another hour was spent for documents and baggage. And here goes the funny part. Our friends were supposed to meet us at the airport; however the point is that we knew who they were, but we had never seen them. They were Jeanne and Tim Dorr. Jeanne is my grandmother's friend's cousin. We kept in touch while we were still in Lithuania. And here we are in Philadelphia, with no clue what they look like. My grandmother showed us their picture, but I couldn't remember. So, we're lost and all alone in the airport. My dad asked one man if he could borrow his cell phone. He called Jeanne. She answered on her phone. It was so funny because she was standing only a few feet away from us. But we saw each other and everything was O.K. My dad thanked the good fellow and we left with our new friends to our new home. We felt welcome in America.

Akvile Dudonyte

Akvile Dudonyte lives in Philadelphia and is a high school sophomore. She is also a member of St. Andrew's Lithuanian choir, Laisves.

The Cathedral of Vilnius

VILNIAUS KATEDRA

Senais laikais, turbūt niekur taip iskilmingai ir dziaugsmingai nesvesdavo Velyku, kaip Vilniaus kraste ir paciame Vilniaus mieste.....

In the old days, probably nowhere was Easter more gloriously or joyously celebrated than in the city of Vilnius and its environs. The inhabitants prepared for Easter with strict fasting, which underscored the solemnity and importance of the approaching holy day.

The Easter celebration lasted four days and during those days all the stores in town were closed, even though many of them belonged to people of different faiths. City offices were closed, and even the police conscientiously observed those four days, confident that even those persons inclined to criminality would follow their example. And in fact, during those holy days there were no thefts or other offenses against the law. If it happened that some crimes were committed, it was almost a certainty that the criminal was not a resident, but had arrived from some other place or territory.

The holidays began with solemn devotions in the cathedral, and when the cathedral bells began to ring at the hour of 12 midnight, reporting joyous news to the city, a response would come immediately from the bells of St. John's Church, then later St. Jacob's. Soon they were joined by other churches, and the whole city rang with the sound, echoing to every far corner. Even the Old Believers' churches, where Easter would be celebrated two weeks later, could not contain themselves, and their bells would join in the general gladness.

The devotions in the cathedral lasted about four hours, and were very festive, the bishop with his entire household taking part. The interior of the church was beautifully decorated, with a representation of Christ's tomb, attended by guards attired in colorful garb of ancient style. Earlier, before the hour of twelve, a statue of Christ clad in a shroud had been brought to the tomb, and when the bells began to ring, the shroud would be removed.

The people were squeezed in the cathedral, because not only the area residents would attend, but many would come in from the provinces, and even from much farther away. The celebrated choir would sing, and to hear them, many of Lithuania's dignitaries would come with their retinues, greatly increasing the number of participants. That day, people were not separated by class or wealth; but all elbowed their way towards Christ's tomb to pay their respects. Often a noble in splendid robes stood or knelt alongside a drably-dressed farmer or city-dweller. That day, all were equal, all took the same joy in Christ's Resurrection, and that joy embraced the whole city.

From the old days, there had spread a legend, that if anyone participated in the cathedral's Resurrection celebration for nine years in succession with no interruption, the risen Christ would appear to that person the last year, and bless them. Most folks believed that legend, and even by their family names indicated those who had been so blessed. Those persons never got sick, and remained happy and blessed through their lifetimes. People used to say that the last few of the required successive nine years were the hardest to keep, that all sorts of problems cropped up to prevent them from participating in the Easter celebration. It was necessary to be wary, and to be able to conquer all temptations, and most important, never to wander from the path of a just and honest life.

During 1740 the bishop of Vilnius, Mykolas Zienkovicus, was visiting in his diocese, and in one poor little parish's tiny wooden church he saw a statue of Christ carved by an unknown artist. This statue seemed very different from the little church, with its tiny windows and its wall darkened with age. It seemed, through its own beauty and distinction, to heighten the ceiling, expand the walls and transform the old wood of the little church into shiny black marble. The bishop was fascinated and wanted at any cost to cart the statue away to Vilnius's Cathedral.

— For this statue, even the Vilnius Cathedral is not good enough, and here it stands in a modest wooden chapel — he said.

But there was an obstacle, because the elderly pastor steadfastly refused to give the statue to the bishop.

— This is the only valuable thing we own in this parish — he protested.

