

bridges



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3



3 Mission Siberia:
Building Social Awareness and Patriotism
By Karilė Vaitkutė

9 The North West Lithuanian Centennial Cross
By Vilius Zalpis

13



13 Opportunity to Experience Lithuania from a
Completely New Perspective
By Rasa Kerelis

15 Discovering my Identity through BTLT
By Nojus Ausra

17 Bring it Together Lithuania
By Vaida Naris

15



2 from the editor
By Karilė Vaitkutė

19 book review
Provisionally Yours by Antanas Sileika
By Audra Kubilius

21 current events
By Alan Stankus

our community
25 Edward Gervickas Lithuanian Heritage School
Begins its 15th Year
Written by Virginija Mockevičius
Translated by Aušra Lelis Clifford

27 Martynas Mažvydas Lithuanian Heritage School
Starts its 20th School Year
By Vilma Alkhas, School Principal

28 South Florida Lithuanian School Kicks Off
New School Year
By Kimberly Manning

17



30 calendar

Front Cover: Mission Siberia 2019 team in Kazakhstan. Photo courtesy: Mission Siberia.

Back Page: North West Lithuanian Centennial Cross by Vilius Zalpis

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from the editor

Dear readers,

The month of October is here. Lithuanians call it the month of chaff (spalis). Chaff is the dry, scaly protective casings of the seeds of cereal grain. The reason behind this name is that October is the time of harvest. When farmers thresh grain they loosen the edible part of the grain from the chaff to which it is attached. Many of us who are not farmers might not even know the meaning of this word anymore because we do not have to use it in our daily conversations.

The month of October is the month of harvest, and it could be the month of contemplation. After a busy summer, the fall comes, and life slows down a little bit providing us with some space to think about past events. In this issue of Bridges, you will read several stories that give account on past summer's events. Lithuanian American students are sharing their thoughts about the Bring Together Lithuania program they participated in. We will see how important this program is in bringing modern Lithuania closer to young people of Lithuanian descent who are trying to balance their American and Lithuanian identities.

In this issue, you will also find articles about erecting crosses. As we all know, Lithuania has been called "a land of crosses" because, in the countryside, we can spot quite many crosses and small chapels on the crossroads. The tradition of building crosses and wayside chapels was brought by Lithuanians to the United States as well. These days, crosses can be erected as symbols of remembrance of many who died defending our motherland's freedom or in honor of anniversaries, such as the 100th anniversary of Lithuania's independence.

Erecting crosses and tending to the graves of Lithuanian exiles in Siberia and Kazakhstan is a wonderful and patriot undertaking of the "Mission Siberia" program that has continued for almost two decades. This year, a Lithuanian American participated in the program, and you will be reading her account on the trip to Kazakhstan.

Tending to graves of our loved ones ties in with October at the end of which we observe All Souls Day (Vėlinės) and light candles for the souls of the departed.

Wishing you a calm and soulful October,

Karilė Vaitkutė
Editor

Mission Siberia: Building Social Awareness and Patriotism



In the summer of 2019, Marija Čyvaitė, a young Lithuanian American went to tend to the graves of Lithuanian exiles in Kazakhstan. She was part of an expedition organized by Misija Sibiras (Mission Siberia), one of the most successful programs of all times that honors people who died in Siberia by tending to their graves and builds social awareness and patriotism. Since the secret protocol of the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact was signed in 1939 and before and after the Second World War, approximately 300,000 people suffered from repressions caused by the Soviet Union. More than 130,000 people were deported from Lithuania to Siberia and were forced to work without any payment. Many died and were buried in Siberia. Mission Siberia expeditions started in 2005 and so far, approximately 170 Lithuanian cemeteries were tended to. Marija Čyvaitė agreed to tell us about this year's expedition.

Karilė Vaitkutė: Please tell about yourself. Where did you grow up, where did you go to school, what is your family like?

Marija Čyvaitė: I grew up the youngest of five kids in a very Lithuanian family. My grandparents, originally from Lithuania, ran from their homeland during the war in fear of being deported to Siberia. They were all very involved in the Lithuanian community and passed on their love for Lithuania to my parents and later to me and my siblings. We grew up not far from Lemont, Illinois, the main hub for Lithuanians in the Chicagoland area. I attended Lithuanian Saturday school, Lithuanian dance, Lithuanian choir, I have attended camp Dainava since my earliest days and I even help to plan the camp sessions now. I am active with the Ateitininkai. I'm sure there are more things I am involved in within the Lithuanian community. I went to catholic school from kindergarten through high school. I started playing volleyball at a high level in 8th grade and continued to play through college. I attended the College of Wooster, from which I graduated in May with a double degree in Sociology and Russian Studies. I even wrote my undergraduate thesis on a Lithuanian topic, "What it Means to be Lithuanian in America and what Russia's got to do with it: A Study of Ethnic Identity Formation among Later Generations in a Diasporic Community." Since 2015 I have had the chance to travel quite a bit. I have participated in at least 7 mission and/or volunteer trips to the Appalachian mountains, El Salvador, Mexico, and now Kazakhstan. I plan to work in higher education and eventually pursue a master's degree in education administration or something like it.

KV: How did you find out about Mission Siberia?

MČ: I first found out about Misija Sibiras from a post on Facebook. I had never heard anyone in the U.S. talk about it, nor had I ever come across any information about it myself, so I asked a friend from Lithuania what she knew about it. Once she told me that there is a trial hike as part of the selection process, I became a bit intimidated, though the entire purpose and essence of the project sounded like something I would love to be a part of. This past spring, after Misija Sibiras announced that applications for the 2019 team were open, about 5 or 6 people wrote me personal messages saying that I should absolutely consider applying and that it would be the perfect program for me. After doing a little more research on the project, I thought, "this would be awesome. Let's do it."



And I sent in my application.

KV: Why did you decide to participate in the Mission Siberia expedition?

MČ: If anyone was raised like I was – in a Lithuanian family, participating in the Chicago Lithuanian community, being reminded regularly by parents and grandparents what a beautiful gift our inherited Lithuanian heritage is – why would they not want to participate in such a program like Misija Sibiras? I was especially drawn to the idea of preserving this part of Lithuanian history, sharing about it with others, and passing on the knowledge of it to the next generation. Throughout my time in Lithuania and Kazakhstan with the Misija Sibiras team this summer, as I learned more and more about how Lithuania and its people suffered under Stalin, I grew very emotionally attached to this piece of the Lithuanian history. I am very excited and equally honored to represent Misija Sibiras in the U.S. and spend the next year traveling to various Lithuanian communities and sharing about my experience with Misija Sibiras. Also, with 2019 being the Year of the Lithuanian World Community (Pasaulio lietuvių metai), I felt that my participation in Misija Sibiras was my way of contributing to the relationship between two

Lithuanian communities. Finally, I think that it is important and necessary for the future of Lithuania that all Lithuanians, no matter where they may live in the world, understand and consciously preserve the history of Lithuanian deportations. I also think that it is important that Lithuanians living in Lithuania make an effort to learn about the histories of the Lithuanian diasporas around the world – Australia, USA, Canada, South America, and elsewhere.

KV: Your family lives in the United States. Do you have distant relatives who were exiled to Siberia?

MČ: I have many relatives living in Lithuania and my family has stayed in close contact with them over the years. My great-grandfather (Kazys) on my father's side was deported to Siberia along with his son (Jonas), Jonas' wife, and Danutė (Jonas' daughter and my father's first cousin). They were deported to Igarka. Kazys died while in exile, but Danutė and her parents were able to make it back to Lithuania after 9 years in exile. I met with Danutė to hear her story. On my mother's side, my grandfather's cousin (Palmyra) was deported to Siberia. Upon returning to Lithuania, Palmyra gave birth to her son Arūnas, with whom my family stays when visiting Lithuania.

KV: How long did it take you to prepare for the expedition? What was involved in the preparations?

