

bridges

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may 2006

LITHUANIAN AMERICAN NEWS JOURNAL

Letter from the Editor

This issue of Bridges starts by honoring mothers, grandmothers and all women who care for, love and nurture children. It is probably the most difficult, but least appreciated job in the world. Unfortunately, it seems we have to grow older ourselves to truly appreciate the love and sacrifices our mothers made for us. Dorothy Minkus McKenna shares her beautiful memories of her grandmother's kitchen.

With Memorial Day soon approaching, Henry Gaidis pays tribute to the Baltimore Lithuanian American Legion Post. Thanks to Eugene Uzpurvis of the Cape Cod Chapter of the LAC for sharing their Feb 16 - March 11 commemoration with us. Tomas Pleckaitis' moving speech given to the New Haven, CT chapter says it all. The June issue will feature Norfolk, VA's commemoration. How about more chapters sharing with the Bridges' readers?

Thanks to Elizabeth Didzbalis for writing about the V. Kudirka Lithuanian School. There aren't many English videos available about Lithuania's beautiful monasteries. Now is your chance to own a copy of one by contacting the Sisters of St. Casimir in Chicago.

Gloria O'Brien lets us know how the cuckoo came about while Ed Shakalis tests our knowledge with another trivia quiz.

It was a busy basketball season as you will see from Laurynas Misevicius' and Vytautas Brazauskas' articles.

Thinking about summer? Don't miss M. Rimavicius' article about Camp Neringa. Speaking of summer, do you have your tickets for the July 2 Song Festival in Chicago?

Congratulations to the US Baltic Foundation on their gala and to Raymond E. Snyder, Jr. for being selected Waterbury, CT's Mayor for the Day on Feb. 16. To the wonderful ladies who are knitting and sending packages to the orphanages in Lithuania, thank you and God bless you.

As you probably know, the cost of Bridges will increase by \$2 a year on June 1. The price has remained the same since 1992 despite increases in postage and printing.

Speaking of Lithuania, by the time you receive this issue, God willing, I will be on my way to Lithuania. I hope to visit many of the families I have written about and introduce you to the many new children I hope to meet.

Hopefully, I will also have some exciting interviews.

Happy Mother's Day and please take a moment to reflect on the meaning of Memorial Day.

Happy reading!


Jeanne Shalna Dorr

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in this issue:

2
editorial
Letter
from the Editor
Jeanne Dorr

4
mother's Day
Endless Love!
Jeanne Dorr

6
mother's day
Grandma's
Lithuanian Great
Room
*Dorothy
Minkus-McKenna*

7
cultural
Experiencing the
"Wow" of
Camp Neringa
M. Rimavičius

8
memorial day
Lithuanian
American Legion
History
Henry L. Gaidis

12
lac chapter
"Vasario 16-ta" on
Cape Cod.
*Submitted by
Eugene Uzpurvis*

12
trivia
Mother Earth
*Submitted by
Edward Shakalis*

13
lac chapter
Lithuanian
INDEPENDENCE
DAY,
Past and Present
Tomas Pleckaitis

14
education
Dr. Vincas Kudirka
Lithuanian School
*Eiizabeth
Danguole Didzbalis*

15
"Pazaislis
Monastery Idyll"

16
art
Jadvyga Paukštienė

16
Child's Gate to
Learning
Ramune Kubilius

17
news and views
Jeanne Dorr

17
here at home
US Baltic
Foundation
Vytautas Brazauskas

18
sports
Ambassador's
Cup games
Vytautas Brazauskas

19
treasures among us
Lithuanian Mayor
for the Day
*Submitted by
Laurynas R. Misevičius*

19
treasures among us
Hats Off
*Submitted by
Laurynas R. Misevičius*

20
sports
"Lietuvos
Telekomas" from
Vilnius
Laurynas R. Misevičius

21
baltic folklore
How the Cuckoo
Came to be.
*Translated by
Gloria O'Brien*

24
Calendar of Events

*Cover: *Madonna and Child* By *Jadvyga Paukstiene* Chicago 1967
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mother's day

Jeanne Dorr

Endless Love!

A mother is the truest friend we have, when trials, heavy and sudden, fall upon us; when adversity takes the place of prosperity; when friends who rejoice with us in our sunshine, desert us when troubles thicken around us, still will she cling to us, and endeavor by her kind precepts and counsels to dissipate the clouds of darkness, and cause peace to return to our hearts."

Washington Irving

Endless Love

Although being the editor of Bridges has given me the opportunity to meet so many wonderful people, I feel a certain sadness that I no longer have the time to write in each issue. In the past I loved to share my stories of the children and families I visited in Lithuania. I don't make New Year's resolutions because I never keep them. And yet, I promised myself I would write more often. So much for good intentions; here it is May and I'm getting around to my first article of 2006.

Mother's Day evokes memories of our dear mothers, grandmothers, aunts and other women who played a major role in our lives. But for many children, this is not always true. The memories of a mother are not filled with love and happy memories. I met nuns, teachers, social workers, foster parents, and yes, I met fathers and grandfathers who fulfilled the role of mothers. I even met an older brother, twenty one years old, who was raising his two orphaned younger brothers by himself.

It was very difficult to select someone in Lithuania to write about for Mother's Day. I met so many people who have done so much for Lithuania's children that the task was almost impossible. In fact, I decided to single out some of these people from time to time in future issues of Bridges.

Lithuanian Orphan Care encourages and supports small group homes with a mother and a father in the home. In this environment children learn how to live in a family. When they turn eighteen years of age, they still have a mother, father, brothers and sisters and the world doesn't seem such a cold and uncaring place.



Aldona and her daughter enjoy a quiet moment.



Aldona and her family prepare for winter.

So now, let's move on and please meet two fantastic foster mothers.

Aldona Sereika

Twenty-nine children? Surely one would have to take leave of her senses to take care of that many children at home. And yet, that's how many children were in the home of Aldona Sereika the first time I visited the family.

I was having trouble combing my hair and brushing the cheese and bread crumbs off my skirt while finishing my breakfast and trying to get ready to visit this family. But then again, that's how things are when trying to visit Orphan Care families. There's no time to primp in front of a mirror or eat a leisurely breakfast. The theme is always, "Let's go." Even today those words give me an upset stomach.

Regina Svoba of Countryside Children filled me in on the family as we drove from Vilnius to the countryside. Regina told me she visited the family when she wanted to relax or felt overwhelmed with work. Good grief, another Lithuanian who appeared to have taken leave of her senses. As a teacher, my first reaction would be to head to a deserted island to relax, not visit a house filled with children.

The Sereikas are farmers raising food, cows, pigs and chickens. As we all know, there is no such thing as a "day off" for farmers and everyone has to do their fair share of work. Aldona was working in a field with her pants rolled up to her knees, while Stasys, her husband, was fixing machinery. There were children of various sizes and ages doing a variety of chores.

The house was spotless, and had a comfortable lived in feeling. Each child had a small personal space for belongings that was off limits to the rest. Respect for others was obviously being taught by example.

Why would someone take this kind of commitment upon themselves? The Sereikas were not childless. They always loved children and with the orphanages bulging at the seams and daily reports of child abuse in the local paper, they knew they had enough love and energy to go around. They just didn't plan on twenty-nine! When the word got out about the Sereikas and the outstanding job they were doing, social services seemed to know exactly where to place those who were abandoned, abused, or were runaways.

Where do you start and what do you do in this situation? I asked them their philosophy in raising such a large family. Aldona said she considers Stasys the anchor of the family, while Stasys gave all the credit to his wife. They settled it with the statement, "Neither of us is the boss."

At this point, I was getting worn out even though I had not moved off the couch. One child was asleep with her head on my shoulder while another was sleeping in my arms. I asked Aldona how she coped day in and day out. She laughed and said I should have been there is the beginning. Twelve of the children were wetting their beds and she never had her hands out of the wash tub. Not one child came without excess mental baggage. Most endured more in their short lives than we could ever imagine.

Although we brought sweets, not one child touched them or asked to taste them. Only when Aldona, nodded each child took one piece of candy. No one went back for seconds. They learned consideration for others through example.

Education is a priority. They insist that the children stay in school and work to the best of their ability. The family is deeply religious and everyone attends Mass. It's not a question that is open for discussion.

Not long after the family grew by leaps and bounds, Aldona became critically ill. While in the hospital the doctors told Stasys that she might not survive. He brought photographs of each of the children and she kept them near her. When she had enough strength, she held the photos in her hands. She literally refused to die because she could not leave Stasys and her children. She had enough love and concern for her children to will herself to stay alive.

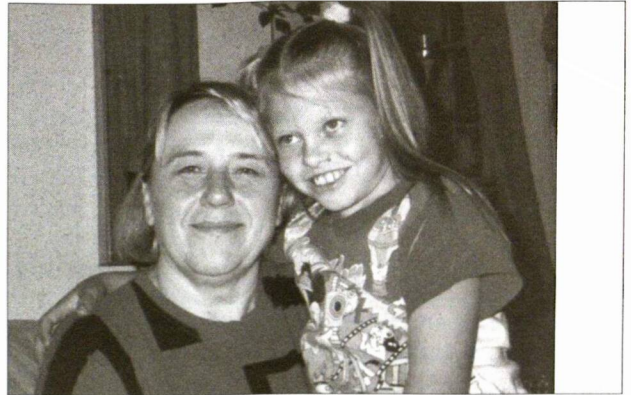
I always visit this family when I'm in Lithuania. Many of the children are grown, married, and living on their own. But they, their spouses and their children will always have a home and a place to spend the holidays with Aldona and Stasys.

On the way back to Vilnius, Regina and I talked and talked about our visit. Was she relaxed in this house with twenty-nine children? She certainly was. She was so relaxed that she forgot it was her twenty-fifth wedding anniversary that day.

Elena Ilgunas

My second group home encounter was with Elena Ilgunas and her husband, Aleksandras. As with the Sereika visit, breakfast was eaten getting into the car while hoping my hair didn't look like a nesting place for storks because there was no time to comb it. Once again the same words kept echoing, "Let's go." Not too bad this time, only fourteen children here. While driving to the Anyksciu area I was filled in with the details about each child.

