

bridges



LITHUANIAN-AMERICAN NEWS JOURNAL

\$5

September 2016

this month in history

September Anniversaries

780 years ago

September 22, 1236

In the Battle of Saulė (Saulės mūšis), Samogitian Lithuanians defeated the Crusaders.

The Livonian Brothers of the Sword, along with a group of crusaders from Holstein, Germany, responding to Pope Gregory's papal bull earlier in 1236 declaring a crusade against Lithuania. The pagan forces used their light arms and the swampy terrain to gain advantage against the unwieldy Livonian cavalry, killing Volkwin, the Grand Master of the Livonian Brothers of the Sword, and between 48 and 60 knights. The battle was the earliest large-scale victory of the Baltic tribes against the crusaders, and halted their advances for decades. Lithuania and Latvia celebrate September 22 as Baltic Unity Day to commemorate the battle.



465 years ago

September 19, 1551

Birth of Henrikas Valua (Henry III of Valois), French nobleman who briefly ruled the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth prior to becoming king of France. He was the son of French king Henry II and Catherine deMedici, and brother of French king Charles IX.

The unbroken line of Lithuanian Gediminid/Jagiellon rulers ended in 1572 when Sigismund II Augustus died without an heir. Following intense lobbying by the French crown, Polish nobles chose Henry as the first elected King of Poland and grand duke of Lithuania in May 1573. Lithuanian nobles boycotted the election.

Henry was hesitant to leave France, and did not arrive in Poland until January 1574. Nor did the people want him as a ruler—both his candidacy and his coronation in February 1574 were met with protests.

After the 22-year-old Henry learned of his brother Charles' death in May 1574, he fled Poland in secret, pursued by the Polish gentry and villagers, less than four months after his Polish-Lithuanian coronation. He never returned to the commonwealth, and assumed the French crown in February 1575.

130 years ago

September 2, 1886

Birth of Kazimieras (Kazys) Grybauskas, Lithuanian farmer, botanist and one of the first professional medicinal plant researchers.

In 1924, Grybauskas joined the newly established University of Kaunas Botanical Garden, where he founded the department of medicinal plants. In 1940, he saved the garden and conservatory from destruction when he persuaded the occupying military leadership that the medicinal plants cultivated there would be able to compensate for the army's lack of medicines.



125 years ago

September 26, 1891

Birth of Magdalena Draugelytė Galdikienė, teacher, feminist and politician, in Bardauskai, Lithuania.

Galdikienė began public activities at the age of 14, when she formed discussion groups at her school on issues of Lithuanian culture and language. She helped organize a local chapter of the Lithuanian Catholic Women's Organization in 1908, then headed the organization nearly uninterrupted from 1919 to 1940, growing it to 410 branches and 42,000 members. She also edited the first women's newspaper in Lithuania, *Moteris (Woman)*, with 18,000 subscribers.

Galdikienė was elected to the Board of Kaunas Municipality in 1919, then to all four democratically elected Parliaments between 1920 and 1926. She was Secretary of Parliament in 1925 and second Vice-Chairman in 1926. She worked to eliminate inequalities in inheritance laws, education and employment rights. She proposed eight weeks paid maternity leave and pensions for widows.

She founded the Union of Catholic Women's Organizations in 1923 and participated in another 15 women's organizations.

After WW II, Galdikienė and her artist husband, Adomas, came to the U.S., where she supported his artistic endeavors and worked with Lithuanian-American organizations.

75 years ago

September 1, 1941

More than 5,000 Jews were mass murdered near the military base in Mariampolė.

September 6, 1941

The Jews of Vilna (Vilnius) were confined to one of two ghettos in the city.

25 years ago

September 2, 1991

The United States recognized Lithuania's restored independence.

September 6, 1991

In the Soviet Union, the State Council, a new executive body composed of President Mikhail S. Gorbachev and republic leaders, recognized the independence of Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania.

September 17, 1991

The U.N. General Assembly opened its 46th session, welcoming Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania among its new members.

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Cover: Fall's bounty in Lithuania often consists of mushrooms and berries from the forest, such as these offered for sale on the street.
Photo: © Millda | Dreamstime.com

Back cover: Beautiful amber creations were only one of fine crafts to be found at the 101st Lithuanian Days in Frackville, Pa. Photo: Teresė Vekteris

from the editor

Off-Season Sojourns



In autumn, one can hike the trails of Lithuania's Curonian Spit (Kursių Nerija or Neringa) through the villages of Pervalka and Preila into Nida and meet barely a soul. Photo: Teresė Vekteris

September has always been my favorite time to travel.

There's little need to compete with droves of summertime travelers, families in tow, trying, with varying degrees of success, to fit all of the fun they can into the summer months. Prices are generally lower in early autumn while weather remains mild. It's more relaxed overall.

The vacations of my youth were the requisite week or two at the beach in the sticky summer heat, battling sunburn, greenheads, gritty sandwiches and a maze of prostrate bodies. Once I could shed the tyranny of the school schedule, I found I could revel in a solitary shoreline, the endless vista of a deserted highway, a snow-dusted peak in the golden afternoon light.

Although my first two trips to Lithuania were summer sojourns, I returned alone last year, finally again off-season. For two glorious weeks of still-warm days and crisp nights in late September, I was on my own travelling the Lithuanian countryside and coast, and exploring a less-touristed Vilnius. In addition to myriad pure and uncluttered views, my other senses were sated with the song of the birches in the breeze, the scent of a pine forest surrounding a dirt road, the salty sting of my own tears as I crested a windswept dune.

Nature seems to speak more clearly when there are fewer people around to hear.

What is your favorite season to travel? Write to us and tell us about a favorite travel memory, in season or off!

Wishing you many beautiful Septembers ahead,


Teresė Vekteris, Editor

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Baseball in Lithuania America's Pastime Continues to Grow

By Will Gordon

Youth baseball players in Vilnius.

2016 marks 28 years since the formation of the Lithuanian Baseball Association (LBA) in 1988. Will Gordon, an American who has spent extensive time in Lithuania and within the baseball community, takes a deep dive into how the game continues to grow in Lithuania and the historic achievements over the past several years.

In reflecting on over a decade of involvement in Lithuanian "beisbolas" (baseball), what strikes me are the incredible milestones, achievements and strides that have been made in the sport during that time, yet also the long road that lies ahead for a burgeoning sport that faces many challenges in a country that calls basketball its "second religion."

It is impossible to cover it all; therefore, I will focus on some of the highlights of the sport (and there have been some amazing highlights) and some takeaways and a look to the future.

Lithuanian Baseball "Firsts"

- 2010: First Lithuanian to be signed to an MLB professional baseball team (Dovydas Neverauskas, Pittsburgh Pirates)
- 2011: First Lithuanian to play Division I Baseball (Edvardas Matusevičius, Grambling State University)
- 2015: First Lithuanian to play professional baseball in the Czech Republic (Edvardas Matusevičius, Brno)
- 2016: First Lithuanian to play Triple-A Baseball (Dovydas Neverauskas)
- July 12, 2016: First Lithuanian to play in the 'Futures' Game at the MLB All-Star Game in San Diego, California (Dovydas Neverauskas)

Big News: Dovydas Neverauskas One Step Away From Playing in the Major Leagues



Dovydas Neverauskas pitching for Pittsburgh's Double-A Altoona Curve.

Easily the biggest news of the decade in Lithuanian baseball is Dovydas Neverauskas, or “Never,” as his teammates call him, signing a professional baseball contract with the Pittsburgh Pirates. Neverauskas’ story is truly one made-for-TV. Neverauskas comes from a tradition of professional sports—his mother was a professional basketball player during the Soviet Union years, and his father, Virmidas, was a graduate of the Lithuania Sports University and one of the founders of the sport in Lithuania in the 1980s. If you ask Virmidas about those early days, he will tell you how they used to make their own bats and gloves—the thought of buying a glove at the store or having one shipped from the U.S. was unthinkable. They learned to play the game straight from reading a copy of *The Rules of Baseball* that they obtained at the library, and through trial and error. These days, if you go to the baseball field in Vilnius, Lithuania, on a late Sunday morning, you just might catch a game in which Virmidas, now in his 50s, will take the mound himself. That’s right—he still plays baseball.

Dovydas Neverauskas was 16 years old when he signed with the Pirates in 2010. When he traveled to Bradenton, Fla., for training camp that first year, he was two years younger than the next youngest player.

“Never” spent the next four years playing for Single-A Pittsburgh Pirates affiliates, trying out both starter and relief roles. In February 2016, he was invited to the Pirates Spring Training. He was assigned to the Pirates’ Double-A club, Altoona Curve, to start the season, where he served as the closer and at one point had a string of 12 appearances without giving up a single run. In May, he was promoted to the Pirates’ Triple-A affiliate in Indianapolis. Then in June, Dovydas was selected for the “Futures” Game, July 12, 2016, as part of the 2016 MLB All-Star Game.

Statistics don’t lie: Neverauskas has turned in an impressive season between Double-A Curve and Triple-A Indians this season, holding a sub-3.00 (2.67) for the first time in his career. Neverauskas has also limited opposing hitters to a .165 average

and he has struck out 34 batters while allowing 12 walks this season.

I had the pleasure of watching Neverauskas play for the Triple-A Indians as they visited the Charlotte Knights on a hot summer night in June. With the game tied 5-4, with his team in the lead, Neverauskas was brought in to pitch the final out of the game with two runners on base in the 9th inning. He got the save by striking out the final batter of the game—another made-for-TV moment.

After the game I caught up with Neverauskas. I asked him how he “got the call” that he was headed for Triple A. He said, calmly, “Coach called me into the office and said ‘Pack your bags; you’re going to Indianapolis’—and that was it.” What struck me was how calm and collected he was about the whole experience. He seemed to be at ease with his recent (historic) success, and focused on his goal of playing the game and pitching well.

In the Pipeline: Lithuanian Prospects Grow Their Game in Europe and the United States

For young Lithuanians, baseball is an opportunity to realize oneself through sport. It is also an opportunity to grow as an athlete and to compete at a high level in-country, in Europe and in other countries. There are several notable players whose talents have led them to opportunities to play baseball internationally.

Edvardas Matusevičius, a Vilnius, Lithuania, native, played high school baseball in Islip, N.Y., in 2010 and eventually received a full athletic scholarship to Monroe College in New York in 2011, the first-ever Lithuanian to do so. Matusevičius went on to play four years of college baseball—two years at Monroe College and two years with Division I Grambling State University in Louisiana.

In 2015, Matusevičius signed a professional baseball contract to pitch for the Brno Draci club in the Czech Republic, one of the top teams in one of the top professional leagues in Europe. Matusevičius went on to have a stellar season on the mound as one of their top three starting pitchers and leading the team to a second-place finish in the CEB European Club Championships.

Kestas Vilimas, 22, also a native of Vilnius, plays professionally for the Minsk (Belarus) Baseball Club. Vilimas led his team to the 2016 European Cup Qualifier tournament in Rouen, France, where he posted a .267 batting average.

Another Lithuanian pitcher that has been raising eyebrows in Europe and in the United States is Marius Balandis, an 18-year-old from Vilnius with Major League Baseball (MLB) aspirations. Balandis is a right-handed pitcher with a fastball consistently around 90 mph. Balandis represented the Lithuanian Men’s National Team in European competition, pitching his side to a victory over Belarus on their way to a fourth-place finish in the tournament. Balandis is a three-time attendee of the MLB European Academy, a collection of the top 50 under-18 (U18) talent in Europe. Balandis has already been fielded offers from the New York Yankees and Minnesota Twins; instead, he has

joined an elite training program in Chicago called Top Tier Baseball Academy, with the goal of improving his skills and school grades to land a college baseball scholarship, or a more lucrative pro baseball contract.

At the youth level, there are several players showing a promising future in baseball. Džiugas Gavrilčikas, 17, a Kaunas, Lithuania, native, was one of two left-handed pitchers chosen for the 2015 MLB European Academy. At age 17, he features an 82 mph fastball; he pitched for the Lithuania Men's National Team in the 2015 European Championship Qualifier Tournament in Vienna last year, and will compete for the Lithuanian U18 and U21 teams in European competitions this summer.

Two Lithuanian players, Adomas Aleksandravičius and Viktoras Ratkevičius of the Lithuania Men's National Team, both completed their high school studies in the United States.

Kaunas Lituania 16-year-old players Domas Kamandulis and Deividas Tamaševskis, in conjunction with sponsorship from the U.S. Embassy and support from other "Friends of Lithuanian Baseball," spent June and July in Durham, N.C., playing in a series of showcase tournaments for Downey Riptide. Sigitas Kamandulis, Domas' father and long-time baseball coach and LBA member, traveled with the two boys to the U.S. He had this to say about the experience: "Everything is a learning experience. It is great to see how the team organizes practices, the tips and comments coaches give to our players, and the level of competition and how hard the kids play. It has been a great



Marius Balandis is aiming for the MLB.

experience for us and I think for everyone involved as well."