MČ: The first step in preparing for Misija Sibiras was making sure I had all the supplies. We were sent a very detailed and specific packing list. I gathered together all my supplies and even had to make some new purchases. The most important things were my 70 lb backpack and hiking boots. I also focused on being in good physical shape. While my sister and I were on a road trip from Chicago to Maine for a family wedding, we did lots of hiking and climbing. I also made sure to continue going to the gym and doing similar workouts to those I did while playing college volleyball. I was sure to do some reading as well, before my trip to Lithuania, about this particular period of Lithuanian history. I read some of Solzhenitsyn's Archipelago Gulag and Gulag by Anne Applebaum. Finally, once I was in Lithuania in early July, we met with Lithuanian deportees and political prisoners to hear their personal histories about their time in Siberia and/or Kazakhstan.

KV: The group was not issued visas and was not allowed into Russia and, as a consequence, went Kazakhstan. What was the groups' reaction to the changed plans?

MČ: I don't think anyone was particularly upset or disappointed upon hearing the news that we weren't let into Russia. Our purpose and mission remain the same, no matter where the expedition may take place. However, I would be concerned if Russia continues to not grant access to Misija Sibiras because there are lots of Lithuanian graves and burial locations that need tending to and that will otherwise be forever lost to history if no one is allowed access to them.



KV: Have you ever been to Russia or any other former Soviet republics before?

MČ: This summer was the first time I had ever been in Kazakhstan, and I also spent a week in Estonia and Latvia with my cousin after returning from the expedition.

KV: What were you expecting from the Mission Siberia expedition and were your expectations met?

MČ: I actually didn't have many expectations for the expedition. I didn't really know what to expect, mainly because I had never traveled to that part of the world before. I knew that it would be physically hard, and I was prepared for that. I expected that it would be emotionally overwhelming at times, and it was. I was actually most worried about how it would be interacting with the other team members being the only one from America and one of the youngest. But I quickly learned that I should not have worried at all about the team. After one day on the trip, it seemed like we had known each other our whole lives. I did expect the trip to be impactful and a good experience and this expectation was exceeded. It was the experience of a lifetime – unforgettable, formative, incredible.

KV: Describe a typical day during the expedition. Where did you sleep, what did you eat, how did you dress, what did you do?

MČ: We set up camp during our first day in Kazakhstan. We pitched our tents and built our suspension bar and campfire where we did all of our cooking. We slept three people to a tent. We prepared our breakfasts and dinners over the fire every day. For breakfast, we typically ate oatmeal and dinner was soup or macaroni – all made in our big pot. We ate lunch every day in the cemeteries, right between all the graves. Lunch every day was light and fast, just sandwiches and cucumbers. A typical day began around 6 or 7 am. One of our team members, Paulius, would wake us up with a very fun song that he sang at the top of his lungs... "lai lyn lai lyn lai lyn lytus...". We would have breakfast around the fire, gather our belongings and tools, and head out to our first cemetery. From about 8 am to 7 or 8 pm we worked in various cemeteries. In total, we searched through 18 cemeteries (some of which were kilometers long) and found 130



tombs and/or graves of Lithuanians. The work in the cemeteries began by spreading out along one edge of the cemetery, where each team member was responsible for one or two rows of graves. We would begin to move in one direction through the rows of graves, carefully reading the names on each tomb. About 90% of the names were written in Russian Cyrillic. Good thing I spent four years learning Russian. If someone found a Lithuanian grave, they would shout it out, and the closest few team members would rush over to help clean it up. We always took a “before” and “after” photo when we found and cleaned a Lithuanian grave. Cleaning up a grave took anywhere from 5 minutes to a half-hour or more. We pulled out any weeds, tall grasses or overgrown plants. We trimmed the branches off of any trees or bushes in the way of the tombstone. We even repainted a few fences. After we finished cleaning a gravesite, we tied a trispalvė ribbon (the Lithuanian flag colors) somewhere on the grave, and then we marked the GPS coordinates and the name of each grave into a GPS device. There will be a list posted of all the graves we found and their locations so that any Lithuanian could see if we happened to find the grave of a relative of theirs. After cleaning a grave, we returned to

our respective rows to continue searching through the cemetery. Once we reached the other side of the section we were searching, we would line up again in the next section, and do the same thing, moving back and forth through each section of the cemetery until we were done. Then we moved on to the next cemetery. We continued this process until the sun was setting, and we returned to camp around 8 or 9 pm. Once we returned, we all washed up with a bucket of water, made dinner, wrote in our daily journals, and then began to prepare for the next day.

Throughout the expedition, we built one cross and two kopyltstulpiai (wayside crosses). We spent our evenings preparing and designing the kopyltstulpiai. We had to measure, cut, sand, nail, and paint the wood for our kopyltstulpiai. Perhaps one of my favorite experiences from the expedition was the way we all worked together through the night on our kopyltstulpiai. At one point I remember taking a break from sanding a piece of wood to take a look at what was happening around me... 15 of my new best friends, sitting around the fire, each with a headlight strapped to their foreheads, working together and diligently on a different piece of what will come together to be OUR kopyltstulpis. We built our three wooden sym-



bols of Lithuanian heritage and faith on three different occasions, mainly in the late afternoon after a full morning of searching through cemeteries. We decided to build these memorials where there had previously been no sign or symbol that Lithuanians had suffered in those spots. The cross that we built was not originally our work. A Lithuanian deportee, Bronislavas from Panevėžys had met with us before the expedition and asked that we bring a cross he had made with us to Kazakhstan. This cross weighed 40kg altogether and was built in an incredible way. It was built in pieces (each piece about twice as big as a Rubik's cube) that could be fit and assembled together

like a cross. I had a lot of room in my backpack, so I carried with me 6 or 7 pieces of the cross with me from Lithuania to Kazakhstan.

As for apparel, every day we wore our Misija Sibiras t-shirts, our hiking boots, comfortable and thick shorts or pants that could withstand the brush and obstacles encountered in the cemeteries.

KV: What were the major takeaways for you from this experience?

MČ: Throughout my experience with Misija Sibiras, both in Lithuania and Kazakhstan this summer, I grew very emotionally attached to this piece of Lithuanian history. I think it's really important that Lithuanians all around the world know and understand this history and make a conscious effort to pass it on to future generations. Likewise, I think it's important that Lithuanians in Lithuania make that same effort to learn and understand the histories of Lithuanian diasporic communities around the world. I've come to realize that we really are a nation spread around the world and that every Lithuanian has value and worth for their homeland Lithuania, no matter where they may live. I also began to see more value in myself as an émigré Lithuanian throughout this experience. After building our second kopylstulpis in the middle of a massive prairie that was once a cemetery, we stood in a half-circle around our completed project and together sang the Lithuanian anthem as we held each other. This was perhaps the most emotional moment for me throughout the expedition. How incredible is it, that I – a third generation Lithuanian American – can be here in Kazakhstan, where a piece of Lithuanian history lies, and do my part in preserving that history. I also think that it's very important for Lithuanian youth from America (and Canada, South America, Australia, wherever...) participate in programs in Lithuania in which they spend extended time (more than a 2-week visit with family) in Lithuania. I also think that if Lithuanians from Lithuania ever travel abroad, they should make an effort to see how Lithuanian communities around the world function and understand an émigré Lithuanian's perspective of Lithuania.

KV: What is next for you as far as life in Lithuania? What are your future plans?

MČ: I think it's important that Lithuanian youth outside of Lithuania spend extended time in Lithuania, whether that is with a program like Misija Sibiras, Bring Together LT, Kurk Lietuvai, or LISS. I personally feel very called to and drawn to the idea of living in Lithuania, and I plan to do so. I'd like to live and work in Lithuania for a year or so beginning in late 2020 or early 2021. I feel the need

to move to Lithuania first of all because I feel as though I owe Lithuania something. All of the most important and valuable things in my life all make their way back to Lithuania – family, the Lithuanian community, camp Marijava, the second language I speak, and the life-long friendships I’ve made with my Lithuanian friends. I also want to better understand my relationship with the country itself. Though I grew up knowing that there was a country far across the Atlantic that was “my homeland” I only visited there for the first time in 2015 when I was 18 years old. We make such an effort to keep the Lithuanian culture alive here in the United States, but very little of that includes direct contact and common activity with the country of Lithuania itself. I also want to feel and experience the reality of an everyday life of Lithuania as a country with real problems. It often seems that when Lithuanian Americans visit Lithuania, it is only during the perfect summer months, and it is often more of a vacation than a full immersion into Lithuanian reality and daily life. I want to feel the cold of its winters, interact with Lithuanian people at their best and their worst, exist there as a Lithuanian citizen and not just a tourist or



“relative from America.” Eventually, I would like to settle in Chicago where the Lithuanian community I grew up in is - but who knows what the future holds.