The house is a typical Lithuanian farm. The front garden was planted with beautiful flowers for all to enjoy. This is also a house where the wash is never finished and something is always cooking on the stove. A huge table was filled with spread out with wedding gowns. Wedding gowns? More than half of these kids were not even teenagers. Was Elena planning on early weddings? No, nine of the children were being prepared for First Communion. A local business that rented wedding gowns asked her if she wanted the outdated gowns. Needless to say, she ran



Elena is never too tired to receive a hug and a smile

to get them. When the farm work was finished, she started her second shift, working late into the night sewing First Communion dresses for each of her daughters

Although in subsequent visits, only after I got to know her well, I have seen Elena worried about some of her children, concerned about financial problems or upset about the theft of the family's van from their yard, but she tends to find the humor in her every day life. There was the time Tomas was looking at his brother's coins even though he was told never to touch them. The "collection" actually consisted of three coins. He panicked when the door opened and swallowed a coin. The entire family spent several days watching vigilantly for Tomas to "pass" the coin.

At one point everyone was in school except for little Jūratė. Elena realized she had not heard Jurate for some time. Imagine her horror when she found her with scissors in her hand and her beautiful blonde hair in a heap on the floor. But that was not Jūratė's masterpiece. Entering the room was an almost bald cat! Jūratė smiled with pride at her great skill in hair styling.

The horrors that brought each of these children into the house and hearts of Elena and Aleksandras are beyond what we can imagine. Many of those horrors were inflicted by their biological mothers.

Aldona and Elena are just two examples of many courageous women in Lithuania. They don't have a million dollar contracts and you won't find their names in newspapers and magazines. But every day they go through the mundane routines that most women in the world face. What most women don't face every day is healing the bodies and minds of these broken children who look at them lovingly and reach out for a kiss or hug from two extraordinary women. They love and protect their children the same as mothers all over the world.

To sponsor a child through Lithuanian Orphan Care please send a check for \$150 to: **Lithuanian Orphan Care**
2711 W. 71st St.
Chicago, IL 60629

A donation of any amount is gratefully appreciated.
All donations are tax deductible.

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.

Grandma's Lithuanian Great Room: circa the 1950's

Great rooms are not a product of the late 20th century. They existed long before then but by another name, kitchen. In reality, my grandmother's kitchen was a great room – not in the physical sense but in the psychological sense. It was the center of our Lithuanian household and the most important family activities.

Grandma Minkus arrived in the United States in 1909 and after a brief stay in central Massachusetts, moved to the house in Westfield, Massachusetts where she lived until her death in 1958. It was there where she raised three sons, entertained me and my cousins, and steeped us in Lithuanian culture.

Physically and figuratively, her kitchen was the center of the house. The room measured 14 feet by 13 feet. Like an octopus, rooms extended off in all directions from the kitchen. There were 6 doors entering/exiting the kitchen: one from the front entry way, one to the living room, one to the master bedroom, one to the pantry, one to the back hall and one to the sun porch.

Upon entering the kitchen, immediately the heat would hit you. Regardless of the season, the temperature was generally in the 80s because Grandpa was always cold, and it seemed that something was always cooking on top or in the gas stove, marble soup (*bulviniai kleckai*) or potato pancakes (*bulviniai blynai*), or baking in the oven like

apple or cherry pie, all examples of Lithuanian soul food. At least Grandpa did not have to sleep on the stove how they did during the frigid winters back in Lithuania. The kitchen had a special smell. Not an odor but a comforting smell – a combination of various Lithuanian soul foods, an aroma which triggers my nostalgia.

The very center of the kitchen was generally empty except during the winter when a rocking chair occupied by my Grandfather would face the stove, or a collapsible rack would be set up to dry the clothes.

A refrigerator was the only electrical appliance in the kitchen. That's where the headcheese (*košelina*) and farmer's cheese (*sūris*) were kept. By today's standards, the refrigerator might qualify as apartment-sized but we could use the unheated room at the back of the house or the porch for extra cold storage for the *Kūčios* or Easter (*Velykos*) gatherings. The porch could also be used to make horse radish (*krienai*), a process that needed all the ventilation possible.

Next to the refrigerator was the message center: a small table with a heavy black telephone with a cord! It weighed as much as a bowling ball and that's probably how old phones were recycled in those days.

A white porcelain sink hung off the left wall with the pantry off to the left. This is where the sausage (*dešros*) operations took place, a favorite especially at Easter time. Not a single cabinet in the kitchen. A pantry? Now there's a word you don't hear much today. The best way to

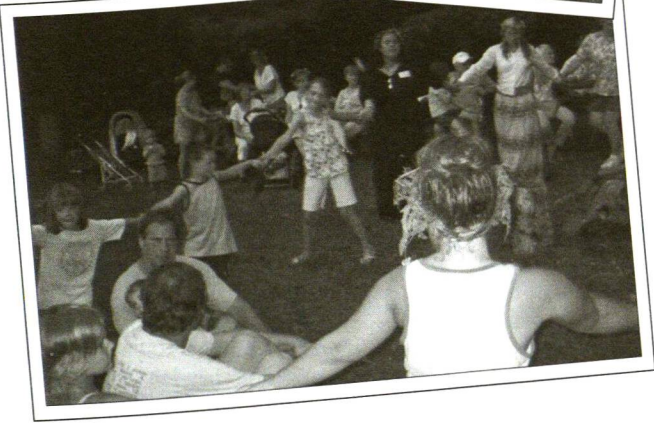
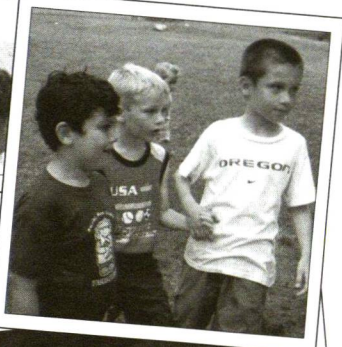
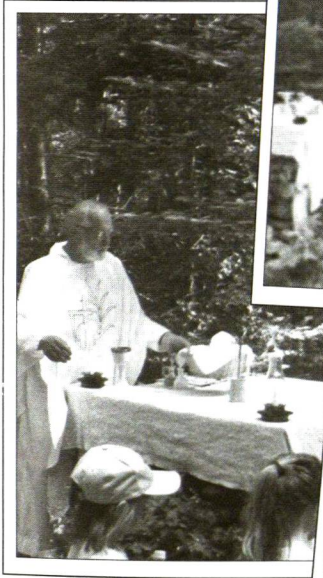
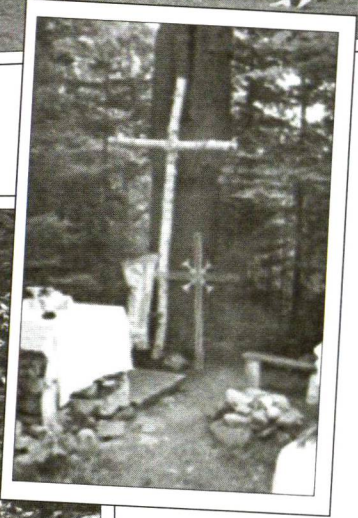
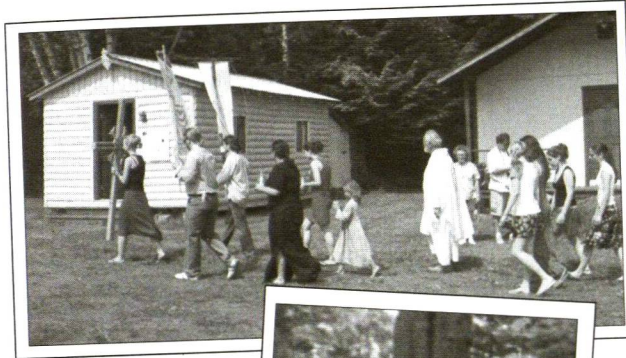
describe it is a walk-in closet approximately 5 feet by 8 feet, where the dishes, cookware and ingredients were stored. The black bread (*juoda duona*), canned jars of mushrooms (*grybai*) and a crock of homemade pickles (*raugiti agurkai*) could be found on its shelves.

Another sensation that permeated the kitchen was the sound of the ticking wind-up clock. An old-fashioned oak clock stood on a short shelf with a piece of Lithuanian linen hanging off. The rhythmic ticking was hypnotic and it always worked in a power outage. A crucifix hung on the opposite wall.

In the southeastern corner of the kitchen, stood a day bed. Grandpa used to pass the time on the day bed. Catty-corner to the day bed were tall bow windows with long lacy curtains, the kind that are still popular in Lithuania today. Through these curtains, he could see all the action on the front stoop. Because the window had a southern exposure, various plants like a snake plant could be found there. Grandpa would read the Lithuanian newspaper, doze a little or listen to the radio but he'd always be aware of all the action. A chunky radio also made out of oak with tall glass tubes inside was the only media center and Lithuanian music programs or opera were often heard. If a family was lucky enough to own a television back in the 1950's, it occupied a place of honor in the living room. Periodically, a wooden frame for weaving rag rugs leaned against the wall.

Continued on page 17

M. Rimavičius



Experiencing the “Wow” of Camp Neringa

Camp Neringa is the place to go!

Camp Neringa is the place to be. Each summer our family loves our four days of singing, dancing, crafts, learning, laughing, praying, eating, games, camaraderie, and sūkiiai (cheers) at the Lithuanian Heritage Family Camp. We experience the “wow” of Camp Neringa.

The “wow” comes from the enthusiastic, loving, talented, and sensitive staff and volunteers of the camp. Whether setting up props for a skit or preparing spiritual contemplative questions for families to discuss, their passion shines through all the activities they present. And it is contagious!

The “wow” comes from the things to do. Saying that we participated in singing or crafts or dancing may sound generic, but what makes it so special is the integration of learning through fun activities and the continuing thread of a theme. Children made paper airplanes and then learned of the historic flight of Darius and Girenas by watching a skit. We made juostos (sashes) and learned about the meaning of the different patterns, then learned to hop and skip to the rhythms of folk music dances.

The “wow” comes from the relationships with other families that develop during our time there. A special time for this relationship-building is during prūdas (pond) time. While the kids find a place to swim, look for salamanders, dig in the sand, and explore, the adults share stories of how they camped at or discovered Neringa, who had the Lithuanian blood in their family, what kinds of traditions they upheld at home, or how they adopted children from Lithuania.

Camp Neringa gives my family the time, place and tools to discover ourselves as a family, discover ourselves spiritually, and develop a further appreciation for my heritage and roots. Camp Neringa provides a safe and secure environment in which to do this. We truly experienced the “wow” of this special place.

You have to go and appreciate the beauty of this camp nestled in the Green Mountains of Vermont. If you go, bring your enthusiasm, nets, curiosity and smiles.

