

bridges



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from the editor

Dear readers,

On August 23, 2019, Lithuanian, Latvians, and Estonians all over the world commemorated the 30th Anniversary of the Baltic Way. On August 23, 1989, over two million people formed a human chain that extended over 400 miles through Lithuania, Latvia, & Estonia. This way, the residents of the three Baltic countries were showing the world their will and determination to be free, to liberate their countries from the occupation which was the result of the signing of the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact on August 23, 1939.

Today, the Baltic Way anniversary commemoration resembles a big celebration of freedom. We express our happiness to be free, and at the same time, our determination to remain free. We remind the world and our young generation that freedom is very fragile. It is easy to lose freedom but it is impossible to get without sacrifice.

For me, the anniversary of the Baltic Way is like Thanksgiving. I feel immensely thankful to those who made it possible for the three Baltic nations to become free once again. I feel thankful to all those courageous two million people across Lithuania, Latvia, and Lithuania who stood in the Baltic Way - peacefully and yet with great determination.

However, I feel even more thankful to those, who kept the flame of freedom alive throughout the Soviet occupation. We have to remember that the Baltic Way did not happen overnight. Ten years before it, there was the Baltic Appeal, a public letter addressed to the Secretary-General of the United Nations, to the Soviet Union, East and West Germany, and the signatories of the Atlantic Charter. The Baltic Appeal was signed by courageous 45 Estonian, Latvian, and Lithuanian citizens. The Appeal demanded public disclosure of the pact and its secret protocols, annulment of the pact ab initio, and restoration of the independence of the Baltic states. The initiator of the Baltic Appeal was Antanas Terleckas. Many of these 45 people were imprisoned and exiled for this brave act. For example, Antanas Terleckas was imprisoned in 1979 in Perm, Russia. After three years of imprisonment, he was exiled to Siberia (the Magadan Region.) After he came back to Lithuania in 1987, he continued to fight for Lithuania's freedom.

The Baltic Appeal was published in the foreign press and constituted the basis for the European Parliament's resolution of January 13, 1983, in support of its demands.

Wishing you a nice summer,

Karilė Vaitkutė
Editor

World Travels Give You Freedom and Knowledge

Interview with Raimondas Šenauskas

By Karilė Vaitkutė



Raimondas and his wife, Dalia, in Guatemala.

Born and raised in Klaipėda, Lithuania, Raimondas Šenauskas has been living in Chicago since 1996 and has traveled to many countries in the world. Since summer is the traditional time of vacations and travel, I asked Raimondas to share tips and impressions from his various trips.

Was coming to America a few decades ago one of your travels?

No, it was something that just happened. It was not a quest for a better life. Just like many of my acquaintances, I left home to see the sights, to spend a year in the United States, not to earn money. At the time I was studying at Klaipėda University and worked at a radio station. After I graduated, it was a good time to leave because the situation in Lithuania was uncertain and seemed to be getting worse. When you are a 24-year-old young man, why not leave home and look around?

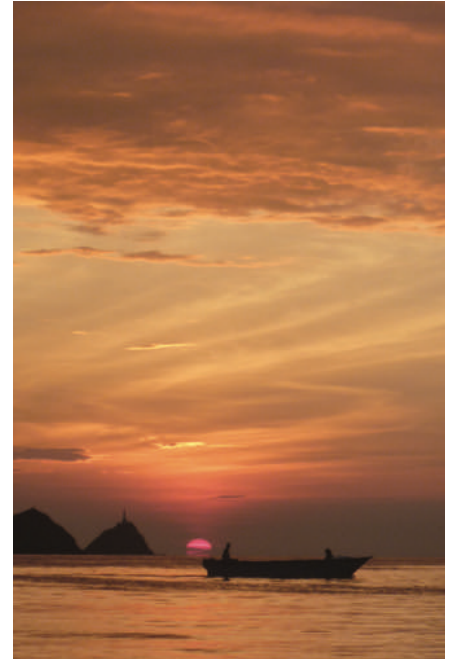
Were your travels in the US extensive? How many states have you visited?

At first, all my major trips were within the United States. It is very convenient to travel here - lots of well-main-

tained roads, the spirit of freedom, beautiful nature, and long distances. In one trip, you can only see two or three states. I've visited all the states except Alaska. Mostly I travel with my wife. I think we have seen about 85 percent of this country.

Where does the desire or the need for travel come from? How much time per year do you spend traveling?

There are times when I don't go anywhere all year, except maybe to the neighboring state of Wisconsin. My travels probably depend on what inspires me. For example, recently I was out to India for two months. You need to mature for a trip like that. These kinds of trips have to be meaningful for you. And sometimes I go on a trip a couple of times a year. Of course, I also have to go back to Lithuania and visit my family and relatives. By the way, I can

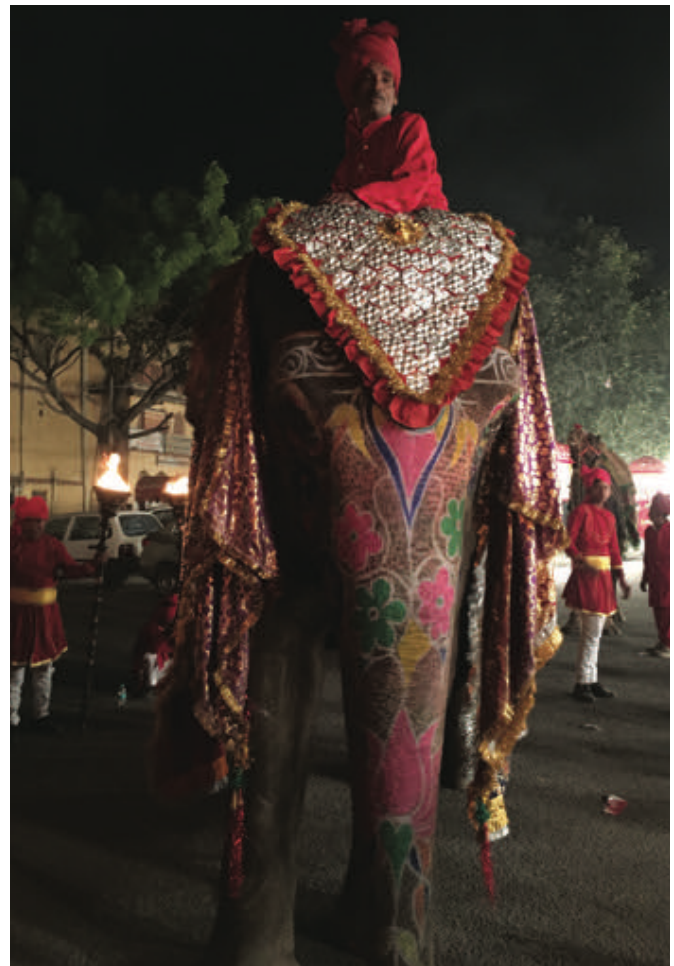


Columbia

advise you to fly to Lithuania via Istanbul. It is cheaper, and at the same time, you will experience yet another country. There are many flights from Istanbul to Vilnius. Once in Lithuania, you can also travel from there because there are many flights to Spain, Italy, and other European countries.

There are several types of travelers. Some people only travel with a tour group and a guide. Others do the so-called homework, learn about a country they chose to visit, and then travel alone or with a few friends. The third type will go wherever their eyes lead them, like a fluff carried by the wind. How do you travel?

I wouldn't recommend traveling like a fluff carried by the wind, unless when you are 18 years old. Homework saves money, stress, and time. I always do my homework. I look for information on websites, forums, and youtube. I create a logical route so it's comfortable enough, and, of course, I keep an open window to allow any changes at any time. I gather information about hotels so that the essential needs - where to sleep and what to eat - wouldn't take away any time while traveling. Of course, I collect information on the sights I would like to visit - temples or other attractions. But most of the time I find various interesting things, like, for example, local markets, when I'm there. Local taxi drivers give the best advice on hotels and restaurants. Ask a taxi driver and he will tell you where the food will be inexpensive and delicious. This applies everywhere, even in Chicago. Taxi drivers eat well.



India



Israel

What do you want to see during your travels? What interests you?

It depends on the country. For example, when in India, you have to see the Taj Mahal. It doesn't matter if other travelers have already shown, drawn, or photographed it. You have to see it for yourself. I'm interested in history, art, beauty, and so-called spiritual experiences. Temples and shrines are visited for a reason. There's a reason why there are places in the world that remain important for centuries. But I always recommend leaving one day open. In India, there is a town called Agra. For a European, the town might seem a little frightening. Although you can't call it a town - it has a population of one million. You have to spend at least one day in Agra's Old Town. It's chaotic, dirty, but very authentic. It has interesting temples that are worth a visit. And, of course, you'll find yourself in the spotlight. India may seem like it has a lot of tourists, but if you walk a little farther away from the traditionally visited areas and you can expect a lot of attention. It is the same in Columbia. There are few tourists, and the country is amazing.



Italy

Which continents have you been to? How many countries have you visited?

I don't count them because I have no reason to travel to as many countries as possible. I have been to Mexico five times. It's a big, exciting country. I can go there often. I've been to Italy a couple of times, to Spain a couple of times. They're countries that are worth visiting more than once. In total, I have visited about twenty countries. I choose a country where I will spend a longer time. For example, I was in Columbia for a month and a half. In Spain I met Colombians who spoke very nicely about their country. Of course, we know the clichés - in Colombia, there are drugs, and it's not safe. But that's not the case. Colombia is interesting because you can experience all of South America in it: the Andes, the desert, the Caribbean, the ancient civilizations, and the friendly, not-yet-ruined-by-tourists people. So, in Colombia, you can see everything South America has to offer, and it is safe enough.