The bishop threatened to take the statue by force, and shut the old pastor up in a monastery. The old man, weeping, gave in. The bishop felt guilty and very uncomfortable, seeing the old man in tears, and in payment for the offence, he promised to enlarge the parish's limits, thereby greatly increasing its income.

The statue journeyed to Vilnius bundled in sheets and laid in a full hay-wagon, the old pastor escorting it on foot, up to the parish's boundary, which at the time wasn't far.

The rumor soon spread in and around Vilnius, that the bishop had brought an extraordinary statue of Christ to the cathedral, and that it would make its first appearance at Eastertime, standing at the Tomb.

Within the city of Vilnius, beyond the Neris River, on a hill by the road to Ukmerge, in his own little wooden house lived the mason, Jonas Daugela, with his family. The family was small, comprising only of the father and mother, an 18-year-old daughter named Anna and a 20-year-old son, Peter. Daugela's family was industrious and orderly, the daughter helping her mother at home, and the son attending the monastery school until the age of 14, when he returned home to assist his father in his craft.

There was no lack of work, and they were often called upon to fix or build a stove, hearth or fireplace, correct a chimney, or to perform some larger bricklaying job. They earned good wages, though they had no other wealth besides their house and garden.

The son, when he was 14 years old, had attended the Easter celebration at the cathedral for the first time, and enjoyed it so much that he proposed to go again the next year. His father told him about the legend, and young Peter, seized with enthusiasm, decided that he would attend the Easter service nine years in a row. His father was doubtful about the plan, knowing it would be difficult to accomplish.

— For someone like us, an ordinary person without wealth, it would be very difficult to do. Our work takes us to various places, and time rules us, rather than the opposite — he said.

But Peter wouldn't change his mind, and from that time, each year he went to the Resurrection Mass at Vilnius Cathedral. Eight years passed, and 1740 was the ninth year. As Easter drew near, Peter made certain he didn't take a job too far from home, no matter how well-paying it might have been. The father did not insist, knowing his son's strong desire to fulfill the ninth year's attendance at the cathedral, and not wishing to obstruct him.

Slowly the day drew near. The great Lenten fast was tiring, but the hope of seeing the Risen Christ gave Peter renewed energy. Holy Thursday, Good Friday and the long-awaited Holy Saturday arrived.

That year, spring was somewhat early; during the past week much snow had melted, and the resulting waters rushed from the hills, swelling rivers and streams. The melt continued and the waters increased even after nightfall, as cold as it was.

On Holy Saturday, as he approached the crossing of the Neris River, Peter heard an unusual loud sound, and when he reached the place where the bridge should have been, he was astonished to see that it was gone, only the pillars protruding from the increasing river. The roaring floodwaters were carrying ice-floes which, grinding edges past each other, added their own thunder to the terrible noise.

Immense slabs of ice, carried by the current, piled up on each other, then slid aside and, diving back into the waters, contin-

uing in the flooded river's current, flowed along pushing against each other. Crossing this river was impossible.

Peter was despondent. He had attended the Resurrection Mass for eight years, and now, just when he was about to reach his goal, this obstacle had arisen to make all his hopes and efforts worthless. Suddenly, he remembered that, near the Hill of Gediminas, there was a place where a boatman ferried people over to the other side. He rushed over, but in despair he saw that the boat had been docked high on the ground, and the boatman was nowhere to be seen. Coming closer, through the darkness he saw a person standing at the riverbank, leaning on a long stick. Peter recovered hope, believing this was the boatman. Walking closer he asked,

— Could you take me across the river? I'm hurrying to get to the Resurrection Mass and will pay you well.

The man raised his head, and Peter realized that it wasn't the boatman, but a complete stranger.

— You are hurrying to the Easter celebration at the cathedral, but here people are in danger of death. Do you see that little house in that hollow? There lives a widow with two small children. The flood is rushing from the hillside and in a half-hour will overtake the house. What's needed here — he pointed — is a channel to be dug so that the water can run into the river. My hands are injured, and my side hurts, but you are young and healthy, and could do this. Here's a shovel — said the stranger.

Peter looked toward the cottage — the water was indeed about four feet away, and would surely overtake the house in a half-hour. Forgetting about his Easter plans, he grabbed the shovel and began to dig. The earth was not frozen in that area and the spade went in easily. He worked quickly; though it was cold, heavy perspiration covered his forehead. The waters were just two feet away from the cottage, when Peter with two strong strokes dug out the last clumps of earth that had prevented the water from running off. A strong stream caught the loosened earth and with a roar slammed through the ditch into the river. The danger past, the waters calmed and no longer threatened the little house.

