

bridges



LITHUANIAN-AMERICAN NEWS JOURNAL

\$5

October 2015

this month in history

October Anniversaries



690 years ago

October 16, 1325

Marriage of Aldona of Lithuania to Casimir III of Poland. Aldona's father, Grand Duke Gediminas, arranged the marriage of the two teenagers as a political move to strengthen the first Polish-Lithuanian

coalition against the Teutonic Knights. Gediminas had just undertaken an unsuccessful attempt to Christianize Lithuania and Poland was seeking allies in the dispute over Pomerania with the Order.

The coalition's first action was a joint Polish-Lithuanian attack against the Margraviate of Brandenburg in 1326. Although the alliance ultimately proved weak, collapsing in 1330, there is no evidence of fighting between Poland and Lithuania while Aldona was alive. Aldona died in May 1339, and was buried in Kraków.

585 years ago

October 27, 1430

Death of Vytautas the Great, ruler of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania from 1392 to 1430. Vytautas had been preparing for coronation but Polish forces interrupted the arrival of his crown to Trakai the month prior. Before a second crown could arrive, he fell from his horse on a ride to Vilnius. He was taken back to Trakai, where he died at the age of 80.

220 years ago

October 24, 1795

Russia, Austria and Prussia held a convention in Petersburg to finalize the third partition of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth, formally dissolving the commonwealth and all of its institutions. Most of Lithuania with Vilnius went to Russia, Warsaw and the left bank of the Nemunas River went to Prussia and the territories of Western Galicia and Southern Masovia along with Kraków went to Austria. King Stanislovas Augustas of Poland was forced to abdicate.



165 years ago

October 9, 1850

Birth of Vincas Pietaris (1850-1902), a writer, publicist, historian and physician. Considered a pioneer of modern Lithuanian prose, Pietaris wrote *Algimantas, or the Lithuanians in the Thirteenth Century*, the first Lithuanian historical adventure novel, about the imaginary Duke Algimantas, who strives to unify Lithuanian tribes into one strong state.



110 years ago

October 1, 1905

Archaeologist Jonas Puzinas (1905-1978) was born in Svaronys, Lithuania. Considered the first scientifically trained archaeologist of Lithuania, he specialized in examining Lithuania's

prehistory. In 1934, Puzinas introduced the first systematic study of archaeology at Kaunas University and established a prehistory division within the newly founded Culture Museum of Vytautas the Great. He was the first to classify archaeological findings according to the general European archaeological dating adapted to the geological periods of Lithuania.

100 years ago

October 2, 1915

The German army occupied Vilnius. The city remained occupied until the end of World War I in November 1918.

95 years ago

October 1920

Lithuania and Poland signed the Treaty of Suwalki on October 7, 1920, establishing a ceasefire in the Polish-Lithuanian War. The agreement called for an end to territorial disputes in the Suwalki and Vilnius regions concerning undefined borders.

Shortly after the agreement was signed, however, Poland broke it in an action known as Żeligowski's Mutiny. Lithuanian-born Polish general Lucjan Żeligowski, acting under secret orders from Polish Chief of State Józef Piłsudski, pretended to disobey orders and marched on Vilnius, taking the city on October 9, one day before the treaty was to take effect. Żeligowski established the Republic of Central Lithuania, which, despite intense protests by Lithuania, was incorporated into the Second Polish Republic in 1923. The Vilnius region remained under Polish administration until 1939.

25 years ago

October 7, 1990

Lithuania issued its first stamp since reestablishment of independence. The illustration, an angel holding a light whose rays fill a map of the country, was created by Violeta Skabeikiene

15 years ago

October 1, 2000

The Lithuanian men's basketball team won the bronze medal at the Summer Olympic Games in Sydney, beating Australia 89-71.

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Cover: Runner Rūta Tuskenytė celebrates her gold medal in the 2015 Special Olympics World Games, held this year in Los Angeles. Photo: Jūratė Venckus

Back cover: Members of the Lithuanian delegation to the 2015 Special Olympics World Games. Photo: Jūratė Venckus

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NEWS JOURNAL

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from the editor

Help Wanted: It Takes a Village

In this issue you'll read several tales of victory, ranging from the accomplishments of Lithuania's Special Olympics athletes to the EuroBasket 2015 silver-medal victory of Lithuania's national team. The talents of these athletes contribute to raising Lithuania's profile around the globe.

Closer to home, our Lithuanian communities in America raise awareness of Lithuania where we live. The talents of the members of our local communities—manifested through events and activism, education and arts—help preserve our Lithuanian heritage and keep us close to our roots.

You might even be considering how to apply your talents and interests in a way that forges a deeper connection with your heritage. If so, we might have just what you're looking for.

I received a note recently from a reader telling me about his recent trip to Lithuania. He related that *Bridges* keeps him close to his roots year 'round, but asked why the magazine is often delivered late. I'm sure a lot of you wonder about that, actually. While we do have some lingering delivery issues with the post office, the truth is that our little staff is stretched by full-time jobs, family obligations and community commitments, and we struggle to fit *Bridges* in between.

We're not complaining—we love what we do. But we need the help of our community. We're seeking contributors to take on some of sections of our magazine:

Contributing Editor, Current Events

Perfect for someone who likes to keep abreast of news here and abroad. Scan credible sources and create approximately 30 to 40 non-biased, factual, "headline news" items across a variety of themes. Commitment: 15-20 hours per issue.

Contributing Editor, This Month in History

Research historical anniversaries and write 7 to 10 summaries. Commitment: 5-10 hours per issue.

Contributing Editor, Our Community

Keep up on happenings across the U.S. and reach out different communities to solicit write-ups and photographs to assure that we're representing all communities throughout the nation. Commitment: 5-10 hours per issue.

Calendar Editor

Scour the newsletters, websites and Facebook pages of Lithuanian-American communities across the United States for upcoming events and compile them in our calendar format. Commitment: 3-5 hours per issue.

The only skills necessary to join our team are a love for Lithuania, a sincere desire to give something back to the community and the ability to work within a deadline. In return, you'll see your name on our masthead and, more importantly, receive the gratitude of our readers. As editor, I'm here to nurture and encourage, to wordsmith and polish.

The Lithuanian community is your community. *Bridges* is your magazine. What better way to be connected?



Teresė Vekteris, Editor

bridges

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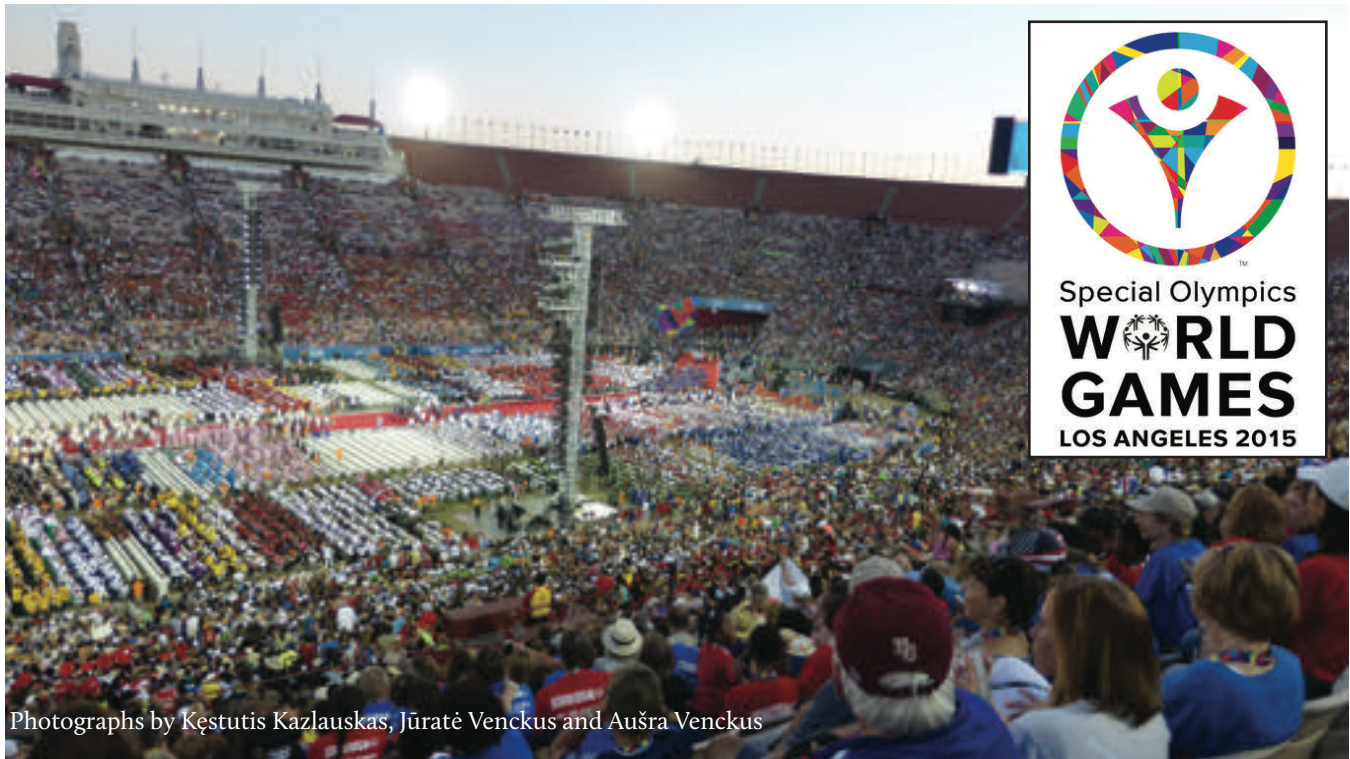
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Lithuania in the Special Olympics World Games



Photographs by Kęstutis Kazlauskas, Jūratė Venckus and Aušra Venckus

Determination of Heart

A personal perspective by Aušra Venckus

When Lithuanian Honorary Consul Daiva Navarrette asked if I would be interested in volunteering two weeks of my summer to assist the Lithuanian athletes and coaches during the Special Olympics World Games in Los Angeles, I had very little foresight into just how much I would grow from my simple, “Sure!” As a native Californian and a third-generation Lithuanian, I was designated the Lithuanian Delegation Liaison to the Special Olympics for what came to be not only the largest global humanitarian event of 2015, but also the largest sporting event in the world this year.

The Special Olympics World Games (SOWG) is a multi-sport event for children and adults with intellectual disabilities, separate from the Paralympic Games. The Special Olympics was created by Eunice Kennedy Shriver and is still managed by the Shriver family today. This was the first time in 16 years that the United States hosted the SOWG, drawing more than 6,500 athletes and 2,000 coaches from 177 countries, including a strong team of 13 Lithuanian athletes. They were met by an army of 30,000 smiling volunteers and an estimated 500,000 spectators from July 25 to August 2, 2015. Many Lithuanian-Americans rallied to volunteer and cheer the Lithuanians on this international stage.