M. Rimavičius
St. Louis, MO

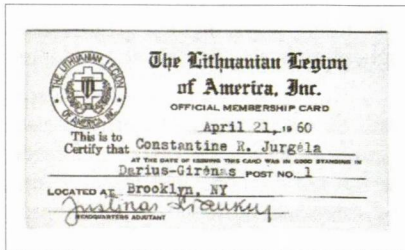
Camp Neringa provides Lithuanian cultural camping experiences through different sessions for children, families, and adults in Lithuanian or English.

To learn more about Camp Neringa’s programs, visit www.neringa.org or contact camp director Vida Strazdis vida@neringa.org 978-582-5592

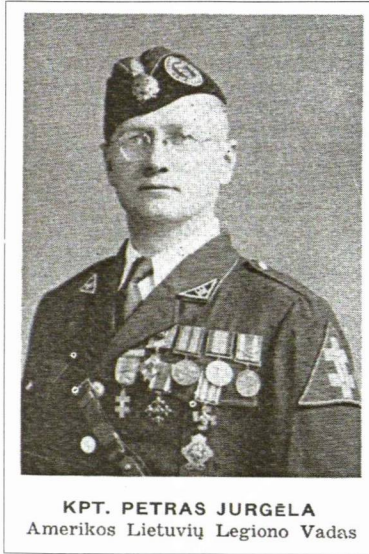
Iki pasimatymo at Neringa!

Lithuanian American Legion History

Not all American Legion Posts are the same nor do they all share a common founding history. Surely Maryland Lithuanian Post No. 154, Baltimore, Maryland, due to its strong ethnic ties, is unique among American Legion Posts. Most readers know the history of the American Legion and therefore there is little need to recap its distinguished history to the United States. Still I would like to make a few brief comments about the founding of the American Legion in order to establish a time prospective. The American Legion was founded immediately following the end of World War I by veterans gathering together in friendship in Paris, France. All American Legion posts annually celebrate the Legion's 1919 founding to this day.



Though this same camaraderie existed among World War I veterans in the American Lithuanian community their situation was not the same. Most were recent immigrants or the sons of first generation immigrants who had fled their homeland occupied by Imperial German or Czarist Russia armies. Like most recent immigrants, the Lithuanian Americans frequently proved to be more patriotic in the defense of their newly adopted homeland than those longer in the country. Even before the



war, the Baltimore Lithuanian immigrants had formed fraternal military organizations such as the Knights of Saint George and the Knights of Saint Casimir. Each member had vivid recollections of what it was like to live under a foreign occupation that even attempted to impose a foreign language and religion upon them. President Wilson's call for the restoration of freedom to all of the peoples of Europe was heard by every immigrant across the United States. For this reason, the Lithuanian Americans quickly rallied behind the colors and flocked to join the American armed forces in 1918. I have no facts concerning the total contribution of Lithuanian Americans as a whole, but the small Baltimore Lithuanian community numbering about 2500 men, women, and children, provided over 150 able body soldiers to the cause. Many served overseas and a number died in the defense of their country.

Space precludes providing a detailed history of the contribution of the Baltimore Lithuanian American community to the war effort. Still I would like to cite one example from those who served. Baltimorean Mindow Leonard Zemaitis was born in Pandela, Lithuania and emigrated as a child with his family during the early

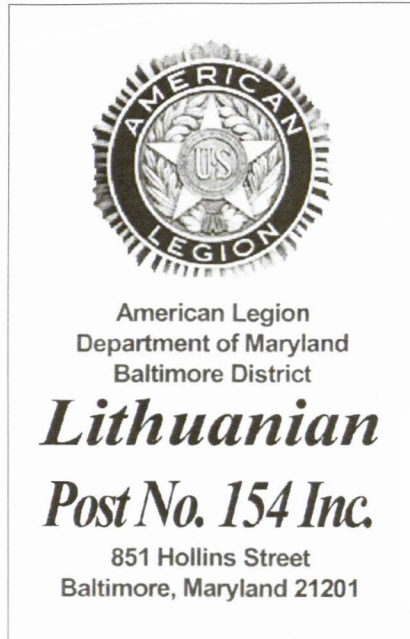
years of the twentieth century. Mindow left his family and traveled to Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, where on May 2, 1917, he enlisted in the U.S. Marine Corps. Assigned to the 43 Company 5th Regiment, he was shipped overseas, on June 7, 1917, with little more training than learning how to salute and shoot a rifle. He fought bravely along side his American born comrades at Toulon-Troyon, Aisne, and Chateau-Thierry until he was killed in action. Mindow died on July 3, 1917, far from the place of his birth or his new home in America. Some would say he was like many American heroes who died in that war for his country. Still there is a difference about Mindow's story. He did not have to serve. This young Lithuanian American lied about his age and enlisted in the U.S. Marine Corps at age 16 without telling anyone. At age 17, Mindow died fighting for his adopted country, surely dreaming of the one day his ancestral homeland would also be free. Similar stories can be told in every Lithuanian American community in America.

Even before the noise, horror, and smoke of the battles of the First World War had been forgotten, Lithuanian American war veterans returning home began to seek ways to liberate their ancestral homeland. As a result, most Lithuanian American veterans chose to then avoid the newly founded American Legion in favor of forming their own veteran organizations with the objective of not only caring for their fellow comrades, but helping in the struggle for Lithuanian independence. From these small groups of veterans several larger organizations evolved the most notable being the Freedom Guards (Laisvės Sargai), the American Lithuanian Legion (Amerikos Lietuvių Legionas) and the Alliance of American Lithuanian Soldiers (Amerikos Lietuvių Kareivių Susivienijimas).

Though these veterans anticipated full support from the American government

for their venture, the administration hesitated in favor of establishing a joint allied military policy for Eastern Europe. With this delay, the Lithuanian American community took it upon itself to go to the aid of Lithuania. In early 1919, Julius Bielskis was appointed by the Lithuanian American Congress as the chief organizer of the proposed brigade. Bielskis was soon joined by Colonel William N. Swarthout, a career American military officer, sent from Lithuania to help in this endeavor. Within a few weeks, Bielskis estimated that approximately 10,000 volunteers were ready to go to Lithuania, but due to the existing political situation in the United States, their travel to Lithuania would have to be arranged in a clandestine manner. A plan was soon developed for these volunteers to travel to Canada as laborers and from there sail to Riga, Latvia, from where they could safely proceed to Lithuania. A contingent staff consisting Colonel William N. Swarthout, Major Oscar F. Newkirk, Captain Julius Bielskis, and Captain Vladas Lazdynas, traveled to Lithuania in the fall of 1919 to coordinate the arrival of the volunteers and the establishment of the Brigade in Lithuania. Upon their arrival, the brigade contingent soon learned that the Lithuanian Minister of Defense, fearing that the arriving Americans posed some imaginary threat to the new government, refused to allow the brigade formation. He was happy to receive the American volunteers, but demanded they be disbursed among existing Lithuanian Army units. Due to the resulting dispute between the brigade contingent and the minister, the actual formation of the Lithuanian American Brigade never came to fruition. Fighting in Lithuania soon terminated and the nation established with only about 500 of the Lithuanian American volunteers actually taking part in the struggle for the nation's independence.

Though the idea of the proposed



Lithuanian American Brigade ceased, these established Lithuanian American veterans' units soon evolved into traditional veteran organizations. On February 16, 1930, some seven of the larger organizations consolidated and formed the Lithuanian Legion of America. The organization was officially incorporated in the State of New York as a patriotic, nonpartisan organization of former soldiers and sailors of Lithuanian extraction. One of the major differences between the Lithuanian Legion of America and the American Legion was that latter organization admitted anyone who had served in either the American or Lithuanian armed forces. Most of the founding members had served as American military in World War I or the Lithuania War of Independence (1918-1920). A few of these veterans had also served in the Spanish American War or taken part in the Philippine Insurrection. The one binding strand of the organization was a love of country both ancestral and adopted.

The Lithuanian Legion of America was founded and organized by Constantine R. Jurgela who formulated its statutes and served as the organi-

zation's staff adjutant from 1930 to 1938. The first Commander of the Lithuanian Legion of America was Dr. John A. Bucnis who was followed by Commander Petras Jurgela who held the position for many years. Among other early national officers of the Lithuanian American Legion were Vice Commanders Frank J. Narcum and Albert Leonaitis, Adjutant Justinas Liaukus, Quartermaster Antanas Urbonas, Inspector Zigmantas Strazda, Judge-Advocate Tamas Sereika, Chaplain/Canon Julius Meskauskas, Sergeant at Arms John Bogush, and Antanas Zemaitis, Officer of the Day.

American born Dr. John A. Buchness (Bucnis) served as the first Commander of the Lithuanian Legion of America, Baltimore Post. Buchness enlisted as a private in the Enlisted Reserve Corps on December 14, 1917, and was assigned as a student to the Army Training Center at the University of Maryland where he eventually obtained his medical degree. Though he was never assigned overseas, Dr. Buchness dedicated the rest of his life to veterans' causes.

Constantine R. Jurgela became a noted Lithuanian jurist and historian who for many years worked for the Voice of America. He was born in Elizabeth, New Jersey, and was one of the first American volunteers to leave the country to serve in the Lithuanian Army. These early Lithuanian volunteers received the title "Savanorių" and were later awarded a medal for their service in the founding of the nation. He served in the Lithuanian Army from 1919 to 1921, which included fighting and having been captured by the Poles in the struggle over Vilnius. From 1922 to 1924, Constantine worked for the Lithuanian Foreign Affairs Ministry in Kaunas, until his return to the U.S. where he eventually obtained a law degree. He wrote frequently for various Lithuanian publications and was the author of several Lithuanian history books.

Living in Bethesda, Maryland, Constantine was a frequent visitor to the Lithuanian Hall and various Baltimore Lithuanian activities.

Constantine's brother, Petras Jurgela, was a soldier and publicist who founded the Lithuanian Boy and Girl Scout movement. He also volunteered to serve in the Lithuanian Army during its War of Independence in 1919 and fought in the Lithuanian Wars of Independence. Following graduation from the Lithuanian Officer's School, Petras was commissioned a 2nd Lieutenant. He rose in rank to Captain and served as the Chief of the Military Press. Upon returning to the U.S., Petras remained active in the Lithuanian Scout movement and increasingly took a lead role in the Lithuanian American Legion. He was a frequent contributor of Lithuanian military articles to "Karys" magazine and authored several books. From time to time, he would visit the

Baltimore Lithuanian Hall along with his brother.