KV: Our readers can find more about Mission Siberia on its website: misijasibiras.lt.



The North West Lithuanian Centennial Cross

By Vilius Zalpis



This story begins at the Lithuanian Independence Day gathering of the Kittitas County Lithuanian Club which was held in Cle-Elum Washington in March of 2017. The Lithuanian club is entirely made up of descendants of Lithuanians who arrived in the US before and after the turn of the century. We all met at a local Mexican restaurant where we had a private room for our gathering. For myself, emotions were high just thinking of the upcoming 100th Lithuanian Anniversary while sitting among other first-wave Lithuanian descendants and sipping on Margaritas, or at least I was. All those present shared nostalgia for our Lithuanian parents, grandparents, and great-grandparents, their customs, foods, and stories of the old country.

During our gathering, a proposal was made to do something in honor of the upcoming 100th anniversary of Lithuanian Independence. With emotions of patriotism for our Lithuanian heritage, I made a motion to build a Lithuanian Centennial Cross. After many years of dwelling in amateur Lithuanian folk art of all types, I felt at ease to come up with designs and the construction of a Cross. When I was 20 I had built a 20ft Lithuanian way-side shrine in my parents' yard in Duarte, California. The

only photo surviving today is in a book published by the Balzekas Museum called "The Lithuanian Heritage: The Many Views of Youth". As we talked of possible locations to put the cross, a suggestion was made to place it in Laurel Hill Memorial Park, the city cemetery of Cle Elum, Washington where more than 50 Lithuanians lie buried. Lithuanians arrived in Cle Elum at the turn of the century to work the local coal mines as well as in the sister cities of Roslyn and Ronald. It was approved unanimously and discussions began with the City of Cle Elum. I volunteered to design and build it with funding to come from various sources. Living four hours away, many trips were required starting with the first trip to present a drawing and to meet and explain to the city what the cross was all about. Discussions went on for some time back and forth, always positive. Mick Mankus (Monkevičius) of Cle Elum, Washington was the main contact between the Club, the City, and myself. Then in April of 2018, the City approved our request. After the snows melted away in June, a location was chosen by the cemetery board and made known to us. Unintentionally the location granted was at the foot of several Kalviūkštis descendants, now known by the name Calvisky. This family first worked the coal mines of Penn-

sylvania moving on to Choctaw Indian Nation in South East Oklahoma and finally settling down in Washington State first in Cle Elum where some remain and other family members moved to nearby locations.

Short History

The three Kittitas County coal towns of Cle Elum, Ronald, and Roslyn were the draw of many Lithuanian immigrants at the turn of the century. Once, Roslyn had the most Lithuanians, numbering over 200. Like other American coal towns, while coal was king, the three cities were a thriving community. However, by the late 1930s coal began to decline and by the late 1950s, it was coming to an end. Lithuanians learned about the new coal mines of the Northwest in various ways: word of mouth, from the Lithuanian American press, and by coal company scouts. Since Lithuanians were considered good coal mine workers, they were often sought out by company scouts. As coal diminished or other jobs paid better, the Lithuanian coal miners moved on to Seattle and beyond. Those who got married settled down and made families, thus remaining in the three towns finding other jobs.

Testimony of the Lithuanian presence can be found some three miles up the mountain from Cle Elum in the city of Roslyn, Washington where the only known Lithuanian cemetery west of the Mississippi is located. An early edition of *Bridges* (Jan-Feb 2007) has an article about the Lithuanian heritage of this area. In 2009 a Lithuanian Monument was erected in the Lithuanian cemetery followed by a Lithuanian Heritage Day attended by hundreds of Lithuanians from Portland, Seattle, and elsewhere. The Lithuanian Ambassador, the Honorable Bruzga flew in for this occasion. Interviewed at the end of his tenure as Ambassador he was asked which memory most remained in his mind about the American Lithuanians. He replied that it was the celebration in Roslyn.

Building the Cross

Offering to design and build the cross is one thing but making it happen was another. After returning from a trip to Lithuania in July the planning began. The hardest part of any project was coming up with an original design. However, as it sometimes happens, within 15 minutes of drawing four designs, I chose the first one and stayed true to it with only minor changes in sizes. As I already had drawn a sketch for the City of Cle Elum while negotiating with them, I used some of the same elements to come up with the final design. This was not my first Lithuanian project and after years of self-study of Lithuanian art patterns, plants used in folk art and so on I had no problem coming up with many choices and feeling authentic to Lithuanian folk art. As folk art never ceases to reinvent itself, I chose a mixed median of materials mixing metal





with wood instead of an original one made of all wood. If one studies the Lithuanian wooden crosses, the first parts to break are always the designs in-between the cross arms. For the four quarters of the aura-around the cross, I chose stainless steel. For the main pole and arms, Alaska yellow cedar covered with tongue oil which made the Yel-

low cedar bring out its beautiful color. With help from my two brothers, Algirdas and Gregory, the cross began to be assembled in a storage area of my brother's shop. Dealing with the cross weight and height was not an easy matter. To transport it from Portland, Oregon where it was built and deliver it to Cle Elum some four hours away, we chose to partially assemble it and finish assembling it in place.

Delivering the cross, All Souls Day, and the North West 100-year celebration

The date of the cross delivery and assembly was postponed several times as it was taking more time than planned. The stainless-steel panels had to be laser cut, then powder coated, all this taking time. The iodized aluminum pieces were put on a two-week cut date. But the final date arrived, and it fell on the same day the Seattle Lithuanians had organized to celebrate All Souls Day in the Lithuanian cemetery of Roslyn. It was decided to start the cross assembly in the morning and finish in time to join Seattle Lithuanians at the All Souls Day celebration. On the day of the assembly, a group of the Portland Lithuanians traveled to Cle Elum. They were joined by another group from Seattle and the local Lithuanian Club members to help in the assembly and lifting of the cross. Up to the last-minute carving and assembling was being worked on for many parts. Plans were made to also place Lithuanian flags on all the Lithuanian graves in the Cle Elum Cemetery. While some people worked on the cross, others placed 60 Lithuanian flags on the graves of each Lithuanian buried in the Cle Elum. After the cross was finally lifted, Dainius and Asta Vaicekonis of Seattle prepared a short concert of early Lithuanian immigrant songs. After many photos, everyone drove up to the Roslyn Lithuanian cemetery to tend to the Lithuanian graves, place candles and share in a pot luck meal of Lithuanian foods. The pot luck meal is not traditional but because many people came from far away and everyone needed to meet and mingle, it has become a tradition to have the meal after attending the graves and placing candles as is customary in Lithuania.

From 1918 to 2018

After the cross was finally lifted and photos were taken, everyone was leaving for Roslyn. It then occurred to me that I had brought an artifact of my grandmother's from 100 years ago, a Lithuanian flag. On the occasion of the first anniversary of Lithuanian Independence, my grandmother, Marijona Zolpiene (Zalpis) had sewed a Lithuanian tricolor flag, being instructed by the then first Lithuanian diplomat Bronius Kazys Balutis to the United States. With almost everyone gone, my car and that of one more turned around and went back to take this necessary photo of the flag with the cross. I removed the flag

from the foil-laced box holding it ever so tenderly. I returned to the cross and draped it over the woven Lithuanian fence surrounding the cross. As I took that first photo and while looking at the screen on my phone's camera, tears of joy for Lithuania came to my eyes. I had a strange feeling that my grandmother was there with me for that moment in time or maybe I was there with her 100 years ago. The unexpected rush of adrenaline as I viewed in my phone's screen that which my grandmother created 100 years ago by sewing one of the first Lithuanian tricolors in America and that which her grandson created in honor of the same dedication 100 years later laid side by side unintentionally
Lai gyvuoja Lietuva dar šimtą!