Mexico

You could say that Lithuanians are northerners. Did the cultural differences in South America make a comparatively larger impression on you?

It was interesting to me that Lithuanians have a lot in common with South American people because we come from Christian countries. It doesn't matter that Lithuania was under Soviet occupation. We are still a Christian country. Of course, in Colombia, I lived amongst Native Indians who were not affected by the Christianity brought by the Spanish. Communicating with them proved to me that all the common principles work: if I respect them, they will be friendly with me. But in Muslim countries, the differences are already greater. Before the war, I got to visit Syria. I realized it was a culture of trade. For them, it seems, it's normal to bargain with foreigners trying to sell their products at a higher price. If it doesn't work out, it's no big deal. This is much less common in Christian lands. Therefore, I think religion plays a big role. For me, this was a discovery. We Lithuanians are representatives of the Christian worldview, so it will always be easier for us in Christian countries. For example, you can be interested in Buddhism, but when you visit a Buddhist country, you will see that it will take a long time before you feel at home there. And in Mexico, say, you can go to a Mass and feel good, even though it's held in a foreign language.



The usual way people communicate is through language. What language do you speak when you visit different parts of the world?

Of course, I can't speak English everywhere. However, I have noticed that when you can't speak the language, you pay more attention to other things - the speaker's eyes, gestures. Most importantly, you need to know what you want, and then you can get things done very quickly. It's interesting that communication also takes place on an intuitive level. The locals seem to know and feel what it is you want. Plus, people are curious. It is always easier to communicate when the other side is interested.

Once, on my way to Nepal, I decided to stay for three days in Abu Dhabi. I was wearing an American hunting hat with a beak. I had on a green shirt and green sweatpants. When I got there, I noticed that the local people were somehow strangely ignoring me. Usually, people are polite, they answer questions, but this time I felt ignored. And then, the bus I was taking broke down in the middle of the desert. We all got out. I caught a taxi. The taxi driver kept looking back at me suspiciously. He asked me where I was going. I said I was going to the hotel. He then asked me if I was a soldier. I said no, but he kept talking about soldiers and American bases. And then I realized that my hat and the green shirt were being associated with the American army. It was enough for me to change my shirt for people's attitudes to shift as if I'd waved a



Nicaragua



Raimondas in front of Taj Mahal in India.

magic wand. So, you always have to do a bit of research about another country before going. Sometimes, very small things that you typically neglect can play a big role. And, for example, when traveling to Colombia or Nicaragua, I'd advise you to know the names of their most popular singers or football stars. It is important to know something about them. Sometimes you can just see the face of whoever you're speaking with light up, they might even drive you somewhere for free, or give you food. A person needs to identify with you, to find commonalities with you. If you say you are from Lithuania, or are Lithuanian, in many countries it will sound the same as if you said you are from Mars. But if you know what to say so that someone could find something in common with you, "identify" you, that person will be excited about it and will be hospitable to you.

So who do you say you are - Lithuanian or American?

It is often pointless to mention Lithuania because nobody knows about it. According to the circumstances, I sometimes even say I am from Russia. There was this one time when the Russian language saved me because I think I would have certainly been beaten up by some Palestinians. I was in the Kidron Valley in Jerusalem's Old Town, near the Mount of Olives. Many Arabs live there as well. I walked through the part of the Old Town where they live. Suddenly, a group of sixteen-year-olds circled me and started saying something in Mexican. I only understood he was saying "American." I started speaking Russian, I said I was from Moscow and I didn't understand what they wanted. They started talking amongst themselves and one of them motioned for me to run. And I bolted. There was quite a bit of adrenaline. So, in those countries, it's better to know some things. For example, in Amman, Jordan, children threw stones and bottles at me. Later I asked someone why they did that. They said they were Syrian refugees from the country who had never seen foreigners, and this was their reaction towards them. They said that sometimes this happens in Tibet as well. A foreigner comes, so he must be stoned like a dog. This is also important to know. Because when bottles full of water start to crash into the wall behind you, it's not nice. Plus, they chase you. Again, this has not happened to me in Christian lands.

Is there a difference between you twenty years ago and you now? Have your travels changed you?

We all start traveling because we want to develop our personality. Just like a child, who, from infancy, begins to

strive to see and learn. Traveling might have given me relaxation in life. I realized that there is a bit of everything everywhere, and people, at their core, don't differ at all. And also that we all have too much of everything, especially people who live here in Chicago. There were trips when I was left with a small suitcase for two months and even during that time I didn't use all of its contents. There were also times when my suitcase did not arrive at all. I was left with nothing, but it turned out that a person doesn't need that much. I realized how well we live here. We have access to global culture, great Chicago festivals, concerts, art exhibitions. You realize how few people in such gigantic cities like Istanbul or Delhi have access to a good symphony orchestra. How few people in the world can sit down and peacefully listen to Beethoven's symphony. You look at those masses of people and realize that they may never have access to that. And you start to better appreciate what you have. And you relax more. Maybe you won't become richer, but you gain more peace and knowledge. You understand that travel itself is an asset. Plus, you don't have to travel far. When it comes to nature, Americans are very fortunate, because not much elsewhere is it so beautiful. And not much elsewhere is everything so easily accessible. In other countries, you may need to take a train, then hire a local driver, and maybe the road won't be clean, or something else ... but

in America you can drive around and find wildlife where no one has lived before, you could dig and find dinosaur bones. There are still places where there is no civilization. For Chicagoans, it's enough to drive around Lake Michigan and there will be things to see. But my favorite place is probably America's Southwest, from Denver westward, where the mountains begin. You can drive around there for months. I sometimes even say that you can simply just stay in America and still be able to satisfy your wanderlust.

Is cheap travel possible? Is it cheaper to travel alone than with a group of tourists?

The best option is to travel in twos because a hotel room will cost the same for one. Or, say, in countries like Nepal, you need to hire a driver for the whole day, as the roads are poor, and it's better to not even try with the local transport. People travel to Nepal, for example, for the Himalayas and the temples. Then it will be cheaper if you travel with a partner. But in general, traveling there is not expensive. Plane tickets are usually the most expensive part of the trip. In Colombia, for example, I lived in places where there was no electricity. And the locals ask in the morning what I'll want to eat in the evening - chicken or fish, because if it's chicken, they will go out to catch that



Spain



Istanbul



Street vendors in Istanbul.

chicken, and if it's fish, they will go out fishing. There are no other options. For a place like that, ten dollars will be enough for the whole day. There are no places to spend money there. The only attractions are walking through the deserts or mountains. I lived in the Amazon. There, you take a canoe in the morning and row through the swamps all day. Or you go to the jungle at night. And you won't have to go far. Ten minutes and you're in the thick of the jungle.

How do you prepare to travel to wild areas that are unfamiliar to Westerners?

Usually, poisonous animals see you before you see them, and so you don't have to look around so much. I lived in an area like this in the Amazon. But missionaries had already brought over the Christian worldview and standards of behavior to the Indians. I asked what shoes I should wear. A resident said shoes are unnecessary since there are no snakes here. I asked about anacondas. They said it would take about ten hours to reach them. Of course, it was possible to organize this because the locals have nothing to do and have no way to make money. You can hire them and they will take you wherever you want. It is also better to go to the jungle with a guide because you can get lost in a matter of minutes. One trail, another, and suddenly you no longer understand where you are going or where you are. You walk with a flashlight, but if you turn it off, you realize what true, absolute darkness means. You can hear sounds around you: tumbling, grunting but you can't see anything, not even a shadow. We, urbanites, think we know nature. But when we find ourselves in the

true wild, we realize that we do not. It's quite dangerous. You know that the nearest paved road is 500 miles away and you know you need to hire locals. And then the locals will respect you more because you learn from them, you hire them, you pay them money. Plus, you can have a meal with a local family for a ridiculously small price. The Western world, of course, is more expensive. But having had an interest and planned in advance, you can, say, in Italy, spend no more than here in Chicago. Of course, it all depends on your habits.

Where would you suggest to research different countries, to do that homework?

The main ones are lonelyplanet and tripadvisor. That's enough for a regular person. And you need to have a good guide book. Most of us only visit for a week or two. Once I had a good guide book about Rome, where every church was described. But after all, it would take a year to visit all of them, and you only have a week. So you just go to Rome and go wherever you see an open door. Of course, you visit the Vatican, and then, if the doors are open to any other church, you go inside, and will surely find some masterpieces.

What makes up memories?

It is good to take pictures, especially when you are traveling alone. It's a good activity, you find all sorts of angles. But most of the time you travel for a sense of novelty. You are in a big city, you don't know anyone, and you know you won't be here for long. It's just a sense of freedom.



Abu Dhabi

You are unattached; you see everything from the side. People are going to work, or doing something else. And you are watching from the sidelines, unbound. It gives you a sense of lightness. Having lived in Chicago for a while, I am not fearful of large cities. Of course, cities like Delhi can still be shocking.

Where else would you like to go?

I would like to travel to where I have never been, to the Philippines, Thailand, and Vietnam. Of course, I have noticed that forum participants are split as to where they travel. Some travel to Latin America, and others to Asia. For Chicagoans, I can advise going to Mexico, because of its nature and culture. It's exotic and not far away. There are very nice, small hotels about a hundred kilometers outside Cancun. Peace, dunes and blue water will be guaranteed. Of course, I would also recommend colonial cities like Mexico City, where you can spend a week at the least. There are so many interesting things there, and it has a great Old Town. Recently, I drove through ten towns, maybe nine of them UNESCO Heritage Sites. The museums are great, people are friendly. Mexico has probably one of the best bus transportation systems in the world. They say it's dangerous, but it doesn't seem that way to me. The buses are great; the drivers wear ties, arrive on time, and have their stations. And it's not that expensive.