By 1938, the Lithuanian American Legion had nine posts with several hundred members. The larger and most active posts could be found in New York, Chicago, Boston, and Baltimore. The nucleus of the organization was the New York Post, among whose members were Stepas Darius and Stasys Girenas, the two early transatlantic pilots who lost their lives in 1933 in the crash of their aircraft "Lituanica". The New York Post and several others were later renamed the Darius and Girenas Post in their honor. Another early aviation post member was Feliksas Vaitkus (Waitkus), a member of the Lithuanian American Legion. Vaitkus received his wings while serving in the U.S. Army and went on to successfully solo cross the Atlantic in 1935 in Lituanica II. He later had a distinguished World War II record and rose to the rank of Colonel.

With their rich cultural and historical background the various Lithuanian American Legion posts prospered. The Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor on December 7, 1941, quickly changed the independent way of thinking by Lithuanian American veterans. Though all members continued to be very proud of their national heritage, they were all Americans first and foremost. As a result, most post members immediately gathered together to support the war effort. Among the very first steps were to disband their honored Lithuanian American Legion organization and seek membership in the American Legion. The petition for American Legion membership was signed by

Dr. Adalbert Zelwis, Vincent J. Velzis, Frank Karcionuzkas, Dr. John A. Buchness, William G. Lacs (Lacavitch), Vincent Ambrose, Frank Dubinskie, Felix Rutkus, Paul Gurklis, Frank Maslausas, Vincent Niemur, Charles F. Ozel, and Anthony Sakievich. Each was a Lithuanian American World War I veteran. Zelwis, Ozel, Gurklis and Lacs went on to Command the post in the years to come. American Legion Darius Girenas Post No. 271, Chicago, Illinois, can similarly trace its roots to the Lithuanian American Legion.

On March 19, 1943, the Baltimore Lithuanian American veterans received a temporary American Legion charter. To their added joy and pleasure, these old veterans were delighted to learn that the Post would be authorized to bear their traditional name Lithuanian Post in honor of their nationality and former organization. It is believed that Lithuanian Post No. 154 is the only American Legion Post bearing an ethnic designation in its official name.

Dr. Adalbert Zelwis, a former member of the Lithuanian American Legion, served as the first Commander of the American Legion-Maryland Lithuanian Post 154. He has served as a private in the Maryland National Guard prior to World War I and was called to active duty with Company L, 5th Maryland Infantry. Due to his medical training, Zelwis spent the war assigned to a field hospital at Camp Jackson, South Carolina. Like his fellow post member, Dr. Buchness, Adalbert was a main stay of the post for many years.

The post members worked diligently and within a year their membership increased from fifteen members to fifty two and received their permanent Charter on June 19, 1944. The new post realized that in order for them to successfully participate in the various American legion programs they would need help, and encouraged their wives, daughters, and sisters to form



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an Auxiliary Unit. The response to their suggestion was indeed a pleasant one. The very popular and active Lithuanian Auxiliary Unit 154 was formed and chartered in 1946. The unit has been of invaluable assistance to Lithuanian Post 154.

As the years passed, those who chartered the post began to fade away. New and younger legionnaires who served in World War II, the Korean War and Vietnam took their places.

Now you will find members who have served in Bosnia, Afghanistan, and Iraq. These younger veterans continue the post work with the same dedication displayed by the older legionnaires. They promote religion without bigotry, charity without prejudice, and are always prepared to defend the ideals and freedoms of this country.

Though its membership has never been large, Post 154 has been led by dedicated Commanders, many of whom have served as officers of State and National American Legion Programs. Their dedicated hard work has not been in vain. Over the years, their work has been recognized not only by the Baltimore District and the Department of Maryland, but by the National Headquarters of the American Legion as well. Many trophies, plaques, and citations have been awarded to Lithuanian Post 154 for a job well done. Among those especially treasured is the "Annual Americanism Citation, which the post has received almost every year since 1943. Another cherished commendation is the "Special Services Certificate" awarded by the FBI for services rendered during World War II. Though these old veterans were no longer able to carry a rifle they continued to contribute to the defense of America.

Deeply concerned about the future of their country and knowing that the leaders of tomorrow are the youth of today, the post continually seeks to instill a positive manner in the hearts

and minds of the our youth. To encourage excellent scholarship and good citizenship, the Lithuanian Post annually presents awards to local students, firemen, and police officers. To keep alive the memory of past post members at all installation ceremonies the post performs the Everlasting Service. Members regularly visit Veteran's Hospital, donate blood, and provide Christmas assistance to the needy.

In all their activities, the members of Lithuanian Post 154 have never forgotten God. When the splendid "Back to God" movement was initiated by the American Legion, this post not only encouraged their fellow American to take part in praying in the church of their choice, but every year since takes part in a post Mass at Saint Alphonsus Church. Foremost, the post never forgets those brave men and women who gave their lives in battle. The newly organized post took part in its first Memorial Day service on May 30, 1943, and their successors continue this activity to the present time.

Following the World War II period, many Lithuanian displaced persons immigrated to the United States. Many of these new immigrants have served in the Lithuanian armed forces and fought against both the Germans and Russians that reoccupied their nation. These new immigrants like those of the earlier generation, sought ways to support their new homeland and defend it against the threat of communism. Since they had not served in the American military these veterans were not eligible for American Legion membership. As a result there was a brief revival of the Lithuanian Legion of America in 1951 through its merger with the Lithuanian Reserve Officer's Association (RAMOVĖ). Posts were re-established in Chicago, New York, Boston, and Baltimore. During the cold war the revived Lithuanian Legion of America concentrated on the preservation of mem-

ories and incidents associated with the War of Independence. The Legion was the first to start the commemoration of the founding of the Lithuanian Army celebrated on November 23, 1918. Members of the Lithuanian American Legion freely contributed their time and money in support of the American Legion. Due to the resulting 50 year Soviet occupation of Lithuania, the Lithuanian American Legion was unable to replenish its ranks and has gradually faded away. Though there are still a few old veterans still alive, the Lithuanian American Legion organization has passed into history.

As these old soldiers began to fade away newer members came forward to continue their service to the nation. Today Maryland Lithuanian Post 154, Baltimore, Maryland, stands proud along side its fellow legionnaires in the American Legion in keeping the tradition of God and Country. They are a worthy successor to their fore fathers in the Lithuanian Legion of America.

Henry Gaidis

Henry Gaidis is a contributor to Bridges. He is a member of the Board of Directors of JBANC and among his many interests is military history.

bridges

New Subscription Prices

Bridges has held the line on subscription rates for the past fourteen years. During that time both printing costs and postage have increased several times. As of JUNE 1, 2006 the cost of a subscription will increase by \$2. The new rate will be \$20 per year for domestic mail. Subscriptions to other addresses will be \$30 per year.

“Vasario 16-ta” on Cape Cod.

On a cold and snowy day, Sunday February 26th, 2006, members and guests of the Lithuanian American Community of Cape Cod gathered at Our Lady of Assumption church in Osterville, Massachusetts to commemorate Lithuania’s Independence Day. Lithuanian independence was established on February 16th 1918 and reinstated on March 11th 1990, after 50 years of Soviet Union’s occupation.

As the congregation was gathering in church the organist played “Maria, Maria.” a very moving Lithuanian church hymn. Rev. Robert Nolette spoke briefly about Lithuania and its people and offered the Mass to Lithuanians on their Independence. During Mass a short prayer was read in Lithuanian and English by Algirdas Dapkus, the chapter president. The offerings were presented by two Lithuanian ladies, Regina Petrutis and Aurelija Borges, dressed in national costumes. At the conclusion of the Mass the organist played the Lithuanian Anthem.

After church services the members and guests went to the church hall. The front of the hall displayed the American and Lithuanian flags, a banner with the “Vytis”, a small rostrum and chairs for seating. At the opposite end of the hall a very large table was set up with a variety of sandwiches, salads, fruit, cakes and coffee. The goodies were prepared and donated by the members.

Before the start of the official meeting old acquaintances were renewed and new ones made. The treasurer, Algimantas Gustaitis, collected dues and monetary gifts for the Lithuanian activities of education, sports, literature, art, political lobbying and others.

The official commemoration was started by the Chapter President with a greeting and a moment of silence to honor the fallen for freedom, followed by the American and Lithuanian hymns. Aurelia Borges, the chapter secretary, read the invocation; a Lithuanian prayer. Algimantas Gustaitis read the governors proclamation and Eugenijus Užpurvis, the vice-president, read the proposed resolutions to be forwarded to the appropriate US and State government representatives and Lithuanian and Russian Federation embassies.

The main program started with the introduction by Dr. Stasys



Dr. Stasys Gostautas, Algirdas Dapkus, Dr. Vytautas Ušackas, Rev. Robert Nolette and Algimantas Gustaitis.
Photo by Vytautas Brazauskas

Gostautas of the Lithuanian Ambassador to the U.S.A. and Mexico, Dr. Vygaudas Ušackas, and the introduction and presentation of his book “A Collection of Speeches, Articles and Interviews” relevant to Lithuania, it’s people and independence. Next the ambassador discussed the issues of Lithuania, the governing of the country, the economic state, relations with NATO and EU, and particularly the building and maintenance of the Lithuanian spirit. He thanked the Lithuanians in the USA for their support at present and in the past to regain freedom. The organizers thanked the ambassador for his attendance and speech, presented a monetary gift for the “Kaimas Fund” to support deprived children and a token gift of Cape Cod candy to be shared with his family.

“Lietuvių Fondas” local representative, Regina Petrutis, commented for the need of donations and new members. This concluded the official portion of the celebration.

Members and guests, by now the thirsty and hungry, were invited to the bountiful table of food and coffee. With goodies in hand, people socialized with new and old friends and chatted with the ambassador or had his book signed. The book was available at the front of the hall. And last but not least a very big “ačiu” to the hostesses, Regina Dapkus and Nijolė Užpurvis.

Submitted by Eugene Užpurvis

TRIVIA QUESTION

Before Lithuanians became Christians, they were pagans who believed in many deities. What is the name of their “MOTHER EARTH” deity?