The Special Olympics required all delegation liaisons to com-

plete training in advance of the games. This training spanned international customs sensitivities, such as never showing the bottom of my shoe when seated, to criminal background scans, sexual harassment protection knowledge, tours of the game venues, transportation schedules and disability awareness. For instance, I was never to refer to someone as “a disabled person” or “an autistic person,” etc. Instead, I learned to say, “a person with a disability” or “a person with autism” in order to raise the individual out of stereotypical constraints. If addressing someone in a wheelchair, I learned to squat down to eye level rather than hover overhead. And most importantly, the training emphasized to call and respect the competitors as athletes.

Even after days of training I did not have clear expectations of what my experience would be. I was very enthused to be a part of this movement, but a little voice of fear still crept within me, wondering about the extent of the disabilities I might encounter. I was about to live two weeks, 24/7, in the same dorms, dining halls, busses and excursions with 13 athletes with intellectually different abilities. Would I lose anyone? Would I have emotionally difficult moments? How will they look? Will I be able to communicate with them? Will I be uncomfortable? I am embarrassed now that I had these sub-thoughts, because they are precisely the type of thoughts that the Special Olympics movement is combating. Alterity of disability is a stigma that prevents dignity, respect and, ultimately, inclusion. And I could not have been more naive in my worries.



Aušra Venckus (standing, left) and Jūrate Venckus (standing, right) with some of the Lithuanian delegation.

The Lithuanian team's flight was 45 minutes early. American Airlines phoned to notify me to hurry to the Los Angeles International Airport, and I relayed that message to 15 Lithuanian-Americans who wanted to welcome the Lithuanian delegation there. I was issued a boarding pass so that I could be at the gate the minute the team exited their airplane. American Airlines asked me to translate a welcome greeting over the gate intercom. That was the instant I was at a loss for words. Literally. I couldn't remember my Lithuanian and stumbled through my first translation. But as I looked at the forest of Lithuanian green Audimas Olympic uniforms and tired faces, I was comforted that this group would be sympathetic to my rambling efforts. Their compassion and encouragement was clear. My Lithuanian language only needed a warm-up, which was crucial as only one person of the group of 13 athletes and seven coaches spoke English. We walked through the American Airlines terminal and I was quick to point out the Lithuanian flag that famously hangs in the archway, along with the myriad SOWG banners. Luckily, our Lithuanian-American greeters made it in time to hold a 20-foot-long Lithuanian flag, flowers, and gifts of Lithuanian American Youth Association-branded sunglasses and sweatbands. Due to a glitch in scheduling, as we were called upon unexpectedly to organize transportation and lodging for our guests that night in local Lithuanian-Americans' homes, I admired how the Lithuanian athletes maintained their patience.

The first week of the program was intended for tourism, rest and training. The City of La Habra in Orange County, California, warmly hosted the Lithuanian delegation. We enjoyed breakfast in Downtown Disney with Disney characters, cheered in the best seats at an Anaheim Angels baseball game and socialized with local firemen, police officers, SWAT teams and paramedics. The athletes (and coaches) loved climbing into their vehicles,

admiring their technology. They asked me to translate messages of gratitude to the servicemen, sincerely thanking them for their work and to express how safe they felt in America.

During one of our tours, I had the absolute delight of sharing a bus row with a teenaged Lithuanian swimmer, Kristupas Von Gravrock-Goes. He immediately struck me with his warmth and intelligence by passionately teaching me Lithuania's history from the 12th century, accurate details about Žalgirio mūšis, facts about the partisan Forest Brothers and specifics of Darius and Girėnas's historic flight across the Atlantic. He knew the birthdates of his extended family members. During lulls, the youth reached for a thick book of poetry by Lithuanian poet Maironis to sweetly recite some pieces. It turns out that not only was Kristupas a historian, a patriot, an athlete and lover of poetry, but he himself also wrote poetry. When we had waiting time, I could hear him peacefully praying the rosary. The next week he won the silver medal in the 25-meter backstroke and the bronze in the 50-meter breaststroke. With his kind eyes and sweet smile, Kristupas was focused on our collective welfare, searching for ways he could improve our lives. At the least expected times, he surprised me with an apple or a bottle of water.

As I came to know the Lithuanian delegation more closely, I was humbled and inspired by others like Kristupas. I realized that I was not in a superior role, there to help others in need of me. Instead, it was the athletes who were teaching me how to be a better person, showing me that it's not about the condition with which you are born; it's about what you bring to the table. If you give that race, that subject, that person everything you've got, you've excelled. Kristupas was born with Down syndrome, and look at the level of success he has reached!

The actual competitive athletic events began the following week in two venues. The Lithuanian delegation was housed in the University of Southern California. As one could imagine, housing close to 9,000 people on arrival day is no easy feat. When we arrived and unloaded our luggage, one of the Lithuanian powerlifting athletes, 19-year-old Justinas Bladika, could not resist helping others. Lines of charter buses wrapped the block of dorms, each unloading luggage of various delegations. Justinas ran to the busses and asked to levy his strength by helping unload as many buses as he could access. Once we were assigned dorm rooms, he insisted on carrying my luggage to my door. Settling me into my room, he paused and remarked how few people consider the needs of others. He admitted that he was raised to be considerate, but it seemed to him that most people seemed to care only about themselves. After a minute of reflection, he ran down the hall to help more athletes move into the dorm building. He quickly became one of the most popular people in the Olympian neighborhood. Justinas later won two gold medals, one silver medal and another gold medal for overall most weight lifted. Between rounds he even helped his competitors by coaching their lifting technique.

That evening at the Opening Ceremony and Parade of Nations, Justinas reiterated how meaningful the Special Olym-

pics were to him. He said, “A person just needs to be given opportunities to blossom.” His words resonated with the message of the Opening Ceremony at the L.A. Coliseum, that we need a revolution of the heart. The Opening Ceremony dazzled with Hollywood celebrities, with appearances by Jimmy Kimmel, Eva Longoria, Michael Phelps, Yao Ming and Greg Louganis. First Lady Michelle Obama and Maria Shriver gave opening remarks. We danced to musical performances by Avril Lavigne, Stevie Wonder and many more. Dr. Tim Shriver asked for a new declaration of interdependence instead of division based on disability. He called us to stand united to defeat fear, not to rest until every person is given the chance to have their rightful place at the table of belonging.

Lithuania’s top national powerlifting female in her weight group happened to be a Special Olympics athlete. Through self-discipline she overcame a slew of life hardships to perform amazing feats and achieve staggering results. Kristina Kirilesku, a petite and stunningly beautiful powerlifter, helped to raise her siblings in the Obeliai Children’s Home. Powerlifting became her emotional release. During her competition, the international judges called her a tiger and were left admiring her impeccable form. Kristina swept medals in all her events, leaving with four gold medals as the absolute champion.

Jonas Valančiūnas dropped by for a surprise meeting with the Lithuanian athletes mid-week. The famed NBA Toronto Raptors Lithuanian basketball star and the Lithuanian Special Olympics head coach, Zenonas Misiūnas, both hail from the town of Utena. Valančiūnas came with Los Angeles native Marius Markevičius, director and producer of *The Other Dream Team*, to spend time with the athletes in a private setting. Valančiūnas praised the athletes for winning more medals than he’s ever gotten. After a hilarious interview by the athletes, Valančiūnas thanked them for a breath of thorough inspiration. He said he was extremely proud of the athletes that are representing Lithuania so well on the international stage.

The final sporting event for the Lithuanian delegation was the track 4 x 400-meter relay. Lithuania was in the highest track division. The runners performed outstandingly in their individual races; the relay championship was the culminating event because it was the only team race. The team had four runners: Raimondas Vaicekuskas, Rimvydas Kriauzlys, Aurimas Jasiulionis and Rūta Tuskenytė. Moments before the race, a judge noticed that Rūta’s running shirt was not uniform with her male teammates’ shirts. She had a women’s version and, according to regulations, all members of a relay were required to wear identical uniforms. Lithuania was about to be disqualified. Just then, the Latvian track team saw the commotion and embraced their Baltic brothers. The Latvian relay team was in another division, competing at a later time, so they took the shirts off their backs, flipped them inside out and gave them to the Lithuanians. The Lithuanians ran and won the championship.

I recently finished my master’s degree from Columbia Uni-



Powerlifter Kristina Kirilesku won four gold medals.

versity in Inclusive Education. My professors were passionate about inclusion and equity. They said America has overcome a series of social human rights challenges. We have included equal rights for women in the suffrage movement. We have spread inclusivity of equal rights to races and orientations in the civil rights movement. The new revolution on the horizon yet to be acknowledged is disability. Working at the Special Olympics, you are changed inside. You gain a sense of dignity and respect when you see an individual’s determination to give all they’ve got. The athletes were so brave. They were fiercely competitive—conversation was all about medals. But there was a more important battle than country against country. They were united in their revolution to change the world’s perception of disability. Athletes were not allowed to wear national flags during competition because the emphasis was on unity, not diversity. They were there to show the world their determination of heart.

We can all understand sports. But to these athletes, the opportunity to compete is a victory in itself.



Solventa Kapačiauskaitė won silver in table tennis.



Lithuanian champion powerlifter Kristina Kirilesku won gold medals in all four of her events.



Toronto Raptors basketball player Jonas Valančiūnas made a special visit to Los Angeles to meet with the Lithuanian delegation.



The Lithuanian relay team celebrates their gold medal.



Rimvydas Kriauzlys won two individual gold medals, as well as team gold.



Members of the Lithuanian delegation to the Los Angeles Special Olympics enjoy a picnic with event volunteers and coordinators.



Aurimas Jasiulionis raced to an individual silver.



Alfredas Šimas brought home a bronze in bocce.



Powerlifter Justinas Bladika captured four medals.

Answering the Call

A personal perspective by Marytė Newsom

In the Old Testament, God called Samuel. In Los Angeles, Aušra Venckus called me. Neither Samuel nor I knew what was awaiting us.

Aušra, a lovely and talented young teacher and the official liaison to the Lithuanian delegation of the Special Olympics World Games, asked for a little help with translating duties during the Games. As the competitive events took place in several venues, she wasn't able to dart around to the two main places, the University of Southern California and the Los Angeles Convention Center, even though she did a remarkable job appearing at different events. Offering to give up a couple of days of my summer vacation, I agreed. Little did I know that I would receive a life-changing gift for the next six days, nine to 10 hours daily, accompanying the incredible Lithuanian athletes and their coaches.

Knowing close to nothing about bocce, powerlifting or table tennis, I gamely translated instructions, directives, terminology and conversations. In some instances the Lithuanian coaches were able to chat with the many Russian-speaking attendees to confirm the fine details of scheduling and scoring.