Lithuania in International Competition

The Lithuanian National Team continues to be competitive in European and World Championship tournaments. In 2015, the Lithuanian Men's National Team finished in fourth place in the 2016 European Cup qualifier, held in Vienna, Austria, a tournament that featured an Israeli team with six Division I baseball players on their roster, a Swedish team with several American players and a history of competing for the European Championship, and an Austrian squad whose host crowd showed up in full force, with a sell-out crowd of 800+ every night. There were many firsts in this tournament—including the first-ever Lithuanian victory over the Israeli National Team, and probably the first-ever loss to the Polish National Team.

Lithuania has shown perhaps even more impressive results at the youth level in international competition. In 2015, Lithuania took fifth place in the CEB European Championships. This summer, Lithuania's U18 National Team competed for the European Championships in Gijon, Spain, and the U21 team also competed for the European Championship in Tel Aviv, Israel later this month. More information about these competitions can be found on the Confederation of European Baseball's website: baseballeurope.com/competition/tournaments_events_overview_2016.

As of March 2016, Lithuania ranked #57 according to the International Baseball Federation (IBAF).

Final Thoughts

Despite the many challenges it faces, baseball continues to be played by many in Lithuania. Currently there are baseball clubs in the cities of Vilnius, Kaunas, Utena, Radviliškis and Raudondvaris (Kaunas region). More than 20 teams compete for Lithuanian championships from age 12 to adult. Softball has also begun to grow in popularity, both women's fast-pitch and co-ed slow-pitch softball.

Unfortunately over the past 10 years, the number of kids and adults playing baseball may have actually decreased because of slowed public funding and a continued



Kaunas Lituania Baseball Club won the 2016 Lithuanian Baseball Association Championship.

challenge with proper baseball fields and stadiums. Baseball also faces the unique challenge of competing for talented athletes with basketball, in a country where basketball is truly considered Lithuania's "national pastime" and where the majority of public funding and private sponsorship and investment are focused on basketball. Also, the financial collapse of 2008 is still being felt in Lithuanian sports across the board.

Kaunas Lituanica Baseball Club, for example, broke ground on their baseball field nearly 20 years ago. However, because of roadblocks such as lack of funding, lack of support from the city municipality and, for the last decade, a court battle over land rights stemming from multiple conflicting post-World-War and post-Soviet claims to the land in question, the field remains unfinished, without proper fencing, infield dirt or dugouts. In fact, today there is no baseball field in Lithuania that meets international or European standards—a source of frustration for the baseball community.

Baseball in Lithuania is one full of paradox and contradiction: how is it that funding for the sport can be shrinking, yet Lithuania's international rating and results in international competition are improving? How can it be that more and more Lithu-



Cincinnati Reds Hall-of-Famer Barry Larkin giving instruction in Kaunas in June 2015.

anians are playing professionally, both throughout Europe and in the United States, yet there are still no proper baseball fields in Lithuania and grassroots support for the sport is more or less in the same place it was 10 years ago? I believe that the sport is truly at a crossroads.

Lithuania continues to receive annual support from the MLB



Part of the Kaunas baseball community.

Envoy program, which sends American coaches to Lithuania for several weeks at a time to run baseball clinics and give instruction to both coaches and players. Jim Fuller, an MLB Envoy coach, has come to Lithuania several times and provided invaluable instruction. In 2015, 18-year MLB veteran Cincinnati Reds shortstop and Hall-of-Famer Barry Larkin, and MLB retired Montreal Expos pitcher Joe Logan, spent a week in Lithuania working with the men's and youth national teams helping to promote the game. Through a program sponsored by the U.S. Embassy and Lithuanian Baseball Association, a U.S. ROTC vs. Kaunas U18 team match was held, which drew more than 500 attendees to the game. Larkin and Logan threw out the first pitch and signed autographs for kids; more than 100 attendees were welcomed down on the field to try throwing, hitting and catching a baseball for the first time. This was the largest crowd to ever attend a baseball game in Lithuania.

These efforts are both exciting and important, but serve as a patchwork of efforts that are difficult to sustain year to year.

One of the conundrums facing Lithuanian baseball, for example, is a lack of funding. For many things in Lithuania, including baseball, organizations look to the government for funding. For sports, the amount of money you get from the city, or the Ministry of Sport, is based on how you finish in international tournaments. Clubs and national teams therefore spend a large part of their budgets on travel and participation in these tournaments, leaving insufficient funds to truly invest in the



Youth baseball players in Kaunas.

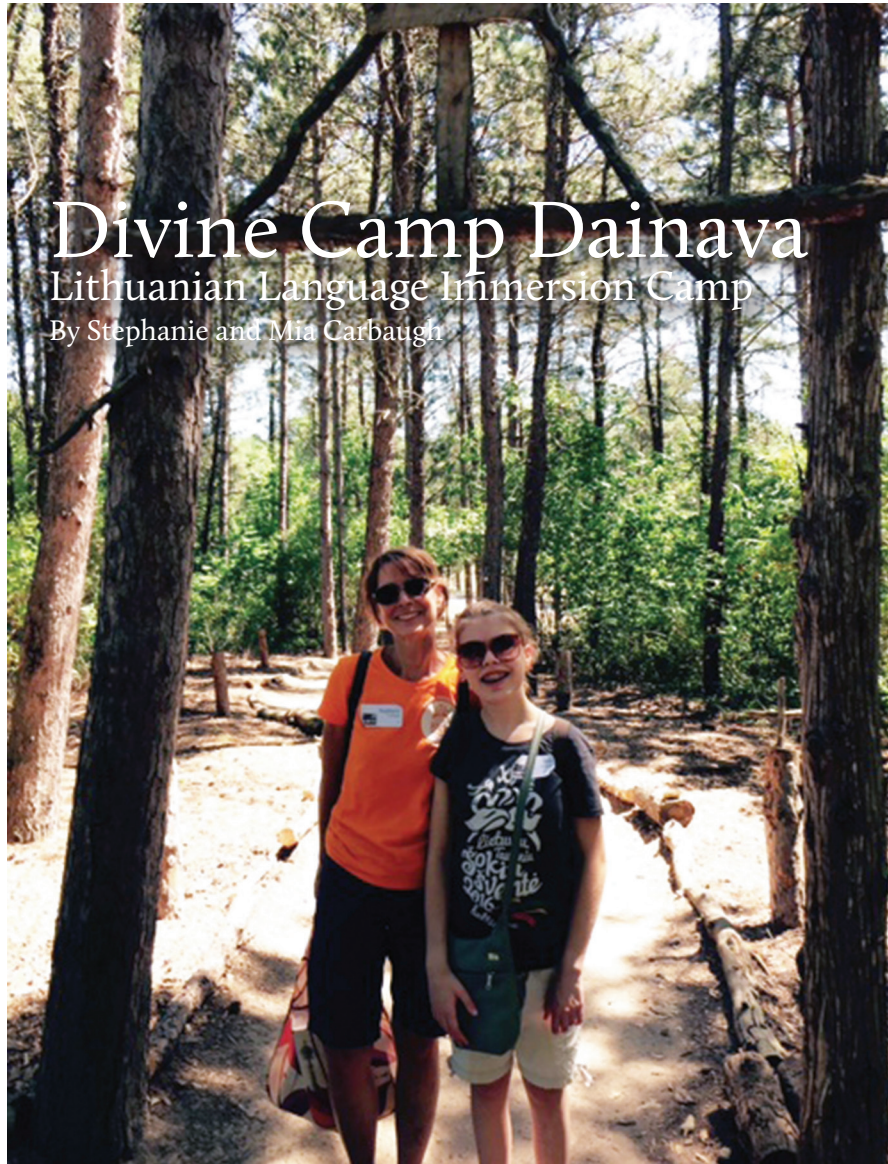
sport, infrastructure, coaches, or outreach and marketing programs that are needed to grow the game locally. Every investment of time and attention, every success, makes an impact—yet each of those successes opens the door to seeing that so much more can be done. Over the past decade there have been many great achievements, waves of success, but so far no tide to lift all ships.

Will Gordon (pictured at right coaching the Lithuanian National Team) has spent more than a decade in Lithuanian baseball as a player, coach, fund raiser, board member and advocate. After a successful playing career at Division III Wesleyan University in Middletown, Conn., Will first traveled to Lithuania to play for the Kaunas Baseball Club from 2005 to 2009, competing in European Club Championships. From 2009 to 2011, he served as director of Game Development and Foreign Affairs at the Lithuanian Baseball Association. In 2011, Will completed his master's degree in social anthropology at Vytautas Magnus University in Kaunas. In 2015, he served as assistant coach to the Lithuanian Men's National Team, helping the team to a fourth-place finish in the European Championship Qualifier in Vienna, Austria. Will currently lives in Durham, N.C., with his wife, Viktorija, and his two daughters, Andrea and Nora. Will and family divide their time between Durham and Kaunas.



Donatas Maculevičius (left) and MLB Envoy Coach Jim Fuller (right).





Divine Camp Dainava

Lithuanian Language Immersion Camp

By Stephanie and Mia Carbaugh

Stephanie and Mia at outdoor chapel entrance at Camp Dainava.

When asked to write about our upcoming experiences at Dainava, my daughter and I replied an enthusiastic, “YES!” Now that the time has come to write about our experiences we wonder how to sum up our incredible adventure from August 7 to August 14, 2016, in mere words. But we must—documentation of a precious event is necessary to archive for us and many to follow.

These are the words we have chosen to describe our story: Lithuanian Language Study, Lithuanian Culture and History, Forever Friends and Magical Moments.

Lithuanian Language Study
Lithuanian language study is the primary reason my daughter and I signed up to attend Dainava.

Because our daughter was born in Marijampolė, Lithuania, and arrived home in the United States via adoption at 2½ years old, the time is here for her (at age 16) to study her first language. And, oh my, what a whirlwind language study we did at Dainava! Our teacher was fantastic for both of us at each of our levels. We brought home more knowledge of the language and many materials to work on until our return next summer.

About Camp Dainava

In 1950, the Lithuanian American Roman Catholic Federation first discussed the idea of a summer campground for Lithuanian youth. Fundraising began in earnest in 1954, when Dr. Adolfas Damušis was elected president of the Federation. In 1957, the federation purchased a 226-acre farm near Manchester, Michigan, and Camp Dainava was born. Since that time, each summer has seen campers and supporters of all ages enjoying the beauty of Camp Dainava, learning about their rich Lithuanian culture, and creating lifelong friendships. For more information, please visit dainava.org.

We highly recommend Dainava for Lithuanian language immersion study.

Lithuanian Culture and History
Lithuanian culture and history is very important to our family. We were thrilled to learn more of both and to experience the culture while living at Dainava.

Highlights included raising the Lithuanian and American flags daily while singing the Lithuanian National Anthem; participating in singing, dancing and performance; listening to historical talks and movies; celebrating Duonelės Kelias; learning about and trying our hand at Lithuanian paper cutting; and eating wonderful, delicious meals prepared daily for us.

As a few seasoned campers shared during the Remembrance on Saturday evening, Dainava is a bit of Lithuania right here in Michigan.

Forever Friends

Forever friends became a bonus for both my daughter and me.

We met incredible, warm, friendly people from the time we arrived and opened our car door at Dainava until we had to depart. Everyone was welcoming and endeavored to make our experience



The Lithuanian language beginners' class at Camp Dainava.

memorable and successful for our goals. The fellow students in our class and other classes were unique and warmhearted. We bonded as a class even though we had just met.

Already our friendships have continued since we got home, and Skype visits are in the planning stages. My daughter and I appreciate that we are blessed with new American/Lithuanian friends throughout the United States ... Forever Friends.

Magical Moments

Magical moments, we learned, are an expected, special part of Dainava. We felt these moments with hearing the echo, "Dainava," across the lake during the bonfire evening, the incredible connection of students and teacher in our "beginners" language class, and the "chats" outside our living accommodations each morning, afternoon and late-night free time.

The most magical moment for me occurred the night my daughter spoke Lithuanian in her sleep. Unfortunately, I do not know enough Lithuanian at this time to comprehend what she said and she does not remember, as she was asleep.

My daughter's most magical moment occurred while singing sitting on a rowboat on the evening of the bonfire while

twinkling lights floated on the lake. The words magically poured from my daughter's voice as she joined in to sing Lithuanian songs she had never sung before. Another reason for us to come again to Dainava—Magical Moments.

Camp Dainava is an exceptional place to experience for many reasons. Most of all, it is a destination "to come home to" for those born, nurtured or connected in any way to Lithuania.



Beginners' language class in session.



Mia and Jolanta singing at the lake.



Language class participants also learned the art of papercutting.

Postcards From Rio



Since its independence in 1991, Lithuania has participated in all Summer Olympic Games. From 1992 through 2016, its athletes have won 25 medals.