- (a) Auštrinė
- (b) Žemyna
- (c) Saulė

Answer to Trivia Quiz
on page 16

Tomas Pleckaitis

Reflections On The Meaning Of Commemorating Lithuanian Independence Day, PAST and PRESENT

Of course, it is fitting that we assemble to commemorate Lithuanian Independence day especially because it is once again free. However, this was not often the case. When I was growing up in New Haven, Conn., in the 1950s, 60s and 70s, the Lithuanian-American Community (LAC) commemorated Lithuanian Independence Day at St. Casimir's Church Hall, year after year, while the sad reality was that Lithuania was a captive nation. I thought it was odd to commemorate independence when Lithuania was neither free nor independent. Nonetheless, we would go to church and after Mass we would go to the church hall. We made donations to LAC and other Lithuanian organizations. We sang the American and Lithuanian anthems and then we usually heard long, dull and boring speeches. This was followed by a cultural program which usually was a Lithuanian folk dance group putting on a nice show. Then it was time to eat. The kugelis, sausagė, and kopūstai was always great. The bar was open and people were socializing. Before too long the old Lits at the bar were singing songs from the old country. I didn't know the meaning of many of the words but I loved listening just the same because the voices and the songs sounded so beautiful. So celebrating Lithuania's Independence was a pretty good time when I was young, except for the fact that Lithuania was not free. I often wondered, what was the point of commemorating independence when it was long lost, and it didn't seem likely that Lithuania would ever recover her independence in my lifetime? However, as I grew older, I came to believe that the real importance of attending and observing Lithuanian Independence commemorations was to keep the idea of freedom, and the hope for independence alive. It also kept the Lithuanian American community strong and united by giving it a reason for coming together.

It took 50 years, but at long last Lithuania is again a free and sovereign nation, and a member of the UN, NATO, and the EU.

Today, there are reasons to commemorate Lithuania's Independence that go beyond just the simple joy of celebrating freedom. Indeed, some of the reasons are the same, and just as important now as they were before Lithuania regained her independence. For example, it is a time to remember that Lithuania, and many other Eastern European nations, lost their independence for 50 years as a direct consequence of the infamous Nazi-Soviet Pact of 1939 and its secret protocols. It is a time to remember and reflect upon the tragic events experienced by Lithuania after its forcible occupation by the Soviets from 1940-1941, and again in 1944. Countless thousands of people were falsely arrested, unjustly imprisoned, brutally tortured, and ruthlessly murdered. As many as 300,000 men, women, and children, almost 10 percent of Lithuania's population, were inhumanely deported to Siberia or other remote and frozen gulags where they were forced to do hard labor with minimal food, medicine, and inadequate clothing and shelter. Many did not survive. Many thousands fled their homeland in fear of the same fate. Religious persecution was intense, especially against catholic priests and nuns. Let us also remember the heroic partisans. Between 1944-1952, between 30,000-50,000 partisans or freedom fighters died resisting the Soviet occupation. It did not take long before the Soviets had imposed total control over virtually every aspect of life. Thus, the Lithuanian people lost not only their independence, their freedom, their land, but their way of life as they had known it.

Amazingly, despite the cruel and inhumane treatment of the Lithuanian people, despite 50 years of enslavement and genocidal policies, somehow the Lithuanian people did not perish or lose their longing



Tomas Pleckaitis, president of the Hartford Chapter of the LAC.

Photo by Žydrūnas Gimbutas

to one day re-gain their freedom.

Amazingly, during this dark and gloomy period in Lithuania's history, during which the Russian language was the official language of the land, somehow the people found a way to preserve their national identity, and to maintain their language and cultural heritage.

Thus, we should all feel inspired by the courage and indomitable spirit of the Lithuanian people because they not only persevered, but prevailed in their struggle for independence against overwhelming odds. Imagine; imagine one small country of 3.5 million people, without an army and without any material support from the outside world, defying the mighty Soviet Union with its standing army of 4 million soldiers! It seemed insane. Did the Lithuanians not fear that the Soviet Union might use military force against them as it had done so violently and brutally against Hungary in 1956 and against Prague/Czechoslovakia in 1968? Gorbachev could easily declare presidential rule, seize the barricaded Lithuanian parliament, declare it unconstitutional, and install a new government willing to take orders from Moscow. Again I thought, they must surely be insane. Moreover, the Lithuanians were led by Vytautas Landsbergis, a seemingly unlikely leader. After all he was just a professor of music at Vilnius University. What did he know about politics? *Continued on page 14*

Dr. V. Kudirka Lithuanian School ELIZABETH, NEW JERSEY



Children perform in the annual Christmas program

Dr. V. Kudirka Lithuanian School is located in Sts. Peter & Paul Parish School building. We have celebrated our third year anniversary after being closed for about 20 years. Our goal is to teach the students the Lithuanian language, history/geography, songs, dances and culture.

Currently we have 11 children aged 4-13 and 3 adults enrolled in our program. We have 4 teachers who teach the kindergarten class, first grade class, a class of children who are beginning to learn the Lithuanian

language and an adult class wishing to learn the Lithuanian language. We meet every Sunday from 9:00 a.m. to 1:00 p.m.

We also attend the 11:00 a.m. Lithuanian Mass and then return to school until 1:00 p.m. The school has participated in our annual Christmas program, Feb. 16th celebration and Mother's Day festivities. We end the school year with a picnic in a local park.

Elizabeth Danguolė Didzbalis,
Principal

Commemorating Lithuanian Independence Day.

Yet, he proved to be a modern day warrior who was as fearless as our warrior kings and dukes of old. He was a passionate nationalist who was not afraid to challenge or defy Moscow. His weapon was his ability to communicate, to express the hopes and aspirations of the Lithuanian people. Thus, the majority of the country rallied behind him and his party, Sąjūdis. His battle cry was freedom. Landsbergis was not going to ask for Moscow's permission to leave the Soviet Union because Lithuania had never willingly joined the Soviet Union in the first place. Recall that Gorbachev made a visit to Lithuania in January of 1990 to make a personal appeal to the

Lithuanian people to slow down in their drive for independence. But the Lithuanian people were not going to slow down, and they were not going to wait for Moscow to give back what it had taken by force even though Gorbachev promised he would pass laws establishing procedures for secession. Instead, Landsbergis pushed Gorbachev's policy of perestroika to the limit. The result, on March 11, 1990, the first freely elected parliament in the history of the Soviet Union did what had never been done before: it passed an act restoring Lithuania's independence and sovereignty, by a vote of 124-0.

Finally, as we commemorate Lithuania's Independence, it shouldn't matter whether

one is a "third wave" or a "second wave" Lithuanian, and it shouldn't matter whether one speaks Lithuanian or not, because we have the same cultural heritage. We have the same roots. Therefore, we are like brothers and sisters. So today we have come together like a family to celebrate a special occasion, the anniversary of Lietuva's declaration of independence, February.

Tomas Pleckaitis

Tomas Pleckaitis is the president of the New Haven, CT Chapter of the Lithuanian American Community.

“Pažaislis Monastery Idyll.”

The Sisters of St. Casimir in Chicago have released a magnificent video/DVD entitled, “Pažaislis Monastery Idyll.” This 17th century former Camaldolese monastery in Lithuania is filled with priceless murals, colorful orange marble, and a remarkable history unto itself. It also houses an historical portrait of the Virgin Mary known as “Our Lady of Fair Love” given to the monastery founder as a gift by Pope Alexander VII in 1661.

This video/DVD, was translated into English and is currently being marketed here in the States and in Lithuania for the thousands of English speaking tourists who visit the monastery every summer. This video is a captivating overview of the Lithuanian, baroque pearl of the 17th century located outside of Kaunas, Lithuania. Accompanied by splendid classical and national music, the beauty and architecture of this remarkable complex reveals itself along with the fascinating history of this hidden jewel in Northeast Europe. The story of the Sisters of St. Casimir coming to the monastery in 1920 and Mother Maria’s experiences there are also included.

The video was first released in 2004 in Lithuanian under the direction of V. Kubilius with assistance from Nijolė Bauzytė, renown TV Journalist in Vilnius, Lithuania. Under the inspiration of Algis Liepinaitis of Riverside, IL, the script was translated into English by Knights of Lithuania past president, Loretta Stukas of New Jersey and edited by Sister Margaret Petcavage, SSC.

The captivating music throughout the film is from J.S. Bach, H. Perselis, G. Kuprevicius and A. Aponavicius. The English voices were done by Rev. Monsignor R. George Sarauskas, Pastor St. Mary Church, Riverside, Illinois, Sisters of St. Casimir of Chicago: Sr. Margaret Petcavage, SSC, Sr Regina Marie Dubickas, SSC, Sr. Theresa Papsis, SSC, Sr. Johanna Marie Shainauskas, SSC, and Sr. Elizabeth Ann Yocius, SSC.

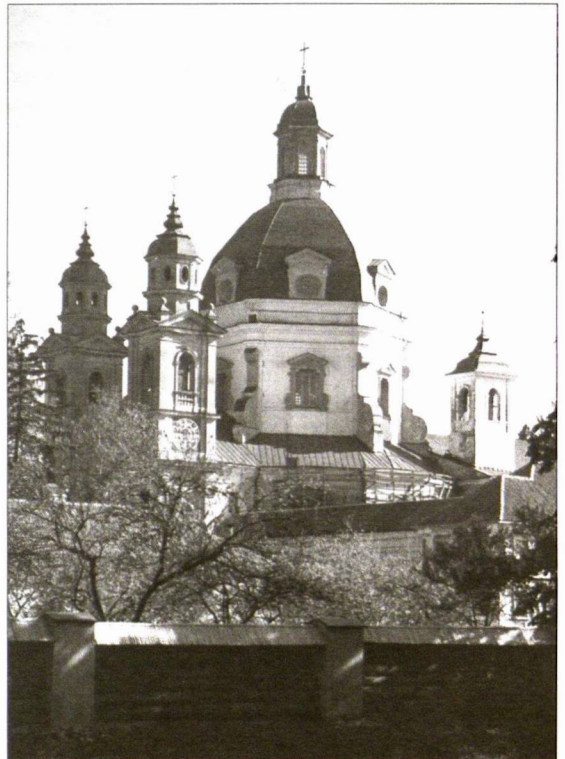
The video can be purchased for \$20.00 and the DVD for \$15.00 by calling