My experience with special-needs individuals was extremely limited, so I wasn't sure if I would be effective in making a connection. Alas, I was quickly smitten with all of them: the ever-smiling and poised Jūlytė and exuberant Alfredas of bocce fame; ambassador par excellence Justinas and petite Kristina of powerlifting; crafty Solventa and utterly focused Algirdas of table tennis.

Together with their coaches, we rejoiced in the athletes' victories and consoled them in defeat. But you have never seen such glorious reactions at both extremes. When Alfredas, who has Down syndrome, won one of his bocce events, he literally flew to us, embracing each one with such complete joy and pride, that it took my breath away. When Kristina initially faltered in her first powerlifting event, determination transfixed her; she went on to win every gold medal in her category. Each event culminated in an awards ceremony, where every athlete received either a medal or ribbon to the pounding tune of "Reach Up, L.A.!" We all sat through scores of these identical ceremonies as we waited our turn to cheer the happy Lithuanians. It never ceased to produce a lump in your throat when the words "... from Lithuania" blared through the speakers.

The beauty of these games was in the observation that the competitors encouraged and congratulated each other wholeheartedly, even having lost. There was no anger or scoffing at



Marytė Newsom (right) with bocce athletes Alfredas Šimas and Julia Vanagaitė and their coach.

the other party. They hugged, high-fived, smiled. Language was no barrier. Seeing so many thousands of athletes from around the world, from wealthy nations and war-torn ones, with "disabilities" of various degrees, I returned home each evening humbled and grateful for this experience.

A word of admiration goes out to the faithful, patient coaches who have been working with the athletes and honing their skills, in some cases for many years. I was struck by the kind, yet professional relationship each had with his charge. When after an unsuccessful bocce game, Alfredas was remorseful about his poor performance and looked for sympathy from the coach, the latter went over the game objectively pointing out how Alfredas could do better in the next one: "Don't feel sorry for yourself; just remember what you learned." The coaches were constantly solicitous of their charges' needs, making sure they had eaten, watching where they were wandering, encouraging them to call parents, cracking jokes and being excellent guardians overall.

I'm not sure how Samuel felt after his conversations with God, but I am glad to have answered Aušra's phone call!



Bocce athletes Julia and Alfredas enjoy a dance at a community event.

Who's Who: 2015 Special Olympics World Games in Los Angeles

Compiled by Juratė Venckus



**JUSTINAS
BLADIKA**
Lithuania
Powerlifting



**AURIMAS
JASIULIONIS**
Lithuania
Athletics



**SOLVENTA
KAPACIAUSKAITE**
Lithuania
Table Tennis



**KRISTINA
KIRILESKU**
Lithuania
Powerlifting



**RIMVYDAS
KRIAUZLYS**
Lithuania
Athletics



**JULIUS
REKSNYS**
Lithuania
Aquatics



**AUGUSTE
SERPYTYTE**
Lithuania
Aquatics



**ALFREDAS
SIMAS**
Lithuania
Bocce



**RUTA
TUSKENYTE**
Lithuania
Athletics



**ALGIRDAS
USCILA**
Lithuania
Table Tennis



**RAIMONDAS
VAICEKAUSKAS**
Lithuania
Athletics



**JULIA
VANAGAITE**
Lithuania
Bocce



**KRISTUPAS
VON GRAVROCK-GOES**
Lithuania
Aquatics

Lithuanian Delegation Leadership and Coaches

Zenonas Misiūnas - head of delegation

Asta Misiūnaitė - assistant head of delegation, swim coach, press information

Daiva Dabrilienė - athletics coach

Rimvydas Mikučauskas - bocce coach, Kaunas

Jonas Pravilonis - powerlifting coach, Radviliskio trade school director

Vilius Petrauskas - table tennis coach,

Arūnas Bagdonas - athletics coach

Athletes

Bocce:

Alfredas Šimas (age 32) - 1 bronze

Julia Vanagaitė (age 23) - 1 silver

Powerlifting:

Justinas Bladika (age 19) - 3 gold, 1 silver

Kristina Kirilesku (age 20) - 4 gold

Table tennis:

Solventa Kapačiauskaitė (age 38) - 1 silver

Algirdas Uscila (age 57) - 1 silver

Aquatics:

Kristupas Von Gravrock-Goes (age 19) - 1 silver, 1 bronze

Julius Reksnys (age 11) - 2 gold

Augustė Šerpytytė (age 17) - 1 gold

Athletics, running:

Rūta Tuskenytė (age 32) - 1 gold, 1 silver, 1 team gold

Rimvydas Kriauzlys (age 14) - 2 gold, 1 team gold

Aurimas Jasiulionis (age 29) - 1 silver, 1 team gold

Raimondas Vaicekauskas (age 23) - 1 team gold

Los Angeles Volunteers and Coordinators

Daiva Navarete - Honorary Consul of

Lithuania - international coordinator

Jurga Simaitė - psychologist, athlete family guest from Lithuania

Aušra Venckus - delegation liaison, translator

Marytė Newsom - assistant translator

Juratė Venckus - assistant translator

Sigutė Miller - assistant translator

Marius Markevičius - coordinator of meeting with

NBA star Jonas Valančiūnas

Laima Leco - beach party organizer, food and transport

Danius Anelauskas - assistant tour guide

Kęstutis Kazlauskas - photographer

La Habra - initial host city

About the contributors:

Marytė Sandanavičiūtė Newsom is the director of St. Casimir Lithuanian School of Los Angeles, a longtime teacher of literature and English, member of the L.A. Archdiocesan Office of Ethnic Ministry and an active participant in educational issues.

Aušra Venckus is a talented, well-traveled professional who teaches at Carlthorp School of Santa Monica, is active in the Lithuanian Scouting Association, graduated the 12-year Lithuanian School program and is an active member of the Los Angeles Lithuanian Community.

Juratė Venckus coordinates Religious Education and Spirituality at St. Casimir Parish, is a member of the Parish Council, teaches religion at St. Casimir Lithuanian School, is a eucharistic minister in several parishes and, using her copious talents and big heart, gives a helping hand wherever it is needed.

For more information about Special Olympics Lithuania, visit lsok.init.lt.



Papal Visit

Philadelphia's Archbishop Chaput introduces Pope Francis before his address at Independence Hall. Photo: Bishop Norvila

Local Lithuanian Communities Welcome Pope

By Rimas Gedeika

For the second time in almost 40 years, Philadelphia has welcomed a pope. In 1979, it opened its doors to Pope John Paul II; in September of this year to Pope Francis. Not only did these two visits bring attention to Philadelphia, they also brought attention to Lithuania.

In 1979, Philadelphia Lithuanian Community representatives had the great honor of bringing the offertory gifts to Pope John Paul II and receiving Holy Communion from him during the papal Mass. Both local and national newspapers and television captured these events.

This year, the media again were instrumental in bringing Lithuania's name into the spotlight, but with a slightly different twist.

In Washington, D.C., as Pope Francis left his overnight residence on his way to address Congress, three children dressed in Lithuanian folk costumes approached him and asked if they could take selfies with him. The Pope agreed and the selfies spread like wildfire through the electronic highway, newspapers and television. In New York, news cameras captured a woman in Lithuanian national costume among those greeting the pope's plane.

In Philadelphia, to prepare for the World Meeting of Families congress and the papal visit, Fr. Peter Burkauskas and the parish committee of St. Andrew's Lithuanian Church spent many hours organizing a Lithuanian Family Celebration for the Sunday before the congress. It began with a beautiful Mass celebrated by Bishop Rimantas Norvila, who came from Vilkauskis specifically to attend the congress. Two "sons of the parish," Fr. Danielius Staniskis and Fr. Jonas Puodžiūnas, along with Fr. Burkauskas, concelebrated the Mass. Our Laisvė choir, accompanied by a philharmonic orchestra, was outstanding; they sang like angels. After Mass there was a marvelous reception in the parish hall. It was a fantastic day, a true family celebration. On Monday, September 22, the World Meeting of Families began at the Philadelphia Convention Center. Lithuania was

represented by Bishop Norvila and the Vitkauskas and Zimkus families from Kaunas.

The highlight of the week-long congress was Pope Francis' visit to the city at the end of the week. Security was extraordinary—a large area in the center of the city (dubbed the "Francis Festival Zone") was blocked to vehicular traffic except for emergency and papal transport.

While in Philadelphia, the pope celebrated Mass at the Cathedral Basilica of Sts. Peter and Paul, visited a prison, stayed at St. Charles Seminary, addressed an audience in front of Independence Hall and attended the Saturday evening concert.

On Sunday, September 27, the long-awaited public, outdoor Mass on Eakins Oval at the foot of the Philadelphia Museum of Art took place in front of an estimated 1.5 million people, many of whom watched on giant screens from blocks away. The waiting crowd was pleased to see Pope Francis riding his pope-mobile to the area where the altar was set up. On the way, he kissed babies left and right. Everyone lucky enough to catch a glimpse will always remember the pope's smiling, loving face as he blessed them.

For most Philadelphians, the celebration ended—with a big sigh of relief—at 8 p.m. that night. For the Lithuanian community, it continued until the following Sunday, when the Zimkus and Vitkauskas families attended Mass at St. Andrew's and afterwards met parishioners and related their experiences from the prior week.



Bishop Norvila with Fr. Burkauskas and members of the Laisvė choir. Photo: Rimas Gedeika



St. Andrew's Parish Committee with Bishop Rimantas Norvila from Kaunas (seated, center) and returning sons of the parish, Fr. John Podžiūnas (left) and Fr. Dan Staniskis (right).



Aistė Orentaitė takes a selfie with the pope in Washington, D.C.

From Lithuania to Philadelphia: Looking Back on My Impressions

By Violeta Vitkauskienė; translated by Gabija Barnard



Violeta Vitkauskienė with daughters Audronė, Ugnė and Miglė. Photo: Mindaugas Vitkauskas

I was somewhat uneasy about travelling to the United States with my whole family, as I wasn't sure how each one of us would cope in such an enormous event as the World Meeting of Families. We survived the journey: it took 30 hours to get from our home in Lithuania to the hotel in Philadelphia. In the elevator we ran into a large group of nuns from Latin America—they had the Lady of Guadalupe on their habits. They smiled at us. It felt so nice, as if we were already among friends.

On the first morning we glanced through the window and saw a continuous line of people—nuns, families, groups—heading for the family congress. After breakfast we, too, joined

the procession. Luckily, the Convention Center was only five minutes away from our hotel (thank you, Lithuanians of Saint Andrew's parish!), a distance both we and the children greatly appreciated after our journey.