And where will your next trip be?

It will be a trip to Lithuania. This will also be an experience. Lithuania is changing fast, and there are many new

things to discover. I am never bored there. Many people probably notice the emptiness of Lithuania. The towns are becoming more beautiful, but the population is decreasing. You can feel a sense of emptiness. I like it when there are few people, the sense of space. But these are two different things. One is when people have recently left a place, and another is when the place is just empty. I am from Klaipeda. It seems to me that Klaipeda has become more provincial. Vilnius has become a center. Many of my friends moved to Vilnius while others left the country. It is also sad to see differentiation there. The towns of Lithuania are beautiful and the infrastructure is good. It's a good country to live in, you can stop anywhere to eat, and it's clean and tidy. Many new things have appeared. For example, I have never been to Druskininkai. They say it has changed a lot. But you can feel the alienation of the people. It used to be that no one was in a hurry, and now everyone is in a hurry, running around. When you ask how someone's doing, they answer that they don't know. In the past, everyone knew everything. I believe that in the past, a close relationship between people was one of Lithuania's greatest strengths. Now globalization is felt everywhere. Young people are becoming similar, whether in Bali, Chicago, Nicaragua or Lithuania. They all have iPhones, listen to similar music, and wear similar clothes. As is often the case, good comes along with bad.

Thanks for agreeing to talk with me and good luck with your travels.

All photos are from Raimondas Šenauskas family collection.

LISS Program 2019

By Lukas Smidtas



After participating in this program 4 years in a row, I am glad to say that this year has been one of the best years yet! Not only have I made so many lifelong friends and connections, but I have experienced Lithuania in ways only most people of Lithuanian descent could dream of. Many of my adventures with the LISS program across the years have involved meeting many government officials. I have met over 15 mayors from cities across Lithuania, the Speaker of Parliament, the Head of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and all 3 current living presidents, former and present. Our group this year had the honor to be invited to watch the Presidential Inauguration of Gintanas Nausėda! How cool is that!?!

Other adventures that I experienced include the views of Lithuania from the clouds in a hot air balloon, drifting in a tank and firing different types of military-grade weapons at the Lithuanian military base in Rukla, a vacation to the beach in Nida for a weekend, smooth kayaking along the Neris River that flows through the capital, and meeting of dozens of Lithuanians from around the world at the World Lithuanian Youth Organization sponsored event Kaunas2022 in the city of Kaunas.

As somebody who loves to experience Lithuania from different perspectives, I must admit that my favorite adventure this year was the hot air balloon excursion. The reason is in part because when I was a kid, I always said that if I had any superpower in the world, it would be the

power to fly, and boy did we fly higher than any of the birds dared to go. When we went, it was like the perfect aerial scene out of a movie because we went during the golden hour, so when we flew over the many fields and lakes of Lithuania, we saw this beautiful golden glow casting over them. We also flew over Trakai Castle, a famous landmark in Lithuania known for its location and the fact that it technically has never been conquered from any opposing forces in Lithuania's history. The hot air balloon made me feel like I was flying. The difference between flying in an air balloon versus a commercial plane is that you get to experience the world without the roaring sound of a jet engine and without a small window interfering with your field of vision of the world. It was one of the most incredible feelings that I have ever felt in my life.

Overall, it has been an absolute joy to see this program evolve and come into its own over the years. I would not trade anything in the world for all of the friends that I've made and for all of the adventures I've been a part of. I would like to send a special thanks to the Lithuanian Foundation, the Kazickas Foundation, our other sponsors, and to our amazing coordinators for making this year's program possible. I look forward to seeing this program grow even more and hope to see more Lithuanian youth from around the world connect and realize that we are all a part of one big family.

LISS Swamp March

By Max McNellis



On Sunday, July 7th, the LISS organized a 4-kilometer “swamp march” through a forest located about an hour and a half outside of Vilnius. We were all told beforehand to dress in clothes we were prepared to ruin, so I made a trip to the thrift store the day before and picked up some cheap shoes and a shirt to wear. Finding pants was a struggle being 6 foot 8, so I settled with a pair of my sweatpants and socks that I was not afraid to get muddy.

Upon arriving at the swamp march location, we pulled into a house that had a patio area, volleyball nets, three ponds, a rope swing, and slip and slide. The house was surrounded by thick forest, similar to that of northern Minnesota or central Wisconsin, both areas I grew up exploring.

Before beginning the march, we were instructed to tape up our shoes so they would stay on in the mud and sign a waiver. Then we were off! We began by crossing a thick tree branch laid across one of the ponds. I made it over without fault, but the log claimed three casualties.

The march started relatively simple, as we walked through the woods on a single person trail and encountered no wet spots. Then about a kilometer in, we hit the first mud spot and were in muddy water up to our knees! This continued for another kilometer or so until we came to another dry spot to regroup and talk about our journey ahead. We were told the land we were standing on is floating on top of the water, and 10 meters to the north the ground would open to a sinkhole if anyone walked on it! The guide then instructed us we were going to go test

out a controlled sinkhole for our self! The sinkhole was a short walk away and resembled quicksand despite being a very dark muck. We were each given the opportunity to have a rope tied around us and jump into the tiny opening of the sinkhole. One by one we all jumped, and thankfully everyone made it out with little issue. I only sunk to about my waist, but the sinkhole still provided quite a challenge to squirm out of.

We then went a hundred or so meters along the trail to another hole, which this time was much larger and resembled a giant puddle of muck and water. Similar to before, we each had a rope tied around us and jumped into the puddle, this time being fully submerged, and traveling quite deep into the puddle. Everyone

came out caked with mud and soaked, making for some quality pictures.

We were told we still had about 2 km to go, and for the rest of the way had to trench through very thick and deep





muck. The muck was about up to my chest, and heavily restricted mobility. I was familiar with muck and swamps from spending time at our cabin in Tomah, Wisconsin, but had experienced nothing like this. The muck was so thick at some points, we were instructed to roll over the top or army crawl on the mud!

In addition to an abundance of mud, an abundance of wild creatures was seen on our trek! Within the first twenty minutes of our walk, someone pointed out a spider the size of my fist! The spider did not seem to mind us, despite being a few inches from where we put our hands to keep our balance. In addition to the spiders and a variety of other insects, I encountered a multitude of frogs every few feet chilling on the bank of the mud trail. The frogs would even come and jump into the water right next to us! The only issue I had with wildlife was when I saw a small creature swimming towards me under the surface of the muddy water in an “S” motion. I immediately pulled myself onto the bank and let the snake pass by before getting back into the water.

We eventually made it back to the home base and immediately jumped into one of the deeper ponds to wash off. The showers were next, and we all got ready for a traditional Lithuanian Sauna and Šašlykas meal!

The swamp march is just one of the many activities participants in the LISS program can experience. The swamp march was one of my favorites, although participants engage in a wide variety of events, ranging from attending the presidential inauguration to spending a weekend on the beach and having breakfast with the mayor of Nida. The LISS organization also provides a great opportunity for students to gain experience in the field of their



major. I am an international business management major and have been working at a financial technology company. I have learned about the different approaches to business across the world as well as the flourishing market of financial technology! The LISS program has also done a great job helping me interpret the language and include me in discussions despite being an English-only speaker. Since coming to Lithuania a month ago, I can now understand basic Lithuanian and nearly hold a conversation in the language! I highly recommend the LISS program to any Lithuanian-American students wanting to explore Lithuania and gain valuable experience in their field of study!

LISS Trip to “Brolis Semiconductors”

By Tomas Vyšniauskas



The small Baltic country of Lithuania is often known for its beautiful language, pride in basketball, and unique foods such as cold beetroot soup and cepelinai. However, most people are unaware of Lithuania’s progress and contribution towards the development of laser and photonic sensor technologies. Our LISS group was granted the privilege to visit one of the leading companies in this field, “Brolis Semiconductors,” located in the capital of Vilnius.

Founded in 2011 by the three Vizbaras brothers, “Brolis Semiconductors” quickly became globally active and is now seen as a leader in these cutting edge technologies. Upon our arrival, we listened to a presentation which demonstrated some of the new technologies at “Brolis Semiconductors.” First, we were shown a blood analysis sensor which has just finished testing. Human blood can tell us a lot about the vitals and conditions of various organs. By harnessing measurements from our blood, the blood analysis sensor can sense these molecules in real-time. This sensor will bring great change to healthcare as they aim to make it accessible and affordable for all individuals. This personalized form of healthcare is specifically effective in measuring “glucose for diabetes patients, lactates for sports performance monitoring and sepsis management, and urea for renal function diagnostics” (Brolis Semiconductors). Technology like this is especially encouraging due to the number of people it benefits. I am confident that this technology will have an everlasting impact on the world and I am especially proud that it comes from our small country of Lithuania. The second set of technologies which were shown to us were laser defense systems used for security, surveillance, reconnaissance, and targeting applications. Brolis Semiconductors are renowned for their mid-infrared lasers due to their power efficiency and unparalleled performance. Seeing

the militaristic applications of their products makes me more comfortable as Lithuania is a key geopolitical area in Eastern Europe. After this presentation, we received a tour of some of their facilities which were very interesting to witness in person. Overall, our experience at “Brolis Semiconductors” portrayed Lithuania’s tremendous growth in the technological sector and seeing these new developments is extremely encouraging for what is to come in the future.