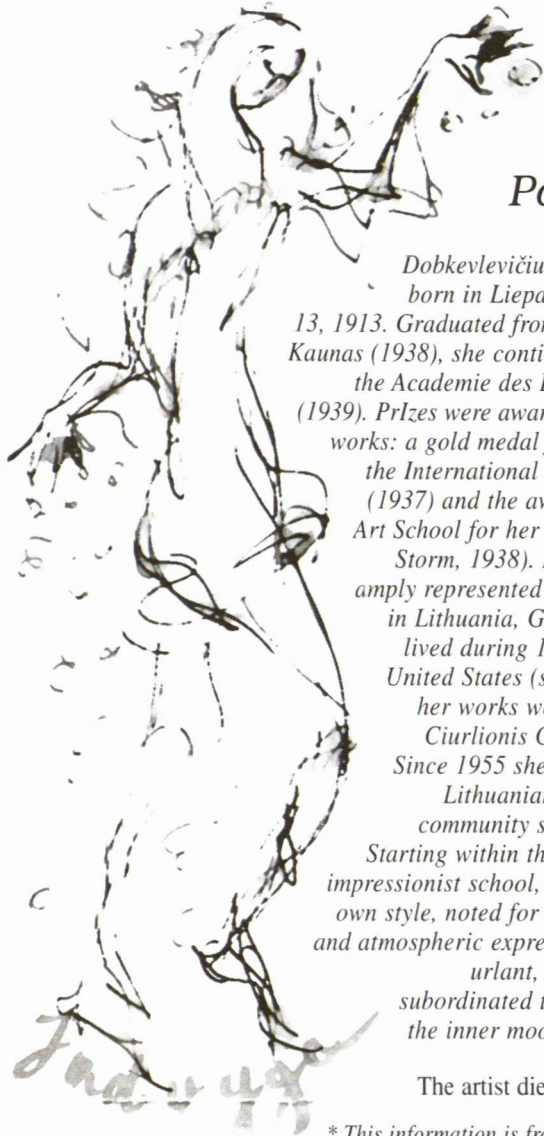
773-776-1324 or by mail.

Please include \$2.00 for postage and handling.

**SSC Motherhouse
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Editor’s Note: *Please order as soon as possible as there are a limited number of videos and DVDs available.*





COVER
ARTIST

Jadvyga Paukštienė

Antanlna (nee Dobkelevičiūtė; 1913-), painter, born in Liepāja, Latvia, on June 13, 1913. Graduated from the Art School of Kaunas (1938), she continued her studies at the Academie des Beaux Arts in Paris (1939). Prizes were awarded for her earliest works: a gold medal for a rug design at the International Exhibition in Paris (1937) and the award of the Kaunas Art School for her canvas Audra (The Storm, 1938). Her paintings were amply represented in exhibitions held in Lithuania, Germany (where she lived during 1944-49) and in the United States (since 1949). Two of her works were selected for the Ciurlionis Gallery in Chicago. Since 1955 she has been teaching Lithuanian art at Lithuanian community schools in Chicago. Starting within the framework of the impressionist school, she discovered her own style, noted for its dramatic power and atmospheric expressiveness. Her luxuriant, sonorous palette is subordinated to the expression of the inner mood of her paintings.

The artist died several years ago.

** This information is from
"Encyclopedia Lituanica."*

Continued from page 20

"Lietuvos Telekomas"

citizenship so they can play for Lietuva in the next World Championship in Brazil this Fall.

Laurynas (Larry) R. Misevičius

Laurynas (Larry) R. Misevičius is a Financial Analyst at the Union Bank of Switzerland (its Securities division) and an active member of the Lithuanian American Community. He received his B.S. in Business Administration and Management (1993) and Master of Marketing and International Commerce (1995) degrees from the Vytautas Magnus University in Kaunas, Lithuania; and an MBA (1996) from the University of Bridgeport in Bridgeport, CT. He was the first president elect of the re-established Lithuanian Sports Club of CT and from early 2003 a chair of the Bridgeport (CT) Chapter of the Lithuanian American Community, and a vice-chairman for sports in the National Executive Committee of the Lithuanian American Community. Additionally, he is an editor for the Lithuanian American weekly newspaper "Amerikos Lietuvis" northeast edition "Rytų Pakrantėje" and frequently writes to other Lithuanian and English language media.

Answer to Trivia Quiz

The answer is in Marija Gimbutas book Ancient Symbolism in Lithuanian Folk Art (1958). She wrote as follows: In Lithuania, the Mother earth deity is called "ŽEMYNA".

Earth was the mother: "Earth, my mother, I am born of you. You feed me, you carry me, you inter me after death." These significant words, recorded in the area of Salantai, may still be heard in various refrains in rural Lithuania as a prayer to the soil.

Between MOTHER EARTH and the human being exists a mystic bond.

According to a popular saying: "The person who strikes his mother will not be accepted by the earth after death."

An Observation: You may recall seeing a news clip of the late Pope John Paul II in his early travel days, kneeling down and kissing the earth upon arrival at the airport of the country that he was visiting. You can interpret the Pope's action as a sign of showing respect for "ŽEMYNA", MOTHER EARTH.

Submitted by Edward Shakalis

Edward Shakalis is a retired Electrical Engineer and a ham radio operator. He enjoys playing golf.

Ramunė Kubilius

Child's Gate to Learning

"Child's Gate to Learning" recently updated their Web site (<http://www.childgate.org>); a documentary film in Lithuania called "Dievo vaikai" (Children of God); was commissioned; a special committee completed the fourth character building program, "Žingsniai į prasmingą gyvenimą" (Steps Towards a Meaningful Life); and will present the annual seminar in Kaunas for our 10 supported centers' directors, staff, and volunteers. The latest supported center, in Kaunas, was approved by the Board, to begin receiving support in 2006.

News and Views

LITHUANIAN PRESIDENT RECEIVES "PERSON OF YEAR" AWARD IN UKRAINA

The international award "Person of the Year 2005" for merits in public life and politics was given to President Valdas Adamkus, who was one of mediators in settlement of the political crisis during the recent presidential elections in Ukraine. As the Lithuanian President said in his speech, "I receive this award as the award to the whole Lithuanian people, who supported and support the independent Ukrainian people, when they really needed that".

The Person of the Year Title was established in 2001. The first laureate of the award was Pope John Paul II. In 2002 the Title was conferred upon Polish President Alexander Kwasniewski, Italian Prime Minister Silvio Berlusconi in 2003 and Georgian President Mikhail Saakashvili in 2004.

<http://www.omnitel.net/ramunas>

BALTIC COUNTRIES

ANKARA - Ambassadors of Baltic countries in Ankara expressed pleasure about Turkey's undertaking "air police" mission in air spaces of these countries.

Latvian Embassy in Ankara stated that ambassadors of Latvia, Lithuania and Estonia visited Turkish National Defense Minister Vecdi Gonul and Turkish Chief of General Staff Gen. Hilmi Ozkok today and thanked for the mission Turkey undertook.

The ambassadors stated that Turkey's starting patrol in Baltic skies as of April 1st will further develop the relations.

Turkey, within the scope of the resolution of NATO Council, undertook "air police" mission in air spaces of Baltic countries for the 9th term - between April 1st and July 31st, 2006.

Four F-16 and 80 military personnel undertook the mission.

Source: The Anatolian Times

Continued from page 6

Grandma's Lithuanian Great Room:

Kūčios was when we broke bread (plautkies) and tried to eat eel (I still don't like it). Days before Easter, the table would be covered with the necessities of dying Lithuanian Easter eggs.

Today's kitchens or great rooms may be more efficient and better decorated, but for me that tiny kitchen was a great room. And it felt so comforting. Memories of it makes me hunger for those days, that food and my loving grandmother. Hopefully your great room whatever size it is will provide you with great memories of your great Lithuanian heritage.

Dorothy Minkus-McKenna

US Baltic Foundation



M. Albright and V. Vyke-Freiber, President of Latvia.

This past March 4th, a Saturday evening, on the occasion of the U.S. Baltic Foundation's second Gala Banquet in Washington D.C., a small Lithuanian delegation of the Northeastern shore including correspondents from "Amerikos Lietuvis", the Lithuanian American weekly newspaper, businessmen from the New York area and their Baltimore/D.C. friends participated at this now annual event of the organization, founded in 1990.

This year the host nation honors belonged to Lietuva's neighbor to the north, Latvia. The ceremonies began with the singing of the American and the Latvian national anthems in the downtown Ritz-Carlton Hotel. The anthems were sung by an octet of young, handsome Latvian men, known as "Cosmos" group, who performed with style and panache. They later mentioned their desire to sing America's anthem before an NBA game. Perhaps someone out there will be instrumental in making their wish come true.

Select businessmen were lauded for their contributions to Latvia's emerging economy. Former U.S. Secretary of State Madeline Albright addressed the audience. Last and certainly not least, the audience was graced by Latvia's Vaira Vyke-Freiberga, as she outlined her country's struggles leading to its current successes and hopes for the future. And what of our small Lithuanian American community delegation spear headed by none other than Laurynas Misevičius? We secured all four basketballs (signed by current Lithuanian basketball notables at a Lithuanian basketball festivity, held by the Lithuanian Embassy in Houston last month) at the silent auction and thus realized our unexpected mission to help the USBF raise funds to support its noteworthy missions in the Baltic countries. Next year will be Lietuva's turn to host the gala. See you all at the Ritz-Carlton!

*Vytautas Brazauskas
Baltimore, MD*

sports

Ambassador's Cup games

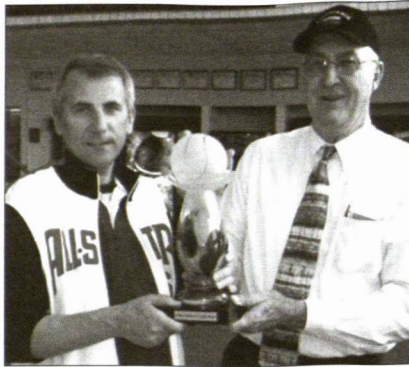
*Greetings from Catholic University,
Home of the Ambassador's Cup Games.*

This past March 18th, 2006 witnessed the passing of the 4th annual struggle for the prestigious Ambassadors' Cup, sponsored by the Lithuanian Embassy to the United States of America. Need I say the game is basketball?

It has become without a doubt the most important American Lithuanian sporting event rivaling the annual "SALFASS" (Lithuanian Athletic Union of North America) games, which by the way will be held in Chicago this May. This will be their 56th annual event. No apologies given for this shameless plug.

This year the participants came from as far as Los Angeles, Atlanta, Minnesota and Boston. At least 16 teams participated in this "first come, first served" basketball tournament. Other club teams are anxiously waiting in the wings.