At the Convention Center we become part of the chattering crowd of families, priests and nuns. Our confused eyes are immediately met by a volunteer who makes sure we're all right and points us in the right direction. After collecting the amazing see-through backpacks—which within seconds have found their way to the children's shoulders—we pause and try to find our bearings in the huge building. Hurriedly, we skim the titles of the lectures and try to pick the most fitting for us, as well as to figure out where the youth congress is held: our eldest, Miglė, is already 7 years old and has been registered to participate. Finally we decide to split up: my husband and the girls head back to get some sleep, while I go to hear a lecture.

The family congress was themed "Love Is Our Mission: The Family Fully Alive." I stumbled upon a lecture on the Virgin Mary, the first apostle and the mother of the Redeemer, which was being delivered by Deacon Harold Burke-Sivers from the Eternal Word Television Network. I found some of his ideas so familiar and refreshing: "We want God to be as we imagine him. If he isn't, then we no longer need him. The Holy Trinity has



The Lithuanian delegation at the 2015 World Meeting of Families. Fr. Žydrūnas Kulpys (far left) and Bishop Rimantas Norvila (far right) with the Vitkauskas family (Mindaugas and Violeta (in green T-shirts) and their daughters Audonė, Miglė and Ugnė) and the Zimkas family (Vida and Rymantas), both from Kaunas.

become 'I, Me, Myself.' "Some people say 'I am a good person, I haven't killed anyone—of course I shall be allowed in heaven once I've died.' Newsflash: there are nine other commandments to obey before the gates of heaven open for you." The main idea of the lecture was that only if we listen to the word of God as attentively and sensitively as the Virgin Mary once did—only then will he change our lives.

I felt very pleased to see a Lithuanian flag on the wall of the youth congress hall. I don't know if there were any other children or young people from Lithuania, but finding our flag made us feel much more welcome. Miglė found participating a little difficult, as she doesn't speak English, but over the course of the afternoon and with the help of a volunteer she did manage to do a few projects.

The event rushed by and seemed to be over as soon as it started: when we had finally got the hang of how to participate, the few days were up! We didn't even manage to see all of the



Audronė takes a nap draped in the Lithuanian flag while waiting for the concert to begin. Photo: Mindaugas Vitkauskas

Festival of Families, which was a cornucopia of things meant for families and for maintaining the ideals of family, starting with literature, ending with jewellery.

The night before the pope's visit, we could hear tractors moving blocks of cement and watch police squads through our window. So much excitement—so many preparations to ensure that this visit goes smoothly. To get to the evening concert we had to join a crowd moving like a slow, serene current. With 3-year-old Audronė and 5-year-old Ugnė on our shoulders and holding Miglė tightly by the hand, we joined the flow. Tears were shed at the checkpoint: we were told to remove the rods of the little flags, and, failing that, had to break them off. Audronė mourned the event on behalf of us all, then we moved on. We walked on for quite a while until finally, after showing our passes, we reached the area meant for us. Audronė fell asleep. We laid her down on the grass and covered her up with all we had, finishing with the Lithuanian flag.

More and more people were gathering, as were the police officers. Because we had the flag, strangers kept chatting with us. We met at least five Lithuanians or people who knew of Lithuania. One was a basketball-playing student, whose impressive height suggested as much; others were a family from Canada, the head of which was a Lithuanian. We met a priest from Argentina whose two friends were missionaries in the Archdiocese of Vilnius, and a couple of Poles who, having emigrated to Philadelphia, were as happy as clams at high tide. As evening drew close, the screens showed Pope Francis arriving. The crowd exploded with excitement. We rushed to wake Audronė; Miglė rehearsed climbing up a post to see the pope better. Finally all three children settled down on the grown ups' shoulders: Ugnė on dad's, Audronė on mum's, Miglė on a neighboring Pole's. How we waited, how we shouted when the pope drove by! Then we listened to his simple speech until we realized it was time to go back to the hotel. The children collapsed into their beds at once, whereas we finished watching the concert on TV.

Walking to Mass the next day was a very similar experience: we walked a long way just to stand in a queue at the checking point. Then we walked some more until we finally reached the zone we were allowed to enter—where our travel companions, the grandparents Zimkai, had kept a place for us. We settled down as close as we could to the railing, so we would definitely see the pope. We hung up our flag. Asked a policeman to take a picture. And then, once more, we waited. Audronė asked again and again if the pope was really coming, if there would really be God. To her, God and the pope were one and the same. Then it happened—the pope drove past us.

While waiting, we got to know a wonderful family from Philadelphia who were standing right next to us: a mother and her three daughters who already had children of their own. During our chat they remarked that Americans don't really leave the U.S. very often. But having seen us, maybe they would attend the next World Meeting of Families in Ireland. This time it was Ugnė who fell asleep on the grass. It was strange to be part of



Above: Violeta Vitkauskienė and daughters head back to their hotel after the Festival of Families concert. Photo: Mindaugas Vitkauskas

Right: The Spogis family from Canada (left) joins the Zimkus (center) and Vitkauskas families as they wait along the Benjamin Franklin Parkway in Philadelphia for the papal Mass to begin.

Bottom: The Vitkauskas family meets Pope Francis (at least his life-size cut-out) at the Lithuanian Family Celebration at St. Andrew's Lithuanian parish in Philadelphia. Photo: Rimas Gedeika



such a massive Mass. The time positively flew by, maybe even too fast. We felt the festivities coming to an end and home starting to beckon. It all happened so fast.

What will we remember? The peace-keeping soldier who, upon learning we were from Lithuania, immediately mentioned the basketball player Žydrūnas Ilgauskas. All the people who knew what country Lithuania was—the marketplace salesmen, the grocery-store cashiers, the neighbors in the crowd—their knowledge surprised and pleased us. The incredibly friendly people, the considerate volunteers, the attentive and friendly soldiers and police officers. I saw one policeman lacing up a child's shoe, while the tired mother held the infant in her hands. I heard policemen wishing each other peace. We experienced the joy of an American-Polish woman, who was delighted to learn we'd travelled all this way to the convention.

We appreciated that the pope's speeches were simple: fatigue was a constant companion and our brains were functioning at only half their capacity. The idea that love in a family is a hug, a kiss, breakfast lovingly made in the morning; that it's very important to love children and grandparents; that God favors the humble, struggling family that is especially careful in heeding his will over the family with a good, easy life ... all he wants is sincere faith. These ideas are what sustain my family. His encouragement to seek togetherness in good deeds, not differences in ideas and ideologies, was so meaningful! It's very important to realize how many people and how much work it takes to encourage and strengthen a family. If you keep in mind that these conventions began as an initiative of Pope John Paul II, it clearly shows just how dear both family and every single one of us is to God. If only we cared about God as much as he cares about us...



Following the Pope in Philadelphia: A Spiritual Journey

by Julieta and Vytautas Gedvila, as told to Rimas Gedeika

Suddenly the long-awaited moment was here! We were going to see Pope Francis! We got up at 5 a.m., caught the 6:30 a.m. train and got to the center of Philadelphia at about 7 a.m.

As we got off the train, the first thing that caught our eyes was the small number of people waiting to pass through the security stations. For weeks we heard that there would be huge crowds and long waiting lines, but this was not the case. We got through the security checkpoint without any problems.

Days in advance, we had gotten tickets to see Pope Francis at Independence Mall at 4:45 p.m. Now we had hours to spare. What should we do? We looked at our schedule and saw that the Pope was to say Mass at the Cathedral at 10:30 a.m. Why not?

We started to walk toward the Cathedral with little hope of being able to get in. As we approached, we were surprised to see, for the second time that morning, that the crowds were sparse. We picked up our pace, walked through the main entrance without any problem, and were able to get an aisle seat. We waited and waited, but the waiting was worthwhile because as the pope entered and began his walk to the altar, we were right there! Pope Francis passed us so closely, that if we were to have stretched out our hands we would have touched him. What a marvelous sight! What a spiritual uplifting!

At the end of the Mass, the pope walked right by us, blessing us. Never in our wildest dreams did we think that we would be so fortunate as see him that close.

After we left the Cathedral we decided to walk around and experience the atmosphere of the entire event. Every aspect of the event was very well organized. The volunteers were very helpful, always willing to show us where to go, where to get food, coffee—all with minimal waiting time.

As the hour approached for Pope Francis' appearance in front of Independence Hall, the crowd began to become larger and larger. We began to meet others heading the same way. Soon nine Lithuanians were marching happily toward Independence Hall. This time we were not as lucky as we were in the morning. It was very slow walking, with longer lines going through the security points. This time we could only stay way in the back and hear the pope speak.

Security was great. We could see them walking in the crowds, at the security points and on almost all the rooftops.

As evening approached, we decided that we would not try to see the Festival of Families entertainment program. The crowds were larger than before, and the lines going through the checkpoints also larger. We decided to call it a day.

We had no difficulty taking the train home. Again, surprisingly, we encountered very few delays.

It was a wonderful day, a day which we will always cherish, which we will always remember.



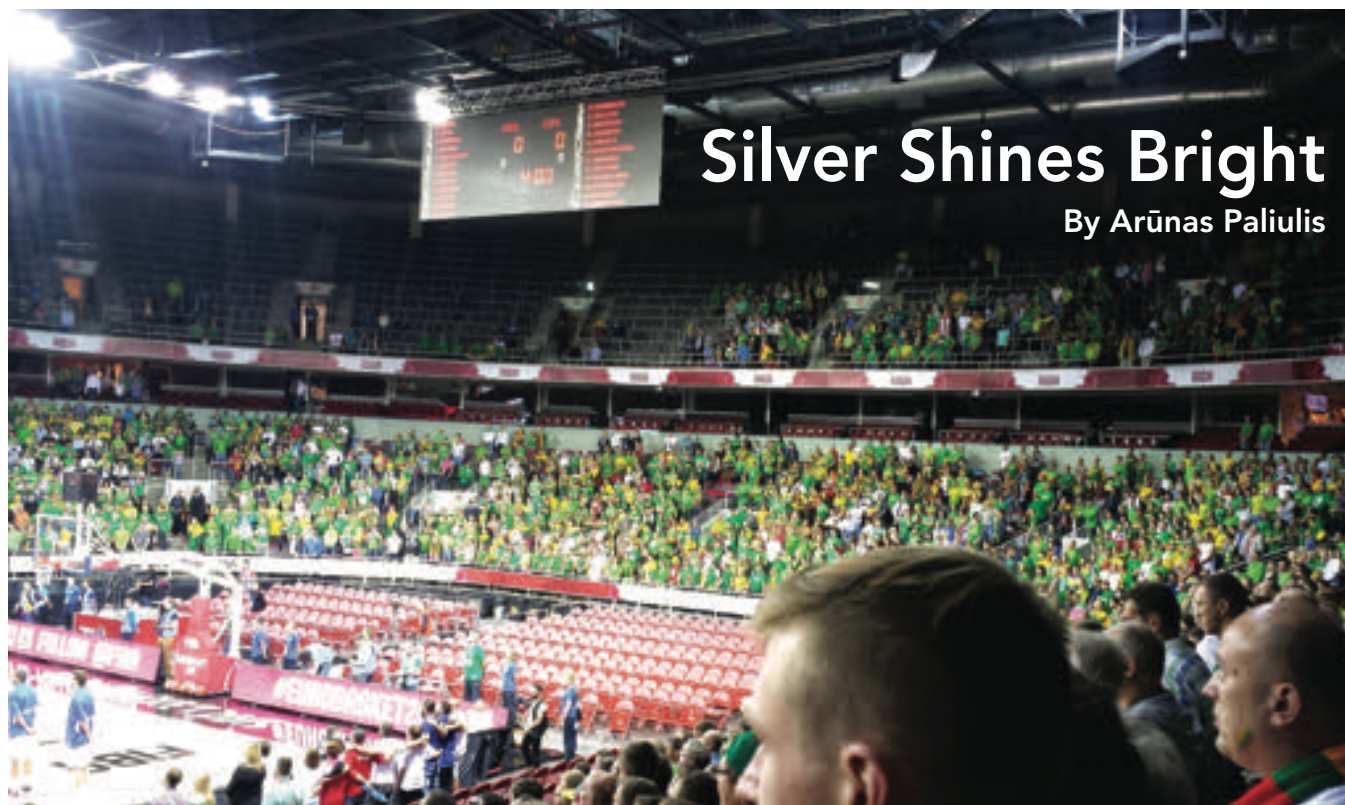
Waiting for the pope's Saturday afternoon address at Independence Hall. Photo: Vytautas Gedvila