While seeing these advancements is very motivational, I know that these opportunities would not be possible without being a part of the LISS internship program. Being in LISS is a blessing as it allows students to have a multitude of interactions at various events which otherwise would not be possible. The diverse collection of scientific institutes, political conventions and recreational activities that students are exposed to is an experience that I would not trade for anything. The LISS leadership is also extremely proactive in ensuring that participants in the program acquire valuable work experience which is specific to each individual. This dichotomy of an engaging work internship and a very well-thought-out program is exclusive to the LISS program.



Bring Together Lithuania

Why I Changed my Mind about Working in Lithuania

By Viltė Vaitkutė



Bring Together Lithuania program closing day at the Vilnius Municipality. From left: Teresa Rozanovska, producer at the Unnecessary Films, Kamilė Naraitė, Bring Together Lithuania Project Manager, Viltė Vaitkutė, and Agnė Vertelkaitė, Director of the Kazickas Family Foundation.

I didn't give myself the opportunity before to think about living or working in Lithuania as a real option. Previously, I had only visited the country to see family, learn some history, and eat cepelinai. It was me at 5 years old, 8 years old, 12, 15, always trailing behind my parents and grandparents, seeing only what I was shown, absorbing only what I was told. We visited often, too, every two or three years, whenever we saved up enough money. It was a pretty, shiny vision of my tėvynė, complete with baroque churches and romantic, narrow cobbled streets. But though I was considered very Lithuanian in Chicago, I tended to be "the American" in Lithuania, my trace of an accent picked apart, my quality of life assumed. Although I always felt like a large part of my heart belonged there, I still felt doubted, foreign. When I was little, I remember going through some derivative of a self-hate stage where I couldn't even forgive myself for having been born and grown up in the US. Despite this, I felt very attached to my heritage, planning to live there when I grew up.

But as I grew up, I began to understand that there are real reasons my Lithuanian-American friends' parents left in the first place. A more realistic, or perhaps cynical, perspective began to take shape on what a future in tiny Lithuania would look like for me. What could this country, where even today emigration is one of the largest issues, have to offer for my future career? And even then, would people accept me? Would I be judged? An ignorance, formed by my funneled understanding of the country as a place of fields and museums and not much else, is what helped maintain that perspective for a long time.

This year, I graduated from the University of Iowa with a Bachelor's degree in Cinema. Freaking out about what exactly to do next, I searched for project grants, grad schools, internships, keeping all possibilities open. I saw, in an e-mail, that there was an internship program for university students and recent graduates in Vilnius -- Bring Together Lithuania. I considered my personal con-

nection to that city. Maybe, I thought. It would be cool to be in a program there that's more career-focused than tour-focused. I then read that the program itself finds and matches participants from all over the world to internships. Wow, I thought -- half of the anxiety would have come from poking my nose into random film production companies, asking for work. But then, I saw that speaking Lithuanian wasn't a requirement for the program. This is what really helped convince me to apply. Though I can speak Lithuanian well, this fact was important to me as evidence that suggested the program's acceptance of (and, I later learned, enthusiasm for) a wider "array" of Lithuanians than those living there. Any pressure that I imagined for myself that I would have to speak perfectly or somehow appear as though I had lived there all my life had disappeared.

And now that the six weeks are over, I have an entirely new understanding of Bring Together Lithuania, of Lithuania itself, and of Vilnius. I didn't understand before that people like me would be received by other young professionals with open arms, and once that barrier was crossed, I allowed myself to open up to Lithuania in a different way than before. Six weeks aren't enough to give a comprehensive understanding of what it's like to really live somewhere, to exist as a part of it. But it is enough to allow someone to dissolve any preconceived notions, myths, stereotypes, and allow themselves to begin forming their own -- especially for a college student or recent graduate. Bring Together Lithuania helped make that possible.

A few group excursions were the expected museums and city tours, which were lovely to have, especially for those who had not been to Lithuania often or in a very long time. But most were meetings with inspirational people and companies -- Jurgis Didžiulis, Urtė Neniškytė, Kurk Lietuvai, Nasdaq, TeleSoft, and then-president Dalia Grybauskaitė herself, to name a few. These meetings were important. I felt like, even if our aspired professions weren't always exactly aligned in each meeting, simply having conversations with these people showed how young people find all sorts of opportunity in Lithuania, and that it really is much more modern than our parents and grandparents let us believe.

But despite these impressive meetings with the rest of the participants, my experience was very down-to-earth. In my own separate internship, I got a real understand-



The first week. Tour of Vilnius.



Sisters, Viltė and Ūla, on the Tauras Hill in Vilnius. Photo by Aurimas Balčiūnas.



Participants of the Bring Together Lithuania meeting inspirational artist, corporate speaker and entertainer Jurgis Didžiulis.



Eating kibinai in Trakai.



Filming an episode of "Raudona Linija" TV show.
Photo by Viltė Vaitkutė.



During the closing ceremony at the Vilnius Municipality.

ing of what working with a film production company in Vilnius looks and feels like, all of its ups and downs, problems and perks. I was taught the processes of film production specific to Lithuania -- where to apply for grants, how to partner with others, where to find crew members... I had the opportunity to edit an episode of a documentary interview series "Raudona linija," as well as to brainstorm and edit the treatment of a new documentary film with its director, producer, and editor after doing research for it beforehand. It wasn't Hollywood, but Hollywood was never what I wanted in life. I felt at home, and eventually proud of the realization that the steps I could take into the working world weren't limited to the United States.

In the end, language was one of the most interesting aspects of these 6 weeks. Our group of 14 was all at very different levels of Lithuanian. Back in Chicago as a child, I felt safe speaking my usual Lithuanian heavily dolloped with English words and phrases (Lithanglish? Engthuanian?), less around adults, more amongst other 1st and 2nd generation immigrant friends. It was the first time in my life I felt this way in Lithuania as well. I did try to speak only Lithuanian, to learn new words, practice. But what's important part was that I didn't have to feel ashamed to mix in an English word or phrase here and there. I felt, for the first time, that my personal, intercultural experience didn't have to make me any more or less "Lithuanian" (what does that mean, anyway?) than the people who grew up there. I could walk down the streets of Vilnius with confidence and comfort, and, also for the first time, with a feeling, no longer patriotically fabricated from afar, but genuinely born from within me, that this place could be my home.

These ideas in mind, I decided to pitch my own documentary debut film project idea about what it means to be Lithuanian, now, post-independence, when the nation is moving and changing so quickly, but unclear in which direction. If I went through so many stages with my relationship with my Lithuanian culture, others probably have, too. It turns out, I wasn't wrong -- to my surprise, my pitch was quickly accepted. Now, working with a producer, I'm applying for grants to fund the project, planning to return next year to complete it.

I could have never guessed that I would be in this position when I first started losing hope in Lithuania as a place relevant to my future. I didn't even think it would be possible when I discovered and applied to Bring Together Lithuania. It was really worth it, to say the least, to allow myself to branch out and allow myself to open up to possibilities. I truly believe that if it wasn't for programs like Bring Together Lithuania to help break the ice, I might have never stumbled into where I am today.

A Program That Helps Make Lithuania a Part of You

By Ula Renetskis



Bring Together Program participants sitting in front of a "Lietuva" sign, outside of the new MO Museum after a tour of the museum.

Lithuania had always been a land that is part of my family. Being that my entire family was born in Lithuania and I was the only one born in the States, throughout my childhood I had felt as if my connection to Lithuania was never going to be enough, that something is missing, and that "it is what it is." Lithuania had become a place that only meant family history, and was deemed some kind of "dream" or "story" land to me. I also had never thought to look at Lithuania as a place of opportunity for my own life decisions.

This summer, I had the chance to create a bigger and more personal connection to my homeland, apart from what I was taught and told by my family. Being that I had recently graduated from college with an urban studies bachelor's degree, I wanted to spend my last summer

before joining the workforce doing something meaningful, not only to my personal life but also connected to my studies. Upon some research, I decided that the Bring Together Lithuania program fit the glove -- doing a summer internship in Lithuania.

Before the internship began, apart from my cover letter and application, I had to communicate to Kamile, the program director, and tell her what kind of job I was looking for in particular. Then she did all the hard work of searching for one, for me. She quickly connected me with Xwhy/Agency of Understanding and provided me the chance to work closely with the agency in creating an urban gardening strategy in Vilnius.

The last time that I was in Lithuania before this summer was the summer of 2009, so naturally, I was not only

excited, because I wanted to see for myself how much Lithuania had changed in the past 10 years, but I was also anxious. Anxious, because the last time I was in Lithuania, I felt as though I was judged because I was from America, and because of that I felt as though my Lithuanian grammar was always picked apart and mocked.

During the first few days of being in Vilnius, I felt all of my childhood anxieties of speaking Lithuanian seep back. The fear that if I said something wrong to a stranger, I would feel as though they would know right away that I'm not from Lithuania and that I would be immediately judged dissolved. I never felt an ounce of judgment from anyone in the Bring Together program or my workplace. I never would have thought that I would be welcomed with such open arms in a place of work, especially, let's be honest, in Lithuania.

From the get-go, my managers at Xwhy were incredibly accepting and excited to have me work with them. The three of them were hugely a part of making me feel comfortable in Vilnius: registering me with Lithuania's City-Bee scooter-share program, recommending places to see and dine in Vilnius, and overall keeping in touch during my time in Lithuania, I never thought I would feel overly welcomed in a place where I had once felt the opposite. I also never would have thought that I would be doing something I care about, in a place that is rich with my family's history. I never thought that I could make a mark on the city in which my mom grew up in. And for that, I am thankful for Bring Together LT and Xwhy. After a few weeks or so, the anxiety of speaking as well as feeling out of place began to fade. If I started to stumble on a few words while speaking, or if I didn't understand a slang word, I would own it, and use it as a positive learning experience instead.