Peter wiped his brow and watched with pleasure, the rapid course of water in the ditch.

— Now we can think about getting to the other side — he heard the stranger's voice. — If you aren't afraid to risk your life, I'll get you there. There is still time, and you can easily make it to Mass.

Only now did Peter remember the Easter service, and he asked the stranger urgently to get him across the River Neris. The man led him to the edge of the river where ice-floes of all sizes were thundering past, carried on the swift current.

— Do as I do, and do not hesitate — he said.

They were standing on the riverbank. It was frightening to see the swollen river's swiftly running waters with their burden of ice. Fear overtook Peter, and he wanted to move away from the water's edge, but his wish to attend the Easter service won out.

As a particularly large block of ice moved past the bank, the stranger jumped up on it and so did Peter. The current ripped the floe away from the bank and carried it to the middle of the river, but the stranger, using his staff to push away surrounding ice, slowly guided them toward the opposite bank. He used the staff so deftly, it seemed as if they traveled in a boat instead of on a block of ice. Soon they reached the other side, and they safely jumped to the ground.

— Now you can go to the Resurrection Mass — said the stranger.

— Are you not going? — Peter asked.

— I will be there, and you will see me — the stranger answered, walking away into the shadows.

Peter arrived at the cathedral before the ceremonies began. There were not as many people as usual, since the destruction of the bridge and the ice moving on the river kept many people on the other side of the Neris. He easily made his way to Christ's Tomb, and, kneeling, he silently prayed. He didn't notice when the ceremonies began, nor when the procession started or when the statue standing before the tomb was unveiled, and only the ringing of the bells roused him with the news that Christ had risen.

Peter raised his eyes to the statue and was stunned to recognize the statue as the stranger who told him to dig the ditch, and who later carried him across the river. The statue held a long staff and its pierced right hand was raised in a blessing. Peter remembered the stranger's words:

— My hands are injured, and my side hurts — and falling to his knees, raising his eyes to the statue's face, he whispered,

— My Lord, forgive me, but I didn't know You.

Through the flickering flames of the candles, it seemed to him that a forgiving smile passed over the statue's face.

— The Lord be with you — intoned a priest from the great middle altar.

Peace washed over Peter, and he felt as an exhausted traveler after a long and hard journey, reaching a place of rest. And he understood that the half-hour he had spent digging a trench to protect the home of a poor widow with two small children, had brought him much closer to the Lord than nine years' attendance at Easter Mass in Vilnius Cathedral.

He left the church another person, confirmed in his faith and with a peaceful soul. The ice had passed by, and boatmen were ferrying people over the river. Arriving home, Peter told his father,

— Father, I saw Him.

The details of his experience, he told to others only in his old age, having reached 81 years. His story was remembered for a long time by those to whom it had been told, and they repeated it again many times, remembering that Peter reached a gray old age without ever being sick.

After that Resurrection Mass in the cathedral, the artistic statue of Christ disappeared. It was supposed that the congregants of the poor parish had stolen it and carried it back to their own little church, but others believed the statue had returned on its own, not liking the noise of the city and the cold walls of the cathedral. There was even one woman who swore that, on her way to Vilnius, she met a man with a long staff, resembling the cathedral's statue, walking on the road leading to the poor little church. When she spoke to him, he replied only:

— I am going there, from whence I came.

The bishop forgot about the statue and didn't search for it. With time, people forgot, too. But the poor parish's boundaries remained expanded.

By Genrikas Songinas
English translation by Gloria O'Brien

Genrikas Songinas was born in Lithuania in 1895. After WW2 he lived in Chicago and was a well-known writer. He collected legendary stories, intending to publish them eventually, but died in 1977 before he could do so. His grandson did that, in 1988. The book is called "Vilniaus Krasto Legendos", "Legends of Vilnius Territory".

Gloria Kivytaite O'Brien is a frequent contributor to Bridges

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Calendar of Events²² for March and April

Please verify all dates, times, and places as events are subject to change.