Opportunity to Experience Lithuania from a Completely New Perspective

By Rasa Kerelis



Rasa Kerelis at the Center for Civil Education in Vilnius.

I grew up in Chicago, Illinois. Both of my parents were born in America, but all four of my grandparents were refugees during World War II when they fled from Lithuania. I was raised in the Lithuanian culture in the US, with Lithuanian having been my first language. I attended Saturday school and have participated in Lithuanian scouts ever since I can remember. I've always been an active member of the Lithuanian community here, and because of what my grandparents sacrificed to come to this country, I've always done everything I could to honor and value that aspect of my identity. At Northwestern University in Evanston, Illinois I study Political Science. My Lithuanian background has kept me interested in things like international relations, but also identity and other cultures. I've always worked to find ways to incorporate everything that my family has taught me through my culture into everything I do. It has helped me view things from various perspectives, and has given me an appreciation for

diversity that I otherwise wouldn't have had. Now as a student considering what kind of impact I want to make on the world, staying in touch with my cultural roots and utilizing them to be my best self has helped me connect not only to myself but to other people. It's something that always has been a part of who I am, and will continue to make me into the person I hope to be.

I was interested in the Bring Together Lithuania program at first because several of my friends in the Lithuanian community had participated in it, and the more I looked into it the more interesting it seemed. I had been doing research on the EU all year as an assistant for a Political Science professor at Northwestern, and so going to work for the EU seemed like the perfect next step to take. Bring Together Lithuania provided me with an opportunity to realize that goal, while at the same time incorporating something very dear to my heart: Lithuania. Not only would I be able to get one of my dream internships,

but I would be able to make close connections to other Lithuanians both in the country and abroad, as well as experience Lithuania from a completely new perspective. Sure, I had vacationed in Lithuania before, but being able to live and work there as a young adult was an unforgettable and eye-opening experience. I would recommend this to anyone interested not just in Lithuania, but anyone who wants to see for themselves what it's like to be a true global citizen. Now, I see possibilities I never have and I feel like I could live anywhere in the world if I wanted to. During the program, the most helpful thing for me personally was the connection between the work I was doing and what I was studying. Bring Together Lithuania did a great job of knowing exactly what would suit me best instead of feeling completely in the dark as this was one of my first internships ever. The other helpful thing is that since Lithuania is such a small country, the accessibility of leadership and various influential figures is much higher than in most any internship in the U.S. and most of these people are very open to having conversations and speaking to you. I got to sit in on conferences and go to events of the highest caliber, and I thank Bring Together Lithuania for providing me with a chance to take those kinds of opportunities and make the most of them. I worked under Arnoldas Pranckevičius, one of the most open and friendly people I've ever met and head of the EU Commission Representation in Lithuania. We got a short tour of the Presidential Palace by Dalia Grybauskaitė, who shared stories of studying in the U.S., interactions with foreign diplomats, and an overview of her opinion on the state of the refugee crisis in Europe. I even met Vytautas Landsbergis, the president of Lithuania at the time of the fall of the Soviet Union.

During the program, I realized that I'd actually be very interested to live in Lithuania for a time if the right job opportunities presented themselves, and if not Lithuania, then definitely somewhere outside the U.S. This trip made me realize that there is so much more outside the United States to see and experience, and as a young person, this is the time to explore my options.

I have chosen this program because I wanted to see Lithuania from a new perspective and to see what it had to offer me as a student and young adult, and the Lithuania I found was an innovative, highly advanced, and hard-working country determined to continue growing and improving for future generations. I was inspired by the spirit of the various companies we visited as they were all committed to showing us the best version of Lithuania they could, and the vision was spectacular.

I was fascinated by the willingness of respected Lithuanian figures, as well as the program leaders themselves, to speak to us as a group and hear our stories. It made me feel like part of a community that I wasn't sure I belonged



Rasa Kerelis with her good friend and the participant of Bring Together Lithuania program Eristida Butkevičiūtė.



Rasa Kerelis with her mentor Arnoldas Pranckevičius, the Head of European Commission Representation in Lithuania.



A moment from the tour around the Presidential palace with the President of Lithuania Dalia Grybauskaitė.

to at first. It made me feel important and what I had to say mattered. So aside from providing an interesting and immersive program, my self-confidence and vision for what I wanted for my future were strengthened and defined thanks to the support of everyone we interacted with. I highly recommend this program for every student of Lithuanian descent. It's a life-changing experience.

Discovering my Identity through BTLT

By Nojus Ausra



Nojus Ausra.

I have been constantly surrounded by Lithuanian culture my entire childhood. I spent most of my life among the Lithuanian community in Chicago— my parents had many Lithuanian friends, I attended Lithuanian Saturday school, and my family regularly attends local Lithuanian cultural events. Attending two different schools while having nothing to bridge the two, it felt as though my Lithuanian life was separate from my American life. I also visited my extended family in Lithuania every Summer, where my American characteristics seemed more conspicuous among the native Lithuanians around me. From these experiences, I didn't feel as though my identity was whole— I am a Lithuanian and an American, yet neither one completely.

I desperately wanted to prove to myself that I am a Lithuanian, and so I turned to the resources that were available to me. As a student in Boston, I introduced myself to the local Lithuanian community by working as a teacher's assistant at the Boston Lithuanian School. Nevertheless, I wanted something more intimate, closer to my roots— I already understood life as a Lithuanian in the United States very well. It was soon after getting my teaching position that I found out about the Bring Together Lithuania program through my parents, who knew that

I wanted to start getting professional experience in biotechnology. After further inquiry, I admired how the program gives its participants the opportunity to see Lithuania from a business and modern perspective— a different perspective from what I witnessed with my family. With the yearning to witness how I can further connect myself to my roots, I decided to apply.

This six week-long experience has been helpful in many unforeseen ways. I greatly appreciated having a dorm to myself in the old town of Vilnius and receiving first-hand experience of what independent life in Lithuania looks like. This of course included taking the trolleybus to and back from the Life Sciences Center at Vilnius University, which was a unique (yet familiar) experience on its own. I am also thankful for my internship as a laboratory assistant— it was a great way for me to start my professional life within STEM, and it offered me a great way to continue it in Lithuania.

Most importantly, the Bring Together Program allowed me to achieve a more holistic view of Lithuanianism. Ever since we met with Jurgis Didziulis, I've been thinking about my mixed identity and its role in modern Lithuanian culture. He taught me to perceive my Lithuanian-American background not as two separate and incom-

plete things, but as parts of their own whole. The empowering talk also helped me realize how valuable it was to share my experiences in the program with the other Lithuanian-American participants. By living together and exploring the country for six weeks, I was able to discuss my thoughts and the impact of this trip with those who saw things similarly to me. Synergizing our experiences, I was able to further understand the sociocultural and professional lifestyle in Lithuania, and it helped me begin to understand the potential spaces I can occupy in the future. I thought that this program would show me how to fit in to Lithuanian society. Instead, this program illuminated the possibilities for me to belong. Rather than having to transform my identity, I learned that I can remain true to who I am— a Chicago-Lithuanian— and still make a favorable life for myself in Lithuania.



Nojus Ausra in a hot air balloon above Trakai Island Castle (Trakai, Lithuania). Taken by Aurimas Balciunas



BTLT meeting with artist and inspirational speaker Jurgis Didžiulis (Vilnius, Lithuania). Taken by unknown.