One of my favorite takeaways of this trip, besides gaining a personal connection to the motherland, was experiencing the excitement and energy that many people have about Lithuania, and how much it shows that there are people who want to stay and continue to take part in the positive growth and investment of the country. This was seen through many of the different events and gatherings that the Bring Together Lithuania took part in, such as meeting Jurgis Didžiulis, learning about Kurk Lietuvai and Klaipėda's Light House space, as well as many other events I was personally interested in and seeing the abundance of people that were there (Vilnius's Culture Night, national anthem singing on State Day, Joninės, etc.) and overall the work that Xwhy does, which is revitalizing Vilnius and other Lithuanian cities by creating projects for its citizens.

This experience made me see Lithuania through a different lens -- it made me realize that Lithuania is a land of many opportunities, not only for people born and



Ula standing in front of one of the more secluded urban gardens of Vilnius in which Xwhy is working on preserving, in the Naujininkai neighborhood.

raised in Lithuania but also for me and others around the globe. It made me realize that there are people in Lithuania that are accepting and won't mock you because you didn't grow up in there and that there are people who are interested and devoted in investing their time and ideas in continuing its culture and growth. This summer is the first time I had felt as though Lithuania is not a land that is only a part of my family, but it is a part of me.

The Musical Tree

By Paula Martinson



Sitting on a little hill in a quiet forest once grew a magical tree, unlike any tree that ever lived. Nobody knows why it grew or how.

What made the tree so special? It played music. At night all the animals in the forest would gather around that tree to listen to the music, sing, and dance. It didn't matter who you were.

It was a place and time for everyone to gather in peace. The tree loved what it did. Playing its music made it happy. Late one evening a pair of woodcutters returned from a tiresome day when they heard music in the distance. They could not resist trying to find what made the beautiful melody. They followed the music for several miles and when it seemed they would never get there, the music grew louder and even more alluring. When the woodcutters arrived at the source of the music they found no person, but rather a small, humble tree playing music. But now something else besides the music caught their interest. The tree's trunk, a beautifully shaped horn seemed valuable to them. They could sell it without any carving or shaping. Both woodcutters took their saws out and began cutting the tree. It fell to the ground with not a thud, but a sad tune that even made the rugged woodcutters feel a bit sorry. The woodcutters then sawed off the top of the tree so it was now just a wooden horn. They then packed up the horn and set off to their town laughing all the way, thinking of how they would become rich from selling the horn.

Some of the best musicians in the world came to buy instruments and supplies in the town known for its music. The woodcutters set up their wood crafts stand and on the very center display sat the horn. Immediately someone with a clean suit and top hat walked up to the stand and asked how they made such a graceful instrument. The woodcutters explained how they found it and when they were done the man in the suit laughed so hard he almost fell over. "I have never heard such a silly tale in all my life," chuckled the man. "At least allow me to try it before I go and throw my money at you." The woodcutters nodded and the man picked up the horn. When he blew into it a sound so elegant came out that everyone nearby turned their head toward the man in the suit. He stared at the horn wide-eyed. Both woodcutters grinned, thinking about the money the man would pay for the horn. But instead, the man in the suit screamed and threw the horn back at the woodcutters. One of them caught it. "It's cursed! Cursed," yelled out the man in the suit! Everyone scrambled to the stand with the horn. The man ran away

from town and never returned. "Cheats, Liars, Thieves, Crooks," everyone yelled, convinced that the men brought a cursed horn to town. "Great," said one of the woodcutters. "Now we'll never sell it." The woodcutters packed up and push through the crowd.

They walked toward their home when they came across a path to the woods. One of the woodcutters clenched his fists. He then grabbed the horn from his bag, carried it to the edge of the woods and threw it toward the forest. It landed deep in a thorny brush at the forest edge. The woodcutters trudged away with faces red with anger. The horn sat in the thorns for many weeks, longing to play music. It felt sorry for the woodcutters, but it also hurt that they brought it away from its happiness. Sometimes it would try to play a song. But nobody heard it because of the faint sound. It waited and waited. The only thing that would keep it from rotting into the ground was its thoughts and hopes of being rescued and playing for the animals in the forest again. It sat there for so long the moss began to grow over it, and eventually the bush and moss entirely enclosed the horn. The moss muffled every noise it made. The horn eventually lost all hope and it slowly began decaying. Over the years, it rotted away completely. As it seemed completely gone, inside the horn something couldn't be rotted away, a seed. Although the seed lay hidden under the moss, the seed couldn't grow with the dense trees and thorn bush blocking the sun. Long, lonely years went by with the sun still hidden from view.

But as all things must, the forest changed after a great storm. The thorn bush shredded and crumbled allowing the sunlight to land on top of the moss patch. The moment the seed felt the warmth of the sun as the moss shriveled, it sprouted out of the ground and rapidly grew. It formed into another horn tree. Its trunk grew tall and sturdy, but curved just like the decayed horn tree. Notes grew on the tips of its branches, but it seemed as if something else had caught on to them. Three more seeds pushed out of the ground with the tree and rested on top of the branches. The tree began to slow its growth and then came to a stop. The tree decided the first song it would play would be a song of freedom and happiness. As the notes floated up they picked up the other seeds along the way. The notes carried them far away to other parts of the world. One seed carried to a vast desert. The second floated to Antarctica. And the last one dropped into a stream in the mountains. Nobody knows for sure where its final destination is. Some say a river swept it into the ocean and it grew on the very bottom. Others say a flood washed it up in a forest and it sings there. People passed this story down for many generations and as the story ends, "if we forget the tale of these trees, every one of them will falter and cease to exist." We can only hope we remember the trees, playing beautiful music, safe and happy.

Knights of Lithuania 106th Annual National Convention

"Blessed in Tradition, Faith in our Future"



Knights of Lithuania 2019-2020 Supreme Council. Sitting, from left: Honorary Member June V. Grenier, Honorary Member Elena Nakrosis, Supreme Council President Honorary Member Regina Juska-Švoba, and Lexie Rudmin. Standing from left: Brian Johnson, Jr., Cathy Nakrosis, Honorary Member Robert A. Martin, Jr., Dave Boucher, Alex Fletcher, Honorary Member Terese Stroliene, Aldona Zajauskas, Norma Petkus, and Debbie Martin-Rudmin. Photo by Lexie Rudmin.

Regina Juška-Švoba

K of L Supreme Council President Honorary Member,
K of L Public Relations Chair

The Knights of Lithuania is a national Roman Catholic organization consisting of men and women of Lithuanian ancestry. Its motto is- "For God and Country." The Knights of Lithuania's primary focus is to foster, maintain and nurture an appreciation of the Lithuanian language, customs, traditions and culture among its members. It further stresses the importance of the beliefs of the Roman Catholic Church. The Knights are actively involved in programs to assist their less fortunate brothers and sisters in Lithuania. There are currently four charity groups within the organization and function under the auspices of the "Knights of Lithuania Charities". They are: K of L Foundation, St. Casimir's Guild, Scholarship Fund and Our Lady of Šiluva Fund. Aid to Lithuania, Inc. functioned from

1991 until it was suppressed in December 2007. The four ancillary charities are under the main "K of L Charities." The Knights of Lithuania organization was founded by Mykolas Norkūnas in 1913, in Lawrence, Massachusetts. Currently there are 40 councils in the United States with nearly 1,100 members. A National Convention is held annually at different state sites. In 2013 the Knights of Lithuania celebrated its Centennial Anniversary Convention in Quincy, MA. This year's Knights of Lithuania 106th 5th National Convention was hosted by Council -157, Lemont, IL from July 26-28, 2018. The Embassy Suites Lombard Hotel was the home base for the convention. 67 delegates, clergy and guests converged to participate in the 3-day long meetings, cultural activities and banquet celebration. Prior to each day's sessions and meetings, Mass was celebrated. For those members who arrived prior to the convention, an optional pre-convention tour was offered on July 25, 2019.

Thursday, July 25, 2019

On this sunny, warm and beautiful day, Thursday morning, July 25, 2019, 37 eager K of L travelers were transported by bus to the dock at the Wrigley Building where we embarked on our pre-convention tour-cruising on the boat "Wendella" to see many of Chicago's exquisite buildings. Our journey began with a close-up perspective of internationally known architecture as seen from the Chicago River. We then ventured through the Chicago Lock to view Chicago's architecture from Lake Michigan. Our guide told the story of more than 130 years of innovation in design, style and technique and why it is important today. The K of L group enjoyed the scenery of the boats on the water and the fantastic architecture. The 90minute tour ended too soon.

We then boarded our bus for a boxed lunch and travelled to Lisle, IL, to visit the Morton Arboretum. It was a pleasant surprise to discover that our tour guide, Venetia Šimaitis, was Lithuanian!

The Morton Arboretum is a 1,700acre living outdoor museum. It is the size of 200 football fields! There are 200 full-time employees, between 250-300 part-time and seasonal workers. Many educators and scholars visit, do research through scientific study, conservation and outreach to protect and plant trees on the grounds. The oldest tree found at the Arboretum is an Oak tree, which is over 300 years old. The area is divided into four regions: north, south, east and west. There are various gardens, walking trails shelters, pavilions in each area. We had an opportunity to see several of the awe-inspiring nature themed sculptures created from LEGO bricks. There are 15 displays that were created with over 500,000 bricks. The peacock required the most bricks (68,827) and took over 600 hours to assemble. The tallest sculpture is the Monarch butterfly, which stands at nearly 7 feet tall. The dragonfly is eight feet long. Also, we saw large wooden troll statues throughout the areas.