People lined the Parkway to catch a glimpse of the pope's motorcade. Photo: Rymantas Zimkus



The pope arrives to cheering crowds. Photo: Rymantas Zimkus



Silver Shines Bright

By Arūnas Paliulis

Riga, Latvia, hosted EuroBasket 2015 Group D in qualifying rounds. Other host nations included Germany, Croatia and France. This scoreboard shows that the Lithuanians are about to meet the team from the Czech Republic, who they will go on to defeat 85-81.

The auto caravans started streaming out of Kaunas and Vilnius and Klaipėda by mid-morning on Friday, September 4, even though the opening match of EuroBasket 2015 wasn't until Saturday evening. The basketball faithful were joined en route by their brethren from Šiauliai and Kursėnai and Panėvėžys and Kupiškės, with all vehicles adorned with yellow, green and red national flags and stickers, and their occupants hollering "Lietuva-Lietuva-Lietuva" and "mes laimėsime" (we shall prevail). Arrivals in the ancient Hanseatic city of Riga straggled throughout the afternoon and evening, and after installation in the various hotels and guest houses of the old city, most everyone paraded through the streets chanting "lab dien bralai Latviai" (good day to our Latvian brothers) and received the popular response "laipni lugti majas brali Lietuvi" (welcome home dear brother Lithuanians).

All fans were warmly welcomed at the Švyturys Klaipėda brewery hospitality pub called Paddy Whelan's by its very amiable general manager Edis (Fast Fingers) Berzins, a former national junior basketball team member and amateur boxer. The site was adorned with Lithuanian national and club team memorabilia, showed film clips of past games and tournaments, and served countless dekaliters of all the popular Švyturys brands, provided by the especially hospitable marketing manager Arūnas Čižauskas.

All of the nine matches over the 15 days were hotly contested, with six of them decided by four points or fewer. Lithuania

won its group phase in Riga, and when Latvia also qualified for the elimination phase in Lille, France, many pundits started dreaming of an eventual Lithuania-Latvia final, akin to the early years of the FIBA EuroBasket tournament when the tiny Baltic nations dominated their much larger neighbors. Here are the results of the first three championships:

1935 in Moscow: Latvia 24 - Spain 18

1937 in Riga: Lithuania 24 - Latvia 23

1939 in Kaunas: Lithuania 37 - Latvia 36

It was only a few months after the great celebration at the Kaunas Sports Hall where president Antanas Smetona delivered the opening and closing addresses to rapturous fans that the demonic Soviets invaded the Baltic States and occupied them for 52 years. All national political, cultural, social and sporting life was silenced, and we were largely gone but not forgotten until the national revival and reassertions of independence in 1989 to 1991.

This year our Latvian hosts regaled us and cheered for us during all the group matches, just as we did for them. Our heroes of the tournament were 30-year-old veteran Jonas Mačiulis, who plays club ball for Real Madrid with four members of Spain's national team starters, and Jonas Valančiūnas, the 23-year-old star center of the Toronto Raptors. Both were selected to the all-tournament team.

When the group phase was ended and the elimination phase transferred to Lille, France, the composition of the partisan



The author (center, yellow shirt) cheers on the Lithuanian team.

Lithuanian end changed as well. In Riga it was largely a contingent from the homeland, while in Lille it more comprised the diaspora, dominated by expats from Dublin and London, but also well represented by fans from Oslo and Barcelona, Toronto and Chicago, and even Adelaide.

Each match was preceded by a resounding and heart-thumping rendition of *Lietuva, Tėvyne mūsų* followed by Marijonas Mikutavičius' ever-more-popular ode to Lithuanian basketball,

Trys Milijonai (Three Million).

The Lithuanian cheering section was led by national hero and basketball great, the 7-foot-3-inch Arvydas Sabonis, his ravishingly beautiful 6-foot-4-inch daughter Aušrinė Sabonytė, and the boisterous, wildly exuberant and colorful drum corps led by Tomas Balaišis, a.k.a. Sekla. France's daily sports paper, *L'equipe*, printed a full-page spread about Sabonis, referring to him as a living legend, and probably the most talented European basketball player ever. Sabonis was well known to French fans from his playing days at Valladolid and Madrid before moving on to the Portland Trailblazers.

This reporter's French sojourn was tainted by a mugging by two rogues on the Lille subway, resulting in a loss of documents, cash and credit cards, but the pain and chagrin were soon

relieved by two 25-year-old natives of Kaunas, who collected more than 300 euros in less than 10 minutes from fellow countrymen. It was enough to pay the outstanding hotel bill and procure tickets to the remaining matches. Beyond that, other fans insisted on covering all bar and restaurant bills for "dedukas" or good ole uncle for the remainder of the week. Never in my 64 years had I felt so happy and proud to be a Lithuanian.



EuroBasket 2015 fanzone in Riga, Latvia. Photo: Edgars Košovojis

The final against Spain was attended by an all-time European record of 27,372 spectators, as most French and other team supporters threw their weight and their sympathies toward the underdog Lithuanians. The green team fell behind by 11 points midway through the first period, then struggled to stay even for the rest of the game. Spain's Pau Gasol was clearly the difference on the day, scoring 25 points and securing 12 rebounds. He was named the tournament's most valuable player.

Here are all the results of Lithuania's games in this year's tournament:

- 69-68 vs. Ukraine
- 68-49 vs. Latvia
- 74-76 vs. Belgium
- 64-62 vs. Estonia
- 85-81 vs. Czech Republic
- 85-81 vs. Georgia
- 95-85 vs. Italy
- 67-64 vs. Serbia
- 63-80 vs. Spain

Despite the loss in the final, collective Lithuanian hearts and souls the world over swelled with joy and pride, especially as the silver medal earned us an automatic invitation to the Olympics in Brazil next August. We're on the road to Rio, and we hope to see you there!



The author, center, and two friends dressed in national colors in Riga, Latvia.

Arūnas Paliulis was born in Waterbury, Conn., the son of displaced persons. He currently works in agricultural product trading and marketing. His wife, Caroline, is an actress.



The author (right) with friends at one of the games in Latvia.

photo essay

Heroes' Welcome

Photos by Teresė Vekteris

Silver was just as good as gold for the Lithuanian basketball fans who greeted their returning national team in style. The streets surrounding the Vilnius Town Hall swelled with cheering fans gathered for the welcome ceremony to celebrate the EuroBasket 2015 silver-medal victory that guaranteed Lithuania a place in the 2016 Summer Olympics in Rio de Janeiro.



Fans displayed their national colors at the event.



Pride was apparent on fans' faces in more ways than one.



Fans begin to gather for the welcome-home event in front of the Vilnius Town Hall.



Lithuania's prime minister presented the team with a 69,480 euro check.



The Lithuanian Basketball Federation awarded the team 100,000 euros.



Players tossed out autographed balls, and then their victors' wreaths.



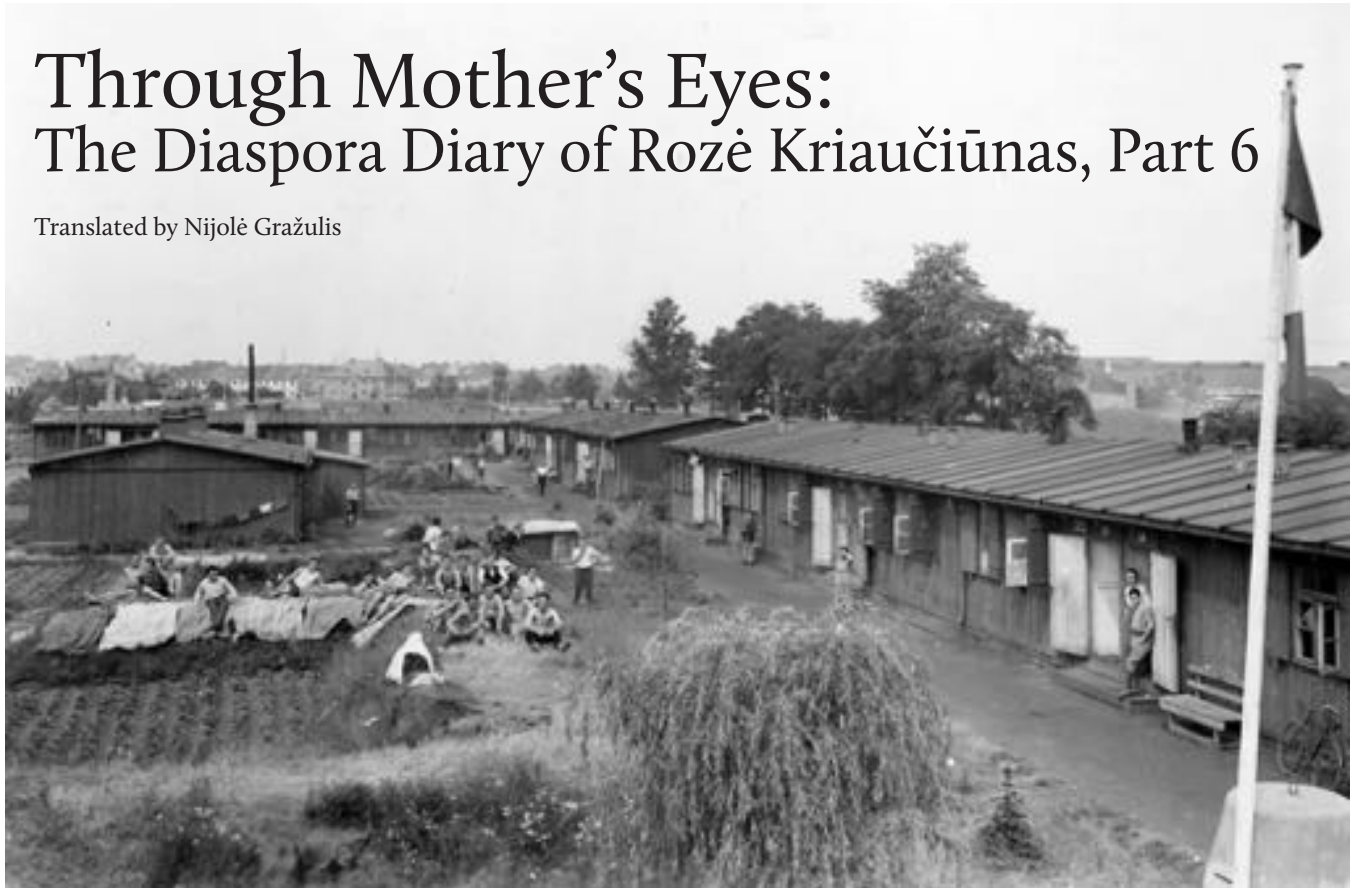
Apartments overlooking Town Hall Square provided a bird's-eye view.