Bring it Together Lithuania

By Vaida Naris



Vaida Naris outside in front of the hospital sign photograph by Vaida Naris

The main goal of "Bring Together Lithuania" program is to provide the youth of Lithuanian descent with opportunities to acquire professional skills, meet global Lithuanians from all over the world, and explore Lithuania. By finding internship opportunities with leading companies, innovative startups, and public sector organizations, the global Lithuanian youth have an unforgettable opportunity to rediscover modern Lithuania. There were also opportunities to travel around Lithuania and visit historical and main attractions of Lithuania and meet prominent political officials and business organizations. This six-week program created exceptional opportunities for growth, recognition, and helped develop relationships and connections for a lifetime.

Some of the highlights of the program were meeting the former president of Lithuania Dalia Grybauskaitė, and being part of the inauguration of the new president of Lithuania Gitanas Nausėda. Some of the group members had the opportunity to vote in the election and then saw the inauguration service, address, and concert. The group visited iconic landmarks of Lithuania such as Trakai, Merkinė observation tower, Kaunas, and a visit to the Baltic sea and the amber museum in Nida and Klaipėda. This year, I wanted to get to know Lithuania not as a tourist but as a Lithuanian citizen. From an early age, I have been involved in Lithuanian activities in the United

States, singing in choirs, dancing folk dances, scouting, Ateitininkai, attending a Lithuanian school, and other activities. When the opportunity arose, I joined the Bring Together LT program to learn more about Lithuania and get to know every day and working life. My internship was at the Children Hospital's Rehabilitation Unit, where I was introduced to the Lithuanian healthcare system and various therapies for younger children with developmental problems. I am grateful to the staff at the Children's Development Center at Children's Hospital for this unique opportunity. As an art therapy student, I worked with an art therapist. This internship helped me to get to know myself better and also to understand that I want to go deeper and continue my advanced education in art therapy. I was inspired to help spread the ideas and methods of creative therapies, and to deepen and apply art therapy in a variety of ways in Lithuania, the US, and the world. I am looking for opportunities to study in the master's program in Art Therapy and Psychology and to attend Art Therapy Seminars in Lithuania.

This six-week trip to Lithuania expanded the participants' world view and what it means to love one's country. I am very grateful to the organizers and sponsors of the Bring Together LT program to be able to experience modern Lithuania.



Vaida Naris at the Vilnius Children's Hospital, in front of the early rehabilitation center where she worked. Photograph by Vaida Naris.



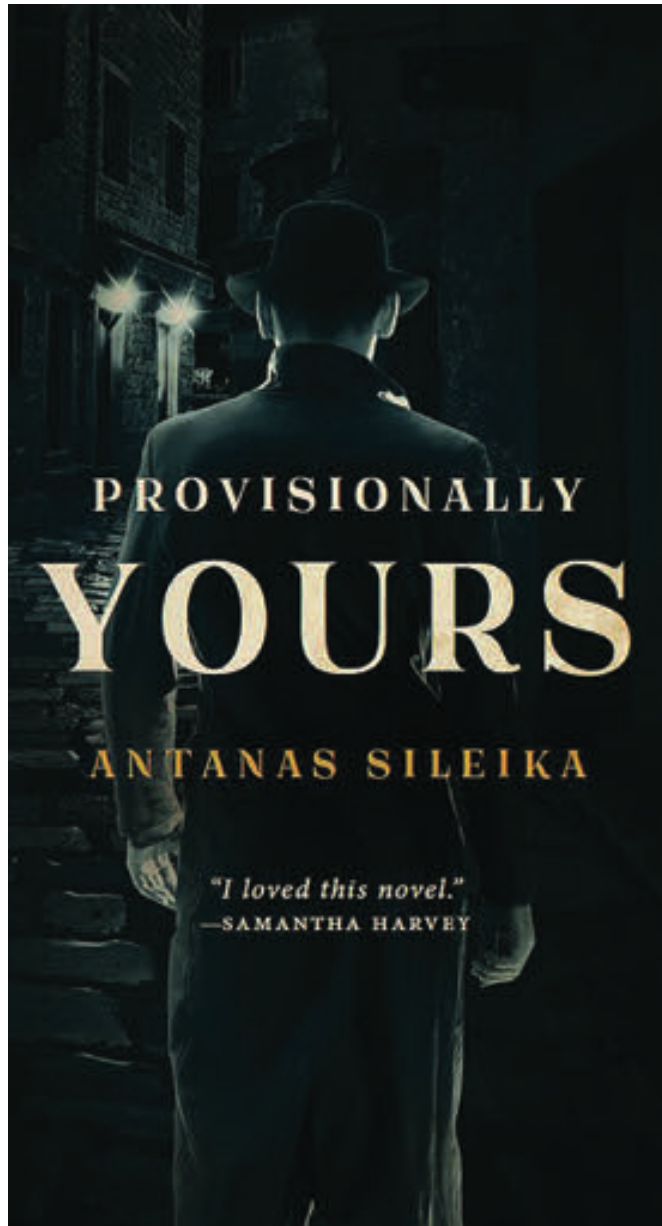
Vaida Naris at the Vilnius City Council with other Bring Together Lithuania participants. Photo courtesy: Bring Together Lithuania.



Participants of Bring Together Lithuania meeting with President Dalia Grybauskaitė. Photo courtesy: Bring Together Lithuania.

Provisionally Yours by Antanas Sileika

By Audra Kubilius



There are those who read, and those who don't. I am a voracious reader – of an eclectic mix of books spanning all type of genres – and read whenever I can make the time. One of my favorite genres is stories about international espionage – of the real or the fictionalized sort. This type of book – particularly the recorded version on long car trips – keeps my interest and feeds my curios-

ity. Having just listened to the techno-thriller in which Lithuania figures prominently, Commander in Chief (Mark Greaney continuing the Tom Clancy franchise), I was intrigued and pleased to learn that Antanas Sileika had just published *Provisionally Yours*, an international espionage book set in Lithuania. I have enjoyed Sileika's books in the past and was eager to see what his approach would be to a very different genre than he had written in previously.

The book is set in the chaotic, confusing time in European history after the Russian Revolution and World War I. Czarist Russia had collapsed, and refugees fleeing the violence and uncertainty headed back to the parts of the former Czarist empire from which they had come. For Lithuania, it was a bittersweet time – the country had managed to reestablish its independence, but Vilnius, the city that Lithuanians had expected to be their capital, had been seized by the Poles and diplomatic intrigue and international manipulation meant that Lithuania would not be getting it back any time soon. Kaunas, formerly a provincial garrison town, would become Lithuania's political center and provisional capital. The small nation was surrounded by less than friendly neighbors; remnants of a variety of foreign armed forces and other groups formed underground cells in the young country; the new government was full of young idealists with minimal experience.

After a long and harrowing journey, Justas Adamonis, a former counterintelligence officer, is returning to Lithuania. He is heading home – but he does not know to what. He knows his parents are dead. He is heading to stay with his sister, whom he had not seen since she was a teenager, years before. He was heading to Kaunas, the city of his youth, a city which he finds to be "neither familiar not unfamiliar, suspended between reality and memory". Adamonis barely has time to adjust to his surroundings when he is recruited back into the intelligence service by the new government of Lithuania, which is eager to utilize his experience and knowledge while securing his loyalty.

Adamonis immediately is given an assignment, which he is easily able to accomplish as a result of his years of experience and skills of observation. Soon afterward, he is injured in the course of another assignment and ends up spending time recovering his health at his sister's home. Subsequently, he is totally involved in intelligence

activities, with his cover story being that he works in the Bureau of Statistics. The story features major and minor characters, is full of twists and turns, with intrigue and action across all of Lithuania. The novel is one of international espionage, featuring danger, treachery, love, lust, moral ambiguity, betrayal on multiple levels, bureaucratic bungling, political corruption and power grabs at the highest levels. From an uncertain start, the backward country matures and Adamonis finds his place as his role in intelligence operations grows.