What a day, what an experience, what a time we shared! Those who participated in the pre-convention trip were certainly impressed. We returned to the hotel with plenty of new experiences and stories to share with our fellow members.

Friday, July 26, 2019

The 106th National Convention's opening Mass was celebrated at the Embassy Suites Hotel in Lombard, IL. The K of L Mid America District (MAMD) spiritual advisor Rev. Anthony Markus, HM and Rev. Audrius Arštikaitis, Rector of the St. Casimir Pontifical College in Rome, Italy, were the co-celebrants. The opening Mass was offered for the of the Knights of Lithuania organization, the success of the convention and the host council. Hymns were led by Paul and Tom Strolia, Council 157, Lemont, IL.

The first plenary session was also held at the Embassy Suites Lombard Hotel. K of National President and Honorary Member Regina Juška-Švoba officially opened the convention.

Rev. Audrius Arštikaitis led in the opening prayer. The singing of the National Anthems of the United States, Republic of Lithuania and Knights of Lithuania were led by Susan Binkis, C-112, Chicago, IL. The roll call of the Supreme Council Officers was led by National Recording Secretary Liza Macke. Georgianna Macke, co-host of the 106th National Convention welcomed all delegates and friends to the Chicago area and wished everyone a good and memorable stay. The convention presidium was elected and consisted of and Michael Petkus, C-96, Dayton, OH and Dave Boucher, C-78, Lawrence, MA as co-chairs. Robert A. Martin, Jr., C-16, Chicago, IL, and Tom Miller, C-72, Binghamton, NY, served as secretaries. Greetings in writing were received from: Ambassador of the Republic of Lithuania to the USA and United Mexican States Ronlandas Kriščiūnas; Consulate of the Republic of Lithuania in New Hampshire Dr. Thornstein Gislason; Archbishop of Vilnius Gintaras Grušas; Cardinal Audrys Juozas Bačkis, archbishop emeritus of Vilnius; Msgr. Edmond J. Putrimas, Lithuanian Bishops' Conference Delegate for the Lithuanian Catholic Apostolate Abroad; Apostolic administrator of Kaunas Archdiocese Bishop Algirdas Jurevicius.; Rev. Msgr. Albert J. Contons, HM, president emeritus of the Lithuanian Roman Catholic Priests' League; religious orders- Sisters of Jesus Crucified of Our Lady of Sorrow Convent (Sister Mary Valliere, General Superior) and Sisters of St. Casimir (Sister Regina Dubickas); Most Rev. Robert G. Casey, Auxilliary Bishop of Chicago; Most Rev. Andrew P. Wypych, D. D., Auxilliary Bishop of Chicago; Most Rev. Raymond E. Goedert, Auxilliary Bishop (retired); Richard J. Durbin; US Sena-

our community

tor; Maria Pappas, Cook county Treasurer; Mirga Girnius, Amerikos Lietuvių Kultūros Archyvas (ALKA); Erika Dilys-Brooks, President, Chicago Lithuanian Women's Club; Vida Kuprytė, editor - "Draugas" and "Draugas News"; Saulius V. Kuprys, President of the Lithuanian Roman Catholic Federation of America; Saulius V. Kuprys, National President of Lithuanian American Council; These greetings were included in the specially prepared 106th National Convention program book

National President and Honorary Member Regina Juška-Švoba gave a comprehensive state of the organization report. Special prayers were said in memory of three honorary members who passed away last year: former National Financial Secretary Rita Sussko, LCRA director Bishop Paulius Antanas Baltakis and John Mankus, past National Supreme Council President, Amber District President and President of the St. Casimir's Guild.

National treasurer and Debbie Martin-Rudmin gave a full financial report of the organization's status.

Honorary Membership Committee chairperson Theresa Strolia, HM reported that Georgianna Macke, C-57, Lemont, IL, will be elevated to Honorary Membership at the closing banquet.

On behalf of Irene Ozalis, President of the Knights of Lithuania Foundation, Elena Nakrosis, HM, Vice-President of the ancillary arm of the K of L reported about the last fiscal year. A resolution was passed to use the principal funds of the Foundation's assets to distribute for various worthy causes. E. Nakrosis announced that during the 2019-2020 fiscal year, donations will be made to the following: a grant to the Supreme Council hosting the 107th National Convention in 2020; reimbursement for the Supreme Council for convention donations; donation to the Our Lady of Šiluva Fund to be used as a donation to the Šiluva Shrine at the Immaculate Conception Basilica in Washington; request to supplement St. Casimir's Pontifical College in Rome, Italy's projects;

A presentation was made by Theresa DiCello, C-38, Kenosha WI, well-known instructor of Lithuanian folk art. She spoke of and demonstrated making Lithuanian straw ornaments from plastic drinking straws. Theresa showed a 15 -minute film, where she was invited to HGTV as a guest viewer to demonstrate the art of making straw ornaments. Theresa DiCello published a booklet entitled "Fun with Straw." Theresa's presentation was educational, entertaining and hands-on.

Georgianna Macke, Ritual Committee chairperson announced that 9 members have been approved to receive their 4th degrees at the closing Mass of this convention: Lillian Klinosky, 63, Lehigh Valley, PA; Alex Fletcher and Rob Petkus, both C-96, Dayton, OH; Dr. Paul Michael Kazas and Rev. Vytautas Volertas, both C110 Mas-

peth, NY; Alvina Giedraitis, Ausra Padalino, both C-112, Chicago, IL and Barbara Kotlar and Genevieve Maluska, both C-157, Lemont, IL.

The first plenary sessions closed with a prayer led by Rev. Audrius Arštikaitis.

The cultural evening was an interesting, informative, educational and fun-filled event. From our hotel we travelled to Lemont to tour the Lithuanian World Center (PLC), a 150,000 sq. ft. structure over 18 acres of land. Our guides K of L legal advisor attorney Al Domanskis and PLC representative Elytė Reiklytė were waiting for the K of L delegates and met us at the bus. We climbed the area's "Hill of Crosses", where approximately 50 various sized crosses and wayside shrines are erected in memory of loved ones. This "Hill of Crosses" is a nearly a replica of the Hill of Crosses found in near Siauliai in Lithuania. Nearby we visited the recently erected monument to the partisan leader Adolfas Ramanauskas-Vanagas and Mother of the Partisans statue. We proceeded to the Blessed Jurgis Matulaitis Mission to tour the church and its surroundings. We visited the Maironis Lithuanian School, Žiburėlis Montessori School, and the Sielos Galerija (Lithuanian Museum of Art) and the Lithuanian Scout Archives. There are more than 20 nonprofit Lithuanian organizations that use the facilities. We saw the basketball courts, banquet hall that are used for fundraisers, special events and parties. Various organizations, dance groups, choirs use the facilities regularly. There are also condominiums on the property.

After such a comprehensive tour, we boarded the bus and travelled a few minutes to the "Ateitis Foundation" center, where we celebrated "Kūčios in July". The facility was beautifully decorated in the Christmas holiday motif. Pure white straw ornaments decorated several tall Christmas trees making them appear like snow princesses. Tables were covered with white linen tablecloths and pieces of straw were placed beneath them. Christmas music, songs and carols were provided by Paul and Tom Strolia. The history of Kūčios, Christmas wafers and traditions were told by members of the host council. The Christmas wafers (kalėdaičiai) were blessed by Rev. A. Arštikaitis and distributed to all the guests, who then shared them with each other. We sampled 12 traditional dishes. There was a raffle of Christmas themed gifts. And of course, Father Christmas visited and spent time with us. He and his "elves" presented gifts to everyone: children received a toy, women- a flower and men - an apple. Lyrical Christmas music continued. There were also sing-alongs. A wonderful evening was had by all!

Saturday, July 27, 2019

Prior to the second plenary session, Mass was celebrated at the hotel. The main celebrant was Rev. Audrius Arštikaitis. Paul and Tom Strolia led the delegates with hymns for all the daily Masses.

The K of L membership report was given by Elena Nakrosis, HM, Second Vice-President. It was announced that the organization gained 19 new and rejoining members. The councils that gained the new members are: C-72, Binghamton, NY; C-133, Los Angeles, CA; C-141, Bridgeport, CT; C-7, Waterbury, CT; C-143 Pittston, PA. C-26, Worcester, MA closed, but transferred to C-10 and the new council's name is Athol-Gardner-Worcester.

Dr. Robert Vitas, Chairman of the Board of the Lithuanian Research and Studies Center (LRSC), now known as the Lithuanian Research Center (LRC) provided the delegates with an insightful slide presentation of the LRC's history, activities and archives. The LRC is the largest Lithuanian academic institution outside of Lithuania. It regularly hosts researchers and educators from around the world, who conduct studies and prepare publications. The original LRC is located in Chicago, IL. The center was receiving massive archives and, in 08/2018 purchased property in Lemont, IL, nearby the PLC. The Periodicals and Žilevicius-Kreivėnas Musicology as well as the D.P. Camp Archives, have already been transported to the new site. Also, more than 2,300 titles of newspapers and journals have already been placed onto the shelves. Over 50,000 books, 1,900 boxes of individual, organizational and diplomatic archives, 800 art exhibition programs, 1,500 manuscripts and letters, stamps, shirts, calendars and maps are housed at LRC. The LRC has four large rooms for the archival material; there are office, conference room space and a kitchen. After Dr. R. Vito presentation, he graciously answered many questions.

Trustees Dave Boucher and Cathy Nakrosis reviewed the organization's general treasury, K of L Charities, St. Casimir's Guild, K of L Foundation and Our Lady of Šiluva Fund financial records and found and, overall, found them to be in compliance. A site has been secured for the 107th National K of L Convention. They invited Rob Martin, HM to give an update.