The Lithuanian national basketball team stands before the gathered crowd.

Through Mother's Eyes: The Diaspora Diary of Rozė Kriaučiūnas, Part 6

Translated by Nijolė Gražulis



View of Camp Frohe Zukunft, one of the 26 camps for displaced person near Halle, Germany. Photo: PFC Kluger, U.S. Army Signal Corps

October 3, 1945

On this day I have experienced the most painful of all the incredible hours I have lived through. And why did everything seem so hopeless today? Why did it not occur to me that God is my Savior? Naturally, you can't expect much consideration from people, although they will always say a kind word to cheer you. But I need practical help. My little boy, Romualdas, has been sick all week. I have no tasty snacks to offer him. He is very frail. The doctor did not offer to provide me with better food. This affected me so strongly that I lost my desire to live and my purpose in life. I burst into tears. I cried in the room at the doctor's, right in front of all the people. Nothing mattered to me at the time. It is now 9 p.m. I am lying in bed feeling helpless and writing these words. What has my crying accomplished? One thing is certain: it has affected my health.

... [illegible text] Mykolas, why did we end up in this predicament? What are you feeling and going through this very hour? Your heart too is probably full of bitterness, but I also feel our children's pain in addition to my own. Plus, I am heartsick because I don't know what has happened to you. Dear God, please let this uncertainty end soon. If only at least a small ray of hope would penetrate into the darkness that is now my existence.

October 9, 1945

Time is passing quickly even though the days are boring. The hours are flowing into the immense sea of eternity, never to return. As they pass, they take with them into oblivion all the painful experiences, the grief, and the tearful days in the life of a refugee. And there is plenty to endure in the lonely life of a refugee. Many worries are tainting the hours of this dreary autumn.

My little boy, Romualdas, is in the hospital. He does not feel too bad, nevertheless he is sick. When I was told that he is going to be transferred to the hospital in Erlangen [Germany], I felt a pang in my heart. He is so shy [illegible text]. One of us will now be separated from the rest by 95 miles. I don't know for how long. I don't have much food to send with him, and there is no one to visit him there, no one to offer him even a bite of bread. He will be all alone in a foreign land among foreigners, and he does not know the language. His young heart will have to bear so much! My little boy will have to endure many unpleasant experiences. He has been preparing for the journey quite willingly, for he likes to travel by car. But he will be sad once he gets there.

October 12, 1945

Some variety was introduced into our daily lives by a Mission

conducted by the Rev. Bružikas during October 7-12. I did not like his style of preaching. He spoke haphazardly, touching upon a number of topics. His tone was sharp and at times even harsh. Words spoken in such a manner do not reach the depths of my soul. I am moved by sincere, charitable words that express compassion for the unfortunate [illegible text] like those of the Rev. Tulaba.

He spoke of many things and put his heart into the Mission. He urged us to be good, to pray. He said that our time on earth is truly short, and we spend so much time just getting ready. All our attention is on earthly things and on our bodies. There is so much egotism and intolerance, and so little love of one's neighbor. People would show much more love for one another if they had more empathy. Then the life of a refugee would not be so difficult, and there would be less loneliness and less evil in the lives of human beings. Many persons came to listen to his sermons, and many went to confession. Yet I think that only a few will incorporate his teachings into their daily lives. Each person thinks he or she is good and that it is the others who are bad. Almost everyone can find something to criticize, but no one should seek out tiny blemishes in a neighbor's heart while ignoring one's own larger ones.

I went to hear nearly all of the sermons and took them all to heart ... [illegible text]

He kept referring to our homeland and our relatives. As for me, I need no reminders, for the persons I care about are always in my heart. While sitting in the church I reconsidered so many things that my head began to spin from exhaustion. He constantly kept referring to families. Families went up to the altar together to receive Holy Communion. Nearly all of the women had their husbands with them. As I knelt before the altar with Elvyra, I suddenly felt so grief-stricken that I could not control myself, and my tears began to flow. The priest was giving me the Host, and I was crying. It was embarrassing, but, O dear God, the pain! After all, I don't know if Mykolas is still alive, and my little Romualdas is not with us, and my mother, brother, and sisters may be somewhere in Siberia. How can a heart endure all that? Nevertheless, I became calmer after receiving Communion. I put my faith in Almighty God. I entrusted the care of my family to Him. I am awaiting help only from Him. If we are worthy, our dearest Mykolas will come back to us. If he does not return, I believe it will be because God is punishing me for my past mistakes, for there were so many needless arguments between us. There were so many times when I only wanted to get away from him and feel some peace of mind. Wasn't it my own desire to be separated from him? Yes, I did have to endure much criticism from Mykolas, but I should have been more patient and forgiving rather than condemning him. Instead, I thought of him as a bad person, even as my enemy.

Now I feel even worse, thinking that my own actions may have contributed to our separation. Dear God, please forgive me if you are punishing me for that reason. It truly was hard for me to endure his harsh words at the time, but I truly felt most

unhappy having lost him in such a cruel manner.

If he came back now, we would know how to live, we would know how to understand and support and comfort one another. How indescribably difficult it is to be without him, how sad. How I long for him. At times I am even afraid to talk with a man in case it may be construed that I am seeking male companionship. No, not at all! I do not want to be unfaithful to Mykolas by even so much as the slightest inappropriate glance. I want to be completely faithful to him as he was to me.

I am totally at peace as far as any bodily desires are concerned. No one interests me in the slightest. I believe you too, Mykolas, will remain faithful to me. If it comes to that, I would forgive you everything if only I could once again gaze into your blue eyes and feel the beating of your heart and if I could kiss you and keep kissing you without stopping.

October 14, 1945

I feel terrible today. I have a sore throat and laryngitis. I've been sitting in our room all day by myself. No one has visited me. I have no close friend. I don't fit in with the other ladies. When necessary, I can go and talk with anybody, but it doesn't come naturally. There is another teacher here, but all she talks about is men. She even has several suitors. So I am alone and unhappy. Every day I eye the newcomers in the yard, hoping to spot my dearest Mykolas. But without luck. Yet I still believe that my waiting is not in vain. Especially these last few weeks I have been thinking about this a lot, and waiting, always waiting. If he's alive he may also be worrying about us and searching. Or has he lost all hope of finding us and is no longer looking? So much time has passed that it seems to me as if by now he could



The mail room of the UNRRA Central Tracing Bureau received thousands of letters daily from people trying to piece together their families from more than a million former slave laborers and prisoners of the Nazis still remaining in Germany in 1945. Photo: U.S. Army Signal Corps

have visited every refugee camp even on foot. Can it be that he has forgotten us? If it were only me, perhaps he might forget me and find someone else. But his children are so dear to his heart. How he loved his cheerful Vitalija! No, no, Mykolas won't do that. He really will come back to his family. Dear God, please help him find us.

October 18, 1945

All day today I did laundry, and I'm tired. I had hoped to be able to visit my dear Romualdas today. My heart ached when I was told that there wasn't enough room in the car so I could not go. It is already two weeks since he was taken away and has been alone among strangers. I don't even know how he's doing. This is so hard to bear, and I feel so sorry for him. The poor dear had to be separated from us. I have prepared a small package so they could take him some food. Maybe I can go there by train one day soon.

October 21, 1945

It's a beautiful autumn Sunday. People are going for walks in the forest to look at the yellowing leaves for the last time. Everything looks so beautiful in the flickering sunlight. The tree-tops sparkle as if golden. Destined to perish, the leaves will soon fall to the ground and be crushed underfoot without pity. They beautified the trees. Many of us took pleasure in them all summer long, for they soothed our hearts. Now the end has come. Yes, the autumn season comes to all things. It mercilessly destroys everything that was once beautiful. Autumn comes to every one of us ... [illegible text] to our youth, with its stormy experiences and its wondrous dreams.

My life now is as if a perpetual autumn. Everything within my soul is as if shrouded, bleak, and depressed. It feels dreary and cold. Everything around me is overcast with pitch-black clouds. I can't see a single ray of light. It is just awful. I am so tired of this limited, monotonous life. How I would like to talk, to listen, to reveal my heartaches to someone. When and to whom will I be able to do this? I am tired of waiting, for my Mykolas never shows up. There is no one, no, no one at all close to me here. It is indescribably difficult to be without my relatives, my friends, or the people I once knew.

Yesterday Mrs. Šimkus was reunited with her husband. He had been separated from his family in January. They are overjoyed, although they don't seem to get along very well. I feel comforted by this, for if someone can still come back at this late date, then my husband too might return. We are still young, we still long for each other, body and soul. Oh, the loneliness!



Correspondence room of the UNRRA Central Tracing Bureau in Frankfurt, Germany, where typists wrote hundreds of letters daily in efforts to bring together families among the more than one million displaced persons still in Western Europe in 1945. Photo: U.S. Army Signal Corps

Oh, how dreary everything is without the one I love. True, I do have the children, and I love them. But it is not enough. My soul hungers and thirsts for its soul mate. Where is he? When will I see him again? Dear God, please help me to be patient! This is so hard.