This year, Lithuania's four medals came not where expected—basketball, swimming or modern pentathlon—but in sports where Lithuania had been given little chance to win, namely, rowing, kayaking and weightlifting.

This year, Lithuania's Olympic stars included:

- Mindaugas Griškonis and Saulius Ritteris—silver medal in the men's double sculls.
- Milda Valčiukaitė and Donata Vištartaitė—bronze medal in the double sculls.
- Aurimas Lankas and Edvinas Ramanauskas—bronze medal in the men's double kayak 200 m sprint.
- Aurimas Didžbalis—bronze medal in the 94k weightlifting class, after hoisting 185 kg in the snatch. This was the first time that a Lithuanian athlete won an Olympic medal in weightlifting.

*Photographs by
Alfredas Pliadis
pliadisfoto.com*

The iconic 98-foot-tall Christ the Redeemer statue on Rio de Janeiro's Corcovado mountain was constructed between 1922 and 1931. It has been listed as one of the New Seven Wonders of the World.



Milda Valčiukaitė and Donata Vištartaitė proudly wear the bronze medals they earned in double sculls rowing.



Lithuanian athletes enter the stadium during the opening ceremonies, led by flag bearer Gintarė Scheidt.



Edvinas Ramanauskas and Aurimas Lankas show off their bronze medals from the 200 m double kayak against the backdrop of Rio de Janeiro's mountains.



Aurimas Didžbalis lifts 185 kg to capture the bronze medal in the 94 kg weightlifting class.



Lithuania's President Dalia Grybauskaitė presented the Lithuanian Olympic team with linen, black bread and honey. Basketball player Domantas Sabonis accepted the gifts on behalf of the team.

How-To: Lithuanian Straw Ornament Construction

By Donatas Astras



Materials

- Wheat or rye straw
- Protractor
- X-acto or utility knife
- Scissors
- Masking tape (1½" width)
- File folder or other very lightweight cardboard
- Chisel or burnisher
- Elmer's glue
- Nylon or decorative thread

It may seem a bit early to talk about Christmas tree ornaments until you consider that the end of the harvest season is the best time to acquire fresh straw for projects. And, of course, ornaments in traditional folk designs may be hung anywhere in the house at any time—there's no need to wait for the holidays!

Lithuanian Christmas tree ornaments have been made from natural wheat or rye straw for centuries. My mother, Ursula Astras, constructed the traditional designs of braids and mobiles with strings running through them (sodai), which she had learned from her mother in Lithuania. However, in the early 1950s, Ursula created new art forms of intricate snowflake or geometric design by pressing the straw on to a masking tape backing and gluing these veneers together. No one else had used this medium in such an original design or prolific manner.

In this article, I will show you how to create your own. Constructing a Lithuanian straw ornament requires these processes:

- Designing the ornament
- Creating a template to cut each piece
- Preparing the straw
- Building the straw appliques
- Gluing the appliques together

Again, these processes and art were mastered by Ursula and taught to her family. In turn, I am documenting this further for my family and posterity because I still marvel at the beauty, craftsmanship and ingenuity of my mother's artistry.

Geometry



The construction of this Lithuanian straw Christmas ornament begins with two variations of triangles. Our pattern is based on a 5" diameter. Essentially, it is a pentagon with cut-outs. The geometry consists of five sections with 72-degree angles.

Template for Applique

Our template was cut from a manila file folder. Draw the construction lines before cutting. You may use a hole punch near the inside of the corners to facilitate cutting out the insides. Notice that the jagged edges were cut with pinking shears.

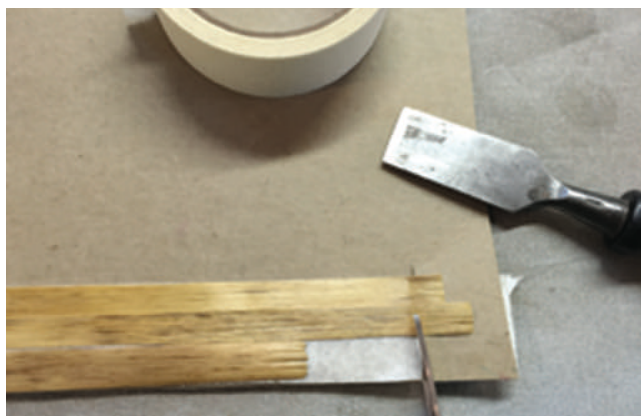
Preparing the Straw

Use the process below to prepare the straw. Alternatively, you may purchase wheat (already cut, soaked, split and ironed) or rye (already cut) straw from the Straw Shop at thestrashop.com.

1. Remove chaff and flowers from natural wheat or rye straw. Clip off joints or knuckles and discard. Save the hollow parts ranging from 5 to 15 inches.
 - We prefer to use the longer pieces for flattening
 - Save the thicker lower pieces for mobiles (sodai) and
 - Save the flower stems for larger picture compositions (see Ursula's Online Straw Art Picture Gallery at <http://ladyofwheat.com/ursula-astras-art-portfolio/fine-art-prints-straw-pictures/>).
 - Also, save the chaff for the manger.
2. Soak the straw in hot water for 30 minutes until tender.
3. Slit the end of a piece of straw with a toothpick or X-acto knife and iron it flat. Iron only from the inside. Using the side of the iron, curl the straw slightly. Repeat this process for the remaining straw.

Building the Straw Applique

4. After the ironed straw is dry, create appliques by adhering the straw to a masking tape backing. We used a cardboard with slits to hold our tape in place while applying the straw. Select straw of similar shading or color and affix it to the masking tape. For a more dramatic look, you can use wheat straw for one triangle and rye (darker) for the other. Press the straw to its backing with the back of a chisel or metal burnisher. Trim the ends the applique.



5. Next create two opposing patterns (one for the left side and one for the right) at opposing 30- to 45-degree angles.
6. Cut five left and five right sides using the applique template. Again, test the alignment and fit of the sides for the ornament. For a true handmade look, we do not want a perfect shape. However, we want near perfect alignment of the triangles, as well as parallel as possible straw applique. Trim any excess at the end, and correct any geometry visually.



Gluing the Appliques Together

7. After the designs are cut, connect the pieces with masking tape on the back side or use Elmer's glue to affix straw to straw. If necessary, you can use a thin piece of applique to reinforce more fragile designs. Remember to place a flat portion of a plastic bag underneath to avoid getting glue on the table.
8. Attach a nylon thread or plain thread with an ornament wire to hang from the tree. For those who prefer bling, use decorative gold thread.

The ornament or decoration may also be mounted on velvet or felt material using Elmer's glue, then framed.

Additional Designs

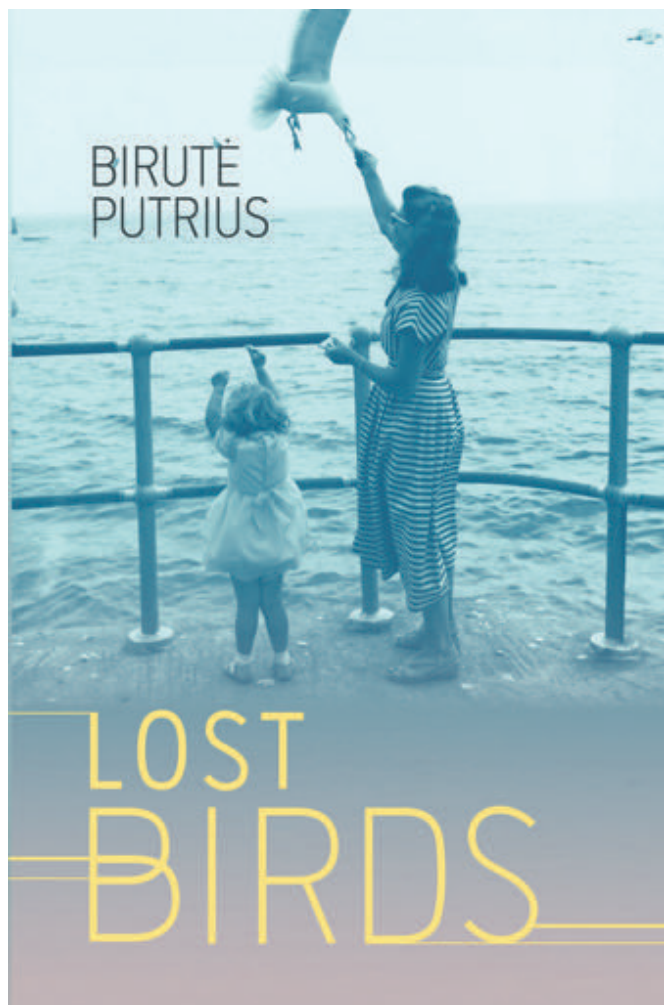
More patterns or designs by Ursula Astras can be found on her website at <http://ladyofwheat.com/ursula-astras-art-portfolio/lithuanian-straw-christmas-tree-ornaments/> and can serve as templates. Notice the shapes used and their repetition. Please feel free to simplify the designs or create your own.

Donatas (Don) Astras followed in his mother's footsteps, taking up art at a young age, often accompanying Ursula at demonstrations and workshops, and participating as translator and instructor. He is the owner of marketing agency Tempest, Inc. in Grand Rapids, Mich., and still teaches folk art.

Becoming American

Irene Matas, 1950

Excerpt from *Lost Birds* by Birutė Putrius



Spanning 40 years and two continents, *Lost Birds* weaves a tale of Irene Matas and her friends, who arrive as children in Chicago after World War II and begin to puzzle out what it means to be American.

It took eleven long days and nights to cross the Atlantic Ocean on the *General Howze*, a GI troop transport. For five days it stormed, raising mountains of water that made me feel so small. Everyone was sick, including my mother. My older brother Petras couldn't get out of bed for two days, which made my mother frantic since the men and women were separated on different levels. My father took care of Petras as best he could until the sea finally calmed. The next day, my mother stood with me and my brother on the deck holding our hands as she pointed to the schools of flying fish leaping out of the blue water. "Fish can fly!" I said, delighted, not knowing it was possible. When

I turned to look at my pale brother, I saw he was smiling, his eyes shining as he stared at the magical creatures that were part bird and part fish.

On the last day of our voyage, our family stood on deck watching the great city of New York in the distance with its towers touching the sky. It was so amazingly different from our DP camp in Bavaria where I was born after the war. When we reached New York Harbor, we disembarked like birds thrown out of our nest, staring at the immense forest of skyscrapers. I was a timid girl, and the huge city scared me. Everything seemed too big.

"So this is America?" my mother asked my father.

"Well, it isn't Kaunas," he answered, his face exhausted by the journey. The sharp October wind blew newspapers and dust across the grimy street, clearly distressing my mother who craned her neck to see the tops of the buildings.

"Oh, Viktoras, it's so big, and there's no grass. Where will the children play?"

My weary father put a reassuring hand on her shoulder. "Don't worry, Dora, Mr. Jankus said there was a part of Chicago as green as a Samogitia."

That same day we boarded the train to Chicago.

Our American sponsor, Mr. Jankus, met us at the train station and shook my father's hand heartily. "Welcome to Chicago," he boomed in American-accented Lithuanian, a cigar hanging loosely on his protruding lower lip, sending smelly puffs into the city's gloom. "I'm George Jankus, and this is my wife, Adele."

"Viktoras Matulaitis," my father said, introducing himself and his family.

"I'd change that name to Victor Matas if you want to get work here," said Mr. Jankus.

"Is that so?" said my father, shooting my mother a worried look.

"My last name used to be Jankauskas, but no one in America could pronounce it."

I stood below the thicket of grownups, my skinny blond braids freshly redone with large plaid bows, noticing how our sponsor's belly strained the buttons of his brown pinstriped suit.

His wife Adele, a tight-lipped woman wearing a hat like a plate of flowers, blinked nervously as she escorted us to their blue Studebaker. My parents, Petras, and I stood there in our wilted, refugee-camp clothes donated by St. George's Church. The Lithuanian-American parish had sent boxes of used clothes

to the displaced person camps in Germany after the war. Its members had agreed to sponsor Lithuanian families wishing to immigrate to Chicago, promising to help them find shelter and work.

Mr. Jankus escorted us to his Studebaker, where our cardboard suitcases were swallowed up in the trunk. My parents and brother squeezed into the back seat of the car while I sat on my father's lap. Mr. Jankus drove us to the South Side, pointing out the various factories where my father might find a job. "There's more work in Chicago than pigs in the stockyards," he said, grinning, the foul cigar bobbing up and down as he spoke. We stared out the window at the industrial neighborhoods filled with factories and brick two-flats, searching for the green part of Chicago that looked like Samogitia. The South Side was one poor neighborhood after another, filled with Negroes, Gypsies, and runaways from Eastern Europe.