Robert A. Martin, Jr, HM reported that the 107th National Convention will be hosted by the Supreme Council. It will be a cruise on the Royal Caribbean Cruise Line's "Mariner of the Sea" to Bermuda. The ship will serve as the home base for the for meetings and activities. The dates are August 03-07, 2020. 40 cabins (outside, inside, balcony; suites-upon request) have been reserved for the K of L and their friends. The travel agency making the arrangements is World Travel Jacksonville (WTJ) in

Jacksonville, IL. We will be setting sail from Port Canaveral Florida on August 03,2020. It was strongly urged that participants fly into Orlando on 08/02/19 to assure that they will be able to board the ship. The convention registration fee amount is still pending, but members will be notified via "Vytis-The Knight" publication.

The second session was closed with a prayer led by Rev. A. Arstikaitis.

After lunch, the third plenary session began with a prayer led by Rev. Aurdrius Arštikaitis.

The Scholarship Committee chair Alex Fletcher announced the 2019-2020 scholarship recipient winners. They are: Brian Johnson, Jr., C-19, Pittsburgh, PA and Guoda Daciolaitė, C-158, Michigan City, IN. In all, \$2,500.00 will be awarded.

Elena Nakrosis, H.M. president of Our Lady of Šiluva Fund, one of the ancillary organizations of the K of L, gave an update of the activities during the past year. The history of Our Lady of Šiluva continues to be promoted on the official website www.ourladyofsiluva.com. The history has been translated in the Polish and Spanish languages to promote further dissemination about Our Lady of Šiluva. E. Nakrosis stated that she recently brought back specially made candles from Šiluva, Lithuania. They are available for purchase. Also, there are "Our Lady of Šiluva – Hymns to Mary" CD's available for purchase. In closing, E. Nakrosis thanked everyone for their continued support to the Our Lady of Šiluva fund.

Robert A. Martin, Jr., HM, St. Casimir's Guild President, gave the annual report about the Guild's past year's activities and the support to the St. Casimir's Pontifical Lithuanian College in Rome, Italy. During the last year, St. Casimir's Guild past president John Mankus passed away. There were 315 Mass requests: 212 Sympathy, 18 Special Intention, 24 Special Occasion, 35 Health, 18 Christmas and 9 Easter. There were 18 additional donations. A St. Casimir's Facebook Page has been set up. Also, working on setting up a "Go fund me" page to support the needs of the College. St. Casimir Guild labeled items have been procured to benefactors and others who may be interested in learning about the works of the Guild. Preliminary discussions have commenced about a Guild sponsored tour to Rome, Italy in 2023, for the College's 75th Anniversary of the College. There are four projects for the upcoming year. The College needs a new industrial six (6) burner stove, industrial oven, and freezer. The fourth project- renovating the College Chapel. New floors altar and abron from marble and repainting of the walls. The total costs to complete the projects and purchase the needed items is 26,900 USD.

Rev. Audrius Arštikaitis is the current Rector of the Pontifical Lithuanian College in Rome and the director



Participants of the Knights of Lithuania 106th Annual Convention. Photo by Lexie Rudmin

of the Villa Lituanae. He thanked the Knights for adopting the Pontifical Lithuanian College in Rome. The K of L organization has steadfastly and consistently supported the College's various projects throughout the years. Rev. A. Arštikaitis informed the delegates of the upcoming projects for the College. He showed photographs of the completion of last year's projects (new industrial dryer and installed gas lines to comply with the security requirement of the Italian government).

At the present time there are 18 priests furthering their studies at the Pontifical College. The Lithuanian Bishops' Conference determined to include other priests of different ethnicities to reside at the Pontifical College. There are five (5) priests from Lithuania, seven (7) from Latvia,

four (4) from India and two (2) South Korea.

Rev. Audrius Arštikaitis received two (2) checks for \$3,625 USD for Mass stipends and \$13,900 USD toward the needed renovations of the chapel and purchase of the industrial oven, stove and freezer. Additional 13,000 USD will be forthcoming through the donation from the K of L Foundation. Rev. A. Arštikaitis thanked the K of L organization for its generosity and ongoing support. He extends his blessings upon the K of L members. He congratulated the K of L organization on the occasion of the organization's 106 years of existence.

The Financial Review Committee announced that there were three (6) requests for donations: 1. four (4) religious order congregations: Sisters of St. Casimir, Sisters of the

Immaculate Conception, Sisters of the Jesus Crucified, Sisters of St. Francis of the Providence of God; 2. Lithuanian press "Draugas"/ "Draugas News"; 3 JBANC; 4. Lithuanian Research Center (LRC); 5. Lithuanian World Center (PLC); 6. Our Lady of Šiluva Chapel at the Basilica of the Immaculate Conception in Washington DC. A total of \$3,650.00 was allotted for the donations.

Elections of the new 2019-20 Supreme Council were held. Regina Juška-Švoba Honorary Member, Council 102, Detroit, MI was unanimously re-elected as president for a eighth-year term to lead the K of L organization.

Donations to various charities were collected during the convention. A total of \$2,515.00 was received and will be distributed to: St. Casimir's Guild, Scholarship fund, Our Lady of Šiluva (includes general fund and for the Shrine in Washington, D. C.), Knights of Lithuania general fund, K of L Foundation, "Vytis-The Knight" and Juniors.

The formal sessions were concluded with a prayer by Rev. Audrius Arštikaitis.

Banquet

After every K of L National Convention completes the working sessions and elects a new Supreme Council for the next year, a celebratory banquet is held. So, too, the 106th National Convention celebrated with a formal banquet. Over 100 delegates, guests, clergy and families participated. Prior to the banquet, the official convention photograph was taken.

106th National Convention mistress of ceremonies for the evening Lexie Rudman introduced the Supreme Council. She presented the guests at the head table: Regina Juška-Švoba, H.M., National President; Rev. Audrius Arštikaitis, Rector of the St. Casimir's Pontifical College in Rome; Theresa Strolia, Honorary Member chair, Georgianna Macke, honorary member candidate; and convention co-chair Liza Macke. Susan Binkis led in the singing of the National Anthems of the United States and Republic of Lithuania. The welcome greeting was given by Liza Macke.

Knights of Lithuania National President Regina Juška-Švoba, H. M. thanked the distinguished guests, clergy, Knights and friends for their participation in the banquet. She thanked Georgianna Macke and Liza Macke, co-chairs and the members of C-157, for doing an outstanding job in organizing the 106th National Convention. She encouraged everyone to continue to dedicate and fully participate in the various celebrations and activities on the K of L organization, as not many organizations with such longevity continue to be active and exist. We continue to exist because we are a multigenerational organization that has loyal, dedicated, committed and talented

members'. And let us never forget our roots and heritage. With that, she recited Bernardo Braždžionio poem "Visas Turtas" ("Wealth"). Regina Juška-Švoba congratulated the soon to be new Honorary Member Georgianna Macke and wished her well and continued participation in the K of L organization. She also thanked the K of L members for re-electing her as president and entrusting her in this position.

Rev. Audrius Arštikaitis gave the invocation.

Honorary Membership Chair Theresa Strolia, HM, gave a brief biography about her niece Georgianna Macke, honorary membership candidate. Afterwards, Honorary Membership was bestowed upon G. Macke, who was grateful and thanked her family, friends and K of L family for such an honor.

Co-chair Liza Macke thanked everyone for their attendance and participation in the K of L 106th National Convention.

The official portion of the banquet program concluded with a prayer led by Rev. Audrius Arštikaitis.

Musical entertainment was provided by Paul and Tom Strolia.

Sunday, July 28, 2019

The closing Mass was celebrated at the Franciscan Village Chapel in Lemont, IL. The main celebrant was Rev. Anthony Markus, HM. He was assisted by Rev. Audrius Arštikaitis.

Prior to the celebration of the Mass, the fourth-degree candidates gave their oaths and received their 4th degree medal and certificates. The Supreme Council elect gave their oath of office.

After the closing Mass, a farewell luncheon in the social hall of the Franciscan Village Many of the Sisters of St. Casimir joined the K of L. Rev. A. Markus, HM blessed the food. After the luncheon, delegates and friends bid their farewells to one another and wished each other safe travels to their homes or next destination.

The 2019 National Convention and sessions were productive and fruitful. It was good to see and nurture special friendships of members known for many years and establish new acquaintances and contacts. It was a special time of sharing and catching up. May this organization continue to live and work by our motto: "For God and Country - Dievui ir Tėvynei"! Valio Vyčiai, ilgiausių metų!

The 107th convention will be hosted by Supreme Council. The convention will be held on August 03-07, 2020, Royal Caribbean Cruise Line's "Mariner of the Seas" cruising into the Bahamas. Mark your calendars and save these important dates! Hope to see everyone there!

current events

Security

...The British warship, the HMS Albion, an amphibious transport with a helicopter flight deck, leads an international Joint Expeditionary Force (JEF) in a two-month exercise in the Baltic Sea. The exercise, codenamed "Baltic Protector", includes 20 ships and 3,000 personnel from Denmark, Estonia, Finland, Latvia, Lithuania, Netherlands, Norway, Sweden, and the UK, comprises the largest deployment since World War I. The companion group of Royal Marines will practice amphibious operations including helicopter raids, vehicle ambushes, urban combat, parachute drops, and live firing. The 9-member JEF is led by the U.K. and does not include U.S. forces. NATO with 29 members may have more difficulty in gathering unanimity to quickly respond to any (i.e. Russian) aggression. The British Secretary of Defense, Penny Mordaunt, met with Defense Ministers and Chiefs of Defense of the JEF members in Klaipeda where they reviewed various missions.