As in his other books, Antanas Sileika's subtle humor and dry observations are a treat for the reader. Sileika is masterful at creating a believable and unique cast of characters, inveigling them in scenes, activities, and scrapes that match the time and mood of the novel. Adamonis is the portrait of a counterintelligence officer, with his faults and foibles, trying to be a good officer and a decent human being, in the middle of a corrupt and bungling nascent bureaucracy. There are plenty of strong women and men – and desperate ones as well. From Johnny, clad in a smelly sheepskin vest, not exactly an agent, but with connections to the worker class across the city; to Pranaitis, the former high school teacher, now chauffeur, with a loony former lover at his heels; to Milda, Adamonis' dentist sister, lithe as an American, who manages a household, a business and peoples' affairs with aplomb; to Lily and Robert, the long lost American cousin and her husband, a former diplomat, who are very clearly out of their realm in "uncivilized" Lithuania and staying to research potential business ventures in Lithuania for a curiously long time; to the farm cousins in their countrified glory – the book features them all.

The setting of Provisionally Yours immerses the reader in a different era, a totally non-tech time - a time of smoky bars, low wattage electricity, backroom deals, and situations steeped in uncertainty – a noir fiction feeling. Vivid descriptions of food and drink and places described in painstaking detail add to the 1920's feel.

The author did a significant amount of research and unearthed multiple sources of information in writing this book, succeeding in capturing the mood and essence of the time. While the novel is fiction, many of the events described actually happened, although perhaps not in exactly the way described. The book does provide some historical context – perhaps enough to pique the interest of those who are game to do a little more research, but



"Jonas Budrys, originally known as Jonas Polovinskas, the chief of Lithuanian counterintelligence between 1921 and 1923. He was one of those outsized characters who appear when history changes dramatically, when nobodies like Josef Pilsudski and Vladimir Lenin become somebodies in the new circumstances, or in modern times, when a playwright like Vaclav Havel becomes the leader of his country or an electrician named Lech Walesa climbs over a fence to take Poland out of the Soviet orbit. Jonas Budrys was the James Bond of a backward former Russian province; he inspired my Justas Adamonis."

-- Antanas Šileika, author

a few more explanatory historical footnotes may be of use to readers who have studied much less European or world history.

Provisionally Yours is an enjoyable and unexpected international espionage thriller set in post-World War I Lithuania – a little-known period of history in a little-known place. In his afterword, Sileika, who lives in Canada, writes about why he chooses to write about Lithuania. He notes that it is not surprising that a small country lying between the hammer of Germany and the anvil of the Soviet Union would see a lot of sparks flying. He further explains: "...in that small country, acts of great drama took place under the relentless pressures of politics and history. And if all the world is a stage, then all of humanity's character types stepped into that tiny theatre...". The book is a fine addition to the works of a master storyteller.

current events

Security

...Major General Valdemaras Rupšys, commander of the Lithuanian Land Force since 2016, was appointed Chief of Defense succeeding Lt. General Vytautas J. Žukas. The current defense budget is 948 million euros, about 2% of the Lithuanian GDP. He spoke on conscription, female officers, Syria, and pledged to further modernize the military, improve readiness and maintenance, and wants to speed up the acquisition of the 88 Boxer infantry fighting vehicles on order.

...Two of the Boxers have been delivered for evaluation. The Boxers are wheeled vehicles; they are meant to replace the tracked M113 armored personnel carriers. The evaluation will judge the relative performance in Lithuania's varied terrain in consideration of a second order of Boxers in 2021.

...Brigadier General Raimundas Vaikšnoras, commander of the Iron Wolf Mechanized Infantry Brigade, moved up to become commander of the Lithuanian Land Force.

...As part of the air defense Operation Rapid Forge, U.S. 5th generation F35A stealth fighter jets and C-130 transport planes landed at the Lithuanian Air Base in Siauliai.

...A long-time friend of the Baltic nations, former U.S. Army European commander, retired Lt. General Ben Hodges, now the Pershing Chair in Strategic Studies at the Center for European Policy Analysis in Frankfurt, Germany, told Defense News that small specialized additional units should deploy to the Baltics on a more consistent basis to fill gaps in host-nation capabilities. The gaps include logistics, intelligence, communications, and air-missile defense and personnel could come from existing trained Army National Guard and Army Reserves because there is no chance of increasing the size of the U.S. Army. In logistics, Hodges cited the ongoing conversion of rail gauge from Soviet to European as enabling trains to load in Belgian and Dutch seaports and unload in Kaunas in time for the American-lead exercise Defender Europe planned for 2020.

...Defense News also reported that there was general concern on Russia's unconventional operations in the gray zone of conflict aimed at fracturing NATO and Europe by tampering with elections, engaging in cyber attacks and attempting to influence populations through false narratives in social media.

...The Luxembourg based European Union Court of Justice agreed with Lithuanian's restrictions on the TV chan-

nel, NTV Mir Lithuania, (n.b. Mir is "Peace" in Russian), for hate speech related to its 2016 broadcast of Lithuanians and Latvians' alleged collaboration during the Holocaust as well as implying that authorities in the Baltic nations pose a threat to the local Russian-speaking minorities. The channel is owned by the British company Baltic Media Alliance, which primarily broadcasts in Russian. The decision backs the decision to make the TV channel only available for paying customers and not be freely broadcast to anyone with a TV.

...Pennsylvania Governor Tom Wolf met with 600 PA National Guard (PNG) members deployed in Lithuania and Poland as well as met with business and government leaders including President Gitanas Nausėda. Wolf and Nausėda discussed defense, economy, culture, and energy security. Throughout the 26-year partnership, thousands of PNG troops have trained in Lithuania and many Lithuanian troops have trained at PA's Fort Indian-town Gap training ground. While in Poland he visited the Auschwitz-Birkenau Memorial in honor of the 11 victims of the October 28, 2018 attack on the Tree of Life synagogue in Pittsburgh. Governor Wolf personally paid for his air travel and lodging.

...The U.S. State Department approved the sale of 500 Oshkosh Joint Light Tactical Vehicles to Lithuania but Lithuania has budgeted only \$157 million to buy 200 between 2020 and 2024.

...The Combat Aviation Brigade Supply Support Activity platoon of 24 soldiers from Fort Riley, Kansas has relocated from Illesheim, Germany to Marijampolė, Lithuania to better support U.S. helicopters flying throughout Europe including Romania and Latvia. In addition to sharing duties and equipment with their Lithuanian counterparts, the platoon shares free time in physical training and playing soccer and basketball.

...Lithuanian customs officers detained a shipment of explosive ammunition at the Belarusian border checkpoint at Lavoriškės. The shipment was from Russia to a company in Peru. The ammunition is used by Russian Mil MI-8 and Mil MI-24 helicopters and planes. The driver lacked the required license required by the European Union and under existing sanctions against Russia, the transportation of such goods via Lithuania is banned.

...Two Russian FSB border officers were temporally retained after violating Lithuanian's border by half a kilometer with pistols and video surveillance systems near the fishing village of Nida on the Curonian Spit near the

Russian enclave of Kaliningrad.

...The Voice of America reports that the U.S. has established a group to assist the Baltic nations to resist Russian hybrid warfare attempt including disruption of the banking systems. According to Latvian Defense Minister Artis Pabriks, Latvian banks participated in an exercise simulating a Russian fomented financial crises to test their resilience to withstand hacking and sabotage.

...In August, the Russian Defense Ministry held its 9-day Ocean Shield 2019 drills in the Baltic Sea with 49 combat ships, 20 support vessels, and 58 aircraft including 10,634 personnel of the Russian Armed Forces. A smaller Ocean Shield 2018 was held in the Mediterranean Sea and involved 26 combat ships, two submarines, and 34 aircraft. Russian Defense Minister Sergei Shoigu indicated that Ocean Shield drills would be held on a regular basis.

...In September, Russia and Belarus (the "Union State") will hold the 7-day Union Shield 2019 drills in the Nizhny Novgorod region northeast of Moscow. The exercise will involve about 70 aircraft, 950 weapon systems, and 12,000 troops. The exercise takes place every two years alternately in Russia and Belarus.

...John Bolton, President Donald Trump's National Security Advisor, met with Belarus' President Alexander Lukashenko in Minsk. This was the highest-ranking US visit to Belarus in 20 years and sends a message that the US regards Belarus as an independent state and not a "union state" of Russia. The US would like to be an alternative source of oil via Lithuania for Belarus and lessen its dependence on oil from Russia.