The tournament champions are once again Chicago's "Žalgiris". This makes it four years in a row that they have done so. It was determined that whoever would win three years in a row, would capture the "Cup", and return it to where ever it may have come from. So in this case, the first "Cup" sits somewhere in Chicago guarded by the ghosts of "Žalgiris". The second "Cup", which once again is a stylishly designed glass trophy fashioned in Lietuva, for the time being resides in the embassy. Will the fate of this "Cup"



Ambassador Usackas and Tom Lubin.

befall the fate of the first? Pleeese, who will beat "Žalgiris"!

It is indeed noteworthy to mention that the courts of Catholic University were graced with the presence of one Tom Lubin. This nephew of all time great Frank Lubinas (center of the 1939 Men's European Basketball Champions), assembled and coached the Los Angeles men's team. It was a pleasure to get a chance to meet and chat with Mr. Tom, who added to my knowledge of this game and fascinated me with some stories of his uncles' exploits. In turn, Frank Lubinas has a nephew to be proud of as well.

Finally, where would we be without

the foresight and presence of mind of the Ambassador to the United States and Mexico, his Excellency Vygaudas Ušackas?

We extend a special thanks to Vaidas Taucius of the Lithuanian Embassy staff who performed as the tournament director, following in the footsteps of the past tournament director Alvydas Jocius and to Jurgita Dapkaitė for coordinating the dinner, ceremonies and entertainment, which by the way was led by the most popular Lithuanian country style performer, Virgis Stakenas.

I'm sure we all stand in line with thanks and admiration. What other country has such an athlete/statesman? I too had the honor of rubbing elbows with him on the court of play last year. We wish you success and look forward to next years struggle for the "Cup".

*Vytautas Brazauskas
Baltimore, MD*



Chicago's Zalgiris does it again!

**Photos by Vytautas Brazauskas*

Lithuanian Mayor for the Day

Waterbury, CT

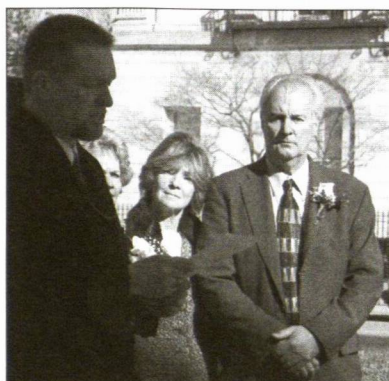
In a recent article in the Republican – American written by Robyn Adams, Raymond E. Snyder Jr. was a little choked up as he addressed a crowd of about 100 people in Waterbury's City Hall.

Mr. Snyder spoke in Lithuanian and his speech was translated by Linas Balsys, president of the Knights of Lithuania, Council 7.

Raymond Snyder is president of Snyder Funeral Home and was honored by the Lithuanian community to be the 2006 Lithuanian Mayor of the Day. The ceremony coincided with their Lithuanian Independence Day celebration which included the raising of the Lithuanian flag over City Hall.

"Let us pray for all the Lithuanians who fought for freedom," said Balsys. "Let us not forget the Lithuanians who gave their all so this great United States can remain free."

The Mayor of the Day, accompanied by his wife, Mary, was presented a proclamation from Paul Pernerewski, majority leader of the Board of Aldermen. Mr. Pernerewski was filling in for Mayor Michael J. Jarjura who was attending a family funeral.



Raymond E. Snyder, Jr., stands at the flag pole in front of City Hall with his wife Mary while Linas Balsys, president of the Knights of Lithuania, makes a speech to mark Snyder being Lithuanian Mayor for the Day in Waterbury, CT.

Snyder is the son of the late popular five term Mayor Raymond E. Snyder. His grandparents came to the United States in 1902. They first lived in Pennsylvania and then relocated to the Brooklyn neighborhood, which in those days was predominantly Lithuanian.

Snyder is the owner of Snyder Pool Co. and is a man of few words. He stated it was an honor to be the Lithuanian Mayor of Waterbury.

He was an All-Naugatuck Valley League swimming selection for three years and was the member of the teams that won two state championships. He was also a New England champion freestyler as part of the medley relay team. He earned All-American honors as a high school sophomore.

Šarūnė Macys of Waterbury and Janina Nawarškas of Wolcott were dressed in colorful, hand woven Lithuanian traditional clothing. Nawarškas, who was displaced from Lithuania in 1949, was quoted as saying, "I am very proud to be an American. This is paradise."

Submitted by Laurynas (Larry) R. Misevičius

**Photo by Josalee Thrift Republican-American Reprinted with permission.*

Hats Off!

The Republican American recently carried an article by Kathy Hallogran about women helping orphans in Lithuania. Jeannine Bruneau of Naugatuck has been working with Agnes Bauza and Nellie Simmons, both of Waterbury.

Bruneau enjoys knitting. Several years ago she read an article in the paper asking for clothing and donations. She called Agnes Bauza to pick up some hats she had knitted. She has knitted more than one hundred hats for children in Lithuania. She hopes to knit several hundred more to send next year and is looking for help. "As long as God will give me my eyes and hands, I'll keep knitting."

About six years ago she read a magazine article about conditions in Lithuania for children; especially during the Communist era.

Nellie Simmons who has been helping Bauza has family in Lithuania. She enjoys sending packages to children in need. She called Agnes just to talk and during the call Agnes convinced her to help. Simmons said she wanted to help because the children definitely need the help.

The packages include clothing, shoes, scarves, and other items. They will be sent to two orphanages; Lopšelis (The Cradle) where about one hundred children live and range in age from birth to four years. The second orphanage is Tėviškės Namai Marijampolės (Child's Family Home), a Catholic orphanage with about ninety-eight children from ages of five to eighteen years.

The cost of shipping has increased. Bauza has recently received a donation from the Lithuanian American Roman Catholic Women's Alliance of St. Joseph's Church.

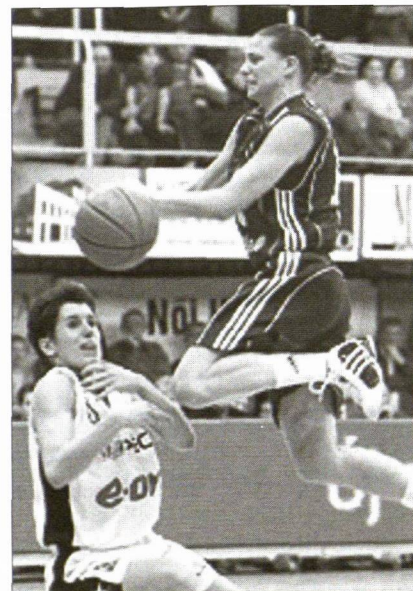
Submitted by Laurynas (Larry) R. Misevičius

“Lietuvos Telekomas” from Vilnius in the Women’s Euroleague’s Final Four for the second year in a row.

When the Women’s National Basketball Association Tournament is over the WNBA’s best American basketball female players are tempted to cross the ocean and enlist in the best clubs’ European championship rosters. Surprisingly, in a country of only three million people, Lithuania is one of the strongest. And sure enough, the team called “Lietuvos Telekomas” (Lithuanian Telecom, named after its main sponsor—the telecommunications giant) tries to get the best female players to compete against the finest other basketball teams from the Old Continent. A Connecticut based WNBA participant “Sun” star Katie Douglas and her teammate in New England as well as the Vilnius team Jennifer Derevjanik are helping the Lithuanian “super girls” squad “Lietuvos Telekomas” to reach the All European “summit”. Last year the Baltic team came out third in this tournament, this spring it looks like they’re hungry for more. Lithuanians have just reached the EuroLeague’s Women’s Final Four for the second consecutive year on March 1 defeating “MiZo Pecs” from Hungary 63- 59 securing a 2-1 win in the quarter-final outcome.

Dalma Ivanyi, Pecs’ outstanding Hungarian guard who received an invitation to play in EuroLeague’s Women All-Star Game in the same arena this month, then fouled “Lietuvos Telekomas” American star Katie Douglas who made both free throws for a 61-59 edge. “MiZo” reacted quickly, but failed to execute as Ivanyi drove into the lane late but missed a lay-up. The visitors grabbed the rebound and, after being fouled, another Connecticut “Sun” player Jennifer Derevjanik made both shots from the stripe to complete the 63-59 victory. The game once again illustrated the heroics of Douglas, who is certain to get some MVP votes by season’s end in Europe. With her team trailing 55-50,

Kate nailed a shot from the arc which put “Lietuvos Telekomas” back in the game. Neither side would score for more than a minute until Ivanyi had the ball stolen by a Lithuanian Aušra Bimbaitė, who successfully passed ahead to fellow guard Derevjanik for an easy lay-up to make it 55-55. The Vilnius team then took the lead by 59-56 with 27 seconds remaining after Bimbaitė split two from the line. Branzova then tied it before “Lietuvos Telekomas” did just enough to win at the end. Douglas, who would have played for the “Rest of the World” team at the All-Star Game, has been her team’s most consistent performer on offense and that was the case in this game with her 16 points a game high. The winners shot well, especially from three-point range (which is very characteristic both for men’s and women’s all basketball teams from Lithuania), including their long term leader Jurgita Štreimikytė-Virbickienė, who has been playing for Indiana “Fever”/WNBA. She ended up with 13 points in the last “Lietuvos Telekomas” win at Pecs. This year’s EuroLeague’s Women’s Final Four will take place in Brno (Czech Republic) on March 31st



What a jump!

through April 2nd. The semi-final matchups feature “US Valenciennes Olympic” from France competing with the host “Gambrinus” of Brno and “BC VBM-SGAU” from Samara (Russia) going up against “Lietuvos Telekomas”. Let’s keep our fingers crossed for Lietuva! Photos used are from www.fibaeurope.com

Note: According to reports in the Lithuanian press Katie Douglas and Jennifer Derevjanik may seek Lithuanian.

Continued on page 16.



Lithuanian Women's National Team

Gloria O'Brien

How The Cuckoo Came To Be

KAIP ATsirADO GEGUTĖ



Seniai seniai
gyveno
turtingas
ukininkas ir
turėjo vieną
dukterį

HOW THE CUCKOO CAME TO BE

From "Lietuvių Sakmės",
compiled by Pranas Sasnauskas
Translated from Lithuanian by Gloria O'Brien

Long, long ago, there lived a prosperous farmer who had only one daughter. Both father and mother did their utmost to indulge and pamper their only child. She grew to be so beautiful that her fame spread far and wide.