MARCH

March 4-7, 2005

Mid-America District
Spring Meeting and
St. Casimir's Day
Hosted by Council 133
Los Angeles, CA.
More information to
follow:
www.knightsoflithuania.com

March 5, 2005 - 5 pm

Lithuanian
Independence Day
Portland, OR
Lithuanian American
Community
Contact:
Zalpai999@aol.com

March 5, 2005

Independence Day and
St. Casimir's Day
Celebration
Community gathering and
program following
11am Mass
St. Cyril's Church and Hall
44 N Mill, Kansas City, KS
For more information:
www.aidasdancers.org

March 6, 2005

St. Casimir Feast
Celebration 11am Mass,
followed by Council 3
meeting & social in
parish hall
St. George Church
Salmon & Venango Sts.
Philadelphia, PA
Knights of Lithuania
Council 3
Information: 215-426-6762

March 6, 2005

Commemoration of
Lithuania's Independence,
12:00 Mass
Our Lady of the
Assumption Church
Osterville, MA
1:30 pm.
Commemoration
Church Hall
Sponsors:
LAC Cape Cod Chapter
www.javlb.org

March 6, 2005 - 9:30 am

February 16th
Commemoration
Sts. Peter & Paul Church
520 Myrtle Street NW
Grand Rapids, MI 49504
Program: Mass, Networking
and potluck lunch
Sponsors: LAC Chapter of
Grand Rapids, MI
(chair Sigile Conway)
Grand Rapids Chapter
www.javlb.org

March 6, 2005

Commemoration of
Independence Day
Mass - 11am
Commemoration - 12 pm
Sts. Peter's and Paul's
Parish Hall
216 Ripley Place,
Elizabeth, NJ
Sponsors:
LAC Elizabeth Chapter
Speaker: Mr. Mindaugas
Butkus, Lithuanian Consul
General in New York
Program: Concert of
Varpelis children's choir
(directed by Birute Mockiene)
Performance by Saturday
school students - Snacks
Elizabeth Chapter

March 6, 2005

Commemoration of
Independence Day
Mass - 10:30 am
Commemoration-11:30 am
Hall of Lithuanian Catholic
Church
1509 Baugh Ave., East St.
Louis, IL
Sponsors: Lithuanian
American Community,
East St. Louis Chapter
Speaker: East St. Louis
Chapter Chair
Danute Zabaite-Lasky
Program: Lunch, Movie
about Lithuania
(by Joe Verbalis) and Sing
along fun
East St. Louis Chapter
www.javlb.org

March 12, 2005

Multicultural Festival
10:00 am - 4:00 pm
Cape Cod Community
College
Cape Cod, MA
We will participate with
Lithuanian displays and
film about Lithuania.
www.javlb.org

March 12, 2005 - 2 pm

Commemoration of
Lithuanian Independence
Declaration & Restitution
Hall of St. Paul of the
Cross Church
10970 Highway A1A
North Palm Beach, FL 33408
Speaker:
Vygaudas Usackas,
Ambassador of Lithuania
to the U.S.
Program: Concert by local
Lithuanian choir Daina
(director Renata Armalaite)
Sponsors: Palm Beach LAC
(chair Kestutis K. Miklas)
Palm Beach Chapter
www.javlb.org

March 13 & 27, 2005

12:30 pm, Roman Catholic
Mass in Lithuanian will be
celebrated at the Our Lady
of Guadalupe Chapel,
which is located on
55th Ave one block south
of Glendale Ave,
Glendale, Arizona.
The Mass is followed by
coffee, snacks, and
fellowship.
For information regarding
the Arizona Lithuanian
Mission please contact:
Algis Kvedaras
623-974-1860
kvedaras@earthlink.net

March 13, 2005

Council 141
St. Casimir's Day
Celebration
St. George Church
443 Park Ave.
Bridgeport, CT.
Mass 11:30 am

Brunch in the church hall.
\$15.00 per person.
Reservations deadline is
March 6th.
www.knightsoflithuania.com
www.javlb.org

March 13, 2005 - 2 pm

Lithuanian Independence
Commemoration
Matulaitis Nursing Home Hall
10 Thurber Road,
Putnam, CT
Speaker:
Skirmante Kondratiene,
Advisor to the President
of Lithuanian Republic
Program:
Worcester/Boston folk
group DOLIJA
(director Egida Matulioniene)
Other Surprises, Networking
Sponsors: Lithuanian
American Community,
Eastern Connecticut
Chapter: www.javlb.org

March 13, 2005 - 3.00 pm

Easter Egg decorating
Bernice Feliss will teach
the art of Lithuanian
Easter Egg decorating.
Bring your friends and get
ready for Easter
Admission by donation.
Latvian Community Center
10705 W Virginia Ave
Lakewood, CO
Contact: Arv Jarasius
(Colorado Chapter)
www.javlb.org

March 19, 2005

New England
District Board Meeting
The NED will meet at the
Sisters of the Immaculate
Conception, Putnam, CT.
Lunch will be at noon and
the meeting will be at
1:00 pm
www.knightsoflithuania.com

Calendar continued on back page.