...Since 2015, all men aged 19 to 26 are included in the list from which the military drafts between 3,000 and 4,000 each year for 9 months. Last year 31,000 were included in the list. The Ministry of National Defense has indicated that older draftees are more likely to request postponement because of jobs, families, and mortgages. A Member of Seimas, Povilas Urbšys, has proposed limiting the draft to men under 21. If passed the amendment to the Law on Military Service would become effective next year. The Lithuanian Defense Ministry has an alternate proposal of setting the age of conscripts at between 18 and 23 years because older draftees are more likely to be unfit for military service for health reasons and are less motivated.

...The Speaker of the Seimas, Viktoras Pranckietis, backs an investigation into Russia's influence in Lithuanian poli-

tics. Specifically, he wants an investigation into Seimas member Irina Rozova's alleged ties to Russian diplomats and security officials. She is accused of requesting financial assistance from Russia for her party, the Russian Alliance. Per a recent State Security Department intelligence report, she was denied access to classified information in January 2018.

...Ukraine has detained the Russian tanker in the Ukrainian port of Izmail on the Black Sea, which blocked two Ukrainian naval vessels and a tugboat in the Kerch Strait on November 25, 2018, resulting in the capture and imprisonment of 24 Ukrainian sailors. There are on-going efforts to effect the release of the Ukrainian sailors via some form of prisoner exchange.

Business

...Ranked 7th in the FORTUNE 500, McKesson Corporation has opened a Business Services office in the "Business Stadium" complex in the city center of Vilnius. Vilnius was selected after an extensive search which considered available skills, language, education, experience, infrastructure, and accessibility. McKesson is a global leader in healthcare supply chain management, retail pharmacy, community oncology, specialty care, and healthcare information technology. Headquartered in Irving TX, it has over 76,000 employees and in 2018 had sales of \$208 billion.

...Denmark's leading cloud solution company, Cloudeon, has opened a Center of Excellence in Vilnius and plans to hire up to 20 people this year and more next year. Founded in Copenhagen in 2016, it has grown from 6 people to over 100. Among its clients are the Danish State Railways, the Danish telecommunications company, TDC Group, and Microsoft. It is also a Microsoft Authorized Education Partner which expands its capacity in the education field with their Cloudeon Cloud Academy. Vilnius openings include Senior Developer, Cloud Support Engineer, and Cloud Operations Engineer.

...Another cloud-based business is planning on opening a 25 person office in Vilnius. UK based Beyond Analysis offers customer insight, data tracking, predictive modeling, project management, and marketing strategy development using artificial intelligence (AI) and machine learning. The company evaluated sites in Sri Lanka and India but found Vilnius to be superior with respect to talent, proximity to customers, cultural and linguistic factors. Current customers include Visa Inc., Kingfisher PLC, and Virgin Flight. The company has another site in Australia.

current events

...A London based AI-driven digital concierge service, Velocity Black, will open a new technology center in Vilnius and partner with some of the local technical universities. Founded in 2014 with \$32 million venture capital, the lifestyle management service promises 1-minute response for 24/7 bookings to restaurants and events. The VIP app is priced at \$600 application fee with a \$2,400 annual membership. VB has offices in New York, Miami, and Los Angeles. The Vilnius center will be located at the new UMA Workspace and lead by Vygandas Pliastas who comes with experience with KAYAK.

...With Barclays exiting the Lithuanian market, it has sold its financial technology hub, Rise Vilnius, to Swedbank which has renamed it Rockit a combination of the English phrase "rock it". Swedbank also announced partnerships with the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development (EBRD) and Startup Wise Guys with the Google Developers Launchpad. The plan is to provide access to early-stage investments and a superior mentoring network for startup companies. As the successor to Rise Vilnius, Rockit hub is already home to 34 companies.

...Lithuanian President Gitanas Nausėda cautioned about Chinese investment in an outer deep-water port in Klaipėda undermining national security. He indicated that there are unsettled issues regarding the need, location, and environmental impact. Klaipėda has been mulling the port's expansion worth about 800 million euros for about 10 years. There is a concern that Chinese investments in Eastern Europe will divide the European Union.

...Latvian airline airBaltic placed a record 200 million euro bond issue with more than 100 investors from 25 countries. At 6.75% the bonds will be traded on the Euronext Dublin Stock Exchange. This largest bond offering in the history of Latvia was led by J.P. Morgan and SEB Bank and entailed a road trip to Riga, Tallinn, Vilnius, London, Frankfurt, Zurich, Helsinki, and Geneva.

...The Business to Business payments firm, SumUp, has received an electronic money license from the Bank of Lithuania and plans on hiring 30 people to staff its Vilnius office over the next 3 years. Started in London in 2012, it now operates in 31 markets across Europe, U.S., and Brazil with 15 offices and over 1500 employees. The Minister of Economy and Innovation, Virginijus Sinkevičius, believes this B2B service will be invaluable for small and medium enterprises in providing a variety of payment plans.

...The Bank of Lithuania has suspended payments com-

pany SatchelPay from issuing electronic money or providing part of its payments services because it failed to provide the government with the required financial data on its operations this year. The company is still allowed to provide cash withdrawal services and to transfer funds received into customer accounts via other electronic money, credit or payment service providers.

...AmerisourceBergen, a global wholesale pharmaceutical distributor, announced plans to expand its current Vilnius team of specialty logistics through World Courier to include Finance, Accounting, Digital Business Solutions, and Human Resources. It intends to invest 30 million euros and add 200 employees. The company is ranked #10 on the Fortune 500 with more than \$160 billion in annual revenue. Headquartered in Valley Forge, PA, the company is active in more than 50 countries with 21,000 associates.

...Russian crude oil was found to have higher than acceptable amounts of organic chlorine used to boost oil production but deleterious to refining equipment. The only way to use the oil is to dilute it with clean oil from the Urals. More than 35 million barrels of oil were affected and analysts believe that it could take months to resolve the contamination issue. Russia has arrested several suspects for the contamination but the chief suspect, 40-year old Russian, Roman Ruzhechko, was arrested then released in Lithuania under a Russian issued international warrant. He has sought refuge in Lithuania. Russia has 30 days to officially request his extradition.

...Lithuania is planning on tripling its budget for solar power from 6 million euros to 18 million with facilities near Vilnius, Kaunas, Klaipėda, Šiauliai, Panevėžys, and Alytus. In October neighbors will be able to apply to buy certain amounts of power based on their anticipated needs.

General

...Newly elected President Gitanas Nausėda asked Prime Minister Saulius Skvernelis to stay on as PM and he has accepted after winning a confidence vote in the Seimas. The ruling parties have decided to replace the Ministers of Transport, Interior and Agriculture. Outgoing President Dalia Grybauskaitė thanked the government led by PM Skvernelis for the overhaul of state enterprises and making their management more transparent as well as increasing defense funding.

...President Nausėda asked the Judicial Council to advise him on the dismissal of Konstantinas Gurinas, a Court of

Appeals judge suspected in a judicial system corruption investigation of 48 individuals including 8 judges and 6 attorneys. The president needs Seimas approval to dismiss Supreme Court and Court of Appeals judges. The corruption involves the payment or promise of bribes for favorable decisions.

...The City Council of Vilnius plans to go ahead with a national stadium project without depending on contributions from the European Union. By November 2019 it plans to have lined up 55 million euros from the Lithuanian Government and 50 million euros from Vilnius and complete the financing with borrowings.

...President Donald Trump nominated Robert S. Gilchrist as U.S. Ambassador to Lithuania. Mr. Gilchrist is currently the Director of the Operations Center at the Department of State and was Deputy Chief of Mission to Sweden and Deputy Chief of Mission to Estonia and the Director of Nordic and Baltic Affairs in the State Department's Bureau of European and Eurasian Affairs. He speaks Spanish, French, Estonian, and Romanian. He is the former president of Gays and Lesbians in Foreign Affairs Agencies, an officially recognized organization representing LGBT employees at the State Department and other federal agencies working in foreign affairs.