October 30, 1945

Rather early this morning I was awakened by unusual sounds in the hallway. I jumped out of bed and ran to see what was happening. All the men were being ordered into the yard. Our entire refugee camp was surrounded by armed soldiers, who were herding the men into the yard. They were looking for Nazi collaborators. Many (50) men were taken away to the city prison. A great panic ensued. Women were weeping, shouting, and screaming. The soldiers were threatening to shoot if all of us did not go back to our rooms. Mrs. Sirdomas was crying especially grievously. Her friends from Freiburg [Germany], who were visiting, had been arrested. One of them was her beloved. She agonized and worried about him. The men were held in prison for three days and released when none were found guilty of the charges. We refugees were terribly upset during that time. This had to be the work of the Bolsheviks or the Germans. Everyone treats us like dirt. Everyone wishes us ill. Dear God, when will we be able to feel safe and worry free? Perhaps elsewhere too it will be just as bad? Only back in a free homeland could we breathe more easily and feel more secure. But, alas, will we ever be able to go back there, and when?

To be continued in the next issue of Bridges.

Mozaika Tortas

(Mosaic Cake)

By Jana Sirusaitė Motivans



As in many other North American cities, the once vibrant and active Lithuanian community in Montreal has diminished, as the older generation has aged and the younger generation has withdrawn. We are still very fortunate to have a dynamic group here and some committed and motivated individuals who keep the community active.

The backbone of the community is, of course, the DP (displaced persons) generation, those who arrived in Canada after World War II. They established the churches, the choirs and the dance groups. For them, the Lithuanian community was the center of their social lives and an important support network.

In Montreal, this group continues to meet as the Rūtos Klubas, a club for those over 50 years of age. This lovely group of people, usually about 20 to 25 strong, meets every Wednesday in our parapijos salė (church hall) for bingo, lunch and socializing. I help in our church office on Wednesday mornings and then join them for lunch. It has been a pleasure to get to know them and, through them, to learn the history and stories (and gossip!) of the Montreal Lithuanian community at Aušros Vartų Parapija.

Danutė Staškevičienė, one of the founding members, is a talented weaver who makes exquisite sashes, and I have been

visiting her at her home to learn to weave. Her home is full of looms of various sizes, boxes and bags of yarn, beautiful woven sashes, display cases of dolls wearing tautinai rūbai (folk costumes) she has woven herself, along with a closetful of tautinai rūbai for herself and her daughters.

Before we weave, we have a cup of tea in Mrs. Staškevičienė's cozy kitchen, and usually some biscuits or tea cake. Mrs. Staškevičienė shared a recipe for a favorite cake. It is called a mozaika tortas, because the cake contains pieces of dried fruit and when it is cut into slices these pieces of dried fruit look like a mosaic. The recipe comes originally from Lithuania, was brought over by a member of the parish and spread in popularity throughout the community.

This is a simple cake to make, but looks impressive. It tastes somewhat like a Napoleonas, but without all the work. It falls under the category of cakes known in Lithuania as "tinginys" (lazy cake) because there is no baking involved. Dried fruits are chopped up and soaked in brandy, a creamy filling is made, and it is all layered together with tea biscuits, pressed down and refrigerated. Little effort, but great results—perfect for Easter, Christmas or other special occasions.

Mozaika Tortas

(Mosaic Cake)

INGREDIENTS

- 1 pound dried apricots
- 1 pound dried pitted prunes
- 1 1/4 cups pecans
- 1 pound unsalted butter, softened
- 2 cups sour cream
- 1 cup sugar
- 1 teaspoon vanilla
- 1/2 cup brandy or amaretto
- 2 boxes of arrowroot cookies or similar plain tea biscuits

1. Dice the apricots, prunes and pecans into small pieces. Put them into a glass or ceramic bowl, add the brandy (or amaretto) and mix everything together. Cover the bowl and allow the fruit to soak in the liquor for 24 hours, stirring occasionally.



2. In a large bowl, beat the sugar with the softened butter until smooth. Add vanilla and sour cream. Mix with a spoon.



3. Add the fruit, nut and brandy mixture and mix well.



4. In a large (10-inch) springform pan, place two large sheets of aluminium foil, criss-crossed, in the bottom of the pan,

leaving the excess to overhang the edges. Place some cookies on the bottom of the pan, breaking some to fill in as many gaps as possible. Repeat with more cookies, making a double layer.



5. Add about 1/3 of the filling on top of the cookies and spread it carefully. Add another double layer of cookies, followed by another 1/3 of the filling. Repeat again, ending with a top layer of filling.



6. Place a few cookies in a bag and crush them, and sprinkle the crumbs over the top of the cake. Fold the overhanging pieces of foil to cover the cake and press down gently with your hands.
7. Leave the cake on the counter to settle, then press down again gently. Find a flat-bottomed plate or use a cutting board to weight down the cake to compress it. Place it in the refrigerator for two or three days to allow the cookies to soften and the cake to settle. The cake freezes very well (in fact tastes even better) and thaws quickly.



Three Lithuanian-American Luminaries Inducted Into Hall of Fame



Ann Jillian at the 1988 Emmy Awards.
Photo: Alan Light



Vyto Ruginis in 1997 press photo.



Arnold Voketaitis and wife Nijolė in Vilnius in 2009.

Three “Lithuanian American Legends” took their places in the National Lithuanian American Hall of Fame (NLAHF) at a ceremony on September 12, 2015, at the Lithuanian World Center in Lemont, Ill.

The new hall-of-famers—actress Ann Jillian (born Juratė Nausėdaitė), actor Vyto Ruginis and opera soloist Arnold Voketaitis—joined the ranks of previous inductees, football greats Dick Butkus and Johnny Unitas, and actress Rūta Lee.

Jillian, 65, is best known for her role as Cassie Cranston on the 1980s sitcom *It's a Living* as well as the eponymous series *Ann Jillian*, which aired from 1989 to 1990. She won a 1988 Golden Globe for Best Actress – Miniseries or Television Film for *The Ann Jillian Story* and is a three-time Emmy Award nominee. Jillian's acting career began when she was a child, and she has guest starred in numerous television shows, mini-series, musicals and made-for-TV movies, Bob Hope USO shows and Broadway shows. A breast cancer survivor, she is now an advocate for awareness, motivational speaker and musical performer.

Ruginis, 59, is a character actor known for his recurring roles on *NCIS: Los Angeles*, *ER* and *Presidio Med*, as well as guest appearances on *Angel*, *House MD*, *The X-Files*, *Law & Order* and *Star Trek: The Next Generation*. He has appeared in numerous films, including *The Devil's Advocate* with Al Pacino and Keanu Reeves, *Cliffhanger* with Sylvester Stallone, *Broken Arrow* with John Travolta and Christian Slater, *Jumpin' Jack*

Flash with Whoopi Goldberg, *The Fast and The Furious* and *Auto Focus*.

Voketaitis, 80, is an internationally known bass-baritone opera singer who began his singing career touring as soloist with the United States Army Band (Pershing's Own) in 1956. After winning several singing competitions in 1957 along with a Rockefeller Award, Voketaitis made his professional opera debut as Vanuzzi in Richard Strauss's *Die schweigsame Frau* at the New York City Opera in 1958. He has performed with many companies since, including the Houston Grand Opera, Opéra de Montréal, Palacio de Bellas Artes, San Francisco Opera, Metropolitan Opera national touring company and Lyric Opera of Chicago, and as a soloist with symphony orchestras across the U.S. His recordings have garnered six Grammy Award nominations. In 2009 he was awarded the Commander's Cross of the Order of the Lithuanian Grand Duke Gediminas, Lithuania's high cultural medal, in honor of his artistic achievement and support of Lithuanian culture.

The induction ceremony was also a fund-raising event for the organization that featured live entertainment by popular vocalist and musician Aldegunda and Kęstutis Stančiauskas with “Streetdancer.” Attendees enjoyed dinner, music and dancing. Jon Platakis, NLAHF chairman, founded the organization in 2011 to “acquaint the American people with Lithuania, its epic history, its people and their culture.”

Saulė Shines in Omaha

By Aldona Tanner

Saulė Folk Music Ensemble



The dancers of Saulė folk music ensemble from Lithuania

This year, Omaha Sister Cities Association celebrated our 50-year anniversary since establishing our first sister city with Shizuoka, Japan. The sister cities that have been established since then are Braunschweig, Germany; Šiauliai, Lithuania; Naas, Ireland; Xalapa, Mexico; and Yantai, China.

As part of this celebration, a subgroup of the Sister Cities, Omaha Friends of Šiauliai, invited guests from Lithuania to help us celebrate. In collaboration with the University of Nebraska Omaha, the Saulė folk music ensemble from Šiauliai University traveled to Omaha and held several performances. They were the special performers at the International Friendship Banquet celebrating the 50th anniversary.

The Omaha Lithuanian Women's Club contributed toward Saulė's lodging expenses during their stay. On Sunday, September 20, 2015, we had a free performance by Saulė at St. Peter & Paul gym and the Lithuanian Women's Club prepared a complimentary luncheon. Club members exceeded expectations in preparing and donating food. We also were fortunate to receive torte donations from the Lithuanian Bakery, Napoleonas and hazelnut.



Saulė presented three loaves of wheat bread as a thank you to their hosts.

We enjoyed a great performance with the audience swaying with the singing, clapping to the music and dancing. Many in attendance were not Lithuanian yet they seemed to really enjoy the performance and the food. Saulė gave the club three loaves of wheat bread from Lithuania to thank us and the mayor of

Šiauliai, Arturas Visockas, gave the club a box of chocolates from Lithuania.

Eglė, Queen of the Grass Snakes



Eglė, Queen of the Grass Snakes, Lithuanian folk wood sculpture by Aurimas Šimkus.

The other Lithuanian activities included the "Saulės Takas" (Sun Trail) project inspired by the opening of the Japanese Garden at the Lauritzen Gardens.

The Mayor of Omaha and other dignitaries were at the August 28, 2015, unveiling of the Lithuanian folk wood sculpture by Aurimas Šimkus at Lauritzen Gardens. The sculpture is of Eglė, Queen of the Grass Snakes, and is the first Lithuanian folk wood sculpture project at any botanical garden in North America.

The Honorable Rolandas Kriščiūnas, Lithuania's ambassador to the United States, was in attendance. Kristina Kuprytė gave a performance playing the kanklės, a traditional Lithuanian instrument resembling the zither.

Lithuanian Mural

We also had a Lithuanian mural painted on the side of the Lithuanian Bakery. Richard Harrison (A Midsummer's Mural) is the artist who obtained grants to fund this project. He along with other artists held meetings with the Lithuanian community, obtained input from the community, and designed and painted the mural. The Honorable Rolandas Kriščiūnas, along with the Saulė dance group and the mayor of Šiauliai, Arturas Visockas, visited the mural during their stay here.