Clutching my father's hand, I stepped out of the Studebaker as Mr. Jankus walked to a decrepit storefront that was to be our new home. Once he unlocked the front door, we stepped inside a large room with shelves along three walls, which smelled of mold and stale tobacco. The only light came from the streaked and dusty storefront windows while the rest was a dark cave with one light bulb hanging over a wooden table. Two beds and a dresser stood forlornly in the back of the store. A dust-covered treadle sewing machine sat abandoned in the corner, and an old stove hunched close to the sink, next to the minuscule bathroom.

Holding our suitcases, we stood there, disappointment shrouding us. No one said a word until Mr. Jankus tried to cheer us up by telling us that the church had finally found a used refrigerator.

"It's coming tomorrow," added his wife as she handed my mother a bucket with rags, soap, brushes and a can. "Missus, these are some cleaning supplies," she instructed, pulling out a can of Glass Wax.

"Call me Dora," said my mother.

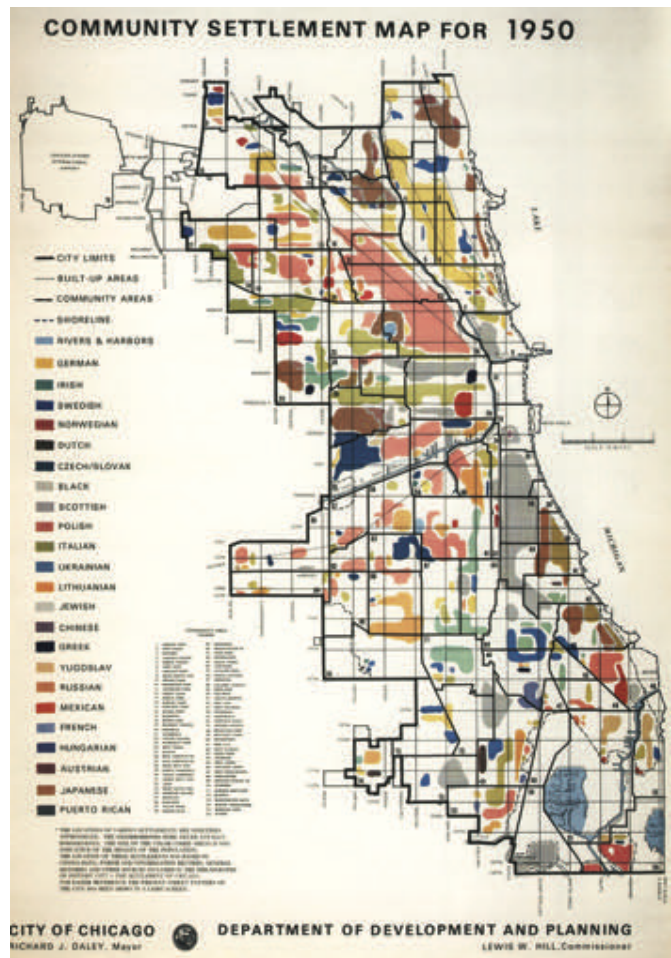
Mrs. Jankus looked up impatiently and cleared her throat. "Dora, this is for cleaning windows. You pour a bit of this on a rag and make circles until you cover the window. Then you let it dry and wipe it off with a clean rag. She demonstrated by smearing the cloudy pink liquid on a small section of the dirty window while my mother studied the perplexing ritual. Afterward, Mrs. Jankus went to the car to get a bag of groceries and some old sheets. Her husband told my father how lucky we were to have Lithuanians help us. "When we came to Chicago in 1914, no one helped our folks. Hardly no food on the table and everyone worked the stockyards, even us kids. You read that book *The Jungle* by Mr. Upton Sinclair?"

My father shook his head, "As a high school teacher in Lithuania, I read a great deal, but never any books in English."

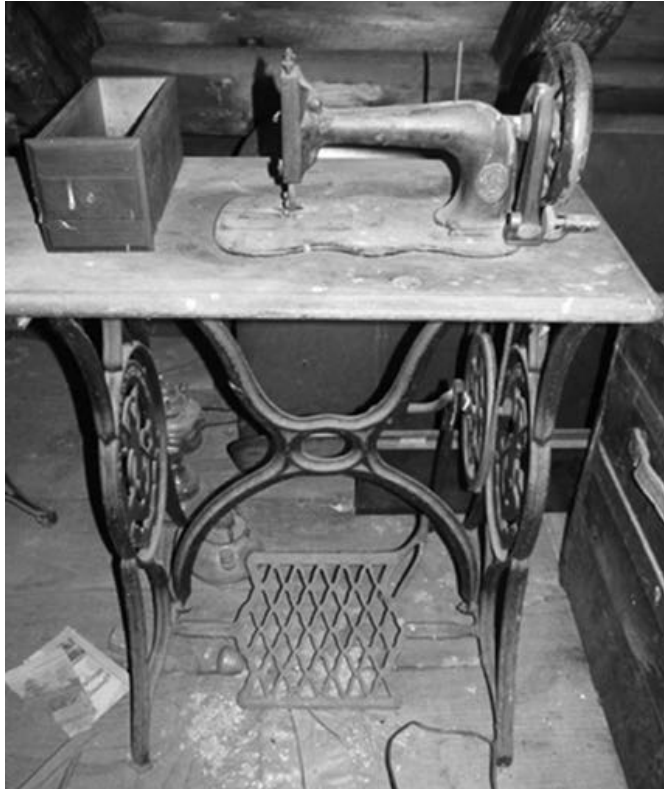
Mr. Jankus shrugged. "I didn't read it either, but they say it tells a sad story about the Lithuanians working at the stockyards, but it's different now that the unions cleaned up the



"Our American sponsor, Mr. Jankus, met us at the train station and shook my father's hand heartily."



Locations of various ethnic settlements in Chicago in 1950



"A dust-covered treadle sewing machine sat abandoned in the corner, and an old stove hunched close to the sink, next to the minuscule bathroom."

stockyards. Maybe I could fix you up with a job there?" He took off his brown fedora and scratched his short gray hair, the folds of his chin jiggling. "Nobody fixed us up with a job when we came here. Heck, we almost starved. We at St. George's remember those days, so we weren't going to let that happen to you DPs. At church, you'll meet the Vitkus family, one of the other DP families our church sponsored. They live right down the street," he said, pointing out the dirty front window.

Mr. Jankus shook his head. "It's such a shame how the horrors of World War II just continue. Those damned Communists just swallowed all of Eastern Europe like it was theirs. Sons of bitches," he mumbled under his breath.

My father thanked him and shook his hand.

"Mr. Matulaitis, you call if you need anything," said Mr. Jankus, the cigar still clenched between his teeth. "This is a great country. You work hard; you can make it here. Ain't that right, Adele?" His wife looked at us sideways, as if she wasn't so sure. She opened the door and turned back to us, her purse locked safely in the crook of her elbow. "Nice meeting you," she said mechanically as she nodded to my mother, ushering her husband out and closing the door behind them.

My father seemed both grateful and burdened by this help. "What's a DP?" my brother wanted to know.

"Displaced person," my father said, frowning as he looked around the dank and dismal store. "I want you to remember this," he said looking into our eyes with such seriousness.

"We're not immigrants like the Jankus family. They came to America long ago looking for work and a better life. We are exiles. Never forget that. We came to this country for shelter until the Soviets leave our country and it's safe to return home. It won't be long now. The Free World will never stand for an occupied Europe. They'll make short work of Stalin, and then we'll go back home to Kaunas." He patted our heads and smiled. Ever the teacher, he added, "There are fewer than four million people in the world who speak our Baltic language, one of the oldest languages, the closest to ancient Sanskrit on the tree of languages. We must keep it alive until we return so that the Russians don't wipe us from the face of the earth."

Petras and I hadn't known we were exiles. We knew we were Lithuanians, but now we were also DPs and exiles. This sounded serious, but we weren't sure why. While examining the room, Petras mumbled his complaints under his breath, "This place doesn't look any better than the camp we left behind in Germany. I thought America was rich."

"I thought we were going to a home with flowers and apple trees," I said, looking around the scary and lonely store with nothing on the shelves to sell. If this was America, I hated it. "Mama, I want to go back home, to our camp," I whined, on the verge of tears. "To the Danube to catch minnows in my bucket." I had an aching longing for our refugee camp, a converted cavalry stable where we had lived in one small room.

"Irena," my father interrupted, "Don't you remember how every time it rained, the smell of horse manure returned?"

For me it had been cozy having my family tucked in tightly around me. I held on to my mother's skirt for comfort until I noticed a gaggle of children with their faces pressed to the front window, straining to see who had moved into the old store. There were two Negro boys and three young girls with dark eyes and long tangled hair and small gold earrings, smiling and waving their arms as if they wanted us to come out and play. Petras looked to my father for permission, but my mother hissed, "Gypsies," and I could see by the look on her face that she didn't like them. "They used to steal my father's horses in Lithuania."

"Dora, please! These are children, not horse thieves." My father gently chased them away from the windows while my mother wondered what she could do to cover the windows. Newspaper would have been fine but since we didn't have any, she pulled out the tin can of Glass Wax and some old rags. "This will give us some privacy." Petras and I were told to smear the pink liquid onto the windows while she went to open cans of soup for our supper. We had hardly finished a row of cloudy circles, when one of the Gypsy girls returned and pressed her face against the glass, flattening her nose and sticking her tongue out. I laughed and also stuck out my tongue, and we made faces at one another. Soon they were all back at the window. I drew a funny face on the window with the Glass Wax and the Gypsy girl clapped. Soon Petras and I were dancing and making faces, laughing so hard that my mother came over to chase the children away so we could finish smearing the windows.

That night, I slept curled into my mother in one narrow bed while my father slept with my brother in the other bed. Our khaki GI-issue wool blankets from the camps were as scratchy as ever. The night seemed long, and I felt far away from the only home I had known. When I woke in the middle of the night, I could feel the bed shaking as my mother cried into her pillow.

"Why are you crying, Mama?" I finally asked.

My mother wiped her tears on the blanket. "I'm worried about your grandparents in Kaunas," she whispered. "I miss them so much."

"Tell me again about your house in Kaunas," I asked, knowing how she loved to describe it.

My mother didn't say anything for a moment and then sighed deeply. "It had many rooms filled with light," she whispered the familiar version in my ear. "With china teacups and silver candlesticks and flower boxes filled with red geraniums in every window." It soothed us both to imagine those rooms. "When I left my home in Kaunas, I thought it was only until the war ended. But now an Iron Curtain has come down in Europe, sealing it off from the rest of the world, and there's no going home." She wiped her tears.

In the morning, when I opened my eyes, I thought I was back at the DP camp, and it took me a moment to realize it was the store in Chicago. And yet something had changed. The gray and

dinky room was transformed by the rosy glow of the Glass Wax. The sun shining through the bubble-gum pink of the smeared windows bathed the room in a cheerful glow like a fairy-tale spell. The sheets on my bed shone, as did my mother's sleeping face, no longer tired and worried. In this light, she looked younger. Everything in the grim storefront had been magically transformed.

When I woke my mother to show her, she squinted into the bright light, indifferent to everything. "Irena, go back to sleep," she murmured, turning away from the window, leaving a mountain of a shoulder.

But I couldn't go back to sleep. This was a magic hour. Waving my hands back and forth, I saw they were glowing. A man walked by outside, and I could follow his dark pink shadow across the large windows. I was enchanted.

Later that morning, while my parents were busy with cleaning the store, Petras and I ventured outside to see how America looked. My parents said we had to stay on our block. Old two-story brick apartment buildings lined the street, and at the corners, a few small stores like ours—one sold fruits and vegetables while another sold cigarettes and held racks of newspapers and magazines. We went to the end of the block and found one of the Negro boys who had peered into our window yesterday. Soon the tangle-haired Gypsy girls appeared, and they were all speaking words I couldn't understand.

"Are you American?" they kept repeating. I smiled and shrugged, not understanding a word. Pointing to myself, I said, "Irena, DP, exile," but they all looked at me as if frogs were leaping from my mouth. The oldest girl pointed to herself and said, "Marlena," while the younger ones introduced themselves as Delphina and Seraphina. The Negro boy's name was Lovey. And just like that we were pulled down the block to play in a trash-littered lot they called a "prairie." We swarmed an old fallen tree like busy ants. "This is our ship," my brother said to me, pointing to the tree. "And here is your sword," he yelled, handing me a long stick. "We're sailing the seas through storms to fight off Russian pirates." Holding his stick, he yelled, "Attack," as we bravely fought the spindly branches.

Every day, we ran around the block with the Gypsies like feral children, faces smudged with dirt, climbing fences and playing tag in the cinder alleys until dusk. Being the youngest, I often tripped and fell, skinning my knees bloody on cinders, crying and screaming while my mother tried to pick them out with a pair of tweezers.

"Are we Americans, Mama?"

She glanced up at me. "No, we're Lithuanians. And we'll go back home as soon as our country is free again, God willing." She picked out a few more cinders as I screamed, but then her nerves gave out and she dabbed iodine on and bandaged my knees, hoping for the best.