...Kaunas marked the 75th anniversary of the liquidation of the Jewish ghetto during the German occupation as the Russian front approached. The event was commemorated with film viewings, excursions, and concerts over 4 days.

...Deputy Government Chancellor Deividas Matulionis announced plans for 70 programs to mark 2020 as the "Year of the Vilna Gaon" in celebration of the long history of the Jews in Lithuania. Gaon (1720-1797) was an eminent scholar and leader of the opposition to Hasidic Judaism who encouraged his students to study natural sciences and even translated geometry books into Yiddish and Hebrew.

...The Vilnius City Council backed by Mayor Remigijus Šimašius voted 21-16 to change the name of Kazio Škirpos Alėja (Street) to Trispalvės Alėja because of his anti-Semitic Nazi collaboration. He founded the Lithuanian Activist Front which worked with the Nazis in the Holocaust.

...As a summer heatwave continued in Eastern Europe, the combination of heat and alcohol were a lethal combination. Poland recorded 113 drownings in June while

Lithuania recorded 32 deaths of which 26 were men. Lithuania hit a record 35.7 C (96.2 F) forcing school closures and threatening crops.

...Lithuania plans on donating 1 million euros for the reconstruction of the kitchen, dining room, and playground of School No. 2 in Avdiivka in the frontline town of Donetsk, Ukraine.

...Sigitas Tamkevičius, 80, Archbishop Emeritus of Kaunas, Jesuit, is included in the list of 13 who will become cardinals on October 5. When Pope Francis, also a Jesuit, visited Lithuania in September 2018, he was accompanied by the former Archbishop when they visited the former KGB building in Vilnius where more than 2,000 people were executed and 300 priests were held prisoner including Tamkevičius. Pope Francis accepted the Archbishop's resignation in 2015 and he views his surprise appointment as an appreciation of all those honest people who have gone through many things for Lithuania and the Church. He was arrested in 1983 for anti-Soviet propaganda and spent prison time in labor camps of Perm and Mordovia and exiled to Siberia in 1988 but with perestroika was released shortly thereafter.

...Prime Minister Saulius Skvernelis announced that he has stage 1 lymphoma, a type of blood cancer, and will undergo chemotherapy. President Nausėda has signed a decree allowing him to be on sick leave until early October and he will work as much as possible. The Energy Minister, Žygimantas Vaičiūnas, will substitute whenever necessary.

...Seimas has approved the nomination of the Minister of Economy and Innovation, Virginijus Sinkevičius, for European Commissioner. At 28 he has already worked at the Lithuanian Airports, the Lithuanian Post, and the Lithuanian foreign investment agency, Invest Lithuania. Former President Dalia Grybauskaitė declined to seek the nomination.

...A Vilnius University survey on alcohol policy indicated that bans and tax increases have failed to have any major impact on consumption. The survey indicated that while legal sales have dropped 7% last year but people said that they bought three times more alcohol from abroad.

...Single-use plastics (plastic plates, cups, cutlery, and straws) are set to be eliminated by Iki, Lithuania's largest retail chain by the number of stores.

Edward Gervickas Lithuanian Heritage School Begins its 15th Year

Written by Virginija Mockevičius

Translated by Aušra Lelis Clifford



Each fall, schools welcome back relaxed and grown-up students with new projects, competitions, celebrations and teachers. On September 7th the Edward Gervickas Lithuanian Heritage School began its 15th school year. Teachers, Nida Lelis, Lina Mitchell, Skirmantė Juodeikytė Philippone, Živilė Vėbraitė, Aušra Clifford, Birutė Litvinas and Virginija Mockevičius met students and invited them to start the day with the Lithuanian national anthem and prayer. After playing a few games, students went to their own classrooms.

Living in Rochester, a city in western New York State, and having a relatively small Lithuanian community, we still carry on centuries old traditions and are happy to have 14 children and 12 adult students.

The first day of school, a day of celebration, brought together parents and members of the Lithuanian community. Because the weather was beautiful, Director Austra Clifford invited everyone into the Our Lady of Lourdes Church courtyard. She welcomed students to the 15th year of school. Greetings were also given by Honorary Consul Rimantas Chesonis, Rochester Lithuanian American Community President Skirmante Juodeikyte Philippone and Lithuanian Heritage Society of Rochester Chairman Eugenijus Vidmantas. Teachers were recognized and given flowers. After the ceremony, refreshments were served in the school and people shared summer memories and ideas for the new school year.



Martynas Mažvydas Lithuanian Heritage School Starts its 20th School Year

By Vilma Alkhas, School Principal



The Martynas Mažvydas Lithuanian Heritage School was founded in 1999. Thirty students will be studying the Lithuanian language, history, geography, folk art, and folk dance during the 2019/2020 school year. Children's folk dance group Vėjas (Wind) represents the Minnesota Lithuanian Community in the annual Festival of Nations in St. Paul and in the annual International Peace Day.



South Florida Lithuanian School Kicks Off New School Year

By Kimberly Manning

Saulėtas Krantas Lithuanian Saturday School opened its doors to students and parents in a brand new location for the new school year. Ingrida Lomberg, school director, cut ribbons of red, yellow and green, while teachers welcomed students and officially opened the school for the 2019-2020 academic year. An Open House was held for students and parents to meet the teachers, visit the classrooms and learn more about the programs and events planned for the year.

At Saulėtas Krantas Lithuanian Saturday School, Lithuanian language and traditions are alive. Experienced and knowledgeable teachers present Lithuanian language and grammar, history, culture and customs. Language classes focus on reading, writing, listening and speaking. Classes are taught in both Lithuanian and English, and fluency in Lithuanian is not required. Because of demand, last year Saulėtas Krantas added classes for adult learners.

History and culture classes are also part of the curriculum at Saulėtas Krantas Saturday School. Students learn about the history of Lithuania, experience traditional crafts, songs and even learn folk dancing.

We welcome new students! Classes for kids ages 3-16 years old, and classes for adult learners, will begin September 28th. Visit sauletaskrantas.org to register.

Saulėtas Krantas's new location is located at 15935 Lyons Road, Delray Beach, Florida 33446. The new facility offers spacious, state-of-the-art classrooms.

About Saulėtas Krantas and the Palm Beach Lithuanian Community: Saulėtas Krantas Mokykla, Sunny Coast Lithuanian Saturday School, is a non-profit organization founded in 2004. In 2013 it joined the Education Council of the Lithuanian Community of Lithuania. The school for the Palm Beach Lietuvių Bendruomenė, its mission is to provide Lithuanian language and cultural education in South Florida. The school is supported by the Lithuanian Foundation, the Kazickas Family Foundation, the Lithuanian Ministry of Education and Science, Pasaulio Lietuvių Fondas, JAV LB Švietimo Taryba, and other generous donors.

For more information visit SauletasKrantas.org





LIETUVIŲ TAUTINIŲ
ŠOKIŲ ŠVENTĖ

FILADELFIJA 2020

LIETUVIŲ LITHUANIAN
TAUTINIŲ FOLK
ŠOKIŲ DANCE
ŠVENTĖ FESTIVAL

SEKMADIENĮ SUNDAY
LIEPOS 5, 2020 JULY 5, 2020

sokiusvente2020.org



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.

OCTOBER

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

November 9, 2019
at 7:00 PM
JAZZU concert
Copernicus Center, Chicago, IL

November 23, 2019
at 7:00 PM
**Lithuanian Opera Concert
and Gala**
World Lithuanian Center,
Lemont, IL

November 30, 2019
at 6:00 PM
**Alatėja Charitable Banquet
Balzekas Museum of
Lithuanian Culture**
6500 S. Pulaski Rd., Chicago IL

DECEMBER

December 1, 2019
at 1:00 PM
**Concert at the Nativity BVM
Church**
Chicago, IL
Vivaldi's "The Seasons"
Viktorija Čepinskienė, violin
and Giedrė Špečkauskaitė,
piano

bridges

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