Harrison received his master of fine arts in scene design at North Carolina School of the Arts in 1989, and has worked many years in painting murals, designing scenery and teaching high school and college students how to design and paint. He has done mural work in Omaha, Chicago, Minneapolis, South Carolina and Colorado. His work with the Thomas Melvin Painting Studio in Chicago included the AT&T corporate headquarters and work for the Art Institute of Chicago.



A Midsummer's Mural by Richard Harrison on the wall of Omaha's Lithuanian Bakery.

Stranded Lithuanian Seamen Return Home



The Venta crew with the Lithuanian community visitors. Photo courtesy of Seamen's Church Institute of Philadelphia and South Jersey.

The 20 crew members of the Lithuanian cargo vessel MV Venta, which had been moored in the Delaware River in Philadelphia for two months, are finally on their way home.

The bulk carrier ship first came into port in Philadelphia on June 30, 2015, and was arrested three days later due to its owner's non-payment of bills. Lithuanian Shipping Company owed money to vendors, the ship was in disrepair and the seafarers on board had not been paid for three months. The ship could not leave until its owner repayed debts, and the men on board could not disembark in the meantime, as many did not have the type of visa that would allow them to go ashore.

Because the ship's owner had declared bankruptcy, it was

unclear what the fate of the seafarers would be, so the community rallied to provide assistance where it could. The seamen received regular visits from the Seamen's Church Institute of Philadelphia and South Jersey, which coordinated aid. They brought representatives of the International Transport Workers Federation to the ship to put the sailors under contract, giving the ITWF the ability to protect their rights.

The Institute also brought the Lithuanian ambassador, two Lithuanian honorary consuls and the pastor of St. Andrew's Lithuanian Catholic Church to visit the crew to discuss the situation and learn how they could advocate on their behalf. They learned that the men felt isolated from the world, were short on water, fruit and fresh food, and that all were tired, depressed and longing for their loved ones. However, they appreciated meeting people that spoke their native tongue.

Following the meeting, St. Andrew's began collecting donations to help assure a constant source of food and water delivered to the ship. Other churches and businesses in Philadelphia and the suburbs also aided the sailors, donating fans when the ship's air conditioning malfunctioned, making home-cooked meals and even delivering donuts.

Lithuanian Shipping Company eventually was able to obtain a 3 million euro loan, halting bankruptcy proceedings and allowing them to pay enough bills to permit the Venta to leave Philadelphia, bound for Montreal, Canada, on August 27. The ship returned to Klaipėda at the end of October and is listed for sale.

Plans Made to Market U.S. Dance Festival in Lithuania

On September 22, 2015, a meeting was held in the Lithuanian Ministry of Foreign Affairs to discuss the 15th North American Lithuanian Folk Dance Festival (Šokių šventė) in Baltimore and the preparations for it. Most of the participating ministry officials recently held diplomatic posts in the Lithuanian Embassy in Washington, D.C., and had a chance to dance at the 14th Dance Festival in Boston. They believe that people in Lithuania should be better informed about the festival, which will take place at the Royal Farms Arena in Baltimore on July 3, 2016, and that Lithuanian entrepreneurs and companies should assist in the organizational efforts.

The festival's artistic director, Tomas E. Mikuckis, who was visiting Lithuania to attend a choreography course, was in favor of compiling marketing information on the festival to be presented to representatives of Lithuanian businesses this year.

Another idea discussed at the meeting was to organize a live demonstration of the dance festival in Lithuania. Its participants would be the organizing committee of the festival, the officials



After the meeting, from left: Ministry of Foreign Affairs economic issues spokesperson, Deputy Director General, Department of Lithuanians Living Abroad of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs Lina Žukauskaitė, Political Director of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Lithuania Rolandas Kačinskas, 15th North American Lithuanian Dance Festival Artistic Director Thomas E. Mikuckis, Lithuanian American Community Representative in Lithuania Dalia Cidzikaitė and Lithuanian Ambassador at Large for Europe's East Žygimantas Pavilionis. Photo: Žygimantas Pavilionis

of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and members of the press and business. This event could take place as soon as later this year.

Submitted by Dalia Cidzikaitė; translated by Gabija Barnard



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

ONGOING

Through December 31
No Home To Go To: The Story of Baltic Displaced Persons 1944-1952

Balzekas Museum of Lithuanian Culture, 6500 South Pulaski Rd., Chicago
 Info: balzekasmuseum.org

One Sunday a Month
Lithuanian Brunch

The Avenue Restaurant, 71-22 Myrtle Ave., Glendale, N.Y.
 12 - 4 p.m. Call for dates. Reservations strongly recommended.
 Info: theavenuebarandgrill.com; 347-725-3853

Every Friday, 2-10:30 p.m.
Fish Fry Fridays at the Rockford Lithuanian Club

716 Indiana Ave., Rockford, Ill.
 Open to the public.
 Info: rockfordlithuanianclub@hotmail.com or 815-962-9256

NOVEMBER 2015

November 21, 1-3 p.m.

Lithuanians in San Diego Rudens Balius/Fall Ball

MCAS Miramar Officers' Club, Building 4472, Anderson Ave., MCAS Miramar, San Diego, Calif.

November 21, 1-3 p.m.

Amber Roots Heritage Club

Lithuanian Music Hall, 2715 E. Allegheny Ave., Philadelphia
 Everyone welcome. Use side entrance on Tilton Street. Bring a dish to share.
 Info: milliemarks@aol.com

November 28, 8 p.m.

Andrius Mamontovas Concert

Copernicus Center, Chicago
 Info: copernicuscenter.org/mamontovas

DECEMBER 2015

December 5, 9 a.m. - 4 p.m.

December 6, 10 a.m. - 3 p.m.

LWC Holiday Craft Fair

Lithuanian World Center, Riskus Hall, 14911 127th St., Lemont, Ill.
 Info: lcenter.org

December 5, 5 p.m.

Portland Lithuanian Christmas Eve and Children's Program

Latvian Hall, 5500 SW Dosch Rd, Portland, Ore.

December 6, 11 a.m.

Advent Mini Mugé/Fair

Annunciation Parish, 259 North 5th St., Brooklyn, N.Y.
 Info: nyapreiskimo.com

December 6, 4-7 p.m.

Presentation of Antanas Vaičiulaičius' book, Images of Italy

SLA 307 Artspace, 307 W 30th Street, New York
 Discussion of diaspora literature after the presentation. Admission: free-will donation.
 Info: zybuokle@gmail.com

December 6, time TBA

Omaha Lithuanian Community Christmas Program

Sts. Peter & Paul, Omaha, Nebr.
 Info: omahoslbt.blogspot.com

December 7, 6:30-8 p.m.

Land of Songs Screening at Baltic Film Festival

Stanford University, Pigott Hall, 450 Serra Mall, Bldg. 260, Stanford, Calif.
 Info: creees.stanford.edu/event/baltic-film-series

December 12, 5 p.m.

Kansas City Lithuanian Community Christmas Party, Potluck Dinner and Kučios

Cedar Creek Clubhouse, Olathe, Kans.
 Info: facebook.com/kansascitylithuaniancommunity

December 12, 1-3 p.m.

Amber Roots Lithuanian Heritage Club Kučios

Lithuanian Music Hall, 2715 E. Allegheny Ave., Philadelphia
 Everyone welcome. Use side entrance on Tilton Street. Please bring a traditional, meatless dish to share.
 Info: milliemarks@aol.com

December 13, 11 a.m.

Annunciation/OLMC Kūčios

OLMC Lower Hall, 275 North 8th Street, Brooklyn, N.Y.
 Info: olmcchurchbk.com

December 14, 7 p.m.

Lithuanian-American Community Night with Denver Nuggets / Pre-Game Meet and Greet with Arturas Karnisovas

Pepsi Center, Denver, Colo.
 Info: nuggetstix.com/arturas1214

December 19, 6:30 p.m.

Eastern Long Island LAC Kalėdinė vakaronė (Christmas party)

Moose Lodge, 51 Madison Street, Riverhead, N.Y.
 Info: rmitrulevicienne@nylithuanian.org

December 26, 7 p.m.

Tale of Two Brains: Comedy by Arūnas and Inga Valinskas

Theatre of Western Springs, 4384 Hampton Ave, Western Springs, Ill.
 Info: 630-464-5000

FEBRUARY 2015

February 6, 7 p.m.

Kugelis and Krupnikas 3.0: Contest and Tasting

Lithuanian World Center, 14911 127th St., Lemont, Ill.
 Info: www.facebook.com/Biciu-Burelis-191994260908697

February, date TBA

Poker Tournament to benefit Versmė Lithuanian School of Kansas City

Info: facebook.com/kansascitylithuaniancommunity

MARCH 2016

March 6, 10 a.m.

St. Casimir Scout Fair

Info: facebook.com/kansascitylithuaniancommunity

March 19, 1-3 p.m.

Amber Roots Heritage Club

Lithuanian Music Hall, 2715 E. Allegheny Ave., Philadelphia
 Everyone welcome. Use side entrance on Tilton Street. Bring a dish to share.
 Info: milliemarks@aol.com

March, date TBA

KC Lithuanian Community Independence Day Celebration

Info: facebook.com/kansascitylithuaniancommunity

APRIL 2016

April 16, 1-3 p.m.

Amber Roots Heritage Club

Lithuanian Music Hall, 2715 E. Allegheny Ave., Philadelphia
 Everyone welcome. Use side entrance on Tilton Street. Bring a dish to share.
 Info: milliemarks@aol.com

MAY 2016

May 21, 1-3 p.m.

Amber Roots Heritage Club

Lithuanian Music Hall, 2715 E. Allegheny Ave., Philadelphia
 Info: milliemarks@aol.com

May 26-28

Association for the Advancement of Baltic Studies Conference

University of Pennsylvania, Philadelphia
 Info: aabs-balticstudies.org

JUNE 2016

June 18, 1-3 p.m.

Lithuanian Music Hall, 2715 E. Allegheny Ave., Philadelphia

Info: milliemarks@aol.com

JULY 2016

July 3

15th North American Lithuanian Dance Festival

Royal Farms Arena, Baltimore
 Info: sokiusvente2016.org

OCTOBER 2016

October 9

Golden Jubilee of Our Lady of Šiluva Chapel

Shrine of the Immaculate Conception, Washington, D.C.
 Info: siluva50usa.org

Errata

In the September 2015 issue, the reference to "Lozoraitis" on page 11 should have been to Stasys Lozoraitis Sr., Lithuania's chief diplomat at the Vatican. His son, Stasys Lozoraitis Jr., was ambassador in Washington much later.

bridges

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