"Do you have to play with those rough children?"

"They're my friends, Mama."

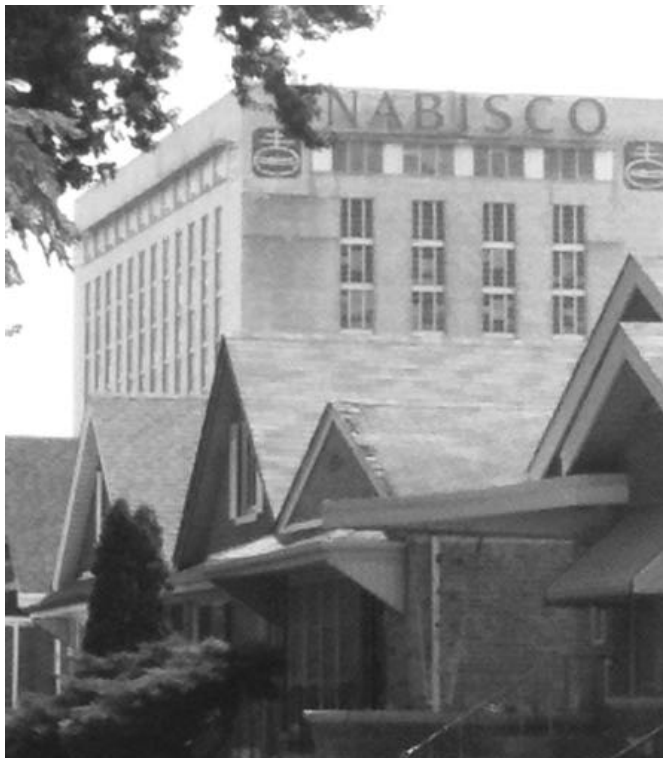
By the end of the second week, my father had changed our



"Missus, these are some cleaning supplies," she instructed, pulling out a can of Glass Wax."

last name to Matas. He counted himself lucky because a Lithuanian acquaintance got him work at the Nabisco factory in Marquette Park, instead of the stockyards, and my mother got a job cleaning offices downtown at the Prudential Building. In each place, there were other Lithuanians who would help them. Though my father could speak four languages fluently, he knew very little English, so teaching was out of the question. Few of his friends, who had been accountants, lawyers, or writers, could resume the kind of life they had left behind. My father worked the day shift while my mother took the evening shift so that someone would always be home to care for us. Before long, Petras enrolled in the Precious Blood Catholic School, got his uniform, and left for school down the street. I started morning kindergarten, and in the afternoons I stayed with Mrs. Vitkus, who lived across the street from the church in a one-room attic. Her daughter Magda was older, but she still played with me. Her son Algirdas, whom the kids called Al, never wanted to play with me, but he followed my brother like a shadow. Now we had some Lithuanian friends and it was easier to speak to them. It turned out that Lovey, who lived in the large stone apartment building next door, was in my kindergarten class. His brother, Charlie walked to school with Petras, who now wanted to be called Pete. Instead of Irena, the nuns started calling me Irene, as did my friends.

Before I met Lovey, I had never seen a Negro before and so I kept examining him as if he had stepped out of a storybook.



"By the end of the second week, my father had changed our last name to Matas. He counted himself lucky because a Lithuanian acquaintance got him work at the Nabisco factory in Marquette Park, instead of the stockyards."

One day, when he came over to play and asked for the bathroom, I took him to the small one in the back of the store. I had never seen a penis before, and I was amazed, wondering what it was and why I didn't have one. I bent over, curious to get a better look and was about to ask him why he peed standing up when my mother came in and shrieked, "Irena, what are you doing?"

I jumped, knowing from her tone of voice that I had done something wrong. "Nothing," I answered. "Lovey had to use the bathroom." But I could see from her expression that I was in big trouble though I didn't know why. After sending Lovey home, she spanked me and sent me to the corner. "Never do that again," she said sternly. I stood in that corner feeling angry and confused, still unsure of what I had done wrong.

A week later, my brother and I went to play jacks with Charlie and Lovey on the stoop in front of their apartment. Charlie wanted to know why my brother had no little finger on his right hand.

"Boom in Germany," Pete said in his halting English, making explosive sounds.

"Did the Nazis shoot it off?" asked Charlie, looking excited.

Rubbing the nub where his finger used to be, Pete tried to explain how he was playing war games in a bombed out tank, throwing empty cans at his friends in a field full of war junk. One day he found a half-buried Nazi helmet with a bullet hole and put it on. One of his friends threw something at him, and it blew up, sending shrapnel flying, slicing through Pete's finger and gashing his leg. He told this story with plenty of miming and explosion sounds. Then he pulled up his pant leg to show the scar on his leg. "Hospital," he said proudly.

Charlie and Lovey had that soft look on their faces as if they were seeing a miracle—Saint Pete of the missing finger, already a child war veteran. I hated Pete's missing finger because he poked it in my face whenever he teased me.

Sometimes my brother had nightmares about the bombing, but mostly he made drawings of planes bombing cities, or fighter planes dancing loops in the skies, with machine-gun bullets flying in all directions. As he drew them, he'd make gunfire noises or imitate the whine of falling planes as they crashed. My brother had fled to the West with my parents, through a rain of Allied bombs, escaping the Soviets. He drew those pictures for years after we came to Chicago. Even Charlie started to draw them though he had never been in a war.

At the end of October, Lovey, dressed as a cowboy with chaps and a gun, came over and told me to find a costume because we were all going trick or treating. My brother put on his helmet with the bullet hole, and a khaki shirt that one of the GIs had given him—his cherished souvenirs. Charlie was a pirate with a scarf and eye patch. The wild Gypsies came as themselves with their liquid eyes and pierced ears, their full skirts and jewel-colored blouses patched or ripped in a dozen places.

I wondered why their mothers didn't scrub their dirty necks the way my mother did. Though I loved how wild they were, I was careful because they could curse you out or bloody a nose if they got mad.

Lovey could see that I was upset about not having a costume, so he brought over an empty cereal box, cut out the tiger mask on the back, attached a rubber band, and showed me how to wear it. Lovey always took good care of me. He gave me a paper sack and taught me how to say "trick or treat."

Bundled in our coats and scarves, we set forth. The streets were dark and filled with monsters, witches, and princesses. The smell of leaves burning filled the air as I skipped alongside Lovey, my pigtails bouncing as we went from house to house, fear and excitement coursing through me. I had never seen so much candy. Every time I got a piece of chocolate, I ate it quickly before anyone could take it back. By the time we had circled two blocks, I had a stomachache and Marlena laughed at me. Delphina, shivering with cold in her thin jacket, asked to wear my blue gloves with the knitted tulip pattern that my mother had made in the camp. Reluctantly, I gave them to her and didn't realize until it was time to go home that she hadn't returned them. Because I knew my mother would scold me if I came home without them, I went with Lovey to Delphina's apartment building. While he waited on the street, I went to knock on the door. A large woman opened it, wearing a long green lace dress with a pink sweater. A dozen bracelets clanged together on her arms as she called Delphina. The smell of spicy cooking wafted out from the kitchen. When I asked Delphina about the gloves, she lied, saying she had given them back to me and that I must have lost them. When Marlena said, "But I saw you..." her sister elbowed her in the side, and Marlena shut up. Suddenly four women gathered around Delphina like a protective shell around a pearl. The large woman growled in a foreign language and slammed the door shut. "Dirty DP," I heard the girls shout through the door. "Go back to your own country." I wanted to yell that we couldn't go back; the Russians had our country, but I was so mad, I almost cried.

When I told Lovey about Delphina, he told me to wait outside while he went to talk to her. It was cold, but I waited, hands deep in my pockets, as jack-o-lanterns winked on porches and ghosts and goblins ran through the streets. The wind whooshed through the fallen leaves, making them dance madly. Just as I was beginning to feel hopeless, I saw Lovey coming toward me, smiling with his straight white teeth and laughing eyes as he pulled my blue gloves out of his pocket. "There you go, Princess," he said, his soft eyes shining with pride. I was so grateful I hugged him. Prince Lovey had rescued me from the ogre. I wanted to sprinkle rose petals on his royal head. I hoped Delphina, the stupid witch, was sprouting hairs on her chin, and dark vapors were circling her gnarled body.

By Christmas vacation, English words were starting to come more easily. It wasn't as hard as I thought. Sister Mary Con-

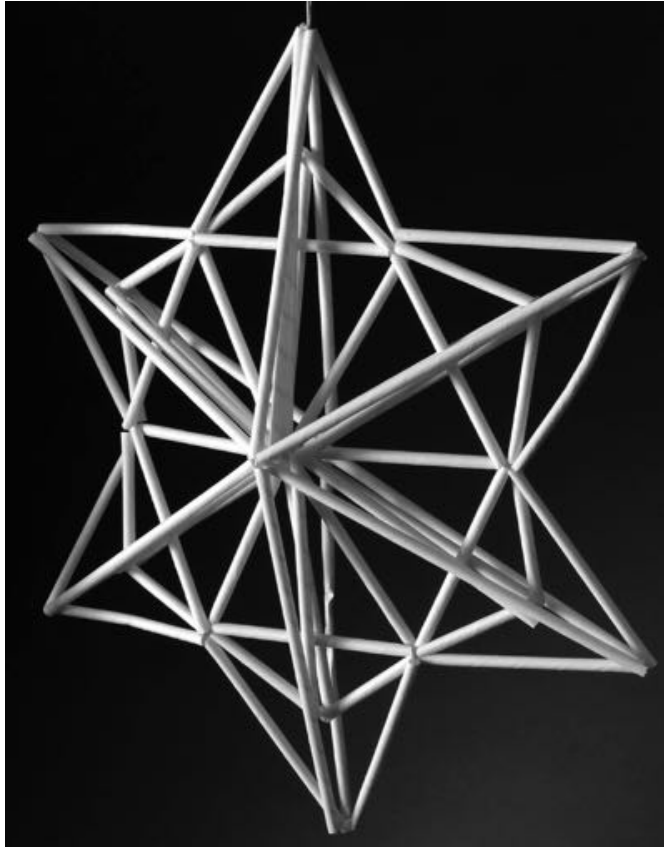


"Lovey could see that I was upset about not having a costume, so he brought over an empty cereal box, cut out the tiger mask on the back, attached a rubber band, and showed me how to wear it."

stance said I was a quick learner and gave me a blue enameled medal of the Virgin Mary, which I never took off but hid under my blouse whenever the Gypsies came around.

A week later, when my father brought home a small Christmas tree, we made ornaments out of white drinking straws, cutting and stringing them into elaborate stars and snowflakes. Mr. Jankus came by with a cooked ham and a box of second-hand clothes from the Lithuanian relief fund. From his back pocket, he brought out a pint of whiskey, which he shared with my father. I got a blue wool coat with a missing button and a funny smell that my mother said was mothballs. My mother said she had loved to dress elegantly before the war, in high heels and a fox-collared suit. "That's how I caught your father's eye, at the radio station where I worked in Kaunas."

In the DP camp, my mother had learned to knit and sew all of our clothes, including my underwear. They all had that DP look. I searched through the box of donated clothes to see if there was something that looked more American. There was a blouse with a lace collar, but when I picked it up I saw that it had brown stains under the arms, so I quickly put it back. From the bottom of the box, my mother pulled out a huge bosomy iridescent blue



"A week later, when my father brought home a small Christmas tree, we made ornaments out of white drinking straws, cutting and stringing them into elaborate stars and snowflakes."

dress, which she later cut up and then sewed back together with the ancient sewing machine. Her new sheath shimmered when she moved. She also made me a plaid dress with a white collar so that we both had dresses for Christmas that were American looking. No stains under the arms.

Under the tree, there was one present for each of us—my father got a new tie, my mother a bottle of Evening in Paris cologne, my brother a stamp album with a large envelope of stamps, and I got a Negro boy doll with a striped shirt and over-all shorts that I had been admiring at the drug store. Wide-eyed, I kissed its nose and called my first doll Lovey. I didn't let go of it all day, even eating dinner with it on my lap. I would let Magda play with it but not the Gypsy girls because they might break it or not give it back. It was a great Christmas.

On New Year's Eve, I was about to have my first party. Not a big party—just the Vitkus family from down the street. All day my mother had been cooking, and the smell of ham was mouthwatering. She had made an apple cake earlier and was now humming Lithuanian songs as she peeled potatoes for a kugelis. My father came in the door, dragging the cold in behind him. He pulled a bottle of brandy and chocolates out of a bag—such luxuries for our family.

"It smells so good in here, Dora." He laughed and kissed my mother. "What a party we'll have, eh?"

My mother wiped her hands on her apron. "Like the old days." She pulled her apron off and smiled at my father, so stylish in her blue dress and high heels.

He nuzzled her neck. "You smell good and look beautiful, Dora."

"In this old dress I made?" She pushed back an errant strand of hair, pleased by the compliment. It was true. My parents looked transformed.