One day, a young prince heard about the beautiful girl, and decided he wanted to cast an eye upon her. And when he saw her, he wanted nothing more than to speak with her, and gaze upon her lovely face. He asked her parents to allow him to marry her and take her to his castle far away.

The parents joyfully agreed. Of course they would – a prince! – not some ordinary plowman! It would be an honor to have such a son-in-law.

They married and rode off to the prince's distant castle, beyond ten forests, beyond hills and many rivers.

The first year, the young pair lived together like lovebirds: always caressing each other while cooing loving phrases. Life was happy for the girl, and she never

even thought of her parents.

But the second year, the prince began to think it was a shame that he, a prince, should have a wife from such a poor background. Her parents were farmers, and she herself, ordinary and uneducated. Soon, he was not so loving towards his wife, and forgot all those tender words he used to say.

And the third year, the prince no longer loved his wife at all. He began to dislike her, complaining that he was ashamed of her, threatening to throw her into the castle's dungeon. If she should die there, then he could marry again, a woman of the nobility, not such a simple creature as she was.

Day and night the unhappy princess wept, so that her eyes reddened and her face became pale, her little hands jaundiced. She begged the prince to allow her to leave so she could visit her parents, and not to keep her by force.

"No!" said the prince. "I will not permit you to leave here! I will shut you in the dungeon, so you will die soon!"

"She realized that her husband truly wished for her death, and so she stole away from the castle, wishing to reach her home, to see her father and mother once again. She walked through the dense woods, weeping and lamenting, remembering those days, when her husband valued her and spoke kind and loving words to her.

She lost her way completely, and stopped

beneath an aged tree to consider what she should do. Suddenly she saw a bear approaching her.

Perhaps it's better to be eaten by a bear, than to die of hunger in these woods", she thought, and began to pray.

"Where are you going, princess?" asked the bear with a human voice.

"I am going to visit my parents", answered the amazed princess. "I cannot stay in the castle, as my husband hates me and wants to kill me."

Shaking his big head, the bear replied, "You will not reach your home, poor child. It is very far away, and you travel on foot. If you wish, I can change you into a bird, and you can fly to your home within a month. When you reach your home, fly to your mother's shoulder and place your little beak in her mouth. That very minute, you will change back into a human".

The princess agreed and thanked him warmly. The bear transformed her into a small gray bird, and showed her the direction to reach her home. She flew unceasingly, a week, then two, and soon a full month had gone by, but still she had not reached her parents. Finally, one morning she saw her home, and, weary, she sat in a cherry tree. It was spring, and all the cherry trees were wearing their snow-white blossoms. She looked down, and saw her father, walking alone, seeming sad and deep in thought.

He saw an unfamiliar small gray bird, and musing, said, "Oh, little bird, if only you could fly to my daughter and tell her,

that her dear mother closed her eyes forever, just last week. And now I am left alone in this world and yearn for my dear daughter".

The princess, hearing that her mother had died, knew that fate had left her to spend the rest of her life as a bird, flying through the sky. She wanted to shout "It is I, Father, the princess!" but those words instead became "Kū-kū! Kū-kū!" She spread her wings, and calling "Kū-kū! Kū-kū!" she flew off into the forest.

People named the new bird "gegute". Each spring, she returns, flying hither and yon, calling "Kū-kū! Kū-kū!", trying to tell her sad story.

Gloria Kivytaite O'Brien
is a frequent contributor to Bridges.

She grew up in Brooklyn, Annunciation Parish. Gloria can be contacted at Senaboba@aol.com.

Sequel to April's Trivia Question

Dear Readers,

Ed Shakalis' received this answer from his daughter-in-law, Ilona. She spoke to her mother concerning Old and New Lithuanian days of the week: I spoke with my mother about the days of the week. She says that Pirmadienis, etc. is the proper way to say things.

This comes from her grammar school training in Lithuania, which stressed becoming more intelligent and carrying oneself with dignity. The "new" way follows the order of the days of the week, first day, second day, etc, and thus is more intelligent and logical.

She says that there was a real struggle to get the language "cleaned up" and more purely Lithuanian. People resisted sending their children to school, and some parents actually went to jail for refusing and saying, "You are taking my child from me!" But I guess things settled down, and people realized it was a good thing, and were more accepting.



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All VYTIS representatives speak English and Lithuanian !!

Calendar of Events for May - June, July/August

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

BLP(LKA)1195
2006, Iss.4

FOR ALL NERINGA EVENTS, PLEASE GO TO WWW.NERINGA.ORG OR call 978-582-5592

MAY, 2006

May 6, 2006 - 2:00 pm
Baltic Rites of Spring Festival Seattle Central Library downtown
1000 Fourth Ave
Microsoft Auditorium, free
Lietutis and Lankas dancers will perform.
Information: <http://www.lithuanian-american.org/seattle>

May 7, 2006 - 4:00 pm
"Kugelis"
Mother's Day Dinner
Mothers of our community will be honored with special performance by our Lithuanian chorus.
Admission: \$10 adults, free admission for mothers.

RSVP: Reservations must be called in or emailed to Arv Jarasius.
Fraternal Order of Eagles Hall
1151 S Galena Street
(just west of Mississippi & Havana)
Denver, CO 80247
Info: Arv Jarasius
303-439-2089

NEW DATE

May 13, 2006 - 7 pm
Spring Concert
Philadelphia LAISVE Choir
Lithuanian Music Hall
2715 E. Allegheny Ave.
Philadelphia, PA
Info: 215-938-0783

May 13, 2006 - 3 pm
Talent Show Benefit Concert
South Boston Lithuanian Club
368 West Broadway
S. Boston, MA 02127
Spectacular show of

Neringa's talented campers & alumni as well as auctions & raffles to benefit Neringa.

May 16, 2006 - 7 pm
Amber Roots
Heritage Club Meeting
Culture Center Philadelphia
Lithuanian Music Hall
2715 E. Allegheny Ave.
Philadelphia, PA 19134
All are welcome.
Milliemarks@aol.com
610-497-5469

May 20, 2006
Lithuanian Work Day at Kursa Campground
In support of Lankas Family Camp
Overnight stays available in the dorms.
Do some work & have some fun!
Info: <http://www.lithuanian-american.org/seattle>

May 19 - 21, 2006
56 Sports games in Chicago
The 56 North American Lithuanian Sports Games Chicago Organized by Chicago ASK Lituanica & Chicago LSK Zalgiris.
Competition in basketball (men, women & junior A class) volleyball (men, women & mixed teams), swimming, table tennis & chess.
Info: dr. Donatas Siliunas
5116 Illinois Ave.
Lisle, IL 60532 - 2014
Tel: 630-852-3204
Fax: 630-852-4026
E-mail: dsiliunas@aol.com
Website: www.lituanica.org

May 27 - 28, 2006
The 2006 North American Lithuanian juniors B, C, D, E & F (molecule) class basketball

tournament for boys & girls age 6-16 is being organized in Toronto, Ontario by Sports Club Aušra.
Info: Sports Club "Aušra" c/o Edis Punkris, pirmininkas
1 Resurrection Road
Toronto, ON M9A 5G1
Canada.
Tel: 905-465-1010 Ext. 227
E-mail
edpunkris@hotmail.com.
Aušros E-mail: info@ausra.net
Website: www.ausra.net

May 28-29, 2006
50th Annual International Folk Festival
David Lawrence Convention Center
Pittsburgh, PA
Acclaimed Lithuanian Folk Music Group "Saulė" from Sialuliai University Award winning group will provide the music for Pittsburgh Lithuanian Neris Dancers.
Info:
www.pittsburghlithuanians.com

JUNE, 2006

June 11, 2006 - 10:30 am
Mass in memory of Lithuanian deportees to Siberia
St. Andrew Church
1913 Wallace St.
Philadelphia, PA

June 11, 2006 - 2 pm
Concert featuring singers and musicians of SAULĖS Ensemble
www.neringa.org 978-582-5592

June 11, 2006 - 2 pm
Concert Saulės Ensemble
Lithuanian Music Hall
2715 E. Allegheny Ave.
Philadelphia, PA
Info: 215 - 938 - 0783

June 24-28, 2006
Heritage Family Camp in English, Neringa

June 20, 2006 - 7 pm
Amber Roots
Heritage Club Meeting
Culture Center, Philadelphia
Lithuanian Music Hall
2715 E. Allegheny Ave.
Philadelphia, PA 19134
Milliemarks@aol.com
610-497-5469

JULY/August, 2006

July 2, 2006
Eighth Lithuanian Song Festival University of Illinois - Chicago Pavilion Tickets are on sale now
Welcome Reception
Celebration Banquet
Tickets are \$22 - \$32 for adults and \$12 - \$22 for children under 12 years.
Tickets can be obtained through:
Ticketmaster
800-277-1700,
Canada 416-870-8000
Info: www.lithuanian-songfest.org/tickets

July 2 - 8, 2006
Family Camp in Lithuanian, Neringa

July 9-23, 2006
Lithuanian-speaking children's camp ages 7-16
Neringa

July 23, 2006
Putnam Picnic
See Neringa website for details.

July 23 - 29, 2006
Continuation of Lithuanian speaking children's camp (ages 13-16) Neringa

July 23, 2006 - 2:00 pm
Sunday-House of Lithuania Lawn Program, Balboa Park

Heritage Children's Camp (ages 7-16) Neringa
August 3 - 6, 2006
Knights of Lithuania
93rd National Convention
Grosvenor Resort in Lake Buena Vista, FL.
www.knightsoflithuania.com

August 6 - 13, 2006
Lithuanian Language Courses for beginners, intermediate and advanced speakers
Camp Dainava, Manchester, MI
Lithuanian Educational Council of the USA
Info: Vytautas Jonaitis
1332 Sprucewood Drive NW
Grand Rapids, MI 49504
Phone: 616-453-7549
vjonaitis@juno.com

August 12 - 19, 2006
Continuation of Heritage Children's Camp (ages 13-16) Neringa

August 20 - 27, 2006
Adult art camp in Lithuanian (21+) Neringa

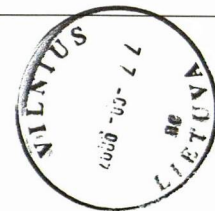
August 21 - 25, 2006
2006 Lankas Family Camp
Lithuanian dancing, singing, language, crafts, history, folklore, hiking, swimming, scouting, and more!
Parents and community members needed to teach one or more classes during the week & to help with cooking.
Info:
www.javlb.org/seattle/events.htm

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