...The Russian intelligence ship, the Fyodor Golovin, monitored "Baltic Protector" exercises near the Russian enclave of Kaliningrad.

...Over 4,000 troops from 10 NATO nations took part in Exercise "Iron Wolf" in the Pabradė training area in Lithuania led by the Mechanized Infantry Lithuanian Iron Wolf Brigade.

...The 47th annual NATO BALTOPS naval exercise was led by the U.S.'s 2nd Fleet command out of Norfolk, Virginia and involved 8,600 troops from 18 countries including the U.K., Belgium, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, France, Germany, Latvia, Lithuania, the Netherlands, Norway, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Spain, Sweden, Turkey, the U.K., and the United States.



Marines disembark from landing craft during an amphibious demonstration at Palanga Beach, Lithuania held as part of 'BALTOPS 2019'. Source: Lee Willett

...Since joining NATO in 2004, the Baltic nations have been protected by military aircraft from 17 NATO countries. Hungary now leads the air cover with four Saab JAS-39 fighters based in Šiauliai, Lithuania; Spain deployed five F/A-18 Hornets in Šiauliai, and the U.K. has stationed four Typhoon Eurofighters at Estonia's Amari airbase.

...Lithuania transferred nearly 1 million pieces of ammunition to Ukraine via a Ukrainian military plane. The shipment, valued at 255,500 euros, is suitable for Soviet produced light rifleman guns including machine guns.

...The Chancellor of the Ministry of Defense of Lithuania, Daiva Beliackienė, led a delegation to the Ukraine conflict zone in Donbas and discussed Lithuanian medical support for the Joint Forces Operation. During the visit, the delegation met with officials in Selidove, Kurakhove, and Avdiivka.

Business

...The hottest June on record combined with a severe drought has affected farmers who expect a harvest shortfall of 50%. On June 12 temperatures reached 35.7 C (96.2 F). A government declaration of a state of emergency will allow the government to compensate for some losses and permit the farmers to avoid EU sanctions for not meeting production goals. The Ministry of Agriculture has allocated 8.5 million euros for the 2018 drought. The Lithuanian Environment Minister, Kęstutis Mažeika, requested Belarus release more water from its reservoirs to raise the water level in the Neris River to help the fishing and shipping activities.

...The Swedish Court of Appeal rejected the Lithuanian gas company Lietuvos Dujos' appeal regarding what it contended was overpricing by the Russian company, Gazprom, from 2006 to 2015. In addition to rejecting the 1.5 billion euro claim, it ordered the Lithuanian company to pay all of Gazprom's legal costs which are upwards of 9 million euros. In 2003, Lithuania paid \$85/1,000 m3 for natural gas which increased to \$500/1,000 m3 during the period in dispute and had a large negative impact on Lithuania's economy. Gazprom's price decreased only when Lithuania began importing LNG from alternate sources, including the United States.

...The Chinese company, Huawei, reported that its Netherlands' registered subsidiary in Lithuania in 2018 had over a 50% increase in sales to 82 million euros but net profit fell 15% to 2 million euros. It employs 21 people in Lithuania and markets smartphones and networks worldwide with global sales of \$109 billion with a workforce of

188,000. U.S. sales have been hampered by allegations of possible surveillance by the Chinese government and violations of U.S. sanctions regarding trade with Iran.

...Estonia has reduced the excise tax on alcohol by 25% to lure buyers from neighboring countries. This reduction is in direct violation of the October 2018 Resolution of the Baltic Assembly on the cooperation in Reduction of Alcohol Consumption. The Prime Minister of Latvia, Krisjanis Karins, indicated that Latvia may be forced to match the cut to stem the anticipated cross border bargain shopping. The ruling Lithuanian Farmers and Greens Union which has waged a spirited war against alcohol to reduce the alarming Lithuanian statistics on suicide, DUI auto deaths and related medical issues related to alcoholism has yet to respond to this direct assault on its fundamental principle on reducing Lithuanian's misuse of alcohol.

...The British company Sofa Brands, which manufactures furniture upholstery has halted a five million euro investment in the Alytus Industrial Park in southern Lithuania because Lithuanian banks which declined to finance the project became concerned regarding the negative effects of Brexit on its production. There are currently six companies in the industrial park and represent an investment of 37 million euros which has created more than 200 jobs.

...Lithuania is working to approve regulations on cryptocurrencies by requiring that operators abide by the Fifth EU Anti-Money Laundering Provision Directive which requires the identity and verification of clients sending and receiving cryptocurrencies and when exchanging one cryptocurrency for another. Invest Lithuania is promoting Lithuania as a fast venue for startups from non-EU countries to access EU markets. Crowdfund Insider reports that 35 new financial firms were registered in 2017 and early 2018.

General

...One of the notable effects of the summer drought is the lack of kefir and beetroot as ingredients for šaltibarščiai, the pink-colored cold borscht, that make hot summer days more tolerable.

...The U.S. Ambassador to Lithuania, Anne Hall, has resigned. She assumed her post in October 2016 and worked closely with the Lithuanian Minister of Foreign Affairs, Linas Linkevičius, to foster close ties between Lithuania and the U.S. in the areas of security, defense, economy, culture, and education.

...An urn with the ashes of Jonas Mekas, 96, a Lithuanian born American filmmaker, poet, and artist, was buried in Semeniškiai, northern Lithuania near his parents. Known



Jonas Mekas gravestone in Semeniškiai cemetery.

as the godfather of American avant-garde movies, he lived in New York City for more than 50 years and at the 2005 Venice Biennale represented Lithuania's pavilion which won an honorable mention by the special jury. He was a laureate of the Lithuanian National Culture and Art Prize.

...A District Court of Kaunas has rejected the request by former OMON officer, Konstantinas Michailovas, a Latvian and Russian citizen, to serve the rest of his life sentence in a correction house from his current prison location. He was convicted in the 1991 massacre at the Medininkai checkpoint where 7 Lithuanian border guards and police officers were killed and one disabled by his wounds. As one of her last acts as President of Lithuania, Dalia Grybauskaitė met with relatives of those killed at the Medininkai checkpoint. Three other members of the OMON Soviet special police unit were convicted and sentenced to life imprisonment in absentia because of Russia's refusal to extradite them.

...The Seimas is considering adding another national holiday to the existing 15 – All Souls' Day, November 2 would join All Saints' Day, November 1. Lithuania's existing 15 holidays already exceeds the EU average of 12, although some EU countries have 17.

...The Lithuanian pavilion received the highest award – the Golden Lion - at the prestigious Venice Biennale. After receiving the award, attendance rose considerably so that there was a need for additional 80,500 euros from the Lithuanian Council for Culture to keep it open.



Lina Lapelytė, Rugilė Barzdžiukaite, and Vaiva Grainytė golding the Golden Lion award.

calendar

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

ONGOING

Most Fridays,
4:30-7:30 p.m.
**Friday Fish Fry at the
Rockford Lithuanian Club**
716 Indiana Avenue,
Rockford, Ill.
Open to the public. Weekly
specials vary. First Friday
of the month—Lithuanian
dumplings.
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
\$15 per person; \$6 kids 6-12
Info: lithclub@gmail.com,
216-531-8318

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

First Sunday of the
Month
**Rockford Lithuanian Club
General Membership
Meeting**
716 Indiana Avenue,
Rockford, Ill.
Open to all members.
Info: lithuanianclub.org,
815-962-9256

Every Third Saturday,
Mar-Jun & Sep-Nov,
1-3 p.m.
**Amber Roots Lithuanian
Heritage Club**
Lithuanian Music Hall,
2517 E. Allegheny Ave.,
Philadelphia, Pa.
Use Tilton Street entrance.
Bring a dish to share.
Info: milliemarks@aol.com

**Exhibit "For Freedom:
Lithuanian American Sup-
port for Lithuania's Inde-
pendence and Recognition"**
Balzekas Museum of
Lithuanian Culture
www.balzekasmuseum.org

GOT EVENTS?

Let us help you spread the word! Please send your event notice to kariledalia@yahoo.com two months in advance of the month in which you would like to see it listed.

SEPTEMBER

September 21, 2019,
7 PM
**Charity Banquet at the
Lithuanian Hall in Baltimore**
851-853 Hollins St, Baltimore,
MD, 21201

September 27, 2019
at 6 PM
Eurobeats Festival Night
6:15-7:15 PM MIGLOKO
(Lithuania)
Union Stage, 740 Water
Street SW,
Washington, DC 20024

OCTOBER

October 11, 2019,
6:30 p.m.
**Balzekas Museum Man of
the Year Award Celebration**
Balzekas Museum of
Lithuanian Culture
6500 S. Pulaski Rd.,
Chicago, IL 60629
More information:
773-582-6500

October 19, 2019
at 6:00 PM
**Maironis Lithuanian School
will celebrate its
60th anniversary**
Registration for the event:
630-853-5603

October 13, 2019
at 6 AM
**Lithuanians in Chicago
Marathon**
Family members, loved ones,
friends, and all sports fans
are welcome to come and
support the fans in the area
of the 17th Marathon, at IUC,
on the west side of Halsted,
just south of Polk Street.

NOVEMBER

November 7 - 9, 2019
Baltic Film Festival
Scandinavia House, 58 Park
Ave.,
New York, NY 10016
www.balticfilmfestival.com

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ŠOKIŲ ŠVENTĖ

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ŠOKIŲ DANCE
ŠVENTĖ FESTIVAL

SEKMADIENĮ SUNDAY
LIEPOS 5, 2020 JULY 5, 2020

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