My brother and I had hung paper chains around the front of the store, which we called the dining room. I was excited because Magda would be coming over with her brother, Al.

Before long, the Vitkus family knocked on the Glass Waxed front door. Jurgis Vitkus wore a woolen jacket, his shirt frayed at the collar, while his wife, Regina, wore a beige wool dress with an amber brooch she had brought from Lithuania. Both husband and wife were rather thin, and while the wife hummed with nervous energy, her husband simmered with subdued anger. Like their parents, Al and Magda both had dark hair and eyes, but Magda was beautiful. My father always said she had the face of a medieval icon—innocent and ageless.

After dinner, my parents, who had had toasted the New Year with numerous shots of brandy, asked me to recite the little German ditty they had taught me in the refugee camp. I felt shy to say it in front of Al and Magda, but my mother insisted, giving me a little push. She told me to curtsy, so I did, holding out the skirt of the dress my mother made, feeling my big red bow bob along with me.

"Deutschland, Deutschland, uber alles, zwei kartoffeln, das is alles." I curtsied again and felt the blood rushing to my face.

Mr. Vitkus burst out laughing and clapped. "Germany, Germany, over all, two potatoes, that is all. Ha! You've changed the national anthem of the Third Reich!" He laughed again. "Hitler boasting of his thousand-year reign. All that was left of that reign—two potatoes! And rubble."

My father added, "Thank God, we ended up in a camp in the American Zone in Germany, rather than the British, French, or—God forbid—the Russian Zone. We finally got some food."

The adults decided to play cards. Mr. Vitkus drank too many highballs and began to curse the Communists again. "The French, Danish, and even the Russians went home after the war, but we couldn't go home. Why?"

My father studied his cards and slapped one down on the table. "It's as if the war never ended in Eastern Europe."

My mother took the cigarette out of her red mouth and blew a string of smoke up in the air. "Remember how the KGB agitators showed up at the camps urging everyone to return to a free Lithuania, saying that Uncle Joe Stalin said we had nothing to fear. We later heard that those who were caught in the Russian sector of Germany were either sent to Siberia or shot at the train station in their home country." She shook her head. "As if we'd ever trust Stalin."

"The women caught in the Russian zone were raped," Mrs. Vitkus whispered behind her hand. "Which camp were you in?" "Dillingen, and you?"

"Hanau, thank God. The KGB came to our camp as well."

Mr. Vitkus put out his cigarette. "Remember how, after the Soviets invaded in 1940, there followed a reign of terror, and how anyone could be declared a Soviet enemy and put under arrest or deported without any legal process?"

My father added, "What I remember is how, in June of 1941, many thousands of men, women and children were being deported to Siberia. It only stopped when the Germans invaded Lithuania. And then what a disaster for the Jews." He shook his head as if trying to erase the memories.

"What a horror," said Regina. "I can't bear to think of it."

"Tell me, why didn't the Americans come to rescue Lithuania or Latvia or Estonia?" Mr. Vitkus demanded as he scooped up the cards on the table. "The Allies signed the Atlantic Charter promising to protect the sovereign rights of those forcibly deprived of them. God, I memorized those words! Thousands of anti-Soviet partisans are still in bunkers in the woods, fighting as they wait for Allied help."

"Stalin knew that everyone was exhausted by the war," said my father.

I rolled my eyes. War, war, war. That's all they ever talked about.

Magda and I took our dolls and went to rummage through my mother's box of fabric scraps to see what we could use. I tied a piece of gauzy fabric on my Lovey doll, like a babushka.

Behind me, I could still hear them talking. "Remember V-E Day? How we all celebrated, thinking we could go home again?" Reshuffling the deck, Mr. Vitkus began to drum his war stories again. "Millions of refugees marching across Europe at the end of the war—stateless, without countries or passports."

Regina Vitkus added, "Running from the Soviets into a bankrupt and bombed Germany."

"Enough please, it's New Year's." My mother slapped another card down. "Can't we forget these conversations for just one day?"

"You're right, Dora," said Regina. "Let's talk about something more pleasant."

No one said anything for a few moments, and then my father looked up. "We're finally moving out of this place."

Hearing this, I turned around and asked my father, "Are we going back to the DP camp in Germany?" The adults laughed.

"No, we're moving to Marquette Park, right here in Chicago."

"Really?" Regina's head shot up. "We'll miss you all so much." She looked over at her husband.

Jurgis shrugged, looked at his daughter, Magda, and drank down the rest of his highball.

Across the room, the news hit me hard as tears welled in my eyes when I realized we'd be leaving Magda and Al, and Lovey, Charlie, and even the Gypsies, though they had made me mad. Pete had the same stricken look in his eyes. Neither of us could stand any more change.

"I don't want to move," I announced loudly.

My parents looked at me with puzzled expressions. "Why, Irena?" asked my father. "Do you love this dirty store so much?"

"My friends are here."

My mother waved her hand in dismissal. "Who? Those Gypsies? Bah! Forget those dirty girls. They're nothing but trouble. You've been running wild with them ever since we moved here, and I don't like it."

"What about Lovey?" I pleaded, tears threatening.

My mother shrugged. "Who—that Negro boy? Don't worry, you'll make new friends. I hear there are nice Lithuanian boys and girls in that neighborhood for you to play with."

"I don't care," I said. "What about Magda and Algis?"

"You'll be fine, Irena, you'll see," said Mrs. Vitkus. And with that the adults returned to playing cards and drinking.

Pete went to show Al his stamp collection while I went over to the window to sit with Magda. Hugging my Lovey doll, I scratched a peek hole in the dried pink film on the windows and another hole for Magda. Together we watched the snow falling in thick clumps, piling up on the sidewalks, on the cars, on the trembling bare branches of the elm trees. The night was still and bitterly cold as we watched the lights in the other apartments and houses across the street. We sat there until we heard the bells of Precious Blood Church ringing in the New Year on the South Side of Chicago. Somewhere outside people were cheering and blowing horns. The noise scared Magda, so she held my hand. It seemed all of Chicago was celebrating, but I felt a helpless sadness coming down on me like the snow piling up outside. The war and the refugee camps of Europe seemed far away. My parents' home in Lithuania was behind an Iron Curtain. We had started our new life in America, and it was safe here. But on this night I saw that war wasn't the only heartbreak.

As I was kneeling by the window, my knees began to hurt. Though they had healed long ago, I could still sometimes feel those forgotten sharp cinders my mother hadn't managed to take out. When I looked closely, I could still see them, submerged below my scarred knees, like black pebbles beneath ice, remnants of old pain.

Birutė Putrius is a Lithuanian-American author who was born in a displaced person's camp in Germany, grew up in Chicago and now lives in California. She has published short stories and poetry in numerous literary journals and anthologies. "Lucy in the Sky" was highlighted by Publisher's Weekly "for its charming magical realism." Two of her stories were optioned for short films by Columbia College in Chicago. She was a finalist in the Sol Books contest and has translated poetry and non-fiction.

Lost Birds may be ordered online at balzekasmuseum.org or amazon.com.



a taste of lithuania

Varškės Spurgos

(Curd Cheese Doughnuts)

By Jana Sirusaitė Motivans



The campers of Neringa's Cabin 11 assemble for their special cooking class. Photos: Jana Motivans

I spent two weeks in August helping in the kitchen at Camp Neringa during the Lithuanian Heritage Camp. This English-language session is for children of Lithuanian descent who are interested in their heritage but do not necessarily speak the language. During their stay at the Vermont camp, the children learn about the Lithuanian culture through folk dance, song, language courses, history lessons, games and discussions. They also learn about the cultural food identity of Lithuania. The best way to preserve a food culture is to find people to cook it and eat it—and there are plenty of opportunities to do that at Neringa!

Our talented and tireless head cook, Tania Perkins, prepares many Lithuanian specialties for the children. In addition to her delicious “American” meals, this summer Tania also served balandėliai (stuffed cabbage), šaltibarščiai (cold beet soup), morkų salotos (carrot salad), pikantiška mišrainė (garlicky egg salad), dešros ir kopūstai (kielbasa and cabbage) and the camp favorite, kugelis (baked potato pudding).

Campers interested in learning more about Lithuanian food can sign up for the cooking elective, headed by Gaila Narkevičienė. This year Gaila was exceptionally ambitious with her cooking group, and they prepared šaltibarščiai, burokėlių mišrainė (mixed vegetable salad with beets), marinuotos stintos (marinated smelts), pickles, natural herb teas, and duonos gira (fermented black bread beverage). With help from Inga Wronski and Reggie Jagminas, they also prepared grybukai (mushroom-shaped cookies). Inga and Reggie are talented teachers

of arts and crafts, and this year they extended their talents to baking.

Inga also organized a special cooking class for the girls in cabin 11, where she had two daughters. There were 12 girls in the cabin, between 13 and 15 years of age.

The girls made varškės spurgos (Lithuanian curd cheese doughnuts). These doughnuts are very simple to make. The girls mixed the batter, shaped the doughnuts and were ready to fry them in about 20 minutes. The frying takes about seven minutes per batch, and the longest part is waiting for them to be cool enough to eat!

In Lithuania, these doughnuts are made with traditional Lithuanian curd cheese (varškės sūris). As this is not readily available in Vermont, we used Friendship brand farmer cheese, available in a 7.5 ounce package in most grocery stores. Do not use cottage cheese—it is much too watery and you will not have good results. The best alternative would probably be ricotta cheese, if you cannot find farmer cheese.

It is important to have the proper tools to make spurgos. You will need an electric mixer with a whisk attachment (or a strong arm with a hand-held whisk). Because there is no yeast in the batter, you need to whisk to aerate the batter for a fluffy doughnut. You will also need a cooking thermometer used for deep-fat frying (or a candy thermometer) to monitor the temperature of the hot oil. It must be maintained at a constant 350° F to ensure crisp donuts and to prevent them from soaking up too much oil.



Varškės Spurgos (Curd Cheese Doughnuts)

INGREDIENTS

- Two 7.5 ounce packages Friendship farmer cheese
- 1/4 cup sugar
- 4 eggs
- 1 2/3 cups flour
- 1 teaspoon baking powder
- Crisco shortening for frying

1. Empty the Crisco into a sturdy pot, attach the thermometer to the side and begin to heat the shortening for frying. There should be enough melted shortening in the pot to submerge the donuts completely and there should be a few inches from the top of the oil to the top of the pot to help reduce splatters. The standard temperature for deep-fat frying is 350°F.
2. In a large mixing bowl, combine the eggs, sugar and farmer cheese. Using an electric mixer with the whisk attachment (or a strong arm and a hand whisk), whisk until smooth and airy.



3. Add the flour and baking powder, and gently mix into the cheese mixture with a large wooden spoon until the dough comes together.
4. Roll the dough into small balls about the size of a golf ball, trying to keep them all the same size to ensure even cooking. Place the dough balls on a large platter.



5. When the oil has reached 350°F, carefully drop five or six dough balls into the oil by hand (careful!) or using a long-handled metal spoon. Don't overfill the pot because the doughnuts need room to expand.



6. Cook the doughnuts for approximately seven minutes, keeping an eye on them so they don't burn. The doughnuts will move around in the pot and turn themselves over while cooking.
7. When the doughnuts are cooked, carefully lift them out of the hot oil using a slotted spoon. Cool them on a tray lined with paper towels.
8. Continue to cook the rest of the dough in batches, trying to maintain the oil temperature at a constant 350°F. Note that the succeeding batches will be darker in color than the first batch as the hot oil is re-used again and again.
9. Allow the doughnuts to cool before eating—this is the hard part! Eat as is, or sprinkle with powdered sugar.



Like Father, Like Son

By Rimantas Gedeika



Domantas Sabonis also plays on the Lithuanian National Team. Photo: Alfredas Pliadis, pliadisfoto.com

On June 23, 2016, the eagerly awaited National Basketball Association (NBA) Player Draft took place in Brooklyn, N.Y., at the Barclays Center. This annual event, which occurs at the end of the NBA Championships, is much anticipated, much analyzed and much debated by sports writers, by announcers and, especially, by fans. It is during "the Draft" that the NBA teams select players (from the college ranks as well as from foreign countries) for their teams. All of the heated discussions/arguments as to which players will be selected in the first round (top 20), by whom, and who will be the top player selected, were settled here at the at the Barclay Center.

This year's Draft was of special interest to Lithuanian basketball fans. They were eager to see which NBA team would select their fellow countryman Domantas Sabonis, son of the legen-

dary Lithuanian basketball player Arvydas Sabonis. They did not have to wait long.

Domantas was selected in the first round as the 11th overall pick. In attendance were his proud parents, Arvydas and Ingrida; his two brothers, Žygimantas and Tautvydas; and his sister, Aušrinė; as well as Lithuanian fans from New York, New Jersey and Pennsylvania. It was quite an event for Lithuanian basketball, and for Lithuania itself.