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CHICAGO REPRESENTATIVES

Rita Pencyliene..... tel: 708-923-0280 e-mail: pencylar@comcast.net

Brone Barakauskiene.....tel: 708-403-5717 e-mail: mamabar3@aol.com

All VYTIS representatives speak English and Lithuanian!!

March 19, 2005

Basketball Tournament
"Lithuanian Embassy Cup 2005"
Embassy of the Republic of Lithuania will host the annual men's basketball tournament "Embassy Cup 2005"
The tournament will be held at the Catholic University of America (CUA) in Washington D.C.
After the tournament there will be a reception at the Embassy of Lithuania in honor of the champions featuring Lithuanian food and beer. Entrance to the receptions will be free to all participants and spectators.
The tournament will start at 8:30 am and will continue till about 6:30 pm. The reception will begin at 7:00 till 9:00 pm. We will send the directions and tournament schedule when we will have the full list of participants. If you have any questions regarding the tournament please contact:
Alvydas Jocys: cell or e-mail at 202-234-5860
ext.126, 202-368-8943
alvydas@ltembassyus.org

March 20, 2005

Lithuanian Easter Egg Workshop
Seattle Daughters of Lithuania
Hosted by artist
Nomeda Lukoseviciene
nomeda@msn.com

APRIL

April 3, 2005

Easter Egg decoration
Lithuanian style
9:00 am to 12:00 noon
(bring some hard-boiled eggs to work on)
202 W. 4th Ave., Escondido, CA
Sponsor: Bernardas Brazdionis
Lithuanian Saturday School and San Diego Lithuanian American Community
You'll be served coffee & cookies and have a great time.
www.javlb.org
April 3, 2005 - 3.00 pm
Potato Pancake Dinner
We're reviving a favorite from the past: the all you can eat potato pancake dinner!
No lines this year, as the pancakes will be made ahead of time. Come on by for companionship and food.
Admission: \$10
Fraternal Order of Eagles Hall
1151 S. Galena Street
(just west of Mississippi and Havana)
Denver, CO 80247
For information contact:
Arv Jarasius (Colorado Chapter)
www.javlb.org

April 9, 2005 - 7 pm

Lithuanian Music Hall
2715 E. Allegheny Ave., Phila, PA
Lithuanian Drama Group of Connecticut presents one act comedy by Vida Bladykaite "Zenteliai" (Sons-in-Law)
Followed by dancing to the music of Stasys Telsinskas.
Sponsored by Phila. Chapter of LAC and Phila. Chapter of Lithuanian Youth Association.
Information: 215-938-0783
gecysta@verizon.net

April 10 and 24 12:30 pm

Roman Catholic Mass will be celebrated in Lithuanian at the Our Lady of Guadalupe Chapel which is located on 55th Ave.
one block south of Glendale Ave
Glendale, Arizona
The Mass is followed by coffee, snacks, and fellowship.
For information regarding the Arizona Lithuanian Mission
Contact: Algis Kvedaras
623 - 974 - 1860
kvedaras@earthlink.net

April 16, 2005

Knights of Lithuania
The Supreme Council
Annual Spring Meeting in Pittsburgh, PA
Wyndam Airport Hotel
Council 19 will be our host.
For more information:
www.knightsoflithuania.com

April 23, 2005

Bus trip to St. Jude Shrine and Baltimore's Inner Harbor
Knights of Lithuania Council 3
St. George Church
Edgemont & Venango Sts.
Philadelphia, PA
Departure 9 am,
Returns - 8:30 - 9 pm
Cost - \$35 per person
April 9 is deadline for reservations. Tickets or more information: Lillian Greymas
215-426-6762

April 24, 2005

New England
District Spring Meeting.
The members of the NED will meet in Hartford, CT.
The meeting will be hosted by Council 6 .
www.knighsoflithuania.com

LITHUANIAN AMERICAN NEWS JOURNAL

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VOLUME 29 ISSUE 2

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12/1/2005
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