Domantas, the 20-year-old, 6' 11" power forward, after completing high school, chose to play in the U.S. for Gonzaga University's Bulldogs. During the two years that he played for the Bulldogs, Domantas achieved very impressive results, averaging 17.6 points and 11 rebounds per game. These statistics, plus his strong play during this year's NCAA March Madness Tournament, quickly attracted the attention of many NBA scouts. They concurred that, even at this stage, Domantas had the talent and strength to be able to play in the NBA right now.

The only questions that remained were would he be willing to leave college and how high he would go in the draft.

After considering all his options, Domantas decided to forego his two remaining years in college to begin his professional career right away. Thus, he declared his eligibility for the Draft. His dream of playing in the NBA came true when the Orlando Heat selected him as their number-one pick (11th overall pick). Shortly after making their selection, Orlando traded him to the Oklahoma City Thunder.

What made this draft even more exciting for Lithuanian fans was that it was the first time that a father-son duo from Lithuania played in the NBA (Arvydas Sabonis for the Portland Trail Blazers and Domantas for the Oklahoma City Thunder). Also, for the second time in NBA history, one of the two was also a member



Domantas Sabonis battling for the loose ball during the Olympics.
Photo: Alfredas Pliadis

of the Hall of Fame Hall—Arvydas was the first Lithuanian to receive this award.

In addition to the Arvydas-Domantas father-son duo, three other Lithuanian father-son duos also played in the NBA. The difference was that the previous three duos were all born in North America. They are:

1. U.S.-born Matt Guokas Sr., who played for the Philadelphia Warriors, and Matt Guokas Jr., who played for the Philadelphia 76ers, Chicago Bulls, Cincinnati Royals, Houston Rockets, Buffalo Braves, Chicago Bulls and Kansas City Kings. In addition to both playing in the NBA, they were the first-ever father-son duo to each win an NBA championship, Matt Jr. while he was with the Sixers.
2. U.S.-born Rick Barry, who played for the San Francisco Warriors, Oakland Oaks/Washington Caps, New York Nets, Golden State Warriors and Houston Rockets, and son Brent Barry, who played for the Los Angeles Clippers, Miami Heat, Chicago Bulls, Seattle SuperSonics, San Antonio Spurs and Houston Rockets. They were the second father-son duo to each win an NBA Championship, Rick while with the Warriors and Brent with the Spurs.
3. Canadian-born Leo Rautins, who played for the NBA's Philadelphia 76ers and Atlanta Hawks, as well as European teams, and U.S.-born son Andrew Rautins, who played for the New York Knicks and several European teams.

This fall, Domantas Sabonis will join four other Lithuanians who are currently playing in the NBA: Jonas Valančiūnas (Toronto Raptors), Mindaugas Kuzminskas (New York Knicks), Donatas Motiejūnas (Houston Rockets) and Nik Stauskas (Philadelphia 76ers).



Arvydas Sabonis and N.Y. Geležinis Vilkas basketball coach Stasys Kavaliauskas meet at the end of the Draft. Photo courtesy of Stasys Kavaliauskas



Domantas Sabonis' brothers Tautvydas (left) and Žygimantas (center) with Stasys Kavaliauskas at the NBA Draft. Photo courtesy of Stasys Kavaliauskas

U.S. Lithuanian Emigrant Reunion Picnic Celebrates Its 70th Anniversary

By Irena Nakienė-Valys



The sisters were honored for their ongoing efforts to keep the Lithuanian Christian spirit alive through their ministries.

Between World War I and World War II, nuns from orders founded in the United States—like the Sisters of St. Casimir and the Sisters of St. Francis—hurried to establish their communities in Lithuania. During the same period, the Sisters of the Immaculate Conception of the Blessed Virgin Mary, established by the blessed Archbishop Jurgis Matulaitis in 1918 in Marijampolė, Lithuania, came to New England and began their activities in Connecticut in 1936.

The Sisters of the Immaculate Conception of the Blessed Virgin Mary founded their convent in Putnam, Conn., in 1943, purchasing the orphanage building along with the farm. The convent management moved to the newly acquired place and the novitiate was transferred there, too. The little offspring of the sisterhood was able to take root on this continent and maintain their monastic existence, so it could flourish in Lithuania again.

The nuns took care of the farm themselves; they planted trees, plants and flowers. They tried to maintain it in Lithuanian Christian spirit. As there was a girls' dormitory, cultural activity abounded. With the help of donors, a tall wooden Lithuanian cross was built on the premises of the convent; it has been rebuilt several times. The Lithuanian community named the garden "Garden of the Cross." When the girls living in the convent dorms got together with Ateitininkai (Lithuanian Catholic youth organization) and scout groups, the Lithuanian Student Union and club *Dainava*, as well as various sponsor guilds, the get-together was named the "piknikas" (picnic). This is how the Putnam Picnic—now also known as Lithuanian Friendship Day—got to be celebrated on the fourth weekend of July from 1946 to the present.

This year, for the 70th time at Immaculate Conception of the Blessed Virgin Mary convent in Putnam, Lithuanian emigrant

communities got together from faraway places and states to meet each other, interact, talk, enjoy Lithuanian national food and watch the program put together by the children's Camp Neringa.

The convent's superior, Sr. Ignė Marijošiūtė, rejoiced in her interview that, "... there is no such thing as one most memorable picnic because all were meaningful each their own way, all were beautiful, they had their own mood, goal, and reflected the spirit of the particular period. Neringa is very important to the camp participants—this year families came here from California, Texas, Illinois, Colorado, North Carolina, Toronto—not to mention neighboring New York, New Jersey, Massachusetts or New England. Young families come, camp and everybody is always welcome."

As every year, the celebration traditionally started with Holy Mass to commemorate those who were gone. Mass was celebrated by Aurelijus Gričius, a Franciscan monk from Kennebunkport, Maine, and the Salesian priest Izidorius Sadauskas.



Neringa campers performed their program for picnic-goers.

The sun was scorching mercilessly, but participants cooled themselves with ice cream and root beer made according to a Lithuanian recipe. Despite the heat, people ate hot sausages with sauerkraut, pork with peas, chicken and kugelis.

At the rose garden, those who wished could look around, admire or purchase handmade things, artifacts from amber, Lithuanian food, souvenirs, cards and paintings about Lithuania. Because the picnic is a meeting ground for old and young alike, it was interesting to meet people, talk and interact. The picnic attracts people from the furthestmost states, and 70 years later the third and fourth generation come to meet here.

One had a chance to see a movie about Camp Neringa at Raudondvaris hall; the topic was a "Historic View of the Sisters' Mission at Neringa." The camp, under the leadership of the sisters, camp director Regina Kulbytė, assistant director Dana Vainauskienė and other staff, fosters Lithuanian and Christian spirit among Lithuanian-American youth. Well-rounded programs are held in Lithuanian and English languages in the mountains of Vermont. Understanding of Lithuanian culture and spiritual maturity are fostered in all of Neringa's camps.

Neringa is like a second home for many American Lithuanians; they return there not only every summer, but year round—it's a camping tradition. In the fall, a walk-a-thon helps raise funds, in winter people gather to remember Kučios (Christmas Eve) and Kalėdos (Christmas) traditions, and in the spring everybody gathers to help prepare the camp for the coming summer.

Kulbytė has had ties with Neringa since childhood—she attended girls' camp there. She had a chance to dance in the same meadow. Vainauskienė said she represented the third-wave emigrants, and had this to say about the Lithuanian get-together picnic: "... this is a big example how tradition is continued in emigration; we who have arrived—the new generation—are learning this, we get to know how work of fostering Lithuanian traditions is done, the importance of Catholicism, value of friendship, interaction regardless of those who come here—the older World War II emigrant generation or the new generation of emigrants, but we all get together and we can celebrate, we can interact and feel Lithuanian. Neringa's camp is growing yet another generation of Lithuanians who are going to continue this tradition, and for us, the organizers of this camp, it is extremely important."

At this picnic, one could hide away from the hot sun at the Alka museum, exploring exhibits or purchasing no-longer-needed books. One could also stroll in the shade of the forest trees near Mindaugas' Castle, built by Rev. Stasys Yla, and explore the structure from inside.



A scout serenades the ladies at the Knights of Lithuania New England District raffle table.

The merriest part of the celebration, as always, was the performance by the Neringa campers. This year, the children staged a new program, entitled Village Day, which commemorated the Jubilee Year of Mercy. The campers entertained everybody with their concert, singing and dancing barefoot for an hour in the hot sun. At the same place, in the square, the sisters were celebrated and presented with flowers.

The most beautiful moments of the camp were remembered after the program: when the flags were down, all the participants were very happy and merry, their eyes were shining and they were hugging each other. Parents and other participants were taking pictures with their cameras and cell phones, trying to capture the special moments. The smiles on the campers' faces showed that the hot sun did not wear them out or make them feel tired. The Picnic was crowned with the drawing for the big raffle prizes.

The participants in the festivities were not in a hurry to leave—they conversed in the shade of the trees and shared moments from the picnic, and they remembered the previous picnics, especially those participants who were no longer with us.

Finally, a big thank you for their efforts, work, faithfulness to the spiritual and cultural values that we brought from our homeland to: the convent's sisters and the organizers of the picnic Aidas and Gita Kupčinskas, Snieguolė Stapčinskaitė, Diana and Leonardas Norkas, Gintaras Čepas and Leonas Bernotas.

Irena Nakienė-Valys is head of the Eastern Connecticut Chapter of the Lithuanian American Community, Inc. And a member of the World Lithuanian Community XIV-XV parliament.

our community

Lithuanian Days at 101

More than a century old and still going strong, Lithuanian Days in Frackville, Pa., draws folks far and near to an annual two-day celebration of Lithuanian spirit and culture in the middle of Pennsylvania's historic coal region every August. Though the largest number of participants came from nearby communities and the Mid-Atlantic states, others hailed from as far as Ohio, Michigan and even Oregon. Many of the events' organizers are descendants of the first wave of Lithuanian immigrants who settled in the region around the turn of the 20th century.

This 101st Lithuanian Days featured, as always, a celebration of fine food and folk traditions, along with songs, dancing, cultural exhibits, crafts, vendors and a boilo contest. New this year was an interactive adaptation of the folk tale Eglė, Queen of the Snakes, with children from the audience, in which King Žilvinas was tickled to death with pool noodles by Eglė's brothers.

Photographs by Teresė Vekteris





Lithuania's President Named Balzekas Person of the Year



Balzekas Museum president and founder, Stanley Balzekas Jr., presented the award to Lithuanian President Dalia Grybauskaitė. Photo: Robertas Dačkus, Office of the President of the Republic of Lithuania

President of Lithuania Dalia Grybauskaitė received the 2016 Award of Excellence from the Balzekas Museum of Lithuanian Culture, Chicago, Ill., during her recent visit to New York. Grybauskaitė was recognized for her courageous leadership and her dedication to a secure, democratic and sovereign Lithuania.

The award presentation took place at a private ceremony at the Lithuanian Consulate in New York on September 22, 2016, during the President's visit to attend the United Nations General Assembly.

The Award of Excellence (also known as the Person of the Year Award) was established as early as in 1969. Each year, this award recognizes persons with special merits to Lithuania, its culture and its progress.

"No matter where we happen to live, we all are united by strong feelings for our homeland that inspire us to work together for the present and future of Lithuania. We will hand it over to new generations as it was handed to us by our parents," the President said in accepting the award.

According to Grybauskaitė, Lithuania knows that it can always count on the Lithuanian-American community. She underscored the substantial contribution of American Lithuanians to Lithuania's struggle for independence at the end of the last century as well as their assistance in consolidating the partnership between Lithuania and the United States, which is important for Lithuania's security.

The Balzekas Museum of Lithuanian Culture was founded in 1966 by Stanley Balzekas Jr., Honorary Consul of Lithuania, from his own funds. The museum's exhibits feature Lithuanian culture and history, and its events include concerts, films and seminars.

Mushrooms and Nature Star at Neringa Weekend

The first "Mushroom and Nature Weekend" at Camp Neringa in Brattleboro, Vt., brought 40 adult campers together on a September weekend under the tutelage of mycology experts Dr. Rytas Vilgalys of Duke University and Dr. Linas Kudzma of Baxter Pharmaceutical. Both had been campers during the inaugural years of boys' camp 40 years ago. Under their watchful eye, participants picked, sorted, learned about, cooked, fried and ate mushrooms.

Participants were also introduced to Pope Francis' encyclical to the world, *Laudato Si*, calling people to a responsible ecology and care of the environment, which is now an integral part of Catholic social teaching.



Dr. Rytas Vilgalys explains the finer points of fungi identification to the weekend's participants.

Security

... Lithuania will purchase a Norwegian air defense system for 100 million euros to counter a perceived Russian threat. This expenditure brings Lithuania's defense spending closer to the NATO target of 2 percent of GDP. The system is produced by Konsburg Defense & Aerospace with parts supplied by U.S.'s Ratheon Company and will equip two Lithuanian batteries. Similar systems are operational in Norway, Spain, the Netherlands and Finland, and one is in production for installation in Oman. Lithuania's 2017 budget includes provisions for this increase in national defense as well as raising the minimum wage and the non-taxable personal income tax threshold.

... In another 100 million euro purchase, Lithuania will acquire 88 Samson Mk2 remote-controlled weapon stations by Rafael of Israel, mounted on new Boxer fighting vehicles supplied by the Dutch-German consortium ARTEC.

... Several hackers have been arrested for the spring cyber attacks on the President's Office, Lithuanian Seimas (Parliament), Ministries, the State Tax Inspectorate and the Central Project Management Agency. The robot and command communication network (botnet) was infiltrated and used to generate spam and denial of service. Lithuania's State Security Department has identified the hackers as connected to Russia.

... Lithuania has sold 150 tons of Soviet-era ammunition to Ukraine. The AK-47 cartridges and other munitions were surplus to their needs since the conversion to NATO standard weaponry. Lithuania has also aided in the treatment and rehabilitation of wounded Ukrainian soldiers.

... 150 paratroopers of the U.S. 173rd Airborne Brigade conducted airborne operations in Rukla, Lithuania, at the beginning of a new rotation in Lithuania.

... Lithuania has created a fake town in which to practice urban warfare and has opened it to Latvia and Estonia to conduct their own exercises, said Juozas Olekas, the Lithuanian Minister of Defense.

... Ukraine Today reports that the Lithuanian Embassy will remain NATO's contact point in Ukraine for the next two years. In 2013, before the 2014 coup, two-thirds of Ukrainians opposed NATO membership; in July 2015, 64 percent favored joining NATO; in July 2016, the opinion was 50-50 on joining.

Business

... Koch Supply & Trading of the U.S. will supply 2 million megawatt hours of liquefied natural gas (LNG) to Lithuania's LNG ship Independence in Klaipėda in 2017. The contract will supply about a third of the needs of the state-owned supplier, LDT, which has 650,000 customers in Lithuania. Currently the ship is supplied with LNG from Norway's Statoil. These suppliers reduce Lithuania's dependence on Russia's Gazprom.

... During the first six months of 2016, Small Planet Airlines, headquartered in Vilnius, added six planes and carried 660,000 passengers—26 percent more than in the first six months of 2015. They service passengers in Germany, France, Lithuania, Poland and the United Kingdom. Even greater growth was limited by delays in delivery of the new Airbuses and scarcity of pilots. The airline plans to add Asian destinations to its schedule to pick up the winter slack period. The airline's Air Operating Certificate allows them to operate 16 Airbus A320s with 180 seats and four Airbus 321s with 220 seats.

... Peikko Group, a worldwide supplier of concrete composite beams, will invest 9 million euros to expand its Kaunas facility to meet growing demand in the Baltic Sea region. It will be hiring project management specialists, designers, 3D modeling experts and manufacturing staff.

... Coca Cola has announced it will shut down production in Alytus, Lithuania, and move it to the larger Polish market. Eighty workers will lose their jobs but 135 logistic, sales and marketing jobs will be retained.

... Betsson AB, an online Swedish gaming operator, has acquired TonyBet, the second-largest licensed online operator in Lithuania and sponsor of many basketball, soccer, volleyball and racing teams. It provides betting opportunities for sporting events, presidential elections and even the end of the world!

... During this year's harvest season, Lithuania exported 25,000 tons of peas to India via two ships from Klaipėda. The agriculture company Linas Agro paid 242 euros/ton, which is 15 percent higher than last year. Farmers planted 155,000 hectares this year, which is almost double last year's plantings of 79,700 hectares.

Global Affairs

... Lithuanian and Spanish police arrested 52 gang members, including 24 Lithuanians, who were trafficking and modifying arms that could be used by terrorists. The gang acquired deactivated AK-47 assault rifles and reactivated them. They also trafficked in sniper rifles and pistols. In addition to Lithuanians and Spaniards, the gang included citizens of Azerbaijan, Bolivia, Columbia, Ireland, Panama, Russia, Ukraine and the United Kingdom.

... The Vatican's Cardinal Peter Turkson, president of the Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace, met with Lithuanian Foreign Minister Linas Linkevičius in Vilnius. They discussed refugee issues, migration, military conflict and eastern Ukraine. Cardinal Turkson was born in Ghana and educated in New York and Rome.

In Lithuania

... Three thousand marchers, including President Dalia Grybauskaitė, retraced the 2.5 km route that 2,000 Jewish residents of Moletai followed 75 ago that led to their murder at the hands of Nazi invaders and anti-Soviet Lithuanian collaborators.

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f. Total Distribution (Sum of 15c and 15e)		855	855
g. Copies not Distributed (See Instructions to Publishers #4 (page #3))		15	15
h. Total (Sum of 15f and g)		870	870
i. Percent Paid (15c divided by 15f times 100)		98%	98%

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d. Percent Paid (Both Print & Electronic Copies) (16b divided by 16c x 100)		98%	98%

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Clarifications
In the July/August article "Dancing Through Time," part of the description of the first dance festival should have read: Cleveland's dance group Grandinélé, led by Liudas Sagys, and the Putnam dance group led by Sr. M. Paul, danced the Sadutė for the first time in Chicago.
In the same article, in the caption on page 19 under the description of the X Folk Dance Festival, Violeta Smieliauskaitė-Fabianovich is on the right, not second from left.
The item on the August Coup in "This Month in History" the July/August issue stated that Soviet troops withdrew after the failure of the coup. It should more clearly said that the troops in position for the coup pulled out of Vilnius on that day. Soviet troops did not completely withdraw from Lithuania until August 1993.

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September 2016

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

ONGOING

Through December 10
Atlanta LAC Charity Drive
 Donations benefit five children's homes in Lithuania.
 Info: virga_vilnia@yahoo.com, lietuviaiatlantoje.org

Through December 31
No Home To Go To: Baltic Displaced Persons Exhibition
 Healy Hall of the Science, Business and Industry Library, 188 Madison Avenue at 34th Street, New York, N.Y.

Most Fridays, 4:30-7:30 p.m.
Friday Fish Fry at the Rockford Lithuanian Club
 716 Indiana Avenue, Rockford, Ill.
 Info: lithuanianclub.org, 815-962-9256

Every Sunday,
 11:30 a.m. - 1:30 p.m.
All-You-Can-Eat Lithuanian Brunch Buffet
 Lithuanian Club and Gintaras Dining Room, 877 E. 185 St., Cleveland, Ohio
 Info: lithclub@gmail.com; 216-531-8318

First Sundays, 12-4 p.m.
Lithuanian Brunch
 The Avenue Restaurant, 71-22 Myrtle Ave., Glendale, N.Y.
 Reservations recommended.
 Info: 347-725-3853

DECEMBER 2016

December 10, 1-3 p.m.
Amber Roots Heritage Club Kučios
 Lithuanian Music Hall, 2715 E. Allegheny Ave., Philadelphia, Pa.
 Use the Tilton Street entrance.
 Bring a meatless dish to share.
 Everyone welcome.
 Info: milliemarks@aol.com

December 10, 2-8 p.m.
Atlanta LAC Mass and Traditional Christmas Eve Dinner
 St. Ann's Catholic Church, 4905 Roswell Rd., Marietta, Ga.
 Mass 2 p.m.; dinner 4 p.m.
 Info: facebook.com/AtlantosLietuviai

December 10, 3-9 p.m.
Kučios bei Kalėdinė eglutė/ Christmas Eve & Kids Program
 Latvian Hall, Portland, Ore.
 3 p.m. Mass; 5 p.m. children's program and Santa; 6:30 p.m. potluck dinner begins.
 \$15 per adult / \$25 per family.
 Info: 503-974-6407, info@portlandlithuanians.com

December 17, 2 - 5:30 p.m.
Vaiva Vebraitė and Vytury's Lithuanian Schools' "Kalėdos Pušnyjė"
 Fairfield Library, 1080 Old Post Road, Fairfield, Conn.
 \$20; tickets available until Dec. 10.
 Info and tickets: Agne D'Orso, 203-808-0451

December 17, 6 p.m.
Colorado Lithuanians Christmas Eve/Kučios
 Latvian Hall, 10705 W. Virginia Ave., Lakewood, Colo.
 Members: Adults, \$15; children 13-18, \$10; under 13, free
 Non-members: Adults, \$20; children 13-18, \$15; under 13 free
 Info: coloradolithuanian.wixsite.com

December 18, 11:30 a.m.
Vincas Krevė Lithuanian Sunday School Christmas Show
 St. Andrew's Parish Hall, 19th and Wallace Streets, Philadelphia, Pa.

December 18, 12:30-5 p.m.
Traditional Lithuanian Christmas Eve Celebration - Los Angeles
 St. Casimir Parish Hall, 2718 St. George St., Los Angeles, Calif.
 Donation: \$45, under 10 free
 Info and reservations: 310-995-7352, dschuksta@yahoo.com
 Mail checks (payable to the Daughters of Lithuania) to: Daiva Schuksta, 4218 Perlita Ave., Los Angeles, CA 90039-1313
 or pay online at DaughtersofLithuaniaLA.org

December 18, 1 p.m.
Ateitis Traditional Kučios
 Lithuanian Youth Center, 5620 S. Claremont Ave., Chicago, Ill.
 \$20 adults; \$15 seniors; \$10 students; 8 and under free. RSVP by December 11.
 Info: odaugirdas@hotmail.com, 630-325-3277

December 18, 2:30 p.m.
San Diego Lithuanian Christmas Eve Kučios
 Mission San Luis Rey Parish, 4070 Mission Ave., Oceanside, Calif
 Traditional food; performance by Rolandas Dabrukas; meet Santa and get a gift in exchange for a song, dance, poem, etc.
 \$25 per adult; \$5 per child.
 Info/reservations: ausra@vabalas.com

December 28, 7:30-9:30 p.m.
Atlanta Hawks vs. N.Y. Knicks and M. Kuzminskas
 Philips Arena, 1 Philips Drive NW, Atlanta, Ga.
 Come and cheer on Lithuanian player Mindaugas Kuzminskas.
 Info/tickets: lietuviaiatlantoje.org

December 30
Colorado Lithuanians New Year's Eve Party
 Winter Park, Colo.
 Live music with Colorado Romas
 Info: coloradolithuanian.wixsite.com

December 30, 8 p.m.-2 a.m.
Philadelphia Lithuanian Community New Year's Eve Party
 Lithuanian Music Hall, 2715 East Allegheny Ave., Philadelphia, Pa.
 \$100 per person, includes happy hour, dinner, dancing and surprises. Black tie optional.
 Advance reservations required.
 Info: ilonairvaldas@hotmail.com, dvgedvilai@gmail.com, artur79@verizon.net or alemacinas@gmail.com

JANUARY 2017

January 13-15
Winter Šventė/Celebration and Fund Raiser
 Camp Neringa, Brattleboro, Vt.
 Info: Neringa.org

FEBRUARY 2017

February 11
Poker Tournament to Benefit Voksmė Lithuanian School of Kansas City
 Info: kclith.org

February 24-March 4
Lithuanian Snow Ski Trip
 Aspen Mountain Resort, Aspen, Colo.
 Sponsored by Lithuanian Athletic Union of North America and Lithuanian American Doctors Union. Skiers, non-skiers and families welcome. Race schedule TBA.
 Travel and accommodations: linda@ski.com, 800-525-2052 x3329 or 970-925-9500 x3329.
 Identify yourself as part of the Lithuanian Ski Group.
 General info: edmickus1@aol.com or vsaulis@sbcglobal.net

February 26, 4 p.m.
Annual Aspen Lithuanian Independence Day Celebration
 809 South Aspen Street, Aspen, Colo.
 Special guest Rolandas Krisčiūnas, Lithuanian Ambassador to the U.S.
 Info: dmb@aspenconsul.com

MARCH 2017

March 6
17th Annual Florida Lithuanian Open Golf Tournament
 Info: LTConsulFlorida.com, 727-895-4811

March 17-20
Vyresnių Skaučių + Gintarių Lithuanian Scouts Jamboree
 Agatha A. Durland Scout Reservation, 1 Clear Lake Road, Putnam Valley, N.Y.
 Registration: via Facebook: Vyr. Sk. + Gintariu Suvaziamas 2017 or Skautai.net
 Info: djmattis@gmail.com or vaiva.rimeika@gmail.com

March 24-26
Women's Weekend
 Camp Neringa, Brattleboro, Vt.
 Discussion, exercise, art, cooking, spiritual and personal rebirth.
 Info: kerry@watershedcoachingllc.com or kriscon@frontiernet.net

APRIL 2017

April 1
Benefit Concert for Neringa
 600 Liberty Hwy., Putnam, Conn.
 Info: neringa.org

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VOLUME 40 ISSUE 7

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